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Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Minutes

Madeline Davis Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual,
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January 2019; Buffalo-Niagara LGBTQ History Project Minutes

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Buffalo Niagara LGBTQ History Project

Jan. 9, 2019

Dramatis Personae: Dean, Jeff, Carol, Ryan, Lydia, Hadley, Catherine, Cory, Bridge, Melissa, Adrienne, Ana, Amanda, Ari

Some Housekeeping Items

She Walked Here Expenses: Adrienne needs to send Humanities New York a full accounting of our spending on She Walked Here, so that they will give us more funds in the future. If you bought anything for She Walked Here, either with your own money or with project funds, please let Adrienne know, either on Facebook or via email to bfolgbtqhistory@gmail.com, ASAP. She needs to know how much you spent, what you spent it on, and whether you have been reimbursed.

She Walked Here Archives: In our last meeting, we agreed that people with digital material from She Walked Here would send said material to bfolgbtqhistory@gmail.com by January 1, and would bring physical materials to tonight's meeting, so that it can be sent on to the Madeline Davis Archives. As of yet, no one has passed on any archival materials. In the meeting, Ana and Lydia mentioned having some archival materials; Adrienne will gently remind (read: bug) them to hand them over for archiving.

Archive Days: Jeff announced that he is in the habit of visiting the Madeline Davis Archives on Fridays in order to conduct research. He invites other members of the project to join him, if they so desire.

Carol Speser's Photo Project

Carol Speser gave a report on the status of her collaborative project to recreate photos from the 1994 Pride celebration in Buffalo.

At the end of the last meeting, we agreed that Carol would speak to people in the 1994 photos, and see if they would consent to being photographed before we proceeded further. Carol has started talking to people, and has obtained the consent of several people, including (but not limited to) Madeline Davis, Wendy Smiley, Ron Ehmke, and Eileen Katz. At this point, she estimates that enough of the original participants have consented to make the project worthwhile.

At the same time, Carol is having second thoughts about holding the exhibit at City Hall, since it closes at 5, and parking may be difficult downtown, particularly for elderly participants. We spent some time talking about possible venues:

- *Asking the Common Council to keep City Hall open late* We estimate that between all of us, we have strong enough connections to City Hall to make asking worthwhile. Bridge knows David Rivera, and Carol has connections to Byron Brown and Darius Pridgen. This doesn't eliminate the parking problem, but given that the Pride celebration in question took place at City Hall, the historical and political significance of holding the exhibit and reception at City Hall can't be discounted.
- *Hallwalls*. Hallwalls has a history of accommodating LGBTQ arts events—in fact, some of the 1994 photos Carol wishes to display have been displayed before at Hallwalls. We're not sure if this is logistically possible, though, as Hallwalls tends to book its events months in advance.
- *Sugar City*. Another place strong in historical significance: it was home to MC Compton's in the 1980s and '90s. Parking and public transit access may be a problem, though. Like Hallwalls, Sugar City tends to book shows months in advance.
- *Buff State*. We're not sure what kind of space, if any, Buff State has for an exhibition like this. But it makes a certain kind of sense to hold the event at the site of the Madeline Davis Archives, especially since Carol would like them to take the photos after the exhibition is over. Parking and public transit should be relatively easy at Buff State, as well.
- *Erie County Library*. The library assisted us with *She Walked Here*, so we already know they are willing to work with us. And while holding an exhibition at the library doesn't have exactly the same kind of historical resonance as holding it at City Hall, it is a very public institution.
- *Pussywillow Gallery*. Heidi and Dianne, the owners of Pussywillow Gallery, would be DELIGHTED to host something like this. We would need to find out whether the venue would be wheelchair-accessible by June, though.

Our plan going forward is as follows: Amanda will work with Carol on creating a statement of curatorial intent to send to potential venues. Then, we will contact all the venues listed above, and make a decision on a venue based on availability and suitability.

We also had an extensive conversation about the logistics of the event, the planning necessary to make the event happen, and some of the possible features of the exhibition itself. Some highlights:

- *Photo presentation*. Carol has taken some of her negatives to Walgreens and had them blown up to 8x10s. Her plan, at this point, is to simply take all the photos in question to Walgreens and have 8x10s printed. Some members of the group, however, suggested that Carol think more about varying the sizes of the photos. Citing last year's Black in Time event, for instance, Ana pointed out that there is a visual impact to having a few poster-sized photos, juxtaposed with some smaller photos. Amanda also suggested that we think a bit more about photo presentation --

possibly framing some photos, mounting them on foamcore, or other possible presentation techniques. (Bonus: Dan DiLandro of the Madeline Davis Archives says that he'll give Carol some money for photo reproduction and presentation.) Lydia agreed to research pricing options for photo presentation.

- *Inviting people to participate.* Carol does not know, nor does she remember the name of, everybody who appears in the photos. As such, we need a strategy for finding people who were photographed at Pride 1994, and eliciting their participation in this project. Amanda suggests that we begin by scanning the remainder of Carol's photos, and creating a social media campaign asking people to identify everyone who appears in the photo. In addition, because not everybody who participated in 1994 Pride is an active participant in social media, we plan to have a casual event around March or April, perhaps in a local coffee shop, where people can look at the photos in person and write down the names of people they see. Our goal is to get a comprehensive list of people who participated in 1994 Pride and their contact info, so we can call them to participate. Carol reminds us that this list of people also overlaps significantly with the History Project's potential donor base, so it's doubly important that we create this list.
- *Representing community members who have passed away* We briefly revisited the question of how to represent deceased community members in the recreated photographic images. Both Jeff and Amanda advocated leaving blank spaces where deceased people used to be—it seems like the most sensitive and poetic option. We've also discussed representing deceased people through their ephemera, or at least including their ephemera in the exhibition. Whichever path we choose, we need to make sure it is sensitive and respectful.
- *Oral history/narrative.* Carol and the project members agree that some form of oral history, storytelling, or structured remembering needs to be part of the exhibition. We can either do that work at the exhibit reception itself, or beforehand, perhaps at the informal gathering in March/April, in order to include stories in the exhibition itself.
- *Possible features of the exhibition.* We brainstormed some preliminary ideas for what we could do at the exhibition itself. Those ideas include: inviting Madeline Davis' drum circle to play; inviting musicians to play songs by the late local singer-songwriter Mike Maffei; including altars; holding a memorial service (perhaps coordinated by the Imperial Court) to honor the deceased, to compensate for the "de-gayed" services most AIDS victims received circa 1994. In general, we need to keep in mind that the goals for this events are a satisfying experience for the people featured in the photos, a learning experience for younger participants, and the creation of a donor base for the History Project.

Based on this brainstorming, we've created a rough timeline for the project:

January-February: Find venues for the event; do some preliminary searching through social media to create a contact list of people who appear in the 1994 photos. Research options for presenting photos.

March: Have venue selected. Hold a casual event inviting people who participated in the 1994 Pride festivities to identify people in Carol's photos.

April-May: Take, print, and prepare photos; prepare captions and curate the exhibit.

June: Hold exhibit.

Amanda's Branding and Logo Presentation

Amanda has spent the last month working on a new logo for the History Project, as part of a larger project of standardizing our visual identity. She created an entire report around her proposed logos, which will be posted independently to social media and not reproduced in full here, but here are some of the highlights:

- Some of the common cliches/pitfalls of logos for LGBTQ history projects include using only the gay pride flag, and an excessive use of purple. Amanda wants to avoid both of these visual cliches.
- Amanda is removing the Buffalo cityline from our logo, out of respect for the fact that people have multiple and differing relationships to local government.
- Both of Amanda's proposed logo options gesture towards the color schemes in multiple Pride flags (not just gay pride, but lesbian, bi, transgender, genderqueer, and asexual pride) without perfectly reproducing the colors in any one flag.

Amanda then presented two logo ideas to the group.

Option 1:



Option 2:



We had the following discussion about both logos:

Option 1	Option 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the most popular of the two logos (9 votes). • Liked the way Amanda incorporated multiple pride flags into this logo. • Liked that this logo was still recognizable in grayscale. • Liked that the spectrum portion of the logo could exist independently of the words. • Liked the motion to the logo. • Some concern that this logo looks too corporate. (We may or may not be able to remedy this by changing the font.) • Some members felt this logo would be more impressive to potential funders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is less popular than Option 1 (3 votes), but most group members liked both options. • Liked the brightness of the logo. • Logo is somewhat difficult to read. (Could be changed if we rearrange the color scheme.) • Some members felt that this logo was more expressive of our grassroots identity than Option 1. • Amanda presented two versions of this logo. People liked the versatility of this logo; we could use the more colorful version to interpolate our grassroots supporters, and the more muted version to communicate to donors.

Although Option 1 was the most popular logo, the general consensus was that group members liked both logos, and wanted to see Amanda tweak them to see if she could address some of our concerns. Amanda will continue to work on both logos. We will also continue our logo conversation on social media, so that people who could not be present at this meeting can weigh in on logo options.

Project Planning

501c3 Formation Group: This group will meet **Thursday, January 17 at 7pm** to discuss board composition. Thanks to Bridge, we will be able to meet at the UU church on Elmwood Avenue. At present, board formation is really the only thing we can move forward on: the last Adrienne heard, Heidi Jones was working on getting the HistoryProject incorporated in the state of New York. Adrienne hasn't heard from Heidi in a few weeks, but her understanding is that if the government shutdown lasts much longer, it's going to seriously delay our ability to procure a 501c3.

Queers and Their Pets: Our most immediate goals for this project are to create a Facebook working group, and to hold a meeting within the next two weeks.

We are still in the process of trying to figure out the shape of this event. We envision that some sort of exhibit will be the end product--although we are not yet clear on whether that exhibit will consist solely of photos and other archival materials, or (as Catherine suggested) original visual art as well. One idea that everyone at the meeting liked was to create and sell a zine, inviting LGBTQ Buffalonians to talk about their relationships with their pets. The event could be a release party for the zine, and we could perhaps split the proceeds between the History Project and a local animal rescue. Adrienne likes the idea of making the event a pet adoption event, as well. There was some concern among the group that this would take too much work, but Adrienne explained that volunteers and staff from the animal rescue would do all the work to get the adoption portion of the event together. We also discussed possibly partnering with Buckminster Cat Cafe, if they are in a position to do so when the event happens.

We also need to figure out what kind of stories/objects we want for this event --what story we're trying to tell about local queers and their pets. Ana has begun to share some articles on the topic on our Facebook group, which could give us something of a theoretical background. As a group, we are interested in some of the stories Carol has told us, particularly about the group of Buffalonians that helped AIDS patients take care of and/or rehome their pets. During the meeting, Carol told us some additional stories, as well: about how she used to hold a Pride celebration for her cats, and how she began to list her phone number in the phone book under her cat's name after she began to receive homophobic death threats over the phone. We also discussed researching and including the following angles:

- Making sure we include queer elders, and those who are not literate or internet savvy.
- Stories of people who rely on pets for primary support following the loss of a partner.
- Homeless queer people and their pets.
- Ana has material from an organization the late Jim Petretta tried to start, which would have helped elderly and disabled LGBTQ people care for their pets.
- Service animals for disabled LGBTQ people.

Stonewall Celebration: This event is six months away, but we still need to start making a plan for it. Amanda agreed to create a Facebook working group for the event, and Jeff will share the research he's already done on this topic in said group. People interested in this event should plan to meet within the next 2-3 weeks.

Fall Research Project: As a group, we decided that this taskforce does not yet need to meet. We should, however, start thinking about this project, and doing some preliminary research on our own time in order to figure out what shape this project will take. People who are interested in this topic should be working to put together a list of possible resources for research.

Documentary Project: Ana reported that people interested in helping with the documentary project will be meeting on **Wednesday, January 16**, at Adrienne and Ana's apartment.