Finding aid of the Gay Activists Alliance, New York Collection Coll2010-002

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Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, USC Libraries, University of Southern California
Title: Gay Activists Alliance, New York collection
creator: Owles, Jim
creator: Rash, John
creator: Gay Activist Alliance
creator: Lauritsen, John
source: O'Hara, Jerome
source: Perez, Angel
creator: Wandel, Richard
creator: Kennedy, Joe
Identifier/Call Number: Coll2010-002
Physical Description: 2 Linear Feet 2 archive cartons, 1 flat box
Date (inclusive): 1969-1998
Date (bulk): bulk
Abstract: Constitution and bylaws, correspondence, committee structure and reports, along with newspapers, informational pamphlets, fliers, lists of gay and lesbian organizations, photographs, and clippings of the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), New York. The GAA sought to avoid internal conflict by democratically electing an executive committee and to avoid entangling alliances by focusing on gay and lesbian rights issues. The organization utilized coordinated non-violent confrontational actions in the attempt to leverage the power of the straight and gay press to increase the awareness of gay and lesbian civil rights issues, 1969-1981.
Access
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Preferred Citation
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Acquisition Information
Donated by Jerome O'Hara and Angel Perez, date unknown.
Processing Information
Processing this collection has been funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.
Formerly housed in boxes 103-034, 103-035, 103-036, 103-90 and Gay Activists Alliance -- New York, ONE subject files.
Collection processed by Michael C. Oliveira, 18 June 2010.
Administrative History
Jim Owles, Marty Robinson, Arthur Evans, and others disenchanted by the lack of structure and focus of the Gay Liberation Front and the rigid hierarchical structure of the Mattachine Society of New York formed the Gay Activists Alliance, GAA. The founders sought to avoid conflicts that had plagued other civil rights organizations by democratically electing an executive committee, holding regular membership meetings, observing parliamentary procedure, and focusing on a single issue, gay and lesbian rights. In December 1969, Owles, Robinson, Evans, Arthur Bell, and eight others (which according to some sources included Kay Tobin, Vito Russo, and Morty Manford) gathered in Bell's apartment to begin the process of forming a new organization. The GAA focused on exclusively on gay and lesbian rights issues, such as the end of discriminatory practices in housing and employment, the repeal of the consensual sodomy statue, and the end of police harassment. The group specialized in direct confrontational actions, "zaps," challenging homophobic comments and politicians to take a stand on issues concerning gays and lesbians. The leadership of GAA attempted to plan their "zaps" to leverage the power of the gay and straight media. What little media coverage GAA received provided some protection against police abuses, increased awareness of gay and lesbian rights issues, and fueled the expansion of the GAA organizational model to other cities across the United States and Canada.
Beginning in 1971, weekly dances held at the organization's headquarters, a rented firehouse on Wooster Street in SoHo, a neighborhood in Manhattan, attracted new members and provided a regular source of income until an arsonist struck in 1974. While the group contributed to the successful campaign of Bella Abzug to the United States Congress and Mayor Lindsay's executive order to end discrimination in city hiring, the passage of a bill to end discriminatory practices in housing and employment in the city would not pass until the 1986. Overtime people splintered from GAA, many women left to form Lesbian Feminist Liberation in 1972 and in the next year, others formed what would become the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. GAA members would also contribute to the organization of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, PFLAG and Lambda Legal. While the group continued its “zaps” membership dwindled. In 1977, Anita Bryant’s “Save Our Children” campaign spurred membership. However by 1981, there had not been a regular meeting in years, and unauthorized letters on the organization's stationery began appearing. The veterans and the last remaining active members called a meeting to pass the necessary resolutions to dissolve GAA.


**Scope and Contents**

The collection consists of the Gay Activists Alliance, New York (GAA) constitution and bylaws, publications, newsletters, newspapers, fliers, and news clippings along with limited correspondence, committee report files, conference fliers, and photographs of early picketing and zaps. The GAA published materials include The Activist newsletter and newspaper and public outreach pamphlets proving general information on homosexuality, the repeal of the consensual sodomy statue, and the fight for gay and lesbian civil rights. The collection also includes reports on employment discrimination, information on the state and city gay and lesbian civil rights bills, and 3 editions of an international list of gay and lesbian organizations. Information on the choice of the lambda symbol, a typescript copy of Joe Kennedy's *The Summer of 1977: GAA's Last Hurrah*, and a few buttons along with a small frisbee complete the collection. Photographs by John Lauritsen, John Rash, and Richard C. Wandel captured picketing and zaps by GAA members including John Paul Hudson, Bob Milne, Jim Owles, and others. The demonstrations documented include; a synagogue, Saint Patrick's Cathedral, CBS Broadcasting Center, Household Finance Corporation, and New York City Hall.

**Related Archival Materials**


Morris Kight papers,Coll2010-008, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, California. - see Morty Manford correspondence.

Advocate records, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, California.

**Separated Materials**

The following books were relocated to the ONE library


The following newsletters, newspapers, and pamphlets were relocated to the ONE archives periodical collection:


*Fag Rag*: Summer 1972.


*Gay Flames*: newsletter; December 14, 1970.


*Gay People and Mental Health*: Volume 1, number 6.


*Manhattan Gay Scene Guide: Interesting, Hysterical & Historic Places*.


**Subjects and Indexing Terms**

Newspapers

Photographs

Gays -- Civil rights

Gay liberation movement -- New York (State) -- New York

Associations, institutions, etc. -- New York (State) -- New York

Clippings

Gay activists

Gay rights -- United States

Discrimination in employment

Owles, Jim

Rash, John

Gay Activist Alliance

Lauritsen, John

O'Hara, Jerome
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