

A LETTER FROM THE CURATOR

June 6, 1986

Dear friend of the Archives:

The enclosed Bulletin, which should be labelled #4, is, except for the last item, our Corporate ANNUAL REPORT. I would like to add a few points which might concern average readers, or which are later news, as well as to reinforce the message that the Archives, with the world's most valuable collection of materials on gay/lesbian life and gay movement history, really needs contributors, large and small, to raise us off the floor and enable us to efficiently do this necessary work. For example, we are (not for the first time) three months behind in the rent.

THE A.I.D.S. HISTORY PROJECT

The Bulletin omitted mention of our vigorous AIDS History Project. When David Grossman, a former Minnesotan who had volunteered with the National Gay Task Force in New York, moved here six months ago, he offered to put our AIDS files into better order (they then filled one and a half file drawers.) He did much more than that: elevating our passive collecting and sorting of whatever clippings and literature came our way into a systematic attempt to build a preeminent collection of international materials on this crisis, making the Archives the repository for many of the ad hoc groups springing up to meet this devastating epidemic -- for gays, a veritable Holocaust Two. Our collection of AIDS materials has grown apace -- faster than David, working as a nearly full-time volunteer, could keep up with, and we now have seven full file drawers plus several boxes of unfiled materials.

But two months ago, David made a trip to Hawaii, fell in love with the place, and after another trip, has now moved there. We desperately need a Project Co-ordinator and volunteers to keep this part of our files up to date and in good order. And, of course, we need to receive AIDS-related materials (clippings, leaflets, posters, buttons, medical reports, etc.) from all over.

THE ARTS PROJECT

One result of our large Gay Men's Art Show in February was the contribution of almost \$30,000 worth of drawings and paintings by the artists, including nine major paintings by Philip Core, one of Britain's most prominent new artists. Since one objective of the show was the acquisition of new art, this represents a large step toward the establishment of an archival gallery.

We were recently approached by the Advocate, which did a fine article about the problems of archiving the gay movement in their May 27th issue, and which is currently moving into the new Max Factor building on Hollywood Blvd nearby, asking us to mount regular art displays in their headquarters -- thus providing the Archives with its much needed gallery space in a handsome location. It has been somewhat frustrating assembling a considerable collection of artwork, posters, photos and historic exhibit materials -- and having virtually no place to display them as we have run out of wall space. This arrangement will make it possible to show both historical and new works by artists, including works the artists may offer for sale, and to prepare displays on the history of gay life and the movement.

THE VIDEOTAPE PROJECT

With the help of Philip Quetschke, Chuck Spero, Bunny McCulloch and others, the Archives videotape project has made much progress. Our tape collection keeps growing, though we have few relevant educational tapes. We are proudest of the life-history interviews we have done with Pat Rocco, Karla Jay, Shelton Dewey, Morris Kight, Harry Hay, veteran actor Phil Jones, Tom of Finland, John Preston, model and filmmaker Al Parker, the Empresses Nicole of San Diego and Jose of San Francisco, Geri Dilno, and others. The Whitman-Brooks Foundation has agreed to help us with fundraising in order to make educational videotapes that would be more widely available.

Last Sunday evening, John Brown used his video camera (ours was stranded) to tape a panel discussion at Celebration Theatre (an Archives spinoff) between Gay movement pioneers (in 1950-51) Harry Hay, Chuck Rowland (who heads Celebration Theatre), Conrad Stevens, Martin Block, and yours truly, a late-comer on the start 36 years ago of America's gay movement.

ACQUISITIONS

Paul Hardman called recently from San Francisco to say that Pride Foundation there had to vacate quickly and that, if we could send some one up, we could pick up several boxes of Pride and Society for Individual Rights files, dating back to 1964. After much phoning, Paul Sehm, who did the framing for our art show, offered to drive us up, and we made a quick trip, bringing back a truckload of valuable files. Then the mother and sister of a Dallas man who died with AIDS sent us his valuable collection of books, papers and erotic videos; we got a wonderful set of files from Dignity's National office; several boxes of periodicals from NGTF; and someone called saying that San Diego's Book Mark was folding -- why didn't we call them and see if they'd make a donation? I frankly thought that unlikely, but Olaf made the call, and, with David Grossman, brought back 677 new books -- half of them for the women's section, which generally grows more slowly. It was the largest acquisition of women's books we have made since starting in this location. There are still parts of the

U.S. and overseas from which we receive few buttons, posters, clippings or organizational records.

John O'Brien, a gay militant from pre-Stonewall days and a top button-and-memorabilia collector who twice ran as a gay activist for State Assembly, gathers a lot of material for us. He recently gave us an original Oscar Wilde note on Women's World stationary to a Madame Marchetta in Paris. Several small acquisitions have resulted from the Advocate article, including an exciting collection of fine photographs from a New Yorker, many dating back to the middle of the last century.

CONTRIBUTORS

Southern California Women for Understanding remain our steadiest contributor, as an organization and through their members. We have had generous annual donations from the Valley Business Alliance and smaller ones from other groups, mostly in this area, but the donations from Christopher Street West mentioned in the Treasurer's Report ceased a year ago. Several individuals contributed more than the \$30 annual membership fee, but the largest two, other than Gene LaPietra of Circus Disco, were both anonymous: one person contributed funds for purchase of a new computer, and later for a hard disk drive and a faster, dot-matrix printer; and a woman friend donated most of the postage used in our recent mailings.

GETTING SWAMPED

Both my report and the President's in the accompanying ANNUAL REPORT mention that the Curator took several months off largely from Archives work to get a real start on a personalized history of the gay movement. That work has now expanded to a 2,150 page manuscript (not 1,000) which includes extensive source material which will inevitably get squeezed out of any final account -- but will remain a source document for later researchers. This combines my autobiography with a movement history, as I have been involved, as a journalist and a member of well over 100 groups since 1943. [I participated from 1943-45 in a proposed gay rights group called the Sons of Hamidy. While its national structure proved to be mythical, I met and corresponded with many people who thought that we were on the march -- as we actually began to be a decade later with the Mattachine Society.] These reports do not adequately emphasize how seriously this time out affected our backlog of unfinished work here, and how much dozens of boxes of incoming materials have piled up in the place, making it harder to get to the files or shelves.

WOMEN'S COLLECTION

The accession of 500 new books recently in the women's section has disastrously burst the space available, and we're not sure which library section will have to be moved to make room. We need a woman volunteer (and could use designated contributions) to help build this

valuable and heavily used section. While most materials donated to the Archives are largely male-oriented, Archives users are about equally male and female.

FOREIGN COLLECTIONS

Our books and periodicals in other languages continue to increase, particularly those in German and Spanish (or in Catalan, the language of the Barcelona region), with smaller gains in Japanese, French, Italian, Dutch and the Scandinavian languages. In Russian, Finnish, Chinese, Arabic and Yiddish we have far less. We welcome any relevant foreign language materials, even though we only occasionally have staff members who are proficient in other languages. I have since 1956 presented repeated classes on the gay history of a number of countries, often spending several weeks each on England, Germany, Russia, the classic lands, Islamic civilization, Black history, and the U.S., and two hours sessions on Scandinavia, Japan, France and Latin America. We will hope at some time to publish some materials from these notes.

NEED FOR STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

We greatly need new people to help in Archives work, including typing, sorting, filing, cataloguing, transportation and fundraising. But I must dissent from the view of some of our board members that we should not "dissipate our energies" on fund-raising efforts. If other people will responsibly raise money for us without effort on our part, we of course will welcome that, and would be glad to spend all our time sorting through files and books, and helping people with enquiries. But we have taken this responsibility, and just doing the filing doesn't get the back rent paid -- or bring in funds for many things we need (file cabinets, file folders, desk chairs that aren't falling apart, photograph preservation materials, shelving, a new typewriter [our fine IBM electronic 50 just broke down totally, and IBM tells us that at six years old it is hopelessly obsolete].)

We thank you in advance for your support, whether through donations of funds, or archival or library materials, or sending us lists of names we can solicit for support, or talking to friends who might help us maintain and improve the world's best known gay and lesbian library and archives -- or remembering us in your wills....

in gay love,

-- Jim Kepner

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