

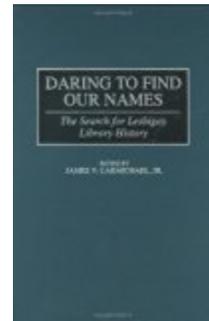
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

James V. Jr., Carmichael, ed. *Daring to Find Our Names: The Search for Lesbian and Gay Library History*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998. xiv + 251 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-29963-6.

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GLB Library History in the Making

In this aptly titled volume, Carmichael has put together diverse materials to begin a search and opens a door to much more work. The book should be of interest to a wide audience. While library history, and particularly gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) library history may seem a small closet in the world, it is an area of rich potential for scholars of women's history, gay and lesbian studies, and print culture. The contributors provide plenty for academics to chew on, but they also offer good reading for anyone interested in GLB community or libraries. If your library does not own it, request it.

Carmichael's book is important for further breaking the loud silence in library and information studies (LIS) literature surrounding gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) people. As Carmichael states in his introduction, Cal Gough and Ellen Greenblatt must be acknowledged for their 1990 book, *Gay and Lesbian Library Service*. However, their work focused on providing services to gays and lesbians, while *Daring to Find Our Names* focuses on GLB librarians and research. In 1997, Norman Kester edited a collection of personal essays, *Liberating Minds: The Stories and Professional Lives of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Librarians and Their Advocates*. Otherwise there have been only infrequent journal articles in the LIS literature, mostly focusing on library services and particularly evaluation of GLB materials for youth. Overall, however, there has been virtually no GLB history research in the field—despite the American Library Association (ALA) being the first professional organization in the United States officially to sanction a gay and lesbian

group within its ranks, despite the widespread stereotype of librarianship as a haven for gay men, and despite in library history an intriguing number of “single women” librarians sharing personal as well as professional lives.

Carmichael's excellent introduction starts the book by contextualizing it in terms of the library world. In suggesting why this area of library history has been neglected, he points out the tension in the librarianship between librarians as cultural conservators or social change agents. Further, within librarianship there has been angst over professional image and status, usually related to being a feminized profession. Also, the field is in a time of many calls to “reinvent” itself to meet the challenges of this Age of Information. Add these issues to the uneasy mix of sexuality and the workplace; pour over a field that spreads across many institutions—public libraries, academics libraries, special libraries, school media centers; top with most library history being done in professional schools where there is little support and few people for such work. Voila, invisibility.

But at last the search has begun. Carmichael has assembled contributors to consider methodological issues, document the history of the Gay and Lesbian Task Force (GLBTF) of ALA, provide an inside look at gay and lesbian archives, and share personal experience. He has created coherence among essays widely varying in topic and voice with his organization of the chapters.

In Part One, “Finding Our Names,” the first chapter presents a broad overview of research issues ranging

from the question of the meaning of gay/lesbian identity through history, to accessing a hidden population, to lack of financial and academic support. Caitlin Ryan and Judy Bradford rightly point out that the answer is not to despair, but to train. The second chapter, by Christine Williams, examines the gendering of librarianship and the paradox of heterosexism in a “gay” profession. The author extracts information about librarianship from her research exploring the position of men in female dominated professions. Williams illustrates the power of “hegemonic masculinity” and how it impacts the structure of organizations.

The other chapters in Part One illustrate issues by describing the process of three projects: Margaret Rose Gladney’s biographical work on Lillian Smith (author of *Strange Fruit*); Louise Robbins’ historical research on the McCarthy Era purge of employees from the Library of Congress; and Norman Kester’s editorship of *Liberating Minds*. By great chance Gladney discovered letters of Smith to her female lover and received fierce resistance from Smith’s family about sharing this aspect of Smith’s life. Robbins uncovered much evidence pointing toward homosexuality as the reason for dismissal of some Library of Congress employees, but ultimately had to accept that without additional sources of information, the full story is still in the closet. Both of these chapters display scrupulous documentation and make very intriguing reading-researcher-as-detective stories as well as historical essays. Kester’s chapter details the genesis of the project and talks about his methods for reaching potential contributors and finding a publisher. While he received plenty of encouragement to put together the project, it turned into quite a saga to find contributors, especially librarians of color.

Part Two, “Telling our Names,” documents GLBTF with essays by the first principle organizers, Israel Fishman, Barbara Gittings, and Janet Cooper, photographs from the early years by Kay Tobin Lahusen, and a twenty-five year chronology by Cal Gough. It’s wonderful to have this history collected and in book form. Gittings was a driving force in GLTF for many years, and while her history of the first sixteen years is a reprint, it has been only sporadically available in pamphlet form until now. Gough put together his chronology for the program of the anniversary celebration in 1995, but it too has not been widely available. Fishman’s essay as the actual founder and Cooper’s provocative essay pointing to the inconsistency in ALA (its high minded official stance on intellectual freedom on one hand and its ambivalence about concrete action on social issues on the other) com-

bine with Gittings’ essay to give a more thorough picture of the development of GLBTF. Together the chapters in this section make a good sourcebook for someone to undertake a longer history of an organization that is an interesting piece not only of library history but of gay and lesbian activism and the creation of political identity.

GLBTF was founded in 1970 as the Task Force for Gay Liberation, several years before homosexuality ceased to be designated a mental illness by the American Psychological Association. The Task Force combined tactics such as the Hug-a-Homosexual booth at the 1971 ALA conference exhibit hall with the wide distribution of bibliographies of gay and lesbian books and the establishment of their book award to increase the visibility of gays and lesbians in society as well as within the profession. Throughout its history GBLTF has arguably been a force to “normalize” the inclusion of GLB materials in libraries and by its very presence has demonstrated that “we are everywhere.” As most GLB organizations, GLBTF has had tempestuous moments, internally as well as externally. Ironically, the librarians involved have not been the best record keepers; deposits at the ALA archive in the library at the University of Illinois-Champaign/Urbana have been inconsistent at best. Part Two of DTFON provides an invaluable start to getting the whole story told.

Part Three, “Saving Our Names,” provides a good look at four very different gay and lesbian archives. Each is a bit of history unto itself, telling the stories of the Human Sexuality Collection at Cornell (Brenda Marston), the Lesbian Herstory Archives (Polly Thistlewaite), the Western Gay Archives (Jim Kepner) which merged in 1994 with the ONE, Inc. Library to become the ONE/International Gay and Lesbian Archives, and the Lesbian and Gay Archive of New Zealand (Phil Parkinson and Chris Parkin). Each examines issues of archival collecting, storage, security, and maybe most importantly, politics. What gets collected? Who decides? Who has access? What are the pros and cons of a community based archive versus an institutional one? All are hard questions, and the authors share viewpoints that are both passionate and thought-provoking.

While there is always more to be collected and backlogs to be inventoried, amazing work has been done by professional archivists and legions of volunteers to make sure future generations have access to GLB history. No graduate student of history should ever be told again that “there are no sources” for doing lesbian history, as Marston was fifteen years ago. GLB community mem-

bers can know they are far from alone. The Lesbian and Gay Archives Roundtable (LAGAR) of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) has been working on a directory of archives collecting gay and lesbian materials. LAGAR can be contacted through SAA's web site: www.archivists.org/. Literally tons of materials are waiting to be used.

Part Four, "Owning Our Names," consists of three personal essays by recent gay graduates of the Department of Library and Information Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Donald Forbes, Richard Huffine and John Barnett were asked by Carmichael to share their reflections on what librarianship means to a gay professional. In sharing their experiences, the three provide moving testimony of both the difficulties and heartfelt motivation they have to be librarians who truly are defenders of intellectual freedom. While it would have been nice to have some gender parity in the voices,

these men provide poignant tales that remind us lives are at stake.

Daring to Find Our Names brings together an incredibly varied, and in sum, rich collection of essays. On first picking up the volume, I found the movement between the "teacherly," the personal, and the traditional academic among and even within chapters jarring. However, as I read on I felt a sense of living history. I laud Carmichael's vision and initiative in undertaking this work. It has been sorely needed. I hope Carmichael himself plans to undertake more of the research this book so clearly invites. Together with his contributors, he has offered us a fine beginning.

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