

The Lesbian Herstory Archives

Moira

I have been trying to organize a trip to the Lesbian Herstory Archives for several years. Finally this spring I was able to arrange a time to visit. I was intrigued when one of the volunteers told me over the phone, "It will change your life forever." Always open for adventure, this was the perfect recommendation.

Locating the elegant brownstone in Brooklyn (surprisingly close to where my family was born and raised) was simple. A quiet side street, no flashing banners, just a small "archives" written above the buzzer. A young woman from the University of Minnesota greeted my mother and me. (Yes my mother has come a long way). We were given the full tour and let loose to dig and poke about. I spent a fabulous afternoon buried in impeccably organized file cabinets, book cases, boxes and drawers, all brimming with a sense of history, excuse me Herstory. I left with a wonderful picture drawn by these collective images.

The collection is divided into eight major sections. The first two rooms hold 10,000 books, from history, health and religion to several hundreds of the 50's pulp novels, poetry, classic favorites and contemporary lesbian writers. Especially innovative is the system of alphabetizing by the women's first name, not her father's last name. Also in these front, high-ceilinged rooms are all the indexes and reference materials, along with subject files. There is a file for just about everything - all filled with clippings, articles, notes, and photos. I went through a small slice of them from Relationships-couples/marriages (even with a few matchboxes and cocktail napkins from that special day), Sports (plenty of stories on Martina), Stonewall (lots on this subject), Spinsters, songs, and S&M. The file on Passing Women was so complete there was a reference to the Brandon Teena file (the woman killed in Nebraska this past New Years for being a "passing woman").

The Archives was organized in the pantry of Joan Nestle and friends in 1974. Their objective was to collect and preserve what the mainstream libraries and research institutions were ignoring. In 1993 the Archives moved to its present location. This was a reflection of much growth and activity in the 80's when the organization also incorporated as the Lesbian Herstory Educational Foundation. It is the overwhelming effort of thousands of lesbians. The material housed spans decades, from the paperbacks of the fifties to current news articles on issues such as lesbian parenting. One is immediately impressed with the many diverse lives that have shaped this unique place.

Next is the Audio-Visual collection. While I was there, a woman was spreading hundreds of photos on the big table, looking for images for a store front window she was designing for the Stonewall Anniversary. I looked over faces of lesbians of every color, size and age. Displayed on the walls is a recent



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Bennington College
Bennington Library
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Brattleboro

Brattleboro Food Coop
Common Ground
Everyone's Books

Burlington

Burlington College
Chassman & Bem
Fletcher Free Library
Onion River Co-op
Partners in Recovery & Growth
Peace & Justice Center
Pearls
Planned Parenthood

Castleton

STEP Learning Center

Chester

Misty Valley Books Chester

Craftsbury

Craftsbury Public Library

Center Rutland

Rutland Area Gay/Lesbian Connection

East Hardwick

Greenhope Farm

Fair Haven

Fair Haven Free Library

Hardwick

Buffalo Mountain Coop
Galaxy Books

Lyndonville

Jon's Automotive
Project EXCEL, Lyndon State College

Manchester Center

Northshire Bookstore

Middlebury

Middlebury Natural Food Coop

Montpelier

Bear Pond Books
Horn of the Moon Cafe
Rivendell Books
Woman Centered

Morrisville

Morristown Centennial Library

Newfane

Moore Free Library

Northfield

Brown Public Library

Norwich

Social Alternatives for Gay Men

Plainfield

Woman's Study Program

Putney

Putney Library

Randolph

Kimball Public Library

Rutland

PFLAG
Rutland Free Library
United Methodist Church
Grace Cong. United Church of Christ

St. Johnsbury

LUNA/NEVGALR c/o Umbrella
Natural Provisions
Regional Library
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