

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

Research Summary – Installment #1

Blog Post – February 4, 2022

Research Participation

By the numbers, this is a snap shot summary of those who responded to the research activities.

Since April of 2021, with a grant from the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, Lesbrarian Mev Miller has been researching the viability of creating Wanderground – a Lesbian Archive/Library located in Rhode Island. The research primarily focused on this goal:

To assess the specific interest and enthusiasm of RI Lesbians to contribute to and use a locally-based archive of Lesbian publications and memorabilia. This research will guide the long-term development of Wanderground as collaborative and welcoming Lesbian-centered community-archive space welcoming to diverse communities.

Research Activities

An interest survey of 27 questions was developed and released on April 29, 2021 via Survey Monkey and made available in both English and Spanish. [Survey questions attached in pdf.] Invitations and Press Releases advertising the survey were sent to 132 individuals (predominately Lesbians) and 108 community organizations, universities, and publications to share with their networks across Rhode Island. Community organizations included LGBTQ social, political, health, and support venues in Rhode Island. In an effort to reach Lesbians who no longer live in Rhode Island, a notice was sent to *Lesbian Connections*, a national publication known to many. Between May through October, several reminders were sent to encourage participation. In August, a shorter version (21 questions) was released to attract more responses. Surveys closed Nov. 30.

Information about the survey and the research project were also shared through these local venues:

- Article in *Options* [<https://www.optionsri.org/post/survey-released-for-wanderground-lesbian-research-project>] and a regional notice in *Boston Spirit Magazine* (July/Aug).
- Newport Out Website Resources [<https://www.newportout.com/lgbtq-resources>]
- Down Time Podcast from the Cranston Public Library [<https://anchor.fm/down-time-cpl/episodes/63---The-Wanderground-Archive-e13jfi2>]
- [Boston Spirit Magazine – regional notes – July/August 2021](#)
- Flyers on tables at various June Pride events
- And presentations made through SAGE-RI and OLOC-RI

In-person interactions would have created better opportunities to reach more Lesbians and gain more survey results and/or detailed information. Active COVID restrictions, cancellation of Providence Pride activities in June, and additional precautions placed limitations on the ability to make those contacts. As a result, other creative measures were made available:

- two open discussion forums via Zoom
- one-on-one interviews (in-person socially distanced, phone, and via Zoom), and
- email correspondence

Numbers of Research Participants and some Demographics

Survey Responses

Total # of Responses: 57

- Long Survey in English 52
 - 44 complete / 6 partial
- Long Survey in Spanish 0
- Short Survey (English only) 5
 - 4 complete / 1 partial

The following data aggregated by 57 responses, though not everyone completed all questions.

I prefer to call myself:

- Lesbian 56% (32)
- Gay woman 11% (6)
- Dyke < 1% (1)
- Queer < 1% (3)
- None of the above < 1% (2)
- Other < 1% (5)
 - All of the above :)
 - _____ (her name!)
 - Lesbian, Dyke, Queer.... Not just one label
 - Mostly I don't really care. I use all but "gay woman" depending on the circumstances, audience, my feelings of the day.
 - Nonbinary, trans, grey ace, queer.

Age Group

- 80+ 0
- 60-79 60% (34)
- 35-59 26% (15)
- 20-34 < 1% (2)

I "Came Out"

- Prior to 1970 < 1% (4)
- Between 1970-1995 56% (32)
- After 1995 23% (13)

Race/Ethnicity

This was an open-ended question so that respondents could self-identify. These numbers reflect groupings for summary purposes.

- Caucasian / White 81% (46) **in RI, white population is 84%*
 - Anglo-American
 - European- Italian/German
 - Irish-American
 - Irish, Scandinavian
 - Italian
 - Italian-American
 - White, Irish Italian ethnic
 - white, secular Jew
 - White/American

- Black < 1% (1) **in RI, Black population is 9%*

- Jewish (*Ethnicity, not race*) < 1% (3)
 - American
 - Ashkenazi
 - Secular

Residence

- Currently live in RI 80% (45)
- Currently live in MA or CT < 1% (1)
- Lived in RI between 1970s-1990s 25% (14)

Agreed to be Added to the Mailing List 80% (45)

On-going Participation / Volunteering

Nearly 90 % of all respondents expressed interest in some form of on-going participation or volunteering with Wanderground, either as a user or as an active volunteer (39%) in some capacity.

Additional Input (*No demographics but responses included in data information*)

- Two open discussion forums via Zoom
 - 5 attendees from 15 pre-registrations
- One-on-one interviews and correspondence
 - 15 interviews with individuals
 - 8 email exchanges
 - 5 interviews (with 3 visits) to Lesbian, Feminist, or LGBTQ archive collections

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

Research Summary – Installment #2

Blog Post – February 11, 2022

I Found My People

What were our first encounters with Lesbian publications and how they made us feel.

As early as the 1960s, Lesbians began to more openly express their feelings and life experiences in poetry, stories, and essays. The Women in Print Movement (1970s-1990s) emerged as Lesbian-focused writers, publishers, and bookstores positively shaped and affirmed Lesbian thought and writing. Despite adversity, those vibrant spaces and voices encouraged women/Lesbians, to discover and affirm their own identities, claim their own strength and power, and gain support and a sense of well-being. They had a profound effect on Lesbians struggling to come out. As Lesbians came to an awareness of themselves as Lesbians, they found each other and formed alliances and communities.

Though I was very involved in the Women in Print Movement while living in other cities, I did not live in Rhode Island during that time. So, I was curious to learn more about what Lesbian words or publications contributed to specifically Lesbian visibility and activism in Rhode Island.

In this summary section, I will share the responses to these questions on the survey:

- Do you remember the first Lesbian book, magazine, or other publication you read?
- Where did you typically get your Lesbian reading materials?
- What do you remember about how that publication made you feel?

Overall, most respondents (80%) had clear memories of their early Lesbian cultural experiences. They were able to provide book titles and authors, some that were named frequently. Others remembered being influenced by periodicals or magazines. In some cases, these experiences involved music or events.

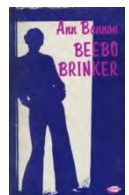
[Note: In this list, I've added comments and details as I know them. Many of the book titles are listed in the [Wanderground Collection](https://cloud.collectorz.com/wanderground/books), <https://cloud.collectorz.com/wanderground/books>]

The Resources

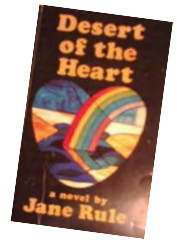
NOTE: All quotes are from survey respondents unless indicated.

Books (in alphabetical order):

- **Beebo Brinker Series**, Ann Bannon – “*Well of Loneliness* was, of course, dreadful to read. But reading *Beebo Brinker* was a lightning bolt of affirmation.”
[Researcher note: The series included five titles: *Odd Girl Out*, *I Am a Woman*, *Women in the Shadows*, *Journey to a Woman*, *Beebo Brinker*.]
- **The Case for the Feminist Revolution**, Shulamith Firestone
- **The Color Purple**, Alice Walker



- The **Coming Out Stories** by Julia Penelope Stanley (editor), Susan J. Wolfe (Editor), Adrienne Rich (Forward). 1980. "I came out in college in 1987-1988 and this book was passed around from friend to friend (cover ripped off for privacy). When my friend passed it to me she said, 'some stories you'll relate to and some you won't, but overall I think you'll find it really helpful.' It was my first incredible introduction to stories of women loving and having sexual relationships with women."
 - **The Original Coming Our Stores** (*This title was mentioned by a different respondent. Researcher Note: It is a reprint/updated version of the title above*)
- **Country Women** (*Researcher assuming Country Women: A Handbook for the New Farmer by Jeanne Tetrault and Sherry Thomas*)
- **Curious Wine**, Katherine V. Forrest
- **Desert of the Heart**, Jane Rule. "That book and the movie (*Desert Hearts*) made me want to write novels ...and also become screenplay writer for more lesbian entertainment in general."
- **Dykes to Watch Out For**, comics by Alison Bechdel
- **The Fingersmith**, Sarah Waters
- **In Every Port**, Karin Kallmaker
- **Lesbian Nation**, Jill Johnston
- **Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence**, edited by Rosemary Curb and Nancy Manahan
- **Lesbian Short stories**. About or by Lesbians
[NOTE: There is not a title by this name, but there are several Lesbian short story anthologies, including the Coming Out Stores mentioned above]
- **Nightwood**, Djuna Barnes -- "Which I still stand by as a masterpiece - I think I was as taken by the devastatingly beautiful prose and relationship to the *avant garde* as with the queerness - but of course it's all interrelated."
- **[Our Bodies, Ourselves**, Boston Women's Health Book Collective, perhaps?] "It was a section in a very fat book my mother had, about women's health and all kinds of aspects of women's lives. I knew its name very well but I cannot dredge it up now. I was 61, it had never occurred to me I might be a lesbian, although I was often aware that I was weird. I was being flirted with by the woman who was painting our house. I was interested and liked her a lot, but was wondering who are these lesbians anyway?"
- **Patience and Sarah**, Isabel Miller
- **Rubyfruit Jungle**, Rita Mae Brown was the most popular item with six (7) mentions
- **Say Jesus and Come to Me!**, Ann Shockley
- **Stone Butch Blues**, Leslie Feinberg (2 mentions)
- **We Two Must Love** and **We Two Won't Last**, Ann Aldrich. "I bought them at a local drug store in Warwick in the early 1960's."
- **Well of Loneliness**, Radclyffe Hall (2 mentions)
- "I read Radcliffe (Radclyffe) books or any of the lesbian relationship/love fiction books found at the public library."



Periodicals (in alphabetical order):

- **Curve Magazine**
- **Equal Times** (A Boston publication)
- **Gay Community News**
- **(The Ladder?)** - "I can't remember the title but it led me to the [Daughters of Bilitis](#). The chapter was in Boston and I traveled there to meet with its members."
- [Lesbian Connection](#) (5 mentions)
- **A Lesbian Position** (Local monthly publication in New Haven, CT)
- [Options Magazine](#) (5 mentions)
- **Sojourner** (A Boston publication). "I especially remember the Cambridge-based Sojourner -- was it published monthly? Biweekly? It was a touchstone for me."
- "I picked up a weekly LGB newspaper at Giovanni's Room bookstore in Philadelphia where I lived at the time"

Miscellaneous Memories and Comments by the Respondents

- Ferry Beach Unitarian Universalist summer camp catalog description of Sappho's Sisters camp for Lesbian women.
- Can't remember the title, but it depicted women like me! I connected with the characters.
- I don't remember in particular just a lot of lesbian feminist stuff
- Mystery/detective fiction; one of the female characters was the police detective.
 - A mystery that began a series of books to come.
 - Some lesbian erotica
- titles by Andrea Dworkin
- Women's music from [Ladyslipper](#). Used to buy cassette tapes from the catalog.
- I actually do not remember the first Lesbian book that I ever read but I do vividly recall reading in 1974 a story in **Aphra - The Feminist Literary Magazine** that had a profound impact. I have that and the next issue still. I believe I read Rubyfruit Jungle early on - of course, and spent time at a feminist book store in Cambridge and also at the Dorrwar Book Store on Thayer St. in Providence.
- It may have been **Sisterhood is Powerful**: (An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement by Robin Morgan). Around that time, I was also introduced to a few feminist journals and newspapers... I "met" lesbianism through feminism.
- That was along time ago, but I remember these awakenings (not all exclusively lesbian materials but they helped me identify myself as a lesbian): images in Playboy, Betty Dodson book about masturbation (with hand drawn illustrations of labia) posters around Cambridge MA and Iowa City IA for lesbian events. Whatever the monthly (?) or so newsletter in IC? Those were all positive. The Well of Loneliness was discouraging. [Researcher Note: **Liberating Masturbation: A Meditation on Self Love Dedicated to the Women**]
- Theater by **Sharon Bridgeforth**, Black Lavender experience at Brown University



Where did Lesbians get these materials?

In general, Lesbians found their reading materials in small and independent venues. As one woman commented:

- *I want to **specify independent bookstores** because regular bookstores in the 1980's and early 90's didn't have anything when I went searching.*

And another noted:

- *...back when Lesbian bookstores existed ☺*

Most lesbians seemed able to access Lesbian/women's/gay independent bookstores (77%) but a significant number (36%) did find materials in other bookstores such as a secondhand bookstore in Vermont. One woman mentioned finding something in the local drugstore.

- *...indie bookstores, locally run, large bookstores with tiny feminism and lgbtq sections, especially few books re: Lesbians*

Several comments indicated frustration at not being able to find reading materials about Lesbians.

- *Had little or no reading materials until I found **Lesbian Connection**.*
- *...wasn't much around to read*

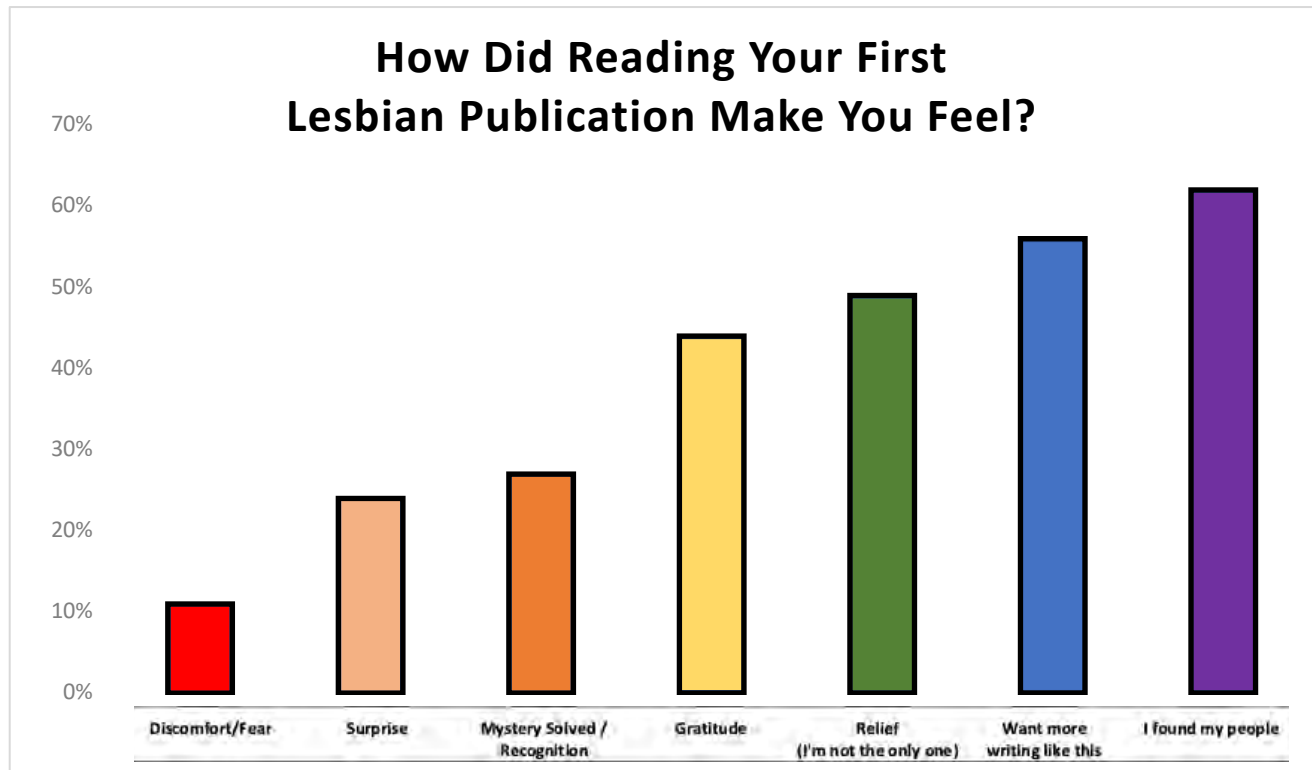
The "alternate" Lesbian Economy played a significant role as 21% mentioned borrowing from friends, a local Lesbian coffeehouse to LGBT community center/organization (13%), and university-based women's centers (Sarah Doyle Center at Brown in Providence and Northeastern University in Boston). Several Lesbians purchased their book directly from the publishers (13%).

Libraries seemed to have the least significant impact (only 9%).

- *I found the Well of Loneliness in a college library after surreptitiously searching the card catalog. It was under the subject heading, "homosexual." Most of what I found that day was utterly depressing.*

It seems that the observation of *surreptitiously* is the most revealing here as many Lesbians did not want to be seen and remained careful about any public exposure.

I Found My People!



The responses to the question “What do you remember about how that publication made you feel?” clearly indicate a range of emotions (see graph above). While few did experience discomfort or fear (11%), more women experienced surprise (24%). Closely associated with this, many Lesbians experienced recognition, a mystery solved about who they are and their emerging identity as a Lesbian (27%). In some situations, Lesbian writing not only opened recognition of one’s sexuality, but also created a larger understanding of women in society, sexism, and misogyny. Representative comments include:

- *Intrigued, but uneasy*
- *Exhilarating with a little bit of fear mixed in.*
- *I was curious. Still straight identified, but happy to learn about a segment of the population I didn't know existed, and that they were normal people, but oppressed. I had a strong Italian-Catholic background, so Lesbian or Gay had never been mentioned in my presence.*
- *Intrigued, but uneasy*
- *I distanced myself to some extent from fully embracing feminism on account of having been socialized to see women as second-class citizens, but I immediately recognized the issues. They were compelling and transformative - suddenly I understood why I had so often felt invisible and excluded.*
- *Works by **Andrea Dworkin** really opened my eyes deeper to feminist writings and misogyny in general*

In gratitude (44%) and relief/“I’m not the Only One” (49%), we can feel the collective sense of exhale and commonality. Examples of this include:

- *They're just women, like me!*
- *First time I read that there were other women sexually interested in other women also.*
- *Although...I resisted recognizing myself as a lesbian for several more years.*
- *It gave me a vocabulary for what I was feeling*

Once introduced to Lesbian writing – regardless of the type – many Lesbians experienced a hunger for more (56%) and some sense of connection or community (“I found my people” – 62%).

- *It was in Madison Wisconsin in the '70's, and was probably a local flyer. But then I went to a feminist bookstore, and the lesbian world became alive to me!*
- *Continually blowing my mind!*
- *Excitement. Thrilling. Looked forward to the mail delivery every issue.*

The next comments hint at the larger impact of Lesbian writing and culture.

- *I found a woman who was bisexual and exchanged email with her which was helpful. I found Women Outdoors which was such a great group of women to do outdoor things with. Not a lesbian group but everyone in the RI contingent seemed to be lesbian. I went to the last NEWMF (Northeast Women's Music Festival) with them which was an eye-opening experience.*
- *I had been digging around for months trying to find local lesbian community*

Next Week

Be sure to come back next week for Installment #3... **Creating Communities & Activisms**

Beyond publications, where else did we find other Lesbians? Where did we go to find ourselves and each other? How was Lesbian/feminist organizing impacted by Lesbian artistic expression?

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

Research Summary – Installment #3

Blog Post – February 18, 2022

Creating Communities & Activisms

Beyond publications, where else did we find other Lesbians? Where did we go to find ourselves and each other? How was Lesbian/feminist organizing impacted by Lesbian artistic expression?

“You feel your lesbian power standing in a group of sisters, united against the tide.”

During the 1970s through 2000 (and to a lesser extent since then), Lesbians found their way to themselves and each other in many ways beyond written words (Installment #2). Herstorically, these were years (especially through the 1980s) when it was definitely not acceptable to be Lesbian or safe to come out. Lesbians who responded to the survey offered numerous examples of the places and organizations where they could relax into their identities. For many, it was risky to be “out,” but this did not stop them from seeking community. As one Lesbian stated: “I could be in public with my partner comfortably and without fear.” Another shared this: “The more there is to see out in the public, the more we get to see each other in real life and make it normal for us.”

These are the many places mentioned in the responses.

Bookstores

In “Little Rhody,” it was easy to be informed. Bookstores provided not only reading materials but also places for community gatherings with bulletin boards, a variety of events, and space to meet or gather. Key among them were:

- Dorwar Leftist bookstore
- Vision and Voices (only for a few short years)



Bars / Restaurants

**not all were Lesbian – many also gay as well as lesbian*

- Cabana
- Mardi’s Lounge (CF/Pawtucket)
- Deville’s
- G-Spot
- Pulse
- Mirabar
- The Gallery
- The Homestead
- David’s in Newport
- Kings and Queens in Woonsocket – well-known Lesbian bartender, Kim Deacon
- Pot au Feu – (comfortable to be there)
- Rue de l’espoir



Music / Theater / Art

Music and theater provided not only entertainment but very often visibility and consciousness-raising for Lesbian lives and experience. Performers and actors sang and voiced positive encouragement, hope, political ideas, and support. As a performer or audience member, these opportunities offered connection. As one Lesbian answered: "Art and music are some of the great vehicles for recognition, unity, and organizing." Venues in Rhode Island included:

- RI Feminist Chorus
- RI Feminist Theater
- Posters & flyers created by RISD students
- The Goddess Show
- The HighHat
- Concerts produced here included Holly Near, Sweet Honey in the Rock, among others
- Voices of Women radio program from URI
- Hera Art Gallery

Organizations

During these earlier years, many organizations focused on women's/feminist organizing – though they were started, organized, and/or run by large numbers of Lesbians. With that, many did not specifically focus on Lesbians issues per se, but organized generally for women's rights, especially stopping sexual violence and harassment, rape, domestic violence, reproductive rights, and so on. Organizations that addressed gay rights included many Lesbians, but focused largely on the array of issues for LGBT peoples. For many of those years, activism and organization centered around AIDS activism. One comment made this evident: "I think you need to be clear on whether you're asking "lesbian feminist" or "lesbian" or "feminist."



One organization serving Lesbians was (and still is) RIWA – Rhode Island Women's Association. Initially, this group provided social activities for women generally, but Lesbians primarily, AND were careful not to be too open about this. When founded in the early 1980s, Lesbians were scared to lose their jobs/professions, housing, children, families, friends and so on, so great care was taken not to use the words Lesbian, gay, or any other language that would obviously "out" its members. An off-shoot of that organization was the ORIELs, a group of older Lesbians who dined out together regularly (every 6 weeks).

One or two respondents did mention the Lesbian Feminist Union, but its existence seems short-lived.

These are many of the organizations mentioned, many more than once!

- Feminist Resources Unlimited
- Women's Liberation Union
- RI Clothesline Project
- Take Back the Night Marches
- Rape Crisis Center

- NOW (National Organization for Women) - CR (consciousness-raising) groups
- Equity Action (through the Rhode Island Foundation)
- Homophile Center (1970s)
- RI Alliance for Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights (started 1983)
- SAGE-RI (Advocacy & Services for LGBTQ Elders)
- Pride committee in the early 90s. There were many talented Lesbians working on the graphics and posters.
- PFLAG
- RI affiliate of the ACLU
- Sarah Doyle Center at Brown University
- MERI (Marriage Equality RI)

Activities in RI

- Softball – both players & spectators / Team: Lightning Painting
- Women Outdoors (not only for Lesbians, but in RI was predominately Lesbians!)
- Gay Pride marches
- Dignity Catholic masses
- Gay Bingo
- Potlucks! “Lots of Lesbian potlucks in the 70s and 80s!”
- Events at Bell Street Chapel
- Gender-free Contra Dancing in church basement downtown near Providence Public Library
- Cable Car & Avon cinemas played indie films with Lesbian content
- Lavender Thumbs in South County (social group that started as a gardening group)
- In more recent years....Facebook and MeetUp groups

It was clear from many of the comments that these questions offered a walk down memory lane. Some answers were lengthy (paragraphs even!) and exuberant with lists of national names and places well beyond the borders of Rhode Island. National resources such as concerts, festivals, marches, musicians, authors, movies, sports teams, and bookstores from all over the U.S. were mentioned.

IMPACT

Many Lesbians responding to the survey did not live or come out in Rhode Island during the 1970s – 2000. So, the question about whether “*Lesbian artistic expressions had an impact on Lesbian/Feminist organizing in Rhode Island*” was not an easy question for everyone who answered it. Regardless of where one lived during those times, it’s clear the cultural expressions gave strength, meaning, joy, and confidence to those who found them.

- “How could the foundations of feminist thought (read lesbian) not have an impact? We were hungry for sisterhood, hungry for recognition and equality. We were angry. And the brilliant ideas of lesbian feminist thinkers, writers, polemicists gave us signposts for our journey.”

- “It's hard to tease out the threads (between feminist & Lesbian), but overall, art and music made specifically for the lesbian and feminist communities played an important part.”
- “I've been in Rhode Island for about 16 years but the music and literature definitely had an impact on lesbian and feminist community building and organizing where I was in Western Massachusetts through the 1980's and 1990's.”

However, it's also clear that since the early 2000s, many of these Lesbian places and spaces have all but disappeared, a phenomenon not unique to Rhode Island. The surveys and interviews expressed the value of those spaces and how much they are missed. “I've been here for 20 years and find it difficult to connect with the lesbian community.” Two lesbians in their early 20s expressed regret (and some jealous/anger) that Lesbian community, herstory, connections, activism are so hard to find. They long for that connection.

Finally, this comment: “OMG do I miss Lesbian specific place 😞”

Next Week

Be sure to come back next week for **Installment #4: Sisters Are Doing It for Themselves**
What did we create here in Rhode Island? Introducing RI authors, musicians, and some others....

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

Research Summary – Installment #4

Blog Post – February 25, 2022

Sisters Are Doing It for Themselves

What did we create here in Rhode Island? Introducing RI authors, musicians, and some others....

As early as the 1960s, Lesbians began to more openly express their feelings and life experiences in poetry, stories, and essays. The [Women in Print Movement](#) (1970s through the 1990s,) emerged as Lesbian-focused writers, publishers, and bookstores positively shaped and affirmed Lesbian thought and writing. Despite adversity, those vibrant spaces and voices encouraged Lesbians to discover and affirm their own identities, claim their own strength and power, and gain support and a sense of well-being. The publications had a profound effect on Lesbians struggling to come out. As Lesbians came to an awareness of themselves as Lesbians, they found each other and formed alliances and communities.

In addition to this this movement in writing, Feminist/Lesbian bookstores also carried a wide selection of other Lesbian-created materials: music, crafts, artwork, jewelry, cards, and so on. The broader Lesbian cultural scene also featured concerts and performances (music, dance, theater, spoken word), festivals, gallery exhibits, craft fairs, and street demonstrations.

I was not living in Rhode Island during those days, so I wanted to discover and know more about what Lesbians had been creating since 1970. Those who completed the survey had much to offer.

Periodicals

There has not been a specifically Lesbian publication in Rhode Island though many Lesbians have contributed to creating periodicals that did include content relevant to Lesbians. Chronologically, these publications include:

Feminist Yellow Pages: A Directory of Services for Women (1982 and 1988)

Produced by the Women’s Liberation Union of RI / Feminist Resources Unlimited. (Available in the [Jodi L. Glass Papers](#) archived in the John Hay Special Collections at Brown University And the [RI LGBTQ+ Community Archive](#) / Providence Public Library.)

Options (1982 – present)

Since 1982, *Options Magazine* has provided news, resources, and events for the Rhode Island area’s LGBTQ+ community. (Archive issues available at the [RI LGBTQ+ Community Archive](#) / Providence Public Library)

- **Ink, Inc.**, a Lesbian owned printing press, produced Options in its early years.

The Third Wave (1993-1997)

A voice for RI's Feminist Women, this monthly newspaper (10,000 distribution) was published by Feminist Resources Unlimited (FRU). (Available in the [Jodi L. Glass Papers](#) archived in the John Hay Special Collections as Brown University.)

GET Magazine (2011-2017)

GET RI Magazine claimed to be Rhode Island's premier GLBT, gay, lesbian, queer, indie, artist, and alternative lifestyles magazine with a monthly distribution

ZINE: Scream Queens Magazine (Issue 1, Vo. 1, 2016)

Features a discussion between Public Bath (Katrina Clark) and Jane Harms discussing their music and performing experiences. It includes a brief mention of performing at Deville's in Providence. (Available from the [Malana Krongleb Zine Collection](#) archived in the John Hay Special Collections as Brown University.)

Books

For titles with (**), more details about them can be found in the [Wanderground Book Collection](#).

Pre-2000

- Anne Fausto-Sterling
 - *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women & Men*, (1992). Academic.
 - *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality*, (2000). Academic.
- Barbara Zanotti, editor, *A Faith of One's Own: Explorations by Catholic Lesbians*, (1986). Non-Fiction Anthology. (**)
This anthology is not really from RI but one of the contributors, Mev Miller, founder of Wanderground who currently lives in RI, tells of her experience as a Catholic at Yale Divinity School in "She's a Witch, Burn Her."
- Dana R. Shugar, *Separatism and the Women's Community*, (1995). Non-Fiction. (**)
- Linda Handel, *Now That You're Out Of The Closet, What About The Rest Of The House?*, (1997). Non-Fiction.

Titles published since 2000 / Post-Women-in-Print "Heyday"

- A.K. Summers, *Pregnant Butch: Nine Long Months Spent in Drag*, (2014). Graphic Novel. (**)
- Christina Crosby, *A Body, Undone*, (2017). Memoir. (**)
- Dorothy Devine, *Patchwork: Fifty Years of Poetry*, (2019). Poetry. (**)

- Elda Dawber, *Wait Until I'm Dead! A Novel of Family Secrets*, (2014). Fiction. (**)
- Emily Danforth (**)
 - *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, (2012). Fiction.
 - *Plain Bad Heroines*, (2020). Fiction.
- Linda Skibski, *Forever, Joanne: A Story of Love, Loss, and Leaps of Faith*, (2021). Memoir. (**)
- Mari SanGiovanni (**)
 - *Greetings from Jamaica, Wish You Were Queer*, (2006). Fiction.
 - *Camptown Ladies*, (2011). Fiction.
- Mariellen Langworthy, *All the Way Home*, (2017). Fiction. (**)
 - *Soul Sister* (2017) is her other book but it doesn't have Lesbian content
- Mary Cappello
 - *Called Back: My Reply to Cancer, My Return to Life*, (2009 / Re-issued 2021). Memoir.
 - "Gone Fishing" in *Telling Moments: Autobiographical Lesbian Short Stories*, (2003). Memoir. (**)
 - *Night Bloom: An Italian-American Life*, (1998). Memoir.
 - And several other titles that are not specifically Lesbian content
- Mev Miller (**)
 - *At Home with Old Lesbians in Rhode Island: A Photo Album in Progress*, (2020). Photography.
 - *Our Stories, Ourselves: The EmBODYment of Women's Learning in Literacy*. (2011). Education Anthology.
 NOTE: This book is an edited volume in which Mev has a chapter that addresses Lesbian experience, "Four Directions to the Center of Embodiment: Vignette 4 – West: Water and Emotion – Making Sexuality and gender Relevant." The co-editor of this volume, Kathleen P. King, also a Lesbian, was born and raised in Rhode Island.
- Paula Vogel – Playwright
 Paula has written numbers of plays, though few of them have directly Lesbian content. As of now, they are not yet in the Wanderground collection. A longtime teacher, Vogel spent the bulk of her academic career – from 1984 to 2008 – at Brown University, where she served as Adele Kellenberg Seaver Professor in Creative Writing, oversaw its playwriting program, and helped found the Brown/Trinity Rep Consortium.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paula_Vogel

- Susan Joyce (author) & Thea Ernest (illustrator), *Billy the Rescue Dog*, (2021). Children's book. (**)

Musicians / Performers

Several musicians and performers were also mentioned by those who completed the survey. Those with ties to Rhode Island include:

- Becky Chace Band
- Clarice LaVerne Thompson, Composer and Conductor (Director of RPM Voices)
- Kim Trusty (Singer-Songwriter)
- Mary Ann Rossoni (Singer-Songwriter)
- Mary Day Band
- Poppy Champlin (Comedian)

Lesbian Cultural Workers in Rhode Island

Let us know who you think we should add to our list of Lesbians based in RI who make art!

Do you know of Lesbians in Rhode Island who create cultural expressions that affirm Lesbian life or portray Lesbian life experiences? Please let us know who they are so we may add their works to the Wanderground archives.

<https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/sv/fsWJJdl/LesbianCulturalWorkers>

During the Month of March

An exhibit of many of these materials and other Wanderground items will be on display...

[Cranston Public Library Central Branch](#) – Community Display

140 Sockanosset Cross Rd / Cranston, RI 02920

Next Week

Be sure to come back next week for Installment #5: Who Needs Archives (and why the name Wanderground)?

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

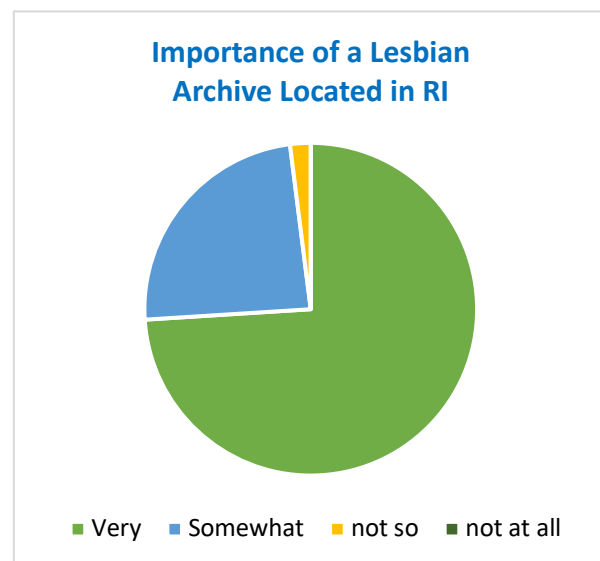
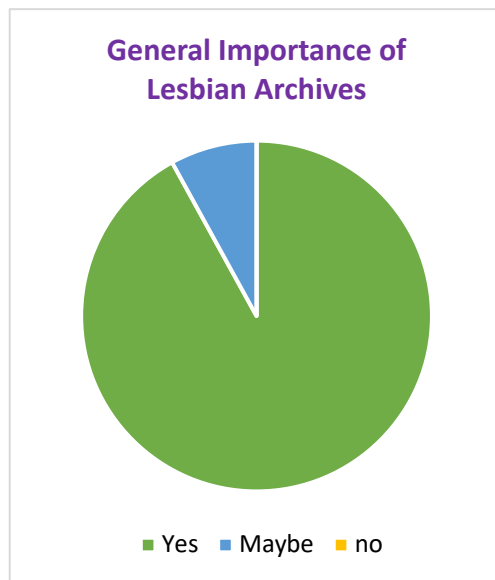
Research Summary – Installment #5

Blog Post – March 4, 2022

Who Needs Archives (and why the name “Wanderground”)?

Are Lesbians in Rhode Island enthusiastic about an archive in RI?

Let’s just start here...overall, those who responded to the Wanderground Research (by survey or interview) were generally quite enthusiastic about having access to a Lesbian archive based in Rhode Island. By the numbers, 92% agreed that the existence of Lesbian archives, in general, are absolutely important (only 8% thought maybe). Whether such an archive should exist in Rhode Island, one person thought extremely important while 74% were very interested and 24% were somewhat interested.



Written comments from the surveys included:

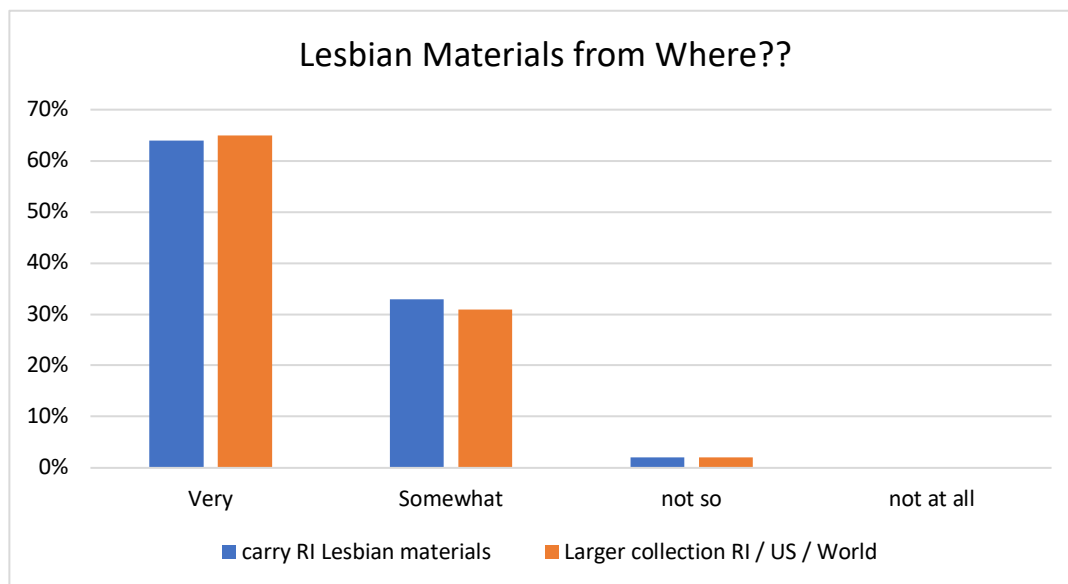
- Desperately needed. The lesbian feminist activists of the second wave of feminism are aging fast. We need to capture this herstory while we still can. And, unbelievably after all these years of work, it seems lesbians are just as invisible now as we were 40 years ago. It is still true that people do not see what they do not want to see.
- The lesbian visibility is so meager in south county. I would love to have even a gay center here. The University (URI) has one but does not seem to be community welcoming.
- It is important to protect the history of marginalized communities - so much is lost over time that could if preserved shape future progress.
- Would love to know of important lesbian contributions here.
- I would want it to be a specifically LESBIAN archive!

And there were some concerns, such as being sure the archive in Rhode Island didn't conflict with other projects in RI (covered in future Summary #7) and include a diversity of experiences and communities. One comment also expressed, "I do feel it may be a swimming-upstream endeavor."

When asked if Lesbians had ever visited Lesbian archives in other areas of the country, only 30% had done so, though a few mentioned checking them out on YouTube videos or websites. The most prevalent visits were to the Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) in NYC and the Lesbian Art Museum or the Mazer Archives in Los Angeles. Other mentions included the San Francisco Library, the LGBT Center in San Jose, CA, and the Women's Centre in Glasgow, Scotland. Those visits affected their views of how Lesbian archives can impact our communities:

- I watched [a] documentary about archives in NY. IMPRESSED by dedication of workers, impact on younger lesbians, AND I KNOW as a researcher the value of primary source documents for future researchers, and readers.
- I was impressed by the fact they actually accomplished the establishment of those archives (LHA) and especially impressed and grateful that they opened their doors to visitors so early ... when the collection was still in their home!

In terms of importance about whether an archive located in Rhode Island should primarily feature materials by Rhode Island Lesbians as compared to national and international materials, the percentages were relatively similar.



Again, comments were very positive in expressing a willingness to visit, share, personal items, and curiosity to know specifically more about Lesbians in Rhode Island.

- I would love to know of a place where I can go to read books, and learn and be welcomed.

- It would really be very good to have this material accessible for review and likely important for today's students.

And then there were the interesting contradictory comments:

- I believe that any archive should be 99.999999% Rhode Island focused. There's no need to regurgitate national stuff.
- I think focusing solely on RI might be too small in scope. Perhaps New England...

And my personal favorite comment was this:

- I think what's in a collection has to be connected to the passions and visions of the persons organizing & fun for them!

Well, that's very much what I'm doing!

Finally, in a conversation that I had with two college-bound Lesbians in their early twenties, the hunger for Lesbian herstory, resources, connections, and places was quite palpable. With a combination of anger (*why did all that community go away?*) and sadness (*we want mentors and support – there's nothing here for us*), they were clear about claiming Lesbian and feminist identities while still recognizing the fluidity and spectrums of sexuality. For them, it's less about labels ("stupid, but helpful") and more about coming to identity and self-acceptance.

This is a paraphrase from our very passionate conversation...

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.

Why the name Wanderground???

In a survey response, one individual commented: "Wanderground seems like an odd name for a collection related to the lesbian experience." For me, this comment identified another important reason to create Lesbian archives.

As I've been pondering for more than 20 years about what to do with my extensive collection of Lesbian publications and memorabilia, I've also played with what to name it. A variety of "obvious" ideas have come to mind: the Labrys Collections, Amazonian Chronicles, Sappho's Sisters Place or Sappho's Salon, The Well of Companionship...you get the idea.

But a few years ago, in conversation with a close friend, we started talking about how Sally Miller Gearhart's Lesbian novel, *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women*, had such a

profound impact on our sense of creating Lesbian communities. First published in 1978 by Persephone Press, Gearhart depicted a world where women came into their full being and power. Men live violently in the cities while women who have fled the violence created peace and security in the hills. As a futuristic Lesbian utopia fiction, *The Wanderground* featured a collection of short, interlocking narratives where women of many ages and diversities live in alone or together in supportive collaboration, communicate telepathically with each other, plants, and animals, and share stories of survival, remembrance, and self-discovery.

From that conversation, I decided to name this venture Wanderground. As grounding place to wander and browse, this community-based archive and resource will affirm Lesbian identity and encourage learning from Lesbian legacies to build positive futures, especially for younger Lesbians yearning for connection. *(More of the longer vision will be outlined in Summary #8 on March 25.)*

Next Week

Be sure to come back next week for **Installment #6: Do I Count?? How to Collect Your Life in Memorabilia**. There I will discuss more about what can we learn from other Lesbian archives around the country and how to save our own “stuff.”

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

Research Summary – Installment #6

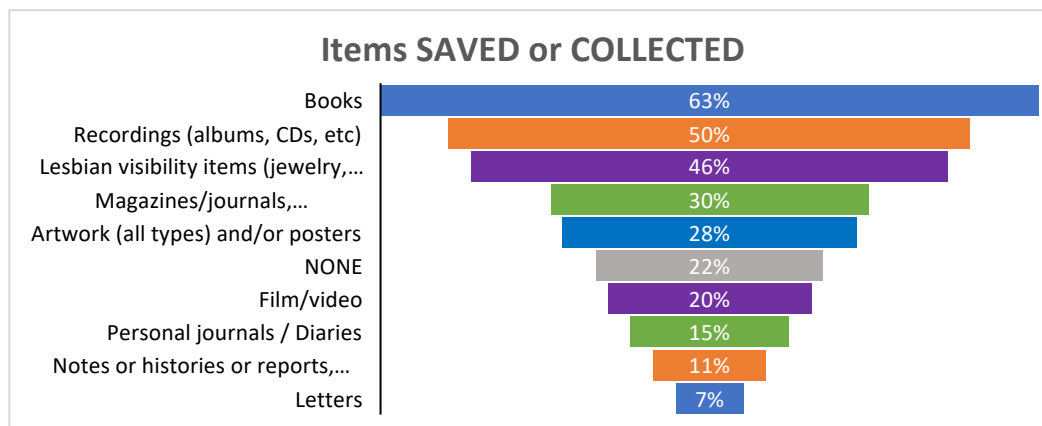
Blog Post – March 11, 2022

Do I Count? How to Collect Your Life in Memorabilia

What can we learn from other Lesbian archives around the country and how to save our own “stuff.”

One might say I’m a pack rat...others might call me too nostalgic. I come by this honestly, I suppose, having spent a full year cleaning out my parent’s house of generations of saved “important” stuff! Whatever the reason, I have in my possession boxes and file cabinets of my own memorabilia reaching back into my childhood. But when I look at what I’ve saved, most of it tells the story of my life as a Lesbian.

In the Wanderground research survey, respondents were asked what Lesbian publications or artifacts they may have save over the years. This chart gives an overview.



However, the comments led me to believe that anyone who saved something doesn’t have much. There were several responses of “might have...” and “maybe saved...” In addition to the materials listed above, a few mentioned photographs, articles written, or other odds and ends.

When asked if they have considered if or how they might preserve those treasures, nearly 75% of respondents hadn’t thought about it. Only 6% gave a definite yes and the rest are sort of looking around for what to do. A few mentioned passing along personal journals and such to family members. Other were skeptical of whether items they have are suitable to save because of how they’ve been stored over time.

Through several conversations, there seemed to be this kind of sentiment ... collecting Lesbian herstory is important but many Lesbians don’t feel individually important or significant enough to contribute their own personal journals, photos, memorabilia to an archive collection. In the words of our last governor, “Knock it off!”

Lesbian lives and experiences are all unique and diverse. Our life collections are invaluable to creating a wholistic picture of the diversity of Lesbian experiences. They may guide each of us and future generations of Lesbians towards understanding both unique and comparable journeys through various historical contexts. These are our stories and making or keeping them visible creates a clear statement:

Your life – your story is VALUABLE!

And here's the real truth of it: No one else can tell your full story. If you don't tell it, who will (or can)?

Q: What kinds of memorabilia will be of interest to a Lesbian archive (Wanderground or otherwise)**?

A: Just about anything relevant to your life as a Lesbian.

- **Personal or organizational documents:** journals, diaries, letters, travelogues, writings, scrapbooks, calendars/datebooks, notebooks, recipes, event flyers, newsletters, meeting notes, postcards/cards, etc.
- **Publications:** books, zines, periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, articles, etc.
- **Visual Items/art:** original creations, drawings/paintings, posters, photographs, bumper stickers, framed pictures, etc.
- **3-dimensional memorabilia:** jewelry, textiles (including clothing, t-shirts), pottery, sculptures, movement buttons or patches, games, awards, etc.
- **Media:** albums, CDs, cassettes, DVDs, home movies, VHS tapes, and perhaps USB flash drives, etc. (note: out of date electronics such as floppy discs, may not likely be accepted)

*** And before you send anything, always check that the individual archive you chose actually wants or has space for it!*

How you gather and organize your memorabilia is really up to you. However, here are some basic tips for preserving your materials:

- **Gather:** all kinds of memorabilia listed above, especially anything personal if it portrays or honors your life a Lesbian.
- **Categorize:** put items into boxes (Banker's boxes are good) and mark them – especially notify your friends or family – e.g., "KEEP THIS and donate to (xxx archive)."

You can stop here if you like, and archivists can figure out the rest. But if you'd like your story understood more clearly, then do some of the next steps.

- **Separate & Organize:** Go through the boxes and do further sorting...use hanging folders, or large envelopes, or portfolios – even baggies or other containers – to keep similar things together. How you do this is up to you:
 - By type: separate photos, letters, from event flyers, journals, writings, awards, etc.

- By years or sets of years... (high school, at a particular job, living in a certain location, etc.)
- By theme (items related to activities or hobbies, e.g., softball teams, protest marches, favorite picnics, ex-lovers, etc.).
- **LABEL:** In whatever way you decide to collect items, be sure everything (boxes, folders, containers) is clearly labeled, e.g., an envelope with letters from SuzyQ from 19__ - 20__.

And a word about photos: When possible, provide as much information as you can, such as who's in the photo (from left to right), event, geographical location, approximate date, and the name of the photographer. It's best to do this with a #2 pencil or fine point or archival pen on the back of the photo.



The Lesbian Herstory Archives offers some [useful tips for how to prepare your materials](#) for an archive. There are many more things to consider when you actually get ready to donate. [A Guide to Donating Your Personal or Family Papers to a Repository](#) provides a straightforward list of personal and legal information to consider. As Wanderground gets more developed, we will outline our own procedures and forms to provide safeguards and permissions.

What we can learn from other Lesbian Archives

Over the past year, I have visited websites and/or interviewed several Lesbian Archives*:

- [Lesbian Herstory Archives](#) (NYC)
 - I highly recommend the documentary on them: [The Archivettes](#)
- [June Mazer Lesbian Archives](#) (West Hollywood, CA)
- [Black Lesbian Archives](#) (GA)
- [Bay Area Lesbian Archives](#) (Oakland, CA)
- [Purple: Lesbian Legacies in Special Collections at Michigan State University](#) (E. Lansing, MI)

** I've also started to compile a list of Lesbian / feminist/ and or LGBTQ archives from around the country (and world).*

Their collections are rich and diverse. From the founders/curators of those collections, I learned a great deal of information about what to consider when setting up an archive. The obvious things are funding, space, and volunteers/staff. But I also discovered interesting insights on questions like:

- Where do you get archival materials? Where have they come from over the years? What do you take and not take – only Lesbian? Lesbian/feminist? Lesbian/gay? What are your parameters?

- How do you organize and catalog your collection? What specific library guides do you use or have you created your own? Do you use specific software?
- What types of archive boxes or other supplies do you need or use?
- What is your alphabetization order (first name or last name)?
- Do you have a lending library (all said no)? If not, why? What do you do with duplicates, especially books?
- Do you have enough space at your location? Where else do you store items?
- What types of forms have you developed? What forms, permissions, or “deeds” do you require?
- Who does your website? What other media do you use?
- Does your archive (when not in COVID lockdown) offer events or demonstrations?
- Who actually uses your archive? Are they used at all?
- Do you have paid staff? Only volunteers? What do they do?
- What collaborations do you have with other Lesbian Archives or organizations nationally or locally? How do they work?
- How do you deal with current electronic realities – such as digitizing, social media, changing computer software and back-ups, etc.?
- What do you do about climate control?

As you can see, there are many questions and concerns to be addressed. I was able to get a good deal of information related to these questions, and more.

But this was my biggest takeaway...

All of these Lesbian archives are based in community. Most everything in them can be seen and touched. **They are visible.** Deb Edel, co-founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives put it this way...

People (lesbians in particular) need to see and touch their herstory. In order to feel connected with the past, it's important that Lesbians can look and touch and discover riches or information they hadn't known about. Being able to browse allows for uncovering or witnessing pieces of lives or moments you didn't even know existed.

Of all the information I learned, this observation resonated with my own vision of making Wanderground a place for Lesbians. Any Lesbian (or those interested in Lesbians) can enter Wanderground to breathe-in, observe, investigate, and relate to the many Lesbians who have come before her. She can find herself as a crucial stitch in the fabrics of Lesbian communities.

Next Week

Be sure to come back next week for **Installment #7: Collaborations & Information Sharing.** In that blog, I will focus on local libraries and archives at Providence Public Library, Brown Univ., and others....

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

Research Summary – Installment #7

Blog Post – March 18, 2022

Collaborations & Information Sharing

Working together with other LGBTQ collections – in RI and beyond...

Wanderground (as a physical space) has been brewing in my imagination for nearly 10 years – and even longer if I include many iterations over decades. I have finally found time and mindful space to think strategically and work diligently to make Wanderground a reality.

In my experience, successful Lesbian ventures of any sort rely on vision and passion, creativity and courage, hard work, determination, flexibility, – and collaborations/cooperation. While pursuing this research project over the past year, several types of potential collaborations have emerged. For the success of Wanderground, it’s essential to understand how we can work with those collaborations as well as find our unique niche among them. In this installment, I will explore some possibilities for working alongside other local and national ventures.

Coincidentally, the receipt of this grant and my efforts for determining the viability of a Lesbian archive located in Rhode Island dovetailed with the emergence of the [RI LGBTQ Community Archive](#) hosted by the Providence Public Library (PPL). As I started asking about Lesbian interest in Wanderground, I received several comments such as... “just as long as it doesn’t compete with PPL.” In fact, I had already been in contact with Kate Wells and Jordin Goffin at the collection. We actually do work in support of each other and their collection has been useful as I’ve moved forward with gathering information about Lesbian community publications and efforts in Rhode Island. My research has informed them as well. Over time, I expect these bonds will strengthen.



For the purposes of Wanderground research, the PPL collection currently includes:

- Options – all past and current issues
- The Kim Deacon Collection – Lesbian bar owner of Kings and Queens in Woonsocket (photo albums and other papers)
- Queering Oral histories gathered by Virginia Thomas

Our differences (discovering the Wanderground niche):

PPL	Wanderground
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses <i>only</i> on <u>Rhode Island</u> • “Collecting, preserving & providing access to publications, archival materials, oral histories & ephemera that document <u>Rhode Island LGBTQ+ history</u>” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on Lesbians • Includes a broader collection of national and international items with a focus on New England, including Rhode Island

- Items not out for view – held in stacks and individuals must ask to see specific items

- Items will eventually be accessible for open, visible, casual browsing

The John Hay Library at Brown University includes many special collections, including LGBTQ Collections. Their selection offers five main areas relevant to LGBTQ: Global Lavender, Pembroke Collection, Japanese Queer Magazines, Gay Pulp (mostly men), and Intersex Studies. The curators at the Hay (with special thanks to Heather Cole) are very much interested in collaboration with Wanderground in some way. For the purposes of Wanderground research, the Hay collection currently includes the papers of several Lesbians. I specifically looked at:



- Jodi Glass Collection, 1978-2002
- Anne Fausto-Sterling papers, 1961-2020
- Malana Krongelb Zine Collection, 1974-2018

Our differences (discovering the Wanderground niche):

Hay Library	Wanderground
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBTQ from around the world with a desire to obtain more Lesbian materials • Focused for researchers / includes many academic materials • While open to a general community, it can be difficult for those not connected to Brown or academic institutions to gain access to the collection • Items not out for view – held in stacks and individuals must ask to see specific items 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on Lesbians • Includes a broader collection of popular materials (fiction, creative writing, etc.) with some scholarly materials • Open to communities with for activities and space • Items will eventually be accessible for open, visible, casual browsing

In addition to these primary resources for Lesbian archive herstory in Rhode Island, there are other collections that contain materials worth investigating.

- **Sarah Doyle Center Library @ Brown Univ.** They are not generally open to the public and their extensive Women's Studies library is not catalogued in the Brown Library.
<https://www.brown.edu/campus-life/support/sarah-doyle-center/library-sarah-doyle>
- **Pembroke Center Archives @ Brown Univ.**
http://www.pembrokecenter.org/farnham_archives/collections.php
- **Rhode Island State Archives**
<https://www.sos.ri.gov/divisions/state-archives>

- **Univ. of Rhode Island** reportedly has an archive of LGBTQ legislative work in RI as well as five issues of Morning Glory from the 1970s

And, of course, as I mentioned in the last blog, there exists a number of community-based Lesbian archives in the U.S. and around the world. Additionally, there are some LGBTQ community archives. Many universities also maintain specialty feminist/women's archives that include Lesbian resources. Unfortunately, many of the university-based collections are focused towards academic researchers and not easily accessible to Lesbian communities or those casually interested in seeing our herstories. These resources exist in many places and one can only find them through digging and hearsay, as in the statement, "Have you heard about (*xxx fill in the blank*) collection located in (*xxx fill in the blank*) location?"

As I was digging into the websites of several collections, it occurred to me that it would be wonderful to have something that does not currently exist – namely, a cohesive database on "where to find the Lesbians." Our collected papers and memorabilia are scattered all around and difficult to locate. Where do we find the papers of well-known Lesbians such as Alix Dobkin, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Kay Gardener, Julia Penelope, Elana Dykewomon, Barbara Smith, Kitty Tsui, and so on and on. Where are the collections of materials from our Lesbian organizations, such as Naiad Press, the Ladder, Bloodroot Feminist Vegetarian Restaurant, RIWA, Olivia Records, New England Women's Music Festival and other festivals, and so on and on. And how do we learn about those everyday Lesbians such as you and me who also have much to offer to our collective Lesbian her-stories? As you might suspect, another project on my "to-do" list is to look into the possibility of creating such a comprehensive resource.

Ah, the possibilities....

Next Week

Be sure to come back next week for **Installment #8: Wanderground – Bigger Visions for Space & Collections.**

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....

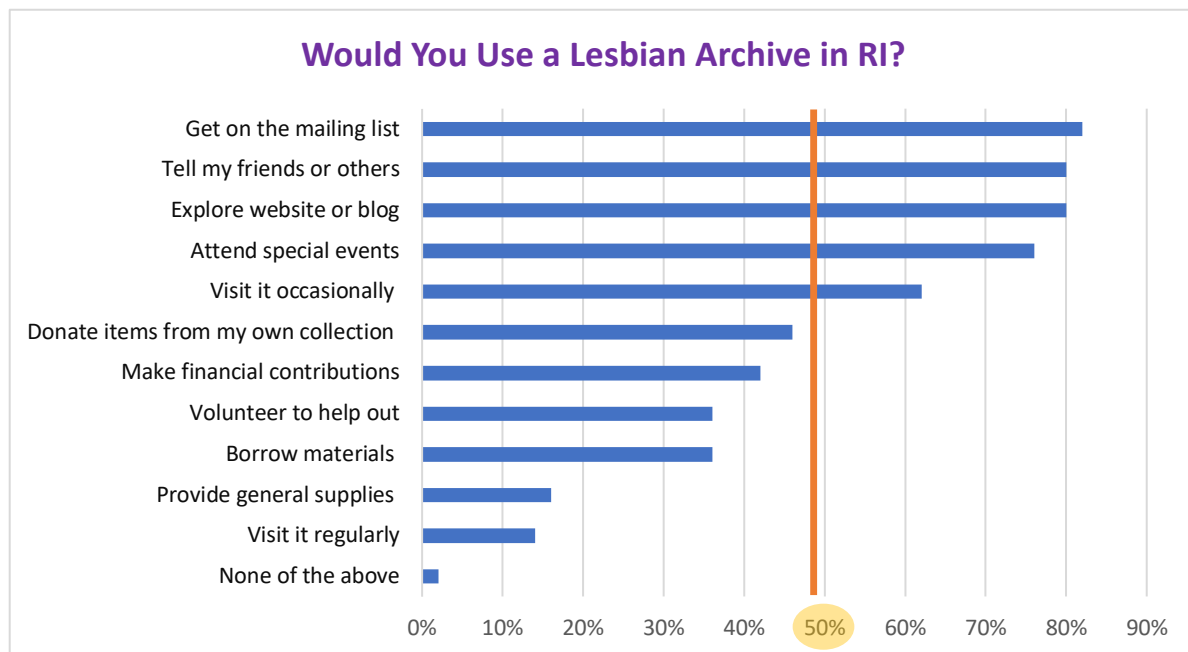
One of the key questions I had for this research project over the past year was this:

- 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?

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

Research Summary – Installment #9

Blog Post – March 31, 2022

Wanderground – What’s Next

This is the final installment summarizing the Wanderground research project funded by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities. A warm thank you to the Council for their support – for both the funding and the staff involvement. And thanks to all who offered their time and wisdom and shared their experiences and responses. With your support, the progress of bringing Wanderground from vision to reality is now well on its way.

What are the next steps?

Forthcoming Exhibit:

From June through August 2022, I will be showcasing a broad range of Wanderground resources in display cases at the Providence Public Library (Rhode Island Room). The free [exhibit will include](#): writings by RI Lesbians, early publications from independent Lesbian/feminist publishers, music and videos, art and artifacts and other life-affirming Lesbian legacies. Also from that venue, I will present [a curator’s show-and-tell](#) as part of their June Pride Month activities. I’ll be sure to send reminders as we get closer to the date.

Outlining a Structure:

Currently, I am participating in the Social Enterprise Greenhouse Incubator Program (segreenhouse.org/incubator/). This opportunity provides valuable workshops, encouragement, and support in taking the next steps towards developing Wanderground. From now through the end of May, I will be drafting mission and vision statements, creating a business model and taking the steps to incorporate as a non-profit, as well as outlining costs, revenue, and fundraising strategies. This process will also include initiating some form of advisory council of Lesbian volunteers passionate about breathing life into Wanderground.

Another big step will be to look beyond Rhode Island. Though located in Rhode Island, Wanderground (as I have imagined it) was never intended to only focus on Lesbian activities in Rhode Island. I plan to promote Wanderground as a community-based Lesbian archive accessible in the New England region. The holdings will certainly feature Lesbians from Rhode Island (and New England) but will broadly include national and international materials as well.

Keeping You Informed:

I will periodically share news about our progress while continuing to gather, identify, catalog, label, and properly box Lesbian resources for longer-term archival purposes. In the meantime, this is the current draft of the **Mission Statement**.

Wanderground Lesbian Archive and Makerspace provides vibrant community gathering spaces to collect, preserve, and bring to life Lesbian activisms, artistic cultural expressions, and forgotten legacies.

Were you unable to attend our March events?

These are the links to enjoy what you missed.

- **International Women's Day, March 8, 2022**
A Peek into the Herstory of Lesbian Activities in Rhode Island through Archival Materials - [PowerPoint Slides \(only\)](#) / [Full Video](#) [youtu.be/noBAFRB4VXE]
- **Celebrate Rhode Island Lesbian Authors, Author reading March 27, 2022**
Readings by and discussions with by our very own Lesbian writers: Mari SanGiovanni, Linda Skibski, Elda Dawber and Susan Joyce & Thea Ernest.
The video recording is [located here](#): [youtu.be/01FsSaxBM4o]

This is a listing of all the research summary blogs with topics and links:

1. [Research Participation](#): a summary of who participated in the research
2. [I Found My People](#): What were our first encounters with Lesbian publications and how they made us feel.
3. [Creating Communities & Activisms](#): Beyond publications, where else did we find other Lesbians? Where did we go to find ourselves and each other? How was Lesbian/feminist organizing impacted by Lesbian artistic expression?
4. [Sisters Doing It for Ourselves](#): What did we create here in Rhode Island? Introducing RI authors, musicians, and some others....
5. [Who Needs Archives \(and why the Name "Wanderground"\)?](#): Are Lesbians in Rhode Island enthusiastic about an archive in RI? What can we learn from other Lesbian archives around the country?
6. [Do I Count?? How to Collect Your Life in Memorabilia](#): Information for how to save your own "stuff" – and why!
7. [Collaborations & Information Sharing](#): There are other LGBTQ collections in RI! How we can work together and complement each other?
8. [Wanderground – Bigger Visions for Space & Collections](#)