

MAKING HISTORY

with **The
Gay and Lesbian
Historical
Society** of

Northern California

by Jordy Jones

Part of the archives at GLHS.

I knew I was queer

*before I knew there was such a thing as history. I had studied history in school, and had seen antiquities, but it never really occurred to me that **times change** until I was a young teenager.*

I knew I was queer, and as the arty, androgynous new kid in a middle school with a rigid system of cliques, it was pointed out daily. They didn't like queers. It was a risk to be my friend. Any girl who hung around me was labeled a lezzie, and any boy who was seen with me got the fag tag.

I was sent to relatives in Arizona for high school, and that's when I noticed history. It was such a shock. My classmates didn't seem to notice I was queer, and I was grateful for that. They didn't like queers. One night some jocks from my school waited outside the town's only gay bar until a man emerged by himself. They followed him and beat him to death with baseball bats. They were star athletes and local heroes. They missed one day of school to talk to the judge, and did community service that sum-

mer. It was 1976 and the '60s were over, and I wasn't in California any more. I locked myself in my room to listen to David Bowie and think about it.

I saw Harvey Milk on NBC running for supervisor in San Francisco. I couldn't believe it. Something was going on. I went to the Tucson Public Library to look for books. I found almost nothing. I did find an anthology of gay liberation writings and furtively took it to a cubicle to examine. I didn't dare check it out. I opened the book, but it wouldn't stay open. I spread its covers wide and ran my thumb down the spine to make it lie flat. I was surprised to see the pages begin to turn red. It hadn't hurt at all when the razor concealed in the binding sliced into my thumb, and it took me a moment to realize that I had been cut by the booby-trapped book. Somebody didn't like queers. I felt sadness, then rage. I dug the strait-edge from its hiding place with a ballpoint pen and went to the counter with the book. I checked it out, nursing my injured thumb. I never thought to report the sabotage, but I defiantly met the librarian's disapproving gaze, and secretly read the treasure under the covers for the next week.



Even toys are on display at the GLHS.

The purpose of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society of Northern California (GLHS) is to collect, preserve and disseminate knowledge of GLBT culture in Northern California and beyond, and to educate the public about the history of these communities, in all their diversity, through public programs, exhibits and publications.

The GLHS developed from the San Francisco Lesbian /Gay History Project. The History Project was a small group of grass-roots scholars working in the late 1970s to recover gay history. It included MacArthur fellow Alan Berubé, Out/Write Literary Conference founder Jeffrey Escopier, and legendary feminist critic and renowned theorist of alternative sexualities Gayle Rubin. At a presentation by Berubé called *She Even Chewed Tobacco*, transvag diarist Lou Sullivan pointed out the reasons that the subject of this particular talk should be considered a gay transsexual man and not a lesbian crossdresser. Berubé was intrigued and, in turn, invited Sullivan to join the project. *Female to Male: The Life of Jack Bee Garland* was the result.

In the early '80s the AIDS crisis was just beginning. Gay men were dying, and no one knew why. When nurse and amateur historian Willie Walker began working on the AIDS ward at SF General, he became aware that as the community lost individuals, it also lost their voices, viewpoints and histories. He went back to school and got an M.S. in Library Science at Berkeley with an Archival Sciences concentration, and set to work organizing what would become the GLHS archives. At that time in the Bay Area there were no archives, libraries or museums that were systematically collecting gay history. Berkeley's Bancroft Library didn't even carry back issues of

The Advocate. That basic lack of information was what researchers were facing even into the mid-'80s. In 1985 the scholars and the archivist filed for non-profit status, and the GLHS was born.

The new organization immediately started compiling collections of periodicals—everything from publications of early homophile groups to newsletters of the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis; from les-sep rags to street-tranny sheets. They undertook the huge project of microfilming these early periodicals, and, due to that initial effort, copies are now available at libraries around the world.

As the organization grew, its scope expanded. The GLHS began collecting manuscripts—unique original documents from individuals, businesses and organizations—serving as records of the lives of both everyday people and prominent community members. Next came ephemera—printed material with a one-time purpose, such as tickets, programs, flyers, business cards, match book covers, coasters, stickers and more. After that came photographs, audio recordings, artifacts and the oral histories.

The Oral History Project, started in the early '90s, preserves the stories of Bay Area elders and individuals from communities whose history is at risk of being lost. The project conducts interviews, recording the stories of lives onto audio or video tape. Volunteer Rod Geddes has transcribed and indexed thousands of hours of tape, and the resulting histories are available in print with exhaustive indexing.

Today the GLHS has one of the world's largest and most accessible collections of materials related to the history of sexual diversity. The periodical collection now numbers 2,300 titles.

TAKE THE FINANCIAL CHALLENGE OUT OF AIDS.



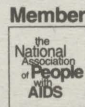
IMMEDIATE CASH FOR LIFE INSURANCE POLICIES

- ▼ One-On-One Personal Interviews ▼
- ▼ Highest Prices Paid ▼
- ▼ Policies Purchased from \$40,000 ▼

If you are living with AIDS and lack financial freedom, get the money you need NOW! We are caring, knowledgeable and all information is strictly confidential.

NATIONAL MEDICAL FUNDING
A LICENSED VIATICAL SETTLEMENT COMPANY

1-800- [REDACTED]
www.natmedfund.com



Providing a personal, confidential service to our courageous clients with care, understanding and support.



SUSAN REAR-ENDED A MERCEDES AT 70MPH. LUCKILY SHE LANDED ON BOTH FEET.



Susan Calloway

- Entrepreneur
- Marathon runner
- '99 Honda Valkyrie owner

The other driver was changing lanes when it happened. On the perfect autumn ride through the wine country, Susan's bike was purring in fifth, and wham! Fortunately, she had liability insurance from McGraw. For as little as \$79 a year we've got you covered. You've got it right, \$79 will keep you from paying big fines for violating state law. And allow you to ride with peace of mind. So get in touch with McGraw. We've been covering motorcyclists for over twenty years. And should the worst happen, we'd like to see that you land on both feet.

McGraw Insurance
California's Largest Writer of Personal Watercraft Insurance

1.800. [REDACTED] (1.800. [REDACTED])

3601 Haven Ave., Menlo Park, CA 94025
P.O. BOX 40, Anaheim, CA 92815

CA License No. 0531139

www.mcgrawgroup.com

Proud title sponsor of the McGraw Insurance World Superbike Challenge.
Laguna Seca Raceway, Monterey, California July 9-11

There are tens of thousands of historic photographs, and the ephemera collection houses hundreds of thousands of slips of history going back into the '40s. Artifacts range from José Sarria's Black Cat opera clothes to the Bulldog Baths murals.

The GLHS continually works with other institutions committed to preserving our queer history, which has led to a cooperative relationship with The Leather Archives in Chicago, The Hormel Center of The San Francisco Public Library and many others. Financial support comes from membership dues, tax-deductible contributions and fundraisers. The October Banquet during History Month has been an annual event for the past nine years.

Earlier this month the GLHS premiered *The Art and Award Affair* at Yerba Buena Gardens, which featured two performances by the brilliant Joe Goode Dance Company and the unique and inventive "Art Collection Give-Away"—a special drawing for artwork donated by such respected artists as Ross Bleckner, Robert Wilson, Connie Samaras, Don Bachardy, Daniel Nicoletta and Rodney O'Neill Austin. Conceived as an annual spring fund-raiser, next year's event will be scheduled in June to kick off *The Queer Arts Festival*.

As the GLHS acquires more quality objects, exhibitions have become a higher priority. This June the Pride Celebration Committee and Frameline are co-sponsoring an innovative approach to public programming. Called *Making a Case for Community History*, the exhibit features eight custom-built museum-quality display cases, and will demonstrate how a queer community can "make a case" for its own history, both literally and symbolically. The exhibit enjoys the support of the art and museum community of San Francisco, as well as that of Mayor Brown and City Super-

visors Tom Ammiano, Mark Leno and Leslie Katz. It also has the pledge of long-term participation by museum professionals from the Western Museum Association, the de Young Museum, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), and the JFK Graduate Museum Science Program. This year, the highlighted communities will be the African-American Community, Bears of SF, Gay American Indians, the Imperial Court of San Francisco, the Latino/Latina Community, the Leather Community, the Lesbian Feminist Community and the Transgender Community. The exhibit will run from Friday, June 18, to Friday, June 25, at the mezzanine of the Castro Theater. On Sunday, June 27, the exhibit moves to the Civic Center Pride Celebration site, and then to City Hall in July.

GLHS Executive Director Susan Stryker, who also co-authored *Gay by the Bay: A History of Queer Culture in the SF Bay Area*, says of this show in particular, and of the Society in general, "We really believe that historical preservation work can be a form of community organizing and community empowerment."

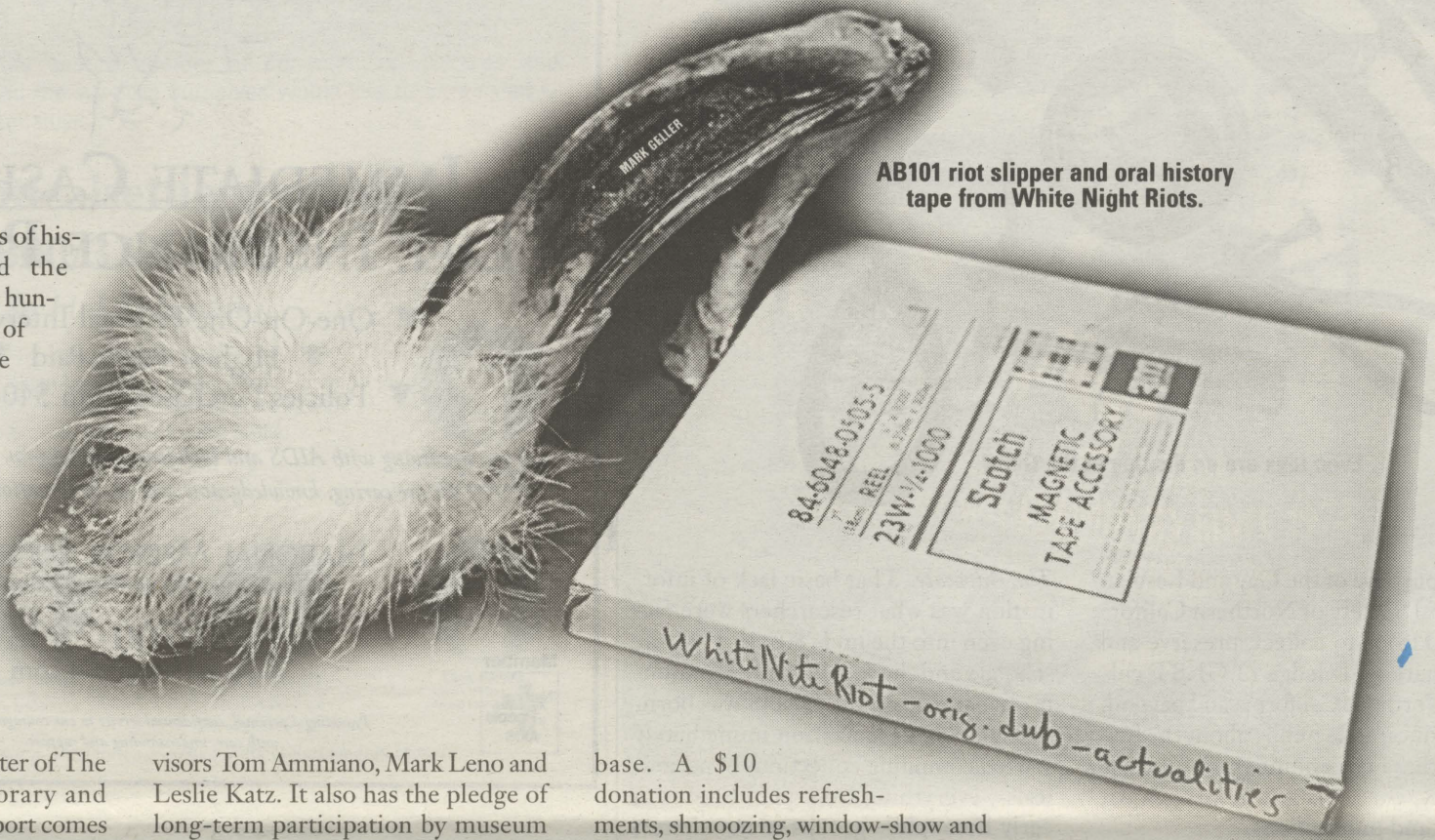
Also in June, the Society continues its tradition of hosting an open house on Pride Sunday. The fourth floor suite overlooking Market Street makes an ideal parade-viewing perch and home-

base. A \$10 donation includes refreshments, shmoozing, window-show and tours of the archives.

For information on making tax-deductible donations, becoming a member, volunteering or programming information, please call (415) [REDACTED]. The GLHS is located at 973 Market St., near Fifth St., and is open to the public from 2 pm–5 pm on Saturdays, and at other times by appointment. You may also visit the GLHS web site at www.glhs.org.

Each of us has our own history and our own stories to tell. When I think back on my history as a 14-year-old queer search-

ing for community, I think of the elders whose stories I discovered and the excitement at realizing that—as hard as the history was to find—it was there. It brought context to my existence and to my experiences—I realized I wasn't alone. When I think of the kids coming up now, and of the new generations that will follow, I wonder what they'll find when they go looking for their history. I realize that it depends a lot on what we do now. What we leave is what they will find. "We nurture our roots so that we can flower today and produce seed for tomorrow." F



AB101 riot slipper and oral history tape from White Night Riots.



(L to R) José Sarria, his escort Joel, Supervisor Mark Leno and artist Rodney O'Neill Austin attending the GLHS First Annual Art & Award Affair on May 1 at Yerba Buena Gardens.