

Wanderground: Archiving Lesbian Legacies, Words, Creativity in Rhode Island

Research Summary – Installment #8

Blog Post – March 25, 2022

Wanderground – Bigger Visions for Space & Collections

Summarizing interests....

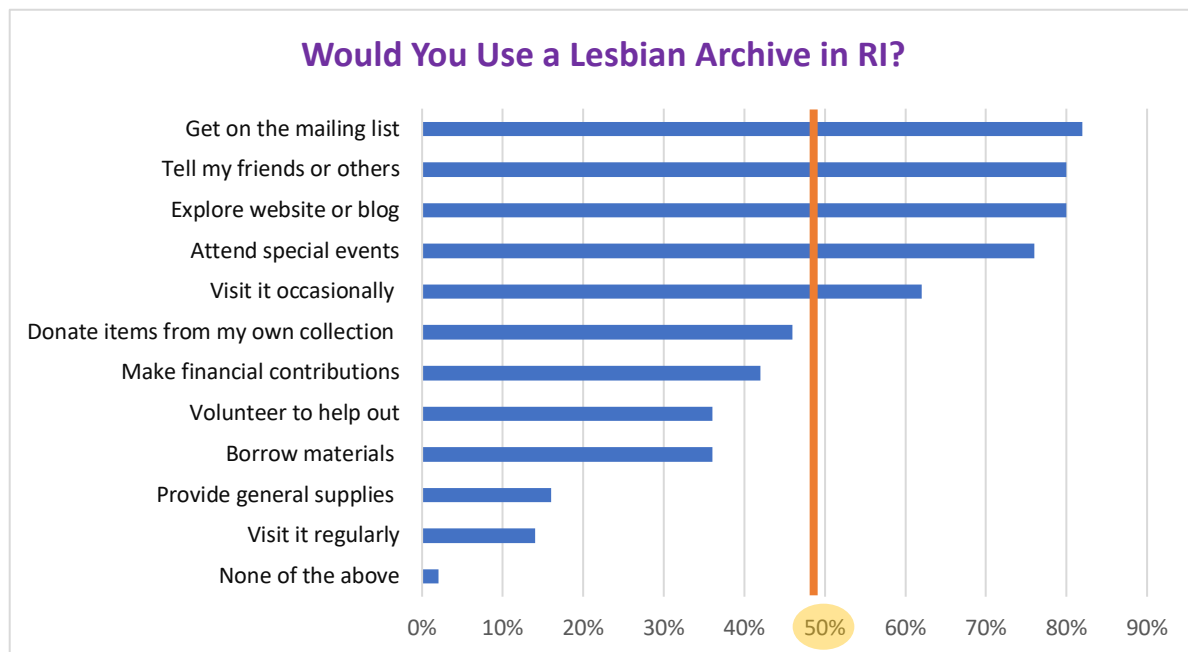
One of the key questions I had for this research project over the past year was this:

- Is there evidence that Lesbians in Rhode Island would be interested in visiting and using a Rhode Island based Lesbian archive-library?

After all, there’s no point in pursuing such a big undertaking if there seems to be no or limited interest. Throughout the blogs over the past weeks, one thread seems to suggest YES, RI Lesbians are indeed interested! To get some real numbers, though, I asked the question this way in the survey:

“If a community-based, accessible archive-library of Lesbian publications, cultural resources, artifacts, and memorabilia (especially those from Rhode Islanders) existed in RI, I would....”
(Check all that apply)

These percentages are based on 50 responses.



I’m not sure how much to take away from this since there were so few responses to the survey. However, I interviewed 15 individuals who also seemed very supportive of the prospect of such a place in Rhode Island.

Additionally, some responses throughout the survey did imply that Rhode Island is too small and perhaps not the best place for a Lesbian archive. I would add, in many ways, still too closeted as well! The limited number of specifically Lesbian focused publications and places in

Rhode Island since 1970 might bear this out *[Refer to the PowerPoint slide presentation from March 8](#). When asked if Lesbians have been actually collecting any memorabilia or books, both the number of lesbians collecting and the number of items they're holding onto seemed quite small. Many Lesbians had either already donated their collections or hadn't begun to think about what they might do with the small bit they have collected.

Do I have my doubts about the success of this venture? Yes. Am I discouraged?? Not really. I'm a bit stubborn and have a broader view. As one respondent stated, "I hope you build it – 'cause they will come." Many of the other comments I received about the project also give me hope.

- Fantastic, essential project. Thank you for pursuing this valuable event
- Good luck with this project----back in the old days (I am 54) you had go deep forensic to find any lesbian content!
- I think it is important that the archive present the objects and the factual narrative and leave it to the user to draw could conclusions. I have seen "histories" that give credit to the wrong people or the wrong organizations or that misrepresent pivotal turning points. I urge no editorializing.
- Long overdue!
- I think Wanderground is a very interesting project and really appreciate that you are doing this. I am very intrigued.
- So glad this project is happening, it is important that we tell our herstory, otherwise that knowledge and experiences are lost or worse, are told by others who minimize or negate what happened and how it changed our lives and others.

Older Lesbians who responded in interviews or surveys remember Lesbian community gatherings both with nostalgia and wonderment. They question, how could all the community spaces and events we built during the 70s, 80s, and 90s have been so easily lost. Younger Lesbians expressed anger and frustration. I repeat a passionate paraphrase from Week #5 blog:

We want a space for Lesbian visibility. We want access to Lesbian and feminist history and activism, specifically Lesbian. We want support for our feminism and our Lesbianism. We don't know our Lesbian history and we want to know more. Having a Lesbian archive and library could be a place where we — and everyone — can learn more about Lesbians. We want (need) Lesbian visibility — a place that is unapologetically Lesbian-visible. Lesbians have been in the front of many social change movements — we do a lot for others — we can get sh— done! But Lesbians also need space for themselves, where we can learn about ourselves and spend time with each other — not for any man or society. We want more Lesbian stories and space(s) where we can be in community.

So, where do I/we go from here? I've always had a "bigger than Rhode Island" vision for Wanderground. These are a few of my Bigger Vision musings.

- The closest dedicated **Lesbian** archive is located in NYC. There is no such similar *community-based* archive in New England. (All others are located in hard-to-access

universities.) Therefore, I vision this project to actually be promoted as a **New England based** community Lesbian archive.

- I will use my collection of publications and memorabilia as the foundational cornerstone to develop a New England regional Lesbian archive. My collection currently includes 3500+ books and other publications along with dozens of Lesbian artifacts and memorabilia collected over the years. I have a great “starter” collection and expect (hope) many other Lesbians in New England could add to this collection.

My broader vision has always included an active and vibrant community center with the archive “living” as the anchor in a makerspace of artistic and cultural events and activities.

I had a working vision already outlined (see vision board drawing) but in one interview, the Lesbian I was speaking with offered her imagination and detailed what a Wanderground space would necessarily consider and include. Without prompting, her vision was extraordinarily close to my own:

- Accessibility in many diverse ways
 - building structure with street access (no stairs, preferably but at least elevators)
 - location - neighborhood community (comfortable in diversity)
 - public transportation & parking & outside lighting
 - Languages (ASL & Spanish)
 - Screen readers & assistive technologies
- Daylight / Natural lighting – and plants
- Nooks and crannies where one could get lost
- Comfortable furniture – not “matchy, matchy” and easy to move around
- Work tables (also moveable)
- Art and writing and other supplies for artmaking
- Colorful (Posters and art all around) & “whimsy” (beach umbrellas and flamingoes ??)
- Collaborative spaces for discussions and meetings and place just to talk with others
- All kinds of activities – workshops, meetings, speakers, book groups, shared writing, etc.
- Performance space – theater, readings, music, dances, movement, etc.
- Community bulletin boards
- Places to listen to music (headphones, CD & record players, etc.)
- Copier and computers
- Sustainable & green
- Nice landscaping outside
- Beverages / snacks

And this is just the “short” list of possibilities.

With this information, I have developed a short **Vision Statement** – **NOTE: THIS IS A DRAFT...**

The cornerstone for Wanderground includes a broad collection of Lesbian/feminist publications and cultural artifacts. Wanderground also offers makerspace for Lesbians (and other communities) who are casual/amateur artists and creators of all types. Built on the energies and pride of Lesbians and supporters, this project reclaims Lesbian visibility, herstories, and creativities of Lesbians as Lesbians. Wanderground supports

feminist/womanist/social equity values and principles. Wanderground allows for the personal to be political where creative energies foster transformative power. Wanderground claims and insists that Lesbians will continue to envision and sustain life-affirming and equitable communities.

As grounding to wander and browse, this community-based archive and makerspace will affirm Lesbian identity and encourage learning from Lesbian legacies to build positive futures for all Lesbians yearning for connections and community.

If we build it, will you come??



Next Week

Be sure to come back next week for Installment #9: Wrap-Up – Next Steps?