

1985 ANNUAL CURATOR'S REPORT

I'd hoped to present a fuller, more systematized Annual Report at the Annual Meeting, but couldn't find the Daily Logs of visitors and phone calls until a few days ago -- they were buried behind Olaf's desk when a volunteer cleared both front desks some months ago -- and since then, there have been too many interruptions to find all the information which should be included here. With the Board's permission, I'll present a temporary report now, and complete the official report shortly.

= = = = =

Resarchers continued coming in with frequency, seeking all sorts of information. Those who were seeking obscure material not been covered by previous writers, and wanted it all put in their hands in five minutes flat sometimes found the Archives disappointing or disorganized. But year-long, six or seven graduate and undergraduate students, community activists and media people, came in each week for more than superficial study, and most found what they needed.

Visitors as usual came from all over the US and abroad, several from Australia (steadily our chief overseas source of visitors), from Japan, Germany, Israel, France, Canada and Latin America. We averaged more than 12 visitors a week from outside Southern California, and several from outside the L.A. metropolitan area. A number of them made repeated visits.

Media coverage improved considerably in 1985, with articles about the Archives appearing in the L A Times, the L A Herald, USA Today, interviews on several radio and TV stations, and many local, national and overseas gay and lesbian papers. These stories dealt with the Archives generally, and with the Gay Pride Parades, Boy Love, our AIDS History Project, the Men's Art Show, Gay and Lesbian History, the F.O.I.A. case, discrimination, etc. Press Releases sent out by David and Olaf prompted many of these, but we need more work on this. Each such story brings us immeasurable gains.

Early in the year we withdrew from active participation in the Freedom of Information Act suit brought against the FBI by Professor Dan Siminosky.

The Curator in 1985 spoke to Humanist groups in West Hollywood and Pomona, to a Gay community Awards ceremony in Santa Barbara, San Diego's Gay Democratic Club, the Desert Business Association in Palm Springs, to Gay People in Science locally, a regional Gay Students conference held at Cal State Northridge, and several talks in Salt Lake City at the University of Utah gay pride week. He appeared on two panels on the bath closing issue, one during the Black & White Men Together International Conference here. Other Board or staff members filled speaking engagements, but I don't have a record of those. He was also a judge late in June in Los Angeles' Gay Erotic Film Festival -- a far more enjoyable experience than expected.

Library growth was the smallest of any year, partly because we gave several batches of books away (to Connexus, GLCSC, the Long Beach Center, etc) and sold off some duplicates. Our growth was considerable though in audio and videotapes, posters, periodicals and other special collections. Our total book collection at years' end still was a bit short of 22,000.

Staff changes were constant, as short-term arrangements were made through different agencies for some paid workers. At times during 1985 we would have four or five people working here fulltime, and others in frequently, then a few weeks later we'd be back to one person at a time staffing the office. Briefly we had three women here fulltime, Nikki, Melissa and Lydia, Nikki left without explanation, Melissa completed her paid time and has visited a few times since. We'd expected Lydia to stay for two years, but she left for another job. Alejandro Hernandez, a Board member at the time, was in for half time for awhile this summer. Others worked out their time as probationers or as free volunteers. This often has long-term disadvantages, as such workers are more inclined to start new projects, which are left unfinished, than to work on less interesting day-to-day tasks. For example, in 1985, six different people worked on preparing shelflists. None of them was willing to start with what had been done already, and none completed the job in the limited section each worked in. The Archives has been a work site since 1978 for persons hired by the Center, but in December, 1985, arrangements were made for the Center to advance partial pay for persons to be work the Archives. The arrangements were not clarified, and we weren't in a position to handle payroll deductions. This remains an unsolved problem, and to both persons, the Center paid less than was agreed, and paid it very late. David Grossman volunteered shortly before I moved back into the Archives, and his work in organizing our AIDS files and contacting AIDS groups nationwide has been invaluable. Olaf came in in June I think, wanting a place to stay for a few days, and has been doing a fine job in several areas since, including managing the office while I was mostly elsewhere, and systematizing and enlarging our collection or artwork and posters.

Material additions included two more file cabinets, a typewriter from Dennis Keir, a new American XT computer which Gary Booher got with the help of an anonymous donor, additional shelves I built, chart shelves built by Olaf on the top of the main row of file cabinets (with lumber a young woman got contributed at cost) case by the front desk donated and transported by a woman friend from San Francisco, and many more piles of papers, filling odd corners of the Archives and two 8x12 garages next door to Circus Disco.

Archives public involvement included participation (with a handsome new banner prepared by Bunny) on successive June weekends in gay parades in San Diego, Long Beach, Los Angeles and San Francisco and staffing booths in the last three cities as well as at the Sunset Junction Fair, an abortive West Hollywood anniversary fair and Pioneer Days. An unexpected problem arose with the great mass of unfiled papers from Morris Kight as he began to send reporters over to look for materials which were said to show the guilt of Valerie Terrigno. At first we gave reporters access only to what was filed already (a great amount) but not to the scores of boxes of unfiled materials -- until Morris threatened to sue us for withholding evidence. Only one team of reporters showed a desire to spend more than a few minutes on the unfiled papers, and what they found, with no guidance from us, was quite different from what was expected.

1985 was our weakest year for Publications: Gay Goals, a pamphlet written by the curator, the first issue of which is nearly sold out; Gary Booher's synopsis of our 1984 Annual Report, and his trimmed-down issue of the IGLA Bulletin.

Member Arnold Schwab had given us funds three years ago for a computer (we chose a Kaypro II, which everyone told us was the best buy available at the time) and a photocopier. Both got heavy use, vastly improving our work, but last Spring, the Kaypro developed distressing habits, which repairmen seemed unable to fix. Large blocks of work done by the curator, and by student-workers Sunita Jain and Mark Frank, were wiped out when the Kaypro stopped with increasing frequency. As it got hopeless, Philip Quetschke loaned us his Kaypro for awhile. Jim had begun work on his book when that had to be returned, and after a few weeks with no word-processor and only one serviceable typewriter in the place, Gary Booher made arrangements to purchase a new IBM-clone, which broke down in the first week but has run beautifully ever since.

Olaf sent out announcements during the summer of our Videotape project, and got several promising responses, but follow-up is needed on these. Whitman-Brooks, a Los Angeles-based gay and lesbian educational group, has promised to help support this project. Olaf, Philip Quetschke, Chuck Spero, the curator and others recorded several new audio-visual interviews, not the least of which were with Empress Nicole of San Diego and the Dowager Empress Jose of San Francisco. We are anxious to upgrade our equipment to improve the technical quality of these interviews so they can become available for distribution.

In June, after the curator had again been without income for awhile, Board President Walter Williams offered to raise funds from friends of his to support the curator for several months while Jim wrote the rough draft of a personalized history of the gay movement, contracted to be published under joint authorship, with Walter to be further listed as editor. Jim retired (but was never secloistered) from July through November to a comfortable apartment on Los Feliz, and spent most of his time writing, (with some relaxation time at his old cactus-raising hobby) completing over 1,000 pages of rough draft material covering all years up through 1985, but not yet completing anything resembling a full account of the movement up to that date. Disagreements arose over how the material should be organized, what was to be included, how long the stipend was to continue (the contract included contradictory terms), etc. The checking account was not set up properly to pay Jim and still permit the donors to take tax deductions so the Board decided that the money Jim had been paid must be charged against funds the Archives owed Jim, so that he in fact received no income for the period of writing time. This, Jim felt, invalidated the contract. Writing continued, however, almost every day, and the Curator is sincerely grateful to Walter for getting it moving at long last. It became clear that this was not the sort of writing job which could be finished in less than two or three years. Meanwhile, the status of the donations need to be incorporated into the Archives' books. Future arrangements like this must be planned more carefully.

In August Jim moved to an apartment on Los Feliz, shared with longtime friend Steve Green, spending only a few hours a week at the Archives, with a consequence that a lot of day-to-day work piled up, undone. Olaf began to occupy downstairs space here about that time, but residential space became a problem after Jim moved back from the apartment. The quarters here are a bit tight for sharing, and by year's end, tempers were getting frayed.

One consequence of Jim's sabbatical and of the breakdown of the old

40
computer, and our inability until March, 1986 to get our mailing list set up workably on the new computer, was that communication broke down somewhat between the list at the office, and the list June and Bunny had set up for sending out renewal notices -- those renewals kept us solvent though the year -- so that a few members received renewal reminders in error. We apologize to them, and hope to get our systems compatible shortly.

Staff members have continued to put out feelers on finding a new, larger location, but no substantial progress has been made in this, though several dangling possibilities remain. Our rent, actually quite moderate for the size and quality of this space, is an onerous burden for us, always using up a major portion of our income. The present location has become far too crowded to keep things neat, a common problem with Archives.

Time hits us worse than space. Even if the curator were not working on a book, he could spend 16 hours every day just keeping up with current clipping and filing -- with no time for the backlog -- and at least eight hours daily rearranging things and putting back what Archives users take out of the files or off the shelves; another eight hours a day answering letters (and we need to initiate correspondence) a few hours for errands -- and someone has to clean the place -- but in fact most of the curator's time during the hours the Archives is open are taken up helping people who are using the Archives -- and while we are officially open only from 1-5, Tuesday-Saturday, those hours usually stretch to over 50 hours a week. Not to say it isn't fun, but each day the piles of unfinished work get higher.

1985 Curator

Jim Refine
curator