



# Trans Folk Fight Back!

Moments of Trans/Queer Resistance

By Skip Teauxmelou & Alyx Trouble



Folks rest on the Anisri Erotic Carnival and Ball at the Manhattan Center, Hoboken.



People march during the Anisri and March 7th parade in honor of the Trans Veterans' Service Organizations (T.V.S.O.) at the Christopher Street Liberation Day (C.S.L.D.) in New York City. Photographer: Laurel Reed. Reprinted by permission from National Archive Archives of the University of California, San Diego. © 2014 University of California



# Introduction

Many think the Stonewall Riots of June '69 were the spark that ignited the gay and trans liberation movements in the US. It was **the moment** that queer/trans folks finally fought back. However, trans and queer folk had been resisting oppression in the decades before Stonewall. This history has often been forgotten due to both the lack of written records and the heterosexist, cissexist\*, upper-class, European- American centered way of writing history.

\*Cissexist: a system of oppression that privileges cisgender (non-transgender) and cissexual (non-transsexual) people.

The history we cover is very East and West Coast centric (as has been the focus of much queer and trans history writing). The stories of many more events, from around the whole country, are yet to be discovered. They reside in old diaries, letters, and scrapbooks stored in attics, archived papers, or in people's memories, just waiting to be discovered and shared.

Diligent queerstorians are working to bring these stories into the light.

We draw on their findings, and the archive at the Transgender Foundation of America (TFA) in Houston, Texas to present a very brief history of trans and queer resistance to the state regulation of our bodies and desires.

The events that we look at include the 1959 Cooper's Donut riot in Los Angeles, the 1965 Dewey's lunch counter sit-in and protest in Philadelphia, and the 1966 Compton's Cafeteria riot in San Francisco. We also highlight the trans and gender non-conforming veterans of the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City.

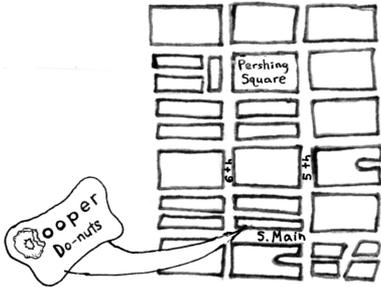
In this zine we try to keep **"trans"** an inclusive term for people whose gender identity, expression or orientation differs from the sex assigned to them at birth, and/or for people who do not fit in with how our society expects "girls" and "boys" to behave. Even though some people we highlight may not have identified as trans, especially since this is a recently developed term, we include them within the scope of trans history because of their transgression of gender norms and their inspiring fierce determination to confront harassment and brutality.



While this zine was produced specifically for the 2011 Houston Pride History Tent, to accompany an exhibit of items from the TFA archive, we hope that it may be useful in other contexts-to spark an interest in the history of trans and queer resistance.

# Cooper's

Cooper's Donuts, 215 South Main Street Los Angeles, CA, May 1959



As early as the 1920s Pershing Square was a meeting place for cruising, but on nearby Main Street, a stretch of bars, theaters and hotels acted as a more visible "playground." Sandwiched between two popular gay bars, Cooper's Donuts was an all-night hang out for an ethnically mixed crowd of drag queens,

male hustlers, and those that enjoyed their company.



Since it was easy to harass the queens who hung out at Cooper's, the place was a frequent target for the LAPD. John Rechy (a Chicano from El Paso) was at Cooper's that night in May of 1959 when some cops came in and demanded to see I.D. for those seated at the counter. Pointing to Rechy, and some other customers, they said, "You, you, and you--Come with us," and took them outside and began putting them into the squad car.



As the cops packed the back of the car, one of the men being arrested objected, shouting that the car was illegally crowded. While both cops were on the same side of the car, trying to force him in, the others being arrested scattered out the other side of the car!

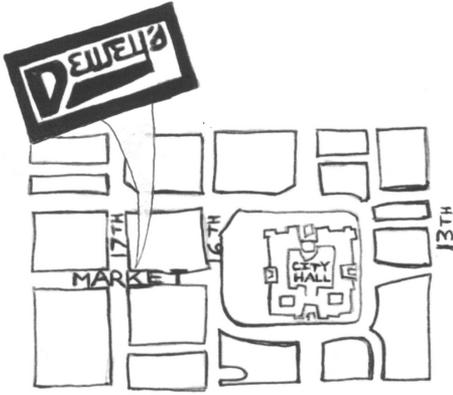
Everyone poured out of the shop and, suddenly, the police faced a barrage of coffee cups, spoons, trash, and shoes. The cops dove into their car and called for backup. More squad cars, and paddy wagons, converged on the scene. In the ensuing chaos many people who had been arrested, including Rechy, escaped into the night.



The TFA has a coffee mug from Cooper's Do-Nuts. Clearly this wasn't one of the mugs thrown at the cops, but it gives us a physical connection to the event that we would not otherwise have.

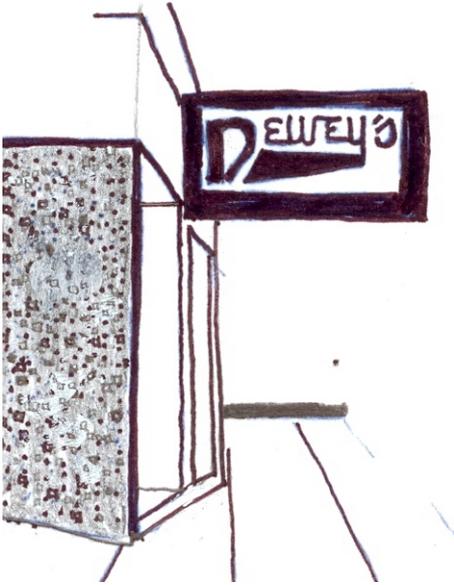
# Dewey's

Dewey's 17th and Market, Philadelphia, PA, April/May 1965



Like Cooper's, Dewey's was a late-night hangout located near the nexus of the queer/trans community in Philadelphia, the "Locust strip". In fact, some referred to it as "Fag Dewey's." After the bars closed it drew in a crowd of black and white lesbians, gays, drag queens, and

sex workers. In April of 1965, the management of Dewey's began to refuse service to people wearing "**nonconformist clothing.**" They claimed that queer/trans customers drove away business.



It was on April 25th that people began to protest this treatment. Over 150 people were denied service that day, but three teenagers refused to be ejected in what may be one of the **first acts of civil disobedience against anti-trans discrimination** in the US. The teenagers, and a gay activist who was advising them of their legal rights, were arrested for disorderly conduct. In the following week a picket line was formed and, for five days, protesters handed out thousands of pieces of literature condemning the actions of Dewey's employees.

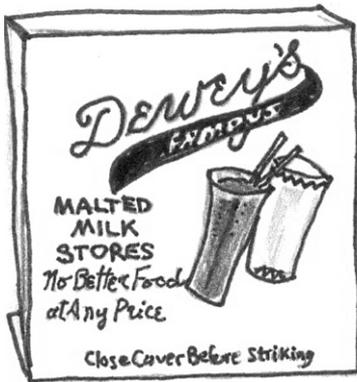
Following the week of picketing, three activists staged another sit-in on May 2nd. The second sit-in was successful. Although the police were again summoned to the scene, no arrests were made and Dewey's management agreed to an "immediate cessation of all indiscriminate denials of service."



The Janus Society, which covered these events in their publication, DRUM magazine, released this statement concerning the protests at Dewey's:

*"All too often there is a tendency to be concerned with the rights of homosexuals as long as they somehow appear to be heterosexual, whatever that is. The masculine woman and the feminine man are looked down upon...but the Janus Society is concerned with the worth of the individual and the manner in which she or he comports himself. What is offensive today we have seen become the style of tomorrow, and even if what is offensive today remains offensive to some persons tomorrow, there is no reason to penalize non-conformist behavior unless their is direct anti-social behavior connected with it."*

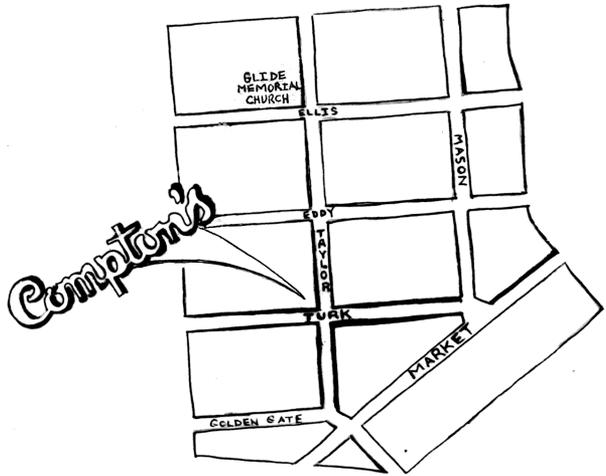
A wonderfully illustrated matchbook from Dewey's is part of the TFA collection. Like Compton's Cafeteria, there were multiple Dewey's in Philadelphia. The matchbook is not from the Dewey's at which protests occurred.



# Compton's Cafeteria

01 Taylor Street (now the corner of Taylor and Turk), San Francisco, CA, August 1966

The Tenderloin neighborhood of San Francisco has a long history as a red-light and vice district stretching back to the California Gold Rush of 1849. Over the decades it has been known for its restaurants, hotels, theaters, speakeasies and brothels. Like vice districts in other cities, corrupt police officers in the Tenderloin often profited from the illicit economy of drugs, gambling and prostitution.



Following WWII, elite urban planners and developers tore down surrounding neighborhoods where mostly black and working class people lived. This turned the Tenderloin into the last pocket of affordable housing in the central city. Incoming residents pushed out some of the areas most vulnerable residents, trans women.

Trans women were pushed into the Tenderloin because the extreme discrimination they faced left them with few choices other than the cheap hotel rooms and sex work that was available there. Trans women were also targeted by the police, who would subject them to humiliating treatment including forcefully shaving their heads, sexual harassment and assault. In fact, trans women arrested in other parts of town would be released in the Tenderloin, stripping many of their freedom of mobility.

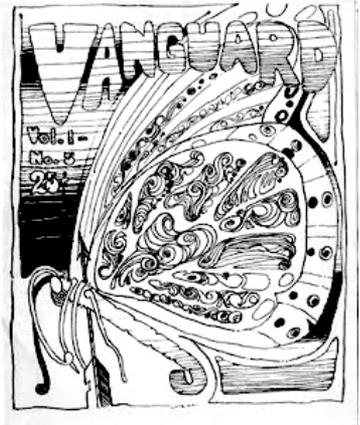
The Tenderloin also housed many gay men and hustlers. Some of San Francisco's first gay bars and bathhouses were located in the neighborhood. Before Castro gained the title, the Tenderloin was the major gayborhood of San Francisco.

## Compton's

located near bathhouses, gay bars, drag clubs, and the hotels where many queens lived. The late night crowd was, "drag queens, hustlers, slummers, cruisers, runaway teens, and down-and-out neighborhood regulars."

### **Vanguard**

Arising out of the anti-poverty work, Vanguard was formed in the summer of 1966, and began meeting at Compton's. Members were mostly young gay hustlers and transgender people, who lived in the Tenderloin. Tensions began to rise when the management at Compton's started charging a service charge just for entering the restaurant, hired security guards to harass the street kids, and called the cops with greater frequency. In **July 1966**, Vanguard organized its first major political action, a picket line in front of Compton's along with ministers from Glide Memorial Church and homophile organizations. Their discontent centered on the fact that the "legitimate" businesses in the area depended on the money generated by the sex trade, and yet they were treated as outcasts.



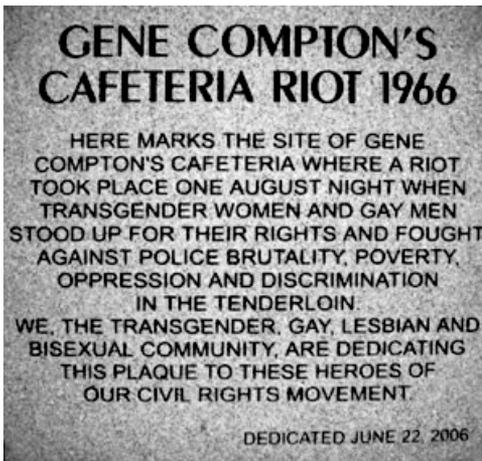
"We protest the endless profit adults are making off youth in the central city," one flier read. "We demand justice and immediate corrections of the fact that most of the money made in the area is made by the exploitation of youth by so called normal adults who make a fast buck off situations everyone calls degenerate, perverted, and sick."



## ***The Riot***

One weekend in **August 1966** the management called in the police to remove a loud group of queens who “seemed to be spending a lot of time without spending a lot of money.” When a police officer grabbed one of them and tried to remove her by force, she threw her coffee in his face. People decided they weren’t going to take it anymore. They began throwing plates, trays, cups, and silverware. Some even flipped over tables and shattered the

windows. Accounts also mention rioters destroying a police car and burning a newspaper stand to the ground. As gay liberation activist Reverend Raymond Broshers, of Glide Memorial Church recalled, “General havoc was raised in the Tenderloin.”

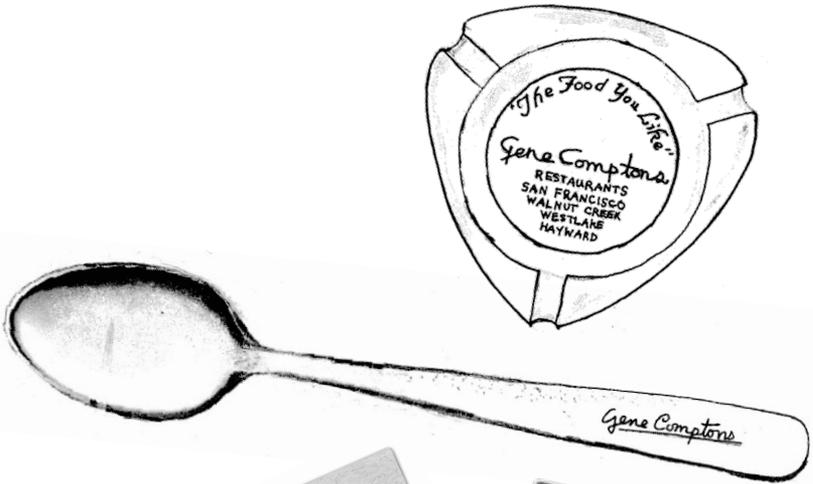


## ***Aftermath***

Unlike Cooper’s and Dewey’s, the riot at Compton’s resulted in institutional change. Following the riot, trans community members met with and educated police sergeant Elliot Blackstone, the police community-relations officer to the homophile community. Blackstone would be instrumental in changing the police treatment of transgender people. He was partly responsible for getting laws against ‘cross-dressing’ changed as well as getting ID cards that allowed trans people

to find better employment. Trans activists became more organized and formed networks along with social service agencies that began to improve the lives of trans people in San Francisco.

The TFA archive has two ashtrays from Compton's Cafeteria, one with a listing of all Compton's locations in San Francisco and one from the Westlake location. Also in the collection are a Compton's matchbook, a Compton's spoon and luncheon checks from 1942.



# Stonewall

51–53 Christopher Street, New York City, June 1969

Greenwich Village has been a queer neighborhood since the end of WWI when many discharged gay and lesbian service members settled in the area. The queer underground flourished during Prohibition and even more gays and lesbians settled in the area following WWII. Greenwich is also known for being the home of Beat bohemian culture. Many writers called the Village home such as gay poet Allen Ginsberg and Audre Lorde, a Caribbean-American lesbian author and activist. According to Susan Stryker, Greenwich Village drew in “drag queens, hustlers, gender nonconformists of many varieties, gay men, a smattering of lesbians, and counter cultural types who simply ‘dug the scene.’”



## ***The Stonewall Inn***

The Stonewall Inn was a small, seedy yet popular and gay bar located on Christopher St. near Sheridan Square, a cruising area. Patrons were racially diverse but usually only men. Few lesbians went to Stonewall. Bouncers would also limit the number of queens let into the bar.

Like most gay bars in the area it was run by the Mafia. Serving alcohol to homosexuals was illegal and police raids were a frequent and expected occurrence. Often times the bar would be notified ahead of time and the police would be paid off. Laws against ‘cross-dressing’ were also used to harass queer and trans patrons of bars. During

raids, it was often the queens and butches who were targeted and arrested.

## ***The Riots***

In the early morning hours of Saturday June 28, 1969 events would go down differently. When police began arresting patrons and employees of the bar, a crowd began to form. Instead of running, those who had avoided arrest waited outside. At first some people threw coins and taunted the cops about taking their



“payola.” However, the atmosphere soon changed into one of militant resistance. What acted as a spark for this change is not clear. Some accounts suggest it was when one of the cops clubbed a butch lesbian who refused to get in the paddy wagon. Others believe that queens, mostly African-American and Puerto Rican, became more and more angry as police were arresting their “sisters.” Regardless of what tipped the crowd, people began hurling objects at the police and soon more and more people from the neighborhood joined in.

Police retreated into the bar and called for backup but rioting lasted until dawn. For several nights afterwards people gathered and protested.

## **Aftermath**

Following the riots, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) formed and spread quickly, buoyed by the student activist networks. The GLF however soon split up into several factions. Gays and lesbians who were more interested in reforming laws rather than revolution created the Gay Activists Alliance. Many lesbians felt the GLF was too male dominated and split off to form the Radicalesbians. Queens and other trans people, many of whom were poor people of color, also felt marginalized by the GLF and GAA and formed their own groups including the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries as well as the Queens Liberation Front.



### **Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (S.T.A.R.)**

Founded in 1970 by Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, STAR, was the first transgender activist group in the United States, certainly the first to focus on the needs of street queens. Other GLBT organizations, including those that Rivera helped to found, often refused to help forward the work of STAR. Consequently, Rivera and Johnson would continually return to sex trade to pay for their living expenses, the ongoing operation of the organization, and the STAR safe house, a place for homeless trans/queer youth. Before her death in 2002, Sylvia briefly renewed STAR

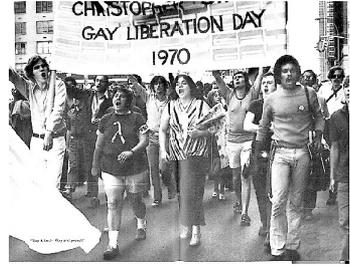
(this time as Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries), initiating street demonstrations and other political activity in order to advance the fight for the transgender civil rights bill in New York City and New York State.

For more on the history of S.T.A.R. go to:

[http://www.outhistory.org/wiki/Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries](http://www.outhistory.org/wiki/Street_Transvestite_Action_Revolutionaries)

## **Commemorating Stonewall**

A year after the riots, activists in San Francisco organized the Christopher Street Liberation Day march to commemorate the event. LGBT pride events, often held in the summer, are a legacy of this march.



## **Trans Veterans of Stonewall**

### **Sylvia Rivera, 1951-2002**

An orphaned New Yorker of Puerto Rican and Venezuelan descent, Sylvia lived on and off the streets from age 11. Poverty and discrimination pushed her into the sex trade. A veteran of the 1969 Stonewall uprising, Sylvia was a tireless advocate for all those who have been marginalized as the "gay rights" movement has mainstreamed. She was a founding member of both the New York Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance, and helped found Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries with Marsha P. Johnson for homeless street queens. She was also involved with Puerto Rican and black youth activism with the Young Lords and the Black Panthers. In her honor: MCC New York's queer youth shelter is called Sylvia's Place. In 2005, the corner of Christopher and Hudson Streets was renamed Rivera Way. And her namesake organization, the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, is dedicated "to guarantee that all people are free to self-determine gender identity and expression, regardless of income or race, and without facing harassment, discrimination or violence".



If you want to read more about Sylvia the "references" section of the Wikipedia article on her includes a number of good links.

## **Marsha P. Johnson, 1945-1992**

Marsha P. Johnson was an African-American transgender activist and a popular figure in New York City's gay scene from the 1960s to the 1990s. Johnson participated in clashes with the police amid the Stonewall Riots. Once, appearing in a court the judge asked Marsha, "What does the 'P' stand for?", Johnson gave her customary response (with accompanying snap), "Pay it No Mind." The judge laughed and let her go. This phrase became her trademark. She was a co-founder, along with Sylvia Rivera, of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (S.T.A.R.) In July 1992, Johnson's body was found floating in the Hudson River off the West Village Piers shortly after the 1992 Pride March.



Police ruled the death a suicide despite reports that she was seen being harassed the day of her death. Police refused any further investigation into her possible murder.

To hear some other Stonewall veterans talk about Marsha, go to:

<http://www.back2stonewall.com/2010/06/lgbt-history-remembering-marsha-p.html>

## **Stormé Delaverié, 1920-Present**

Stormé was born in New Orleans, LA, to a white father and an African-American mother in 1920. S/he worked in the '40s as jazz singer Stormy Dale. During the 1950's and 60's s/he toured as master of ceremonies, and sole male impersonator, of the legendary Jewel Box Revue. Friday, June 27, 1969. Stormé had just returned to New York City from touring with the JBR. The cops were parading patrons out of the front door of The Stonewall at about two o' clock in the morning. As Stormé once told it, "A cop said to me: 'Move faggot', thinking that I was a Gay guy. I said, 'I will not! And, don't you touch me.'" With that, the cop shoved me and I instinctively punched him right in the face. He bled! He was then on the ground -- not me!" King Stormé is now 90 years old, but is scheduled to make a special appearance at the Stonewall Veterans Association's Annual Conference & Stonewall Vets Reunion on Saturday, June 25, 2011! To read more about Stormé, go to the web page of the Stonewall Veterans Association at:



<http://www.stonewallvets.org/StormeDeLarverie.htm>

# Sources

- Transgender Foundation of America Archives, Houston, TX
- GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco, CA
- *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972*, by Marc Stein
- *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians*, by Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons
- *Transgender History*, by Susan Stryker
- *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria*, directed by Victor Silverman and Susan Stryker
- <http://www.back2stonewall.com>
- <http://www.bilerico.com>
- <http://zagria.blogspot.com>
- <http://www.stonewallvets.org/>
- <http://srlp.org/about>
- <http://www.queermusicheritage.us>
- <http://www.outhistory.org/>

## Further Reading

- *Becoming Visible: A Reader in Gay and Lesbian History for High School and College Students*, edited by Kevin Jennings
- *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*, by Joanne Meyerowitz
- *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*, by David Valentine
- *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture and Difference*, by Scott Bravmann
- *Rebels Rubyfruit and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*, by James Sears is the only published work that covers the queer south.
- *That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, edited by Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore
- *Transgender History*, by Susan Stryker
- *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul*, by Leslie Feinberg

This zine would not have been possible without the groundbreaking research of historian **Susan Stryker**. Dr. Susan Stryker is an internationally recognized Emmy Award-winning filmmaker and independent scholar whose work has helped shape the field of transgender studies. She earned a Ph.D. in United States History from the University of California at Berkeley in 1992, that same year she co-founded Transgender Nation, a militantly queer, direct-action transsexual advocacy group. Between 1999-2003 she served as Executive Director of the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco. She now spends her time going back and forth between her home in San Francisco and her job as Director of the Institute for LGBT Studies at the University of Arizona in Tucson.



## Houston LGBTQ Historical Resources

### Houston ARCH (Houston Area Rainbow Collective History)

An affiliation of the queer archives in Houston, interested staff members from Rice University and the University of Houston, as well as other interested individuals. The function of the group is to address the fragmentary and scattered condition of the remembrance of the queer experience in the Houston area. In addition to seeking grant funding for the established archives, Houston ARCH is laying the ground work for an ambitious digital archive that will guide community members through the process of uploading their personal memorabilia from home, be it old photos, letters, journals or pictures of keepsakes they do not wish to give up. There are also plans for an equally ambitious oral history project. Once it is fully established, a main concern will be keeping this digital archive accessible and sustainable. Volunteers with experience in information technology are eagerly sought. <http://houstonarch.pbworks.com>

## The Charles Botts Memorial Archives and Library

Housed within Resurrection Metropolitan Community Church (2025 W 11th St Houston, TX 77008-6320) the Botts Collection has origins that reach back into the 1970's. They have a lot of things like posters, buttons, trophies, fliers, and scrapbooks, more than 10,000 books, and LGBT periodicals from across the country. The Organizational and Personal Papers Collections (which include many photographs) include the personal papers of local activists, such as Gary Van Ooteghem, who went before the Harris County Commissioners' Court on August 1, 1975 to speak out about gay rights and come out publicly about his own homosexuality. An act cost him his job as the County Comptroller and led to a series of lawsuits that lasted through a U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in 1981. A web page for the Botts collection is under construction, but has not yet been launched. Messages for the curator, Larry Criscione, may be left with the church office at 713-861-9149.



## GCAM (Gulf Coast Archives and Museum of GLBT History, Inc.)

Created as a 501c3 in 1999 to collect, preserve and provide access to historical items from the GLBT community in the gulf coast area of Texas. Their holdings consist of a wide range of artifacts, manuscripts, personal papers, original art work, video and audio recordings, periodicals, and books, as well as an

excellent collection of clothing-including historic leather vests and drag stage outfits. GCAM displays many pieces of art and artifacts on the more than 4,000 feet of wall space at the GLBT Cultural Center on the first floor of the Montrose Counseling Center Building at 401 Branard, Houston, Texas 77006. There is also a display case containing GCAM artifacts at EJ's on Ralph Street in Houston. A large portion of GCAM's collection is temporarily housed in climate controlled storage units. GCAM recently secured the bar tops from both the inside and outside bars from the old biker bar Mary's! The bar tops have been moved to a safe location for the preservation work to begin. It is estimated that it will take 100+ hours of work to restore them back to as nearly 'new' as possible. Anyone wishing to contribute to that effort can either go to their paypal account [found on the webpage [www.gcam.org](http://www.gcam.org) ] or mailing a check/money order to **GCAM** at PO Box 130192, Houston, TX 77219. GCAM also has a Facebook page. Like it!

## Transgender Foundation of America Archives

Since the opening of the TG Center in 2008 the TFA has been building a collection of items documenting the transgender experience. The initial collection consisted mainly of items purchased through book dealers and auctions. In addition to newspapers, periodicals, and books, there are many museum quality artifacts in the form of statuary, daguerreotypes, photographs, movie posters, and artworks from around the world. This eclectic, wide-ranging group of items forms a contextual backdrop for the organizational and personal papers the Archive is beginning to acquire. The archive has grown to a sufficient size to display historical content throughout the entire Center. A collection of reference books and thesis papers covering gender roles, sexism, transgender history, gender variant issues, and autobiographies of transgendered individuals may be used on site Monday- Friday, between the hours of 1-5 PM at the TG Center, located at 604 Pacific St. <http://www.tgctr.org/tg-library/>



## Transgender Foundation of America

Houston, Texas-based non-profit organization whose mission is to advancing the quality of life for transgender people. Every program, meeting, educational effort and service is created by the transgender community for members of the transgender community. The TFA provides homeless services and removes barriers to mental health support through free group therapy, counseling and vetted referrals. Free meeting space

for trans groups is supplied and regular social events strengthen ties within the GLBT community. In addition, the TFA engages in advocacy and educational outreach that continually fuels the fires for positive change. The TFA's Transgender (TG) Center (located at 604 Pacific St.) holds the TFA's Transgender archives and library. <http://www.tgctr.org>

