

Pulling Memories Out of the Closet

A How-To Guide to Archiving at Home

This step by step guide will explain how we work, what we are looking for, and how you can help find and sort your important contributions. No matter if you are an established group or an individual person, everyone has important materials the Invisible Histories Project (IHP) would like to preserve and make accessible to the community. If you have any questions, please reach out to IHP at contact@invisiblehistory.org.

How It Works

It Starts with the Donor *“So, you think you might be LGBTQ?”*

YOU are the Donor! This means you are an important part of our shared history and have a story to tell. This story consists of your memory but also the materials that you have created, bought, or collected that reflect your life as an LGBTQ person. IHP works with you to capture this story (your family, your coming out, your activities) and gather and organize the materials you have preserved.

What Kinds of Things Are We Looking For?

Starting the process of building a collection can seem difficult, so look at this list to get started. This list is not exhaustive, just a way to get things moving.

- Photos: physical pictures, electronic photos, negatives, various older formats can be digitized, photo albums
- Files: paper items related to your individual life or organizations, electronic files in various formats, estate papers, papers with personal information can be redacted or disposed of if necessary.
- Correspondence: letters, cards, emails
- Family memorabilia: pictures of entire family, items from trips, marriages, deaths
- Mementos: t-shirts, matchbooks, buttons, give-away items, bar membership cards, any items you have collected from LGBTQ events
- Books/Magazines/Newspapers/Newsletters: we are looking for local examples of each of these, regional examples from the South, or local authors. National papers or mass-produced books about LGBTQ life will be considered.
- Posters/Flyers/Handbills: examples of events, festivals, fundraisers, and other LGBTQ activities

- **Group Records:** meeting minutes, documents related to founding of group, photos of events and members, board membership lists, financial records, filings, t-shirts, giveaways, emails. If there are confidential documents, they can be kept out of circulation if necessary.
- **Textiles:** banners, t-shirts, drag dresses, Mardi Gras costumes, various types of clothing from events or marches, quilts, handmade items
- **Scrapbooks:** various types from different events or important life events
- **Recordings:** tapes, audio, visual, CDs, DVDs, reel to reel tapes, LPs/Vinyl, digital files, oral histories
- **Other Items:** IHP is flexible and open to various types of documents/items including art of various sizes, research materials, and other things. Check with IHP and we are happy to help make decisions. The golden rule? When in doubt, include it!

The Sort *“What’s with all this LGBTQ stuff?”*

- After an initial meeting, Invisible Histories will help you start the process of gathering your materials together in one spot. The sort goes at your own pace and can take as long as you like.
- Sorting means a few things:
 - We bring you boxes to put your materials in,
 - We decide together what you would rather keep and what you can part with for preservation,
 - We work to digitize images or documents that you would like to keep,
 - You sign paperwork to officially donate the materials and we ask you to fill out a short biography sheet to go along with your collection (this biography sheet is confidential and not available to the public),
 - And, finally, we work with you to locate a repository to house your materials.

The Donation *“Now what happens with all my LGBTQ stuff?”*

Once the boxes are loaded and you are happy with everything here is what happens:

- We will take your collection to one of our repositories most likely in your home state. These repositories have been vetted by IHP and are excited to be housing your materials for future generations to access.
- The repositories sign agreements with IHP to make sure that your materials are kept safe, available to the public, and will be cared for.
- IHP will work with you to explain your repository options and connect you with the best location for your materials.
- The repository receives your materials and begins the process of organizing them, creating an inventory, and getting them in permanent boxes for storage.

Starting Your Archiving at Home

Step 1: Self-Survey

- Make a list of groups you belonged to, activities you participated in, people you know, and a timeline of your LGBTQ life.
- Use the IHP biography sheet, old address books, online or print calendars, journals, or any other records: Start your list making!
- There are many options for format including Microsoft Office, Google Docs, or if you need IHP to create a space online for you we can do that too.

Step 2: Object Survey

- What have you kept? Are there papers, objects like buttons or shirts, old newspapers or other things you have held on to?
- Look for electronic files as well. Emails, writings, files in various formats can all be archived.
- If you have old floppy discs, VHS, 8mm film, beta, any of these formats can be digitized and saved. Old film negatives that are in good shape can also be digitized.
- Where should you look? attics, basements, file cabinets, drawers where you store pictures, drawers, boxes you have put in storage, old computer files, old email accounts, Myspace and other social media platforms have archives of you as well!

Step 3: Sorting Your Stuff

- Gather things together in broad categories such as:
 - By year
 - By organization
 - By activity/event
 - By time in your life (pre/post out of the closet)
 - By type of materials (all papers, all pictures)
- IHP and the archive repository will be in charge of more detailed sorting and organization, but by putting things together yourself it helps make the description of items much easier.
- Pulling together electronic files into one space:
 - Saving old emails into a desktop folder/Google drive
 - Perhaps printing items that you think are very useful to preserve
 - Looking through external hard drives
 - Working with organization secretaries/historians to gather documents
 - Looking through work computers

Step 4: Pictures and Scrapbooks

- Pictures of you at various times in your life are great to preserve. IHP would love to have pictures related to all aspects of your life. Include those family photos, group pictures, and your favorite memories of LGBTQ activities at Prides or in bars
- Locate scrapbooks but do not take them apart. Staff will go through these with donors to preserve them but its best to leave them as you created them.
- IHP has additional information for how to best preserve pictures and scrapbooks we are happy to send.

Step 5: The Donation

- Items and materials do not need to be completely organized. We love things in the order that you kept them in, and IHP will take care of “cleaning” things up.
- IHP will schedule a time to pick up your items. After staff have looked through things, they will work with you to take pictures of materials or scan documents for use in social media and other outreach.
- Finally, we will ask you to make lists of people you know, people who have influenced you, or people who you think are important parts of the community and your life so that IHP can reach out to them.

Last but Not Least!

Researchers & the Community *“Who would want to see all this old stuff?”*

Many LGBTQ people feel like they have nothing to give or no specific story to tell. Trust us when we say that you are not the first to think this. Each one of our stories is a piece of a larger history and your group or individual collections help us paint a more complete picture. Once your collection is processed and ready, IHP goes about getting it into the hands of students in classes around our states, on the radar of university and community-based historians, and into the conversations of other LGBTQ people and groups in our region.

Thank you for your help locating and preserving materials. Please feel free to reach out to Invisible Histories Project at contact@invisiblehistory.org if you have questions or when you are ready to get started. You are the most important part of the project and we are here to make sure your story and legacy are a part of our history for a very long time.

Contact IHP:

www.invisiblehistory.org

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