

RAINBOW HISTORY PROJECT YEAR 17: 2017

Rainbow History Project's archiving, social geography, public panel, and oral history programs continue to grow. But we recognize that a small all-volunteer organization, by itself, cannot collect, preserve, and promote the history and culture of all the LGBT communities in metropolitan Washington, DC. We need to leverage our limited resources with the vast resources in the communities. Therefore, in 2017, we initiated a project to give our grass roots communities tools to preserve and promote their history and culture – by teaching individuals and organizations how to construct their own archives and perform LGBT historical research relevant to their lives. Rainbow History Project remains LGBT DC's primary preservation group, and all of our programs are increasingly robust, but we are helping to create mini preservation groups to further our mission.

Here are some of Rainbow History's 2017 accomplishments.

Strategic Planning:

With our continued growth, the board realized that we had reached the point where our board-centric organizational structure might no longer provide the most effective way to pursue our mission. Under the leadership of board member Rob Berger, we began a strategic planning process, reviewing our current programs to determine how well they are contributing to our mission, and analyzing our organizational structure to see if there are changes that would improve our effectiveness. We created a strategic plan that explicitly identifies our goals and objectives and sets a timeline for RHP activities over the next three years. As a part of creating the plan, RHP sought input from the public and surveyed interested parties, members, volunteers and current and former board members about RHP's past, current and future activities. Board members then participated in a day long facilitated strategic planning session to debate and discuss RHP and create the framework for the strategic plan. The plan was finalized in August 2017 and the Board and volunteers are now in the process of implementation.

Teaching communities how to construct their own archives and perform LGBT historical research:

- In March, board members Bonnie Morris, Vincent Slatt, Eric Gonzaba, and Chuck Goldfarb presented a guest lecture on how to perform LGBT historical research to students in an LGBT studies senior seminar at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis. There was great give-and-take between the presenters and the students, who showed a voracious interest in learning how to glean information about marginalized communities that mainstream data collectors and researchers have ignored.
- In the fall, Rainbow History Project submitted two proposals to present "how to" workshops at the January 2018 National LGBTQ Task Force Creating Change Conference in Washington DC. The purpose of the workshop portion of the conference, which attracts hundreds of activists from communities large and small all around the country, is to teach skills needed to be effective advocates and to create community institutions. Our proposals offered hands-on opportunities in two areas – how to perform LGBT historical research and how to create an LGBT community

archive. The conference accepted the archiving proposal. Board members Vincent Slatt, RHP's chief archivist, and Nathan Avant, our digital archivist, prepared a written archiving primer for the attendees and constructed a workshop that started with a formal presentation and then had attendees join break out groups that were given actual recent archival donations to process. This preparatory work done in late 2017 was then put to use at the January 24, 2018 presentation and will be used again in future community workshops we have planned.

Collecting and Preserving DC's LGBT History and Culture:

Our archiving, oral histories, and social geography teams were extremely busy throughout the year, significantly expanding our collection.

- Rainbow History Project held several working sessions with SaVanna Peace and others in the trans community to create a DC Trans History Timeline. Like all our databases, such as the Places and Spaces database that supports our walking tours, this timeline is not a one-time effort. Rather, it will involve an on-going partnership with members of the community to expand the database as we discover additional historical information and to keep it up to date.
- Thanks to a \$2,500 grant from the DC Community Heritage Project (a partnership of the DC Humanities Council and the DC Historic Preservation Office) that was matched with in-kind and other contributions, Rainbow History Project updated its Dupont Circle self-guided walking tour content and made the information digitally accessible.
- We continued to add a new oral history sound file about once a month, with an explicit emphasis on diversity. In 2017, narrators gave stories about LGBT journalism, youth advocacy, Capital Pride, and African American social life. With these additions, RHP has collected about 200 oral histories and authors who have used our archives have donated about 100 additional oral histories that they had performed as part of their research. These oral histories are most frequently used by academics and graduate students.
- Thanks to funding from Brother, Help Thyself, Scarlet's Foundation, and the Centaur Motorcycle Club, and another DC Community Heritage grant, and many hours of our volunteers' skilled work time, Rainbow History Project showcased the first major work product from our long-term project to save and digitize our community's otherwise lost pre-digital photo albums. More than 2,000 photos from the 1970s through 1990s of leather, drag, and other community events in the Patrick Gerschen collection were digitized and made available to the public through an Internet portal. We projected the digitized photos at the annual Scarlet's Bake Sale in February, where some attendees helped us identify previously unidentified individuals and events in the photos.
- SMYAL donated its archival records, most of which focus on the first five years of the organization.
- Longtime activist Bob Summersgill, who performed much of the hard policy analysis in support of DC's domestic partnership and same sex marriage laws, donated his document collection to Rainbow History Project.
- Rainbow History Project received three boxes of videotapes from the groundbreaking Fairfax County cable access television program *One in Ten People*.
- The late Jim Graham donated to Rainbow History his collection of AIDS-related t-

shirts, which highlight the breadth of actions and organizations that were part of the battle against AIDS.

- Richard Schaeffer, who was a plaintiff in an historic 1971 legal case challenging DC's sodomy laws, donated his legal papers to Rainbow History Project.
- Our digital archivist, Nathan Avant, constructed a Digital Preservation Plan (that the board approved) for this growing portion of our collection. The plan included constructing policies, setting priorities, and identifying equipment and other resource needs. Increasingly the materials that RHP receives are digital rather than paper and collecting and preserving digital materials have unique challenges that did not arise in the pre-digital world. With this policy now in place Rainbow History Project is able to move forward with greater efficiency and direction.

Promoting DC's LGBT History and Culture:

It is not sufficient to collect and preserve our history and culture, we also must bring it to the general public. In 2017 we did this in many ways, ranging from public presentations to write-ups to walking tours.

- Former RHP chairman Philip Clark and board member Jeff Donahoe continued to attract large crowds (and small private groups) to their walking tours of LGBT Capitol Hill and LGBT Dupont Circle, respectively. The new DC organization Pride Outside organized several of these tours. One of these, done in association with Dance Exchange, incorporated interpretive dance and attracted more than 60 people. Another walking tour highlight was expanding and tailoring content for gender studies classes from Union College in New York and DC's American University. Philip and Jeff also provided technical assistance in sharing information about DC LGBTQ history and social space to Dance Exchange's production of "Growing Our Own Gardens" work that will continue in 2018.
- Our major project in 2016 had been the preservation and digitization of the historic 1973-1982 *Friends* radio tapes. In January 2017 we had a public event at the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop that highlighted some amazing segments from the more than 300 hours of preserved programming.
- On March 8, board member Dr. Bonnie Morris made a presentation, "The Sounds of Feminine Revolution," on the historic development of women's music in Washington, DC, at the Library of Congress.
- Board member Eric Gonzaba moderated a panel on the history of the *Washington Blade* and the digitization of all the newspaper's back issues.
- Rainbow History Project again had a presence at Pride events through the year, including Capital Pride, NOVA Pride, Youth Pride, and the annual Black Pride brunch for long time community activists. At these events, we brought electronic and paper materials to share with those who visited our booth and encouraged visitors to tell their stories for our oral histories collection.
- RHP volunteer Kate Ruane reviewed the historical documents that Bob Summersgill had donated relating to DC's Domestic Partnership and Marriage laws to prepare an article for Tagg Magazine on the 25th Anniversary of the DC Domestic Partnership Act.
- Chuck Goldfarb made presentations about the work that Rainbow History is doing at the Library of Congress GLOBE and also at Tikkun Leil Shabbat, a progressive Jewish congregation.

Providing Historical Context for Journalists, Researchers, and the Community:

Rainbow History Project continued to provide historical context and guidance to a wide range of requestors.

- When political events occur involving the LGBT communities, journalists increasingly contact Rainbow History Project for historical context. We were contacted by *Metro Weekly* for our reaction when then-Secretary of State John Kerry issued an apology for past discrimination against employees and applicants based on their sexual orientation. When the 2017 Pride Parade was disrupted by demonstrators seeking to have the community address a number of discrimination issues, WAMU interviewed Chuck Goldfarb for an historical perspective on differences within the LGBT community between those who would focus on narrowly defined LGBT issues and those who prefer that the community address broad social justice issues. Portions of the interview were included in a radio program.
- With help from Philip Clark, we once again responded to researcher requests on a wide range of topics.

Changes on the Board:

During 2017, we had three additions to the Rainbow History Project board – Jeff Gruber, Nathan Avant, and Rob Berger. Jeff is now our treasurer, Nathan is our chief digital archivist, and Rob is leading our strategic planning process.

Two long-time board members stepped down in 2017. Bonnie Morris resigned her position when she moved to California. Jose Gutierrez joined the board of directors of Brother, Help Thyself, which is one of Rainbow History's major funders. Since it would be a potential conflict of interest for Jose to serve on both boards, he resigned from our board though he continues to be a strong supporter. We are extremely thankful for the years of service both Bonnie and Jose provided to RHP.