

# 2022\_019\_20210628\_cushing\_ac

Fri, Nov 18, 2022 2:40PM 43:30

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

collection, collections, materials, lgbtq, colleagues, professor, cushing, people, papers, curator, houston, don, faculty, individuals, university, catalog, build, archives, archivists, gay

## SPEAKERS

Vince Lee

---



Vince Lee 00:01

Good morning. My name is Vince Lee and I am the curator and archivists for the LGBT History Research Collections at the University of Houston Libraries Special Collections. Today is Monday, June 28, 2021. And I'm pleased to be joined this morning by



00:21

Hi, I'm Rebecca Hankins, and I am the curator at Texas A&M University's Cushing Memorial Library and Archives. I curate our Women and Gender Studies Collections that are primarily LGBTQI plus materials. But I'm also the curator of Africana Studies and Religious Studies materials too.



Vince Lee 00:52

Thanks for giving the overview on that, Rebecca, for our audience that's listening in for the first time, can you talk a little bit more about what the LGBTQ plus collection is, and when it began or when it was started?



01:05

Yes, so the collection is growing extensively. And in the last few years, we have added so much more to the collection. So the collection, I'm not sure when it started, to be honest. But it was prompted a lot of the material was prompted, I think, with the library, around the country, understanding the value of having materials for the LGBTQI Community. And that was in the, I would say, the 1970s. And it really coincides with a court case that was filed by the Gay Student Services against Texas A&M, because the university failed to recognize them, they refused. And so they took this case, to the regular courts, they won at each level. But the university continue to challenge the results. And so they took the court to the Supreme Court that basically upheld the decisions of the lower court, which meant that Texas A&M had to to

recognize the gay student services. And so every since then, and that was in the late 70s. Every since then, we've been collecting the papers of the LGBTQ community here, not just the Texas A&M, but in the surrounding College Station and Brian communities where there was a very vibrant, gay community.

 Vince Lee 03:07

And you're answered, prompted another thought that came to my mind, not necessarily in our list of questions. But in addition to the, I guess, the impetus from the Gay Student Services, would you say there's also been a demand from faculty because you're on a university campus in terms of materials for instructional support?

 03:29

Absolutely. So the Women, excuse me, the Women and Gender Studies Collection was the I mean, the Women and Gender Studies-- Studies Department was the program because it's not a department yet. But the program was started by a professor here, who, whose collection we house too. And doctor -- and her name just right out of my head. She -- her, she started the, the program here. And so that was in the 80s. And they started teaching classes on Women and Gender Studies. I think the first class though, Harriette Andreadis is the professor, she whose papers we also house, we also house all of the Women and Gender Studies papers from their earliest founding. Dr. Andreadis started the organization she's an open openly lesbian at the time, and still is, but she started the the program and they started teaching a wide variety of classes. I think the first class that specifically dealt with gay issue was in the 90s. And it's been a number of the professor's here have taught courses regularly on on the subject. And it is. And really in many ways they have also helped to build the collection here. Did I answer your question?

 Vince Lee 05:23

Yes, you did. Besides yourself, who else is involved with the project or with the LGBTQ plus collections? At Cushing?

 05:33

So I've only been one, not only -- but I came here in 2003. So this is my 18th year anniversary, I came in July of 2003. But the collection was already built by Michael Jackson, their curators here, the university archives, because much of the early materials came from various university departments, university individuals. And so a lot of the material that we house came from just the programs, those individuals who work. So Michael, Michael Jackson is probably the one that really started to actively collect the collection. And that's mainly because he st-- he was here as a student. So he was engaged in a lot of these activities, and he knew who to contact. And so he built out quite a bit of this collection. I wasn't in charge of the Women and Gender Studies material, probably until I would say maybe 12 years ago. It's so I've been working with Michael every since then, because on the side of the university archives, we have a university archivist. And they were working very closely with him to build that side of it. But

he had been bringing in collections. And if it hadn't been for him, I think so much of these collections and papers from different organizations and individuals would have been lost. So I owe, you know, practically this, the majority of the work that I've done to Michael Jackson,

 Vince Lee 07:32

We definitely owe a debt of gratitude for our colleagues and our predecessors that have laid the foundation work that's before us. So for sure --

 07:42

I will say that when we had Dr. Larry Mitchell is who was an English professor, who came as an interim director of Cushing Library and Archives. And he was extremely supportive what we did. And he oversaw us getting the largest, one of the largest single donor collections we have and the LGBTQ materials, Don Kelly. And it was supported that the getting of that collection was not just supported by Dr. Mitchell. But our dean, Dean David Carlson, the University, Dr. Karen Watson, who at that time, was the provost. So and we had a president at that, at that time, who was an interim president, and Christine Stanley, who was over the Diversity that she was the Provost for Diversity, so there -- we had community people. I can't forget, my dear colleague here [? Chris Mays ?], who has just been the rock of support for a lot of the work that I've been able to do, and I could not have done it without him too. So there was there's a lot of faculty, Jim Rosenheim, Dr. Rosenheim in history. Who else? I know I'm forgetting people who were so -- Stan Humphries in film studies, a professor in Film Studie, then he is Joseph Jewel, who's a professor in sociology. There are so many people who this work would not have been able to be accomplished without their help.

 Vince Lee 09:48

So it sounds like from faculty to colleagues to administration, it really took a team or a village effort to build.

 09:57

Yeah, it really As a team, endeavor, you've got to have the support of your colleagues. In order for me to do the work that I've been able to do. We have Naomi Beymer, who is just the cataloger, extraordinaire, if it was not for Naomi, when these collections come in, she's on top of cataloging and making sure that on the shelf she gets on me, you need to go ahead and deal with this and certain things so that she can get the work done. And she has really, I mean, she catalogs, photographs, she catalogs, ever. And it's made my life easier. And so so I can't, you know, I definitely have to

 10:52

mention the names of those individuals who are in turn,



Vince Lee 10:58

definitely an art and passion to catalog, LGBTQ plus materials and making them accessible. Yes. You mentioned the Don Kelly collection. Could you talk a little bit more about that, please? And what it is and what types of things it contains for our viewers?



11:16

Absolutely. So Don Kelly is a former I believe he was in Galveston worked in Galveston for years as a civil servant. But he's always had a love for collecting and making sure that the LGBT community has been included in libraries. He's donated his collections, parts of his collections to other libraries around Texas. So he lives in Houston after retiring. And he sent out a message that I can't remember the exact date, but I remember he sent it to one of the gay listservs at the Society of American Archivists, so the MCS Society of American Archivists moderated this particular listserv. And there were a number of groups that were sent messages. And this particular message said that there was this large collection that this individual wanted to donate. And, you know, they had they wanted to know if anybody was interested. So he received responses from all over the country, because it was such a unique collection. So I saw it on that that listserv, and I said, Oh, I took this to Larry Mitchell, Dr. Mitchell at the time, and I said, we need to find out about this. This would be wonderful as to have. So I contacted Don and Houston. I asked him about the collection, he sent me the link to librarything.com, where he has still been document documenting the donations. And at that time, I believe it may have been like 6500 books, and other materials and other ephemera. And at the time, we were going to budget issues. And so we really didn't have the funds. I brought in my colleagues Lauren Schiller, Michael Jackson, Jim Rosenheim, that professors, I brought in a bunch of professors. I invited DOD to come up to Texas a&m to talk to all of these individuals, faculty, staff, it was administrators. And he really gave a wonderful presentation about the collection. And everybody was so excited, especially because there was all of this. These cereals, these magazines, these journals that were really rare. They're all of these pulp, books and things. So all of the art books and things so we all were excited, we were gonna get this collection, we were gonna get the support. But of course, because of the budget issues, we couldn't get the funding together. And then the provost office, got this chunk of money. They said, anybody want to try to get this? I talked to the provost, who, you know, Kevin Watson. Dr. Watson was just a she's openly lesbian herself, and she was just so supportive of the work that we were doing. So we've got to get though, Mondays and I definitely attribute Michael Jackson and Lauren Schiller, to the work that they did to get all of the support that we got. So we mentioned we got the support the library, from the Dean Chuck gave it gave us quite a bit of money to purchase it. And we, I mean, this is a shortened version of how we got the collection, because it was a lot more drama than that. But we finally did get it. Michael, Lauren, my colleague, Robin Hutchinson, who deals with a lot of the collections and moving things around and making sure she maintains our quarantine room and all of that she's does a little bit of everything, preservation, and all the four of us went down, we'd looked at the collection, we don had done a lot of the boxing. And we inventoried what we could what you didn't have to do much of an inventory, because he had most of it on library thing, but just to get a number. And then we had it shipped. And that was like I said about 6500 boxes of material. Now it's over 30,000 that because that is such a dedicated collector, he has worked very closely with us. Anytime that we have researchers and we have a lot of researchers who come in to use their collections because it is a national international collection. He finds out about the individuals and he starts building whatever research interests they have. So about, I'd say six, maybe six or seven years

ago, right after we got the collection, we did an exhibition. And it was I mean, we had people come in former students. So that's what our alumni a call and they were in tears, they said they never thought they would see an exhibit of this card. We didn't get one negative comment. It just, it just was. I think something that that people really were waiting to see happen here. And Michael Jackson and Lauren Schiller, Lauren, who's no longer here was the she took over the reins. I really wanted somebody who was a part of the community to be in charge of this exhibit. We and she did just she and Michael did just an amazing job. We did a catalog which we still have if anybody wants. That collection continues to build but not only that, from Dan's donation, we've gotten other materials we have. Some of our our professors here started donating materials here. We've got we already had judge Phyllis Fried's papers, because she was a former student here. And so we started to build in the transgender area to build our collections. And it was Judge Frey who put us in charge in touch with Sharon Stewart, upstate New York. Well, I went and got a heart. She was a judge advocate. And, and she donated quite a bit and we've gotten other materials from other EU University individuals. It's it's just been a really a floodgate of additional collections are an ever Smyers papers who, I mean, not her papers, but we do have her library and she is the founder of the old lesbians, oral history project. So it's just been a whirlwind. I've just picked up 3026 boxes from a colleague who passed away who built a large LGBTQ collection and he don't know he wanted it donated here. So it's just you know, I just picked up about 15 boxes from Don. So it keeps going and



19:52

it's been great.



Vince Lee 19:55

Thanks for talking about not only Don's collection but other materials that y'all have, I noticed is a broad question, but what's your vision and goal for the collection, ultimately, or over time, perhaps



20:11

what our vision is, is to get an endowment for the collection, we've already been trying to build that endowment. Again, we partnered with the College of Liberal Arts, to create a fellowship for the papers. So every year, we have an open call for applications for the fellowship. And we have a provides graduate, anyone who is looking to do this research, we have one of the fellows here right now, who is working on what he's working on various communities, and the collection is rich in gay therapy, transgender therapy, he's been working in that in that area. And so he's here looking at the collection, we also have had a number of fellows to take advantage of the fellowship, and they come from all around the country, and they keep in touch with us, they have done amazing work since leaving here, we've had professors we've had even one undergraduate student who who won the fellowship, because her project was so amazing. So it is open to the public. And just, that's we want to build that endowment up, we want to build an endowment in order to get someone who is just focused on the LGBTQ collections. And although a lot of my other collections that I work on intersect with LGBTQ communities, I also do work on collections that are not related to that. And because this is so much of my job, most of those collections are not as have not grown in the same way. So we

really need someone dedicated to this collection, because it is huge. And we get where we're really overrun with inquiries about this collection. So it's a big part of my job, what my job is, I mean, I do teaching, I do reference, I do a lot of different things that don't allow me to spend all of my energy and time to build more of the collection, and also to advertise and get it out there and let people know about the collection. So I think those are the two biggest things to build the fellowship, and to build the endowment.

 Vince Lee 23:20

Thanks for sharing that. And as a curator, fellow curator, I completely empathize because we were so many different hats. And with something as important as an LGBTQ plus collection, it demands a for that full time dedicated, curious.

 23:36

Yeah, you know, you do what you can, but, you know, I need to really get more publicity about the collection, it's hard to, you know, especially since the pandemic, to get through all the work that you have to do and everything that has been put to the side. You can't, I can't inventory these collections at home. I have to be in at work. And so, you know, there's a lot of things that had to be put to the side because I've got collections all over my office. So yeah, and I'm trying to, you know, also you have to deal with your donors, and really let them know, the respect you have for the collections, because this is a trust that we take on. And I don't want to lose that trust by not being able to do well by these donation people to try to put these collections together. They they're their children, just like I think of my collections. This is Look who they are. And this is a part of who I am. So, yes, we need someone that can just dedicate it their full time to that to these collections.

 Vince Lee 25:14

Speaking of donors, and as archivists, I love to ask my colleagues is, is there a process in identifying potential materials or collections or donors, for your LGBTQ plus collection? And what's the candidate thought process?

 25:31

Well, I cannot I think in many ways, I am blessed to have colleagues who are pointing things to me, who are saying you need to contact this person or that person. I keep in touch with other archivists who we've traded like the one archives in California, we've traded materials, things that duplicates for them. That and similar for us, you know, and so that's one way of, you know, keeping in touch with your colleagues FIND IN THIS like the Don Kelly collection. So, but then people like Don Kelly, Arden average Smyers, other Harriet Andreotti does, they there, these are people who, oh, this is the you know, you need to contact this person, you need to contact that person, which is another reason why you need to have someone dedicated to these collections. Because in many ways I that I don't, I don't know, all the people I don't know. And plus, you want to work with your colleagues, like the University of Houston, you don't want to step on other archival toes. And, you know, we're moving into their areas, we do know of so

many other institutions that that scavenge for collections and, and take them out of the context or communities where they are accessible. And so we don't want to I for me, I don't want to do that kind of going out finding collections that should take that may be better at the University of Houston, maybe better at the Gregory school, maybe better, you know, at other places other than Texas a&m. So it's really working with your colleagues finding out what they are doing, you know, being a part of Oregon news, they stations where we can't say, you know, this is an individual who has a wonderful collection, let's talk about where is the best place for them? Because we were not always the, it's hard to get up here sometime to College Station, Houston, has a much, you know, easier path to get. So you don't want to make it hard for for researchers, you know. So I think you just hope that your colleagues and your community and and the donors, you know, trust you enough to say, Hey, there's this other collection. And I've been very, very grateful for that.

 Vince Lee 28:54

And we can't collect everything. And I think it's also about doing the right thing with our colleagues and with the donors so that they can make the best decision on where they

 29:05

are completely. Yes. I can't agree more because and that's about that's the archival community. I tell everybody, you never found a community that is as wonderful community when it comes time to really helping each other and working together.

 Vince Lee 29:27

And you mentioned a little bit earlier about the public using the collection besides the public, who else would use the LGBTQ plus collection that you may find during the semester or school year?

 29:42

Yes, we've had students always have a great deal of students who and what I really enjoy about that is they see that this is a place where you know they can and start to explore that identity. So if if, if I can provide that space for the students to come and look and explore and research, and we've had that pretty extensively. I've worked with so many professors here. And it's always wonderful because we, we recently hired a couple of transgender faculty, and so to, for them to find out about the collections I've worked with their classes. It's, it's really rewarding. And the other thing is the researchers, we have researchers that come from all over the world. One of the things about our collection is that it is very international, the LGBTQ collection is very international. And so there, we've had researchers who wanted to look at the Brazilian side of and so we have the papers of Antonio, Lapa Steena, who is a professor and communication and his husband del rice. And so they have all of this Brazilian material and, and South American material. And so the so this, Don, Don has included a lot of that kind of material in his collection. And so the international aspect of it is, as what I definitely encourage people, we have some of the earliest materials that are from the Czech Republic, which is really

interesting that that deal with gay rights, they're so researchers are a big part of who comes to us the collections. But we also like I said, have faculty, we have students. We even have a lot of staff who didn't know about the collections who come. We've had Dustin Black, who did milk, and who's done a lot of other wonderful film, he came we had a big event for him. We've had other speakers come in. We have one Arden came in and went to classes and talked about her old lesbians oral history project and it was just wonderful. The students are asking wonderful collections. We brought in a nice Parker, Houston's openly gay mayor, former mayor. And she went to talk to classes, the standing room only. So we try to have programs, exhibitions, we're working on this exhibition. Now. And, and just finding ways to get the word out, I have stayed after hours to allow the meetings of various LGBTQ groups here, because one of the things is Texas a&m has tons of student groups. So I want them to be able to come and see the materials, and just get a chance to really, you know, ask the question, and so Michael Jackson and I, we open the the archives up so that they could come in and, and see the collection. So we've done a lot of outreach, Michael, of course, has done outreach to all over the country I've written, I've written articles about the collection, I tried to make sure that the archivist community is aware of it. And so those are multiple avenues of getting the word out. I think it's important to let the academic community, the scholarly community know about the collection. So I've been writing articles and talking about the collection and making sure we are getting the word out in as many venues as possible.

 Vince Lee 34:39

Great. And I guess for our listeners, and maybe for the public in general, how can we go about accessing the collections? What's that process? How do we if we wanted to pay a visit to your town? Well,

 34:54

tax Cushing has a website and libraries So you can go to Cushing that Tamil Kush, sorry, [cushing.library.tambu.edu](http://cushing.library.tambu.edu). And there's all kinds of information about how to access the materials. A lot of the collection, as I said before, Naomi has a catalog. So a lot of that is available available through our library catalog. So you can start searching for things. You can always contact me at our Hankins at [ta.mu.edu](http://ta.mu.edu). We also have a collection management systems that you can look at. And they are available through our Cushing website, that give you a little bit more detail about the collection. So we have those finding guides, a lot of our materials to be honest, they're not digital digitized. So a lot of you a lot of access has to either happen here, or you have to ask for us to make copies for you. So those that's the next frontier is getting this material digitized. The other thing is library. Thing that library thing.com is where Don's collection is all the entire collection is in there, so you can search it, and then come to us and say I found this here. And that's what we've had a lot of individuals who found the found out about the collection and contacted us and then came or asked for access to materials by copies or, or something. And we've had, you know, film directors, we've had, writers we've had, you know, the New York Times came to do the big story that they did on Judge Phyllis fry. There's someone who's writing a book on Judge fry. And so there are all of these multiple ways to access the materials. Hopefully, we'll get this digital collection off the ground, too.

 Vince Lee 37:24

It seems to be the kind of the current and future projects that we're all wrestling with is making every creasing holdings digitized and available. So absolutely, yeah.

 37:35

This is on my list. Ya know, that keeps growing.

 Vince Lee 37:42

And I keep telling our public and patrons that what we have available digitally is literally the tip of the iceberg. And I'm sure it's the same with you all as well.

 37:53

Although they've been doing the spotlight collections that are just amazing, these digital spotlight, so I'm hoping to get some some of our collections and online and in that way, too, and because that's a faster process to get our digital collections out there. So mother these days, that's why we need this person. Yes, sure.

 Vince Lee 38:23

Is there anything else you'd like to talk about that? Maybe we didn't get a chance to cover? And my previous questions? You Rebecca?

 38:32

Yeah, no, I mean, I think that's about if I, if anybody wants to know about the history of gay student services, there's a wonderful article that was written by a young graduate student here who talked about the impact of that particular the gay student services versus Texas a&m. There are other individuals that are writing about the collection. So you know, you can do a search we've tried to be on every Twitter Instagram, Facebook, I don't go on Facebook as much, Mark Zuckerberg getting all my information, but anyway, you can cut that every the only one that we're not on Tik Tok

 39:35

that I'm considering so you can look for us look for me, I'm on on all of these social medias just trying to get the word out again.

 Vince Lee 39:51

Then I think it's important to also be on social media because it's reaching folks in where they are Especially during this time and even pre pandemic, but post pandemic, especially, I think a

lot of folks are, that's how they communicate. And



40:13

yes, if you want, especially if you want to reach a lot of young people, this is, I mean, you don't have to keep it in perspective, because not everyone is computer literate.



40:30

And that's important. They, we, we always think that young people have all of these computers skills, they can do all of these wondrous things, and some kids, but a lot of that is dealing with social media, using Microsoft Word, spreadsheets and databases. Those are other skills that I've done some research on, on how college students have real trouble with those kinds of skill sets. But social media, yes. And so that's one way to reach them, and have these conversations.



Vince Lee 41:11

And what we're using now zoom to conduct an interview, it's been, I think, a real benefit during this time to be able to reach out to conduct an interview anytime, anywhere, scheduling, working collaboratively. So



41:27

yes, it's it's it has been amazing to have zoom, and the other aspects of that is keeping in contact. I always tell people, I have a zoom, meeting with my family every Sunday, we no matter what we're doing, everybody gets on just let us know. And now those meetings, I mean, sometimes they last I have to log out while they're talking. But they have just been so important to keep in touch with everybody. Yeah. Zoom has been a real for us so many of us.



Vince Lee 42:10

Well, Rebecca, I want to thank you for taking the time with me today, Monday and Monday morning. View and I look forward to our continued collaboration and work together because I know that we're we're still up against it in terms of putting the final pieces but are Yes.



42:31

And Francesca porphyrin. Jessica, who I definitely want to include who has been a rock for me in so many ways. She has just been after me and after me but she really has done amazing work and I so appreciate her so I don't want to end without saying thank you. Francesca Morini Dr. Francesca Marini as thence such a blessing for me.



Vince Lee 43:03

She's definitely been the conductor that keeps this train going and doing it in such a good manner to everybody.



43:12

Yes, herding cats. And she has a lot of cats so she knows how to do it.



Vince Lee 43:22

Thank you so much, Rebecca.



43:25

Thank you. Thank



43:26

you so much, Ben. So I appreciate that.