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Susan Ferentinos

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Ways of Interpreting Queer Pasts

Susan Ferentinos

ABSTRACT: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) historical interpretation is an increasingly common feature of museums and historic sites, while at the same time one that often pushes beyond the physical boundaries of historical organizations. This article considers various interpretive methods as tools for delivering LGBTQ history and offers multiple examples of each type of interpretation. Methods discussed include exhibits (both temporary and permanent); special events; arts programming; youth programming; monuments and memorials; historical engagement with the built environment; and digital history projects. The author acknowledges that, in 2019, these efforts still tend to favor the experiences of white cisgender men and to focus on the realm of political activism and offers some suggestions for how LGBTQ interpretation might develop in coming years.

KEY WORDS: museum interpretation, LGBTQ history, history museums, historic sites, LGBTQ public history, monuments and memorials

The year 2019 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Stonewall uprising, a watershed moment in the struggle for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) rights. Museums across the United States are planning to use the anniversary as a launching-off point for exploring LGBTQ history. No doubt, the year will be its own watershed of sorts, demonstrating some of the most innovative approaches and best practices that the museum field has to offer.

Yet, LGBTQ historical interpretation has been a subject of practice for quite some time already. As historian Lara Kelland has documented, the Gay Liberation movement in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s embraced the task of recovering a history of sexual and gender variance. The Lesbian Herstory Archives (New York City) began in 1974, the Gerber-Hart Library (Chicago) began in 1981, and the GLBT Historical Society (San Francisco) began in 1985.¹ In Europe, Magnus

¹ Lara Kelland, *Clio's Foot Soldiers: Twentieth-Century U.S. Social Movements and Collective Memory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), 101–28; Lara Kelland, “Public History and Queer Memory,” in *The Routledge History of Queer America*, ed. Don Romesburg (New York: Routledge, 2018), 371–79; “The Lesbian Herstory Archives: History,” <http://www.lesbianherstoryarchives.org/history.html>; “About Gerber/Hart,” <http://www.gerberhart.org/>

Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science, which opened in Berlin in 1919, had exhibit space that interpreted the range of human sexuality, including same-sex attraction and what we would now call transgender identities. The first permanent interpretive efforts devoted to LGBTQ history in Europe appeared in the 1980s, with the establishment of the Schwules Museum in Berlin in 1985 and the unveiling of the Homomonument in Amsterdam in 1987.²

Initially, efforts to interpret LGBTQ history remained almost exclusively the domain of LGBTQ community-based organizations, and the work of these groups laid the groundwork for more broadly focused professional organizations to eventually join the effort. In Kelland's words:

During the past half-century, queer public history has transformed from a grassroots cultural form of movement activism to a widely accepted cultural and intellectual practice that blends queer collective memory with the professional practices of the larger field of public history.³

In the US, the first efforts to tell these stories in mainstream venues began in the early 1990s, around the time of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Stonewall uprising. One of the best-known examples is the 1994 exhibit at the New York Public Library titled *Becoming Visible: The Legacy of Stonewall*. Other early examples of LGBTQ interpretation in mainstream institutions included *AIDS/Brooklyn* at the Brooklyn Historical Society (1993–1994), *Public Faces/Private Lives: Boston's Lesbian and Gay History*, presented by The History Project (a Boston-area LGBTQ history group founded in 1980) at the Boston Public Library (1996), and *The Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals, 1933–1945*, which ran at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (2002–2003).⁴

about-gerberhart; Gerard Koskovich, "Displaying the Queer Past: Purposes, Publics, and Possibilities at the GLBT History Museum," *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 62; Joan Nestle, "Who Were We To Do Such a Thing? Grassroots Necessities, Grassroots Dreaming: The LHA in Its Early Years," *Radical History Review* 122 (May 2015): 233–42. See both Kelland sources for additional examples.

2 Koskovich, "Displaying the Queer Past," 62; "The Museum | History | Schwules Museum," <https://www.schwulesmuseum.de/ueber-uns/?lang=en>; Jason Goldman, "Homomonument," *GLBTQ Arts*, January 2015, 1–2.

3 Kelland, "Public History and Queer Memory," 371. This essay provides an overview of early LGBTQ history efforts by grassroots organizations, before the public history profession began working in this area.

4 Molly McGarry and Fred Wasserman, *Becoming Visible: An Illustrated History of Lesbian and Gay Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Penguin Studio, 1998); Stephanie Lehner, "Becoming Visible: Mainstream Cultural Institutions and the Successful Presentation of LGBTQ History Exhibitions" (MA Thesis, Cooperstown Graduate Program, 2008); The History Project, *Improper Bostonians: Lesbian and Gay History from the Puritans to Playland* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998); Edward Phillips, "Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals: The Curator's View," *Museums & Social Issues* 3, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 105–14; Klaus Muller, "Invisible Visitors: Museums and the Gay and Lesbian Community," *Museum News*, October 2001, http://www.aam-us.org/pubs/mn/MN_SO01_InvisibleVisitors.cfm; Dan Luckenbill, *With Equal Pride: Gay and Lesbian Studies at UCLA. Catalog of an Exhibit, University Research Library, January-March 1993* (Los Angeles: UCLA, University Library, Department of Special Collections, 1993); Robin Metcalfe, *Queer Looking, Queer Acting: Lesbian and*

The past five-to-seven years, in particular, have seen a tremendous increase in the amount of LGBTQ interpretive efforts by institutions that are not specifically LGBTQ-focused. As increasing numbers and types of venues are tackling this topic, interpretation is becoming more nuanced and interpretive methods more varied. This article offers an overview of interpretive approaches to the queer past in recent years, focusing on institutions that are not exclusively dedicated to this topic. In doing so, I hope to mark a particular point in time in the development of LGBTQ public history, when, as Kelland states, the collective memory of LGBTQ communities and the practices of professional public history are working together to potentially create something new. I include myriad examples in order to provide a sense of possibility and to foster creative brainstorming for organizations just beginning to work in this area.

Interpretive methods to be discussed include exhibits (both temporary and permanent); special events; arts programming; youth programming; monuments and memorials; historical engagement with the built environment; and digital history projects. Although it is by no means a clear-cut distinction, for the sake of organizing my discussion, I have divided these methods into those that occur within the confines of museums and historic sites and those that take place outside of the physical boundaries of history organizations.

Before we begin, however, a note about terminology is in order. Word choice is important when planning LGBTQ interpretive efforts, and further discussion about this issue is available elsewhere. For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to use the term LGBTQ, even though this means using the term ahistorically at times. I also occasionally employ the word “queer” as a synonym to LGBTQ. I have found this word particularly useful for describing past experiences that may not fall clearly into our modern categories of sexual and gender identity, but do nevertheless stand out as somehow out of the ordinary and likely related to our current concept of LGBTQ. However, I acknowledge that this is a challenging word for some people, and I respect the fact that other authors and institutions may choose to avoid it. Likewise, I am aware that in academia, the word “queer” carries a specific meaning that differs from the way I am using it here.⁵

Gay Vernacular (Halifax, NS: Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, 1997). Note also that one of the Smithsonian’s first efforts to interpret LGBTQ history was in connection to a Stonewall anniversary; Joseph Caputo, “Smithsonian Marks Anniversary of Stonewall Riots,” *Smithsonian Magazine* (blog), June 25, 2009, <http://blogs.smithsonianmag.com/aroundthemall/2009/06/smithsonian-marks-anniversary-of-stonewall-riots/>.

5 Susan Ferentinos, *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 5–7, 25–26, 153–54; Richard Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2017), xiii–xiv; Paul Gabriel, “Why Grapple with Queer When You Can Fondle It? Embracing Our Erotic Intelligence,” in *Gender, Sexuality and Museums: A Routledge Reader*, ed. Amy K. Levin (New York: Routledge, 2010), 71–72; Susan Ferentinos, “Lifting Our Skirts: Sharing the Sexual Past with Visitors,” *The Public Historian* (May 2014), published digitally on *History@Work* (blog), July 1, 2014, <http://ncph.org/history-at-work/lifting-our-skirts/>; Victoria Bissell Brown, “Queer or Not: What Jane Addams Teaches Us about Not Knowing,” in *Out in Chicago: LGBT History at the Crossroads*, ed. Jill Austin and Jennifer Brier (Chicago: Chicago History Museum,

Trends In LGBTQ Interpretation

The first thirty years or so of LGBTQ history—both in scholarship and interpretation—tended to focus on reclamation, finding evidence of same-sex desire and gender variance in the past. Since roughly the turn of the twenty-first century, we have had enough documentation to begin a more nuanced analysis. What does this evidence tell us about the larger historical moment in which it was created? How did the threat of social ostracism shape mass behavior? How does the interplay of race, class, gender identity, sexual identity, and a host of other identities play out in the negotiation of community space? While such questions have created a lively scholarship in the past twenty years, this trend has taken longer to reach the realm of public history.

We now have many examples of public history interpretation of the LGBTQ past. However, these efforts, to a large extent, have confined themselves to a preliminary introduction to the topic. The emphasis has been on political activism since the Stonewall uprising, on relationships that mirror larger societal norms (what many scholars refer to as “homonormative” relationships), on gay and lesbian experiences rather than bisexual and transgender ones, and on a cohesive concept of LGBTQ communities that deemphasizes conflict and difference *within* those communities. This final characteristic—which suggests a more singular experience of sexual and gender variance than actually exists—usually involves an unarticulated privileging of gay white male experiences, which most closely align with the dominant LGBTQ historical narrative. Although I have made an effort to find examples that deviate from these trends, I also acknowledge that a discussion of LGBTQ historical interpretation at this historical moment will carry characteristics similar to its subject matter. Readers will find below far more examples of white, homonormative relationships and post-Stonewall civil rights struggles than they will find examples that take on other issues. At the end of this article, I offer some suggestions for ways LGBTQ interpretation might become more refined in the years ahead.

Interpretation Within Museums And Historic Sites

Within the world of museums and historic sites, incorporating the perspectives of sexual and gender minorities has potential beyond simply interpretive initiatives. In 2014, Ann Bukantas, head of fine arts at National Museums Liverpool (United

2011), 63–75; Frank D. Vagnone, “A Note from Franklin D. Vagnone, Executive Director,” *Historic House Trust Newsletter*, Fall 2010; Sharon Marcus, “Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 31, no. 1 (September 2005): 191–218. For examples of queer theory applied to the museum world, see Deborah Bright and Erica Rand, “Queer Plymouth,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 2006): 259–77; Erica Rand, *The Ellis Island Snow Globe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Jennifer Tyburczy, “Queer Curatorship: Performing the History of Race, Sex, and Power in Museums,” *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 23, no. 1 (2013): 107–24; Jennifer Tyburczy, *Sex Museums: The Politics and Performance of Display* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Kingdom), offered a vision of a future in which LGBTQ perspectives were an integral part of all museums, moving beyond a singular focus on exhibits and programming. She asked:

How many events have you organised in the past year that aimed to engage with an LGBT audience? Can you relate any LGBT stories linked to, say, half-a-dozen objects in your collection?

Is LGBT-themed collecting a part of your acquisitions policy? Does everyone working in your museum know what LGBT means, and if not, have you encouraged them to learn?⁶

Interpretation does not happen in a vacuum. It is part of an overall enterprise of including multiple perspectives and welcoming diverse audiences to our organizations. For the more administrative aspects of creating a space that is welcoming to LGBTQ staff, volunteers, and visitors, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) has published *LGBTQ Welcoming Guidelines*, based on AAM's Standards of Excellence.⁷

In a similar vein, cultural competency goes hand-in-hand with diverse interpretation. Even before LGBTQ history is an official part of an exhibit or historic site tour, museums can ensure that their staff are comfortable interacting with visitors with a range of sexual and gender expressions and can answer LGBTQ-related questions in a sensitive and historically accurate manner. The National Park Service (NPS), which oversees more than four hundred public sites related to the country's natural and cultural resources, offers an example of an organization laying the groundwork for LGBTQ interpretive efforts. The varied content interpreted at national park units means that most efforts to present LGBTQ history will best be identified and initiated by staff on the ground at individual sites. But to help NPS employees approach such efforts in a way that is conversant with scholarly practices, the agency has produced a theme study of LGBTQ heritage that serves as something of a textbook for understanding LGBTQ history. The agency also offers training workshops in the basics of researching, preserving, collecting, and interpreting LGBTQ history and has initiated an Employee Resource Group for LGBTQ employees throughout the agency.⁸

6 Ann Bukantas, "LGBT-Centred Work Confers Many Benefits," *Museums Journal* 114, no. 5 (May 2014): 15. Additional questions for institutions are offered in Stacia Kuceyeski, "The Gay Ohio History Initiative as a Model for Collecting Institutions," *Museums & Social Issues* 3, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 131–32.

7 "LGBTQ Welcoming Guidelines" (Washington, DC: American Alliance of Museums, 2016), http://aam-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/lgbtq_welcome_guide.pdf.

8 Megan Springate, ed., *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2016), <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/lgbtqthemestudy.htm>; Division of Cultural Resources, Partnerships, and Science, "LGBTQ Heritage Initiative," National Park Service, n.d., <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/lgbtqheritage.htm>; Office of Relevancy, Diversity, and Inclusion, "Employee Resource Groups," National Park Service, August 17, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/>

Integration vs. Special Programming

Within the realm of museums and historic sites, organizations have taken a variety of approaches to interpreting LGBTQ history. One way to conceptualize the range of options is to think of them first as falling into two categories: integration versus special programming. On the one hand, an organization can choose to integrate LGBTQ history into general interpretation, making it a part of a permanent exhibit or the standard tour of a historic site. In the other category would be special programming—events and/or temporary exhibits—that focuses particularly on sexual and gender minorities or a more specific topic related to this history. Each approach has its own advantages and disadvantages.

Integrated Interpretation

Among museum professionals advocating for increased LGBTQ interpretation, there seems to be a growing preference for integrating these stories into larger interpretive efforts. Exhibit designer Margaret Middleton argues, “When queer narratives are limited to temporary exhibitions during Pride Month or isolated in queer-themed galleries, it suggests that they are ‘special interest’ and unimportant.” Speaking in favor of integration, Middleton states, “This approach also helps show queerness together with other identities including gender, race, class, ethnicity, and immigration status. By avoiding queerness in isolation, museums can avoid one-dimensional interpretation and show visitors a diversity of queer stories.”⁹ In a similar vein, Sacha Coward, Family Programmes Producer, Royal Museums, Greenwich (United Kingdom) states:

I like the idea of ‘usualising’ queerness. This means moving beyond isolated events and exhibitions, which are separate from everything else. At Royal Museums Greenwich, I’m excited to see LGBT perspectives being integrated in everything we do, from new exhibitions to family programmes. I hope this continues, because it communicates a message to our LGBT visitors that their lives are not something weird, exotic or inappropriate.”¹⁰

1244/ergs.htm; Matthew S. Bajko, “LGBT Historic Sites Garner Park Service’s Attention,” Bay Area Reporter Online, January 9, 2014, <http://ebar.com/news/article.php?sec=news&article=69379>.

9 Margaret Middleton, “The Queer-Inclusive Museum,” *Exhibition*, Fall 2017, 80, 83. See also, Carly S. Woods, Joshua P. Ewalt, and Sara J. Baker, “A Matter of Regionalism: Remembering Brandon Teena and Willa Cather at the Nebraska History Museum,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 3 (2013): 347–50.

10 Sacha Coward and Diana Morton, “How Can Museums Better Reflect the Lives of LGBTQ Communities?,” *Museums Journal* 116, no. 6 (June 2016): 17. See also Annamari Vänskä, “From Gay to Queer—Or, Wasn’t Fashion Always Already a Very Queer Thing?,” *Fashion Theory* 18, no. 4 (September 2014): 458; Sandell, *Museums, Moralities and Human Rights*, 57–86; Mary Warner, “Fighting Homophobia in Stealth Mode,” *AASLH Small Museums Online Community* (blog), June 1, 2012, <http://blogs.aaslh.org/fighting-homophobia-in-stealth-mode/>; Maria Anna Tseliou, “Spotlight on Research—Subverting the Hetero-Normative Museum,” *The Inclusionum* (blog), April 11, 2013, <http://inclusionum.com/2013/04/11/spotlight-on-research-subverting-the-hetero-normative-museum/>.

These authors make an important point. Integration does normalize LGBTQ experiences and subtly places them within the larger historical narrative. It also potentially raises the visibility of sexual and gender variance, by putting that content in front of all visitors, rather than in front of only those visitors who choose to explore a special exhibit or take a special tour devoted to the topic. It is certainly exciting to imagine a time when encountering an exhibit that featured only heterosexual, cisgender perspectives would be as egregious as an exhibit focused solely on white, wealthy men.¹¹

The Atlanta History Center demonstrates what integrated interpretation can look like. The museum's cornerstone exhibit, *Gatheround: Stories of Atlanta*, presents a range of perspectives—including LGBTQ stories alongside those of African Americans, Jewish Americans, immigrants, laborers, and the elite—under the broad themes of Family and Community, Politics and Justice, Cultural Life, and Urban Growth. This diversity of stories comes together in the exhibit to give a more well-rounded view than has been traditionally presented of the city and, by extension, potentially challenges visitors' assumptions about who does and does not make their home in the American South.¹²

Within the realm of historic sites, numerous house museums tell the story of individuals associated with same-sex love and, to a lesser extent, gender variance. Many of these have begun to discuss the historical agent's same-sex relationships as part of their standard house tour. Examples include Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater (southwestern Pennsylvania), which was owned and preserved by Edgar Kaufmann Jr., with the help of his male partner; the Frary House (Deerfield, Massachusetts), in which C. Alice Baker, a founder of Historic Deerfield, lived with two female partners; Glen Burnie House (Winchester, Virginia), built by James Wood, the founder of the town, and preserved and restored by his descendant Julian Wood Glass Jr. and Glass's male partner; and the Willa Cather Foundation (Red Cloud, Nebraska), which includes Cather's childhood home as well as content related to Cather's thirty-eight-year domestic partnership with Edith Lewis.¹³

11 Gabriel, "Why Grapple with Queer?," 78; Jennifer Tyburczy, "All Museums Are Sex Museums," *Radical History Review*, no. 113 (Spring 2012): 199–211; Kevin Coffee, "Cultural Inclusion, Exclusion and the Formative Roles of Museums," *Museum Management & Curatorship* 23, no. 3 (September 2008): 261–79; James H. Sanders III, "The Museum's Silent Sexual Performance," *Museums & Social Issues* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 15–25; Robert Mills, "Queer Is Here? Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Histories and Public Culture," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 62 (October 1, 2006): 253–63. On the normalizing aspects of museums, see Tyburczy, *Sex Museums*, 1–37.

12 Atlanta History Center, "Gatheround: Stories of Atlanta," 2018, <http://www.atlanta-historycenter.com/explore/exhibitions/gatheround-stories-of-atlanta>; Michael Rose, Executive Vice President, Atlanta History Center, interview by Susan Ferentinos, October 19, 2018, Atlanta, Georgia.

13 "The Kaufmann Family," Fallingwater, <https://www.fallingwater.org/history/about-fallingwater/the-kaufmann-family/>; Marla R. Miller and Anne Digan Lanning, "'Common Parlors': Women and the Recreation of Community Identity in Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1870–1920," *Gender & History* 6, no. 3 (November 1994): 435–55; The Museum of the Shenandoah Valley, "Glen Burnie House," 2018, <https://www.themsv.org/visit/the-house/>; Joshua Adair, "O [Queer] Pioneers! Narrating Queer Lives in Virtual Museums," *Museum & Society* 15, no. 2 (June 2017): 114–25. Note that



The Atlanta History Center incorporates the stories of LGBTQ individuals with those of other Atlanta citizens as part of an interactive element of the museum's cornerstone exhibit *Gatheround*. (Photograph by Susan Ferentinos, October 2018)

Yet, despite the success of these examples, the integrated interpretation approach does have some shortcomings. When queer experiences become part of a larger narrative, we lose the potential for much detail (as is true with overview exhibits generally). Differences and conflicts *within* LGBTQ communities remain unexamined. Similarly, although the house museums mentioned above openly acknowledge the same-sex relationships of their notable residents, most devote little tour time to exploring the ways that outsider status or the specific relationship

Adair's article criticizes the Willa Cather Foundation for not addressing Cather's female relationship and gender nonconformity more explicitly. See also, "David Whitney," *The Glass House*, n.d., <http://theglasshouse.org/learn/david-whitney/>; Joshua G. Adair, "House Museums or Walk-In Closets? The (Non)Representation of Gay Men in the Museums They Called Home," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Museums*, ed. Amy K. Levin (New York: Routledge, 2010), 264–78; Alison Oram, "Going on an Outing: The Historic House and Queer Public History," *Rethinking History* 15, no. 2 (June 2011): 189–207; Kenneth Turino and Susan Ferentinos, "Entering the Mainstream: Interpreting GLBT History," *AASLH History News*, Autumn 2012; Lisa Yun Lee, "Peering into the Bedroom: Restorative Justice at the Jane Addams Hull House Museum," in *Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First Century Museum*, ed. Janet Marstine (New York: Routledge, 2011), 174–88.

in question influenced the figure's work and thus contributed to the very reason they are considered worthy of remembrance.

Also, acceptance of LGBTQ identities runs the risk of turning into assimilation of them, in which interpretation carries a subtext of "See, queer people are just like us." Although I suspect this is not the conscious goal of integrated interpretation approaches, careful effort must be made to avoid conveying that message. The Alice Austen House, on Staten Island, New York, is doing interesting work to counter this tendency toward "normalization." The house interprets the life of its most famous resident, turn-of-the-twentieth-century photographer Alice Austen, who shared her life with a female partner and whose work often played with established gender norms. The museum is in the process of updating its interpretation to explore these aspects of Austen's life and work in more depth, but staff also honor her artistic legacy by using part of the house as an art gallery and using that space to feature contemporary artists whose work explores sexual and gender identity. By showing queer perspectives in contemporary art alongside its historical interpretation of Austen, the site centers the idea that an artist's work is influenced by the way they experience the world, an experience that is intricately tied to sexual and gender identity.¹⁴

Nevertheless, even while desiring depth and detail, I do respect the point made by my fellow advocates that LGBTQ experiences should ideally be a part of all aspects of museum and historic site operations—not only interpretation, but collecting, human resources, visitor outreach, school tours, and family programs. At the same time, this ideal can also include special exhibits and programming that offer a more in-depth look at the history of sexual and gender minorities.

Special Programming

Despite the ideal of museums that are fully responsive to a range of identities in all areas of operation, in reality many museums first begin work with sexual and gender variance through special programming. The Chicago History Museum began covering LGBTQ history through a regular speaker series before committing to develop its special exhibit that ran from 2011 to 2013, *Out in Chicago*. Now, building on that exhibit's popularity, plans are underway to integrate more queer content into all of the museum's initiatives and interpretation. Similarly, Beaufort—a historic house museum in Gloucester, Massachusetts, interpreting the life of gay designer Henry Davis Sleeper—offered a special lecture on Sleeper's sexual

¹⁴ "Alice Austen House," <https://aliceausten.org/welcome-alice-austen-house>; Lillian Faderman and Phyllis Irwin, "Alice Austen and Gertrude Tate: A Boston Marriage on Staten Island," *Historic House Trust Newsletter*, Fall 2010; Vagnone, "Note from Franklin D. Vagnone." The site has also adopted a mission that seeks to foster "creative expression, explores personal identity, and educates and inspires the public through the interpretation of the photographs, life, and historic home of pioneering American photographer, Alice Austen" and updated its National Historic Landmark nomination to include the house's connections to LGBTQ history. See "Elizabeth Alice Austen House—Clear Comfort," National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/places/elizabeth-alice-austen-house-clear-comfort.htm>.

identity and held a social hour for a regional gay social group at the site before its managing organization, Historic New England, decided to revise the site's standard tour to include this aspect of Sleeper's identity.¹⁵

The reasons for beginning queer interpretation with special programs are obvious. Special events and temporary exhibits rotate more frequently than permanent exhibits and interpretive tours, and they require less of a financial commitment. They also allow for some prototyping, partnership building, and audience feedback before an organization launches a full-blown interpretative revamp. Special events and exhibits generate more media coverage, and so represent a public relations opportunity for historical organizations. Media attention can, in turn, bring in new audiences. As already discussed, focusing exclusively on LGBTQ history (or one aspect of that still relatively expansive topic) allows for a more in-depth consideration. However, such special programming, if not the start of an ongoing commitment to LGBTQ outreach, collecting, and interpretation, can backfire. Organizations that take a "one and done" approach run the risk of appearing insincere in their efforts—concerned more with crossing one more community off their diversity checklist than with a true commitment to inclusion.¹⁶

Often, the first step to incorporating LGBTQ experiences into a museum involves an assessment of collections and a subsequent initiative to build holdings related to this topic. Reflecting on Ohio History Connection's LGBTQ collecting initiative, Stacia Kuceyeski, the organization's Director of Outreach, has stated that in hindsight she wishes that the organization had incorporated a case-level exhibit of some of the items that were coming into the collection. Sharing new collections in this way, she felt, would have both generated wider knowledge of the effort and helped build trust among LGBTQ communities that Ohio History Connection was committed to interpreting their stories. Perhaps taking Kuceyeski's advice, in 2015, the Indiana Historical Society organized a temporary exhibit of photography documenting thirty years of Indianapolis's LGBTQ community, which they opened in the midst of an LGBTQ collecting initiative.¹⁷

15 Jill Austin and Jennifer Brier, eds., *Out in Chicago: LGBT History at the Crossroads* (Chicago: Chicago History Museum, 2011); Jill Austin and Jennifer Brier, "Case Study—Displaying Queer History at the Chicago History Museum: Lessons from the Curators of *Out in Chicago*," in *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites*, by Susan Ferentinos (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 119–30; Kenneth Turino, "Case Study—The Varied Telling of Queer History at Historic New England Sites," in Ferentinos, *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites*, 131–40.

16 Kuceyeski, "The Gay Ohio History Initiative as a Model for Collecting Institutions," 129–30; Joe Heimlich and Judy Koke, "Gay and Lesbian Visitors and Cultural Institutions: Do They Come? Do They Care? A Pilot Study," *Museums & Social Issues* 3, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 93–104; Donna Mertens, John Fraser, and Joe Heimlich, "M or F?: Gender, Identity, and the Transformative Research Paradigm," *Museums & Social Issues* 3, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 81–92.

17 Ferentinos, *Interpreting LGBT History*, 13; "Indiana LGBT Collecting Initiative," Indiana Historical Society, n.d., <https://indianahistory.org/stories/indiana-lgbt-collecting-initiative/>. See also, Kuceyeski, "The Gay Ohio History Initiative as a Model for Collecting Institutions"; Jen Colletta, "Jewish Museum Collecting LGBT Stories," *Philadelphia Gay News*, December 26, 2014; Darryl McIntyre, "What to Collect? Museums and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Collecting,"

A final strength of temporary exhibits is that they do not necessarily need to be contained within the walls of a museum, bringing the interpretation to the public rather than requiring the public to come to the interpretation. Pop-up exhibits in nontraditional spaces have potential to reach people who would not necessarily make a special effort to educate themselves about queer history. After the previously mentioned LGBTQ photography exhibit closed at the Indiana Historical Society, staff retooled it into a portable exhibit. In October 2017, this pop-up exhibit was placed in the center of the Indianapolis airport's atrium, through which all travelers must pass on their way to and from the airport terminals, thus exposing the history of the city's LGBTQ communities to an infinitely wider audience. Similarly, the Queer Newark Oral History Project developed an exhibit about the LGBTQ communities of Newark, New Jersey, which ran at the Newark Public Library in late 2017 and early 2018, allowing the group to both reflect on the history they had already uncovered and to spread the word about their efforts.¹⁸

Within the walls of a museum, themed tours are another approach, allowing visitors to see familiar artifacts through a queer lens. The Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (Netherlands) offers a "Qwearing the Collection" program, where visitors don kimonos and silk scarves with interpretive information printed on them, offering a queer perspective into various artworks on display in the galleries. The effect is twofold. Visitors not only engage with new perspectives within the permanent exhibit, they also mark themselves in a queer and flamboyant way. Wearing a kimono or a scarf signals their interest in LGBTQ content, which in turn can lead to strangers approaching them to discuss this topic or acknowledgement by others also "qwearing the collection." The experience of visibly marking oneself mimics the experience of being part of a semi-secret subculture, where members adjust their appearance in ways that may not be understood by mainstream society, but serves as a signal for others who identify with the same subculture. Thus, visitors who engage in this program gain access to LGBTQ experiences both intellectually and socially.¹⁹

International Journal of Art & Design Education 26, no. 1 (February 2007): 48–53; Katherine Ott, "Spinsters, Confirmed Bachelors, and LGBTQ Collecting - O Say Can You See?," National Museum of American History blog, August 19, 2014, <http://blog.americanhistory.si.edu/osaycanyousee/2014/08/spinsters-confirmed-bachelors-and-lgbtq-collecting.html>; Anne Clark and Geoffrey Wexler, "Queer Collections Appear: Oregon's Wedding Album," *Museums & Social Issues* 3, no. 1 (April 1, 2008): 115–24.

¹⁸ "Indiana LGBT Collecting Initiative"; "At Home in Newark: Stories from the Queer Newark Oral History Project," Newark Public Library, <https://npl.org/at-home-in-newark-exhibit/>.

¹⁹ "Qwearing the Collection," Olle Lundin, 2017, <http://ollehello.com/olle-lundin-qwearing-the-collection.html>; "Special Guests a Priority at Van Abbemuseum," *News: Susan Ferentinos* (blog), December 21, 2016, <http://susanferentinos.com/wpblog/2016/12/special-guests-a-priority-at-van-abbemuseum/>; Patrik Steorn, "Curating Queer Heritage: Queer Knowledge and Museum Practice," *Curator* 55, no. 3 (July 2012): 355–65. In anticipation for the 2016 EuroPride, held in Amsterdam, local museums underwent a citywide effort to offer LGBTQ tours of their collections, see "Queering the Collections," *izi.TRAVEL*, 2016, <https://izi.travel/nl/fa5b-queering-the-collections/en>. See also, for example, "Queer Tour," *The Hunt Museum (Limerick, Ireland)* (blog), 2013, <http://www.huntmuseum.com/event/queer-tour-2/>; Tirza True Latimer, "A Queer Tour of the Permanent



The author wears an LGBTQ interpretive kimono as part of the “Qwearing the Collection” program at the Van Abbemuseum, Endhoven (Netherlands). (Photograph from the author’s personal collection, December 2016)

Art Programming

The previous example comes from a museum of contemporary art, and thus points to an intriguing trend in LGBTQ interpretation: the melding of art and history to capture queer experiences. Introducing artistic programming into historical space is certainly not a new concept—think museum theater, or indeed, first-person interpretation in general. Museums have long understood that art can be a vehicle to create connection with those who lived in the past. This precedent presents a rich opportunity for discussing queer experiences.²⁰

As anyone who works in the field of LGBTQ history can tell you, lack of sources can be a problem, particularly for historical figures who came of age before the

Collection: Introduction,” *Open Space at San Francisco MOMA* (blog), March 8, 2012, <https://appserver-1243c6d4.c.pantheon-dmz.internal/2012/03/a-queer-tour-of-the-permanent-collection-introduction/>; “V&A LGBTQ Tours,” Victoria and Albert Museum, 2017, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/event/MWQ9gRWB/lgbtq-tours-2017>.

²⁰ For a recent exploration of this topic, see Rebecca Bush and Tawny Paul, eds., *Art and Public History: Approaches, Opportunities, and Challenges* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

1970s. Quite regularly, we face tantalizing clues and rumors, but simply don't have the sources to draw definitive conclusions about a person's sexual or gender identity. Faced with such circumstances, some historical organizations have turned to art programming. Allowing ourselves a degree of poetic license (while clearly distinguishing between evidence-based knowledge and conjecture) reduces our dependence on materials we may not have. At the same time, artistic programs can be more effective than traditional interpretative methods in creating empathy for identities that are too often demonized and "othered."²¹

Kingston Lacy, a National Trust site in Dorset (United Kingdom), embodied this approach beautifully in their 2017 installation. That year marked the fiftieth anniversary of the partial decriminalization of homosexuality in the United Kingdom, and to commemorate the event, the UK National Trust launched a year-long interpretive project, *Prejudice and Pride*, exploring the LGBTQ associations of various historic sites operated by the Trust. Kingston Lacy had one of the more compelling stories to tell. The ancestral home of the Bankes family, this estate was the home of William John Bankes (1786–1855), who was caught having a sexual encounter with another man, during his lifetime a capital offense in the United Kingdom. In order to avoid prosecution, Bankes fled the country and lived the rest of his life in exile.²²

As part of the *Prejudice and Pride* program, the National Trust interpreted William John Bankes's life within the context of the criminalization of homosexual acts. Although historical information about that context was presented in a temporary exhibit, one of the most powerful aspects of the interpretation was an art installation that was erected in the entrance hall of the house. Using wooden scaffolding and thick ropes to evoke the punishment for sodomy—hanging—the exhibit organizers tied remembrance knots on fifty-one ropes, each representing one of the men who had been executed for sodomy during William John Bankes's lifetime. In the words of Julie Howell of the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries, a partner on the project, "What we wanted to do was to unsettle people and to talk to them emotionally rather than in their heads about what it must have been like to live under these laws and to love people that you weren't meant to love."²³

Incorporating more creative elements into historical interpretation can help humanize LGBTQ experiences for people who aren't aware of personally knowing someone who identifies as LGBTQ. It also allows the possibility of (clearly

21 Holly Goldstein and Christy Crisp, "Savannah's Hidden Histories: Using Art and Historical Markers to Explore Local History," in *Art and Public History: Opportunities, Challenges and Approaches*, ed. Rebecca Bush and Tawny Paul (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); Jason B. Crawford, "Forgetting Montreal's Gay Downtown: The Popular Gay Geographic Imagination and the Mis-Mash History of the Present," *Québec Studies* 62 (2016): 169.

22 Alison Oram and Matt Cook, *Prejudice and Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage* (Warrington, UK: National Trust, 2017), 18.

23 University of Leicester, *Prejudice and Pride*, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmaPDAYomlM>.

identified) conjecture to stand in for a silence in the source material. The John Q Collective used this approach to stage “discursive memorials” throughout Atlanta in the early 2010s. These efforts were inspired by documented events in the city’s LGBTQ past, but incorporated site-specific performance art to bring the events to life in a fleshed-out, compelling, and public way.²⁴ Finally, art programming can allow us, as a society, to envision an alternative history, more just and fair-minded than it actually was, which can be a reparative act, even while also being challenging for more traditional historians. The Museum of Trans Hirstory and Art [sic] opened *Consciousness Razing: The Stonewall Re-Memorialization Project* at the New Museum in New York City in 2018. The exhibit featured thirteen artists’ visions of a monument to the Stonewall uprising that acknowledged the role of genderqueer individuals in this historical event. Curator Chris E. Vargas conceived of the idea as a statement against the existing monument to the events at Stonewall, *Gay Liberation*, created in 1980 by George Segal, which features only cisgender figures.²⁵

Youth Programming

Although LGBTQ interpretation aimed specifically at youth can be considered part of our larger discussion of special programming, I am devoting an independent section to this topic because of its importance. Museums in the United States are still reticent in discussing with children various ways of loving and expressing gender. Presumably, this is because some constituencies understand LGBTQ experiences as inherently sexual or inherently political and many believe sex and politics are private topics about which parents have the exclusive right to teach their offspring. I urge museums to push beyond this easy dismissal of LGBTQ experiences in youth programming. To be sure, there is a lot of sex and politics involved in the story of the queer past, but there are also plenty of other aspects of this history to discuss with people of all ages, and for museums to avoid this content in youth programming sends a message to future generations that LGBTQ people are not as worthy of remembrance, or worse, simply did not exist in the past. If we as public historians dream of a future that is more comfortable with diversity, then we need to sow the seeds for that future today, by presenting youth

²⁴ Wesley Chenault, Andy Ditzler, and Joey Orr, “Discursive Memorials: Queer Histories in Atlanta’s Public Spaces,” *Southern Spaces* (blog), February 26, 2010, <http://www.southernspaces.org/2010/discursive-memorials-queer-histories-atlantas-public-spaces>; Julia Brock, “Embodying the Archive (Part 1): Art Practice, Queer Politics, and Public History,” *History @ Work* (blog), April 5, 2013, <http://publichistorycommons.org/brock-johnq-intro/>; Julia Brock, “Embodying the Archive (Part 2): Lineages, Longings, Migrations,” *History @ Work* (blog), April 12, 2013, <http://publichistorycommons.org/tag/queer-history/>; Bernard A. Zuckerman Museum of Art, *John Q: Projects 2009–2013* (Kennesaw, GA: Kennesaw State University, 2014). For other examples, see “The Pop-Up Museum of Queer History,” <http://www.queermuseum.com/>; “The Queer Ancestors Project,” 2014, <http://www.queerancestorsproject.org/>.

²⁵ Jack Balderrama Morley, “The Museum of Trans Hirstory & Art (MOTHA) Queers Monument Design,” *ArchPaper: The Architect’s Newspaper* (blog), October 31, 2018, <https://archpaper.com/2018/10/motha-stonewall-memorial-new-museum/>.

with an accurate portrayal of the past: diversity is nothing new. Adam Ware sums up this idea well:

Museum work is necessarily a conceptually (if not politically) liberal pursuit, in that a commitment to tracking the material past involves a perpetual and ingrained openness to the entirety of human memories, traumas, triumphs, and experiences. Anything less than total openness risks the creation of blind spots in historiographical scope and doors closed to communities whose stories represent vital fulfillments of core museum missions.²⁶

Idealism and our responsibility to the future are reasons enough to explore LGBTQ programming for youth; the call for such programs becomes urgent when we recognize the realities facing young people who themselves identify as LGBTQ. Sexual- and gender-minority youth are at high risk for a variety of negative outcomes. Queer youth are almost three times more likely than heterosexual youth to seriously contemplate suicide, and one study found that 29 percent of LGB youth had attempted suicide at least once in the prior year, compared to 6 percent of heterosexual youth. As disturbing as these numbers are, they do not include young people who identify as transgender, who quite likely are the most vulnerable of all. LGBTQ youth are also at greater risk of bullying, absenteeism, and homelessness. They represent between 30 and 43 percent of young people receiving social services related to homelessness, despite the fact that they make up only 7 percent of the youth population. Furthermore, a far greater percent of homeless LGBTQ youth report being sexually assaulted compared to homeless youth who identify as heterosexual (58 percent compared to 33 percent, respectively).²⁷

Although museums and historic sites will not be able to correct this situation single-handedly, they most definitely can be part of the solution. Many teens struggle with their sexual and gender identity in isolation, fearing (often quite correctly) that by claiming a queer identity they will lose significant other parts of their life—their family of origin, their hometowns, their religious affiliations. In the face of such isolation, learning that others in the past struggled with similar challenges and still

²⁶ Adam M. Ware, “Materializing Humanity: Memorial Collecting after Pulse,” *Museums & Social Issues* 12, no. 2 (October 2017): 98.

²⁷ “Facts About Suicide,” The Trevor Project, 2017, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/preventing-suicide/facts-about-suicide/>; “LGBT Youth | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health | CDC,” June 24, 2017, <https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth.htm>; L. E. Durso and G. J. Gates, “Serving Our Youth: Findings from the National Survey of Services Providers Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth Who Are Homeless or at Risk of Becoming Homeless” (Los Angeles: Williams Institute, UCLA with True Colors Fund and the Palette Fund, 2012), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-Homeless-Youth-Survey-July-2012.pdf>; Jaimie Seaton, “Homeless Rates for LGBT Teens Are Alarming, but Parents Can Make a Difference,” *Washington Post*, March 29, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/03/29/homeless-rates-for-lgbt-teens-are-alarming-heres-how-parents-can-change-that/>; “Gay and Transgender Youth Homelessness by the Numbers,” *Center for American Progress* (blog), June 21, 2010, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbt/news/2010/06/21/7980/gay-and-transgender-youth-homelessness-by-the-numbers/>.

prospered may literally save a life—either by demonstrating to someone who’s struggling that they are not alone or by eroding the fear and ignorance that so often contributes to the miserable circumstances many LGBTQ youth face.

Museum programs related to LGBTQ history and aimed at youth seem more often to be aimed at adolescents, for whom studies suggest the risks are the greatest. Minnesota Historical Society, in partnership with the Tretter GLBT Collection at the University of Minnesota, offers a Summer History Immersion Program (SHIP) focused on LGBTQ history, which is designed to teach high school students college-level study skills by immersing them in historical research projects. The Queer Ancestors Project in San Francisco takes a different approach, incorporating LGBTQ history into a teen art program where young people learn about queer individuals from the past and incorporate this knowledge into art pieces they create.²⁸

Some inroads are also being made in LGBTQ programming to pre-adolescent audiences. In 2015, the Boston Children’s Museum hosted the traveling exhibit *Mimi’s Family: Photography by Matthew Clowney*. Designed by Margaret Middleton, this exhibit depicted the domestic life of Erica Tobias, a transgender woman in the Boston area, whose grandchildren call her Mimi. The photographs focus primarily on Tobias’s relationship with her grandchildren and are accompanied by exhibit text asking visitors questions about their own families such as, “What does it feel like to spend time with someone you love?” and “How does your family play together?” The exhibit was accompanied by a sharing corner where children could tell the stories of their own families and a reading nook featuring children’s books representing an array of family compositions. Although the exhibit did not explicitly focus on history, it did emphasize children’s connections to elders and to family traditions—and demonstrated that LGBTQ individuals have a role to play within these contexts.²⁹

Interpretation Outside The Boundaries of History Organizations

As public historians, we already know that opportunities to interpret the past are not the exclusive domain of museums and historic sites. Interpretation can take place in the wider world as well, and so I now shift my focus to interpretative methods that are not necessarily contained under the organizational umbrella of a museum.

Monuments and Memorials

Monuments and memorials serve multiple purposes. Certainly, a major part of their mission is to educate the public about the past, and in this regard, they serve

²⁸ Kyle Parsons and Stewart Van Cleve, “Case Study—Interpreting for the Next Generation: The Summer History Immersion Program (Minnesota),” in Ferentinos, *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites*, 141–50; “The Queer Ancestors Project.”

²⁹ Margaret Middleton, “Mimi’s Family: One Family’s Story of Transition and Unconditional Love,” *Museums & Social Issues* 11, no. 2 (July 2, 2016): 147–55. See also Angeline Acain, “Two New York City Museums Reaching Out to LGBT Parents,” *Gay Parent*, December 2004.

a valuable purpose for LGBTQ history, since the general public knows very little about the past experiences of sexual and gender minorities. Because monuments and memorials are generally integrated into a larger built environment, they conceptually integrate LGBTQ identities into the larger populace. In other words, they not only make these stories available to everyone, they in a way *compel* the larger population to engage with these aspects of the past.

A good example of this effect can be found at the Harvey Milk Memorial Plaza, which San Francisco transit riders pass through to enter or exit the MUNI station at Castro and Market Streets. Harvey Milk, an openly gay politician elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977 and assassinated a year later, is memorialized in his home neighborhood. Milk lived and owned a business in the Castro District, a neighborhood well known in the 1970s and 1980s for its defiantly open expressions of male-male sexuality. Contemporary visitors to the area, arriving by public transportation, are presented upon arrival with the memory of a gay pioneer and neighborhood hero. In addition to having the opportunity to educate themselves by reading a historical marker about Milk, visitors to the plaza receive the symbolic message that LGBTQ experiences are worthy of commemoration.³⁰

In addition to public education, monuments and memorials serve an emotional purpose. Although emotion is an important consideration in the majority of LGBTQ interpretive efforts, this issue is perhaps the most prominent within monuments and memorials. Memorials, in particular, usually draw attention to an act of violence or other tragedy. As a result, they provide places for active mourning. And there is much to mourn as we reckon with the queer past: murder, prejudice, imprisonment, oppression, fear, and ignorance. Memorials allow a space not only where those who have been personally affected by these harsh realities can mourn, but where others can pay their respects and everyone can reflect on the violent realities that history sometimes forces us to face.³¹

Creating a space to reflect and mourn is a recurring goal for the various memorial efforts dedicated to honoring those lost through LGBTQ hate crimes. In St.

30 Martin Zebracki, "Homomonument as Queer Micropublic: An Emotional Geography of Sexual Citizenship," *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie (Journal of Economic & Social Geography)* 108, no. 3 (July 2017): 345. In late 2017, plans were announced for a redesign of the plaza; see Sara Johnson, "Harvey Milk Memorial Plaza," *Architect: The Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, November 1, 2017, http://www.architectmagazine.com/project-gallery/harvey-milk-memorial-plaza_0; Brock Keeling, "Architect of Original Harvey Milk Plaza Responds to Criticism of His Work and Concerns over New Plaza," *Curbed SF* (blog), November 8, 2017, <https://sf.curbed.com/2017/11/8/16624474/harvey-milk-plaza-architect-castro-criticism-response-design>.

31 Woods, Ewalt, and Baker, "A Matter of Regionalism"; Thomas R. Dunn, "Remembering Matthew Shepard: Violence, Identity, and Queer Counterpublic Memories," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 13, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 611–51; Ware, "Materializing Humanity." The Homomonument, in Amsterdam, provides another example; see Goldman, "Homomonument"; Zebracki, "Homomonument as Queer Micropublic." See also, Paul Harvey Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, English ed. (New York: Berg, 2007); Edward T. Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Liz Ševčenko, "Sites of Conscience: New Approaches to Conflicted Memory," *Museum International* 62, no. 1–2 (2010): 20–25.



After the Pulse Nightclub shooting in June 2016, a spontaneous memorial to the victims was created at the Homomonument, in Amsterdam, itself a memorial to LGBTQ victims of the Holocaust. (Photograph by JPbio, June 2016, via Wikimedia Commons, under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License)

Louis, Missouri, local activists, in partnership with the Metro Trans Umbrella Group and Plants for Peace STL, created a Trans Memorial Garden “to honor the lives of transgender people who have been lost to violence and to celebrate the lives we spend together.” Similarly, efforts are currently underway to memorialize the site of the Pulse Nightclub shooting, in which forty-nine nightclub goers were murdered in a Florida gay bar during Latin Night in 2016.³²

Interpreting the LGBTQ Built Environment

Interpreting LGBTQ history in a museum requires a reckoning with artifacts; the lack of distinctly queer objects can be daunting, but this lack can inspire a new perspective on and innovative approach to existing collections. The same can be said about the built environment. Often, LGBTQ history is hiding in plain sight,

³² Transgender Memorial Garden of St. Louis, “History,” April 5, 2016, <https://transmemorialgarden.wordpress.com/history/>; Aria Bendix, “Pulse Nightclub Will Become a Memorial and Museum,” *Atlantic.com*, May 6, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2017/05/orlando-shooting-pulse-nightclub-memorial-museum/525663/>; Ware, “Materializing Humanity.” Memorial projects related to the AIDS epidemic would also fall into this category; see Carole Blair and Neil Michel, “The Aids Memorial Quilt and the Contemporary Culture of Public Commemoration,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 10, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 595–626; Peter S. Hawkins, “Naming Names: The Art of Memory and the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt,” in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 133–56; “AIDS Memorial Info,” <http://www.aidsmemorial.info/home>.

and we can engage that history through interpretive methods that include historical markers, historic walking tours, and the intentional marking of historically sexually and gender-variant space.

Traditional historical marker programs, usually run by state or city governments, have particular relevance for LGBTQ history in three respects. Like monuments and memorials, they are integrated with their surrounding environment and thus are not dependent on people making a conscious choice to visit them; instead they often simply appear in someone's path and require only a few minutes to read.

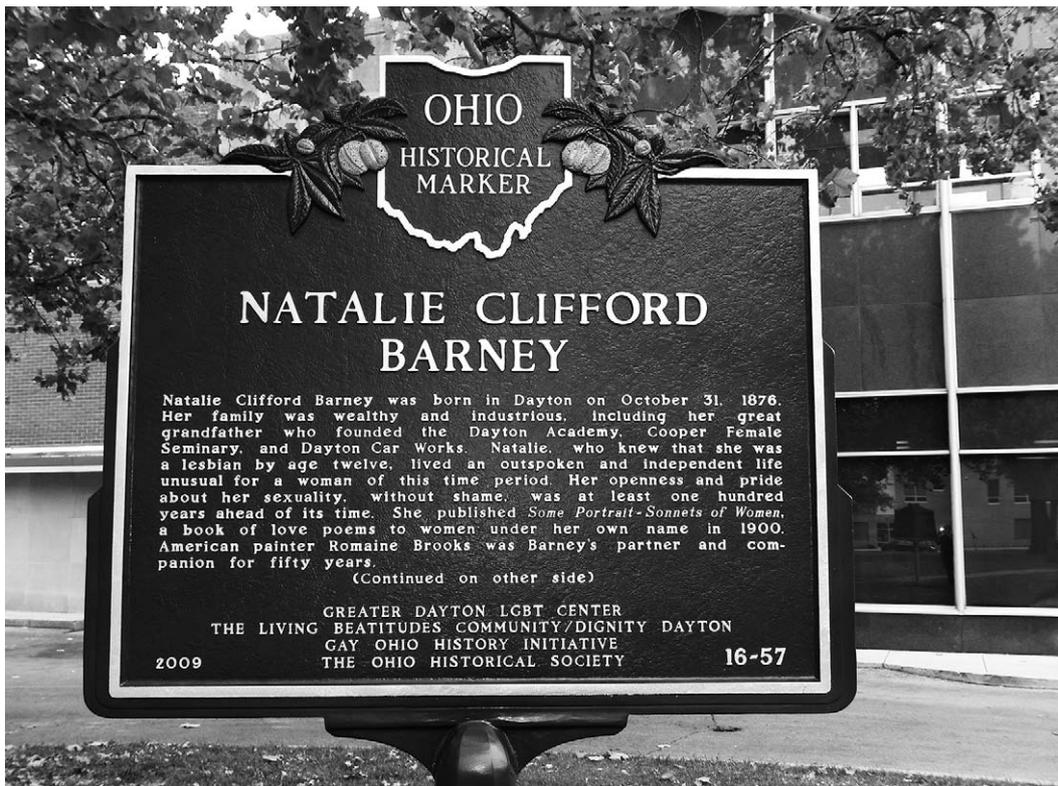
Second, historical markers carry their own type of authority. They are state-sanctioned declarations of what is historically important, cast in bronze. When these markers designate sites related to the LGBTQ past, they make that history "official," part of the larger historical narrative. To some extent, this dynamic is in play whenever historical organizations interpret queer lives, yet the added involvement of the government, combined with the very public integration of markers into the general landscape of a city or town, makes these programs a particularly powerful tool through which to convey official sanction.

Historical markers are also relevant to LGBTQ public historians because, unlike national historic designation programs such as the National Register of Historic Places or National Historic Landmarks, historical markers generally do not require a site to be historically intact, or even extant. Whereas historical integrity is required for official historic designation, markers often designate the *place* where something happened, regardless of whether the specific building survives. This is a crucial tool in interpreting underrepresented communities. Such groups often lack the resources to maintain permanent sites and traditionally have experienced a lack of respect on the part of the larger culture for sites relevant to their stories, which in turn has led to a loss of potentially significant sites long before preservationists can assess their full historic import.³³

Historical markers provide the means to tell historical stories within the built environment whether or not the specific buildings involved still stand. We can see this in the Natalie Clifford Barney historical marker in Dayton, Ohio. Barney (1876–1972) was an early-twentieth-century poet, playwright, and novelist who wrote explicitly about her attraction to other women. She spent most of her adult life overseas, but thanks to the efforts of the Gay Ohio History Initiative, a historical marker calls attention to the site of her birthplace. The marker clearly acknowledges Barney's attraction to other women, stating in part:

Natalie, who knew that she was a lesbian by age twelve, lived an outspoken and independent life unusual for a woman of this time period. Her openness and pride about her sexuality, without shame, was at least one hundred years

33 Rachel Wexelbaum, ed., *Queers Online: LGBT Digital Practices in Libraries, Archives, and Museums* (Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2015), 1; Mark Meinke, "Why LGBTQ Historic Sites Matter," in Springate, *LGBTQ America*, 01-1 through 01-13; Megan E. Springate, "Introduction to the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative Theme Study," in Springate, *LGBTQ America*, 02-1 through 02-30.



This historical marker in Dayton, Ohio, marks the (now-demolished) birthplace of writer Natalie Clifford Barney (1876-1972), who spoke openly of her attraction to other women, during an era when such candor was rare. The marker was erected through the efforts of the Gay Ohio History Initiative. (Photograph, taken December 2009, is in the public domain, via Wikimedia Commons)

ahead of its time. She published *Some Portrait-Sonnets of Women*, a book of love poems to women under her own name in 1900. American painter Romaine Brooks was Barney’s partner and companion for fifty years.³⁴

Historic walking tours, similarly, allow us to engage with LGBTQ history whether or not a specific building still remains. In addition, by incorporating multiple sites in one interpretive endeavor, tours can provide visitors with a more comprehensive sense of LGBTQ neighborhoods and landscapes. These programs

³⁴ “Natalie Clifford Barney - Dayton - OH - US,” Historical Marker Project, http://www.historicalmarkerproject.com/markers/HM1Z3O_natalie-clifford-barney_Dayton-OH.html; Susan Ferentinos, Stacia Kuceyeski, and Kenneth Turino, “Sex and Silences: Interpreting LGBT History” (American Alliance of Museums Annual Meeting, Seattle, 2014). See also, Goldstein and Crisp, “Art and Public History”; Jen Colletta, “Bookstore Marker to Be Unveiled at OutFest,” *Philadelphia Gay News* 35, no. 39 (September 30, 2011): 1-23; “Philly Honors History of LGBT Community: Dr. Anonymous, AIDS Library Commemorated,” *WHYY* (blog), <https://whyy.org/articles/philly-honors-history-lgbt-community-dr-anonymous-aids-library-commemorated/>.

also provide especially fertile opportunities for partnership-building, with local LGBTQ community organizations providing expertise and an audience new to historical programming, and historical organizations providing larger historic context, event planning infrastructure, and an audience new to the subject matter. For instance, the National Park Service has on multiple occasions incorporated LGBTQ community walking tours into planning and training events related to national parks and historic sites, so that participants can learn from community members and can get a sense of larger geographical networks beyond park boundaries.³⁵

In addition to real-time walking tours, mobile phone applications have also joined the effort to interpret the LGBTQ past within the built environment, though the full potential of this medium has yet to be achieved. The Historyapolis project in Minneapolis includes an LGBTQ component of its phone app, and students at Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI) began a similar endeavor, although its current status is unclear. Quist bases its LGBTQ historical interpretation on dates rather than geography, but its website does include a place-based blog, *Quistory in Your Neighborhood*.³⁶

Frustratingly, two of the most comprehensive LGBTQ history projects using a place-based approach do not currently have mobile phone apps connected to them. HistoryPin.org offers numerous collections of LGBTQ sites in the United States and United Kingdom. In addition, NYC LGBT Sites aims to “broaden people’s knowledge of LGBT history beyond Stonewall and to place that history in a geographical context.” The project is creating a massive interactive website of LGBTQ-related sites in New York City, as well as pursuing more formal historic preservation products, such as a historic context statement.³⁷

Yet another means of interpreting urban space has recently come into vogue. Presumably understanding LGBTQ identities as part of the multicultural enterprise, municipalities and neighborhoods in many parts of the United States are identifying historically queer areas and celebrating them with signifiers on the landscape. In Philadelphia, part of Center City has been home to a large percentage of gay businesses and residents for decades and has become known as the Gayborhood. The city now celebrates this fact, designating the area with special rainbow street signs and identifying it by its nickname on tourist maps. Key West, Florida;

35 LGBTQ Outdoor Summit, Seattle, October 2017; Stonewall National Monument Scholars’ Roundtable, New York, October 2017; “Researching, Interpreting, and Preserving LGBTQ History,” Philadelphia, December 2017; LGBTQ Training Seminar, San Francisco, forthcoming August 2019.

36 Susan Ferentinos, “Interpreting LGBTQ Historic Sites,” in Springate, *LGBTQ America*, vol. 2, 13.22; Kirsten Delegard, “YesterQueer,” *Historyapolis* (blog), <http://historyapolis.com/blog/2014/06/25/yesterqueer/>; Sarah Prager, “How to Make the Most of Our Quistory,” *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* 1, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 111–14; “Quistory in Your Neighborhood,” *Quist*, <http://www.quistapp.com/quistory-in-your-neighborhood/>.

37 “LGBT Collections on HistoryPin,” *Historypin*, https://www.historypin.org/en/people/search/keyword:lgbt/sort/most_popular/paging/1; “About,” NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/about/>.

Northampton, Massachusetts; and San Francisco have likewise initiated efforts to designate historically queer space.³⁸

Although the historical substance of such efforts is minimal at best, they still represent a recognition of a subculture and its history that was previously repressed. These programs also carry their own irony. With greater acceptance of LGBTQ identities has come greater assimilation and the subsequent erosion of distinctively queer businesses and neighborhoods. Thus, public historians can read these initiatives to publicly delineate queer space as an endeavor to preserve a legacy that is quickly disappearing.

Digital Projects

Whereas historical markers and other designations in public space allow a serendipitous discovery of LGBTQ history by people who wouldn't necessarily seek it out, digital projects allow for a private, perhaps secret, exploration of the history of same-sex love and desire as well as gender variance. This option can serve as outreach for those who are curious but who either hesitate to visit a public site or cannot easily do so, whether because of geographic location or physical ability. For these reasons, digital LGBTQ projects hold the potential to reach a vulnerable population: those exploring LGBTQ identities in isolation, particularly young people.³⁹

Digital projects can provide a supplement to museum interpretation, allowing visitors to follow a topic more deeply while also enabling ongoing visitor engagement once the onsite interpretive program is over. For instance, from 2013 to 2015, the Museum of Liverpool (United Kingdom) featured the exhibit *April Ashley: Portrait of a Lady*, exploring the life and career of one of the most well-known transwomen of the 1950s and 1960s, April Ashley, who worked as a model and actress. For those who missed the event (or want to continue reflecting on it), the museum features an ongoing website based on the exhibit.⁴⁰

The Internet also provides more lightly curated sites designed to foster personal exploration. Such sites compile primary and sometimes secondary sources, creating

³⁸ Gail Dubrow, "The Preservation of LGBTQ Heritage," in Springate, *LGBTQ America*, 05–24 through 05–29.

³⁹ Sine Nomine, "Pornographic Website as Public History Archive: A Case Study," in *Queers Online: LGBT Digital Practices in Libraries, Archives, and Museums*, ed. Rachel Wexelbaum (Sacramento: Litwin Books, 2015), 19–41. For overviews of digital history forms, see Sherman Dorn, "Is (Digital) History More than an Argument about the Past?," in *Writing History in the Digital Age*, ed. Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013); Meg Foster, "Online and Plugged In? Public History and Historians in the Digital Age," *Public History Review* 21 (2014): 1–19; See also, Wexelbaum, *Queers Online*.

⁴⁰ "April Ashley: Portrait of a Lady," Museum of Liverpool, <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol/exhibitions/april-ashley/index.aspx>; Bukantas, "LGBT-Centred Work Confers Many Benefits." See also, "Desire, Love, Identity: Exploring LGBTQ Histories, an Online Exhibit by the British Museum," Google Cultural Institute, <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/exhibit/JgLyidm3MOo4Jw>; Beth Strickland, "Online Exhibit: Michigan's LGBT Heritage," University of Michigan Library, <https://www.lib.umich.edu/online-exhibits/exhibits/show/lgbtheritage>.

a clearinghouse of sources that visitors can engage with according to their own curiosity and interest. Examples abound and include OutHistory.org, the Queer Digital History Project, the Lesbian Oral Testimony Archives, and the Transgender Digital Archives.⁴¹ In addition to simply presenting information, these compilation sites allow visitors to engage with the past on their own terms and to become conversant with the tools of the historian's craft, a current trend in public history often referred to as "pulling back the curtain."⁴²

Taking a more focused view than these compilation sites, other digital history projects are products of local LGBTQ history groups and projects, presenting a specific part of the LGBTQ historical story. Two such endeavors were recognized by the Committee on LGBT History, an affiliate of the American Historical Association, in 2017. That year, the New York City Trans Oral History Project, "a community archive devoted to the collection, preservation and sharing of trans histories, organized in collaboration with the New York Public Library," won the Committee's Alan Bérubé prize. The Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project, offering online exhibits, oral histories, and documents related to the queer history of this rural area, won an honorable mention for the Bérubé prize that same year.⁴³

Born-digital projects lend themselves to experimentation, both because they involve a newer medium and because they are less expensive to produce than traditional museum exhibits. Online mapping projects, discussed in the previous section, provide a digital overlay on the built environment and unveil LGBTQ-related sites that are often concealed in the modern urban landscape. Graduate programs also serve as a vehicle for sharing little-known historical research with a wide audience. One example is *Carl Corley: Gay Pulp in the Deep South*, a project created by Hannah E. Givens while a master's student at West Georgia State University. Using an archival collection housed at Duke University, Givens resurrected the memory of an author of gay pulp fiction and artist of beefcake images, born in 1919, who published works under his real name while also residing in the deep South and working as a state employee for the Louisiana and Mississippi governments.⁴⁴

41 Lauren Jae Gutterman, "OutHistory.Org: An Experiment in LGBTQ Community History-Making," *Public Historian* 32, no. 4 (November 2010): 96–109; "Queer Digital History Project," <http://queerdigital.com/>; Elise Chenier, "Hidden from Historians: Preserving Lesbian Oral History in Canada," *Archivaria* 68 (Fall 2009): 247–69; *Digital Transgender Archive*, n.d., <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/>. See also "LGBTQ Oral History Digital Collaboratory: Connecting Scholars, Activists, and Archives across Canada and the US to Produce a Collaborative, Digital History Hub for Gay, Lesbian, Queer, and Trans* Oral Histories," <http://lgbtdigitalcollaboratory.org/>.

42 Robert R. Weyeneth, "What I've Learned Along the Way: A Public Historian's Intellectual Odyssey," *The Public Historian* 36, no. 2 (May 1, 2014): 9–25; Ferentinos, "Lifting Our Skirts"; Foster, "Online and Plugged In? Public History and Historians in the Digital Age."

43 Committee on LGBT History, "Prizes," n.d., <http://clgbthistory.org/prizes>.

44 Gutterman, "OutHistory.Org"; Hannah E. Givens, "Carl Corley: Gay Pulp in the Deep South," <http://www.carlcorley.com/>. Another example of a student-based digital history project is "Wearing Gay History," winner of a National Council on Public History award in 2016. Eric Gonzaba, "Wearing Gay History," n.d., <http://wearinggayhistory.com/>.

Although embodying different advantages, memorials, interventions on the built environment, and digital history methods all enable public historians to engage with audiences in public spaces, outside of the confines of traditional museum environments. For LGBTQ historical topics, these methods allow an opportunity to engage with urban landscapes and place LGBTQ historical experiences within their physical context.

On The Cusp Of Stonewall 50

There was a point in time, not too terribly long ago, when it was conceivable that one could compile a comprehensive list of efforts to interpret LGBTQ history to a wide audience. Happily, that moment has now passed. Queer interpretation is now a common enough feature in the world of public history that no one article (or indeed, one whole book) can adequately document every example. Instead, we now have enough experiences to begin to develop a sense of trends and methodology. With an ever-broadening range of case studies, we can see that the interpretive possibilities are a great deal wider than we may have first realized. The interpretation of LGBTQ history is taking place both within museums and historic sites and beyond their boundaries. They involve artifacts and memory; oral testimony and artistic license; integrated interpretation and special programs. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of work to be done. Most LGBTQ historical interpretation thus far has focused on the LGBTQ civil rights movement; favored a cisgender, homosexual white male narrative; and situated the bulk of the story in urban centers of the east and west coasts.

The fiftieth anniversary of the Stonewall uprising will no doubt unleash the next fabulous wave of innovation in the ways public historians share the queer past with visitors. I, for one, can't wait. Ongoing LGBTQ historical interpretation will no doubt pay more attention to differences *within* LGBTQ communities and better highlight the experiences of bisexual and trans folk, people of color, women, and non-urban populations. It will consider the ways intersectionality informed queer political activism and the ways LGBTQ identities and desires influenced the larger historical narrative. It will investigate other parts of the story—same-sex love and desire before the twentieth century; the ways US ideals of the frontier and individualism fostered an ethic of self-creation that could include crossing genders; and LGBTQ lives beyond the ballot box and the Pride parades. Eventually, I hope, the inclusion of LGBTQ perspectives into national historical narratives will queer museum practice itself, destabilizing what we think we know about the past and challenging us to move beyond established interpretive methods.

In the meantime, however, I hope this article can stand as a record of where our field stands at this historical moment, when understanding and acceptance of queer experiences, past and present, is changing so rapidly and bigger changes tantalize us as they appear on the horizon.

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Susan Ferentinos, PhD, is a public history researcher, writer, and consultant specializing in the history of gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ identities. She has served on over a hundred historical projects with the National Park Service and is the author of *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites* (Rowman & Littlefield), which won the 2016 Book Award from the National Council on Public History.

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