

# The Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives in the *Archives of Sexuality & Gender, Part I: LGBTQ History and Culture Since 1940*

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Various source media, *Archives of Sexuality & Gender, Part I: LGBTQ History and Culture Since 1940*



## The Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives

The Canadian Gay Liberation Movement Archives (the original name of the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives) was formed by dedicated volunteers who worked around the offices of *The Body Politic* (*TBP*), a Canadian Gay liberation newspaper founded in 1971. By 1973 *TBP*'s paper collection had grown unwieldy, and the Archives was created as an adjunct to the newspaper. It didn't take long to realize that a "liberation" archive was limited in scope, so by December 1975 the Archives was renamed the Canadian Gay Archives (CGA). A collective of six people was formed and the CGA became a separate body, although it shared offices with *TBP* until that paper's demise in 1987. Pink Triangle Press was formed in 1976 to provide more legal stability for *TBP*, and CGA was part of the Press although an autonomous entity. The CGA became an Ontario corporation on March 31, 1980, and eventually received registered charitable status in November 1981. The Archives was the first lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (lgbt) organization in Canada to receive this status, which would prove useful in the years ahead. The Archives always operated on a limited budget, and being able to provide tax receipts for donations of materials or funds has helped to build holdings, especially lgbt periodicals.

The Archives holds a large periodical collection and substantial vertical files of flyers, clippings, brochures, and other ephemera produced by lgbt individuals and organizations. These holdings are organized into three sections: Canadian, American, and International. In addition, the Archives has a library of books and pamphlets; a substantial international poster collection; photographs, films, and videos; long-playing records and CDs; clippings from the mainstream press

and Canadian newspapers; and the papers (accessions) of many Canadian lgbt individuals and organizations.

## How the Collection Grew

The first issue of CGA's newsletter, *Gay Archivist* (1977), noted that the Archives held 250 periodical titles. By 1979, the collection had grown to more than 600 titles of more than 5,400 individual issues. Two years later, it nearly doubled to more than 1,100 titles, and by 1986 the collection had nearly doubled again, to 1,850 titles.

This rapid increase was accomplished by sending letters requesting free subscriptions to every lesbian/gay periodical publisher. After the CGA sponsored the international lesbian/gay studies conference "Sex and the State" in 1985, it made a concerted effort to add to its holdings by targeting publishers. The Archives was added to the distribution lists of many small periodicals, although most large, established publishers would not provide free subscriptions. However, over the years the Archives has been able to pull together most complete runs of titles such as *Out* (New Zealand), and has been fortunate to be able to preserve the newsletters of smaller groups.

From its inception the Archives has benefited from links to major Canadian lgbt periodicals. *The Body Politic*, Canada's leading gay liberation periodical of the 1970s and 1980s, had an exchange program with most lesbian and gay periodicals of the period. Over time, these periodicals were passed to the Archives and became its core collection. *TBP* had a firm commitment to lesbian and gay liberation, not only in Canada, the United States, and major European countries, but in the

struggling LGBT communities in smaller nations. The newspaper's International News section maintained links to groups in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Central and South America. Again, the Archives benefited from *TBP*'s work by adding new international periodical titles to its holdings.

The Archives has also been fortunate to have people collect periodicals while vacationing abroad, particularly in Eastern Europe. As a result we have almost complete runs of titles from Poland (*Kabaret, Rozowa Kartka*), the Czech Republic (*SOHO Revue*), and Russia (*Tema*). We also acquired a substantial run of *Der Kreis* (Switzerland), courtesy of a book dealer.

### **Making Our Holdings Available**

Although the Archives added the subtitle "National Archives for Lesbians and Gay Men" in 1981, the organization's name wasn't officially changed to the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives (CLGA) until 1993. To try to compensate for this lesbian invisibility, CGA self-published a listing of its lesbian holdings, *Lesbian Periodical Holdings in the Canadian Gay Archives* (1981, 15 pages), which was the fourth bibliography in CGA's publication series. Besides lesbian titles, the bibliography included feminist titles with significant lesbian content. The bibliography included 113 titles, most from Canada and the United States, but a few from England and Australia.

In 1991 the CGA published a major bibliography, *Our Own Voices: A Directory of Lesbian and Gay Periodicals, 1890-1990, Including the Complete Holdings of the Canadian Gay Archives* (704 pages). This work included

not only the CGA's holdings, but titles not at the Archives, a total of more than 7,200 entries.

The CLGA has had an Internet presence since early 1997. One of the main components on its website ([www.clga.ca](http://www.clga.ca)) was an HTML version of *Our Own Voices*. As soon as this appeared, anyone searching the Internet for LGBT titles would be directed to a link to the CLGA's holdings. Donors viewing the bibliography online sent missing issues or offered complete runs of titles that we did not have. The periodical holdings at the CLGA are in an InMagic database. The Archives was able to create HTML codes from the database, and a listing of all periodicals, with complete holdings, was added to the website in the fall of 2005.

Twenty-five years ago the United States was the first country to report on AIDS, but even in 1981 Canada and other nations took notice. The AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) published its first newsletter in 1983, just a year after the CGA published its first AIDS bibliography. The bibliography attracted the attention of AIDS researchers and community-based organizations, resulting in an exchange of AIDS periodicals. All of this occurred well before the advent of the Internet and the global exchange of information. Several Canadian and International AIDS titles are included in this digital archive edition, such as the *ACT Newsletter*, *AIDS Network of Edmonton Newsletter*, and *AIDS Info* (The Netherlands).

### **The Minority Press**

In the mid-1980s ethnic groups in Canada produced important newsletters, including *Celebrasian* (Gay Asians of Toronto, 1983-1996) and *Khush Khayal* (South

Asian Lesbian and Gay Association, 1989-1995). These periodicals were able to meet needs that local mainstream lesbian/gay titles could not. AIDS affected minority communities just as they began to have their own voice and press, and titles like *Black CAP Newsletter* (Toronto) and *Black Lesbian and Gay Centre Project Newsletter* (London) provided much-needed information.

The CLGA has managed to preserve part of our lgbt heritage, filling a need for knowledge and complementing the holdings of other gay and lesbian archives. Yes, lgbt people appear to be everywhere, and have become increasingly visible since 1970. Thanks to the efforts of Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, the printed record of that visibility can now be viewed more widely.

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#### **Editor's Note:**

A digital edition of the complete run of *The Body Politic* can be found in *Archives of Sexuality & Gender, Part I: LGBTQ History and Culture Since 1940*.

#### **Introduction to the Collection We Are Everywhere!**

When the gay and lesbian movement exploded onto the public stage in the late 1960s, one of its rallying slogans was "We Are Everywhere!" It was a cry designed to make the point that, contrary to widespread belief, homosexual people could be found in all walks of life, all occupations, all social and ethnic and religious groups, and all countries, towns, and regions. This collection shows just how true that assertion was — and how it has become more true with the passing of time.

#### **Homosexual Politics in Western Europe and the United States**

In the late 1940s, homosexual politics was largely confined to two regions of the world — Western Europe and, incipiently, the United States. In Europe, the damage wrought by a dozen years of war and fascism upon the social and political world of homosexuals — a world of bars and cafes, of prominent literary and cultural figures and their works, of political and social organizations — was repaired with startling rapidity. By 1948, in Scandinavia and the Low Countries, the old, pre-war homosexual world was back on its feet. Sweden and Switzerland, having legalized male homosexual acts during the 1940s, were now joined by the rest of Western Europe. The concern of these activists was to create a climate of opinion conducive to greater tolerance and understanding, and to prevail upon the authorities to allow some social space in which this work could be carried on. (This moment in gay history is represented in *International Periodicals and Newsletters from the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives* by *Der Kreis*, published in Switzerland, but at the heart of an international network of activists.) Only

Germany, burdened by laws dating back to the mid-nineteenth century and intensified by the Nazis, remained outside this Western European mainstream. In the United States, which is often imagined to have been a leader in the homosexual world, political organizing began in 1950 with the establishment of the Mattachine Society on the West Coast. In the following two decades political organizing took root in small pockets scattered across the country. This was a genuine achievement, but the ferocity of the McCarthyite witch hunts blighted this early flowering, producing a timidity that kept American gay rights activists from reaching out to the rest of the world.

After World War II, Britain and the British world (the independent, former colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa), continued to refuse to acknowledge the existence of homosexuality. Ironically it was here that the first important breakthrough came about, when, in the early 1950s, a series of scandals in the “yellow press” prompted the British government to commission an inquiry into the four-hundred-year-old laws that criminalized sex between men. In 1957, the Wolfenden Committee, named for its chairman, recommended that sex between consenting adult males, when conducted in private, be legalized. The long struggle to persuade Parliament to enact this into law put Britain in the frontlines (and in the headlines) of homosexual politics for a decade. Finally passed in 1967, Britain’s Sexual Offences Act provided a model which Canada adopted almost immediately and which the other countries of the British world were forced to address, albeit in their own ways and at their own pace.

In the meantime, the rest of the world had been moving forward. The great post-war economic boom brought social, political, and cultural transformations and a new generation characterized by a quite remarkable idealism; a generation which threw itself into struggles against colonialism, nuclear weapons, imperialist wars, class inequalities, racism — and, by the end of the 1960s, against the subordination of women and the discrimination to which homosexual people were subjected.

Out of this turmoil emerged the gay and lesbian movement, a public political struggle in which homosexuals themselves (now embracing new terms of self-description) aimed, by a variety of confrontational means, to transform the structures and institutions of the societies that oppressed them.

Slogans such as “Gay Is Good,” “Gay Pride,” “Gay Power,” and, as mentioned, “We Are Everywhere” reflected a new world view characterized by self-organization, coming out, protesting, confronting, demanding, disrupting, and changing laws and attitudes that as recently as the mid-1960s had seemed immovable.

After Stonewall The conventional date of origin for this phase of activism is June 1969, when three nights of rioting in New York City in response to a police raid on the Stonewall Inn led to the founding of new, more militant gay rights organizations — initially in New York, then across the U.S., and then rapidly in the countries of the British world and Western Europe. In the 1970s, gay liberation gripped the imagination of women and men from Toronto and Montreal, to Melbourne and Auckland, to Berlin and Paris, and

Rome and Tel Aviv. While the Stonewall Riots were certainly important, and U.S. gay activists have, ever since, played a leading role in developing strategies, tactics, and slogans that the rest of the gay world has been quick to adopt, too blinkered an attention to the U.S. skews our understanding of the nature and scope of the gay and lesbian movement as an international phenomenon. What makes *International Periodicals and Newsletters* from the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives so important is precisely that it brings into focus the gay and lesbian movement in the rest of the world, allowing it to be given its proper place in history. This movement is strongly represented in this collection by publications such as *Come Together*, *Gay Marxist*, and *Jeremy* (England), *Antinorm* (France), *Fuori!* (Italy), *Open Doors* (Canada), *Gay Liberation Press* (Australia), *Gay Liberator* (New Zealand), *Liberator* (Israel), and dozens and dozens of other titles.

### Growth of the Movement in Eastern Europe and Elsewhere

Over the course of the 1980s, the winds of change spread the seeds of gay rights politics well beyond Western Europe, North America, and Australasia. As the Soviet bloc began to develop socially and economically, homosexual people in Eastern Europe began to assert their right to be visible and active. By the early 1980s gay bars and cafes were easy to find in the more advanced cities of the region. In the mid-1980s gay rights groups were established in Hungary, Slovenia (then part of Yugoslavia), and Poland, and, toward the end of the decade, in Czechoslovakia and East Germany. In the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev's reformist policy of *glasnost* (openness) paved the way for the rapid emergence of homosexual publications

such as *Novaya Zhizn* and *Tema*. As the countries of Eastern Europe broke with the Soviet Union and clamored to join the European Union, opportunities for homosexual visibility increased — witness the publications *Flamingo* (Bulgaria), *Gayzma* (Latvia), and *Kabaret* (Poland). In the 1990s, as social and economic development, democratization, and liberalization took hold in the Third World, organizations to advance the demands of homosexual people were founded in Latin America, East and Southeast Asia, and Africa, as represented by periodicals such as *Gay Scene* (India), *Link/Skakel* (South Africa), *GALZ* (Zimbabwe), and *G: Gaya Hidup Ceria* (Indonesia).

### A Media of Its Own

Meanwhile, in the heartland of North America, Western Europe and Australasia, the gay and lesbian movements grew into communities in which politics was simply one element, alongside the social communities represented by bars and sex clubs, hobby and interest groups, and suburban life. This newly visible community, actively courted by political and commercial interests, occupied its own more or less comfortable niche much like ethnic groups in a multicultural society. One of the community's defining features was a media of its own. The newsletters, leaflets, and activist newspapers of the movement were supplemented, sometimes supplanted, by a commercially-minded, lifestyle-oriented media that, if not actually eschewing politics entirely, was much more interested in homosexuality as a market niche and a focus for consumption of fashion, clubs, consumer goods, and services. This required either new publications entirely or the adaptation of the old. In Australia, the serious *Gay Community News* was

transformed by members of its collective into the seriously stylish *OutRage*; *New Zealand Gay News* became *Out*.

In a world where, thanks to easier and cheaper travel and mass communication, the flow of information was faster than it had ever been, the gay worlds began to converge. They would never, however, achieve homogeneity. Third World gay movements and communities were emerging within societies with histories and traditions very different from those in the West, and much of what the West offered has proved to be of limited value. Browsing *ALN* ("For Women Across Asia") from Thailand, *Bombay Dost* (India), or *Umani News Defender* (Nigeria) will reveal much that is familiar to First World readers, but much, too, that reflects these countries' diverse cultures, societies, and histories. Taken together, the newsletters and magazines collected in International Periodicals and Newsletters from the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives provide a remarkable record of the social, political, and cultural diversity of the gay world over the past fifty years.

Publications (in the form of newsletters, newspapers, and magazines) were a key weapon with which gay and lesbian activists waged their struggle for freedom, equality, and liberation, and it is no accident that the formation of an activist group was usually accompanied by the publication of some sort of newsletter or magazine. The homosexual organizations of both the pre- and post-war years relied on their own communication channels to propagate their message; so, too, did the activists of the gay and lesbian movement. Certainly, access to the mass or mainstream press, radio, and television was always

welcome, but if activists had relied upon these avenues alone, their struggle would have advanced much more slowly. A press of one's own is a vital precondition for any political work. For many years it was very difficult to get homosexual issues reported in the mainstream press — too controversial, unsavory, not fit for family reading were the sorts of reasons given even by sympathetic editors and journalists. Then, when they did report on homosexuality, it was often in the most sensationalist terms; crime and scandals, death and debauchery were given a great deal more space than demonstrations and activist demands. The issues that gay activists wanted to address were rarely of interest to editors in the mainstream media or, indeed, their audiences. But being able to work through the media was vital for the movement's members. That these issues were (and are) debated differently in different countries is a matter of great import, and this collection offers access to a wide range of such debates.

### **The Value of This Collection**

International Periodicals and Newsletters from the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives addresses a wide variety of issues in the gay rights movement over the past fifty years, the many different environments around the world in which the movement has operated, and the ways in which ever-wider constituencies have attached themselves to the movement. Today the movement embraces lesbians and gay men, bisexuals, transgender and transsexual people, and intersex people. From its beginning in small pockets in the West, it has grown into a world-wide phenomenon. All these factors explain the extraordinary range of topics covered in this collection. Browsing the newsletters, periodicals, and newspapers collected here brings one

face to face with fifty years of issues. There is, quite literally, no public social, political, or cultural issue of the past half century that is not touched on in the gay and lesbian media.

For scholars — professionals and students alike — access to these rare publications provides remarkably rich sources for research. For those who study gay and lesbian history, politics, and culture, the usefulness of this collection hardly needs emphasizing. But, more and more, scholars are coming to understand that homosexuality must be studied not as an isolated subject but in context of disciplines as diverse as anthropology, sociology, art history, cultural studies, history, geography, politics, media, and communications. The preservation and dissemination of these rare and often unique publications will allow researchers to study the development of the gay rights movement and culture around the world and to compare them. It would be difficult to overstate the value of a collection of 415 titles, from forty-something countries, published over the past fifty years.

For the most part, until very recently, respectable institutions had no interest in collecting such material, and so it has been preserved in private collections or in national and regional gay and lesbian archives in cities such as Toronto, Montreal, Melbourne, Berlin, Amsterdam, Los Angeles, and New York, where activists have collected and preserved it, usually with very little financial or other support. International Periodicals and Newsletters from the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives provides access to a diverse range of sources which otherwise would not be available except by extensive traveling. The ability to access the work of the movements and the life of the communities

represented here and the opportunity to compare and contrast times and places will enhance our work immeasurably.

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