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Over the Rainbow

Public History as Allyship in Documenting Kansas City's LGBTQ Past

Christopher D. Cantwell, Stuart Hinds, and Kathryn B. Carpenter

ABSTRACT: In 2016 Kansas City installed a marker that celebrated its role as host to the first meeting of the National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations in 1966. The marker was the first to commemorate this historic gathering of gay rights activists as well as the first to recognize Missouri's LGBTQ history. This article charts the effort to install Kansas City's marker as a case study of the issues involved in documenting LGBTQ history. What began as a community collecting initiative quickly evolved into an effort that included students, city officials, and a federal heritage area. The authors—a founder of the community collection initiative, a public history educator, and a public history student—demonstrate how those involved attempted to navigate questions of ownership and shared authority. Ultimately, the authors ask public historians to see themselves as potential allies to, rather than authorities of, the communities with which they work.

KEY WORDS: shared authority, LGBTQ History, collaboration, Midwest

On the northeast corner of Twelfth and Wyandotte Streets in downtown Kansas City, Missouri, stands an eighteen-story real estate development. Built in 1986, the building is one of the younger and taller buildings that dot the city's skyline. Yet the intersection where it stands has long been a site of civic pride. For much of the twentieth century the corner was occupied by the Hotel State, a fashionable establishment built in 1924 that aimed to accommodate fashionable guests (see Figure 1). Surrounding the hotel for several blocks was an even broader district of inns and theatres built around the same time that together reflect the moment Kansas City became nationally known as a "Wide Open Town"—a place that skirted Prohibition laws and let its nightlife extend well into the day. The city continues to point to this era as a cornerstone of the community's identity. Today a number of these hotels are on the National Register of Historic Places, a park across from where the Hotel State stood is named after the city's pioneering hotelier, and, in something of an homage to Kansas City's past, the city recently redeveloped the area adjacent to the site as a new entertainment district. Though the Hotel State is now gone, the area

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Figure 1. The Hotel State in 1950. Note the hotels and lounges that also line the street. (“Looking East along 12th Street,” General Collection [P1], Streets—12th, Number 8, Missouri Valley Special Collections at the Kansas City Public Library)

around 12th and Wyandotte continues to inform Kansas City’s understanding of itself and its place on the American landscape.¹

The site is also a landmark in American lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) history. For two days in February 1966, the Hotel State played host to the National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations, a gathering of some forty gay and lesbian activists from across the country who came to Kansas City as representatives of fifteen recently organized “homophile organizations,” as gay rights groups then called themselves. It was the first national gathering of its kind in American history, and from their efforts would emerge the first national gay rights organization, the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations, or NACHO (pronounced “Nay-Ko”). Though ultimately short-lived, NACHO

¹ On the importance of 12th and Wyandotte to the history of Kansas City’s hospitality industry, see Diane Mutti Burke, Jason Roe, and John Herron, eds., *Wide-Open Town: Kansas City in the Pendergast Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018); James R. Shortridge, *Kansas City and How it Grew, 1822–2011* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012); and Lawrence J. Larsen and Nancy J. Hulston, *Pendergast!* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997).

played a vital role in helping to launch the modern gay liberation movement. Its publications, annual meetings, and coordinated demonstrations forged a grassroots network that supported the formation of many other organizations in the years after the momentous uprising at New York City's Stonewall Inn in 1969. Kansas City also came to play a surprisingly pivotal role in this new phase of LGBTQ activism. In addition to serving as the meeting's hosts, activists in Kansas City volunteered to serve as NACHO's publishers, making the city a clearinghouse for strategic knowledge during these early years.²

Whereas Kansas City has long celebrated its connection to the hospitality industry, it only recently has begun to recognize its LGBTQ past. In 2016 the city recognized the National Planning Conference's fiftieth anniversary with the installation of a marker across from where the Hotel State once stood. The marker not only acknowledges the city's role as host of NACHO's planning meeting, but also recognizes the local activists who took part in the meeting and helped organize Kansas City's gay and lesbian community in the decades after. Like NACHO itself, the marker is also a first. It is the first marker to recognize Kansas City's LGBTQ community, the first of its kind in the state of Missouri, and the only monument dedicated to NACHO's historic meeting. Its installation was the result of a diverse coalition of local historians whose very existence was also something of a new development. Upon the discovery of materials related to Kansas City's role in helping to launch the modern gay rights movement, a nearly decade-long effort by Kansas City's LGBTQ community to document its history quickly grew to include a diverse coalition of students, educators, and city officials who saw in the historic 1966 meeting something they could celebrate as well. In other words, what began as a local LGBTQ community-led effort to uncover its history eventually became a city-wide project that for the first time claimed Kansas City's LGBTQ history as part of the identity of the city.

This proliferation of stakeholders in commemorating NACHO's founding is reflective of larger trends in what has come to be called "queer public history," or the public history of America's LGBTQ communities.³ In the same way Kansas City's efforts went from a project organized by members of the LGBTQ community

² The most comprehensive treatment of NACHO's short history remains John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 197–99, 227–29.

³ Throughout this essay we will be using the term "queer" in one of two ways. Primarily, we use the term as a way to designate historical scholarship that deals with LGBTQ issues in the broadest possible sense. Occasionally, we will also use the term as it relates to individual identities—either of those people who explicitly identify as queer and therefore reject gender or sexual binaries, or to describe those people from the past whose gender or sexual identity is neither normative nor clear. We should note, however, that throughout this essay we will most commonly use the terms gay, lesbian, and homosexual when describing the communities we interpret. This is not to deny the presence of people who identified as queer and transgender from this history; rather it is reflective of the fact that the homophile movement we document tended to prefer these terms. We address ways public histories of the homophile movement could be more inclusive of variant sexual and gender identities in our conclusion.

to one that was integrated into more official outlets of memorialization, so too has LGBTQ history more broadly moved from the margins to the mainstream of America's commemorative landscape. Once the domain of community centers and other local historical societies, American LGBTQ history is now also finding a home in prominent museums, libraries, and federal agencies. The development has in many respects been a positive one. President Barack Obama's 2016 designation of the Stonewall Inn as a national monument, for instance, rightly placed this establishment alongside other icons of US history. At the same time, the National Park Service's LGBTQ heritage theme study has encouraged public historians to consider how sites already on the national register can be reinterpreted to include previously overlooked connections to LGBTQ history.⁴ From coast to coast, LGBTQ history is becoming more intimately connected to American history.

Yet this trend has not been without its challenges. The inclusion of LGBTQ history into more official channels of commemoration brings with it a number of issues. It requires public historians employed at these institutions to build trust with a community that museums have long ignored, and demands that cultural organizations make sustainable, institution-wide commitments to include not only LGBTQ history, but also the LGBTQ community into their work. Of course, these challenges are often present when working with historically marginalized communities. But in the case of American LGBTQ history the process is further complicated by the fact that, as in Kansas City, many LGBTQ communities have been actively documenting their history for decades. In a field defined by an increasing number of contributors, who does—or should—own gay history? How should public historians in mainstream institutions position themselves in relation to these longstanding community initiatives? And what is public history's role when the community is already an effective interpreter of its past?

This article uses the installation of Kansas City's NACHO marker as a case study through which to explore both the evolving landscape of LGBTQ public history as well as the means by which a project can navigate these potential challenges. After briefly considering the history of queer public history, it charts the marker's development from a community collecting initiative to a project that involved students, the City of Kansas City, and a federal heritage area. Along the way the article documents how those involved in the project attempted to navigate the question of ownership and shared authority in professional, ethical, and political ways. Authored by a founding member of the community collection initiative, a public history educator who leveraged classroom resources to support this work, and a public history student who participated in the project, the article aims to provide multiple perspectives and offer multiple conclusions on the future of queer public history.

4 Megan Springate, ed., *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History* (Washington, DC: National Park Foundation, 2016). For more on the National Park Service's work in this area, and to read the complete study, see <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/lgbtqheritage.htm>.

From Neighborhood Initiatives to National Monuments

In many respects, the LGBTQ community's struggle to build a more just future has always included an effort to excavate a queer past. Commonly raised in heterosexual families in a society that actively oppressed them, LGBTQ people often have lacked the familial, communal, or institutional resources that traditionally transmit a community's history and culture. It is perhaps for this reason that the first sustained movement in support of gay rights also made the creation of a storied gay past a part of its efforts.⁵ The Mattachine Society, for example, took its name from a medieval acting troupe of unmarried French men whose masqued parodies protested monarchical oppression. According to Harry Hay, who helped organize the group in Los Angeles in 1950, the society took inspiration from this secretive fraternity of bachelors because gay men in America also had to wear a mask to avoid persecution. Similarly, the pioneering lesbian organization the Daughters of Bilitis, which also organized in San Francisco in 1955, named itself after a fictional lesbian character from an obscure, nineteenth-century French poem on the ancient Greek poet Sappho who wrote from the Isle of Lesbos.⁶

The obscurity of these early names in part reflected the need to protect the members of these associations from harassment. To define an organization by the sexuality of its members was, to some organizers, too risky. But the attempt to link contemporary struggles for gay rights to people and places from the past was also part of a broader strategy that harnessed history in the fashioning of a collective identity. The decision to refer to these societies as "homophile" organizations, for example, reflected their founders' desire to emphasize the cultural heritage that gays and lesbians shared instead of emphasizing the same sex desires that so concerned the wider public. Whereas society might look upon homosexuality as a form of social or medical "deviance," homophile organizations saw it as a way of being that transcended both time and place. The periodicals they distributed, which were in many ways the homophile movement's most enduring contribution, reinforced this claim by crafting a history for the LGBTQ community. In one survey of the first five years of the movement's publications, historian Gerard Koskovich found that fully a third of the issues featured substantive articles on gay and lesbian history. These included everything from brief biographies of individuals known to have been in same-sex relationships such as Oscar Wilde to the reproduction of primary sources that documented what the authors described as evidence of historical

5 On the importance of history to LGBTQ identity see Allan Bérubé, *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History*, ed. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975), 1–2; and Gerard Koskovich, "The History of Queer History: One Hundred Years of the Search for a Shared Heritage," in Sprigate, *LGBTQ America*, 04–1 through 04–3.

6 On the naming of the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 67–68, 101–102; Linda Hirshman, *Victory: The Triumphant Gay Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 2012), 40–41, 50–51.

homosexuality such as the domestic and sexual practices of ancient civilizations or indigenous communities. Fellow homophile organization One, Inc., which was the other major association to organize during the 1950s, formalized this disciplinary emphasis in a series of classes and research seminars on the history of homosexuality that it offered through its One Institute for Homophile Studies.⁷

The gay liberation movement that superseded these homophile organizations in the decades after Stonewall similarly put time and resources into developing a historical consciousness that could promote social action. In addition to highlighting prominent figures from the distant past, however, gay liberation organizations also adopted practices from the historical profession in order to document, preserve, and thereby advocate for LGBTQ history as it unfolded. The Lesbian Herstory Archive, for example, addressed the absence of lesbians from both the historical record as well as in many contemporary homophile and feminist organizations by collecting material that would demonstrate the presence of lesbian feminists in the struggle for LGBTQ and women's rights. Organized in 1974 in the Brooklyn apartment of Joan Nestle, the archive conducted oral histories, developed a library, and took in manuscript collections that would support the political and consciousness-raising efforts of women's groups across the country. Other community-based collections such as the Western Gay Archives, which was formed in Los Angeles in the 1970s; the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian History Project, which was organized in 1978; and Chicago's Gerber/Hart Library and Archives, which was founded in 1981, soon followed. Though the stories and materials that each organization collected inevitably varied, these community-driven initiatives sought to fill the voids found in the collections of established institutions and thereby ensure that the struggle for gay liberation could neither be ignored nor forgotten.⁸

From these community collecting initiatives also emerged the first generation of LGBTQ historians who used this material to produce books, presentations, and public projects. Like the authors of homophile periodicals, many of these early gay liberation historians were not academically trained and intended that their work support the movement. Allan Bérubé, for example, first shared his research on gays and lesbians in the armed forces in slideshow presentations given at local chapters of gay liberation organizations. Meanwhile, Jonathan Ned Katz, who was originally trained as an artist, conceived of his monumental *Gay American History* (1976) as a textbook for the movement, dedicating it to "my people . . . in the struggle."⁹

7 Koskovich, "The History of Queer History," 04-13 through 04-17. See also D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 110-11.

8 On the Lesbian Herstory Archive see Rachel F. Corbman, "A Genealogy of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, 1974-2014," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 1, no. 1 (2014): <http://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol1/iss1/1>; Lara Kelland, *Clio's Foot Soldiers: Twentieth-Century U.S. Social Movements and the Uses of Collective Memory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018). On the history of LGBTQ community archives more broadly see Koskovich, "The History of Queer History," 04-19 through 04-26.

9 Katz, *Gay American History*, v; Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), ix-xii.

These community historians, however, were also soon joined by the first professionally trained historians who brought LGBTQ history to the academy. Doctoral dissertations analyzing the social, cultural, and literary history of homosexuality first appeared in the 1970s, while the Gay Academic Union, which was founded in 1973 by gay and lesbian scholars from across the academy, worked to advocate for the study of LGBTQ issues in every discipline.¹⁰

But the migration of LGBTQ history from community archives to the halls of the academy came with certain tensions. Although some activists saw the inclusion of LGBTQ history in mainstream institutions as a sign of progress, others believed this material should remain under the community's control. The Lesbian Herstory Archives in particular conceived of itself as a separatist organization whose materials existed not to enlighten society but to advance the cause of lesbian feminism. Indeed, it was reluctant even to admit male researchers until 1990. Other community historians also wondered whether institutions that had long discriminated against homosexuals were the best repositories for the community's history. As historian of collective memory and protest politics Lara Kelland has written, the creation of "community-based cultural organizations" like the Western Gay Archive have long been "gestures of self-determination" for social movements. For many of the activist historians connected with gay liberation groups, she continues, placing the community's historical assets in prominent institutions risked weakening "a historical narrative that supported the identity-based goals of the movement."¹¹

It was in this climate that many mainstream institutions began to launch their own efforts to document gay and lesbian history. As Gregory Rosenthal has recently noted, university libraries came to play an important role in documenting regional LGBTQ history at the turn of the twenty-first century, working with communities to ensure vulnerable materials became a part of the historical record.¹² At the same time, many museums and historic sites have also worked to incorporate queer narratives into their work. State historical societies now put on blockbuster exhibits about their state's queer pasts, house museums invite visitors to consider the nature of a prominent individual's same-sex relationships, and museum professionals are asking how to make their institutions as a whole more inclusive. The shift is nothing short of "monumental," as the chair of the American Alliance of Museum's LGBTQ Alliance Michael D. Lesperance has claimed, and is taking place at an unprecedented scale.¹³ Despite this integration, however, the

10 Koskovich, "The History of Queer History," 04–26 through 04–31; Kelland, *Clio's Foot Soldiers*, 123–26.

11 Kelland, *Clio's Foot Soldiers*, 104–5.

12 Gregory Rosenthal, "Make Roanoke Queer Again: Community History and Urban Change in a Southern City," *The Public Historian* 39, no. 1 (February 2016): 40–41.

13 LGBTQ Alliance, *Welcoming Guidelines for Museums* (Arlington, VA: American Alliance of Museums, 2016), 3. On the growth in LGBTQ public history projects see Susan Ferentinos, *Interpreting LGBTQ History at Museums and Historic Sites* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014).

debate over who should own gay and lesbian history continues to impact the work of many museums, libraries, and historic sites. The city of Orlando's decision to purchase the Pulse Nightclub and turn it into a memorial to the victims of the mass shooting that occurred there in June 2016, for example, not only raised questions over whether closing the club would be in the best interest of Orlando's LGBTQ community, but also about whom, exactly, the memorial was for. Although many saw the city's gesture as a sign of respect, the club's owner was initially reluctant to sell the property, because she had founded it as a memorial to her brother who had died from AIDS in 1991. Turning the club over to the city had the potential to erase the club's other legacies.¹⁴

How institutions resolve such tensions will inevitably vary. As public historian Susan Ferentinos has recently written, the development of queer public history projects is often more about attending to a particular set of issues around stakeholders, staffing, terminology, content, and framing than it is about following pre-established guidelines or a list of best practices. The best course forward, she suggests, might be to learn from projects that also navigated these issues.¹⁵ We hope that the effort to commemorate Kansas City's LGBTQ history will prove similarly instructive.

Out of the Closet and Into the Archive

It began with a list. In 1994 Stuart Hinds was completing his library science degree after serving a stint at the Good Samaritan Project (GSP) in Kansas City, a health care initiative that offered services to individuals affected by HIV. Up to this time the scourge of AIDS was still hideously lethal, and, as a budding archivist, Hinds had in his possession an anonymous, demographic list of those in the city who had succumbed to the disease. With the epidemic then still seemingly unstoppable, Hinds became increasingly concerned about the fate of the papers and memorabilia the deceased left behind, particularly with regard to how their lives as gay men and women were reflected in those materials. It was this list and these concerns that led Hinds to first conceive of the collecting initiative that eventually became the Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America (GLAMA). It would be another fifteen years, however, before Hinds and other colleagues found themselves in positions of leadership that would enable them to make GLAMA a reality.

This time, it began with a T-shirt. A lot of T-shirts, actually. In December 2009 a donor approached the Kansas City Museum (KCM) with a complete collection

¹⁴ Pulse's owner, Barbara Poma, had always envisioned erecting some sort of memorial to the victims of the shooting. But her initial vision saw the memorial existing alongside a reopened club. It was only after what appears to have been amicable negotiations with the city that Poma agreed to turn the entire property over. See Paul Brinkman, "Memorial Will Be Part of Rebuilding Pulse 'Place of Safety,'" *Orlando Sentinel*, June 14, 2016; Elliott C. McLaughlin, "Orlando to Vote on Buying Pulse Nightclub for \$2.25M," *CNN.com*, November 8, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/08/us/orlando-pulse-city-to-buy-club/index.html>.

¹⁵ Ferentinos, *Interpreting LGBTQ History at Museums and Historic Sites*, 151–70.

of T-shirts from Kansas City's annual AIDS Walk fundraiser that started in 1988. KCM director Christopher Leitch welcomed the collection. He not only shared Hinds' interest in collecting artifacts from the local LGBTQ community, but was also aware of Hinds' longstanding aspiration to start a community collection initiative. The T-shirts provided a catalyst. By this time Hinds had become the head of LaBudde Special Collections at the Miller Nichols Library at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC) and could complement KCM's intake of physical artifacts by preserving the archival material that might accompany such donations. After reaching out to another colleague, David Jackson, who was the Director of Archives and Education at the Jackson County Historical Society (JCHS), the three approached their respective administrative bodies about formalizing a collaborative collecting partnership. Logistically, KCM would accession artifacts while UMKC would preserve archival material, unless a collection of artifacts came with papers, in which case KCM would house both materials. JCHS, meanwhile, with its connections to communities surrounding Kansas City, would oversee promotional and educational efforts. By February 2010, a mere two months after the first T-shirt came to KCM, the Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America was formed with a mission "to collect, preserve, and make accessible the documents and artifacts that reflect the histories of the LGBT communities of the Kansas City region."¹⁶

Publicity became the project's first order of business in order to make the community aware of its efforts. Initially, KCM provided the resources to produce rack cards highlighting the initiative, which were placed in the local LGBTQIA community center, on the UMKC campus, and at select businesses throughout the city (see Figure 2). GLAMA's leaders also took advantage of public events, staffing booths at the city's annual AIDS Walk and Pride Festival. Local LGBTQ media outlets and alternative newspapers were also supportive, printing articles on the initiative and regularly featuring GLAMA's co-founders as guests on the only LGBTQ-focused radio program in the city. Indeed, in 2010 GLAMA was on the cover of the city's two alternative weeklies at the same time!¹⁷

This focus on visibility proved remarkably fruitful. Within a year, GLAMA had received scrapbooks from a local gay and lesbian sports league, the diary of a local AIDS activist, an unpublished memoir about the city's lesbian community, a collection of press clippings on LGBTQ issues that spanned thirty years, and a small collection of material relating to a 1966 meeting of gay rights activists in Kansas City. That the three founding members were also a part of Kansas City's LGBTQ community also facilitated collection efforts. Tellingly, however, the most success-

¹⁶ For more on GLAMA, see <https://library2.umkc.edu/spec-col/glama/index.htm>.

¹⁷ For more on GLAMA's promotional efforts, see Carolyn Szczepanski, "KC's New Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America Remembers a Pioneer Town," *The Pitch*, June 3, 2010, <https://www.pitch.com/news/article/20596719/kcs-new-gay-and-lesbian-archive-of-midamerica-remembers-a-pioneer-town>; Emily van Zandt, "Preserving Kansas City's Gay Pride," *Ink*, June 2, 2010.

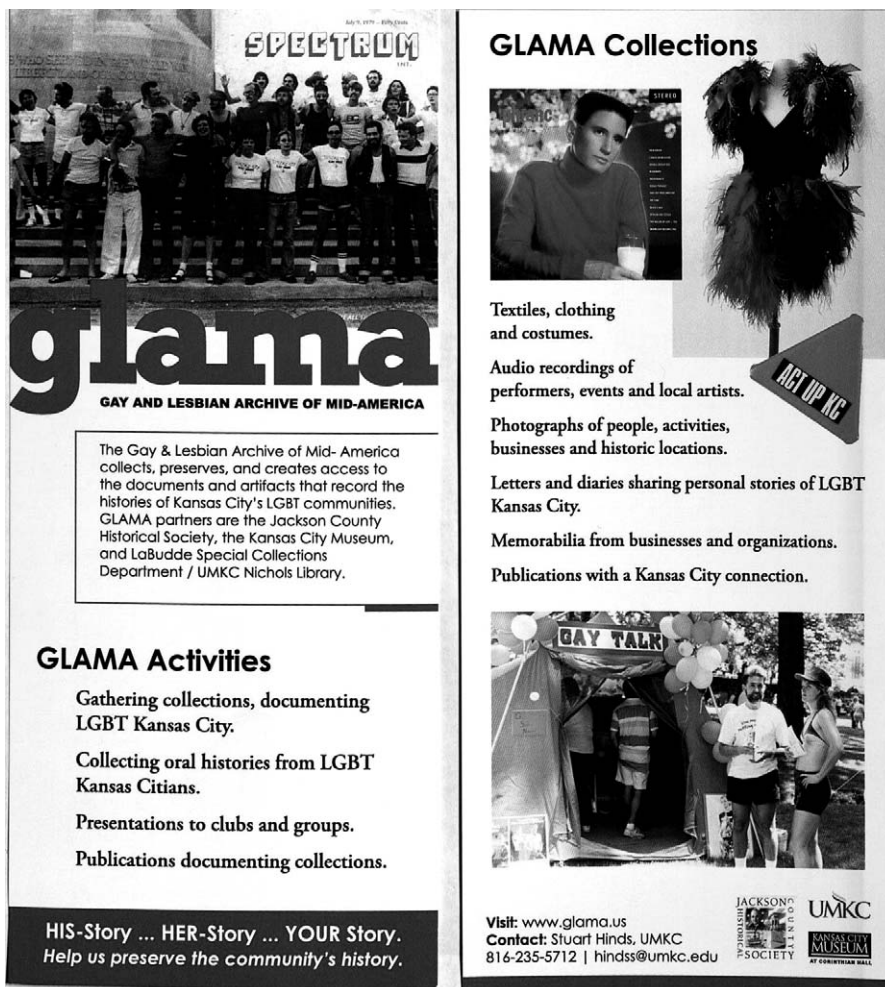


Figure 2. The Gay and Lesbian Archives of Mid-America’s first promotional material. (Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America, 2009)

ful means of donor outreach came from conversations with those who first gave to the project. Very often donors both recommended and introduced GLAMA’s founders to other individuals with collections. This word-of-mouth recommendation not only eased the process of approaching new donors by engendering a sense of trust, but also helped create connections across the LGBTQ community that otherwise would have been challenging to make. Moreover, this close-knit yet expansive approach to collection-building helped explain the relationships between seemingly disparate collections. The archive’s extensive holdings on Kansas City’s drag scene, for example, first emerged from a large collection donated by longtime female impersonator Melinda Ryder. In addition to donating costumes, wigs, and promotional material related to her nearly forty-year career, Ryder also became one of GLAMA’s most ardent supporters, encouraging other members of

the community to donate their materials and going so far as to help organize a fundraiser for the archive at KCM.¹⁸

Beyond simply incorporating LGBTQ material into some of Kansas City's most prominent cultural institutions, GLAMA also worked to make these institutions more inclusive by adding unapologetically queer takes on public programming. Melinda Ryder's fundraiser, for instance, reimagined KCM's annual "Fairy Princess" event, a decades-long winter tradition that saw children share their wishes for the holiday season with a local belle. GLAMA's "The Mary Princess" both played to this holiday tradition and leveraged Ryder's popularity by inviting adults to enjoy a cocktail reception and take their picture with a different kind of royalty. GLAMA's other programs similarly made space for queer histories, such as a "Museum in Your Pocket" initiative that, in the absence of gallery space, printed a pocket-sized exhibit on KCM's AIDS Walk T-shirts. GLAMA also worked with community partners to sponsor scholarly lectures on topics germane to the archive's collections; create an oral history initiative on gay and lesbian relationships after the Supreme Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act in 2013; and form a partnership between GLAMA and Kansas City's National Public Radio affiliate that brought the StoryCorps OutLoud project to Kansas City, which recorded nearly twenty interviews that went into both NPR's and GLAMA's archival holdings.¹⁹

Despite a track record of innovative and successful programming, GLAMA did face a number of challenges related to its institutional partners. Less than a year after GLAMA began, JCHS's board of directors withdrew its support, announcing that LGBTQ history would not be a focus of the society. Members of the Friends of the Kansas City Museum board also complained that "too many gays" had become a part of the museum, which contributed to tensions at the institution. After a change in leadership at the KCM in 2013, the new museum director pulled away from the collection initiative entirely.²⁰ The changes left LaBudde Special Collections solely responsible for GLAMA, which required Hinds to allay a number of

¹⁸ For a summary of GLAMA's holdings see <https://library.umkc.edu/spec-col/glama/index.htm>. The archive was also primed to focus on the city's drag scene given that renowned LGBTQ scholar Esther Newton had focused on Kansas City in researching her pioneering work on female impersonation. See Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

¹⁹ For more on the Pocket Museum project see Alice Thorson, "History, to a 'T,'" *Kansas City Star*, April 24, 2010). For more on the post-DOMA oral history project see Schaeffer Nelson, "'OUTSpoken KC Love and Marriage' Will Voice Our Local LGBT Heritage," *Camp*, August 13, 2013, <http://camp.lgbt/2013/08/31/outspoken-kc-love-and-marriage-will-voice-our-local-lgbt-heritage/>. For more on the StoryCorps project see Bradley Osborn, "LGBT Archive Prepares for StoryCorps OutLoud and Accepts Several Donated Items for Collection," *Camp*, June 12, 2015, <http://camp.lgbt/2015/06/12/lgbt-archive-prepares-for-storycorps-outloud-and-accepts-several-donated-items-for-collection/>.

²⁰ Steve Vockrodt, "What the Hell is Really Going on Between Union Station and the Kansas City Museum?" *The Pitch*, October 31, 2013, <https://www.pitch.com/news/article/20566431/what-the-hell-is-really-going-on-between-union-station-and-the-kansas-city-museum>.

community concerns before collecting and programming could continue. Collections at UMKC remained the property of the university, although a handful of donors retained rights to some of the material therein, and the university assumed all of the cost of processing and housing GLAMA materials. Though disappointing, these community developments did lead to a new interest in the collection among UMKC students and faculty.

Hinds had always promoted the initiative during class tours and instruction, but after KCM and JCHS distanced themselves from GLAMA, Hinds worked to enrich the archive's holdings through teaching, scholarship, and classroom projects. In 2013 UMKC graduate student Kevin Scharlau visited the archives looking for a topic for a research paper. After Hinds suggested that he look at an untapped collection of papers about a 1966 meeting of gay rights activists in Kansas City that GLAMA took in during its first year, Scharlau made a stunning discovery. Although Kansas City had long been known as host of the pioneering National Planning Conference for Homophile Organizations, Scharlau's research put this event into a much wider context. By connecting GLAMA's materials with other archival collections across the nation, Scharlau was able to demonstrate that the national planning conference chose the Hotel State as the site for its historic meeting in part because of Kansas City's long standing reputation as a "Wide Open Town." Organizers had initially proposed St. Louis as the most centrally located meeting point, but Harold "Hal" Call, a former *Kansas City Star* reporter who had become involved in San Francisco's Mattachine Society after the paper fired him because of his sexuality, informed the organizers that Kansas City would be much more hospitable. Alongside the town's cabarets and speakeasies that had remained open throughout Prohibition, the town also boasted a number of gay bars and drag balls that made the city a safer place to visit. Kansas City's bar scene, Call suggested, rivaled the nation's coastal metropolises. Moreover, Scharlau's research helped uncover that after the 1966 meeting a local activist named Drew Shafer, who had previously founded a chapter of One, Inc., in Missouri, went on to organize Kansas City's first gay rights organization called the Phoenix Society for Individual Freedom. Modeled on other homophile organizations, the society not only published its own periodical but also opened a community center for gay youth who had fled to the city. It also helped propel NACHO's growth, using its community center and printing press as the national organization's clearinghouse for publications and helping to host its 1969 meeting in Kansas City.²¹ Scharlau's research would go on to be published in the *Missouri Historical Review* and was awarded the journal's

²¹ Kevin Scharlau, "Navigating Change in the Homophile Heartland: Kansas City's Phoenix Society and the Early Gay Rights Movement, 1966–1971," *Missouri Historical Review* 109, no. 4 (July 2015): 234–53. On Call see Vern L. Bullough, *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 151–55. On KC's female impersonator scene more broadly see Stuart Hinds, "From Proscenium to Inferno: the Interwar Transformation of Female Impersonation in Kansas City," in *Wide Open Town: Kansas City in the Pendergrast Years*, ed. Diane Mutti Burke, Jason Roe, and John Herron (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 291–306.

2015 article of the year award. It also helped inspire a number of other research papers, classroom projects, and even a new general education class at UMKC on LGBTQ history and minority heritage.

Although the misgivings of GLAMA's institutional partners might have suggested that the city was not ready to make space for the LGBTQ community and its past, the fascination that students and the broader public showed for Kansas City's queer history inspired Hinds to make the archive's efforts even more public. With the fiftieth anniversary of the National Planning Conference approaching, Hinds determined that the most appropriate means to note the event might be the installation of a historic marker where the Hotel State once stood. He also quickly realized, however, that such an effort would overtax an initiative that had recently lost two of its three institutional partners. So, early in 2015 Hinds approached a number of community members who, because of their support of GLAMA, might help him with the effort. They all agreed to sign on: two longtime community activists, Kay Madden and Jon Barnett; a local historian who had led a number of LGBTQ history tours named Ross Freese; the director of Kansas City's Historic Preservation Office, Brad Wolf; and David Jackson, whose support for GLAMA was unwavering despite his employer's reluctance. Together the six formed what they called the LGBT-KC committee. It tasked itself with overseeing not only the installation of a marker commemorating NACHO but also future memorials as well.



Figure 3. LGBT-KC's NACHO marker. Visitors reading the marker's information on NACHO face the corner where the Hotel State once stood, which is now occupied by the 12 Wyandotte Plaza development. (Photos courtesy of Christopher D. Cantwell)

On October 20, 2016, LGBT-KC unveiled its memorial to NACHO. With the whisk of a piece of hot pink fabric that shrouded the marker at the unveiling, the commemorative landscape of Kansas City instantly became more inclusive. In just under 2,000 words, the memorial commemorates the National Planning Conference's historic meeting on one side while celebrating the life of Drew Shafer as Kansas City's delegate to the meeting and founder of the Phoenix Society on the other (see Figure 3). And unlike the hesitation of GLAMA's earlier institutional collaborators, the city proved to be a more than willing partner. More than two hundred community members attended the marker's installation, while several hundred more took part in a weeklong series of festivities leading up to the unveiling, which included public lectures by Scharlau and noted historian John D'Emilio and several receptions. Such success was in part a testament to the hard work of LGBT-KC. Each of the committee members made vital contributions, from Jackson's experience installing markers in Jackson County to Freese's knowledge of the history to Madden, Barnett, and Wolf's ability to navigate the city's bureaucracy. Hinds, meanwhile, coordinated the group and raised the necessary funds from a combination of private gifts and university support. But the other reason for success was the interest that many in the city showed for the effort. Multiple Kansas City council members attended the unveiling, including the city's first openly gay councilwoman, and the city council as a whole issued a proclamation "recognizing the installation of Kansas City's first LGBT historic marker and honoring pioneers of the LGBT community."²² Indeed, Kansas City's interest in making space both for the LGBTQ community and its history has been so great that LGBT-KC has already had high-level discussions about the location of the next marker. But with this greater interest also came the question of whom this history was for, which was a question public historians from UMKC had to address when they partnered with GLAMA and LGBT-KC.

Public History as Allyship

At the same time that GLAMA developed its collections, the department of history at UMKC was also developing a new public history emphasis in its master's degree program. Christopher D. Cantwell, a faculty member in the department and the coordinator of the emphasis, initially met Hinds while surveying the resources that could support the work of public history students. For Cantwell, it quickly became clear that GLAMA was one of Kansas City's most exciting historymaking endeavors. It was also clear that GLAMA had a particular set of needs. The project's volunteer directors had developed the archive in addition to their regular responsibilities, and the effort to install a marker was yet another initiative for the team to manage. To expect the archive also to support the work of students could be as

²² For more about the unveiling event, see Joe Chiodo, "Kansas City's LGBT Community Honored with Historic Marker," *KCTV-5 News*, October 20, 2016, <http://www.kctv5.com/story/33442007/kansas-citys-lgbtq-community-honored-with-historic-marker>.

much a burden as an opportunity. In this light, Cantwell and Hinds came to determine that what GLAMA needed was not another project, but an ally.

Of all the principles that guide public historians in their work, perhaps none is more sacred than the idea of shared authority. The notion that public historians make the communities they interpret equal partners in the production of historical knowledge is often said to be what sets public history apart from other fields of historical inquiry. As oral historian Michael Frisch put it when he first articulated the concept almost thirty years ago, “what is most compelling about oral and public history is a capacity to redefine and redistribute intellectual authority, so that this may be shared broadly in historical research and communication rather than continuing to serve as an instrument of power and hierarchy.”²³ Despite this laudable commitment to cooperation, however, public history’s commitment to sharing authority is often also couched as a defense of a historian’s cultural capital. Frisch himself worried about “rejecting the insights of scholarship” when engaging the public, while a more recent public history textbook assures its readers that sharing authority does not require public historians to “relinquish their expertise.”²⁴ This balance of principled collaboration and professional standards is often for the best, ensuring that a community’s stories are both accurate and appropriately preserved. But as shown above, the LGBTQ community has followed professional standards in documenting its history for almost half a century. To expect these competent collecting initiatives suddenly to share authority with historians who have only recently taken an interest in their work is more like asking a community to relinquish its authority rather than sharing it with professional historians.

Recently, public historians who also work with historically marginalized groups have pushed at the boundaries of shared authority. Katrine Barber, for instance, has highlighted how the need for sovereignty and self-determination among Indigenous communities makes coequal collaboration in public projects a potential risk to the integrity of Native traditions. Sharing authority, she argues, must be “framed more broadly.”²⁵ Staff associated with the Tracing Center, meanwhile, which focuses on enhancing the interpretation of enslavement in the United States, have forcefully argued that any interpretation of slavery that does not also account for white privilege and contemporary race theory offers an incomplete picture of the stakes of this history.²⁶

23 Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), xx.

24 Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, xxi; Cherstin M. Lyon, Elizabeth M. Nix, and Rebecca K. Shrum, *Introduction to Public History: Interpreting the Past, Engaging Audience* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 10.

25 Katrine Barber, “Shared Authority in the Context of Tribal Sovereignty: Building Capacity for Partnerships with Indigenous Nations,” *The Public Historian* 35, no. 4 (November 2013): 20–39.

26 On the Tracing Center see <http://www.tracingcenter.org/>, as well as Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, eds., *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

Aware of these broader conversations and sensitive to the ongoing efforts of Kansas City's LGBTQ community in documenting its own history, Cantwell and Hinds came to envision their partnership to be less an act of shared authority and more a work of allyship. The term "allyship" here is drawn from the work of anti-oppression activists who use it to describe how privileged communities can best advocate for those that face systemic discrimination. Like the concept of shared authority, allyship is a process that requires those in power to build meaningful relationships based on trust and accountability with marginalized communities. It is also a commitment to democratizing the decisionmaking process by including previously unheard voices. Unlike shared authority, however, doing public history as a work of allyship requires historians to view their expertise not as a corrective to the professional shortcomings of the communities they partner with but as a resource that communities that face systemic discrimination can use. In this arrangement, public history's role is not to correct but to amplify the work marginalized communities are already doing in documenting their struggle. This means aligning publicly with ongoing initiatives and allowing them to determine when the resources of the historical profession might best serve their cause. In some instances, this might look like providing consultation in the preservation or presentation of a community's materials. In other instances it might look like respecting, supporting, and advocating for a community's wish to tell its own story. Whatever the case, to do public history as a work of allyship requires public historians to suspend the assumption that their status as historians automatically make them desired or equal partners in every work of local history. Instead, it asks public historians to consider how they situate themselves in ongoing struggles for justice by making their training an asset that marginalized communities can use at their discretion. In light of the fact that the institutions where public historians typically find themselves have likely played a role in obscuring the history of these oppressed groups, the entry of oppressed communities into once hostile institutions should be on their terms.²⁷

Conceiving of public history as a work of allyship proved particularly effective for the partnership between GLAMA and UMKC's department of history. With GLAMA's approval, Cantwell agreed to turn his "Public History: Theory and Method" course over to the creation of an exhibit that would tell the history of Kansas City's LGBTQ community, document the city's role as host of the National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations, and promote GLAMA's efforts to commemorate both of these histories. Over the course of sixteen weeks,

²⁷ Our thinking on the concept of allyship comes from Paul Kivel, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, 4th ed. (Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 2017); Frances E. Kendall, "How to Be an Ally if You Are a Person with Privilege," *Seattle Community Network* (2003), <http://www.scn.org/friends/ally.html>; Roxane Gay, "On Making Black Lives Matter," *Marie Claire*, July 11, 2016, <http://www.marieclaire.com/culture/a21423/roxane-gay-philando-castile-alton-sterling/>.

students would use both GLAMA's materials and the organization's history as the window through which they learned about the field of public history. They would then put those lessons to work by drafting a twelve-panel exhibit that would be installed in UMKC's Miller Nichols Library. For Hinds and GLAMA's other stakeholders, the department's parallel project expanded the archive's impact without burdening its volunteers. For Cantwell, as a straight, cis-gender male who would be supervising students from a variety of backgrounds, the arrangement ensured his work would augment, and not appropriate, GLAMA's efforts.

Cantwell reinforced the class's role as a GLAMA ally by involving the archive in the class early and often. Hinds hosted the class once in order to introduce the students to the archive's holdings and the LGBT-KC committee visited the class twice—once at the beginning of the semester in order to share their goals in installing the historic marker and then at the end of the semester in order to participate in a community peer review session of the students' panels. In between, Cantwell attempted to relate all of the class's units to its work with GLAMA. Sessions on archival processing focused on the challenges associated with cataloging queer manuscripts, discussions about interpretive planning turned into brainstorming sessions on the exhibit's themes, and the class's readings on shared authority included a discussion of the power dynamics that haunt even the most collaborative efforts. This sustained focus on allying the students' work with GLAMA proved to be a great success. It fundamentally shaped how students conceived of their work as public historians and informed the design of the final exhibit. For example, students had a vigorous debate over the number of rainbows that should appear in the exhibit. Although now the universal symbol of LGBTQ rights, the rainbow became an icon in the 1970s and would therefore be anachronistic for a project on the homophile movement. But in order to make the exhibit relatable to the ongoing struggle for gay rights, the class decided to weave their support for organizations like GLAMA into the exhibit by agreeing on a design scheme that subtly wove the color spectrum into the background of the exhibit's panels and thus presented the exhibit as a kind of rainbow. More substantively, the class also had a serious discussion about the exhibit's tone. A number of students, many of whom hailed from Kansas City, wanted to take what the class came to call a "did you know" approach to the exhibit, filling the panels with facts like "Did you know that Kansas City hosted the first national conference of gay rights activists?" But the class eventually rejected this phrasing because it put their pride in community ahead of the hard work Kansas City's LGBTQ community had undertaken in developing these institutions. The former, the class decided, should be based upon an understanding of the latter.

The impact of GLAMA upon the students goes to the heart of allyship. In an arrangement built upon allyship, privileged communities become aware of their privilege and consciously work to prevent that privilege from continuing to marginalize oppressed communities. This reality manifested itself in a variety of ways. For example, in one particularly poignant class discussion, a student who identified

as queer argued that the exhibit should indict the homophile movement for being too accommodationist. Change, this student claimed, came about because of the more aggressive tactics of the gay liberation movement and the exhibit should stress this point. But as we discussed the conditions under which an organization like NACHO had to function, it became clear to the student that their assessment stemmed in part from their position as a queer person living in the age after Stonewall, and that their ability to undertake aggressive political action was made possible by the consciousness raising efforts of the homophile movement. Neither Cantwell nor Hinds expected this reaction. But the encounter made clear that conceiving of public history as a work of allyship means more than simply accounting for difference. It means accounting for privilege.

The students' exhibit embodied this appreciation for history and the power of preservation. The exhibit's very title, *Making History: Kansas City and the Rise of Gay Rights*, played upon multiple meanings of how history is made. The majority of the exhibit's twelve banners focused on Kansas City's surprisingly pivotal role in the rise of the modern gay rights movement. Drawing almost exclusively on GLAMA material, panels charted the rise of Kansas City's gay bar scene in the decades surrounding World War II, the founding of early homophile organizations by way of their publications, the debates that took place at the National Planning Conference in Kansas City, and the Phoenix Society for Individual Freedom's role in helping to coordinate NACHO's national efforts. Yet the exhibit's concluding panels also call attention to the fact that the only reason NACHO and the Phoenix Society histories are known is because of local historians who collect, preserve, and interpret this material. After highlighting the historic marker that now commemorates NACHO's pioneering meeting in Kansas City, the exhibit's final panel informs visitors how they can help GLAMA continue to grow its collections. Giving GLAMA the final word, the students thought, accurately reflected how Kansas City's LGBTQ community had documented its own history, and that the students were there to help tell it (see Figure 4).

Out of the Archives and Into the Community

Although Hinds and Cantwell always planned to install the exhibit outside of LaBudde Special Collections, the two also intended to try and expand the exhibit's—and thereby GLAMA's and the marker's—impact by creating a traveling version that could be installed in sites across the region. Such an effort, however, would require additional funding. LaBudde Special Collections had printed the panels that went up in UMKC's library but could not support the fabrication of a traveling exhibit. Hinds and Cantwell also decided against a community-based crowdfunding effort in order to avoid competing with GLAMA's fundraising for public programming associated with the marker's installation. Instead, Cantwell, as the exhibit's coordinating faculty member, approached Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area (FFNHA) to pitch the exhibit as a resource for the federally

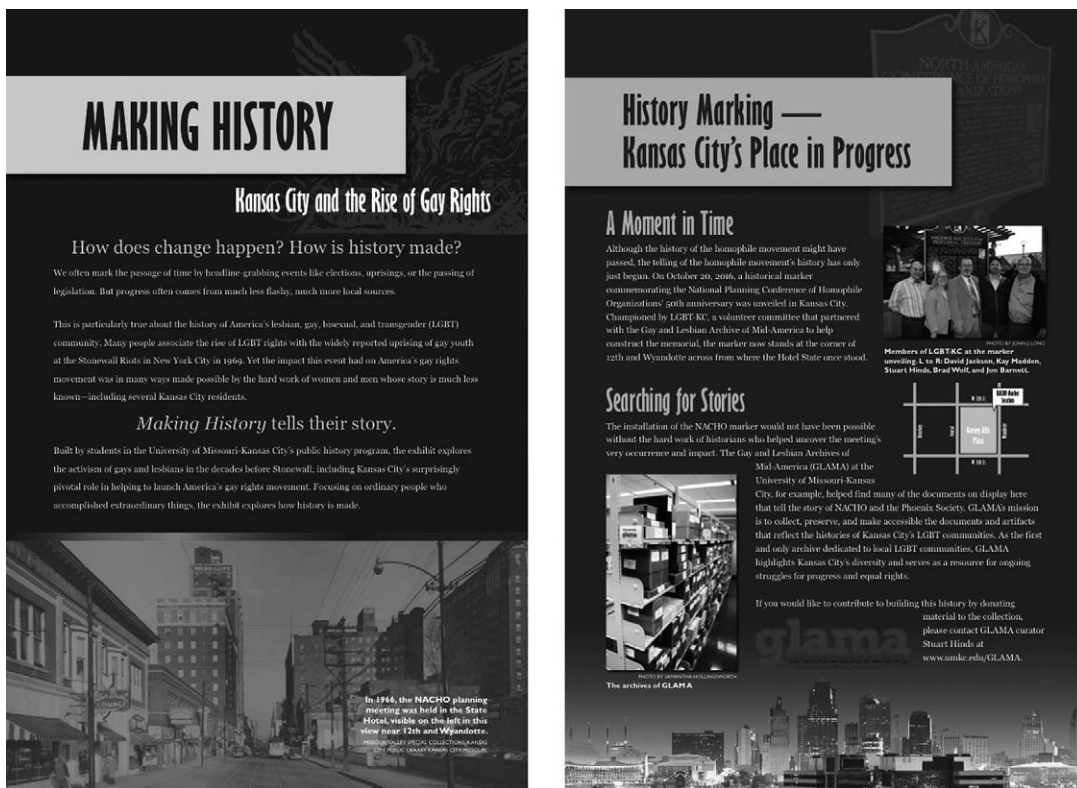


Figure 4. The first and last panels of *Making History*. A permanent, digital version of the exhibit with additional material is available at <https://info.umkc.edu/makinghistory/>. In Christopher D. Cantwell, Stuart Hinds, and Kathryn Carpenter, *Making History: Kansas City and the Rise of Gay Rights* (GLAMA and UMKC, 2017).

designated heritage area. Our proposal, however, immediately confronted a couple of systemic challenges.

Created by Congress in 2006 with the signing of the National Heritage Areas Act, FFNHA covers forty-two counties in eastern Kansas and western Missouri. In cooperation with an ever-growing number of local partners, FFNHA helps preserve and interpret the region's history through grants, projects, professional development, and public programming. In many respects, GLAMA's efforts were a natural candidate for a FFNHA interpretive grant. But our application would first have to overcome a few obstacles. First, the success of our application would hinge upon FFNHA's understanding of its interpretive mission. According to its congressional charter, FFNHA's historical themes are the shaping of the frontier, the Missouri-Kansas Border War, and the enduring struggle for freedom.²⁸ In the past, FFNHA had interpreted these themes almost entirely through the lens of race, supporting projects on Native displacement, conflicts over slavery, and the civil

²⁸ See Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area, <http://www.freedomsfrontier.org/>.

rights struggle that surrounded what became the nation's landmark desegregation case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. In order to support our application, FFNHA would also need to see gender and sexuality as part of the region's "enduring struggle for freedom." Moreover, in addition to securing the heritage area's backing, our application would also need the support of those community partners who served on FFNHA's interpretive grant review committee. Although FFNHA staff signaled their willingness to see GLAMA's proposal as part of the region's struggle for freedom, they candidly expressed concerns about the willingness of some partners to fund such an endeavor.

It was in the midst of these conversations that national developments seemed to shape the course of events locally. Shortly after Cantwell's initial conversations with FFNHA, President Barack Obama designated the Stonewall Inn as a National Monument and the National Park Service published its LGBTQ theme study. The moves seemed to have the effect of giving FFNHA the permission to support our application. After initially expressing reservations about the exhibit, FFNHA actually reached out to Cantwell and Hinds to invite them to apply for an interpretive grant. They submitted their application in November 2016, and in December they got word that they had received funding. It was the first interpretive grant focused solely on LGBTQ history the heritage area had ever awarded. And despite FFNHA's concerns about the willingness of area partners to fund the proposal, feedback from the review panel unanimously praised how our proposal made the heritage area's interpretive themes more inclusive.

With funds from FFNHA, Hinds and Cantwell hired a graduate student from the public history class, Kathryn Carpenter, to oversee the traveling exhibit's fabrication and travel. To start, Carpenter redesigned and rewrote the exhibit, filling in narrative gaps, eliminating redundancies, attaining permissions to publish a few images not from GLAMA, and generally translating twelve individually authored panels into a coherent project. Next, Carpenter had the exhibit fabricated on 33" x 80" retractable banners attached to stands. We chose retractable banners because of their relatively low cost and ease of installation. We also briefly discussed the possibility of making some of GLAMA's artifacts available to host institutions, but ultimately decided against it because of a lack of time and resources. This logistical restraint, however, ended up having the practical benefit of forcing institutions to consider how they could expand or reinterpret their own resources to include both the LGBTQ community and its history.

The exhibit was offered to every institution within the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area at no cost, as long as they would cover the cost of the exhibit's travel by transporting it to and from UMKC. The project team also personally reached out to library systems, cultural institutions, and LGBTQ youth and community centers throughout the region. Within a matter of weeks, the exhibit was scheduled for more than a year's worth of travel. According to some of its hosts, the exhibit's transience and relatively small footprint provided a low-risk opportunity for them to incorporate LGBTQ programming into the work, helping



Figure 5. *Making History* at the Woodneath Library Center, Mid-Continent Public Library. (Photo courtesy of Sara Peterson-Davis)

to convince an institution's more conservative members to sign on. Such presumed reluctance, however, paled in comparison with the overwhelmingly positive response we received from the exhibit's hosts. One of the suburban library systems initially asked to host an abbreviated version of the exhibit at one of their smaller branches. But after the exhibit's success at other sites staff decided "they could rearrange the furniture a bit" in order to fit the whole display (see Figure 5).²⁹ Other host institutions similarly made space for LGBTQ people and their history when hosting the exhibit. Another local Kansas City library used the exhibit's installation as an occasion to invite a local gay rights activist and author to address the branch; the Watkins Museum in Lawrence, Kansas, showcased its recently acquired collection of papers from the University of Kansas's gay liberation student group while hosting the exhibit; and the Missouri Humanities Council dedicated its monthly programming to LGBTQ issues while they hosted the exhibit in its Kansas City office. In addition to these sites, the exhibit has traveled to the University of Central Missouri and will soon visit a library in Independence, Kansas.

Two LGBTQ community centers expressed interest in hosting the exhibit, but ultimately concluded that their small locations lacked the floor space to host even an abbreviated version of the exhibit. However, in spring 2019, the Heartland Men's Chorus, Kansas City's gay men's chorus, plans to host the exhibit at its spring

²⁹ Sara Peterson-Davis to Kathryn Carpenter, personal communication, April 14, 2017.

concert performances. In an effort to make the exhibit available to as many people as possible, we have also created a web version.³⁰

Although the exhibit's tour was an accomplishment in its own right, its success lay primarily in the fact that the project consistently pointed back to the hard work that Kansas City's LGBTQ community had undertaken in making its own history. As local author Brian Hearn put it in a piece on the project for *KC Studio* magazine, the exhibit highlights how "small groups of committed people can change the world in profound ways." We "usually mark history through dramatic events," Hearn continued, when in fact "change is made through the small actions of many people at the local level. It's only when those actions coalesce into a coherent movement that those breakthrough events can occur."³¹ Hearn, of course, was referencing the brave activists who traveled to Kansas City in the winter of 1966. But his comments could just as easily have spoken to the coalition that built GLAMA, installed the NACHO marker, and helped make the exhibit a reality.

Conclusions

On the southwest corner of Twelfth and Wyandotte Streets in downtown Kansas City stands a marker. Its text is unpretentious, its images are few, and it mirrors the design of every roadside sign in Jackson County, Missouri. Yet the sign commemorates a pivotal event in American history: a moment when a number of disparate gay rights organizations first presented themselves to the nation as a coordinated minority with identifiable political goals. And like the history it recalls, the marker's installation is also reflective of broader trends. Whereas the LGBTQ community was once the sole steward of its history, the preservation and interpretation of American LGBTQ history is now part of a much broader ecology of queer public history. Many museums, libraries, and historical societies now work to make the histories they interpret more diverse and the programming they sponsor more inclusive. LGBTQ collecting initiatives, meanwhile, continue to document history as it unfolds.

Yet the process by which Kansas City came to host its first queer monument does call attention to some particularly salient issues as LGBTQ history increasingly becomes more mainstream. To start, it asks institutional public historians to think about the relationship between their own work and that of ongoing community collecting initiatives. Although public historians might be motivated by the right intentions, their eagerness to share authority might be perceived as a demand for deference. The public historians in Kansas City navigated this tension by working to amplify GLAMA's ongoing efforts through parallel projects that worked in tandem with ongoing initiatives rather than claiming to be outright stakeholders

³⁰ *Making History: Kansas City and the Rise of Gay Rights*, Christopher D. Cantwell, Stuart Hinds, and Kathryn B. Carpenter, curators, <https://info.umkc.edu/makinghistory/>.

³¹ Brian Hearn, "Kansas City and the Rise of Gay Rights," *KC Studio*, September 8, 2017, <http://kcstudio.org/kansas-city-rise-gay-rights/>.

in their endeavor. But this is not the only arrangement possible. As a director of the Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project in Roanoke, Gregory Rosenthal established a relationship whereby the local Diversity Center oversaw the acquisition of material while the city's local public library agreed to preserve what the community collected.³² Regardless of the arrangement, though, public historians should see themselves as the ally of a community collecting initiative rather an effort's professional advisor.

At the same time, Kansas City's experience underscores the importance of LGBTQ self-determination in the preservation of historical assets, it also emphasizes the importance of giving queer public history official recognition. Like the Jackson County Historical Society and the Kansas City Museum, Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area initially worried that to include LGBTQ history was to court controversy. But after developments at the federal level, FFNHA seemed to feel more emboldened to support Kansas City's cause. Such national developments gave local workers both permission and cover to expand their work, and other reputable bodies or institutions should consider making similarly bold strides in order to support projects on the ground.

Even with the reticence evinced by a few locals, however, the otherwise overwhelmingly positive response GLAMA, *Making History*, and the historic marker received demonstrate that the interpretation of LGBTQ history is an effort whose time has come. Concerns over potentially controversial content became overshadowed by a far greater interest in exploring the complexity, the diversity, and the curiosities of Kansas City's history. That interest continues. Currently, a PhD student has partnered with GLAMA to collect materials related to the passage of the city's first human rights ordinance in 1993 that outlawed discrimination based on both sexual orientation and HIV status, while LGBT-KC continues to discuss installing markers that focus on Kansas City's local LGBTQ history.³³ But as before, GLAMA's impact continues to be both organic and meaningful. Last summer, for instance, a local homeschooling group reached out to GLAMA for help in making its curricula more meaningful and inclusive. One of the instructors, a nationally recognized advocate for the trans community whose daughter had recently appeared on the cover of *National Geographic's* special issue on gender, had heard about the exhibit. While she saw in NACHO's history an affirmation of her own efforts to take a stand for LGBTQ rights, she also saw an opportunity to make this narrative even more meaningful and inclusive by drawing out Kansas City's long-standing trans community and female impersonation scene. She, like so many who have gone before her, is trying in her own way to make history.

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³² Rosenthal, "Make Roanoke Queer Again," 50–51.

³³ On the effort to collect material related to Kansas City's ordinance see Austin Williams, "The Ordinance Project," <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/the-ordinance-project-history-lgbt#/>.

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