

Notes from March 25 LGBT Digital History meeting (now Houston ARCH)

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Houston ARCH Discussion Notes Wednesday, March 25, 2009 Montrose Counseling Center

Our apologies for the delay in getting these notes out to you all. Please feel free to forward to those you feel would be interested.

Brian Riedel led the discussion by summarizing the history digitization project and bringing the group up to date on discussions held between the January meeting and this meeting. At the end of the meeting, there was a discussion about naming the project. From a list of names suggested since the January meeting, the group present chose "Houston ARCH" (see below).

There will be four parts to the Houston ARCH website:

1. a Wiki to help inventory collections and individual artifacts and to act as a means of communication for the work groups;
2. an Oral History site for purposefully collected stories;
3. a digital archive of all known artifacts and collections; and
4. a social networking site (similar to Facebook) where individual members of the community can share their stories, post pictures, etc.

There were several reports given by individuals to summarize the interim discussions:

A. Existing Local Archives:

1. Craig Farrell from GCAM reported they support being part of the Houston ARCH. GCAM has 7 warehouses of historical materials. About 20% has been inventoried. There is material that needs museum "conservation" as well as cataloging. Some of the materials are very old. Most of their fundraising goes to pay for the warehousing of the materials. GCAM includes a wider community than just Houston, so they have artifacts that cover the entire Gulf Coast. <http://gcam.org/>
2. The Transgender Archives reported their support of the Houston ARCH. They have some very old and unique artifacts in their archive such as newspapers from 1846 and books from the Holocaust documenting the experiments conducted in the concentration camps. Their archive has been set up so that visitors can physically go to the building and read the books and papers. They also have a well organized website: <http://tgctr.org/archive.shtml>
3. Larry Criscione from the Botts Collection is also supportive of Houston ARCH. He has been director of the Collection since 1994. He has most of the materials inventoried and in a computerized system. He has books and papers predominately. He quit collecting between 1994 and 1999 and is actively looking for materials from this time period. Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church currently provides space for the Collection. (No Botts website as yet.)

B. IT Report

André Bourgeois and Jennifer Greer reported the IT group has decided to follow the Dublin Core for setting up the archival project. This is a commonly used and simplified system for metadata used by libraries and archives.

They reported the Houston ARCH Wiki will be built from the existing Wiki set up by Jo Collier at <http://queerstoricalhouston.pbwiki.com/>. This new site will be a place for individuals, as well as area collections, to submit items they have that they believe would be good candidates for digitization. It will also function as a communication hub for the work groups that will address different aspects of the Houston ARCH mission (i.e. IT, community relations, Oral histories, Galveston, etc.) The Wiki will also allow a level of social networking and on-going conversation. These conversations will be harvested and included in the Wiki. There will need to be an editor for the Wiki.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: since the March 25 meeting, the Houston ARCH website has been built: <http://houstonarch.pbwiki.com/>)

The Oral History site will require a digital voice recorder and other equipment.

C. Universities/Researchers

Rosemary Hennessy from Rice University described a meeting that took place among community members and faculty and staff from various area universities, including University of Houston Central Campus, University of Houston Downtown, and Rice University. At that meeting, participants agreed that there are a number of potential grant-worthy projects for which people at different universities could apply. Those grant worthy projects could in turn support the work of existing archives. The next steps from participants in this group focus on researching and writing grants.

Discussion

Rich information was gleaned when the discussion participants introduced themselves and provided information about why

they were in attendance. They were all willing for their materials to be included in Houston ARCH. Examples include:

- PFLAG is collecting oral history of people's Coming Out Stories
- TV Montrose has Master Beta Tapes from the shows – they produced shows three times a week about people living in Montrose
- There are edited videos such as Always My Kid
- There are at least 2 PBS specials that have Houston components
- Queer Radio tapes need to be digitized
- The After Hours Show
- ACT-UP has papers
- Grand Marshals have all been interviewed but the interviews are not digitized
- There was notable political activism in Montrose that needs documentation (Log Cabin, GLBTQ Caucus, etc.)
- The medical story around HIV/AIDS and services to the GLBTQ community
- The dental history around HIV/AIDS which set new standards for the industry
- The history of HATCH
- GLIFE history
- Queer Nation has papers and digitized records ready for a new home
- The history of Stonewall Democrats
- Transgender history: Houston has been a national leader in transgender community organizing, and in providing transgender housing
 - Galveston has a history of performing sex change operations. At one time it was the best and safest place in the nation for these operations.
 - History of Montrose Activity Center. IRS would not provide a 501(c)3 status to any organization with "gay" in the title, so the Activity Center's name did not include "gay".
 - History of Montrose Counseling Center
 - History of the Houston AIDS Foundation
 - History of Out Smart Magazine

There were several concerns expressed by the participants:

- If we don't collect and preserve the history, then it won't be collected or preserved. The example was provided about William S. Woods, a faculty member at Tulane University who had done notable research on GLBTQ issues. He could not publish his research because of the topic and if you Google him today, he is absent from history.
- Botts continues to accept and search for files and papers.
- GCAM continues to accept and search for artifacts.
- Transgendered Archives continues to accept and search for materials.

Naming the Project:

Several words were put together in different combinations. The group decided Houston ARCH (Area Rainbow Collective History) was descriptive of the project and the goals. There was some discussion as to whether the "C" was best thought of as standing for "Collective," "Collaborative", or "Coalition for". There are a couple of different ARCH titles that come up by Google-ing the term "ARCH" with "Houston". We will explore these groups and decide if this matters or not at the next meeting. If you have input, be sure to contact Brian.

Issues to explore include:

- Diana Foundation
- OutHistory.org – William Simon, sociologist who had been on faculty of University of Houston
- Explore Rice and University of Houston history with GLBTQ issues. This may lead to an institutionalization of the Houston ARCH at the Universities.
- Look at Boston History Project for examples
- Students from the universities may be able to volunteer with GCAM and other archives to help inventory materials
- Actively explore funding: State of Texas, NEH, Library of Congress, City of Houston. Look for presentation, history, digitization, equipment, etc.
- Explore how to engage the youth of the community in knowing about and helping in gathering the history.

Next Steps:

Individuals can:

- Join a Houston ARCH working group: (IT, Fundraising, Oral History)
- Volunteer with Botts Collection, GCAM, Transgendered Archives
- Visit <http://houstonarch.pbwiki.com/> and contribute

Collectively, Houston ARCH will:

- Decide on an Oral History plan
- Continue exploring grant options
- Explore the Houston History Archive Project for possible collaboration
- Explore options for having a presence at 2009 Pride Houston

NEXT MEETING

Wednesday, May 20, 2009, 6:30 to 8:30,
Montrose Counseling Center, 401 Branard, Houston, TX 77006

At this next meeting, we will update participants on the status of the working groups, confirm participation in 2009 Pride Houston, and what form that participation may take.

For questions or details, please contact Brian Riedel, riedelbs@rice.edu, or 713.348.2162.