WOMAN OF VISION, WOMAN OF HEART, WOMAN OF FIRE — AUDRE LORDE

In the mid-seventies, when this Lesbian History Archives was just taking its vision known to the Lesbian world, Audre called Deborah Edel and myself to her Stadman island home, in the plan-tined dining room, she shared with us photographs and early editions of her work.

"What you need for the Archives," she said. And so we have pictures of Audre in her first costume dress (cover photo), a studded standing girl, her arms filled with celebratory flowers, pictures of Audre with her children, with her friends. One image she gave us, a black and white photograph of her and her lover woman, holding hands and seated in their 1950's Bermudian shorts, became the first cover for Zami. But even more generous were her appearances at our "At Home with the Archives" events, where she would join a hundred other women to Gather in every career where the Archives was then living.

Later, Audre became friends with Mabel Hampton, always greeting her warmly when Ms. Hampton could manage to get to her readings. Mabel carefully inscribed Audre's name and phone number in her treasured red phone book, and whenever she saw Audre's face in a newspaper or on a book, she said, "That's my gift!" Among Ms. Hampton's most prized possessions were copies of Audre's books inscribed to "Mabel Hampton, sister warrior."

Frommer Audre Lorde's stance of woman warrior, woman lover, I see her reading from her Cancer Journals at Gay Women's Alternative meeting in New York City and being flanked by a woman who was also struggling with breast cancer. "Keep us going with your words," the woman said. Audre replied, "I will not always be here, but you will find strength inside yourself." I see her introducing young poets at Hunter College, embracing their courage and always asking for more. I see her standing in front of me at a rest stop somewhere in Connecticut, saying, "You know I don't agree with you, Joan," and then saying but "you have to keep on writing." And I see her at a party, fitting and courting and darning.

Audre Lorde understood the need for homes both in the physical and cultural sense. She wrote about the homes that must be left and the ones that must be found. She told us to stop for a bit and to look far ahead all at the same time and to love in the face of mortality. In the early seventies, she was one of the few women who understood immediately why we would dedicate our lives to establishing a home for our collective story. Her generosity and trust, her challenging my words about the past, her glint of sensual play, her sternness about inequalities, her support of women writing even when what they wrote did not reflect our view of the matter, her belief in an international community of women of light, her focus on doing things her way and her dedication to leaving a record of her journey whether it be to mark her passage through the Lesbian lifetimes or through a racist America or through the physical and spiritual battle for her life—all this and so much more are why we see Audre Lorde as a living loving presence for all our days. Her spirit, her words, like a touch, will not leave us.

Afreetke Afreetke ride me to the crossroads where the sound of our bodies meeting is the prayer of all strangers and sisters, that the discarded evils, abandoned as the crossroads, will not follow us upon our journeys.

from Zami

From the Audre Lorde Collection

BUILDING UPDATE

We have had three goals for the Lesbian History Archives' new building when we moved in a year ago. First, we had to make the first floor of the building wheelchair accessible. In addition, we had to make the donations area. We also had to build storage spaces for visitors and archival documents, and we had to add shelves and storage areas to accommodate our collections. Finally, we had to meet building codes required for a building to operate effectively as a non-profit educational foundation. We have accomplished all three of these goals.

Two generous and talented architects, Joan Byron and Lynn Gernert, volunteered to help the Archives accomplish this work. They have worked with members of the coordinating committee to make the building's first floor wheelchair accessible and to guide LHEF through the bureaucratic forest — the maze of requirements, inspections, run-arounds, and revisions otherwise known as the New York City Department of Buildings.

Joan designed an incredible wheelchair accessible bathroom with beautiful fixtures, fiery colored tiles on the walls and floor, and a frosted skylight to allow light from the stairwell to filter in. This was contracted with LHEF to implement the design with Andrea Sallack doing the planning. Their fine craftsmanship complements the excellence of Joan's plan.

Lynn Gernert took on the task of selecting a workable wheelchair lift for the front of the building. At first, we all thought to add it to the front of our landmark district building, were met with some resistance from some of the local community board. At an initial public hearing, objections raised included overwhelming concerns about the "unsightliness" of any modern equipment as it would perhaps subtly turn the-century appearance of the street block. Another mortal fear was voiced regarding the possibility that the lift may become impaled on the wheelchair lift. Given the rounded edges and smooth surface building materials, we might also wonder if the lift could magnify this could happen, though the original pointed wrought iron railing lines the block might present a hazard to a climbing child. As you might guess, many of the concerns voiced revealed thirty-veiled homophobia in a neighborhood that is better known for being lesbian-laden and lesbian-friendly.

In a second public meeting with the Landmarks Preservation Commission, the eloquence of Archives supporters, particularly Joan Richter, Janet Waring, and Ed Rogers, overcame the meeting, convincing the commission to wholeheartedly support our efforts to install the first wheelchair lift in Brooklyn's Park Slope Landmark District. Lynn Gernert worked with the commission to find a lift that is functional, durable, and attractive. The sleek model we installed last month is indeed an incredible device, a minor marvel of the neighborhood.

To make the building safer for archival documents and to cut heating costs, we installed ultra-violet filtering glass in windows on every floor except the basement. This will protect paper, fibers, and plastic from the serious deterioration the sun can cause. Eric Schneider and Steven Rosenbusch of American Glass & Iron Security installed a burglar and fire alarm system that is thorough and easy to use. Ely Spier and Rebecca Lurie of Womenworks built and installed bookshelves and a library ladder on the first floor. Finally, building code required that we enclose the boiler in the basement, and we found two doors throughout the building, and patch the plaster ceiling in the basement. John Kelly contracted with LHEF to accomplish this drudgery.

from LHEF Newsletter, April 1993
Our History
An Abreviated Time Line

The following speech was presented November 20, 1982, as part of the 1st Annual Gay
Feminist Lecture in Lesbian and Gay Studies at the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, The Graduate
School and University Center, CUNY. Joan Media presented her speech "It's Up My Cocks In the
NW: The Life of Mabel Nisbett, as Told to a Wux Woman."

I have been asked to introduce Joan Nisbett in relation to her work with the Lesbian Hysterical Archives and it is truly
a pleasure for me to do so. A project, if it is to survive, needs both visionaries and
detail people. The visionary, without the presence of the other, often
floats off into space. The detail person, without the other, tends to get too caught up in basic survival
needs and does not often enough push the boundaries. Together however, dreams
can be realized. The Lesbian Hysterical Archives represents just such a
success and Joan, with her dreams, has been the Archives visionary.

What I would like to do is briefly
weave a tapestry for you, outlining some of the historical moments of the first few years of the Archives, interspersed with
Joan's words. The first thing it is important to remember that Joan is not the Archives and the Archives is not Joan, it is some
times difficult to do this, for Joan has been at the core of the project from its inception, living and breathing not only its wants, but
also, its dust. Neither Joan, nor I for that matter, will ever know who would have done, or who we would have been,
without the Archives, but that is a moot question, just as it is for those who have children, or those who undertake any project which
so fulfills one's life. One only knows that the person helps the project grow and in return the project grows back.
Multifold. And thus it has been, for Joan and for the Archives.

Thanksgiving weekend 1973—the First Gay Academic Union Conference. Out of the women's caucus two CR groups are formed. From one group the core of the Archives emerges in the spring and summer of 1974. The Archives name is
developed at a meeting where Joan is not present. Perhaps if she had been there we would have ended up with a more impres-
sioned and less cumbersome name, but she wasn't, and the Lesbian Hysterical Archives it is.

June 1975—our first newsletter reaching
out to the community. Joan says of herself—"Joan Nisbett is a lecturer in English, SIEK Program, Queens College. CUNY. A Lesbian activist who is old enough to remember the darkness of weekend
toys and young enough to joyfully be-
take in the liberation of our future. She is a cheerful and wise unto the creation of Lesbian Literature."

January 1976—The Archives opens for
continuing use with over 150 hardbound books, a small Lesbian "trash" paperback collection, one overflowing file cabinet, an easily countable number of Lesbian period-
icals, a small tape and photography section and a bulletin board of messages and fliers.

March 1976—Newsletter #2—indul-
ges in the opening of a bibliography project and the publication of our first bibliography, re-
search tool...an extensive and exhaustive
bibliography of bibliographies. We noted in our collection, and from other sources, 4 bibliographies by Lesbians about Lesbians,
11 about homosexuality, and 26 on and about women. From that newsletter...Joan's words talking about various
issues women come to use the Archives..."...several women have come just to be
satisfied with the living, growing, strength of our community. Perhaps these are our most exciting visits, because they reach
the deepest reason for our existence—an affirmation of our continuance in time as a creative, self nourishing family of women."

November 1976—The first grant of $415 is received from the New York Region-
al Lesbian Feminist Conference. This
is to go towards preservation materials and cataloging the collection.

Spring 1977—The Archives makes its first banner for the Gay Pride Parade based on Joan's words: "In memory of the voices we have lost."

Spring 1979—Newsletter #5—from an article written by Joan called One Woman's View. "The room seems to be a collection of papers, books, stray pieces of paper...just a library. But the vision behind the room is much larger; the room is an entrance way, a portal that leads both to the past and to the future and for me its existence is the expression of a terrible hunger. I am a forty-eight year old Lesbian feminist woman. When I first moved in the late 50's, I was living the life of a colonized subject. I did not know it then; I thought it was an accident that I found no references in the surrounding culture to Lesbian creations. Sometimes believing the colonizers' view of myself, I did not even search for markers because I knew we were not a people, just deviant, sad waders, meandering in dark places. It took up the memory of this time, with its sense of homelessness, that is the core of my commitment to the Archives. The Archives room is a healing place; it is filled with voices announcing our autonomy and self possession. The roots of the Archives lie in the silenced voices, the love letters destroyed, the pronouns changed, the dia-

A Dyke by Any Other Name...
31 Other Names, In Fact!

LHA Buttons & Magnets
This design printed in bright blue
and black ink on hot pink 2' square button - $1.25
magnet - $2.50

NOTE: All materials from the
Archives are molten in plain
wrappers. The Archives mailing
list is never sold or sold to anyone! We may occa-
sionally do a special mailing for another group, but we will retain access, control and confidentiality.

Publishing the Newsletter is a time consuming and costly project. Please don't give up on us if it is a
long pause between Newsletters. Be assured that our
daily functioning is ongoing. We're requesting that
women who are able to help us do so to the Newsletter.

Every past issue of our Newsletter contains a listing of Archives holdings on various aspects of
LGBTQ culture. Original copies are no longer available, but we can fax copies for you at cost, plus
postage (see order form below).

#1 6/75 Sent media to Lesbian content Research Project

#2 3/75 Bibliography of Lesbian, Feminist & Gay Bibliogra-

#3 11/75 Lesbian Newspapers, 1900s through 1950s

#4 2/78 Poetry Collection

#5 4/79 Short Story Collection

#6 7/80 Lesbian History Sources: Special Collect. List

#7 9/81 Lesbian Sexuality Bibliography: Special Books

#8 8/82 Collections Lising

#9 9/85 International Lesbian Lising, Poetry Update

#10 2/88 12 pages reporting on Archives activities and projects

#11 2/90 12 pages reporting on Archives activities and projects

#12 6/91 12 pages reporting on Archives activities and projects

#13 6/92 12 pages reporting Archives new home.

Please add my name to the LHA Mailing List.

Yes, I can help. Here is my donation of $__

Send Back Issue(s) #__ $__ enclosed

Please print clearly, and don't forget your ZIP code.
Mail to: LHFF, Inc. PO Box 1258, New York, NY 10116

Please check to make sure that we have your correct address.
We are changed $3.00 for each "address change requested," and Newsletters are destroyed, not returned to us.

Please return this form to LHFF, Inc.

name
street address
city state zip Make checks payable to LHFF, Inc.
Here is a partial list of the places we have spoken over the last year.

October '92—Prospect Park Women’s Weekend, Brooklyn, NY
Amy Beth and Maxine Wolfe
January '93—Gay Activist Alliance NJ.
Taneck, NJ Alexis
Danzig and Amy Beth.

September '93—Women in Touch, Key West, FL, Amy Beth,
Rachel Lucie, and Blue Lunden.

March '93—Women’s Group, Unitarian Church
Plainfield, NJ Deborah Edel.

March '93—BLUES,
Boro, NY Tea Jeffries,
Paula Grant, and Amy Beth.

May '93—Earlham
College, Richmond IN, Amy Beth.
June '93—Bronx
Museum of Art/BLUES,
Bronx, NY, Joan Nestle, Georgia Brooks, and Amy Beth.

July 1980—our first LHA poster was announced in the Newsletter. As beautiful as the poster is, it tells slowly, for we are told many women are uncomfortable putting the word Lesbian up so boldly on their wall.

December 1981—Newsletter #7—LHA introduces a new section in the Newsletter called Lesbian Herstory Sources. Joan writes the introduction: “If we ask docorous questions of history, we will get a genteel history. If we assume that because sex was a secret it did not exist, we will get a sexless history. If we assume that in periods of oppression, Lesbians lost their autonomy and acted as victims only, we destroy not only history but lives. For many years the psychologists told us we were both emotionally and physically deviant; they measured our nipples and clitoris to chart our quotients, they talked about how we wanted to be men and how our sexual styles were pathetic imitations of the real thing and all under this barrage of hatred and fear, we loved. They told us that we should hate ourselves and sometimes we did but we were also angry, resilient and creative. We were part of a community that took care of itself. And most of all we were Lesbian women, revolutionizing each of these terms. We create history as much as we discover it. What we call history becomes history and since this is a naming time, we must be on guard against our own class prejudices and discomforts. It is close friends are to be part of Lesbian History, so must be also, and to me even more importantly, the Lesbians of the title who lie about their sexuality or their courage.

Fall 1981—The Lesbian Herstory Archives is honored to receive its first two awards. The first is from The Committee for the Visibility of the Other Black Woman in acknowledgment of the contribution made in support of affirmative preferences. The second is from Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund’s In recognition of distinguished services, dedication and friendship to the community of Lesbians and Gay men.

Tonight, Joan, it is your turn to be honored. Honored for your work related to the Archives and honored for your independent creative work.

From a detail person to a visionary...thank you.

In our first few years a good part of our money came from a letterwriting by Lesbian Herstory Archive founders as they could give. Over the years the balance has shifted, so that ongoing expenses are now being met by community donations. 1990 marked the first year that our incoming donations topped $25,000 and we had to file our first form 990 with the IRS and all the New York State charitable state agencies.

How Do We Meet Our Ongoing Expenses and Get Our Work Done?

- All labor at the Archives is done by volunteers.
- It is a labor of love and a hard, long hours of work by a core group of women.
- In the past, we haven’t had to fund-raise to pay rent, since the collection was housed in the apartment Joan and Jane shared.

Our vision and knowledge of what needs to be done is great, but our decisions about expenditures are based on actual financial needs.

- We are given generous donations of books and materials from the Lesbian community.
- We receive donations from individual women who visit the Archives.
- We receive money and donations from LHA and conferences where women give us dollars and change anonymously as well as donations for the photocopying we do in response to information requests in letters and by visitors at LHA.

Money comes from donations at LHA and conferences where women give us dollars and change anonymously as well as donations for the photocopying we do in response to information requests in letters and by visitors at LHA.

We receive honorary awards for the show and speaking engagements we do about the work of LHA. We do not charge a speaking fee. We’ve come from a feminist and community center background and are accustomed to working for personal travel expenses.

We also receive money from donations for our poster, T-shirts, buttons, and postcards.

Monies come from grants within the Lesbian community and alternative fundraising sources.

Monies come from other sources such as memorial funds, workplace donations, cultural events, donations from organizations, and donations earmarked for special needs.

How Can You Help?

- Become a FRIEND OF THE ARCHIVES.
- Undertake a fixed expense as your personal project. Let us know what you think we need. We will consider any of our requests.
- We will gladly name it after you if you choose a name.
- We send out basic supplies such as pens, paper, blank mailing envelopes of all sizes.
- Please, let us know if you would like to be added to our mail list.
- We send out annual reports.

Books, Music, and Video

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- We will gladly name it after you if you choose a name.
- Please, let us know if you would like to be added to our mail list.
- We send out annual reports.

Expenses for 1992

Postage/Office supplies: $2,523.66
Printing/Photocopying: $6,278.81
Supplies/Stationery: $1,713.04
Equipment: $1,078.50
Storage: $2,772.10
Computer System: $20,000.00
Utilities: $1,000.00
Bank Charges: $245.46
Supplies: $4,563.91
Materials/Books: $229.44
Restricts Funds: $7,591.00
Total Expenses: $23,100.59

Income for 1992

General Fund:
Individual Donations: $14,551.70
Total Income: $6,681.08
Honoraria: $5,600.00
Grants:
Amazon Auction: $5,000.00
Astraea: $1,500.00
North Star Fund: $3,000.00
OUT Fund: Funding Exchange: $3,000.00
Paul Support Foundation: $30,000.00
Total Income: $23,100.59

Total Expenses:
Postage/Office supplies: $2,523.66
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Our expenses were particularly high this year due to the construction costs necessary to get our building ready.

We are particularly grateful for the support of our friends and the generosity of our donors. Your support has made it possible for us to continue our work and for us to continue to provide a place for women to come together and share their stories.
HOW TO USE THE ARCHIVES FROM A DISTANCE

Since the Lesbian Herstory Archives strives to serve the Lesbian Nation, and not just the Dykes of New York, it is important you understand how to use the Archives from a distance. We may be located in New York City, but we do in fact provide services to Lesbians the world over. In the last year before moving to our new building, we responded to over 3,000 reference requests either by phone or letter. This is a small feat for an all volunteer organization. Of course, there is nothing like a visit to the Archives, and if you are doing any sort of lengthy or scholarly project that requires in-depth research you will have to make the trip to the Archives yourself. There are limits to what we are able to do. However, it is quite possible to use the Archives from a distance, providing you have a clear request and an understanding of how we are organized and what kind of access we have to the information.

The Archives is the kind of place that inspires fantasy. The sheer bulk of the many books, letters, photographs and manuscripts that record and document the history of our people quite simply takes your breath away. The impact is especially great if you are finding it for the first time after many disappointing trips to other traditional libraries and archives in search of some shred of evidence of the women who came before us. And if you happen to be a librarian, which I am, the prospect of gaining any sort of bibliographic control over this terrific collection can drive you nuts.

Organizing, cataloging, classifying and making accessible all of these spectacular resources is a mammoth undertaking. In the complex mind of your average librarian there exists a fantasy whereby every book, article, periodical and unpublished paper is all very neatly cataloged on a big friendly computer that you can talk to like the one on Star Trek and it will crank out a custom-made bibliography for you on demand. Unfortunately, this librarians' fantasy is not yet realized. We do, however, have several classification schemes at work in the Archives that allow you to find what you want.

We use simple schemes to organize our books, files and special collections. We have thousands of subject files arranged alphabetically by subject — a collection that takes up seven five-drawer filing cabinets. Organizational files are arranged alphabetically by the name of the organization; biographical files are arranged alphabetically by the first name of the woman; our many hundreds of newsletters are arranged alphabetically by the title of the publication; our collection of unpublished papers and manuscripts are arranged alphabetically by title. The book collection, although quite large, is arranged very broadly by subject. The only way of knowing if we have a book is to go stand at the shelf and look for it; we do not yet have an on-line card catalog that allows for title, subject or author access to this collection, although we are planning one for the future. Until then, if you write or call to see if we have a certain book or periodical, it means a volunteer will go and comb the shelves and files to look. We do have fairly good access to the periodical collection, so identifying a specific issue of a title can be done with relative ease.

In order to use the Archives from a distance it is best if you have a specific request, such as a certain article in *Amazon Quarterly* on lesbian mothers that was published in a February or March issue in 1979, rather than a broad request, such as — "Do you have anything on lesbian mothers; if so could you please send it to me?" (we have a file drawer full.) There are several excellent periodical indexes to the literature that should be available in your community that you can use for your initial literature search. Clare Potter's "Lesbian Periodicals Index" (Tallahassee: Naidl, 1986) provides subject and author access to over 42 lesbian periodicals from 1947-1982. Dolores Maggiore's "Lesbianism: An Annotated Bibliography and Guide to the Literature, 1976-1986" (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1988) is another excellent source for identifying specific citations. Keep in mind that the strength of the Archive's collection is in the many obscure lesbian/feminist periodicals and books that were published that no other library or archives bothered to keep. Chances are, we've got that elusive issue you've been looking for. Now, if you are looking for a specific article or two, we can photo copy them and send them to you. If, however, it is a book you are looking for, the best we can do is let you know if we have it or not, or possibly copy a few pages for you. If you have a broad topic you are trying to "find anything" on, such as lesbians in the military, we can search our files and let you know if we have subject files on that topic and how much information is available if you visit.

If you are looking for information on a specific organization, we can let you know if we have files on it or not and if so, how many. We have a list of our subject files as well as a list of our organizational files. Also, our unpublished papers are logged into the computer and can be searched by key word or author. Our "special collections" are also in the computer. Special collections number around 250 or so and can range from a hefty folder to 8 large boxes full of materials — diaries, letters, photographs, clippings, t-shirts — you name it. These are the kind of collections one just has to go through on her own; the actual contents of each collection are not in the computer, just the name of the person or organization, the dates the papers cover, the basic category of materials (letters, photos, clippings) and how many boxes there are in the collection.

With our move to the new building and dyke-friendly neighborhood we are anticipating many new volunteers to help with your requests. Remember that it does take a bit of time to process these requests, so give yourself plenty of turnaround time. It often takes us 3-6 weeks at least to process a written request. As of July 6th we hope to be back up and running, ready to help you in using the Archives from a distance.

*See LHA Newsletter #12 — June 1991, for a list of reference sources every good public or research library should have.*

▼Lucinda R. Zoe