Laura J. Bock papers

Finding aid created by GLBT Historical Society staff using RecordEXPRESS
GLBT Historical Society
989 Market Street, Lower Level
San Francisco, California 94103
(415) 777-5455
reference@glbthistory.org
http://www.glbthistory.org/
2020
Descriptive Summary
Title: Laura J. Bock papers
Dates: 1945-2014
Collection Number: 2013-21
Creator/Collector: Bock, Laura J.
Extent: 9 cartons, 1 oversize box (10.2 linear feet)
Repository: GLBT Historical Society
San Francisco, California 94103
Abstract: The collection documents the life and work of activist Laura J. Bock. There are materials related to her personal and family history, her business, and her work as a lesbian feminist, disability rights and fat activist. Bock’s papers include correspondence, writings, photographs, biographical information and personalia, business records, subject files, ephemera and artifacts. There are also materials related to the Fat Lip Readers’ Theater, which Bock helped found.
Language of Material: English
Access
Collection is open for research with the following exceptions: researchers may not publish or publicly disclose names of, or identifying information about, individuals discussed in Carton 3, Folders 11-16 until January 1, 2035.
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
Laura J. Bock papers. GLBT Historical Society
Acquisition Information
Gift of Laura J. Bock in October 2013.
Biography/Administrative History
Laura Bock was born in 1945 in San Francisco, California, the daughter and granddaughter of socialist feminist activists. Growing up in the 1950s during the McCarthy period she learned to be silent about her family background. It wasn’t until 1982 at the Jewish Feminist Conference in San Francisco that she came out as a red diaper baby (RDB) and happily joined other RDB’s in sharing their stories and their leftist culture. She attended the University of Oregon in Eugene where she was a campus and community activist in the civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, and free speech movements. She also campaigned for Senator Wayne Morse and local progressive politicians. Upon graduation in 1967, she lived in Berkeley, California, first working as a teacher in children’s centers and then as a clerk typist at the University of California in the inventory department. She participated in movements to save People’s Park and to end the war. In 1970, Bock began graduate school at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst as one of the few women graduate students in the history department. Her focus was Nineteenth Century social movements in the United States. In June, after completing her first year, she lost her eyesight due to a sudden and catastrophic virus attack on her optic nerves. She returned to San Francisco to be hospitalized and recover. During the subsequent six months she worked with the Department of Rehabilitation and the Lighthouse for the Blind, learning mobility skills as well as negotiating her return to Amherst and resuming her graduate program. Upon her return she discovered that there was little consciousness with regard to disability access and sensitivity at the university or in the little town. She became a client of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind and was counseled not to make waves. She got them to assist her in organizing a support group for vision loss students in the five college-area (University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Smith, Mt. Holyoke, and Hampshire) and helped facilitate the group, which met every month or so. She struggled with finding new ways to accomplish the research and writing tasks she had once done with ease. Ultimately, she left Massachusetts without her Masters, having passed her orals but with two incompletes in classes, and returned to San Francisco to live with her parents in their Willard street family home. She helped care for her critically ill mother, who died in 1977 and for her father, who died in 1979. In 1980 Bock opened Bock’s Bed and Breakfast in her home and operated it for almost 25 years. One of the first B&Bs in San Francisco, she learned “on the run” and was gratified by returning guests and appreciative of prospective B&B operators with whom she consulted and assisted. She was asked to speak at conferences on the gay and lesbian niche market. Bock came out as a fat activist in her early thirties and as a lesbian at the age of thirty six. A founding member of Fat Lip Readers Theater, she wrote, directed and performed for eighteen years on stage, television, radio, in trainings and workshops, on street
corners, at rallies, and on video. She is grateful to the second wave of feminism for inspiring her to find her voice, her anger, her political analysis and her communities. Throughout her adult life, consciousness raising and support groups provided crucial opportunities to be with others coping with the challenges of being a woman, fat, lesbian, disabled, Jewish and old. She cofounded a Jewish Women’s Study Group, an Old Lesbian Memoir writing group and shared facilitation of a fat women’s support group for many years. In 2010 she was co-chair of FABLED Asp (Fabulous Activist Bay Area Lesbians with Disabilities), organizing and hosting many events for “2010, A Year Celebrating Activist Lesbians,” which culminated in a major exhibit and accompanying events at the San Francisco Public Library’s main branch. To her great pleasure and satisfaction, she was trained as a volunteer archivist by the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society and processed the large and important collection of the San Francisco Women’s Centers/Women’s Building which, in addition to documenting an organization, included information about all the issues and controversies and events of the second wave of the women’s movement in the Bay Area. In 2013, Bock sold her family home and moved with her partner of 13 years, Suzanne Gary, and their little dog, Louise, to The Redwoods, a senior living community in Mill Valley, California. In the first 7 months there, she organized four gatherings of red diaper babies living at The Redwoods and, along with two other residents, organized the Women’s History Month event where she spoke on the herstory of the second wave of feminism. This collection was processed by Laura J. Bock with significant assistance from Nadine May, Lena Nsomeka Gomes and Sally Goldin. Finding Aid was created by Laura J. Bock in October 2014.

**Scope and Content of Collection**

The collection documents the life and work of activist Laura J. Bock. There are materials related to her personal and family history, her business, and her work as a lesbian feminist, disability rights and fat activist. Bock’s papers include correspondence, writings, photographs, biographical information and personalia, business records, subject files, ephemera and artifacts. Bock was one of the founders of the Fat Lip Readers’ Theater and the collection includes the group’s organizational records and scripts. The collection is divided into 6 Series: Forebears and Childhood, 1945-1963; University Years, 1963-1973; 1973-2000 comprising 3 sub-series: Bock’s Personal History, Bock’s Bed and Breakfast, and Second Wave Feminism; Fat Lip Readers Theater, 1981-1999; Personal and Political Activities, 2000-2014; and Bock’s Writings.

**Indexing Terms**

- Lesbians
- Feminism
- People with disabilities
- Fat Lip Readers Theater--Archives.
- Mother Tongue Feminist Theater Collective--Archives.
- Fabled Asp--Archives.

[Container List for the Laura J. Bock Papers]