

# RAINBOW HISTORY PROJECT



*Preserving Our Community's History*

*Board of Directors:* Philip Clark, Chair; Jeff Donahoe, Secretary; Jim Marks, Treasurer; Chuck Goldfarb; Patsy Lynch; Steven Mandeville-Gamble; Kim SESCOE; Brock Thompson; Dan Vera

## Year Eleven: 2011

2011 has been a year of changes, adjustments, and transitions for the Rainbow History Project in its efforts “to collect, preserve, and promote an active knowledge of the history, arts, and culture relevant to sexually diverse communities in metropolitan Washington D.C.” While many of the past year’s individual actions and achievements have been small, they add up to an organization that is vitally involved in bringing knowledge of the past to current GLBT communities.

### **Board of Directors and Advisory Board**

Sadly, the Rainbow History Project lost a very dear colleague and friend in 2011 with the passing of Jan Knode after a brief battle with lung cancer. Jan was a long-time member of Rainbow History’s board of directors, including time as RHP’s treasurer. It is hard to adequately measure the depth of her impact on this organization, and to say she will be missed by Rainbow History is to say nothing of how badly those of us who knew her will personally miss her warmth and spirit. Travel safely, Jan.

Rainbow History also lost a member of its advisory board when Dr. Franklin Kameny passed away in October. In addition to his pioneering work for Washington D.C.’s GLBT community over the course of seven decades, Dr. Kameny had always been a supporter and friend of the Rainbow History Project. We will miss his contributions greatly.

Two members of the board of directors, Rebecca Dolinsky and Chris Man, chose this year to transition to the advisory board.

In 2011, the board of directors welcomed two new members, Steven Mandeville-Gamble and Brock Thompson. Steven, who had been on our advisory board, is a special collections librarian at George Washington University, and brings his archival expertise to the directorial board. Brock is head of the gay employees group at the Library of Congress, along with being the author of *The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South* (2010).

We look forward to meeting with the advisory board and getting its members’ advice at our annual meeting in March. Rainbow History would like in 2012 to find a way for advisory board members to be more active in the organization, should they so choose.

## **Collections**

Rainbow History Project continues to have an archival partnership with the Historical Society of Washington. Regrettably, the Historical Society and its Kiplinger Library have been undergoing financial problems, and this has made Rainbow History's collections at Kiplinger unavailable for research since May. If this situation continues, it is strongly advisable for Rainbow History to seek a new archival partner. Collections are only as valuable as they are accessible.

In an aggressive spring cleaning, members of the board of directors descended upon Rainbow History's storage unit in Arlington to reorganize the donations and collections contained therein. This involved a large amount of labeling of file boxes, shifting of materials, and the throwing away of some materials from the Cheryl Spector donations that were too fire-damaged to be of any use. Rainbow History has briefly discussed transferring its collections from the storage unit in Arlington to a more Metro-accessible location. This will likely be deferred until decisions have been made about the status of RHP's archival partnership.

Owing to the kindness of Nancy Tucker, the founder of the *Washington Blade*, Rainbow History has added to its collections in 2011 a large number of issues of the lesbian magazine *The Ladder*. While *The Ladder* was not specifically a D.C.-based magazine, it contains information of relevance to Washington's gay and lesbian communities in the 1960s and greatly supplements magazine materials previously donated by Bob Summersgill.

Additionally, RHP has acquired three boxes of organizational materials from Black and White Men Together (BWMT). These have yet to be processed, so it is unknown exactly what is contained, but watch for news about these papers in the coming months.

## **Walking Tours**

Rainbow History Project continued to present walking tours of GLBT historical sites in 2011. These included RHP secretary Jeff Donahoe giving our Dupont Circle tour to youth activists in August; Philip Clark and Kim Sescoc delivering RHP's Capitol Hill Tour to 19 people over two consecutive weekends of WalkingTown DC in September and October; and Philip taking members of an LGBT studies class from Dickinson College on the Capitol Hill tour in October. The Capitol Hill tour also dovetails very well with the Youth Advocacy Program of the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL), and RHP is partnering again with SMYAL to assist the next crop of Youth Advocates. A selection of the Youth Advocates were recently taken on the Capitol Hill tour of sites near the SMYAL house.

Rainbow History's walking tours are among our most popular programs, when they are given. More members of the board of directors need to receive training in giving our neighborhood tours, and it would be wise for Rainbow History to use these tours more consistently to promote the organization and local GLBT history.

## **Community Outreach and Research**

Rainbow History provided research information to a number of community members in 2011, including material about AIDS in D.C., Georgetown University, Walt Whitman, marriage equality, the 1979 March on Washington, the *Friends* radio program, and a variety of oral histories. People and organizations assisted included independent historians, Ph.D. students, newspaper and radio reporters, student journalists, various gay employee groups, the Smithsonian Institution, and, perhaps most important, non-affiliated GLBT community members who simply wanted to find out more about particular events and people in our past.

In connection to Gay Pride Month in June, Rainbow History partnered with the website People's District (<http://peoplesdistrict.com>) to present online interviews with five members of diverse GLBT communities in Washington D.C. These interviews are archived on the People's District site.

In August, Philip Clark and Chuck Goldfarb presented information about the Rainbow History Project to members of the Library of Congress's gay employees group. With the addition of Brock Thompson from the Library of Congress to our board, RHP may be able to forge a deeper connection with librarians and archivists who are interested in helping in our mission.

In September and October, Philip attended monthly meetings of FLY, a group for gay high school and middle school students sponsored by P-FLAG in Fairfax County, Virginia. Youth attendees heard and talked about local LGBT history and looked at the Equality Forum's list of GLBT icons in honor of Gay History Month.

## **Programs**

In April, Rainbow History Project participated in Youth Pride Day, with Kim Sescoc and Philip Clark manning a table and introducing GLBT youth to the organization's walking tours, website, and programs. Youth Pride returned to Dupont Circle from a decade at the Francis School grounds, and attendance seemed to be up significantly, both among youth and adult allies.

Also in April, RHP celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Academy of Washington, D.C.'s oldest continuously operating social group and the nation's oldest continuously operating drag organization. Academy of Washington founder Mame Dennis (Carl Rizzi) was joined by Destiny B. Childs and Carlton Stevens in presenting stories and memories about five decades of drag in the nation's capitol.

In August, the Rainbow History Project participated in the first edition of the OutWrite LGBT Book Fair, hosted by the D.C. Center and modeled on New York City's Rainbow Book Fair. RHP treasurer Jim Marks moderated a panel discussion about Washington D.C. GLBT literary history. Panelists included board members Dan Vera discussing the Harlem Renaissance in D.C. and writers' homes, and Philip Clark talking about H. Lynn Womack and the Guild Press, along with advisory board member Deacon Maccubbin and his partner Jim Bennett discussing running Lambda Rising, performance artists Michelle

Parkerson and Wayson Jones remembering the ENIKAlley Coffee House, and Deb Morris, a former Lammas employee, discussing the impact of the store.

And in October, the Rainbow History Project marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Mattachine Society of Washington (MSW) with a panel discussion held at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This panel was originally slated to include Dr. Frank Kameny, one of MSW's co-founders and an RHP advisory board member, but Dr. Kameny passed away on October 11<sup>th</sup>, two days before the event. We continued with the panel discussion, featuring MSW members Paul Kuntzler and Lilli Vincenz and moderated by RHP founder Mark Meinke, as a way to celebrate the work and the legacy of Dr. Kameny.

It should be noted that both 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary panel discussions, for the Academy and MSW, were audio-recorded. Copies of the tapes are now in the RHP collections. Both have been transcribed and are available to researchers on the RHP website.

Finally, years of work begun by Mark Meinke and an earlier iteration of the RHP board came to further fruition in November, as Dr. Frank Kameny's home at 5020 Cathedral Avenue NW, already a D.C. Historic Landmark, was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Next stop: National Landmark status?

## **Website**

The Rainbow History Project homepage (<http://www.rainbowhistory.org>) was completely redesigned in 2011 through the hard work of board member Dan Vera, our web curator.

Continued updating of the website to ensure that all pages and links are working will be an ongoing process. We are aware that there are broken links and pages, and those problems will be solved as time permits.

Additionally, before any RHP materials are transferred to our archival partner, those materials need to be assessed, scanned, and added to the website. Rainbow History could definitely use a knowledgeable volunteer willing to engage in this work.

## **And into 2012...**

- Philip Clark has announced his intention to step down as chair of the Rainbow History Project when his term ends in April. This will require discussion about how the board is to be structured and what steps must be taken to achieve continued success.
- The Rainbow History Project's Places & Spaces database of GLBT clubs, businesses, social spaces, and other historic sites in and near Washington D.C., will shortly receive its first large update since August 2005, based on some newly discovered information and continued opening/closing of gay sites.
- The Rainbow History board has begun the process for the next round of Community Pioneers awards, to be given in 2012. More details will follow as they are available.

- The most important individual issue that must be considered in 2012 is whether the Rainbow History Project partnership with the Historical Society of Washington can be profitably continued. If the Kiplinger Library remains closed owing to financial problems on the part of the Historical Society, Rainbow History must give serious consideration to forging a partnership with a different organization and transferring our research files and collections away from HSW.
- RHP also badly needs to identify and apply for available grant monies. It is impractical to believe that the *Friends* radio tapes can be preserved and the RHP oral history tapes transcribed on an *ad hoc* basis. Money must be acquired to have these tasks completed professionally and comprehensively. Suggestions of possible funding sources and, for the oral history tapes, potential transcription services, are greatly appreciated.