

RAINBOW HISTORY PROJECT YEAR 16: 2016

In 2016, the Rainbow History Project preserved, digitized, and made available on the Internet more than 115 hours of *Friends* radio tape recordings from 1973-82 and had a highly successful pilot project to digitize the first 3,000 images in our new DC LGBT Community Photo Album, all while maintaining our legacy programs and expanding our Internet presence. We sought and received funding from a wider range of donors. We also updated our by-laws to facilitate and better reflect the environment in which we now operate. Brother Help Thyself awarded us its prestigious Billy Collison Award. Perhaps most important, we are attracting a younger corps of volunteers who bring state-of-the-art technical skills and provide a multi-generational perspective on our community's history.

Here are some of Rainbow History's 2016 accomplishments and activities already undertaken in 2017.

Preserving, Digitizing, and Making Available to the Public the *Friends* Radio Tapes:

2016 was our most productive year yet for the preservation, digitization, and dissemination of the historic *Friends* radio tapes. The pioneering *Friends* radio program, which was broadcast from 1973 to 1982 by the Stonewall Nation Media Collective, first on the Georgetown University radio station and then on the local Pacifica station, aired news, cultural, and entertainment events of significance to DC's LGBT community. Programming ranged from live coverage of the 1979 LGBT March on Washington and Third World LGBT Conference, to interviews with John Waters and Divine, poetry readings, discussions of police harassment, LGBT-related political developments, and evenings of dance music. Although some of the tapes had been digitized onto CDs in the early 2000s, many of the tapes remained at great risk of total deterioration.

In 2015, Rainbow History Project began a major drive to raise the funds needed to preserve all the *Friends* tapes (both the reel-to-reel tapes of the actual broadcast programs and the cassette tapes of community events, excerpts from which were played on air) and to make the programming available to the public over the Internet. Thanks to several large individual donations, substantial donations from the Capital Pride Alliance and the DC Preservation League, a grant from Brother Help Thyself, and crowd-sourced funding through Razoo.com, by early 2016 we finally had amassed the funds we needed for this, the largest project Rainbow History Project has ever undertaken.

As a first step, we reviewed those materials that had been digitized in the early 2000s and stored on CDs kept in our storage unit. Since the public did not have access to the stored CDs, we posted the digitized material on PopUp Archive, which became our online storage and access platform. The collection is called "Friends Radio: Broadcasts and Outtakes, 1973-1982" and can be found online at www.popuparchive.com/collections/7021. In 2016, we uploaded 115 hours of recordings to the account. Initial, machine-generated written transcripts of the materials were created by PopUp, though the transcripts produced by audio to written conversion had numerous errors. We therefore began an on-going project, that volunteers can perform in the comfort of their homes, to review and edit the transcripts to clarify names, dates, and other key information.

In addition to posting online the previously digitized episodes of the program, all of the not-yet-digitized reels and cassette tapes were labelled, indexed and prepared for digitization. This was a gargantuan task as most of the labels were missing. The digitization was performed by the same vendor that had performed the digitization in the early 2000s, the Cutting Corporation of Rockville, MD

(<https://cuttingcorporation.com/>), which provided highly skilled service, ultimately helping us save almost all the tapes.

To give our *Friends* preservation project visibility in the community, we made a presentation at the Brother Help Thyself grants reception in Baltimore. Also, *Friends* Radio was highlighted in an issue of the PopUp Archive newsletter in April 2016, and through an article in the 2016 Capital Pride Guide co-authored by board members Cassandra Ake and Vincent Slatt. The initial work also was highlighted in RHP's July 2016 public meeting and volunteer recruitment event. In August 2016, RHP invited its major donors as well as individuals who had been involved with the *Friends* program to a coming out event for the digitized *Friends* tapes at the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop. Vincent Slatt, RHP's lead archivist who also leads the *Friends* project, presented excerpts from eight programs and invited audience discussion. When he began playing one excerpt, an audience member identified himself as the program announcer, explaining that he had actually produced the program in Buffalo and then shared it with the *Friends* producers. Given their limited resources, the small number of LGBT radio program producers in the 1970s shared their programming by mailing the reel-to-reel tapes to one another.

Plans were made to complete all *Friends*-related preservation, digitization, and online placement in early 2017, and in fact the work was completed by March 2017. In two batches of deliveries, the Cutting Corporation digitized 141 hours of additional audio – from the broadcast recordings on reels and from the outtakes on cassette. These recordings have been loaded into the same PopUp account as earlier recordings. We now have nearly 300 hours of recordings publicly available, free of charge, over the Internet. Since 2015, this project has cost \$10,817 and required hundreds of hours of skilled volunteer time.

In the process of conducting this work, there were only a few reels that were deemed to be too damaged, or too highly corroded to be handled by the Cutting Corporation without extensive preservation fees. Additionally, in organizing all the reels and cassettes, 48 reels were discovered of the "Speakeasy" gay call-in radio show that was broadcast on the same radio station in the 1970s. The program was run by Ken Rothschild, a member of the Stonewall Nation Media Collective. These represent an additional digitization project that Rainbow History will undertake when new funding sources are identified.

Creating the DC LGBT Community Photo Album:

Over the years, Rainbow History Project has received many photo albums. In 2015, RHP received a particularly historic photo collection – the donation of nearly 3000 images taken at drag and leather events between 1976 and 1994 by the late community photographer Pat Gertschen. This collection provided a unique opportunity to preserve the history of these communities, but also a daunting challenge to identify the places, people, and events captured in these photographs.

This motivated RHP to seek funding for a pilot project that we hoped would lead to the creation of a DC LGBT Community Photo Album. We identified two major tasks – digitizing old photos and finding a way to get public help identifying the photos. In 2016 we sought and received a \$2500 DC Community Heritage Project matching grant to digitize this collection. It is awarded in a partnership of the DC Humanities Council and the DC Historic Preservation Office. To meet the match requirement, our volunteers donated many hours of skilled work time, and we provided supplies and supplemental funds. Board member Edward Benfield, with board member Vincent Slatt, spearheaded the project, obtaining

digitization services from Dodge Chrome, Inc. – one of the preeminent photograph vendors in the area. All the Gertschen collection photos were digitized in 2016.

The second part of the pilot project was to learn how to get community help identifying the places, people, and events in the photos. We created a Facebook page to provide public access to the digitized photos and to get community help identifying the photos. We also applied to participate in the 2017 Scarlet's Foundation annual bake sale fundraiser to support the work of the digitization and identification of the Gertschen and other community albums. We were selected as the primary recipient of funds. On February 12, 2017, we presented a slide show of the Gertschen photos at the Scarlet's bake sale at the DC Eagle. Participants helped us with identification of many of the photos.

The Community Photo Album is now beyond its pilot project stage, but still only in its infancy. We must inform the public about the Facebook page and continue to hold events, like Scarlet's bake sale, where the public can help us identify the photos. We ultimately hope to be able to accept the photo albums of anyone in the community who wants to add their collection to the community album.

It costs more than \$1 per photo, negative, or slide to digitize and place old photos on the Internet. Thus the long term scope of this Community Photo Album project will depend on the funding support we get from the community. We encourage individuals and organizations to donate their old photographs, but we also will need their financial support to bring the photos to historians, researchers and the general public.

Archiving Activities and Expanding and Improving Access to our Collection:

Most of the archiving work undertaken in 2016 was related to our two major new projects – the *Friends Radio* project (primarily review old files and paperwork from our storage unit) and the Patrick T. Gertschen photograph collection (as described above). In addition, volunteers helped to organize donations from community pioneer and former PFLAG-DC leader Paulette Goodman, as well as materials from Jim Marks, and other publications and periodicals. Volunteer Irene Rojas digitized VHS tapes donated by Ray Hagen that detailed local and national news spots about the AIDS crisis. She also digitized tapes of court proceedings donated by Mindy Daniels, who represented DC Fire/EMS employee Kenda Kirby in an anti-discrimination lawsuit based on her sexual orientation and personal appearance.

Early in 2016 some periodicals were delivered to our archival partner, the Historical Society of Washington. Deliveries were discontinued when mold was discovered in the HSW facility, which required remediation. The remediation is now completed so we have renewed depositing materials at HSW. The Rainbow History Project collection remains the most frequently accessed collection at HSW.

In 2016 there was one significant new archival development that we must address going forward. Several donors had digitized their collections and offered us documents in already-digitized format. Most notably, TJ Flavell donated his extensive collection of records, photographs, and videos relating to the Arlington Gay and Lesbian Alliance and the Alexandria Gay and Lesbian Community Association. Unfortunately, it is costly to maintain huge amounts of information on the Internet; we must pay for capacity. Historically, Rainbow History has obtained non-digitized collections, which we have organized and described in finding aids we created to help researchers navigate the large number of physical documents held at the Historical Society of Washington. We have not digitized all documents, just key documents and/or exemplary documents. We have made the limited number of digitized documents available online, but researchers have had to come to the HSW library to review all documents. With

pre-digitized collections, all documents can readily be made available online, but at the cost of paying for online capacity. Our budget does not allow us to obtain the capacity needed to make everything we obtain available online. Going forward, as large quantities of digitized materials are donated to us, we will need to find convenient ways for organizations and other donors who seek to have their entire collections available online to provide funding for such online capacity.

Public Panels and Other Educational Events:

In 2016, we curated historical exhibits, brought together experts for public panel discussions of historical events and trends, and held informal sessions with smaller groups.

- RHP board member Eric Gonzaba organized and moderated a public panel at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum on LGBT activism in Washington, DC during the period 1963-1975, as part of the Museum's year-long exhibit "12 Years That Shook and Shaped Washington." The panelists were RHP community pioneers Eva Freund, Otis (Buddy) Sutson, and Paul Kuntzler, Boden Sandstrom, and Brian Miller.
- RHP organized a public panel at the Mount Pleasant branch of the DC Public Library on Queer Brown Voices, the personal narratives of Latina/o LGBT Activism, moderated by Lisbeth Melendez Rivera, and with panelists Letitia Gomez (an RHP community pioneer), RHP board member Jose Gutierrez, Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, and Moises Agosto Rosario.
- Board members Vincent Slatt and Bonnie Morris discussed the erasure of lesbian spaces and culture at the Story Corps mobile recording studio, a national radio program that partners with the Library of Congress to preserve oral histories.
- Bonnie Morris prepared an exhibit on the women's music movement and its DC roots for installation at the Library of Congress. (Final installation occurred in 2017.)
- Bonnie also discussed changes in DC's lesbian visibility on a panel at Georgetown University that discussed the impact of gentrification on DC's LGBT community.
- Bonnie and board president Chuck Goldfarb met with youth at the Rainbow Youth Alliance of Montgomery County to discuss LGBT history in metropolitan DC. To bring that history to life, Bonnie read from the diary she kept as a teenager growing up in Montgomery County and Chuck described the early SMYAL youth group meetings of the late 1980s (from his perspective as then-president of SMYAL).
- Several photos by Steve Behrens, that are in the RHP collection, were included in the Annual Pride Art Exhibition 2016 at Clifford Chance in DC and New York.

Preserving our Individual Stories through Oral Histories:

Rainbow History's ongoing oral history project gathers the stories of D.C.'s diverse LGBT community through first-person narratives. In 2016, volunteers added more than 20 new oral histories, bringing the collection to more than 200 sound files that we have collected ourselves and about 100 additional interviews donated to us by authors who performed their own interviews as part of their research. These donations were made in appreciation of the help we provided the authors and to make the interviews accessible to other researchers. The oral history stories collected in 2016 related to business, media, politics, the women's music scene, activism, and Pride celebrations. Sound files were requested for use by undergraduate and graduate research students, the National Park Service, and individuals interested in learning more about the DC LGBT community. Another highlight was working with an undergraduate gender studies class at Georgetown University to gather about a dozen of the new oral

histories. Several board members participated in an annual brunch of elders in DC's African American LGBT community that is an unofficial part of the Black Pride festivities to inform the participants of our oral histories program and to encourage them to provide their stories.

Documenting the Community's Social Geography:

Where did we play, party, and do our activism? Where did we live? And when? RHP's social geography project, also known as "Places and Spaces," documents LGBT social spaces in D.C. over the decades. In 2016, RHP volunteer tour guides shared their expertise six times through the popular Capitol Hill and Dupont Circle walking tours. These tours reached more than 100 people, including college and undergraduate students, media, the general community and Walking Town D.C., sponsored by D.C. Cultural Tourism. In 2016, RHP worked with the *Economist* magazine on a feature story about the history (and future) of gay bars. Other 2016 activities included updating the existing self-guided walking tour brochures, adding content to RHP's online resources, and an invited lecture about social geography for students in the historic preservation department at Hobart and William Smith Colleges in Geneva, N.Y.

Assisting Researchers and Journalists:

In 2016 we received requests for help from researchers and journalists on a wide range of topics, but there was one recurring topic of interest – the impact of gentrification on DC's LGBT community. We also received requests from individuals seeking our expertise in the preservation and digitization of photos. Among the requests:

- Bonnie Morris, Jeff Donahoe, and Jose Gutierrez met with a journalist from *The Economist* to give him an historical tour of gay clubs in DC for an article he was researching on the impact of gentrification on gay communities.
- Bonnie met with two different American University students doing papers on the disappearance of lesbian bars in DC.
- Rainbow History Project provided historical photos for *Where Magazine*.
- RHP gave interviews to reporters from the *Washington City Paper*, *Florida Agenda*, *Wird.com* on the disappearing "gayborhood" and the designation of the Furies Capitol Hill house and Stonewall Inn as National Park historic sites.
- We received a request involving the Follies theater fire, seeking contact with individuals who had been involved with GAMMA, a support group for gay, bisexual or questioning men who are or were married, or otherwise involved with a woman.
- We received a number of requests from researchers seeking to communicate with community pioneers and helped facilitate those contacts.
- We were contacted by faculty, students and LGBT studies classes at several universities, including Middle Tennessee State University and the University of Michigan at Flint, seeking to meet with us or use our archives.

Expanding Our Online Presence:

In 2016, Rainbow History Project significantly expanded its online presence beyond our formal website. The website (rainbowhistory.org) remains the primary source of information about the organization, but we now have other online repositories for those seeking specific types of information.

- Selected items and photographs from our physical collection have been digitized and placed on rainbowhistory.omeka.org.
- We have a Facebook page on which members contribute some of their historical research and commentary and photographs, and engage in discussions of current topics.
- Richard Haight designed and manages the RHP Photo Journal on Flickr (RHPphoto.journal), which contains 44 albums and hundreds of photos of RHPs current activities. Albums created in 2016 covered the public panel on Lost Lesbian Spaces held at the Library of Congress, our presentation at the Capitol Hill Arts Workshop of our progress digitizing the *Friends* radio tapes; the Queer Brown Voices public panel that we presented at the Mount Pleasant branch of the DC Public Library; our public panel on Gay Activism 1963-1975, which was part of the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum's year-long program 12 Years that Changed Washington, DC: 1963-1975; RHP's presence at the Capital Pride, Youth Pride, and NoVa Pride celebrations, and our annual meeting.
- In 2016, Rainbow History began work on its DC Community Album on Facebook.
- We now have a webpage for the digitized *Friends* radio tapes, popuparchives.com/collections/7021.

Expanding our Funding Sources:

In 2016, encouraged by our long-time primary funding organization, Brother Help Thyself, we widened our search for funding. To support our grant applications to humanities organizations and others outside the LGBT community, we made a more formal effort to incorporate the expertise of our in-house researchers and academics in our grant applications. Bonnie Morris was the "scholarly adviser" for the grant we received from HumanitiesDC that funded the pilot project to digitize the more than 3,000 photos of the Patrick Gertschen Photo Albums – the first major step in our ambitious, multi-year project to create DC's LGBT photo album. For the first time, we sought funding from Scarlet's Foundation, which represents the portion of our community that is memorialized in the Gertschen photo collection.

Streamlining and Updating our Corporate Documents:

RHP's by-laws were constructed in our founding year, 2000. At that time, it was not possible to know the direction the organization would take over the next 16 years or how members of the community would prefer to interact with us. Over time, it has become clear that the by-laws did not reflect the environment in which we operated. We therefore modified our by-laws in 2016. Notably, RHP is a membership organization, but our definition of membership was limited to those who made financial contributions. There are many individuals who have been active contributors of their time who were not recognized as members. Thus one major by-law change was to expand membership to anyone who makes a contribution of any sort to the organization. Also, reflecting the fact that many individuals contribute to RHP but few join us at our annual meeting to vote for the board of directors, we modified the process for electing individuals to the board, giving the existing board members primary responsibility to select board members, but also allowing the general membership to vote in additional board members at the annual meeting.

As Rainbow History has taken on larger projects requiring greater, on-going fundraising efforts, in 2016 we updated our DC business license to take into account our expanded charitable solicitation activities.