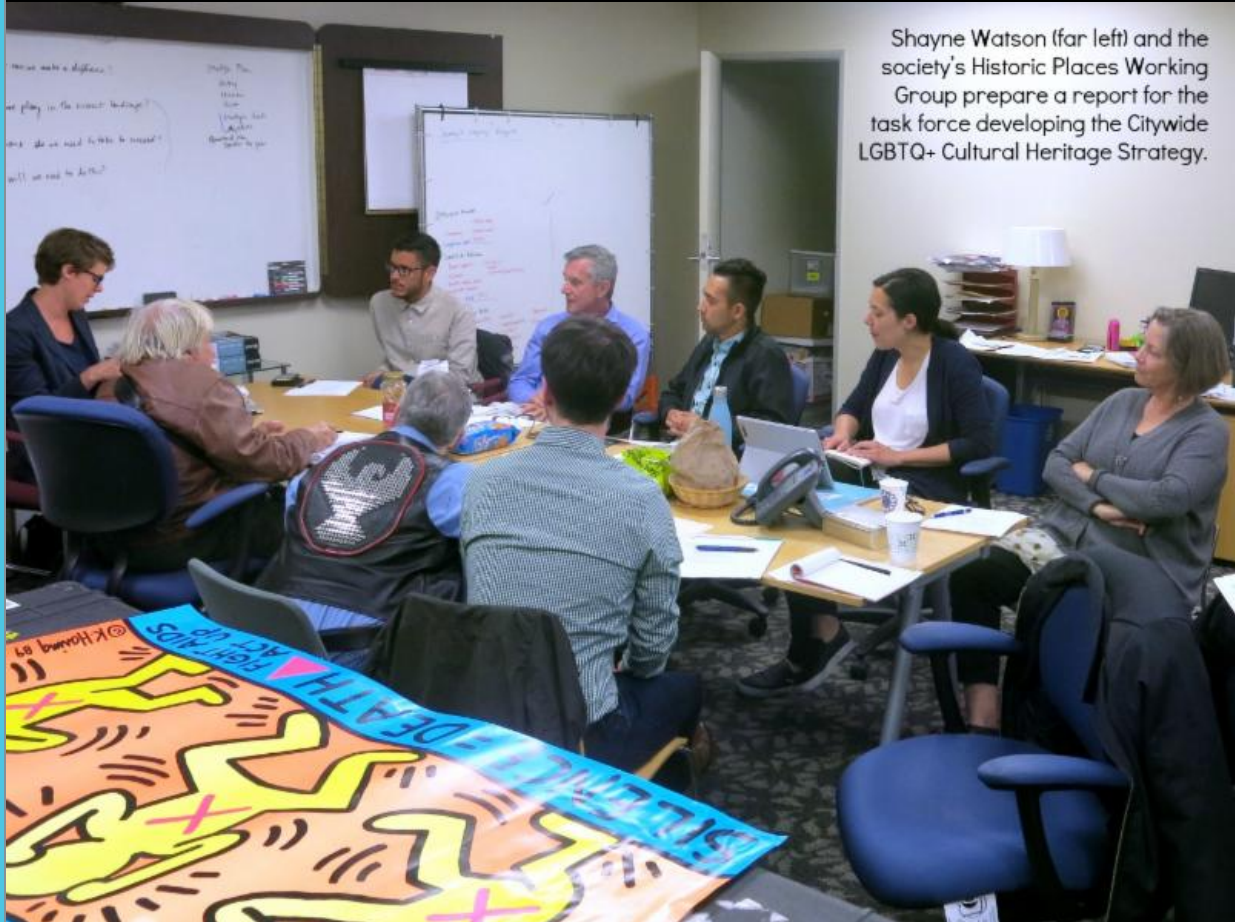


August 2019



Shayne Watson (far left) and the society's Historic Places Working Group prepare a report for the task force developing the Citywide LGBTQ+ Cultural Heritage Strategy.

Strengthening Our Living LGBTQ Communities While Preserving Our Rich and Colorful Past

by Leigh Pfeffer

At a time when San Francisco is changing at dizzying speeds, the GLBT Historical Society is expanding its efforts to ensure that queer history, culture and spaces aren't lost in the whirlwind. In addition to our contributions to the successful effort to create the [Castro LGBTQ Cultural District](#), we are currently supporting the elaboration of a [Citywide LGBTQ+ Cultural Heritage Strategy](#).

Authorized by a 2016 Board of Supervisors resolution, this document is being developed by community stakeholders in consultation with the Planning Department, the Office of Economic and Workforce Development and the Entertainment Commission, and is scheduled to be adopted by the board later this year. It proposes a comprehensive

series of projects, procedures, programs and techniques to safeguard LGBTQ cultural heritage in the city. These are defined in the current draft as “the expression of a community’s ways of living through beliefs, customs, practices, artistic expression and significant places.”

History Happens interviewed Shayne Watson, an architectural historian and preservation planner who has been involved with the development of the strategy since its inception. Watson is the founding chair of the society’s Historic Places Working Group. Along with the society’s executive director, Terry Beswick, she cochairs the Arts, Culture and Heritage Committee of the City advisory group working to develop the strategy.

What was the impetus for the strategy, and who are the stakeholders involved in its development?

The LGBTQ+ Cultural Heritage strategy has two goals: most critically, to stabilize and strengthen what’s left of our living, breathing LGBTQ communities in San Francisco; and at the same time, preserve and tell the stories of our rich and colorful LGBTQ past.

The idea was first prioritized in years-long planning efforts in western and central SoMa that highlighted the vulnerability of LGBTQ communities there. In October 2015, the city adopted a document I coauthored, the [*Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco*](#), which establishes a framework for preserving LGBTQ historic sites and neighborhoods.

This guidance led to the inception of the strategy in 2017. It kicked off with a stakeholder workshop at City Hall attended by cultural heritage, social and health, and economic opportunity organizations, as well as business owners, historians, artists, community members and relevant city agencies. These participants are developing the recommendations at the heart of the strategy.

What threatens San Francisco’s LGBTQ culture and heritage, and how does the strategy address those threats?

All three strategy committees would probably agree that the biggest threat to the health, economic wellbeing and culture of LGBTQ communities in the city is affordable housing. Without it, we have no community. Without community, we have no culture. Solving the city’s affordability crisis is of course far beyond the scope of the strategy, but what we can do is provide measures for making LGBTQ San Franciscans’ lives a little easier and culturally richer. These include building on the work of the LGBTQ cultural districts in the Tenderloin, SoMa and Castro to incentivize LGBTQ businesses and organizations to maintain a presence in those neighborhoods. They will also direct LGBTQ people to existing health, social and economic services as well as new programs the strategy will create.

What mechanisms does the strategy specifically provide for the historic preservation of queer spaces?

One of the five measures proposed by the Arts, Culture and Heritage Committee of the strategy working group focuses wholly on historic preservation: the creation of an LGBTQ+ Historic Preservation Advisory Group. Among other tasks, this group will work with the Planning Department and the Historic Preservation Commission to carry out a citywide survey of historic LGBTQ sites. Such a survey will provide the Planning Department with a priority list of significant LGBTQ places that would merit additional scrutiny if they are proposed for demolition or substantial alteration.

NOTE: For more information on the Citywide LGBTQ Cultural Heritage Strategy, click [here](#).

Leigh Pfeffer is the museum operations manager at the GLBT Historical Society.

From the Executive Director Historic Gatherings Advance LGBTQ Public History



by Terry Beswick

Pride month was a busy time this year at the GLBT Historical Society, one that was all the more impactful due to our strong involvement in two wonderful LGBTQ history conferences that took place in June. During my participation in these gatherings, I was struck by how much work remains to be done, both internationally and here at home.

First, we joined the [Committee on LGBT History](#), an affiliate of the American Historical Association, in cohosting [Queer History Conference 2019](#) from June 16 to 18 in San Francisco. This groundbreaking conference included approximately 50 panel discussions and events on LGBTQ history worldwide from the 16th century to the present, and the society hosted two receptions for the some 350 participants.

I was proud to see scholarly contributions presented by many of our GLBT Historical Society family, including two of our National Advisory Council cochairs, historians Amy Sueyoshi and Susan Stryker, as well as by our board vice chair Marc Stein. I was particularly excited to witness the intergenerational conversations taking place throughout the conference, which we were delighted to facilitate.

The second gathering was the [Queering Memory International LGBTQ Archives, Libraries, Museums and Special Collections Conference](#), held in Berlin from June 27 to 29. The conference featured exceptional presentations by individuals from around the world, including the society's senior public history advisor, Gerard Koskovich. Approximately 400 participants discussed the incredible scope of work that is going on globally in institutions large and small.

Some of these efforts have enjoyed strong public and private support. Yet many archivists and librarians are trying to build queer collections with very few or no resources at all — and in places like Russia, Poland, Hungary and Brazil, under the threat of political persecution or even physical harm. Their examples of bravery and fortitude reinforce my commitment to our efforts to preserve and share the stories of those least represented in our histories.

Our presence at the Queer History Conference and Queering Memory is a reminder that the GLBT Historical Society is one of the world's key LGBTQ public history institutions. Our position gives us a special responsibility to encourage and collaborate with our colleagues throughout the U.S. and around the globe.

We are proud to be part of an extraordinary international movement to recover and share queer heritage. I invite all our members and friends to [join us](#) in carrying forward this great cause.

Terry Beswick is executive director of the GLBT Historical Society.

Pride 2019 Roundup

GLBT Historical Society Marks Successes in June



We're thrilled to report that the GLBT Historical Society had a highly successful Pride this year, with [heightened media attention](#) to our work; much private sector interest in staging queer history exhibits, programs and promotions; and last but certainly not least, [Juanita MORE!](#)'s annual Pride Party, JM! Pride 2019, which raised over \$130,000 to help us build our new museum!

By the numbers, in June the society hosted or cosponsored 11 events,

cohosted two receptions for Queer History Conference 2019, received coverage in over 40 media stories and mounted a highly visible, weeklong pop-up exhibition at the Salesforce West building in downtown San Francisco. The exhibition previewed some of the Gilbert Baker costumes that will be on display in a major exhibition opening at the GLBT Historical Society Museum in the autumn.

In the Archives

Live-Editing History with Sadie Sadie the Rabbi Lady



by Rachel Elise Greiner

The first thing I noticed was a glimmer of rhinestone. I gasped as I gently pulled back the clouds of tissue paper. Nestled within was an all-black, Star-of-David-shaped hat complete with a tiny disco ball positioned in the center and a miniature Torah attached artfully to one side. I had seen this hat, called a “Synagogo” hat by its creator, in photographs, but in person it was like greeting the ghost of an old, dear friend: at once deeply nostalgic, a little magical and definitely subversive.

Handling the Synagogo hat is one of my duties as an archival intern at the GLBT Historical Society processing the papers of Gilbert Block (1944–2010). Better known as Sister Sadie Sadie the Rabbi Lady, Block was a gay, Jewish drag queen and one of the founders of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence.

“Processing” refers to organizing a collection for researcher use. This includes making decisions about the order in which papers should be stored and how many duplicate pamphlets — in this case, about safe sex — should be retained. It also encompasses basic preservation activities, such as rehousing deteriorating paper in protective casings or building a special box to keep the rhinestones on the Synagogo hat safe for posterity.

An Intimate Experience

A friend of mine calls processing “live-editing history,” and it can be a surprisingly intimate experience. I have gasped at glamorous, and slightly scandalous, photo shoots of Sadie Sadie at a local synagogue. And I’ve read dozens of clippings written by or about Sadie Sadie, including hir exorcism of the pope and the controversial city council race they ran in dressed alternatively as a cheerleader and a reverend. (Block used the pronoun “hir” to refer to Sadie Sadie.) Some decisions have felt personal: What am I supposed to make of the booklets of homophobic rhetoric that Sadie Sadie held on to?

The GLBT Historical Society’s archives fight the historical silencing of queer people. Growing up queer and Jewish in a small town, I never had the chance to hear about people like Sadie Sadie. In the course of

my internship, I have learned to appreciate the importance of keeping materials documenting personal lives that would otherwise be erased from the historical record.

I'm grateful to work with professionals at the society who are teaching me how to uphold both professional preservation standards and the ethical standards for recording history. And I'm grateful to Sadie Sadie the Rabbi Lady, who in donating her collection, has taught me both personally and intellectually about the importance of unfiltered, honest truthfulness to living a very full, queer life.

Rachel Elise Greiner is a summer intern at the GLBT Historical Society. She is pursuing a master's degree in American studies and museum studies at the University of Hawai'i, Manoa, where her thesis discusses the strategic role that community-based archives can play in combatting racism and homophobia.

Upcoming Events

Book Launch

Teenage Love in the 1970s: *Ziggy, Stardust & Me*



Thursday, August 8

7:00–9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5 | Free for members

Debut young-adult novelist James Brandon will read selections from his new novel *Ziggy, Stardust and Me* (Penguin Random House, 2019) set in St. Louis in 1973, just months before the

American Psychological Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. The novel follows the story of 16-year-old Jonathan Collins, who is fighting to overcome his "illness" when he meets Web, a Lakota Two Spirit. The two boys fall in love and struggle to retain their identities in a world that continually threatens to tear them apart. Brandon serves on the Powwow Steering Committee of Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits and has done extensive research in the GLBT Historical Society's archives. Joining Brandon in conversation is BAAITS board member Roger Kuhn, and the discussion will be moderated by bestselling author Traci Chee. The evening will include a wine reception, and copies of *Ziggy, Stardust and Me* will be available for purchase and signing. Tickets are available online [here](#).

Community Forum

Rainbow Rice: LGBTQ Asian/Pacific Islander Justice

Friday, August 9

7:00–9:00 p.m.



The GLBT Historical Society Museum
4127 18th St., San Francisco
\$5 | Free for members

Within the LGBTQ community, the experiences of Asian and Pacific Islander American (APIA) people are often marginalized. Queer APIA people face numerous intersectional challenges, including anti-LGBTQ prejudice in their communities of birth as well as racism and xenophobia within the larger LGBTQ community and society as a whole. A panel of Bay Area LGBTQ APIA community leaders and activists will consider these particular challenges and discuss their efforts to promote, defend and extend the rights of queer APIA people. This program is cosponsored by the Human Rights Program at Southern Methodist University. Tickets are available online [here](#).

Current Exhibitions

Front Gallery

[Chosen Families: Bay Area LGBTQ Latinx Stories](#)

Open through October 20, 2019

[More information](#)

Community Gallery

[The Mayor of Folsom Street: The Life & Legacy of Alan Selby](#)

Open through October 20, 2019

[More information](#)

Main Gallery

[Queer Past Becomes Present](#)

Long-term exhibition

[More information](#)



REUNION CHOSEN FAMILY

The 2019 GLBT HISTORICAL SOCIETY Gala

October 18th
Friday | 5-9PM

Salesforce Tower
Ohana Room | San Francisco



Visit Us

THE GLBT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM

Exhibitions & Programs

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

Monday–Saturday: 11:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.
Sunday: Noon–5:00 p.m.

DR. JOHN P. DE CECCO ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

Research & Public History Center

989 Market St., Lower Level
San Francisco, CA 94103-1708
(415) 777-5455
www.glbthistory.org/archives

Call to schedule a research appointment or make an appointment

online by [clicking here](#).

Donate

Volunteer

Join

CREDITS. Feature: Photo by Gerard Koskovich. FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Photo of Terry Beswick by Gareth Gooch. PRIDE ROUNDUP: Photo of Juanita MORE! and Terry Beswick by Fred Rowe Foto; used with permission. IN THE ARCHIVES: Photo of Sister Sadie Sadie, photographer unknown, collection of the GLBT Historical Society. UPCOMING EVENTS. Book Launch: Cover artwork for *Ziggy, Stardust and Me* by Tomasz Mro, courtesy of Penguin Random House. Community Forum: API Equality Northern California chanting during the San Francisco Trans March (2018); photo by APIENC, used with permission.

Executive Director: Terry Beswick

Editor: Mark Sawchuk

Copyright © 2019 GLBT Historical Society

[Back Issues](#)

