

LGBTQ Iowa Archives & Library
P.O. Box 2779 Iowa City, IA 52244
* lgbtqiowaarchives@gmail.com

June 2020

As the residents of the state and members of the LGBTQ community, we have collectively felt the recent threats to queer and trans lives by the state legislature. We are also aware of the threats that COVID-19 poses to LGBTQ folks across the state. We believe that our history must be controlled, owned, collected, and preserved by the queer community in Iowa. Our present moment necessitates founding an explicitly Iowan queer community archives and library: the LGBTQ Iowa Archives & Library.

*This archival project is inspired by the history of LGBTQ community archives founded in the 1970s and 1980s as well as present-day efforts to build new queer archives around the country. We are specifically looking to the work of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York, the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, the Gerber/Hart Library and Archives in Chicago, and the ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives in Los Angeles as models. It is past due to have a community archives that represents the state of Iowa, acknowledging our queer experiences in Iowa are predominantly based in small towns, college towns, and the rural Midwest. We also take inspiration from contemporary archival work such as the Invisible Histories Project in Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia and the national work of the Black Lesbian Archives that offer us avenues to engage the regionality and intersectionality of queer life in the present. Iowa is admittedly absent from many of these archives.

In Practice, LGBTQ archives in the U.S. that are formed outside of urban centers and off of the coasts are able to disrupt popular

narratives of queer history that privilege San Francisco and New York as queer centers in our nation. The reality is that LGBTQ people have and always will exist in the state of Iowa and there are a vast amount of records across the state that have not been archived yet. Through a combination of archive building and oral history projects, we seek to preserve queer history that is uniquely Iowan and Midwestern in nature.

We collectively acknowledge the historical and perpetuated harm of library and archival catalogs that pathologize, criminalize, and invisibilize queer and trans pasts and futures. Institutional libraries and archives have complicated the accessibility of queer history through language utilized to classify queer subjects and repositories that deem queer materials unworthy of collecting ~~or~~ or prioritization. A primary way to combat historical erasure and present-day inaccessibility of LGBTQ history is to preserve and maintain our own library and archives centered on Iowa.

To collect and preserve queer history is to care for the materiality of queer life through the writing, art, documents, photographs, films, and performances made by queer people. We also seek to actively collect our stories. The LGBTQ Iowa Archives & Library is now home to the Transgender Oral History Project of Iowa and serves as an affiliate to the LGBT Oral Histories of Central Iowa Project run out of Grinnell, Iowa. The collection of LGBTQ oral histories from across the state is a central ~~aim~~ aim of this archives, serving as an active method of amassing queer history in Iowa. We aim to combat queer and trans erasure through ethically informed oral history practices, ensuring our narratives are preserved.

Of primary concern is the accessibility of queer Iowan history to LGBTQ people across

the state. While some aspects of queer Iowa history are preserved in archives across the country, the primary issue is the inaccessibility of the documents, ephemera, and books about queer life in Iowa to queer Iowans. Although digitization of archival materials and e-books have drastically altered the ways people are able to access historical resources, we privilege the local. It is crucial to make queer historical materials available in physical proximity to queer Iowans by collecting our history within the state itself. Proximity is empowering, enabling queer Iowans ~~to~~ to know, embrace, and celebrate our pasts and to envision our collective future. Establishing the LGBTQ Iowa Archives & Library affords us the opportunity to have space explicitly devoted to the history of queer Iowa and our collective memory.

In order to build a robust archives, we need the help of LGBTQ Iowans throughout the state. If you currently possess queer materials that you would like to donate to the LGBTQ Iowa Archives & Library, we accept donations via mail, email, direct delivery, or no contact pick up. Donations can be either physical or digital. We can also offer assistance in digitizing your physical materials to assure their inclusion and preservation while you maintain ownership. Lastly we want to capture your stories and are conducting digital oral history interviews via Zoom, Skype, or phone for the duration of the pandemic until we can safely sit and talk together again.

In solidarity and love,
THE LGBTQ Iowa Archives & Library Collective

Follow us on Instagram @lgbtq_iowa_archives
On Twitter @LGBT_IA_Archive
On Facebook at LGBTQ Iowa Archives & Library