

## The foundation of ALGA

The first steps towards creating a gay archive in Australia occurred in the mid-1970s. Between 1975 and 1978, several individuals acting independently of each other, some loosely acquainted through gay activism, had floated ideas of setting up a national gay archive or depositing records of Australian gay activism at a central location in each state or in public institutions.<sup>1</sup>

Two of these efforts were inspired by the Canadian Gay Archives (CGA), which was established in 1973, initially as the Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives.<sup>2</sup> The CGA was created by the collective which published the Canadian gay liberation journal, *The Body Politic*, which circulated in activist circles in Australia and was well-regarded here. CGA and *The Body Politic* shared premises for many years.

Most of these Australian efforts didn't bear fruit, however they were part of a growing recognition that the records of the local gay movement were not being well cared for.

In the latter half of 1977, Graham Carbery, an activist in Melbourne gay liberation<sup>3</sup>, decided that he would begin collecting what records he could find, encouraged by fellow activists who were concerned the young movement's history – it was then only seven years old - could disappear without a trace unless more systematic efforts were made to preserve them.

Some of the first records gathered came from Melbourne Gay Liberation's centre in Fitzroy, which had closed in early 1976 when the rent became unaffordable.

In a visit to Canada in Dec 1977/January 1978, Carbery visited the Canadian Gay Archives and returned to Australia with more concrete ideas about what might be involved in setting up something similar in Australia. His efforts to this point had been largely undertaken as an individual, with the moral support of a few fellow activists, and he recognised the need to formalise the collecting and preservation work. To this end, he decided to take the idea to the forthcoming Fourth National Homosexual Conference, to be held in Sydney on 25-27 August 1978. The national conferences did not have any binding powers but were the closest thing the movement then had to a democratic forum for airing issues about homosexual politics. On 10 June he attended a meeting in Melbourne with a representative from the conference organising collective, Mike Bray. Carbery was one of four reps from the Victorian Gay Teachers Group at that meeting<sup>4</sup>, along with the late Carl Reinganum, then president of the Homosexual Law Reform Coalition. Mike Bray's notes record that "Graham was organising a national gay archive – assistance was required."

It turned out that another archiving initiative had also come to the attention of the conference organisers around this time. Robert French, a professional archivist then working at the Australian National Archives, had written to the conference organisers on 9 August, advising

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<sup>1</sup> These efforts are documented in a chronology compiled by Graham Carbery, Pre-history of the Australian Gay Archives, at <http://alga.org.au/files/Early-history-of-ALGA.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian Gay Archives was renamed the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives in 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Carbery had come to activism through the Gay Liberation movement in Melbourne, initially in a consciousness raising group in 1972. A teacher of legal studies in the TAFE system, Carbery became involved in the Homosexual Law Reform Coalition and the Gay Teachers and Students Group.

<sup>4</sup> Others were Phil Carswell, Mitch Cleary and Gary Jaynes.

them of his wish to use the conference to raise awareness of the importance of preserving the movement's records.

An archives workshop was duly held at the Sydney conference on the morning of Sunday 27 August 1978 – with Carbery and French attending. Carbery took to this workshop a one page document, "A proposal for an Australian Gay Archives".<sup>5</sup> Its content drew on the statement of purpose of the Canadian Gay Archives. Others attending this workshop included Liz Ross and Don Baxter, trained librarians who had been active in efforts to encourage libraries to acquire materials that reflected a more enlightened approach to homosexuality. Liz Ross was later to play an important role in the Australian Gay Archives through donation of materials from her personal collection, and in the organisation of some significant collections (Australasian Lesbian Movement, National Homosexual Conferences, scientific literature about homosexuality until the mid 1970s).

At the final plenary session of the Fourth National Homosexual Conference a resolution to formally establish the Australian Gay Archives was adopted, and the records of the conference were deposited with AGA.

AGA's records at this time fitted in a couple of four-drawer filing cabinets which followed Graham Carbery around as he moved house from North Fitzroy to Flemington, until mid 1980 when the Archives took up the generous offer of a room in The Hub, a centre in West Melbourne operated by John Willis, pastor of Christ's Community Church. The Archives stayed at The Hub until 1987, when the building had to be sold. By this time the collection occupied two rooms. After a period in storage, the collection again moved to a purpose built basement repository in Carbery's house in Ivanhoe, where it remained until 1995. The move to the Victorian AIDS Council's building in South Yarra happened in 1996.

Graham Carbery was awarded life membership by the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives in 1998, acknowledging his role as founder and his sustained commitment to building the Archives in its first twenty years.

Gary Jaynes  
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<sup>5</sup> The Australian Gay Archives became an incorporated association on 2 November 1983, and changed its name to the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives Inc on 12 March 1991.