

alga NEWSLETTER

Australian Lesbian & Gay Archives Inc
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NOW WE ARE TWENTY

In August this year, the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives will be celebrating its twentieth anniversary. Formally established at the Fourth National Homosexual Conference in Sydney in 1978, the Archives has built a fine collection of materials relating to all aspects of gay and lesbian life in Australia. While our collecting continues, we want to use our anniversary to bring ourselves more clearly to the attention of the communities we serve.

Already this year, we have organised an Open Day and marched in the Pride March in Melbourne and Mardi Gras in wherever it is that that was held. We also organised a stall at Midsumma Carnival. At all these events we found many people who knew of the Archives and were interested to catch up with how we are doing. We also found people who didn't know we existed, but who were pleased that we did. Lots of people offered contacts and bits and pieces for the collection.

But now, to future plans. We are planning an **Anniversary Dinner** for August and we are hoping that you will be able to join us. At this evening, we will be awarding our first ever **Life Membership**. Not surprisingly, this will be conferred upon Graham Carbery, at whose initiative the Archives was founded in the first place and through whose untiring work it has continued to exist through the past two decades. Graham has provided time, energy, accommodation, enthusiasm, money, and a host of other contributions and the Committee is pleased to be able to acknowledge his work. There are many other people who played their part and we intend to continue with the conferring of Life Membership from time to time but we felt that Graham's role has been far and away so important that he deserved to be commemorated alone in this first round.

We will also be announcing details of an annual prize to be awarded to the best fourth year thesis. The **Thesis Prize** – which will be \$250 – is in-

tended to encourage young scholars to undertake research in gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer themes in any discipline. We want to receive copies of such work and we want to highlight the contribution that the Archives can make to research (though it is not a condition of entry that the Archives collection be used).

Along with everyone else in the world, we are setting up a **Website**. This will provide access to details of the collection, a history of the Archives and other useful information. Mary Mavroudis is designing and establishing the site, which we expect will be operating shortly.

Finally, there is fundraising. Expenses continue to mount – as explained in a later article – and we are going to undertake a couple of bouts of effort to collect some money. Selling chocolates is one option and if you have access to potential markets (work, school, extended families and circles of friends), contact us and we'll tell you how you can help. We are also having a **Trivia Night**. Yes, we want to take your money, but in return we guarantee a lot of fun and really neat prizes.

We hope that you will be able to join us in our celebrations. For details on any or all of these events contact Graham on (03) 9344 7944 or by email on g.willett@politics.unimelb.edu.au

Graham Willett

DONATIONS

The Committee would like to express its appreciation to all those who have renewed their memberships and to those following who have been able to make an additional donation as well:

Mannie De Saxe, D L Hilliard, Terry Goulden, I. Purcell, KWA, KL, Alison Thorne, Mitch Cleary, John C, Richard Stone.

ALGA GOES ELECTRONIC

Over the years, the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives have been a rich source of information for many historians, researchers, students, organisations and the interested public. Up until recently, volunteers and guests have relied primarily upon manually organised systems for the retrieval of information.

Managing such a large collection however, often meant it was difficult for members and guests to ensure that they located everything available on a particular subject area.

As a final year Information Management student in 1997, I embarked on a project to catalogue a number of items from the ALGA poster collection and then transfer the information onto an electronic database. After consultation with committee members, DB Textworks software was acquired and the project was begun with the greater view of eventually using the database created to store information pertaining to all material held by the Archives.

Thus, in creating the structure of the database, the needs and research requirements of users of the entire collection were considered. Fields such as title, authorship details, language, physical description details, publication and source details, historical and contextual notes, any restrictions on use, and a shelf location for the physical item were allowed for.

Most importantly, records have had subject headings assigned to them which are accessible either as a fixed term or as keywords. For this purpose, the Lesbian and Gay Historical Society of San Diego Subject Headings were adapted to suit local requirements. Some items also have brief summaries describing their content.

What the database essentially allows is keyword or free text subject searches as well as the option of combining a number of search terms in order to narrow or expand a search. Searches can be date or language specific and can also locate material across a variety of formats but pertaining to the same subject area.

Still in its early stages, the database now contains 240 records of items belonging to the poster collection. With the continuing effort of members and volunteers the database will continue to grow. It is anticipated that it will be the sole electronic catalogue for all books and periodicals, ephemera and audio-visual items held in the ALGA collection.

Mary Mavroudis

VICE PRESIDENTIAL ACTIVISM

Since the 1997 AGM I have been concentrating upon the role of Vice President (VP).

One of the key areas for the VP is volunteer liaison and maintenance. It is a good sign that the Archive is in a position to have to manage and deal with so many volunteers. We have been fortunate – even with the accommodation crisis still lingering – to have to introduce, train and plan for our volunteers

I have been working toward setting up some structures to ensure that volunteers needs and interests are being met. Working with Jodie Joyce as Secretary and Graham Willett as President to plan for the current volunteers and to consider how best to utilise any new volunteers has been a rewarding process.

Graham and I have been meeting with all the volunteers (many of whom also happen to be Committee members too). This has given us the opportunity to get to know our fellow archivists and to consider the best way to meet their needs and the Archives work.

When I am not in meetings I am working through a basic list of the ephemeral holdings with another volunteer – currently Geoff. Ephemera may consist of materials such as letters, faxes, media releases, flyers or the minutes of a meeting, although many other varied materials are filed here. These are generally held in filing cabinets (about eight altogether) and some boxes for the files which are too large for a suspension file. The ephemera is maintained under the author or group name (alphabetically). We are listing the files and noting where the group/author is/was located, if it is in a language other than English and whether it is principally gay/lesbian/bi/transgender/mixed or anti-homosexual. The list will then be entered onto the database/catalogue to assist people in their enquiries.

Mark Riley

THE COSTS OF DOING IT BETTER

The Archives has been through rough times in the past two years, and as someone who wondered whether it would emerge from that rough passage, I am delighted to observe the new committee functioning effectively and with enthusiasm. The accommodation question still looms large for ALGA, but it is encouraging to see new people, younger people, both women

and men, valuing the work of the Archives and accepting responsibility not just for keeping the show going, but doing the show better.

Doing it better inevitably involves more funds than ALGA has at its disposal. Even keeping the show going costs money – binding, for instance, is a significant ongoing expense, and proper conservation materials don't come cheap (in fact too many of our materials are not 'proper' for that very reason). But the new committee has set about improving the collection's accessibility with more extensive computerised indexing, getting more people involved to deal with the enormity of that job, and raising the profile of ALGA's collection, particularly through displays and a web site. Our current computer technology is not really up to this task – there's too little of it and it's too old. A much needed computer refit would break the bank and starve the Archives of funds for essential maintenance.

You'll see elsewhere in the newsletter that the ALGA committee has fundraising initiatives under way, and I am sure people will get behind those efforts. But I would like members to bear in mind that effort spent on fundraising, is generally effort taken away from the Archives core functions – conserving and organising our community's records, and bringing them to life in displays, publications and presentations.

Donations to the Archives thus make a big difference – to morale, effort and output – and all donations to ALGA are tax deductible.

Gary Jaynes

SHOPPING DRAG

Percy Baynes of Elwood was arrested in August 1935 on a charge of 'indecent behaviour'. His crime was to go window shopping in Collins St on a weekday afternoon, wearing a frock, hat, gloves, stockings and high heels.

Men who wore drag in public in the 1930s frequently ran the risk of being arrested as a 'public nuisance' or on a charge of 'offensive behaviour'.

Percy had travelled into the city on the tram from his home in Elwood without anyone around him being aware that he was a man. He caused no outrage among the crowds in Collins St. He was, however, spotted by a Police Detective whose suspicions were aroused for some unknown reason.

Instead of accosting Percy in the street, the detective decided to follow him. He followed Percy to the pictures, where they both sat right through the programme (from newsreel to 'God Save the King') and then followed Percy home on the tram

to Elwood. And then, at Percy's front gate, he arrested him for offensive behaviour.

The next day Percy appeared in the City Court in Russell Street before a Magistrate, still wearing the clothes he had been arrested in. He had been taken in charge at his front gate, but not allowed to collect a change of clothing before being taken into the city (on public transport once more -- there were very few [police cars in those days]).

In his defence Percy said that he didn't know why he dressed in women's clothing -- he thought he had a 'kink'. He protested that his behaviour had not been offensive, as he hadn't approached anyone or spoken to anyone the whole time he had been in town, and he had been minding his own business the whole time.

Now here's the twist! The Magistrate took one look at Percy's ensemble and agreed with him!

The Magistrate said that while women were walking the streets wearing jodhpurs and beach pyjamas, he couldn't see the problem with Percy wearing a frock to town. In Fact, His Honour stated, Mr Baynes was dressed more respectably than most women! Case dismissed!

Unfortunately, *Truth*, the scandal sheet which reported this case in tones of shocked (but delighted) horror, did not mention the name of this judicial supporter of drag. That is a pity, because one can't help but wonder if His Honour's hobbies included dressing up as well!

(Source: *Truth*, 17 August 1935, p. 11)

Wayne Murdoch

A TALE OF TWO THESES

In 1990, Naomi Wolf published her doctoral thesis. The Beauty Myth became a bestseller and found its way onto reading lists in women's studies and sociology courses. In the acknowledgments, Wolf thanks her grandmother at some length, clearly regarding her as an extraordinary role model.

However, eleven years earlier, her mother had published her own doctoral thesis. Deborah Goleman Wolf's *The Lesbian Community* was a groundbreaking ethnography of a San Francisco lesbian feminist community.

From 1972, Wolf spent two years researching the lesbian feminist community in San Francisco and wrote what is referred to as the first lesbian ethnography. She met 800 lesbians face-to-face, working closely with about thirty. Her research was informed by residence in a commune of activist lesbians, membership of Daughters of Bilitis,

conferences, classes, lesbian feminist literature, and interviews with twenty five lesbians.

Wolf sought to demystify and legitimise lesbianism. Indeed, she referred to 'the new, affirming lesbianism', which she contrasted with the gay male community's pursuit of 'uncommitted sexual experiences' and the despair of a violent, sexualised, butch/femme bar scene. The new lesbian had given up on coalition politics and largely turned her back on the bar scene. She was intellectually preoccupied, spiritually focused, romantic, serially monogamous and politically informed. Her body was desexualised via, for example, utilitarian clothing. The new lesbian was not a sexual predator. Her ultimate focus was on friendship, and her relationships were no more or less successful than heterosexual ones. If she was a mother, she was no more or less likely to produce lesbian or gay children, was acutely aware of her children's emotional needs, had adopted non-hierarchical principles, and was subjected to a range of legal and other sanctions.

Wolf has been criticised for stereotyping and homogenising diverse lesbian communities, and lesbian feminist communities in particular. In *The Lesbian Community*, she seems to ignore significant differences that would undermine the unified community she is so eager to present. For example, while Wolf records that two thirds of 'the community' were middle class, she notes without comment that middle class women felt confident in speaking for their largely absent working class sisters. Wolf does not describe or comment on racial and ethnic difference or sameness. At one point she lists oppressed communities as though they are discrete and do not intersect. As a result, she does not appear to see black lesbians, for instance. The photographs which accompany the text confirm that she is referring to a white community.

By presenting a community which is unified in its aims, its experiences and its appearance, Wolf was presenting a kind of critical lesbian mass. She also marked herself as the odd one out, the marginal figure – the outsider who has to counter assumptions that she's a lesbian. At Daughters of Bilitis, this warranted a meeting: 'the officers of the organisation and I agreed that it would be inappropriate to announce at every weekly meeting that I was a heterosexual anthropologist'. Wolf fails to interrogate the presumption of heterosexuality which pervades the lives of her subjects. *The Lesbian Community* is a well-intended piece of research which was shaped by the 'rules' of the academy at that time. Prior to its publication, lesbians had been discussed largely in terms of

deviance. Many researchers avoided lesbian subjects as they tended to prompt questions about their own sexuality. It is believed that Margaret Mead relegated an account of same-sex sexual experience between Samoan girls to an appendix for this reason.

Wolf worked at a time when an 'insider's' observations were dismissed as subjective anecdotes. Consequently, only heterosexuals were considered credible interviewers of lesbians and gay men. Both this and the fact that many lesbians could not and did not come out, meant that a lesbian-authored lesbian ethnography was to be a long way off.

There is no doubt that *The Lesbian Community* inscribed a new heterosexually-friendly lesbianism on the heterosexual reader's imagination – and conjured up unfamiliar images for many lesbian readers who were not white, middle class, lesbian feminists. Nevertheless, Wolf risked her academic career, rejected the dominant deviance model and inaugurated the lesbian ethnographic project. She also met 800 more lesbians than Naomi apparently did before writing *The Beauty Myth*.

Jodie Joyce

from *Lesbiana*, February, 1998

SURFING THE NET FULLY-CLOTHED!

In the wonder that is today's technology, there is one thing that we all are beginning to not live without, namely the Internet. For any information junkie, it is a dream come true, not to mention the bulging filing cabinets of extra papers, reports and whatever else takes your fancy . . .

This is a relatively short guide to have a queer ol' time on the 'Net' as we aficionados call it. As there is so much information available, the best place to start is with a *Search Engine*. I have found the best to be www.yahoo.com which is very comprehensive and has a world wide coverage.

As I do most of my research on the other side of the Pacific, all of the following sites are American. For political junkies there is the Human Rights Campaign (www.hrc.org) which links up to many other sites. You can also visit the White House (www.whitehouse.gov) and search their extensive library or just say hi to Socks, the Clinton's cat. Congress is available through <http://thomas.loc.gov> where you can find all sorts of goodies or send a nasty anonymous message to Jesse Helms!

The Queer Resource Directory is a link to every-

thing from gays in the military to gay and lesbian history or plain old gossip. They are at www.qrd.org. For the latest information on gays in the military, try the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network which is a treasure trove of material – www.sldn.org.

For AIDS related material, I have found the best site to be The Names Project which has links to every major AIDS organisation in the States. They can be found at www.aidsquilt.org. Also to be found on that site is a listing of 78,000 people who are on the AIDS Quilt. Another interesting site is the Centre For Disease Control which has a document clearing house where you can access free publications. (For sale. Adult Abstinence Posters. See author) They are located at www.cdcnac.org

Naturally, there are sites galore for favourite actors and actresses – the best place to start there is just type in a name on the Yahoo search engine. There is the Emma Thompson World Wide Worship Site, many official and unofficial Xena pages which naturally would not interest anyone in the Archives! No names mentioned due to the libel laws

Not to be forgotten are sites for the alleged Religious Right which range from the mild to the downright disgusting. The Traditional Values Coalition is at www.tradvalues.org. The Christian(?) Coalition is at www.ccco.org and just to keep the deviates happy, there is a www.godhatesfag.com page. Also to be mentioned is the request for donations to rid society of 'filthy AIDS carrying homosexuals'.

To keep an eye on all of these organisations is Hatewatch who can be contacted at <http://hatewatch.org>. They also have links to the groups that they are watching including STRAIGHT – Society To Remove All Godless Homosexual Trash.

Naturally, after this, I recommend a cleansing of

the soul by visiting the Emma Thompson World Wide Worship site or possibly somewhere else that contains semi-naked pictures of one's favourite actors or actresses.

If you hate waiting for books to come out here – and a hell of a lot never do – try www.amazon.com which is an online bookstore. They give excellent service and even with our dollar, prices are very competitive.

There are also mail rooms where you can communicate with friends or even have online sex with strangers but I'll leave that up to you to find as I don't people to think that I am a sicko ...

For the news junkies among us, it is heaven. One of the best places to go is the CNN home page which is incredibly extensive with links to any story that they cover. They are at www.cnn.com. Another great site is *Time* magazine which is located at www.pathfinder.com. Other magazines such as *Life* and *People* can be accessed from there.

If you do not have Internet access from home, there are several Cybernet cafes around town, but they can be pricey ranging from \$12 an hour plus 50 cents for each sheet of paper. For melburnians, the best place to go is the State Library where you can book for a 30 minute session daily (phone number 9669 9824). It is recommended that you book the previous day as they do not take bookings on the day. Sometimes this can lead to waits of up to two hours if you just drop in off the street or out of the gutter. BYO paper as they sell packets for \$2 which contains twenty sheets.

If you are feeling a little earth bound, I suggest trying www.nasa.gov which can literally take you anywhere in the Universe!

So there is a short guide to the Net, try it and have lots of fun. Also remember that clothes are compulsory for this form of surfing especially if you do it in a public place.

Kate Doolan