

May 2019



Organizers and supporters of the Castro LGBTQ Cultural District, including Supervisor Rafael Mandelman and GLBT Historical Society Executive Director Terry Beswick, at a July 2018 planning meeting.

Castro LGBTQ Cultural District Looks to Preserve San Francisco's Iconic Gayborhood

by Nick Large

As property prices and rents continue to skyrocket in San Francisco, the need is a greater than ever to preserve the heritage of the city's threatened queer spaces. One response has been the creation of six cultural districts, each defined by the City as "a geographic area or location within San Francisco that embodies a unique cultural heritage." Achieving this designation qualifies the area for resources to sustain and promote its cultural assets. Two LGBTQ-related cultural districts have already been established: [Compton's Transgender Cultural District](#) in the Tenderloin and the [Leather and LGBTQ Cultural District](#) in SoMa.

An internationally recognized center of LGBTQ culture since the 1970s, the Castro will soon join them. After more than two years of effort, legislation creating the [Castro LGBTQ Cultural District](#) was introduced to

the Board of Supervisors on April 9. Sponsored by District 8 Supervisor Rafael Mandelman, the legislation was proposed and developed by a working group convened by the GLBT Historical Society that includes neighborhood organizations, businesses, residents and supporters. Historical Society Executive Director Terry Beswick responded to our questions about the project.

Why is the GLBT Historical Society invested in the Castro LGBTQ Cultural District?

The GLBT Historical Society has always had a strong interest in place-based history and has worked to document and preserve queer cultural assets. The cultural district initiative focuses on preserving the living culture of a specific population, and that includes more than buildings. It includes people and everything that makes it possible to live, work and play in the neighborhoods they have claimed as their community's home. The cultural districts program looks at how we can support affordable housing; cultural centers and events; human services; jobs for groups under greatest threat of displacement; and in general, anything the community decides is important to sustain and improve the queer culture of the Castro.

What process is involved in getting the district established?

We called a community meeting of diverse neighborhood leaders, business owners, nonprofits and residents at the beginning of 2017 on the back patio of the Castro Country Club. At that time, many had never heard of cultural districts and did not know about the districts as a proposed source of hotel tax funding. We took a straw poll, and everyone was in favor of forming a Castro LGBTQ Cultural District. The process for establishing cultural districts in the city has changed since the first one was created, and that led to quite a number of open community meetings where we discussed our priorities and the boundaries of the district. I personally facilitated a lot of the process and just tried to keep the train moving.

How can the designation of the Castro LGBTQ Cultural District help maintain the area's visibility outside of San Francisco, including internationally?

Well, I'm not sure that's the goal so much. The concern is that as we work to support and encourage the external trappings of queer culture that make it more attractive to tourists, new residents and businesses, property values and rents will continue to climb. Often, that means fewer people of color, fewer trans and young queer people. My hope is the Castro LGBTQ Cultural District planning process will be set up in an inclusive way that brings together all the stakeholders and that we will be intentional about what we want to achieve. People have been involved in this project for a variety of reasons, but I think we all agree there is value in maintaining an inclusive place for all LGBTQ people to feel completely safe and free. If that continues to attract people from around the world, then that's beautiful, too.

For more information about the Castro LGBTQ Cultural District, click [here](#).

To follow the Facebook page, click [here](#).

Nick Large is an LGBTQ, API and Japanese American activist with a particular interest in LGBTQ movements and place-based organizing in San Francisco. He serves on the GLBT Historical Society Board of Directors.

From the Staff

Expanding Access to Our Digital Resources



by Kelsi Evans

Last year, the GLBT Historical Society completed a major project to digitize the entire run of the *Bay Area Reporter*, the longest continuously published LGBTQ weekly in the United States. In 2019, we've been accelerating our efforts to expand our already rich digital offerings, all of which can be accessed on the GLBT Historical Society website through our [online collections](#)

[portal](#).

So far, we have made available online three collections focusing on the Bay Area's response to the AIDS crisis: the AIDS Legal Referral Panel records, the Linda Albend Collection of Randy Shilts materials and the Sue Rochman Papers. The digitization of these collections was made possible by a 2017 National Endowment for the Humanities joint grant, shared with the University of California, San Francisco, and the San Francisco Public Library. The \$315,000 grant funds the digitization of approximately 127,000 pages from a total of 49 archival collections held by the three institutions related to the early days of the AIDS epidemic.

Thousands of Photographs

We're also working hard to expand selections from our extensive photographic holdings. In partnership with DIVA, a web platform supported by San Francisco State University, we have made available over 4,000 images from three of our most frequently used photographic collections: the Crawford Wayne Barton Papers, the Robert Pruzan Papers and the Henri Leleu Papers. These are joined by selections from a new collection we received in 2018, the Elaine Gay Jarvis Papers, including incredible photographs from the 1978 San Francisco Gay Freedom Day parade.

Finally, we have partnered with the Digital Transgender Archive to share two collections related to the transgender community. Correspondence from the Lou Sullivan Papers sheds light on the life of a transgender pioneer, and the *Vanguard* magazine collection includes ten zines produced by LGBTQ youth in San Francisco's Tenderloin district in the mid-1960s.

Enhancing our digital offerings is a key element of our five-year strategic plan. It makes remote access to our archival holdings possible for our many who aren't able to visit the archives in person. It also demonstrates our ongoing engagement with local institutions, universities, online platforms and funding partners. In the next few years, we're pursuing numerous other grant and partnership opportunities that will allow us to continue to make more material available to users online.

Kelsi Evans is the director of archives and special collections at the GLBT Historical Society.

At the Museum

Living Resistance by Dancing Till the World Ends



by Angela Ting

The anarchist, feminist, activist and writer Emma Goldman — among the first American leftists to condemn homophobia — once quipped, “If I can’t dance to it, it’s not my revolution.” The GLBT Historical Society’s exhibition “[SoMa Nights: The Queer Club Photography of Melissa Hawkins](#)” captures this radical spirit in San Francisco’s nightclubs from

the late 1980s to the early 1990s.

As the society’s spring 2019 museum exhibitions and programs intern, I’ve worked with staff members on the curation and installation of “SoMa Nights,” “[Two-Spirit Voices: Returning to the Circle](#)” and another exhibition opening later this year. While working to prepare the ephemera on display accompanying Hawkins’ photos, I discovered that these items are proof of the fact that resistance has to be lived, not just practiced.

Sometimes resistance is a pair of do-it-yourself earrings fashioned out of CDs, twinkling in the club’s strobe lighting. The neon green, pink and orange flyers in the case advertising club nights and dance parties as well as safe sex and AIDS awareness show how the personal is the political. “AIDS, unlike homophobia, cannot be spread through casual contact,” one flyer proclaims.

As a young queer person, it is difficult to imagine what life was like for my community at the height of the AIDS crisis. Dancing with your friends and lovers one week and burying them the next. Bodies disintegrating from the inside out. Not being able to be with your partner as they pass because the hospital only admits spouses and family members. Partying together and dying alone. But daring to experience love, joy and ecstasy in the face of calamity is, in itself, its own revolution.

These objects in the ephemera display case teach us that art and activism cannot ever be separated. When mere survival seems out of

reach, living your life on your own terms and fiercely protecting the ones you love becomes much more important. Hold on tightly and never let go.

Angela Ting is the society's spring 2019 museum exhibitions and programs intern.

Upcoming Events

Living History Discussion

Two-Spirit Voices: Still Here, Still Queer



Wednesday, May 1

7:00–9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

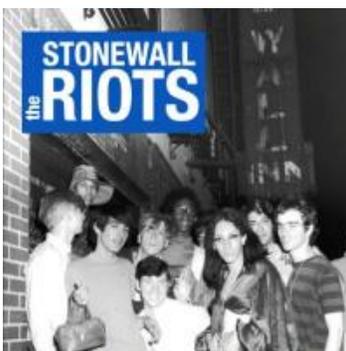
4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5.00 | Free for members

For 20 years, [Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits](#) has been committed to activism and service for the Two-Spirit community. This program offers a look at the history and activism of the organization over the past two decades. Founding members of BAAITS, including Randy Burns, who also founded Gay American Indians in 1975, will engage in a dialog with current board members and community leaders. BAAITS is the subject of the ongoing exhibition “[Two-Spirit Voices: Returning to the Circle](#)” at the museum. Tickets are available online [here](#).

Book Launch

California and the Stonewall Riots



Thursday, May 9

7:00–9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5.00 | Free for members

The 1969 Stonewall riots, when LGBTQ people fought back against police harassment at a New York bar, are often described as the starting point of the modern LGBTQ rights movement. In this presentation, San Francisco State University professor Marc Stein, who also serves as vice chair of the society's board of directors, will discuss his new book *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History* (NYU Press, 2019), which situates Stonewall in a broader perspective. After reviewing pre-Stonewall LGBTQ protests in California, Stein will explore how news about the riots reached the West Coast, how Californians viewed the uprising and how Golden State residents responded. Tickets are available online [here](#).

Exhibition Opening

The Mayor of Folsom Street: Alan Selby's Legacy



Thursday, May 16

7:00–9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5.00 | Free for members

An opening reception for our new exhibition, “[The Mayor of Folsom Street: The Life and Legacy of Alan Selby](#),” which uses photographs, artifacts, fine art and digital displays to

document the life of Alan Selby, also known as Mr. S, who opened the iconic leather and kink retail store Mr. S. Leather in San Francisco’s SoMa district in 1979. One of the city’s longest-lived and best-known queer retail establishments, Mr. S. Leather grew into a de facto community center as well as an international destination.

Curated by Jordy Jones, Jeremy Prince and Gayle Rubin, and drawing on the Alan Selby Papers preserved in the society’s archives, this transdisciplinary exhibition situates Selby’s life within the context of a changing SoMa neighborhood, AIDS charities and the emergence of a distinct queer leather and kink culture. Light refreshments will be served. Tickets are available online [here](#).

Walking Tour

Thrill Spot: A Lost Queer History Walking Tour



Sunday, May 19

2:00–4:00 p.m.

Meet in Jack Kerouac Alley

(behind City Lights bookstore)

261 Columbus Ave., San Francisco

Free

The 1954 police raid on Tommy’s Place, a lesbian bar in San Francisco’s North Beach, is the stuff of legend. Lurid headlines describing

the seduction of teenage girls in a “vice academy” were followed by sensational stories teeming with swaggering butches, police graft and political intrigue. Lambda Award-winning author and visual artist Katie Gilmartin leads this literary walking tour that explores the raid through performance, music and visits to key historical sites, including the infamous “happy hunting ground for adult debauchees.” The tour covers 10 blocks with two steep grades. Cosponsored by the GLBT Historical Society, this program is offered in collaboration with [Openhouse](#) and is made possible by grants from the [Queer Cultural Center](#) and the [Creative Work Fund](#). More information is available [here](#).

Fighting Back

Unions, Workers and Queers: An Enduring Alliance



Thursday, May 23

7:00–9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5.00 | Free for members

The latest in our monthly “Fighting Back” series exploring contemporary queer issues in a historical context, this panel will discuss connections between organized labor and the LGBTQ community in the San Francisco Bay Area. Organized labor and LGBTQ activists have made common cause in San Francisco since the mid-1970s, when Harvey Milk helped create the coalition. Panelists will consider how workers, unions and members of the LGBTQ community have built a worldwide relationship based on shared struggles, similar goals and common values. Tickets are available online [here](#).

[Performance](#)

Gay in the Great War: A Dramatized Reading



Thursday, May 30

7:00–9:00 p.m.

The GLBT Historical Society Museum

4127 18th St., San Francisco

\$5.00 | Free for members

In this unique performance, author Lance Ringel will present a dramatized reading with music from his novel *Flower of Iowa* (Smashwords), a carefully researched work about two soldiers, one American and one British, who fall in love on the Western Front in France in 1918. A tale of bravery and hidden love between men during some of the darkest hours of the 20th century, *Flower of Iowa* showcases unforgettable characters, meticulous historical research and exhilarating storytelling. Tickets are available online [here](#).

Current Exhibitions

Front Gallery

[SoMa Nights: The Queer Nightclub Photography of Melissa Hawkins](#)

Open through May 27, 2019

[More information](#)

Community Gallery

[Two-Spirit Voices: Returning to the Circle](#)

Open through May 6, 2019

[More information](#)

Main Gallery

Queer Past Becomes Present
Permanent exhibition
More information



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CREDITS. FEATURE: Photo by Dino Rosso and Shaun Haines. FROM THE STAFF: Photo courtesy of Kelsi Evans. IN THE MUSEUM: Photo courtesy of Angela Ting. UPCOMING EVENTS. Living History Discussion: Bay Area American Indian Two Spirits contingent in the 2001 San Francisco Pride Parade; courtesy of BAAITS. Book Launch: Detail from the cover illustration of *The Stonewall Riots: A Documentary History*; courtesy of NYU Press. Exhibition Opening: Alan Selby at the Mr. S Products store on 7th Street (circa 1980); photograph by Alexander V. Areno (all rights reserved), courtesy of Gayle Rubin. Walking Tour: Photographer unknown; courtesy of Mary Kay Sicola, Grace Miller Papers, James C. Hormel LGBTQIA Center, San Francisco Public Library. Fighting Back: Marchers carrying the Gay Freedom Day Committee banner at the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade (1977); photograph by Marie Ueda, collection of the GLBT Historical Society. Performance: Detail from the cover illustration of *Flower of Iowa*; courtesy of Smashwords.

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