

**The New York Public Library
Humanities and Social Sciences Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

International Gay Information Center, Inc.

**Gay Activists Alliance
Records, 1970-1983**

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(Ephemera Revised 1997 SW)**

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Summary

Title: Gay Activists Alliance. Records, 1970-83
(Part of the International Gay Information Center collection).

Size: 11 linear ft. (7 cartons; 6 boxes).

Access: Series 5 is restricted until 2055.

Microfilm must be used in lieu of original records. See Microfilm Reel List, p. 13.

Source: International Gay Information Center, Inc.

Description: The Gay Activists Alliance was founded in New York City in 1969 as a militant, non-violent organization dedicated exclusively to the attainment of civil and social rights for gays. The records reflect the activities of an organization which became a leader in the gay liberation movement during its more militant phase following the Stonewall riots of 1969.

Historical Note

The Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) was founded in New York City in December of 1969 in the aftermath of the Stonewall riots. Its founders were dissident members of the Gay Liberation Front who sought to form a militant, non-violent organization dedicated exclusively to the attainment of civil and social rights for gays. In the words of its first president (Jim Owles), its ultimate goal was "to secure basic human rights, dignity, and freedom for all gay people". Open to all persons in the metropolitan area regardless of sexual orientation the GAA quickly achieved recognition as a leader in the gay liberation movement and it became a model for the creation of similar groups in other cities.

By its constitution a "single issue," politically neutral organization, the GAA scrupulously avoided endorsing candidates for public office, or involvements in causes not directly related to gay rights. By doing so, it hoped to avoid internal, partisan disputes among its members, and to attract persons of all political persuasions. By focusing its energies on gay rights it hoped to avoid what it regarded as the mistake of other organizations such as the Gay Liberation Front which embraced a variety of New Left causes unrelated to the gay liberation movement. By the term "activist" it wished to emphasize its commitment to the use of more aggressive tactics than those employed by the homophile movement before the Stonewall riots of 1969.

During its most active period (1970-1974) the GAA lobbied vigorously for the enactment of fair employment and housing legislation, for the repeal of state laws respecting sodomy and solicitation, and for the banning of police entrapment and harassment of gays. It also sought to encourage the development of a new gay culture free from the habitual constraints and role laying forced upon gays by a sexist society. At its headquarters, the "Firehouse", on Wooster Street in Greenwich Village it sponsored dances, cabarets, film and fashion shows, musical and theatrical events and consciousness-raising meetings. By rallies, demonstrations, picketing, sit-ins, and what it called "zaps" - the unexpected confrontation with persons in power - it sought to dramatize its cause, and to convince those in positions of authority of the need for taking immediate steps to end specific instances of legal, economic and political oppression of gays.

Its audacious, confrontational tactics frequently resulted in the physical abuse of its officers and members and in their arrest and indictment on charges of criminal trespass. Included among its many acts of civil disobedience were a sit-in (Oct. 1970) at the editorial offices of *Harper's Magazine* which had published an article which GAA considered to be defamatory of homosexuals and which refused to allow the publication of a rebuttal article; a sit-in (1971) at the New York City Board of Examiners in protest against the Board's policy of refusing teaching licenses to persons it suspected of being homosexual; the occupation (Aug. 1971) of the offices of the District Attorney of Suffolk County in protest against police harassment of homosexuals on Long Island; and the disruption of public ceremonies and cultural events attended by Mayor John V. Lindsay, including the occupation (1972) of Lindsay's presidential campaign headquarters and of his mayoral office by members who chained themselves to his desk in protest against what the GAA considered to be his failure to provide adequate support for the gay civil rights bill (the Clingan-Burden-Scholnick-Weiss Bill) which was then deadlocked in the General Welfare Committee of the City Council.

The passage of a bill for gay rights in the City Council and in the state legislature was one of the major concerns of GAA. Together with the Mattachine Society, Inc. of New York, Daughters of Bilitis and other groups it fought for the passage of William Passannante's Fair Employment Bill which sought to amend the State's Executive Code to prevent discrimination against homosexuals in employment, housing, and public accommodation. Although it was defeated (May 1971) the bill represented the first attempt in America to enact legislation at the state level for the protection of human rights of homosexuals. The GAA also initiated (Oct. 1971) public hearings concerning fair employment for homosexuals before the New York City Commission on Human Rights.

The GAA was instrumental in pressuring political candidates to take stands on issues affecting the gay community. During the electoral campaigns of 1970 and 1972 it polled (by questionnaire) the principal candidates from the metropolitan area on their attitudes towards gay issues, receiving from several candidates (including Senator Charles E. Goodell, Richard J. Ottinger, Arthur Goldberg and Edward Koch) public statements of support for gay rights. In 1972 GAA and the Chicago Gay Alliance organized the first national gay convention which adopted a platform on gay rights and voted to conduct demonstrations at the Democratic and Republican party conventions.

The GAA also produced weekly programs on cable television in Manhattan, issued a newsheet the *Gay Activist* and aided in the preparation of the *International List of Gay Organizations and Publications* compiled by Robert Alan Roth.

Although its initial application for incorporation was rejected by the Secretary of State of New York on the grounds that its corporate purpose was improper and its title inappropriate for a corporation, GAA subsequently secured the reversal of the ruling by an appellate court. Serving as its presidents were (in order) Jim Owles, Rich Wandel, Bruce Voeller, Morty Manford, and David Thorstad.

After 1976 the organization became increasingly inactive. Deprived of its headquarters building by a fire-bombing (in October of 1976) it was forced to abandon many of its social and revenue-producing activities and suffered as a result a loss of membership and income. Public support for its "zaps" also declined. Its strength was also dissipated by internal feuding and by the rapid turnover of its executive staff (it had five presidents in the span of only four years). Its newsheet, *Gay Activist* ceased publication in June of 1980. In October of 1981 its remaining members voted formally to dissolve the organization.

Provenance Note

The records of the Gay Activists Alliance form part of the collection of records of the International Gay Information Center, Inc. which were donated to the Library in April of 1988 by Mr. John Hammond of I.G.I.C.

Scope and Content

The records (1970-83) reflect the activities of a homophile organization of New York City which was dedicated to the achievement of civil rights for gays through militant, non-violent means and which became a leader in the gay liberation movement during its more militant phase following the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Included are correspondence and collateral records of its principal committees including Ad Hoc Intro 2, Agitprop, Executive, Fair Employment, Legal Action, Municipal Government, National Gay Movement, and News and Media Relations Committee. There is also a topical file of miscellaneous records arranged by subject. The records document GAA's struggle to obtain fair housing and employment legislation for gays in New York City and State, the repeal of legislation respecting sodomy and solicitation, the ending of police harassment and entrapment of gays, and its role as a leader in promoting the development of gay rights groups in other cities.

Arrangement Note

The records which are contained in seven record center cartons and five boxes (10.5 lin. ft.) are arranged into five series:

Series 1. Committee Files;

Series 2. Topical File;

Series 3. International List of Gay Organizations and Publications;

Series 4. Printed Ephemera

The containers are numbered sequentially beginning with number "15" continuing the numeration of the records and papers contained in the I.G.I.C. collection.

Series Descriptions

SERIES 1. COMMITTEE FILES

(CONTAINERS #15-17)

Over one-half of the committee files consist of records of the National Gay Movement Committee and of the News and Media Relations Committee. (A complete listing of the committees present appears on the container list). The National Gay Movement Committee worked to establish contact with gay groups in other cities and to encourage the formation of sister organizations with a view to exerting pressure for gay rights at the national level. It also sought to develop a listing of all gay political, service, religious, social and student organizations as well as gay publications in the United States. The records consist of out-going correspondence arranged chronologically of the chairman (Albert C. Block) and corresponding secretaries (R. Paul Martin and Richard C. Wandel) and others including Charles Collins, Jim Owles and Robert Alan Roth; and a file of in-coming and out-going correspondence arranged by state. The correspondence reveals the influence of GAA on the development of the gay liberation movement especially in California, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, and New York. Included are minutes of meetings and lists of gay organizations. Some collateral papers (including ephemera) are filed with the correspondence.

The News and Media Relations Committee acted as liaison with the media and strove to publicize the work of GAA and to furnish information on the gay community and the gay liberation movement. Included is correspondence (mainly out-going) of Bruce Eves, John Hammond, Jim Owles and David Thorstad with representatives of the audio-visual and printed media; and a file of press releases which document the activities, methods and tactics employed by GAA in its struggle to obtain civil rights for gays.

The Ad Hoc Intro 2 Committee lobbied for the passage of a gay rights bill in the New York City Council continuing the work of the Fair Employment Committee. Included is correspondence of Peter Fisher, minutes and other papers.

The Agitprop Committee sought to bring the message of gay pride to high school and college students and prepared written, oral and audio-visual material for presentation to students in New York City and suburban areas. Included is correspondence of Richard Wandel and John Hammond with educational authorities requesting speakers and papers of the talk group coordinating committee relative to consciousness-raising work.

The Executive Committee coordinated the work of the various committees, approved expenditures and acted for the organization in emergencies. Included are minutes (1970-73, 1980) of meetings and other records relating to motions adopted and general policies of GAA.

The Fair Employment Committee worked to achieve fair employment practices and to combat discrimination against persons because of their sexual orientation. Included are outgoing correspondence of Jim Owles and Rich Amato to homophile and business organizations, labor unions, government agencies, and city council members relative to employment discrimination against gays, in support of a gay rights bill, and in preparation for hearings before the New York City Commission on Human Rights. Included also are minutes of the committee and a copy of the report which was submitted by GAA to the Commission.

The Municipal Government Committee acted as liaison between GAA and New York City governmental agencies, lobbied for the passage of gay rights legislation. Included are correspondence of Jim Owles, David Thorstad, and Richard Wandel with labor union officials, city council members, and congressmen; and memoranda, reports, and copies of council bills concerning gay rights.

SERIES 2. TOPICAL FILE
(CONTAINER #18-20)

The topical file includes constitution and by-laws, election questionnaires, records relative to the *Gay Activist*, its gay studies research project, and minutes of general meetings of GAA. The election questionnaires were sent by GAA to candidates for public office from the metropolitan area during the 1970 and 1972 electoral campaigns to ascertain the candidates' views on issues concerning gay rights. Included are signed questionnaires returned by several candidates including Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, Edward I. Koch, Louis J. Lefkowitz, Charles B. Rangel, and Stephen J. Solarz. . Many of the questionnaires have been annotated by the candidates. The *Gay Activist* records consist of correspondence, scripts of articles, and a few make-up sheets. Included is a transcript of an interview (1976) conducted by David Thorstad with John Damien , a horse-racing steward who was dismissed from his job by the Ontario Racing Commission on the grounds that he was a homosexual, and who fought for reinstatement. The gay studies research project concerns a survey (1972) which was conducted by GAA relative to gay studies programs in colleges and universities. Included are questionnaires returned by respondents and copies of syllabi. The minutes (1970-74, 1979-80) of general meetings which were held weekly provide substantial documentation of the policies, plans, tactics and strategies adopted by the general membership. The minutes also contain reports by the president and by the committee chairpersons. Included also is a file of correspondence of James Owles as president of GAA.

SERIES 3. INTERNATIONAL LIST OF GAY ORGANIZATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS
(CONTAINER #21).

This series contains mainly drafts of lists of names of gay organizations and titles of gay publications in the United States and other countries. The gay movement list was compiled by Robert Alan Roth with the aid of the gay movement committee of GAA. Roth had begun the list in 1970 as a project of the Cornell Gay Liberation Front. The international portion of the list was subsequently published (Nov. 1974) by *Gay Yellow Pages* (periodical). Included is a paper bound set of photocopies of heavily annotated page proofs of the list which was being prepared for publication by University Microfilms. Included are some notes and miscellaneous papers kept by Roth.

SERIES 4. PRINTED EPHEMERA
(CONTAINERS #22-24)

The printed ephemera consists of ephemera issued by GAA and by other homophile organizations, and press clippings. The press clippings (1971-72) which are loose and arranged by state and city, contain articles having references to GAA, homosexuality, amnesty legislation, court decisions, and gay liberation movement. The clippings were furnished by the American Press Clipping Service, Inc. There are some foreign clips and a mass of unsorted clippings.

<u>Reel</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
			Series 1. Committee Files
1	15	1-4	Ad hoc intro 2
2	15	5	Agitprop
	15	6	Arts
	15	7	Bars
	15	8	Committee on committees
	15	9	Community relations
	15	10	Culture
	15	11	Dance
	15	12-14	Elections
			Executive minutes
	15	15	1970 - 1971 May
	15	16	1971 Jun - Dec
	15	17	1972 Jan - Apr
3	15	18	1972 May - Dec
	15	19	1973; 1980; n.d.
	15	20	Executive miscellany
	16	1-2	Fair employment
	16	3	Finance
4	16	4	Finance, cont'd.
	16	5	Firehouse
	16	6	Lambda sales service
	16	7-8	Legal action
	16	9	Lesbian liberation
	16	10	Library services bureau
	16	11	Membership
	16	12	Municipal government
5	16	13	Municipal government, cont'd.
			National gay movement
	16	14	Outgoing correspondence
	16	15	California
	16	16	Colorado - D.C.
	16	17	Florida - Maryland
	16	18	Massachusetts - Minnesota
	16	19	Missouri - New Jersey
6	16	20	New York
	17	1	North Carolina - Ohio
	17	2	Oklahoma - Rhode Island
	17	3	Tennessee - Wisconsin
	17	4	Foreign
7	17	5-7	Lists of gay organizations
	17	8	Minutes
			News and media relations
	17	9	Correspondence
8	17	10	Press releases
	17	11	Miscellany
	17	12	Newsletter
	17	13	Police
	17	14-15	Political action
	17	16	State and federal government
8-9	17	17-19	Video tape

<u>Reel</u>	<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
Series 2. Topical File			
10	18	1	Christopher Street Liberation Day committee
	18	2	Constitution and by-laws
	18	3	Dances
	18	4-6	Elections - questionnaires
11	18	7	Fisher, Peter
	18	8	Freedom of Information Act request
	18	9-11	Gay Activist
	18	12	Gay Activist Alliance Reporter
	18	13	Gay studies research project
	18	14	Hate mail
	18	15	Immigration and naturalization
12	18	16-17	Manford, Morty
			Minutes
13	19	1	1970
	19	2-3	1971
	19	4-5	1972
	19	6-7	1973
	19	8	1974; 1979-1980; n.d.
	19	9	Owles, James
	20	1	Secretary's file
	20	2	Sodomy legislation
14	20	3	Stationery
	20	4	Tax exempt status
	20	5	Voeller, Bruce
15-16	21		Series 3. International List of Gay Publications and Organizations
			Series 4. Printed Ephemera
			GAA Printed Ephemera
17	22	1	1970-1971
	22	2	1972
	22	3	1973
	22	4	1974
	22	5	1975
	22	6	1976-1977
	22	7	1978-1981
	22	8-12	n.d.
			Other Organizations
18	22	13	Albany Trust - Good Gay Poets
	22	14	Homophile Action League - WNET/13
	22	15	Miscellaneous Newsletters and Periodicals
			Sorted Press Clippings
19	22A	1	Alabama - D.C.
	22A	2	Florida - Maryland
	22A	3	Massachusetts - New Hampshire
	22A	4-5	New York
	22A	6	Pennsylvania - Wisconsin; Foreign
20	23	1-4	Unsorted Press Clippings
21	24	1-5	Unsorted Press Clippings