

to discuss issues facing the community. I've been a panelist and keynote speaker in places like Augsburg College, Macalester College, Hamline University, State University of New York at Geneseo, University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and a meeting of the Organization of American Historians in Providence, Rhode Island. I've also served as a contributor on multiple publications and events in many of those locations. I even attended and presented at the "Moving Trans History Forward" conference in Victoria, British Columbia, at the University of Victoria—home to the largest transgender historical archives in the world—with the local actress and participant in the Trans Oral History Project, Erica Fields.

These stories that I've been privileged to witness are fascinating in their everydayness but also inspiring in their messages of triumph over adversity. One participant stated, "The Trans Oral History Project humanizes and connects the transgender narrative through space and time in an unprecedented compilation of personal and collective stories. Growing up, I felt isolated because I did not see my trans identity reflected in the broader cultural discourse around gender. I wish I would have had a resource like this when I was younger. I am honored to contribute my story to the collection so that future generations of trans folks know that we have always been here, and we aren't going away."

AARON DEVOR, PHD

The World's Largest Transgender Archives: The Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria

Dr. Aaron Devor, FSSSS, FSTLHE, holds the world's only research chair in transgender studies and is the founder and academic director of the world's largest transgender archives, both at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. Studying and teaching about transgender topics for more than thirty years, he is the author of numerous frequently cited scholarly articles and the author of the widely acclaimed books FTMs: Female-to-Male Transsexuals in Society (1997, 2016); the Lambda Literary Awards finalist The Transgender Archives: Foundations for the Future (2014); and Gender Blending: Confronting the Limits of Duality (1989). He has delivered more than twenty keynote and plenary addresses to audiences around the world. He is a national award-winning teacher, an elected member of the International Academy of Sex Research, and an elected fellow of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, and he has been a member of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health's (WPATH) Standards of Care committee since 1999. Dr. Devor is overseeing the standards' translations into world languages.

The Transgender Archives

The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.

GEORGE ORWELL

Study the past if you would define the future.

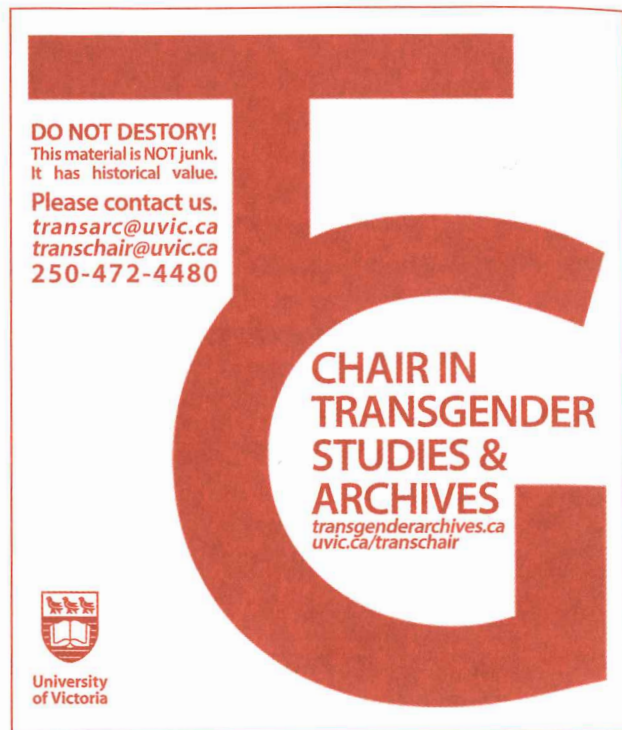
CONFUCIUS

What Are the Transgender Archives and Why Are They Important?

Many of the things that people do also leave behind some kind of record. In some cases, it is only what resides in the memories of people who were there when something happened. Many times there are documents that record some version of what happened. These records may exist in computer files; on paper; embedded in DVDs, CDs, vinyl, film, or magnetic tape; as works of visual art; as poetry or music. The documentation for what has happened may be a kind of formal “official” version, or it may represent alternative views and experiences. When historians want to understand how something happened, they turn to records from the past and try to reconstruct as true a version as possible by using as many different sources as they can. The job of archives is to collect, organize, safely store, and make accessible records from the past so that people can know how we got to where we are today, which, in turn, can help us build a better future.

The Transgender Archives, held at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada (figure 12.3), are the world’s largest collection of original materials documenting the work of transgender activists and researchers about trans, nonbinary, and Two-Spirit people. The collection is composed of thousands of books; hundreds of newsletter and magazine titles from eighteen countries on five continents; newspaper clippings files reaching back to the 1920s; hundreds of short books of trans fantasy fiction; activist organizational records; informational pamphlets; personal papers of trans, nonbinary, and Two-Spirit activists; historic court case records; audio recordings on magnetic tape, vinyl, and CDs; mass culture, specialty, bootleg, and conference videos on magnetic tape and DVDs; art and amateur photographs; erotica; original works of visual art; and ephemera including items such as T-shirts, matchbook covers, business cards, trophies, and plaques. The collection documents nearly 60 years of activism and traces more than 125 years of research. If you put all the books and bankers’ boxes on one long shelf, it would stretch the length of one and a half football fields (approximately 533 linear feet or 162 linear meters).

FIGURE 12.3 “Do Not Destroy! This material is NOT junk”: sticker, Transgender Archives, University of Victoria. The Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria is the largest trans archive in the world. This sticker is a reminder of the importance of ephemera in archival collections.



The University of Victoria is a large Canadian research-intensive, publicly funded university. It serves over 20,000 students, including a large component of graduate students, and has been repeatedly rated among the world's top 1 percent of universities by the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. It is also located in a quiet, midsized city on the southernmost tip of a large island (larger than the state of Israel) off the west coast of Canada that is best known as a bucolic tourist destination—not the kind of place that one would immediately think of as a magnet for trans research and activism. When most people first hear of the Transgender Archives, they assume that they are small and limited to Canadian content. When they understand its size and scope, the first thing that that they generally say is “How did it end up there?”

The Beginnings of the Transgender Archives

The start of the Transgender Archives was not planned. One day I was having lunch with Rikki Swin, the founder of the Rikki Swin Institute (RSI) of Chicago, which had closed in 2004, and I asked her what the status of the RSI was. She told me she was contemplating relocating it to Victoria, and I somewhat impetuously asked her if she might consider donating it to the University of Victoria.

To my great pleasure and astonishment, she agreed to consider the idea. I immediately contacted the university librarian to find out if UVic Libraries actually wanted the collection that I had already solicited. After learning more about the RSI and its archival collections, the university librarian was completely in support, and the entire institute ended up coming to the University of Victoria as a gift.

The next major donation came about as a result of the research work I had then been doing for over a decade on the life of the activist, philanthropist, and trans man Reed Erickson (1917–1992), founder and funder of the Erickson Educational Foundation (1964–1984). Over the years, I had become friends with his daughter. When she had decided that it was time to donate his papers to an archive, she chose the University of Victoria. Up until this point, none of us thought of ourselves as amassing a transgender archive. However, with the acquisition of the Reed Erickson papers, we realized that we then had two large and historically significant trans collections. We started to think that we were developing a transgender archive as we added a few small collections to what we already had. Near the end of 2011, we officially launched the Transgender Archives.

Word got out through our publicity and networking efforts. As it did, more small and medium-sized collections were donated to the Transgender Archives. Whenever I was in contact with people whom I knew from working with trans activists and researchers, I would ask them about their plans for their papers. Many of them held cherished collections going back decades. They understood that they and their colleagues had been doing activist and research work of historical importance that needed to be recorded and preserved. Many of the items in their collections often also reminded them of times when such things acted as lifelines for trans people during a period when the isolation and loneliness of being trans was profound. These were not collections that would be parted with lightly, both because of their personal significance and because of the moral obligations that the collectors felt to past and future generations of trans, nonbinary, and Two-Spirit people.

However, many of the people with whom I spoke were old enough that they were considering their mortality, or simply downsizing. We talked about ensuring that their collections did not end up in the trash because of inattention or neglect. At the same time, they knew that most trans community organizations were fragile and transitory. Many people holding collections were wary that community groups might not have the resources to safely preserve their documents over the long term. The University of Victoria offered them an ideal home for their collections: a publicly funded and publicly accessible institution with high-quality facilities, an exceptionally strong institutional commitment to trans studies, and the prospect of long-term stability. The Transgender Archives continue to grow steadily.

What the Transgender Archives Do for Trans People

First and foremost, the Transgender Archives preserve raw materials from which the history of trans activism and research may be written. Brave people have been working for over one hundred years to increase social understanding, acceptance, and integration for gender-variant people. All people today and in the future—trans, cis, nonbinary—need to know and appreciate the work done by these pioneers. The original records of their work need to be safely held and made available to the public at no cost to users. The Transgender Archives do this and more.

Every year, high school, college, and undergraduate university students from the region around the University of Victoria make use of the Transgender Archives as part of the courses that they take and the papers that they write. Every year, masters and doctoral students from around the world travel to the Transgender Archives to do research for research papers, theses, and dissertations on topics as diverse as science policy, political theory, pop music performance, pulp fiction, queer archives, and prison policy. Many professors and librarians also visit us. Some of the areas that they have been researching include Japanese trans publications, trans culture before the Internet, the history of trans rights for adults and children, and how to build a queer archive. Other people come to the Transgender Archives just because they want to know more about history, or because they want to learn how to do something similar in their location, or they come to borrow some things to show as part of an exhibition back home.

Every two years, the Transgender Archives and the Chair in Transgender Studies sponsor Moving Trans History Forward conferences. They span several days and attract hundreds of people, teens to octogenarians, from all across Canada and the United States, as well as from Latin America, Europe, and Asia. The conferences are designed to be of interest to a mix of students, academics, and community-based people, a place where people from the entire spectrum of trans life—transsexual, transgender, nonbinary, drag, cross-dresser, families, and cis allies—can interact in a positive and respectful environment. We also make many speeches and arts events open to the public for free. After the conferences, we post online as much of the proceedings as we can.

The Transgender Archives and the Chair in Transgender Studies also work to communicate with the interested public through a variety of means. We run a Facebook page with a stream of relevant news and information about modern and historical trans life. We also run a Twitter feed about our collections and about general trans events and activities. Almost every day we post new images from the Transgender Archives to our Instagram account. Our YouTube channel runs videos from the Moving Trans History Forward conferences and our other

events. You can also download for free our Lambda Award finalist book, *The Transgender Archives: Foundations for the Future*.

The Future

The Transgender Archives will continue to grow and serve. As our collections grow, we hope to fill some of the gaps in what we now hold. The materials in our archives have come to us as gifts from private collectors. Private collections reflect certain realities about their collectors. To amass a significant collection of historical materials, one must have enough money to purchase items, enough space to store them, and enough housing stability to preserve them. Furthermore, people collect what interests them and what is available to them. In the trans world, as in much of the rest of society, this means that what has been created in the first place, and what has subsequently been collected, largely reflects the experiences of middle-class white people assigned as males at birth. Thus, one of our projects is to acquire holdings that better reflect the diversity of trans, nonbinary, and Two-Spirit lives.

Although the Transgender Archives are completely free and open to the public, we recognize that few of the millions of people who might want to visit us will be able to do so. Therefore, we will continue the work already begun, both in partnership with the Digital Transgender Archive and on our own, to make larger portions of the Transgender Archives available online for free public access. Fund-raising is also ongoing to provide subsidies to assist visitors with travel expenses.

As the largest collection of transgender archival materials in the world, the Transgender Archives are a unique and invaluable rich resource from which to learn about the complexity of human gender variation. Our collections bear witness to the courage, vision, and perseverance of our elders and forebears. They had the wisdom to see that there was much important work to be done to make the world a more just place for all. Each, in their own ways, took on a piece of the job of making the world safer and more hospitable for people who do not easily fit within prevailing simplistic binary and hierarchical systems and structures of gender. They all took risks in doing this. Some suffered significantly for their boldness. All contributed to advancing gender freedoms. We owe them more than we can know.

The Transgender Archives stand as a testament to those brave souls who risked so much to forge a pathway for today's advances. By keeping their names alive, and by preserving the records of the work they have done, we can repay some of our debt to our pioneers. Thus, those who have had the foresight to do the work of collecting and preserving also do the work of advancing social justice. All people need to know their history; this is even more true for people who

have been so abject that, through much of our history, our very survival has depended on our ability to keep our gender variance hidden.

We welcome community members, scholars and independent researchers, activists and allies to come to the Transgender Archives to explore our diverse collections, and thereby to learn about who we are and how we got to where we are today. Open to the public, free of charge, and accessible to all, the Transgender Archives safeguard a broad spectrum of trans heritage so that the work that our pioneers have done will not be forgotten. We remember. We respect. We preserve. We persevere. We invite you to join us.

HARRISON APPLE

Finding Trans Context in Everyday Newspaper Archives

Harrison Apple is the founding codirector of the Pittsburgh Queer History Project (PQHP) and a PhD student of gender and women's studies at the University of Arizona. Their work on the PQHP documents the emergence of a queer after-hours nightclub community in Pittsburgh between the 1950s and 1990s and its influence on contemporary community politics. Since 2012 they have been collecting oral histories and ephemera that offer divergent and complementary accounts of gendered and sexual practices in the Steel City. Their doctoral work combines transgender studies and archival science to critically engage the criteria of "evidence" when presented with radically conflicting accounts of shared histories.

The Most Livable City: A Reading of Pittsburgh's 1976 Massage Parlor War

Renaissance II—a civic and corporate partnership campaign to restrict air and river pollution, construct public parks, and demolish decrepit buildings in Pittsburgh's downtown between 1944 and 1984—was simultaneously responsible for the regulation of gender and sexuality of the population of Pittsburgh. Specifically, the rise in violence over control of the massage parlor and pornography industry, located on downtown's Liberty Avenue, is a well-documented historical moment in which city officials and the press circumscribed an abject corner of its population and expelled it with full support of public opinion.

Pittsburgh's downtown, also known as the Golden Triangle, is located where the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers meet to form the Ohio. It is a historic juncture for river transportation, and for that reason it has been a consistently documented site of power struggle since at least the eighteenth century. The triangle was controlled by the French military in 1754, seized by the British in 1758 during the French and Indian War, later used as a fort for the Union Army during the Amer-