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Archival Resources on the Web

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LGBTQ+ Archives on the World Wide Web

By Carly A. Lenz, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

The benefits of collecting and contributing to a particular community's historical representation and archival manifestation are manifold. The act of archiving the culture of a unique group of people not only enables some method of preservation and protection, it also serves as a mode of activism geared toward the depiction of different voices, identities, and communities. For instance, archival institutions dedicated to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and others (LGBTQ+) community collect items that pertain to and illustrate that group's cultural spectrum, the materials themselves comprising a variety of ephemera, manuscripts, images, documentation, oral histories, artwork, moving pictures, and even comic books. In addition, these archives aim to undo the marginalizing and silencing that the community and its members have endured over time. Leonard Kniffel delineates the social, political, and cultural history of LGBTQ+ individuals as "a history that had to be pieced together and separated from the literature of fear and ignorance in which it was buried."¹ The decades-long skirmish that the LGBTQ+ population has experienced with identity politics, prejudice, and misrepresentation in the media has resulted in a deficient historical record; fortunately, efforts made in recent years by multiple institutions target these archival gaps.

While myriad repositories, museums, and archives work to preserve the histories, records, and gradations of LGBTQ+ culture, the availability of online sources has surged. Organizations are making their web presences publicly accessible and more interactive by adding comprehensive information about their collecting policies, enabling keyword search capabilities, customizing resource guides, creating digital collection records, and proposing other valuable features.

GLBT Historical Society Archives and Museum

The GLBT Historical Society Archives and Museum, glbthistory.org, is a combined museum and archival institution located in San Francisco, California. Also a nonprofit organization, the GLBT Historical Society aims to document and preserve the histories of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities. The society was founded in 1985 and has since grown into a globally recognized chronicler of GLBT culture and

history. Fortunately for those who do not reside in the Bay Area, the GLBT Historical Society Archives and Museum routinely updates its website with information regarding the organization's collections, articles recently published by the society, e-mail newsletters, upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, and more. The archives' web page provides an overview of the materials, including their available formats, sizes, and subject matters; suggests research guides; describes the repository's donation policy; spotlights the media collection; and offers a user-friendly search capability. The "Search the Collections" feature allows users to choose to explore the archival collections, digitized audio collections, or obituaries gathered from the *Bay Area Reporter*. The museum's web page promotes the institution's current, upcoming, and online exhibitions with brief descriptions and links to individual pages that dive into the exhibits and their content, meaning, and historical significance, in greater depth. In addition to the abundance of images available on the GLBT Historical Society's website, the organization's Flickr account, YouTube channel, and other visually engaging social media outlets are advertised and easy to access.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives

The Lesbian Herstory Archives, lesbianherstoryarchives.org, located in the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, is the world's largest collection of materials about the lesbian community. Founded in the mid-1970s as a consciousness-raising effort, the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) exists "to gather and preserve records of Lesbian lives and activities so that future generations will have ready access to materials relevant to their lives"² and engages in noninstitutional archival practices to function as an exclusively community-driven group. On the organization's website, virtual tours by floor or by collection are available, so that interested parties on a global scale can view the community gathering space, library, and museum hybrid that constitute the Lesbian Herstory Archives. LHA newsletters since the group's founding in 1975 have been archived and are downloadable, offering insight into the inception, key players, and principles of the archives over several decades. The Digital Collections web page describes the video, oral history, and photograph projects undertaken by the LHA, with links to their digitized

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manifestations and to the organization's photo sampler supported by the research initiative New York Heritage Digital Collections.

The LGBT Community Center National History Archive

The LGBT Community Center National History Archive, gaycenter.org/archives, located in Manhattan's West Village neighborhood, is just one aspect of the center's multilayered purpose. At the LGBT Community Center, LGBT populations are celebrated and supported by the implementation of public health and wellness programming, art and cultural events, family and youth services, general and professional resources, and, of course, the National History Archive, which has been working since 1990 to chronicle and preserve LGBT histories. The wide range of material types collected and maintained at the center's archive include correspondence, periodicals, personal diaries and papers, comics, radio sound-bites, video broadcasts, photography, and more. Though the archive is only physically accessible by appointment or during weekly drop-in hours, its website provides an interactive time line tracing the organization's history, an archive gallery, and searchable finding aids. Listed under the "Complete Archive" tab, records about the center's 139 archival collections are rife with detail about the materials' provenance, background history, scope, and folder contents; in some cases, item-level description is available.

ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives

ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, one.usc.edu, associated with the University of Southern California Libraries, is the largest repository of LGBTQ materials in the world. Presently, the institution maintains over two million items that range extensively in format, medium, and content. Made an affiliate of the USC Libraries in 2010, ONE Archives has been a functioning repository since 1952, and it continues to carry out its mission of collecting, preserving, and providing access to LGBTQ resources and queer histories today. While the incredible size of the archives' holdings and the extent of its scholarship may seem overwhelming to those unfamiliar with the institution, the archives' Internet presence provides ample information about donating materials, scheduling tours, conducting research, hosting events, viewing unprocessed collections, reading room etiquette, visiting, and an assortment of other public activities at ONE Archives. Collection, exhibition, and programming details are available on the homepage, including archived information about past exhibits and programs through 2011. The "Publications" tab takes users to a list of catalogs created by various curators and artists as supplementary materials to exhibitions presently or recently on view, like the *Stand Close, It's Shorter Than You Think: A Show on Feminist Rage* exhibition on display during the spring and summer of 2013. In terms of ONE Archives' holdings, users can conduct in-depth searches via the "Collections" tab, where

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online catalogs for books, periodicals, art, photography, audiovisual items, posters, museum objects, digital library materials, and even subject files are available. Supported by the Online Archive of California (OAC), a network offering free public access to primary resource descriptions provided by institutions throughout the state of California, the 600-plus archival collections housed at ONE Archives are also searchable online.

OutHistory

OutHistory, outhistory.org, was officially launched in 2008 as the product of a grant-funded initiative spearheaded by Jonathan Ned Katz, author of *Gay American History*, a revolutionary resource about the history of sexuality published in 1976. Katz envisioned OutHistory as a communal forum where research about LGBT history, its discovery, and its creation could be shared among users and propagated in a safe digital environment. The content on the website is exhaustive and updated regularly, making sure to plug “This Week in History” historical events and “OutHistory Highlights,” a segment for featured posts or new additions to the forum. The sidebar on OutHistory’s homepage has a list of search filters that include time period, people, subject, and multiple format types

for users interested in perusing the research materials available on the site. In addition, the sidebar contains information about user participation for those who wish to create content for OutHistory, make donations, find networking opportunities, or offer their own personal stories about queerness to share on the forum. One of the most valuable facets of the OutHistory website is its “Links” page, which is essentially an extensive catalog of other available resources on the Internet that focus on LGBT history and community. The links are categorized by the nature of their content, like websites for archives and online collections or websites with a topical focus. Not only does OutHistory function as its own communal LGBT resource, it also promotes other online projects that share a similar mission and user base.

Notes

1. Leonard Kniffel, “You Gotta Have Gerber-Hart: A Gay and Lesbian Library for the Midwest,” *American Libraries* 24, no. 10 (1993): 958.
2. LHEF, Inc., “Statement of Purpose,” Lesbian Herstory Archives History and Mission, last modified 2015, lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history.html.

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