

# History Happens

News from the

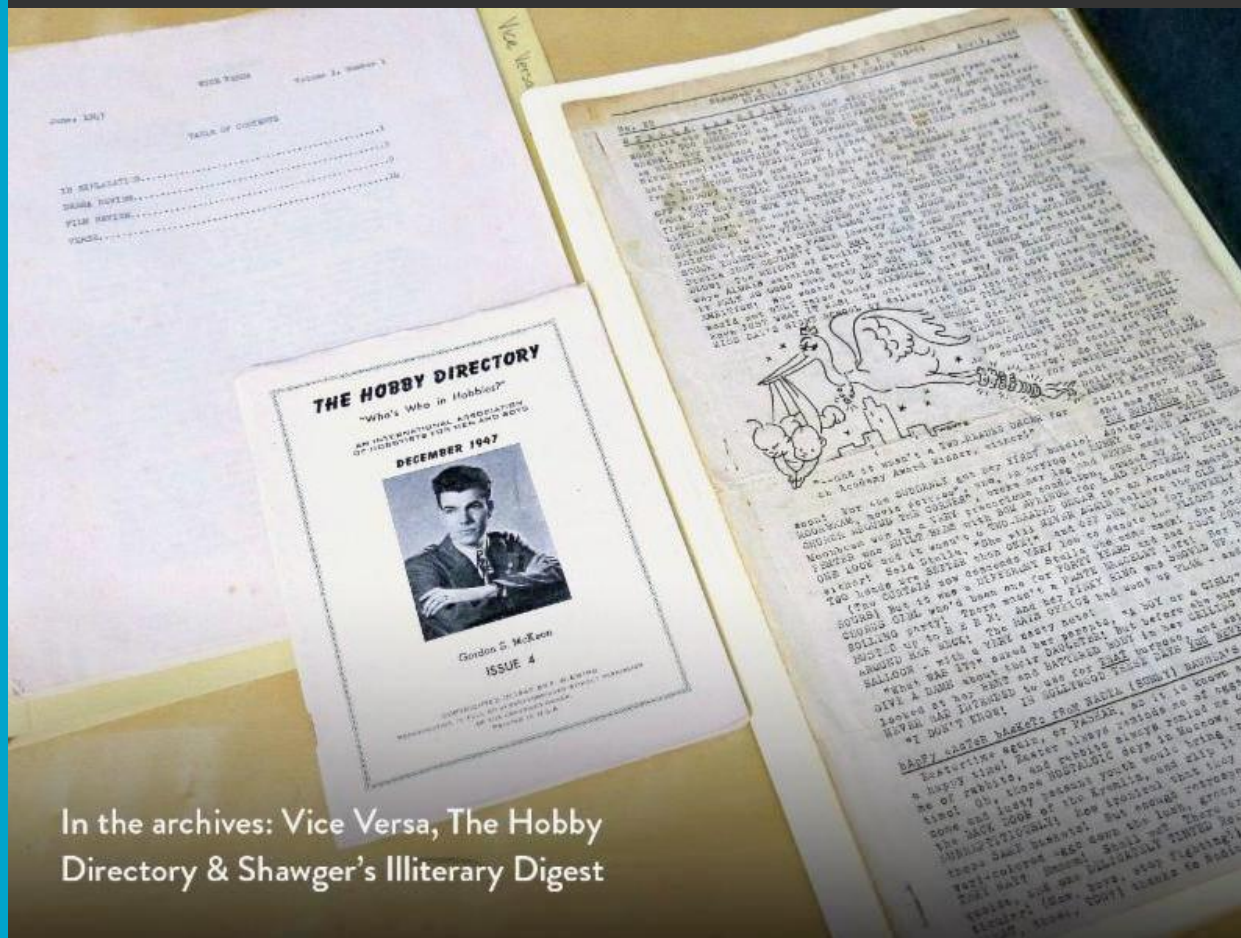


GLBT Historical Society  
archives & museum



## May 2018

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In the archives: Vice Versa, The Hobby Directory & Shawger's Illiterary Digest

## Three Little Magazines in the 1940s: Tracing the Roots of the LGBTQ Media in the United States

by Mark Sawchuk

I'm staring down at three little magazines, all yellowed with age. Two aren't even typeset; instead, they bear the slightly blurry hallmark of classic midcentury typewriting. All date to the 1940s, when commercially

distributed LGBTQ periodicals were unknown in the North America. What I'm gazing may at first look unobtrusive, but the magazines actually represent a revolution in print: They bear witness to the beginnings of the queer media in the United States.

The first publication, *Shawger's Illiterary Digest*, is a mimeographed newsletter written by an unidentified gay GI and privately mailed to his gay servicemember friends. A folksy cartoon of a songbird wearing a pearl choker adorns the March 1945 issue. The homespun design belies the publication's brilliance: It's chock-full of delicious gossip about men with campy nicknames, including "Nadia Nausea" and "Kate Cod." The printed communication goes beyond a private conversation, but is reserved to a tiny group who would have understood the inside jokes.

### Clues in the Classifieds

The second magazine initially looks groan-inducingly boring. Published in New Jersey by F. Willard Ewing (1896-1984), *The Hobby Directory* from 1948 offers information for enthusiasts of what were regarded as men's pastimes, such as woodworking and model railroading. Its queer significance lies in its pages of classified ads. Many relate to hobbies, but others specify something else: "contacts desired."

Careful clues imply the kind of contacts in question: advertisers express an interest in "physical culture" or "singers and wrestlers," and one hopes to meet "friendly, intelligent fellows seeking adventure, comradeship; and boys and young men ... wishing to share enthusiasms, ideas and aims." *The Hobby Directory* is a goldmine of coded language that enabled gay men to find others like themselves for social engagements - and maybe more.

The third publication, *Vice Versa* from 1948, marks a turning point. Editor Lisa Ben (pseudonym of Edythe D. Eyde, 1921-2015) typed up her own personal lesbian magazine and shared it with a handful of friends in Los Angeles. It looks even more homemade than *Shawger's*, but the content mimics a real magazine, with letters to the editor, literary contributions, movie and book reviews, and commentary. Even though Ben produced only 12 copies of each issue, she clearly was imagining a time when LGBTQ people could have their own full-fledged lifestyle periodicals.

### A Stunning Historical Shift

I'm taken by how these periodicals, published within three years of each other, encapsulate a stunning historical shift in how LGBTQ people created and conceived of possibilities for communication. Reading these three magazine issues, we journey from a time of whispered double-entendres, to a world of coded desires, to a prefiguration of the modern LGBTQ press that would emerge in the 1960s and 1970s.

The magazines are preserved in the GLBT Historical Society's Periodicals Collection, which includes not only a run of *Vice Versa*, but also the only known copies of both *Shawger's Illiterary Digest* and *The Hobby Directory*. Visitors to the GLBT History Museum can see issues of all three currently on display in the exhibition "[Empowerment in Print: LGBTQ Activism, Pride and Lust.](#)"

*Mark Sawchuk is a historian and a member of the Communications Working Group at the GLBT Historical Society.*

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## Free Activities

### Celebrating Harvey Milk Day in San Francisco



by Gerard Koskovich

The State of California annually marks Harvey Milk's birthday, May 22, as Harvey Milk Day. The date is officially designated as a "statewide day of significance." The GLBT History Museum will honor the occasion this year by offering free admission to all visitors on May 22. Located at 4127 18th St. in San Francisco, the museum will be open 11:00

a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Reserve free tickets [here](#).

Another San Francisco cultural organization, the Mechanics' Institute, will mark the day with a special program starting at 6:30 p.m.: Renowned lesbian historian Lillian Faderman will discuss her new biography, *Harvey Milk: His Lives and Death* (Yale University Press, 2018), in conversation with activist and author Cleve Jones. The event is cosponsored by the GLBT Historical Society. The institute is offering Historical Society members free admission. The Mechanics Institute is located at 57 Post St. in downtown San Francisco. Order tickets [here](#).

#### About Harvey Milk

Harvey Milk (1930-1978) was the first openly gay elected official in California and one of the first in the United States. He served on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors for 11 months before he and San Francisco Mayor George Moscone were shot to death on November 27, 1978, by Dan White, a former board colleague of Milk's.

Throughout Harvey Milk Day, the GLBT History Museum will feature a special showing of an artist's video about Milk on the video wall visible through the museum's front windows: "[Harvey Milk's Suit](#)" (2007) by Mexican filmmaker [Leo Herrera](#) is an emotionally haunting and

atmospheric evocation of violence and loss.

The museum also commemorates Harvey Milk on an ongoing basis. "Queer Past Becomes Present," the long-term exhibition in the museum's Main Gallery, includes a display on Milk's life and death. Among the historical objects exhibited are a "Harvey Milk for Supervisor" t-shirt from Milk's own wardrobe, as well as the suit he was wearing at the moment he was assassinated. Visitors also can hear Milk's voice in the political will he recorded just days before his death.

Among the materials preserved in the archives of the GLBT Historical Society is the [Harvey Milk and Scott Smith Collection](#), an extensive group of Milk's personal belongings. The collection and other holdings in the society's archives provide a vital resource for researchers seeking to understand Milk's story. Notably, the materials were used by the art directors and costume designers for Gus van Sant's award-winning 2008 feature film "MILK" and by the producers of the 2017 ABC miniseries "When We Rise."

*Gerard Koskovich serves as communications director for the GLBT Historical Society.*

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## In the Archives

### Preserving the Sounds of the Queer Past



by Magnus Berg

Of all of the audiovisual formats, my favorite is 1/4" open-reel audiotape, more commonly known as reel-to-reel tape. The GLBT Historical Society preserves a number of collections with recordings in this now-obsolete format, including oral history interviews, conference programs, radio broadcasts and music. Over the past couple months, I have set up a

digitization station at the archives and have started digitizing some of these irreplaceable historical materials.

Available since the late 1920s, open-reel tapes were used for home recording and professional recording alike. Some of the tapes in the Historical Society's archives date all the way back to the late 1940s. Unfortunately, due to their age and chemical makeup, 1/4" open-reel tapes are highly susceptible to degradation. Many archives are now in a race against time to digitize their holdings while the tapes are still intact.

**Surprising Discoveries**

Digitizing audio recordings can be full of surprises, as the content is usually unclear until the tape has been played. For instance, in the Ted Rolfs Papers (collection no. 1997-01), I discovered a recording of civil rights leader W.E.B. Du Bois speaking at a Longshoremen's Conference; the [M. J. Talbot Papers](#) contain a [documentary about the making of an erotic film](#); and the Chana Wilson Audiotapes (collection no. 2003-07) include a recording of an all-lesbian barbershop quartet singing The Temptations' "My Girl."

Most of our digitized audio recordings will be posted free online at the [Internet Archive](#), with the rest available to researchers at the [GLBT Historical Society archives](#). If you're interested in LGBTQ audio history, we welcome volunteer involvement in our audio-digitization project. For more details, contact me at [magnus@glbthistory.org](mailto:magnus@glbthistory.org).

*Magnus Berg is a research resident at the GLBT Historical Society and a graduate student in the [Film and Photography Preservation and Collections Management Program](#) at Ryerson University in Canada.*

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## Upcoming Events

### Workshop

## Queer Zines: Do-It-Yourself Empowerment in Print



Friday, May 11

7:00-9:00 PM

The GLBT History Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5.00 | [Buy Tickets](#) | [Free for Members](#)

Zines are do-it-yourself publications that emerged in the 1970s. LGBTQ people enthusiastically adopted the form, and zine production continues today as a vital

laboratory for analyzing, communicating and asserting sexual and gender identities. During the first part of this hands-on workshop, **Dorian Katz**, gallery director at the [Center for Sex and Culture](#) in San Francisco, and **Miss Ian**, the center's library director, will share their favorite local queer zines. During the second part, they'll review zine-making basics and will assist workshop attendees in creating their own zines. Participants are encouraged to bring glue sticks, scissors, markers, photos, discarded magazines and other supplies to use and share. The workshop is held in conjunction with "[Empowerment in Print: LGBTQ Activism, Pride and Lust](#)," an exhibition on the history of LGBTQ periodicals currently on display at the GLBT History Museum. Purchase advance tickets [here](#).

## Panel Discussion

### Queer Youth in France & the U.S.: Past & Present



Thursday, May 17

7:00-9:00 PM

The GLBT History Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5.00 | [Buy Tickets](#) | [Free for Members](#)

For LGBTQ young people in France and the United States, claiming their own sexuality and gender has long presented joys and challenges. This panel offers French and

American perspectives on how the lives of LGBTQ teens and young adults in the two countries were shaped in past decades and how LGBTQ communities and their allies are working to support queer youth today.

Offering the historical context are **Michael Lucey**, professor of French at the University of California, Berkeley, and **Don Romesburg**, professor of women's and gender studies at Sonoma State University. Bringing the story into the present, the work of [Le Refuge](#), a French organization that provides housing and services for LGBTQ young people rejected by their families, will be discussed by the founder and president, **Nicolas Noguier**, and vice president, **Clare Hart**. For an American perspective, the initiatives of [LYRIC](#), a pioneering San Francisco LGBTQ youth services organization, will be presented by the nonprofit's executive director, **Jodi Schwartz**.

"Queer Youth in France and the U.S." marks [International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia](#), observed worldwide on May 17; in addition, the program honors the 30th anniversary of the founding of LYRIC and the 15th anniversary of the founding of Le Refuge. The panel is cosponsored by LYRIC and the Consulate General of France in San Francisco. Purchase advance tickets [here](#).

## Community Forum

### Fighting Back: Queer News vs. Fake News

Wednesday, May 25

7:00-9:00 PM

The GLBT History Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

[Free Tickets](#) | \$5.00 Donation Welcome

The latest in our monthly "Fighting Back" series exploring contemporary queer issues in a historical context, this forum will offer a



multigenerational conversation about the role of media outlets and online platforms in discerning facts from falsehoods, how this activity has affected LGBTQ people historically, and how the stories disseminated by traditional and new media become part of the historical record. A panel of historians, veteran journalists, new media representatives and activists will discuss how this history can help inform today's resistance

movements. Reserve your free tickets [here](#).

## [Fundraiser](#)

### [Pride Month Kick-Off: Making History at The Stud](#)



Wednesday, May 30

5:00-8:00 PM

[The Stud](#)

399 9th St., San Francisco

\$60 | [Buy Tickets](#)

The inaugural fundraiser hosted by [QUIP](#), a new LGBTQ philanthropic networking group takes place at The Stud, a San Francisco queer dance bar for more than 50 years. The event will feature an open bar and a catered buffet. A silent auction will offer unique queer memorabilia and artwork.

In addition, a display of original materials from the GLBT Historical Society archives will pay homage to The Stud and other queer establishments of SoMa's "Miracle Mile" in the 1960s -1970s. Proceeds from the evening will benefit the Historical Society. Members of the society can purchase discounted \$30 tickets through May 4: [click here](#). Regular tickets are available throughout the month by [clicking here](#).

## [Fundraiser](#)

### [Introducing the Dyke March Oral History Project](#)



Friday, June 1

7:00-9:00 PM

[The GLBT History Museum](#)

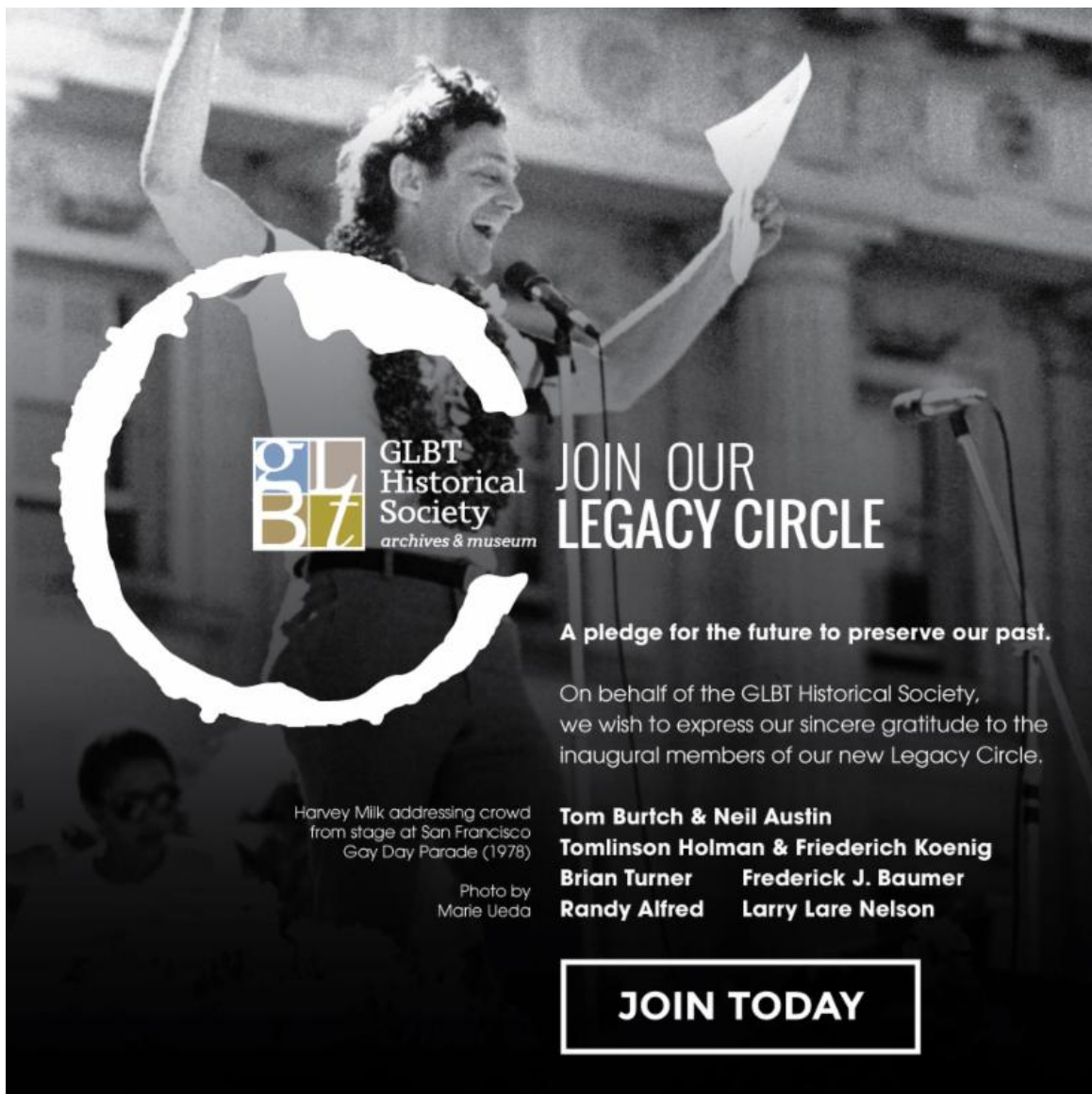
4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5 - \$20 (sliding scale) | [Buy Tickets](#)

The Dyke March Oral History project is a newly created audiovisual collaboration between the GLBT Historical Society and the

[San Francisco Dyke March](#). The project aims to capture and preserve the diverse experiences of dykes, queers and women from all communities at the Dyke March. This event will introduce the project and raise funds for expenses related to recording, preservation and promotion of Dyke March history. Light food and drink will be served, including beer donated by [Virgil's Sea Room](#).

Started in 1993, the Dyke March is described by its organizers as "a grassroots, volunteer-run, nonprofit actively working to bring dyke communities together to celebrate our unity, raise our consciousness and be visible. The Dyke March is committed to the creation, protection and maintenance of dyke and queer spaces, a firm stance against oppression in all forms and the maintenance of a community open to all dykes and queers." Purchase advance tickets [here](#) (no one turned away for lack of funds).



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## JOIN OUR LEGACY CIRCLE

**A pledge for the future to preserve our past.**

On behalf of the GLBT Historical Society, we wish to express our sincere gratitude to the inaugural members of our new Legacy Circle.

**Tom Burtch & Neil Austin**  
**Tomlinson Holman & Friederich Koenig**  
**Brian Turner      Frederick J. Baumer**  
**Randy Alfred      Larry Lare Nelson**

Harvey Milk addressing crowd from stage at San Francisco Gay Day Parade (1978)  
Photo by Marie Ueda

**JOIN TODAY**

**Visit Us**

EXHIBITIONS & PROGRAMS



## The GLBT History Museum

4127 18th St.

San Francisco, CA 94114

(415) 621-1107

[www.glbthistory.org/museum](http://www.glbthistory.org/museum)

Monday - Saturday: 11:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Sunday: Noon - 5:00 PM

## ARCHIVES & RESEARCH CENTER

The GLBT Historical Society

989 Market St., Lower Level

San Francisco, CA 94103-1708

(415) 777-5455

[www.glbthistory.org/archives](http://www.glbthistory.org/archives)

Call to schedule a research appointment.

**CREDITS.** Feature: Photo by Gerard Koskovich. Milk Day: Harvey Milk speaking at San Francisco Gay Freedom Day (1978); photo by Marie Ueda; collection of the GLBT Historical Society. In the Archives: Photo by Magnus Berg. Zine Workshop: Sampling of 1990s zines from the Periodicals Collection of the GLBT Historical Society; photo by Gerard Koskovich. Queer Youth: Youth leaders from LYRIC in San Francisco; photo by Eva Silverman (Pushcart Design). Fighting Back: Newspaper headlines from the 1950s; reproduced from the dust jacket of *Is Homosexuality a Menace* by Dr. Arthur Guy Matthews (New York City: Robert M. McBride, 1957). Stud Fundraiser: Graphic courtesy of QUIP. Dyke March: The 2017 San Francisco Dyke March; photo by Denna Bendall; all rights reserved.

**Editor:** Gerard Koskovich    **Design:** PEPE Creatives

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