

# History Happens

News from the



GLBT  
Historical  
Society  
museum & archives



## December 2018

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Director of  
Archives &  
Special  
Collections  
Kelsi Evans

## Three Questions for Archivist Kelsi Evans: "Ensuring LGBTQ History Is Not Erased"

by Nick Large

Previously serving as the project archivist for the AIDS History Project at the University of California, San Francisco, Kelsi Evans is the GLBT Historical Society's newest staff member. She took on the responsibilities

of director of our [Dr. John P. De Cecco Archives and Special Collections](#) at the beginning of October. Prior to UCSF, Evans worked at New York University's Fales Library and Special Collections and at the Lowe Art Museum at the University of Miami.

Evans holds an M.A. in archives and public history from NYU and an M.A. in history from the University of California, Santa Cruz. As both an expert in the field and a recent staff member, she has had a unique opportunity to look with fresh eyes at our archival holdings -- one of the largest such collections anywhere in the world. In the following interview, she shares some of her observations from her first two months managing the collections.

### **What are some strong points of our collections? What sets us apart?**

The Historical Society's collections are among the most important and unique LGBTQ records in the world. The society's members and staff began developing a dedicated LGBTQ archive well before many other repositories, and we continue to lead the way in preserving and providing access to underrepresented voices. The collections illustrate the vast diversity of queer experiences and document individual and organizational efforts for equal rights, fair treatment and personal freedom. Some of my personal highlights include the records of the 15 Association, a men's BDSM leather club, and the [papers of Elsa Gidlow](#), a poet and philosopher who published the first volume of lesbian love poetry in the United States in 1923.

### **What's missing? And how are we addressing these gaps?**

In support of the society's goal to document the diversity of LGBTQ history, culture and arts, we regularly evaluate our collection strengths and consider areas that need better representation. Our community partners and researchers often provide valuable feedback that factors into these considerations. Currently, we are seeking material that more inclusively documents the lives and work of transgender individuals and LGBTQ people of color. We are also looking for new donations that document LGBTQ life prior to the 1970s. Through collection development, we can facilitate new, innovative research and provide a more inclusive understanding of the breadth of queer history.

### **What excites you about our archives, and why should people support archives like ours?**

What *doesn't* excite me about our archives? It feels like every time I open a carton, I discover something new and amazing. Our mission to document queer history is vital to both historical research and contemporary efforts to resist attacks on LGBTQ rights and freedoms. I am proud of the work the archives team is doing to preserve and provide access to our unique historical material. We rely on the support

of LGBTQ communities and allies to further develop our collections, preserve materials and make the archives more discoverable. Supporting the archives means you are supporting generations of researchers and ensuring that LGBTQ history is not erased or forgotten.

*Nick Large is an LGBTQ, API and Japanese American activist with a particular interest in LGBTQ movements and place-based organizing in San Francisco. He serves on the GLBT Historical Society Board of Directors.*

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## From the Staff

# Doubling Your Support for LGBTQ History



by Sean Greene

Happy Holidays everyone! I cannot say thank you enough for your continued passionate support of the GLBT Historical Society. As we draw to the end of 2018, we have many reasons to be grateful. Chief among them: your belief in our efforts to maintain, preserve and share our community's legacies.

The year 2018 has been an impressive time of growth for our institution. Thousands of people from around the world continue to stream through the GLBT Historical Society Museum in the Castro, and many thousands more read or experience creative and scholarly works such as books and films produced with materials from our archives. We are striving to accomplish even more in 2019.

We can't do it alone -- and luckily, we're not alone. Thanks to the generosity of superstar donors Emily Rosenberg and Darlene deManincor, Al Baum and Robert Holgate, Jason Tester and Sasha Aickin, the Bob Ross Foundation and the Excelerate Foundation, a remarkable \$50,000 year-end matching challenge has been pledged to support our [Vision 2020 campaign](#).

### A Foundation for the Future

"We give to make the coming decades better for LGBTQ people," said matching-challenge donors Jason Tester and Sasha Aickin. "But looking forward starts with a deep sense of history to find patterns and feel progress. The GLBT Historical Society Museum is an important foundation for a better future."

Vision 2020 sustains all the activities required to accomplish our mission to

collect, preserve, and make accessible to the public materials and knowledge that promote understanding of LGBTQ history and culture in all their diversity. What's more, the campaign is laying the groundwork for our project to create the New Museum of LGBTQ History and Culture.

The matching challenge means every dollar you donate will be matched up to \$50,000, allowing us to ring in the New Year to the tune of \$100,000. Please join us this holiday season to keep LGBTQ history alive by making your tax-deductible year-end contribution today: simply [click here](#).

*Sean Greene is development director for the GLBT Historical Society.*

## In the Archives

### Preserving Artifacts From Historic Places



by Ramón Silvestre & Mark Sawchuk

The art déco neon sign from the front of Finocchio's, a North Beach female-impersonation cabaret that ran from 1936 to 1999. Fragments of a stained glass window shattered in a California state office building during the 1991 AB 101 Veto Riot in San Francisco. Door panels from the Artemis Café, a beloved lesbian gathering place

open from 1977 to 1986. Homoerotic murals that adorned the walls of the Bulldog Baths, a famous Tenderloin bathhouse closed in 1984.

These unique artifacts repose alongside many other such objects in the GLBT Historical Society's archives. What gives them particular significance is their direct connection to San Francisco places: the structures and even the sidewalks that make up the fabric of the city. They are critical to our ability to curate place-based history, an approach that makes historical stories memorable by grounding them in the places where they happened -- and that makes places memorable by telling the often surprising stories of what happened there.

#### Cataloging the Collection

Though we have internal records of these artifacts, they hadn't been inventoried in a systematic way so researchers and curators can readily gain access. Thanks to a \$30,000 grant from the City of San Francisco's Historic Preservation Fund Committee, we're now embarking on a major project to assess, document and catalog items from the Art and Artifacts Collection that embody the history of San Francisco places. The project



will create a database detailing the physical attributes, provenance and historical significance of each object, together with high-resolution images.

Not only will the database enable greater public access to the materials without compromising their physical state, it also will make it possible to more efficiently use the objects in exhibitions at the GLBT Historical Society Museum and to lend artifacts to other cultural institutions.

*Ramón Silvestre is the museum collections registrar and Mark Sawchuk is the communications manager for the GLBT Historical Society.*

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## Upcoming Events

### [Living History Discussion](#)

### We Built a Movement From Books: Liberation in Print



Thursday, December 6  
7:00-9:00 PM  
The GLBT History Museum  
4127 18th St., San Francisco  
**\$5.00** | **Free for members**

A panel of creators of queer culture will reminisce about the impetus books gave to the lesbian and gay movement in the 1970s-

1980s. The explosion of bookstores, publishing houses, organizational libraries and literature courses was an important component of San Francisco's struggle for identity and community in the years between Stonewall and the AIDS epidemic. Lesbians and gay men separately and together charted new territory, established a tradition and literally changed and saved lives. Historian James Van Buskirk will lead a conversation with gay studies pioneer Jack Collins and groundbreaking feminist publisher and bookseller Carol Seajay. Purchase tickets [here](#).

### [Film Showing](#)

### REX RAY: How to Make a Rex Ray

Thursday, December 13  
7:00-9:00 PM  
The GLBT History Museum  
4127 18th St., San Francisco  
**\$5.00** | **Free for members**

No other contemporary artist mastered the



hand-crafted aesthetic of fine art while also pushing the limits of graphic design more than San Francisco queer artist and designer Rex Ray (1956-2015). In the documentary feature *REX RAY: How to Make a Rex Ray* (2009), the artist takes viewers on a tour from his hometown in Colorado Springs to his studio in San Francisco, revealing his artistic process and everyday practice. Whether creating a painting or donating a graphic

design, Rex Ray continually reinvented a language to speak in the worlds of both art and computer graphics. Director Joshua V. Hassel will answer questions after the screening. Program held in conjunction with the current Front Gallery exhibition at the GLBT Historical Society Museum, "[A Picture Is a Word: The Posters of Rex Ray](#)." Limited seating, so advance tickets are required. Purchase tickets [here](#).

**\$50,000**  
Matching Challenge

**VISION 2020**  
HONORING OUR HERITAGE  
& BUILDING OUR FUTURE

**MAKE A DONATION TODAY**

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## MUSEUM

### Exhibitions & Programs

4127 18th St.

San Francisco, CA 94114

(415) 621-1107

[www.glbthistory.org/museum](http://www.glbthistory.org/museum)

Monday - Saturday: 11:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Sunday: Noon - 5:00 PM

### HOLIDAY HOURS

Christmas Eve (December 24): 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Christmas Day (December 25): Closed

New Year's Eve (December 31): Closed

New Year's Day (January 1): Closed

## ARCHIVES

### Collections & Research Center

989 Market St., Lower Level

San Francisco, CA 94103-1708

(415) 777-5455

[www.glbthistory.org/archives](http://www.glbthistory.org/archives)

Call to schedule a research appointment or make an appointment online by [clicking here](#).

**CREDITS.** FEATURE: Photo by Patricia Delara. FROM THE STAFF: Photo by Andy Jordan. IN THE ARCHIVES: Photo of the Artemis Café (1979) by Max Kirkeberg; courtesy of **DIVA (San Francisco State University)**. UPCOMING EVENTS. Living History Discussion: Photo of Old Wives Tales (1982) by Joan E. Biren (JEB); used with permission. Film Showing: Still from *REX RAY: How to Make a Rex Ray*, used with permission.

**Editor:** Gerard Koskovich    **Design:** PEPE Creatives

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