

History Happens

News from the



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archives & museum



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October 2017

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Managing archivist Joanna Black surveying Gilbert Baker materials.

True Colors: Welcoming the Archives of Rainbow Flag Creator Gilbert Baker

by Mark Sawchuk

A legend in the LGBTQ community, [Gilbert Baker](#) (1951-2017) was an American artist and activist famed for creating the rainbow flag, which debuted at the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade in 1978. Now an

internationally recognized symbol of the queer community, the flag also is an icon of contemporary design, with examples held by New York City's Museum of Modern Art and other major collections. During his lifetime, Baker traveled widely to promote the flag and to work for social justice. Shortly after Baker's death in March of this year, his estate selected the GLBT Historical Society to preserve his archives, art and memorabilia. As the society prepares to posthumously honor Baker with its annual History Maker award at the [Living Colors gala](#) on October 14, *History Happens* sat down with the society's managing archivist, Joanna Black, to learn more about this exceptional addition to the archives.

How did the GLBT Historical Society come to acquire the Gilbert Baker collection?

A couple of Baker's close friends contacted the society and inquired whether we would be interested in a donation. Of course we jumped at the chance, as this is a highly sought-after collection. When I met them at Baker's apartment in New York, it was an emotional experience for all of us to go through his belongings. I felt so honored to be there and really felt his presence throughout the process.

What specific items does the collection contain and what do they tell us about a man who was a monumental figure in modern LGBTQ history?

Baker's rainbow flag has become universalized as a symbol of tolerance, unity and love. The collection contains plenty of flag-related materials, including documentation about two of the longest rainbow flags ever sewn, rainbow textiles and fabric scraps, all of which show his dedication to his craft as a vexillographer (someone who designs flags). My favorite item is the last sewing machine he owned, which is a companion piece to the one we already have that was used to sew the two original flags in 1978.

What's also wonderful about this collection is that there's lots of material about other aspects of Gilbert Baker's life. We have private writings, correspondence with close friends, fabric protest signs, photographs, AV materials, awards and his drag outfits. He was involved in many political campaigns and was a genius at stirring people up to create positive change. Perusing this collection gives you a much more well-rounded sense of who he was. You see his colorful, theatrical side and his engagement as an artist and an activist. It proves that his commitment to social justice transcended the flag, even if that will always remain his best-known work.

How is the society handling the collection, and when will it be available to researchers?

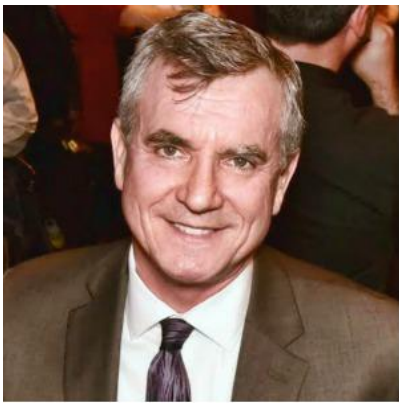
It's difficult to give a precise date because this was a logistically challenging acquisition. Accessioning new collections happens in several

steps. We're nearing the end of the first phase, which is surveying it and making sure the fabric items are properly conserved. The next step, the processing phase, will take several months and involves creating a detailed inventory that provides context for the materials and a guide for researchers. This collection is complex and involves a lot of stakeholders, including Gilbert Baker's heirs. We're hoping to make some of the collection available to researchers in the second half of 2018.

Mark Sawchuk is a member of the Communications Working Group of the GLBT Historical Society.

From the Executive Director

The Legacy Circle: A Key to Our Future



by Terry Beswick

This month, I'd like to take a moment to talk with you about [planned giving](#) -- one of the most important ways individuals can support the GLBT Historical Society. But first, a brief summary of why it matters.

At our annual gala last year, we announced Vision 2020, our campaign to establish a new home for the GLBT History Museum by 2020, when the lease expires on our current small museum in the Castro. The proposal won widespread support, and we've made steady progress in laying the groundwork needed to move forward.

Our long-term goal is to create a full-scale queer public history center dedicated to preserving and showcasing LGBTQ history and culture. The facility would bring together our museum and archives along with operational spaces needed to support research into our past. We hope to partner with a developer and with the City of San Francisco to establish this facility. We're working right now to take necessary steps to develop such partnerships.

Giving an Enduring Gift

When everything else falls into place and we open the doors to the new museum, we'll still need to cover the costs of running such an institution on a day-to-day basis. Which brings me to the point of this month's column: [planned giving](#).

Of the 230 people who responded to our recent member survey, 21 said they have included the GLBT Historical Society in their wills or estate plans, and 20 more said they'd like to. We are deeply grateful to all of these

forward-thinking folks. We're certain many more would like to know their legacy will live on through the work of the society: collecting, preserving and sharing the stories of LGBTQ people so our past will be recognized today and in the future.

So we can honor everyone who designates the Historical Society as a beneficiary in their estate plans, we've launched our new Legacy Circle. If you prefer, we'll hold your name in confidence -- or if you wish, we'll list you publicly, since that's a great way to encourage others to follow your example. Your legacy gift, however large or small, will help the Historical Society thrive and put in place the resources needed to create our New Museum of LGBTQ History and Culture.

We look forward to welcoming many of you to the Legacy Circle. For full details plus a brief form you can use to let us know you've made the GLBT Historical Society a beneficiary of your estate, visit our new [Legacy Circle page](#).

Terry Beswick is executive director of the GLBT Historical Society.

In the Archives

Digitizing Volunteer Uncovers the Queer Past



by Alexander Gray

For a few months now I have been volunteering on the GLBT Historical Society's project to digitize the pre-internet run of the [Bay Area Reporter](#) (1971-2005). The initiative is sponsored by the Bob Ross Foundation, created by the late publisher of the weekly LGBT newspaper. On any given day, I go through issues of the BAR, scanning each page for posting on a website that will be open to all free of charge.

The task may sound tedious, but I find it fascinating: I've always felt more in touch with the distant country of another decade or year when I find it reflected in old periodicals. Paging through newspapers and magazines from the past, you see your own time more clearly: the absurdity of outdated ads or hairstyles that hint our own trendy times will soon look quaint, the foreboding of headlines that only in hindsight reveal good news or bad news was on the way.

Take for example an ad for Steamworks that I spotted in a [Bay Area Reporter](#) from the mid-2000s. A man is doubled over as if crying, his figure half lost in the shadows. The copy reads, "He could have gone to Steamworks," implying that the man is sad because he didn't get laid.

Below the bathhouse logo is information about STI and HIV testing.

Suddenly, this ad, an act of humor on the part a gay bathhouse, is a portal to the gay world after the emergence of AIDS in 1981. Suggesting the horny, the funny and the sad all at once, this small piece of newsprint helps us recognize the complexity and importance of our queer past. When we're done posting thousands of pages of the *Bay Area Reporter*, discoveries of this sort will be available to web users from around the world.

Alexander Gray is an archives volunteer at the GLBT Historical Society.

Upcoming Events

Film Screening

Conversations With Gay Elders: Robert Dockendorff



Thursday, October 5
6:00-7:30 PM
Koret Auditorium
San Francisco Main Library
100 Larkin St., San Francisco
Free admission

Filmmaker David Weissman shares a segment of his [Conversations With Gay Elders](#), a series of in-depth interviews focused on gay men whose journeys of self-discovery precede the era of Stonewall and gay liberation. The subject for this screening is Robert Dockendorff, who was 76 at the time of the interview. A longtime San Francisco resident who had a career in the U.S. Navy and the maritime industry, Dockendorff has played major roles in the city's gay political and philanthropic circles. Weissman, Dockendorff and video editor Alex Bohs will take part in a Q&A after the screening. Sponsored by the San Francisco Public Library; cosponsored by the GLBT Historical Society, the Contemporary Jewish Museum and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. For more information, visit the [SFPL website](#). Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).

Exhibition Opening

OUT/LOOK & the Birth of the Queer

Friday, October 6
7:00-9:00 PM
The GLBT History Museum
4127 18th St., San Francisco



\$5.00 | [Free for members](#)

A new multimedia exhibition focusing on *OUT/LOOK*, a national queer quarterly published in San Francisco from 1988 to 1992. Embracing gender and racial diversity and bridging academic and community perspectives, the magazine addressed political and cultural topics at a critical moment in LGBTQ history. Curated by [E.G.](#)

[Crichton](#), the exhibition and an [associated website](#) feature new works by an array of culture-makers, each of them asked to draw on one issue of *OUT/LOOK* for inspiration. By combining the history with fresh creative investigation, the project will spark intergenerational conversations about the legacy of the journal and its era. The opening will include remarks by the curator. In addition, many of the exhibition contributors will attend, as will founders and editors of *OUT/LOOK*. A new issue of the magazine will be available for purchase. Light refreshments will be served. Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).

[Author Talk](#)

[An Evening With Armistead Maupin](#)



Wednesday, October 11

7:00 - 9:00 PM

Jewish Community Center of San Francisco
3200 California St., San Francisco

Standard: \$28.00 | Premium: \$38

In honor of the 29th anniversary of National Coming Out Day, the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco presents Armistead Maupin, author of the Tales of the City series, in a discussion of his long-awaited memoir *Logical Family*. The book chronicles Maupin's odyssey from the Old South to freewheeling San Francisco and his evolution from curious youth to groundbreaking writer and gay rights pioneer. Peter Stein, arts and media producer, will serve as Maupin's on-stage conversation partner. Cosponsored by the GLBT Historical Society. Purchase tickets on the [JCCSF website](#).

[Panel & Performance](#)

[Q-Public: OUT/LOOK for the Twenty-First Century](#)

Thursday, October 12

7:00 - 9:00 PM

The GLBT History Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco



\$5.00 | [Free for members](#)

In conjunction with the exhibition "[OUT/LOOK and the Birth of the Queer](#)," a roundtable of writers, editors, artists and community organizers will discuss the story of the journal *OUT/LOOK* (1988-1992) and the significance of the exhibition. Participants are author Jeffrey Escoffier, cofounder and publisher of *OUT/LOOK*; artist Maya Manvi, an editor of the

new issue of *OUT/LOOK* published to accompany the exhibition; and writer and curator Dorothy Santos. Exhibition curator [E.G. Crichton](#), a founder and art director of *OUT/LOOK*, will serve as moderator. The panelists will survey the history of the magazine, present the works created for the exhibition and discuss cultural initiatives sparked by the project. A performance by writer and actor Brian Freeman based on a short play written by project participant Casey Llewellyn will round out the program. Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).

[Benefit Evening](#)

[Living Colors: The 2017 GLBT Historical Society Gala](#)



Saturday, October 14

6:00 - 9:00 PM

The Green Room

War Memorial Performing Arts Center

401 Van Ness Ave., San Francisco

Individual: \$150 | Table of 10: \$1250

[Living Colors](#) promises to be our most fabulous annual gala yet. Always a high point of the

Bay Area LGBTQ social season, the evening features exceptional entertainment, dinner and drinks, and a unique silent auction. The gala is hosted by Alex U. Inn of Momma's Boyz and KINGDOM! and Marke Bieschke of 48 Hills and The STUD, with entertainment by Honey Mahogany of RuPaul's Drag Race and opera sensation Breanna Sinclairé. At this year's gala, we celebrate the diversity of the LGBTQ community as we announce our acquisition of the artwork, memorabilia and personal papers of rainbow flag creator Gilbert Baker (1951-2017). Colorful performances and decor will highlight our shared experience as we honor Baker's inclusive vision and recognize the work of other heroes of LGBTQ history. Buy tickets [here](#).

[Book Launch](#)

[Butch Lesbians of the Twenties, Thirties & Forties](#)

Thursday, October 19



7:00 - 9:00 PM

The GLBT History Museum
4127 18th St., San Francisco
\$5.00 | [Free for members](#)

Bringing together amazing queer history and forceful contemporary graphics, *Butch Lesbians of the 20s, 30s and 40s Coloring Book* is a new release from Stacked Deck Press.

Pathologized as inverts, criminalized as cross dressers and denigrated as perverts, these handsome butches insistently blazed their own paths as poets, pilots, speedboat racers and resistance fighters. They were proudly butch as women, sometimes passed as men, and all the while endured the wariness or outright scorn of society. Brought back to public memory by a group of talented artists, the butches portrayed in this collection are now ready for celebration -- and custom coloring schemes. At the museum event, contributors including Dorian Katz, Maia Kobabe, Ajuan Mance and editor Avery Cassell will discuss the book and the heroes it portrays. Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).

[Community Forum](#)

Fighting Back: Art as Resistance



Tuesday, October 24

7:00 - 9:00 PM

The GLBT History Museum
4127 18th St., San Francisco
Free | \$5.00 donation welcome

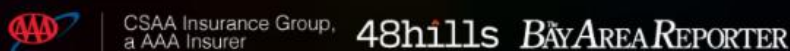
The latest in our monthly "Fighting Back" series exploring contemporary queer-community issues in a historical context, "Art as Resistance: 30th Anniversary of the AIDS Quilt" will offer a multigenerational conversation with organizers, artists and scholars on the role of art in promoting social justice. The participants will lead a community discussion on the history of radical and public art in the LGBTQ and HIV/AIDS movements and its legacy for today, with a special focus on the 30th anniversary of the first public display of the [NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt](#). Join the Facebook conversation [here](#).



2017 LIVING
COLORS
The GLBT Historical Society Gala

October 14th • The Green Room

BUY TICKETS HERE



Jason Tester & Sasha Aickin | Becky Escamilla & Aimee Chang

Visit Us

EXHIBITIONS & PROGRAMS

The GLBT History Museum
4127 18th St.
San Francisco, CA 94114
(415) 621-1107
www.glbthistory.org/museum

Monday & Wednesday - Saturday: 11:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Tuesday: Closed
Sunday: Noon - 5:00 PM

ARCHIVES & RESEARCH CENTER

The GLBT Historical Society
989 Market St., Lower Level
San Francisco, CA 94103-1708
(415) 777-5455

Call to schedule a research appointment.

CREDITS: Feature: Photo by Gerard Koskovich. Terry Beswick: Photo by Gareth Gooch. In the Archives: Photo by Ramon Silvestre. Robert Dockendorff: Photo courtesy David Weissman. Armistead Maupin: Photo by Christopher Turner. OUT/LOOK cover: Archives of the GLBT Historical Society. Butch Lesbians: Courtesy Stacked Deck Press. Names Project Quilt: Photo by Robert Pruzan.

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