Rainbow Bridges: Ryerson’s Community Building with the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives

Kevin Manuel, Alan Miller, Al Stanton-Hagan
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Overview of the Project

- Funding grant received by Ryerson librarian to create online learning resource about LGBTQ+ histories
- Cooperation with CLGA to access holdings
- Students hired to digitize Ryerson and CLGA materials
- Omeka used for online exhibition platform
Ryerson University
The LGBTQ movement has changed the face of Toronto and the world at large for over 50 years, and in that time the various minorities, subcultures and countercultures that make up the LGBTQ community have gained considerable recognition and made momentous victories in the name of social justice. Yet even today the rich history of that movement—the people, the places, the pamphlets and posters—is at risk of being forgotten.

Ryerson University has its place in the history of this movement, starting in 1977 with the creation of the Ryerson Homophile Foundation, which would later become RyePRIDE. Ryerson began building a reputation for a socially progressive institution, intent on protecting the rights of minorities in its student body and beyond. These are values that should be continued and honoured.
The Ryerson Connection

• Kevin Manuel – Data/Sociology/LGBTQ+ Studies Librarian (also CLGA Board Liaison) initiated project

• As a scholarly research activity he decided to explore the digitization of LGBTQ+ materials related to Ryerson

• Framed within social praxis to provide online educational resource about LGBTQ+ histories
Funding from Ryerson

- April 2015 – Kevin received Teaching About Diversity Fund for $5000 from Ryerson University Learning and Teaching Office
- Publicly accessible resource as part of the Ryerson strategic plan for community building and diversity
The Team

• Cooperation with CLGA volunteer Alan Miller to access CLGA holdings

• June 2015 - hired iSchool student Al Stanton-Hagan to start digitization and create Omeka exhibit

• Summer 2015 – Ryerson Work Study student Kexin Zhang digitizes material for Omeka

• September 2015 – Ryerson Work Study student Ewan Matthews was hired to continue uploading new content to Omeka
Preservation and Exhibition

• All materials were digitized and stored on secure server at Ryerson Library and CLGA

• Thematic and visual examples were selected for the Omeka exhibit in various categories
Digitizing Beyond Ryerson

- Created as an educational resource about LGBTQ+ histories at Ryerson
- But other collections/holdings (tabloids, t-shirts, buttons, matchbook covers, posters, CLGA National Portraits, audio files) have been added
CGA/CLGA History

1973: The archives was founded by Jearld Moldenhauer using the files of the Body Politic (BP, 1971-1987) newspaper; soon joined by Ron Dayman who moved several boxes of material to the basement of his house. Initially called the Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives, announced at the first national gay conference in Quebec City on Oct. 6.

1974: Dayman moves to Ottawa and the boxes get moved to 193 Carlton St., a space shared by the BP and Gay Alliance Toward Equality (Jul 1974 to Apr 1976)

1975: In March the name of the archives was changed to the Canadian Gay Archives (CGA)
The BP collective incorporated as Pink Triangle Press (PTP) and CGA forms its own collective and drafts a statement of purpose
Dec 1975 the Collective turns down an offer from the Archives of Ontario to take some material, keeping CGA’s holdings in community hands
1976: The archives moves with the BP to office space at 24 Duncan Street (May 1976 to Dec 1983; expanded floor space in 1980)
City of Toronto archivist James Fraser joins the archives collective and sets up workable filing systems

1977: The first issue of the Gay Archivist is published in May
Rick Bebout joins the BP collective and takes interest in CGA
The offices of the Pink Triangle Press (PTP) were raided by the Toronto police and several boxes of archives records were confiscated. After this it was decided to sever ties to PTP and become more independent

1978: Alan Miller's three bibliographies on homosexuality and employment are published by the Ontario Ministry of Labour -- most of the entries come from CGA's holdings
**CGA/CLGA History**

**1979:** CGA publishes its first bibliography: Alex Spence’s *Homosexuality in Canada: A Bibliography*. Toronto: Canadian Gay Archives, 1979. (CGA publication no.1) 85 pages

Joan Anderson (collective member) attends the Bi-National Lesbian Conference in Toronto, May 1979

**1980:** March 13 the archives incorporated as a non-profit Ontario organization with a board of collective members, those people who worked on the holdings of CGA

The "Whitman in Ontario Conference" is co-sponsored by the archives and Michael Lynch of University of Toronto, Mississauga. It celebrates the 100th anniversary of Walt Whitman's visit to Canada
**1981:** The collective adds the subtitle: "National Archives for Lesbian and Gay Men" to its publication *The Gay Archivist*

Lesbian Periodical Holdings in the Canadian Gay Archives as of June 1981. Compiled by Alan V. Miller. Toronto: Canadian Gay Archives, 1981. (CGA publication no.4) 15 pages

November 1981, the CGA was granted charitable status, but on appeal, after originally being turned down by the Revenue Canada.

**1982:** "Wilde '82," the world's first lesbian and gay history conference, commemorating the 100th anniversary of Oscar Wilde's visit to Canada, is part of the "Doing It! pride events, Jun 30, 1982.

Lesbian and Gay Heritage of Toronto. By James A.. Fraser and Alan V. Miller. Toronto: Canadian Gay Archives, 1982. (CGA publication no.5) 12 pages

1983: The archives receives a grant (approximately $17,400) from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, one of the first to be awarded to a lesbian/gay organization in Canada. The grant allowed CGA to buy a computer and database software. The AIDS Committee of Toronto is formed.


Move to 54 Wolseley Street, 3rd fl (Jan 1984 to Mar 1988).

1985: "Sex and the State: Their Laws, Our Lives," Jul 3 to 7, celebrates the third international lesbian and gay history conference.

1988: Feb move to office space at 464 Yonge St, 2nd floor, next to the AIDS Committee of Toronto and Pink Triangle Press (1988-1992)
The CGA names its library the James Fraser Library; James died of AIDS-related complications in 1985.

1989: CLGA and the Canadian Women's Movement Archives produces a set of feminist, lesbian and gay microfiche of Canadian periodicals

CGA/CLGA History


1992: The collective is replaced with a new constitution and nine-member Board of Directors
In December CGA moves to its first independent space at 56 Temperance Street (1992-2005)

1993: Sep. 13, the CGA Board voted to change its name to the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA)


July prototype of website launched: www.clga.ca


1998: CLGA published the last (number 14) of its publications with the Jim Egan/Don McLeod book Challenging the Conspiracy of Silence: My Life As a Canadian Gay Activist
CLGA History

2001: Discussions with University College, of the University of Toronto about renting space on campus
2004: Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archive: we want more women! Brochure targeting lesbians and listing several Canadian lesbian events. [2004] The Toronto Children's Aid Society to give their heritage house at 34 Isabella Street to the archives
2005: Primary Source Microfilm begin plans to digitize and produce a microfilm set of Canadian and international LGBT periodicals
2006: After several location moves, the archives was offered a building at 34 Isabella Street (Jared Sessions house) thanks to the work of councillor Kyle Rae and grants from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and Heritage Canada.
2009: CLGA moved into its new home, 34 Isabella Street, which opened to the public on Sep. 26.
2013: CLGA celebrates its 40th anniversary
Omeka Digital Collections
About Omeka

• free, open source digital content management
• developed by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University
• easy to use – aimed at small historical organizations, non-developers
• extendable via plugins
Our Omeka Installation

- est. Aug 2015
- hosted by volunteers in Ottawa who donate hosting and minor development
- uses a modified Avantegarde theme
- maintained by staff, volunteers, and work-study students
- partnerships:
  - work-study positions from Ryerson
  - LGBTQ Digital Oral History Collaboratory at U of T
  - Nancy Nicol at York
Challenges/Areas for Improvement

- not a robust preservation platform
- needs developer tweaks
- copyright/permission
Digital Opportunities

- meeting the demand for online material
- another way to connect to high school and university classrooms
- create digital versions of exhibits
Priorities for Digitization and Online Display

- fragile/frequently accessed materials
- vulnerable a/v formats
- underrepresented material
- already digitized material
Audiovisual Material

- workarounds: linking to Soundcloud and Vimeo
- Lesbians Making History which is a collection of activist oral histories
Improving our digitization workflow

- rearranging the CLGA’s physical space
- expanding our digital infrastructure
- working towards accepting donations of digital records

**Communication is Key!**

- use the “Digital Collections” group on basecamp
- let Rebecka and Jade know what you’re doing
- ask for help with background research
- ask Al for help with any Omeka problems
- name and save your files clearly so it is easy for others to see what you’ve done
Official Launch of CLGA Digital Collections

- September 2016 after more content is added
- media and listserv announcements
- reception at CLGA for the official launch
Any questions?

Ryerson Library LGBTQ+ Studies
http://library.ryerson.ca/lgbtq/

CLGA
http://www.clga.ca/