Three Questions for Juliet Demeter: Revealing Collections in the Historical Society Archives

Project archivist Juliet Demeter reviewing a processed collection in the archival stacks at the GLBT Historical Society.

The archives of the GLBT Historical Society hold thousands of boxes of irreplaceable historical materials. Ever wonder what's involved in making the contents available to researchers? Juliet Demeter is just the person to ask. As a project archivist, she has been processing collections at the Historical Society since 2012. A resident of West Oakland, just across the bay from San Francisco, Demeter received a master's degree in library and information systems at Simmons College in Boston and formerly worked at the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. Her current work is supported by a grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR).

What's important about the grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources?

The grant, which we received in collaboration with the ONE Archives at the University of Southern California, comes from CLIR's "Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives" initiative. Our project, entitled "Out West," is designed to preserve and provide access to over 100 collections and 800 linear feet of historical records in our archives. At the end of the two-year project, we'll be able make available an enormous number of collections that were previously unknown to scholars.

What's involved in processing a collection?

The archives of the GLBT Historical Society hold thousands of boxes of irreplaceable historical materials. Ever wonder what's involved in making the contents available to researchers? Juliet Demeter is just the person to ask. As a project archivist, she has been processing collections at the Historical Society since 2012. A resident of West Oakland, just across the bay from San Francisco, Demeter received a master's degree in library and information systems at Simmons College in Boston and formerly worked at the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. Her current work is supported by a grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR).

What's important about the grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources?

The grant, which we received in collaboration with the ONE Archives at the University of Southern California, comes from CLIR's "Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives" initiative. Our project, entitled "Out West," is designed to preserve and provide access to over 100 collections and 800 linear feet of historical records in our archives. At the end of the two-year project, we'll be able make available an enormous number of collections that were previously unknown to scholars.

What's involved in processing a collection?
Archival processing refers to the act of arranging and describing the papers of an individual or the records of an organization so they will be accessible to researchers, curators and other users. Each collection is unique, so the archivist needs to assess the level of processing required. Considerations include what kind of original order the papers are in, conservation issues, and the likely interest in the collection. Once the papers are arranged, the archivist creates a guide known as a finding aid. The final step is to provide a digital version of the finding aid to the public via the Online Archive of California.

What are some particularly interesting collections you have processed?

I have been fortunate to work on the papers of two fascinating San Francisco activists. First was José Julio Sarria, who passed away at age 90 last year. Sarria ran for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1961; he is believed to be the first openly gay candidate for public office. In his own words, he was "a gay activist who used entertaining to get my message out." The collection includes correspondence, photographs, ephemera, artifacts and costumes documenting his career as an entertainer and activist over half a century.

Now I'm working on the papers of Hank Wilson, a longtime gay-rights and AIDS activist who died in 2008. He helped form many well-known organizations in San Francisco including the Gay Teachers Coalition; the San Francisco Gay Democratic Club, which became the Harvey Milk LGBT Democratic Club; and ACT UP/Golden Gate. Wilson also was known for his controversial belief that poppers were a cofactor in HIV transmission and he worked tirelessly to help get them banned from bars and bathhouses.

Sarria's papers are available to researchers now. We're putting finishing touches on the finding aid pending some expected additions coming from his estate. And I hope to have Wilson's papers completed by the end of the summer.

Historical Society to Sponsor Display, Talk At San Francisco History Expo March 1-2

More than 40 historical, cultural and preservation organizations will be participating in the annual San Francisco History Expo, set for Saturday, March 1, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday, March 2, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., at San Francisco's historic Old Mint at 5th and Mission. The GLBT Historical Society will sponsor an information table and a digital display of treasures from the archives.

The expo also will feature public programs on both days. On Sunday, March 1, from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m., the Historical Society will present "Lost and Found: Searching for LGBT Historic Sites in San Francisco." Historians Donna Graves and Gerard Koskovich will survey queer historic places that San Francisco has lost and will discuss the ways a new study funded by the City of San Francisco and cosponsored by the society will help identify the numerous sites of LGBT history that still exist.

For more details, visit the San Francisco History Expo website.

Two-Program Series to Focus on Transgender Stories

Film Screening

Wealth of material from San Francisco's vast queer past.

A long-term display at the side of the Front Gallery features the pantsuits that pioneering lesbian activists and longtime couple Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon wore as the first couple to wed during the "Winter of Love" in 2004 when San Francisco issued marriage licenses in an act of "civic disobedience."

The Erotica Collection includes an array of trashy paperbacks. Male Madame by Donald Evans (1966) portrays life in a "male brothel" in San Francisco. The cover art is by African American sleaze illustrator Gene Bilbrew (1923-1974) -- and the cover blurb promises "The hottest scandal since the
A screening of the award-winning 2009 documentary *Forever's Gonna Start Tonight*. Directed by Michelle Lawler and produced by archivist and historian Kim Klausner and Emmy Award-winner Susan Stryker, this feature-length film is a loving tribute to San Francisco legend Vicki Marlane. A transwoman and drag performer, Marlane got her start as a carny in the early 1950s; rose to fame as a female impersonator in the 1960s; and in her third act, became a beloved community icon leading shows at Aunt Charlie’s Lounge in San Francisco’s Tenderloin until her death at age 76 in 2011. The film will be followed by an audience discussion. Admission: $5.00 (general); $3.00 (California students with ID); free for GLBT Historical Society members.

**Living History Panel**
**Trans in the Tenderloin Since the 1960s**
**Thursday, March 6**
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Stories of transgender life in San Francisco’s Tenderloin District since the era when “screaming queens” acted up at the 1966 Compton’s Cafeteria Riot to today as told by four individuals who have experienced first-hand decades of the neighborhood’s history: a former sex worker, an ex-hair fairy and veteran transwoman activists. Moderated by GLBT History Museum curator Don Romesburg, this roundtable will feature Tamara Ching, Felicia Elizondo, Ronnie Lynn and Veronika Fimbres. Admission: $5.00 (general); $3.00 (California students with ID); free for GLBT Historical Society members.
RESEARCH HOURS

**Holiday Schedule:** For year-end holiday closures and hours, check the [GLBT Historical Society website](http://www.glbthistory.org).

**Weekdays:** By Appointment & Subject to Availability
Members: Wednesday - Friday: 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Nonmembers: Friday: 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

**Saturdays:** No Appointment Needed
Open to members and nonmembers 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. the first and third Saturday of every month; no appointment needed. Hours subject to change; before visiting, check the [GLBT Historical Society website](http://www.glbthistory.org).