Karin Quimby and Walter L. Williams, ‘Unmasking the Homophile in 1950s Los Angeles: An Archival Record’, in *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders, and Generations*, ed. by Joseph A. Boone et al. (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp. 166-195.

With rainbow flags lining Santa Monica Boulevard, the main thoroughfare of "gay" West Hollywood, known today for its gay bars, bookstores, coffeeshops, novelty boutiques, gyms, churches, and government, one can easily forget the very

recent past of this urban space where, as gay L.A. legend reveals, the early gay protest movement erupted in 1970 outside of a notoriously homophobic restaurant in the heart of what is now West Hollywood. Protesting the wooden sign, “Fagots Stay Out,” that had hung outside Barney's Beanery since the 1950s, the Gay Liberation Front began what now has stretched into several decades of visible protest for lesbian and gay rights. Morris Kight, a prominent Los Angeles gay activist who was instrumental in organizing the Barney's Beanery protest, owns that sign today as a prize in his private archival collection.

Such visible signs, however, as any historian of gay life knows, are few and far between. The desire to collect such signs of oppression and victory necessarily must be informed by a profound sense of lack—of any trace of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or otherwise queer existence. The effects of the closet in all its manifestations have given shape not only to queer life, but likewise significantly inform any attempt to construct queer history as a field of legitimate study. The very problematics of re-creating a history defined by gaps, elisions, omissions, as well as the relative instability and historically recent use of terms such as *invert*, *homophile*, *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual*,

transsexual, *transgendered*, and *queer* make reconstructing the history of nonnormative sexual groups through material signs all the more fraught with question.

Around the nation lesbian and gay archives face, in very material terms, the theoretical question of what defines such identity groups and who decides what should be collected and preserved, and what should be discarded. The omission of queer histories in the official records of the United States, as well as their absence even in unofficial local lore, not only has made the historian's interpretive work more difficult, but has led to necessarily creative strategies that employ myth, gossip,

heresy, and fiction in order to reconstruct a past for sexual minorities. In a sense, writing a queer history is still very much a frontier, a terrain yet to be mapped out, defined, and theorized.

The purpose of this chapter is to construct one such history using the resources available in Los Angeles—from the personal testimony of individuals such as the early activist Jim Kepner, who founded what is now the International Gay and Lesbian Archives (IGLA), to an examination of the materials of those early L.A. gay organizations and publications whose archival traces are found in bulging file folders and on the bookshelves of the IGLA. There are various

documents—a gay magazine, a gay academic journal, a U.S. Supreme Court ruling, and the rise and fall of two early gay groups, the Mattachine Society and ONE Incorporated—that show how, two decades before the 1969 Stonewall rebellion in New York City, Los Angeles gays and lesbians were organizing to resist police oppression and to educate themselves and the general population about homosexuality.

Although the original impetus of this chapter was to present a photographic essay of Los Angeles's gay past, as research at the IGLA ensued, as well as interviews with the late Jim Kepner took place, what became clear was the extraordinary

power of the early L.A. gay press to shape the debates and political movement as it came into being, debates that continue in some cases almost in the exact same form today. Also, it became clear through the contentious personal letters found in files among drafts of mission statements and early homophile articles, that Los Angeles's gay history is replete with the personal politics and polemics endemic to much minority group organizing. This L.A. history is as much about imperious personalities, the struggle for power and agendas (resulting in such acts as the heist and holding captive of a collection of gay archives for over

thirty years) as it is about any historical document produced, or any political battle won.

The attention these early activists gave to putting their ideas down on paper, of preserving their words with such care and ferocity, reveals in fact the core political response to living a life of enforced secrecy. Their desire to preserve these traces, coupled with our desire to locate them, reveals a similar impulse: the desire that a visible, "real" legacy might be pasted together to help shore up a sense of permanence and belonging in a general culture that would prefer, still, that we not speak our name.

In Los Angeles two gay groups decided to organize in response to police pressure and government security programs: the Mattachine Society began in 1950 and ONE Incorporated, a group that splintered off from the Mattachine, was founded in 1952. Both groups organized in response to the police repression that homosexuals were encountering in the city, but ONE Incorporated emphasized educating homophiles, as they then referred to themselves, about their lives and loves. This group of volunteers published the first nationally distributed gay magazine called, *ONE Magazine*.

In its attempt to illustrate one way of going about the excavation of a hitherto obscured facet of Los Angeles's gay past, this chapter charts the emergence of this latter organization and magazine. What follows, we hope, is a meditation on the unexpected ways in which a queer history may emerge from the sometimes anomalous, sometimes tantalizing, often ambiguous traces that comprise, in the most theoretical sense of the phrase, the gay archive.

Postwar (Night)Life in Los Angeles, or "Pin Up Your

Bobbypins before You Go out the Door"

From the early 1900s, when the growth of the movie industry attracted many creative and bohemian people to Hollywood, Los Angeles served as a magnet to attract sexual nonconformists of all types.1 Why Los Angeles became the birthplace of these vanguard gay organizations in the early 1950s, however, might best be attributed to its role in World War II. The gay and lesbian population swelled in Los Angeles during World War II, as L.A. served as the departure point for numerous young service women and men leaving for the Pacific front. In addition, many young lesbians working in defense

industry plants discovered each other in their new wartime jobs or in all-female boarding houses. At the end of the war, however, as Allan Bérubé details in *Coming Out under Fire*, many of these lesbians in the Women's Army Corps, and gay men in all branches of the service, found themselves facing undesirable discharges.2 Not able to return to their lives, or not wanting to go back to a life of enforced heterosexual marriage in their provincial small towns, many of these returning veterans decided to remain in Los Angeles once the war was over.

As a result of this increased population of gay guys and girls (as they then referred to themselves), gay and lesbian bars began to proliferate in L.A.'s

wild night life, Historian and longtime Los Angeles resident Jim Kepner recalls some of the bars that opened in Los Angeles in the late 1940s, including one of the more popular bars, the Tropical Village, or "TV Club" in Santa Monica, on the beach. The Tropical Village was unusual, Kepner remembers, because it commingled all kinds of men and women and the attire worn was quite varied—from bathing suits to tuxedos. Also in Santa Monica was Jack's at the Beach, with its sister establishment, Jack's Drive-In on Wilshire Boulevard. Officially a hamburger joint, its handsome male waiters on roller skates made it a popular hang out among gay men.

The lesbian bars in that era were mostly located in North Hollywood. Kepner describes them as "rough," with a clientele of butch dykes and prostitutes on their nights off. The If Club, the Open Door, and Joani Presents were among these early establishments. The first L.A. lesbian bars that broke out of the butch-femme stereotype included the Lakeview and the Bacchanal 70, the latter of which did not emerge until the early 1970s. The Bacchanal 70, located in the midtown Beverly Boulevard area, featured cool jazz combos and drew high fashion female models—a precursor perhaps to the "lipstick lesbian" image for which Los Angeles is now known.

Because of the proliferation of gay bars and patrons in Los Angeles during and after the war, police harassment of homosexuals also increased, heightening an aura of suspicion and fear of entrapment. Kepner remembers the euphemism, "doing the two-step," that was used to characterize the closeted gay patron's departure from a bar. The "two-step" meant that when he left the bar, it would only take him two steps to reach the sidewalk and affect the pose of simply walking by. This pose was sometimes foiled, Kepner recalls, by one of the drag queens in the bar who would prepare to leave at the same time as the departing patron. Once out on the street the drag queen would, to the hilarity of some

and horror of others, throw his arm around the "two-stepper" exclaiming something like, "Oh honey, wasn't that just a wonderful gay bar?"

This tension and play between those frequenting gay bars—between those who were out and visible like the drag queens, and those who remained fearful and in the closet—comprises a relatively unexplored layer of gay history. The emphasis in historical studies on the frequent police raids that forced these very different patrons of the bars into solidarity, sometimes overlooks the extreme differences in gay identity and degrees of "outness" among these same patrons.

Police harassment appears to have been the main motivation for the start of early gay political resistance.[3] Another reason for organizing, however, was the desire to develop a sense of community outside of the bars. The rise of several gay newsletters and periodicals in the 1950s was particularly significant in forming this broader sense of gay community and of advancing the movement for gay and lesbian rights.

The Rise of the Gay Press in Los Angeles

The first step in lesbian and gay community organizing in Los Angeles might be considered to have begun in 1947 with Lisa Ben's printing of the first American lesbian newsletter, *Vice Versa*, (Like most other gay writers and editors of her day, "Lisa Ben" chose to Write under a pseudonym, an anagram for *lesbian*, and still desires anonymity today).

The newsletter was decidedly apolitical, as were many of the small groups that sprang up around the same time whose focus was on creating networks of friends beyond bars and nightclubs. For example, as Kepner remembers, in June of 1951, a small group of interracial male couples in Los Angeles formed

an organization called Knights of the Clocks to provide a social outlet for others like themselves.

Most gay men and lesbians were not politically active and simply wanted to live lives without disruption, They could not do this, however, because of the concerted series of attacks begun by conservative politicians and law enforcement agencies. Responding to the new gay social openness, the Los Angeles Police Department began taking a decidedly antigay stance in the 1950s. Lesbians and gays were increasingly arrested upon any excuse in a determined effort to rid the city of "sexual perverts." This police persecution helped

mobilize what would become the first homosexual rights group in the country.

The Battle of the Boys: In-fighting and Outcasting in the Early Gay Movement in Los Angeles

In response to the police harassment, a Hollywood actor named Harry Hay proposed the founding of a society devoted to guaranteeing the rights of homosexuals. This group, which Hay and several other leftist activists organized in Los Angeles, became known as the Mattachine Society. The term *mattachine* refers to a tradition involving medieval dancers who wore masks while performing

in public plays critical of their world; likewise, the Mattachine Society itself underwent several different public and many private transformations in its tumultuous twenty-year history.[4]

After meeting and organizing for two years the organization decided in 1952 to start a magazine to express “the homosexual viewpoint." A small core of Mattachine members nurtured this magazine into existence, naming it ONE in recognition of the fact that homosexual people shared a common bond that made them "one." They rejected the medical term *homosexual*, and favored using homophile to express the notion that it was their same-sex (homo) love

(philia) that united them, rather than just sexual behavior.

However, within two years of its foundation, Mattachine fractured over debates about how best to accomplish its goals of improving the lives of homosexuals. Harry Hay held a rigid view of Mattachine's development that he modeled on Communist Party ideology. As the Mattachine grew, new activists were shocked to learn of the Communist party background of several of the leftist leaders of the organization. In the context of the red-baiting McCarthy era of the early 1950s, less radical activists emerged in Mattachine, like Ken Burns and Hal Call, who believed that the Mattachine would

never be able to accomplish its objectives if the organization were publicly associated with communism. They wanted homosexuals to be seen as "all-American" and "just like everyone else," which is how they saw themselves.

This early split in agendas, in fact, initiated what remains a central debate in the gay community today, pitting those who believe that gays are essentially the same as straights, and therefore should be treated equally, against those who claim that sexually minoritized people and cultures are intrinsically different from heterosexual society, yet still are deserving of civil rights. People like Harry Hay and Jim Kepner took this latter position. In an article

addressing this debate in the Mattachine Society, Kepner wrote a response in the April 1954 edition of *ONE Magazine*, entitled: "The Importance of Being Different." In this article he poses the questions that continue to split the gay community today: "Are homosexuals in any important way different from other people? If so, ought that difference be cultivated, or hidden under a bushel, or extirpated altogether? . . . While the magazine has been relatively clear in its policy, the Mattachine Society has become almost schizoid on the question of whether we're different, whether to admit it, and what to do about it."

Members like Hal Call, a procapitalist libertarian journalist and businessman, felt that a more effective way to gain equal rights was to publicize homosexuality widely and make it a common topic of conversation in mainstream American society. He wanted to use the progay findings of researchers and intellectuals, like Alfred Kinsey and Psychologist Evelyn Hooker, to spearhead a public relations campaign to revise public attitudes toward sexuality in general. In contrast to Harry Hay, who stressed the gender nonconforming personalities of homosexuals as separate types of persons who should organize as a minority, Call emphasized sexual liberation for everyone, with a focus on sexuality freed from sexual

repression. This focus, according to one source, eventually turned the Mattachine into an all-male "jack off club."

Call reacted against the secretive, left-wing, marginalized approach of Harry Hay, and stressed that communism was no friend of homosexuals (given Stalin's widespread imprisonment of sexual nonconformists of all kinds). Instead, he wanted to see homosexuals succeed economically, to be sexually open and free, and to build a strong presence within mainstream American capitalist society, an agenda that has, forty years later, come to define a certain urban, gay male population.

Under Call's leadership the Mattachine Society moved its headquarters to San Francisco and evolved an increasingly public, mainstream approach to their advocacy of gay rights. Meanwhile, the more radical activists (including radical leftists like Jim Kepner and radical libertarians like Dorr Legg and Don Slater) shifted their emphasis to ONE Incorporated. They focused on publishing *ONE Magazine* out of a belief that the prime need of homophile people was to build a strong sense of community within the homosexual population. They wanted to use the magazine to promulgate the communication and exchange of ideas needed to break down the intellectual and

emotional isolation that disadvantaged homosexual people. As Jim Kepner writes in *Rough News—Daring Views*, "Most gays [in the 1950s], including on ONE's staff, felt that our only concern was to get the police off our backs. It took a long struggle to get others to see the need for education, for building gay community consciousness and institutions."[6] ONE Incorporated's *ONE Magazine*, which unlike *Vice Versa* developed a national subscription list, not only was one of the most potent public forums for protesting the repression of homosexuals in the United States, but simultaneously helped create the first conceptions of a national gay community.

Benedict Anderson has argued in *Imagined Communities* that the invention of the printing press and early print culture was instrumental in forming the conceptualization of nationalism through providing a "common language" publication with the power to bring people together into a discourse community.[7] The early gay and lesbian press served a similar function: while it may not have created a queer nation, it provided individuals, especially those living in rural areas, with their first sense of being connected to a larger community. This increased knowledge of one another, enabled through gay periodicals, did much to spur on the

later gay rights movement of the post-Stonewall 1970s.

For over a decade, *ONE Magazine* served as the major publication of the movement, along with two magazines that followed it, the *Mattachine Review* and the *Ladder*; the latter was a publication of the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), created in San Francisco by lesbian activists Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, and Helen Sandoz. The mission statements Of ONE and the DOB were quite similar, suggesting the tenor of the fledgling homophile movement.

The effectiveness of the early gay press in organizing community is perhaps no better verified

than by the homophobic claim made in the 1954 *Miami Daily News* of the rapid "spread" of the gay population from Los Angeles to other urban centers. This headline and article were reprinted in the October 1954 edition of *ONE Magazine*. The *Miami Daily News* article, entitled, "How L.A. Handles Its 150,000 Perverts," warns Miami of an impending takeover by perverts, eerily perceived as a kind of gay virus spreading from Los Angeles. The fear expressed in this article was based on the perception that a developing homosexual community, solidified through "their own magazine" emanating from Los Angeles and infecting other urban centers:

It happened in Los Angeles and it could happen here. In California the homosexuals have organized to resist interference by police. They have established their own magazine and arc constantly crusading for recognition as a "normal" group, a so-called "third sex."

They number many thousands in Los Angeles, their leaders say, They claim kinship by nature with some of the leading literary and business figures in the nation.[8]

Not only does the author of this article inadvertently recognize the power the "establishment" of a gay press maintained in

organizing a community, he refers to what was to become another hotly debated strategy of legitimizing homosexual existence—that of "outing" well-known writers, artists, and political leaders in the 1990s.

Creating Gay History

The strategy of claiming "kinship by nature with some of the leading literary and business figures in the nation" served both a political and historical purpose, and is a methodology still practiced today. The need to build a chronology of a gay past out of historical fragments, innuendo, and blank spaces

has been the unique and necessary task of the historian of gay and lesbian culture. This strategy of outing famous figures, of constructing history—or truth—through rumor or gossip, has been the basis not only of much gay history but of daily queer existence as well.

The argument for gay rights through claiming kinship with famous figures of the past was identified in Dr. Evelyn Hooker's groundbreaking article, "A Preliminary Analysis of Group Behavior of Homosexuals" (1956), by a Dr. Burgess, who said, "The group lore identifies, not always too accurately, certain famous men past and present, as homosexuals thus providing a justification of their

aberrant way of life."[9] The very act of historicizing or claiming gay existence presents the unique problem of a subject always already obscured through the demands of the closet. In gay historical inquiry, therefore, there can be no myth of an authentic or completely knowable subject that has, in the past, informed much mainstream historical investigation. Gay history begins with the overt recognition of the obscured subject, yet the historical/political strategy of "outing" brazenly subverts that obscurity with a claim of knowledge of the subject. Yet despite valiant attempts by the Mattachine Society and ONE to increase knowledge and acceptance of homosexuals through

such strategies, the state continued to harass the new gay organizations at each turn.

"Based on No Particular Logic"

The United States Post Office became the next government agency to attempt to halt the emerging homophile voice. Even though *ONE magazine* was careful not to print sexually graphic language or pictures, the U.S. Postal Service impounded the October 1954 issue of the magazine and labeled it “obscene.” Ironically, the same issue that was impounded featured an article by ONE's legal counsel on "The Law of Mailable Material." In this piece the legal

counsel reveals the moral and political tenor of the time through its answer to the question, “What is printable in *ONE Magazine*?”:

First, while I do not want to alarm ONE's readers, I must in frankness say that ONE, merely by its existence, is illegal. That line of reasoning would run as follows: Homosexual acts are made crimes in every State in the Union. ONE is published specifically for homosexuals. Therefore ONE is a magazine for criminals, their edification and guidance. It is, therefore, illegal.

This, however, is too extreme a view for 1954. There is no indication from any quarter

that such a view will ever be taken, or could be successfully maintained in a court. It is likelier that a more moderate, sensible position will in fact prevail. This moderate view is in fact the one taken last year by the Solicitor-General.

That view is this: that a discussion of the social, economic, personal and legal problems of homosexuals, for the purposes of better understanding of and by society, is permissible; but appeals to the lusts or salacity or sexual appetites of ONE's readers are not permissible. ONE, in other words, can appeal to the heads, but not to the sexual desires, of its readers.[10]

The legal counsel gives examples of what was and was not permissible to print: "Permissible: 'John was my friend for a year.' Not permissible That night we made mad love.'"[11]

The lawyer's article ends with a comment on lesbians: "Note also that these rules are relaxed somewhat in work dealing with homosexuality among women. Hence, the greater freedom of ONE's February "All-Woman Issue." This is merely a reflection of society's attitudes in general, based on no particular logic."[12]

Of course, this writer fails to understand the patriarchal logic (expressed in particular by male sexologists at the time) that has long claimed that

women have no sexuality except in response to men, a logic it took the lesbian feminist movement of the 1970s to begin to dislodge.

Despite its careful attention to the government's obscenity rules, the magazine was impounded. The pieces in the October 1954 issue that apparently were salacious enough to warrant the seizure of the magazine were outlined in the court case:

1. The story "Sappho Remembered" appearing on Pages 12 through 15, is obscene because lustfully stimulating to the homosexual reader.
2. The poem "Lord Samuel and Lord Montagu," appearing on Pages 18 and 19, is obscene because of the filthy language used in it,

3. The advertisement for the Swiss publication "The Circle" appearing at the top of page 29, is non-mailable matter because it gives information for the obtaining of obscene matter.[13]

ONE Incorporated brought suit against the United States Post Office, and the case went all the way to the United States Supreme Court. The Supreme Court decision was a summary reversal of the decision made by the Ninth Circuit United States Court of Appeals. The earlier decision of 27 February 1957 had read as follows; "The Court of Appeals, Ross, District Judge, held that [*ONE*]

magazine, purportedly published for the purpose of dealing with homosexuality from scientific, historical and critical point of view, but containing articles which were nothing more than cheap pornography calculated to promote Lesbianism and other forms of homosexuality, was not mailable."[14]

In the court's decision, lesbianism is singled out as particularly obscene, which is particularly interesting in light of the article written by the magazine's legal counsel claiming that there seemed to be greater leeway allowed in the "All-Woman Issue." The Ninth Circuit Court's summary of the articles under contention instead suggests—once again—that

relations between women without men are “nothing more than cheap pornography”:

The article "Sappho Remembered" is the story of a lesbian's influence on a young girl only twenty years of age but "actually nearer sixteen in many essential ways of maturity," in her struggle to choose between a life with the lesbian, or a normal married life with her childhood sweetheart. The lesbian's affair with her room-mate while in college, resulting in the lesbian's expulsion from college, is recounted to bring in the jealousy angle. The climax is reached when the young girl gives up her chance for a normal married life to live with the lesbian. This article is nothing more than cheap pornography

calculated to promote lesbianism. It falls far short of dealing with homosexuality from the scientific, historical and critical point of view.

The poem "Lord Samuel and Lord Montagu" is about the alleged homosexual activities of Lord Montagu and other British Peers and contains a warning to all males to avoid the public toilets while the poem pertains to sexual matters of such a vulgar and indecent nature that it tends to arouse a feeling of disgust and revulsion. It is dirty, vulgar and offensive to the moral senses.[15]

The argument in response to the advertisement of the Circle reads in part: "Although on its face the information in this article appears harmless, it

cannot be said that the purpose is harmless. It is for the information of those who read the magazine and particularly the homosexuals. It conveys information to the homosexual or any other reader as to where to get more of the material contained in 'ONE.'"[16]

The case included a long consideration of the different meanings of the words "obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy and indecent." The Ninth Circuit Court thereby upheld the original ruling with its Conclusion *777 [3] [4], which reads: "When the approved definitions and tests are applied to certain articles in the 'ONE' magazine, it is

apparent that the magazine is obscene and filthy and is therefore non-mailable matter."

ONE Incorporated's appeal to the Supreme Court resulted in the issuance of a *per curium* reversal, meaning that the opinion is not one signed by any justice or group of justices but is issued through a more summary process. The Supreme Court ruling of January 1958 in favor of *ONE Magazine* reads simply: "The petition for the writ of certiorari is granted and the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit is reversed" (no. 290). The Supreme Court's decision was based solely in *Roth v.*

United States, 354 U.S. 476, 77 S. Ct. 1304, 1 L. Ed. 2d 1498.

This court decision laid the basis for the legal distribution of all subsequent lesbian and gay newspapers and magazines. ONE Incorporatcd capitalized on that move for legal change, publicizing a "Homophile Bill of Rights" in 1961, that presaged the lists of demands presented at the lesbian and gay Marches on Washington, D.C., 1979, 1987, and 1993.[17]

Culture Building(s)

In Los Angeles, the small group of committed men and women who published *ONE Magazine*

became much more than magazine writers. Led by Dorr Legg, they formed the nucleus of a full-fledged community center. Dorr Legg, who quit his job as a landscape architect to devote himself to full-time work at ONE Incorporated later termed himself "the first full time professional queer."

ONE's office was open to gay people needing counseling, attorney referrals, information, and it served as well simply as a place to be with like-minded others. The staff organized social events, lectures, political events, and even a gay travel club. In many ways then, ONE Incorporated became a prototype of what would later emerge as

gay and lesbian community centers across the nation.

ONE recognized the needs of the gay and lesbian subcultures for social activities extending beyond the bars and protected from a homophobic state; it addressed the issues and needs that have subsequently become some of the main social and cultural services to our community, ranging from the lesbian and gay press to RSVP Travel and Olivia Tours.

Certainly a momentous decision on the part of ONE Incorporated pioneers like Dorr Legg, Don Slater, Tony Reyes, Jim Kepner, Ann Carll Reid, and Stella Rush was the decision to begin holding

classes in what they called "homophile studies." They believed that the lack of solid information on homosexuality was a major gap in the effort to improve the situation of the homophile community. Not only did they teach classes on numerous subjects, from history and anthropology to critiques of Freudian psychoanalysis, but they also began publishing, in 1956, the first scholarly publication on homosexuality in America, the *ONE Institute Quarterly: Homophile Studies*.

Unfortunately, ONE lost momentum in the 1960s, first in a reaction by lesbian leaders of the Daughters of Bilitis, like Del Martin, who felt that the 1961 Homophile Bill of Rights proposal

was too radical. Instead, she signed a letter “Brief of Injustice” prepared by several San Francisco homophile groups.

There were also personality conflicts. Some lesbians got along well with ONE's leader Dorr Legg, but other women (and men) found him imperious and domineering. The 1961 withdrawal of women, and major male writers like Jim Kepner, weakened the organization.

In 1965, another split occurred between Dorr Legg and *ONE Magazine* editor Don Slater. Not only did Slater leave, but one night his faction secretly brought in a truck and loaded up

ONE's library, archives, and files to take them with him to a new location.

For several months rival copies of *ONE Magazine* appeared. Legg and Slater sued and countersued each other in court, and the case dragged on for a long time, draining the organization of energy and funds. Finally, the judge ruled that the two factions should split the library and archives in half. This weakened the use of their most valuable assets, as each faction jealously guarded its holdings. As a result, the gay and lesbian community was denied a strong library and resource center at a crucial time in the movement's history.

In accordance with the verdict, Dorr Legg's faction retained use of the name ONE and continued the monthly lecture series as well as other educational activities, but by 1965 the organization had lost its primary role at the cutting edge of the homophile movement. Don Slater's faction renamed itself the Homosexual Information Center, and began a new publication, *Tangents*. Jim Kepner continued to collect archival material (which he had begun doing in 1942) and founded what was then named the National Gay Archives Natalie Barney/Edward Carpenter Library.

After the 1965 debacle, Slater ran the Homosexual Information Center until his death in 1996. Kepner's archives developed into what has become today the International Gay and Lesbian Archives, considered now to be the largest and oldest archives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) materials in the world, containing over two million items. Both groups continued to add more books, periodicals, manuscripts, and artifacts to their separate collections, but the original division of resources continued to weaken each's impact.

Recognizing this deficiency, in 1994 ONE Institute and the International Gay and Lesbian

Archives formally merged to create an organization that carries on the educational mission of the former and the collecting and preserving mission of the latter, thus gathering under the aegis of a new unified institution the historical items of a queer past. After Don Slater's death, the Homosexual Information Center's library also merged with ONE Institute/IGLA, thus finally bringing all three collections together again.

The University of Southern California has offered a building to house this unique and priceless collection, ensuring its preservation for the future. Events of the 1990s have thus brought

full circle the pioneering work of the 1950s, adding to Los Angeles's potential to once again become an important site for gay and lesbian thought and research.

The Real, the Tangible, the International Gay and Lesbian Archives: Theory into Practice

What does the collecting of LGBT materials mean to queer communities and identities? The daily operations of ONE Institute/lnternational Gay and Lesbian Archives (as it is now known) speaks to the unique issues of gay historicizing, of the drive toward increased visibility that defines in large part

LGBT historical and political agendas. In a culture defined by invisibility, the very act of collecting LGBT materials is political in that it allows an actual visual and material representation of the self. Cultural theorist Susan Stewart suggests that "The ultimate term in the series that marks the collection is the ‘self,’ the articulation of the collector's own identity."[18]

This desire to articulate the self was precisely what the founder of the International Gay and Lesbian Archives, Jim Kepner, was following when, in 1942, he went looking for some visible trace of his gay self and history and found none in the San Francisco Public Library or other repositories of American

cultural life. His decision at that time to begin to collect and keep every book and artifact he could find that related to gay and lesbian life was an impulse that reflected an entire subcultural need to have the self represented. The ongoing and primary gay agenda of working toward "visibility" is informed by the same motivations.

The drive toward the collection and display of LGBT artifacts brings to bear on (mostly hidden) gay history a certain material question of authenticity. Archival collections speak to a mainstream notion of what it means to have a history. For a culture often defined through artifice and apparitions, costume and camp, performativity and impersonation, the notion

of authentic artifacts, of material objects—housed in an institution—"legitimates" gay culture on another level. Recognizing the value of such an enormous archival collection, the affiliation of the ONE Institute/lnternational Gay and Lesbian Archives with a major research institution's library collections suggests a level of institutional support for the documentation of gay life, if not gay existence itself, that crosses a new frontier.

The mission statement for ONE Institute/International Gay and Lesbian Archives reads: "The Archives shall, without bias, identify, collect, organize, preserve and make available documents, artifacts and information relating to the

lives and concerns of LGBT people in all times and places." The Archives, however, had been engaged in a prolonged discussion and disagreement on how to interpret the phrase "relating to the lives of LGBT people" for it raises the difficult question of what it is exactly that defines gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered identities. For example, if there is a novel that contains no overt LGBT content that is written by a "suspected" lesbian, should that book be preserved? Or in another case, because the dance industry has been heavily populated by gay men, should every book, program, flyer, and artifact relating to dance be preserved since it may in time yield clues to gay identity, even, let's say, through its

absence of mention of the gay dancer? Some have claimed that Shakespeare was queer; should all his works be on the shelves of the Archives, or only ones that hint at this queerness? What about male-produced lesbian pornography? Does nonlesbian-identified feminist material belong on the shelves?

On one extreme are those who believe there should be no classification scheme that would limit the Archive's collecting practices. Those who hold this position believe that anything or anyone's works suspected to be gay or queer should not be discarded from the collection or from donations received. Although this may appear an unpractical position to some, it in fact represents what has been touted as a

basic tenet of queer theory that suggests that the so-called opposition between homosexual and heterosexual definition is such a troubled, indeed an artificial one, that to make a distinction between gay and not gay is theoretically impossible. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued that "many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured—indeed, fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition."19 If one were to put this argument into practice in an archive one would have to, in fact, collect everything! As both Michel Foucault and Sedgwick have argued, silences and absences are as telling and defining of (gay)

sexuality as are overt representations or knowledge of (homo)sexuality.

Putting theory into practice is often a complicated process that can either change the theory, the practice, or both. In the case of gay archival collecting, the issue may have more to do with the need and desire to remember and be remembered, not only to see and touch lives that too often have been violently marginalized, but to pass on one's life, especially in the absence of progeny.

For many, our history of struggle is a history that should not be forgotten even—or especially—as we move into new freedoms. It remains a political act to save the evidence of our existence, both past and

present. It was only a little over forty years ago that Jim Kepner began to assemble his own gay archive because he was not able to find a trace of his gayness anywhere in the San Francisco Public Library system; in such cases, the individual gesture, bred from desire, becomes a radical political act whose consequences—as the queer 1990s evidence—are at once material (a building, a collection, the sources from which to re-create history) and logical ("we're here, we're queer, because you, too, can read about it").

This chapter is dedicated to the work and memory of Jim Kepner, 1923-1997.

Notes

The authors would like to thank Debra Silverman for her insightful comments on drafts of this chapter and for her patience in editing.

We use *queer* in this context to refer to the myriad forms of same-sex and other nonnormative kinds of desire that have come to inform certain specific identity groups. At the same time, we acknowledge that many of those from the generation about which this chapter is written find this term offensive. Later in the chapter, we will use the term *gay* when we write about what was in fact a mostly male homosexual movement.

1. The saying, "Pin up your bobbypins before you go out the door," was the common farewell to someone leaving a gay bar in the 1940s and 1950s, meaning, "straighten up."

2. Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Plume Books, 1990).

3. Interview with Jim Kepner, Los Angeles, 7 August 1997.

4. See Stuart Timmons, *The Trouble with Harry Hay: Founder of the Gay Movement* (New York: Alyson, 1990) for a discussion of the Mattachine Society’s transformations.

5. Jim Kepner, *Rough News—Daring Views: 1950 Pioneer Gay Journalism* (New York: Haworth Press, 1997), 6.

6. Kepner, *Rough News*, 3.

7. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

8. *ONE Magazine*, October 1954, 17.

9. *ONE Institute Quarterly: Homophile Studies* 29 (winter 1959):29.

10. *ONE Magazine*, October 1954, 6.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Case no. 15139.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.