Descriptive Summary

Title: Claude Schwob papers
Dates: 1926-1998
Collection Number: 2003-12
Creator/Collector:
Extent: 1 carton, 7 boxes, 1 rolled item (in oversize box), 1 oversize folder (5 Linear Feet)
Repository: GLBT Historical Society
San Francisco, California 94103

Abstract: The Claude Schwob papers document the scientist’s professional, personal and erotic life. Schwob (1910-2000) was a research nuclear chemist who worked on the Manhattan Project. After his time in New Mexico, he relocated to San Francisco and worked at the U.S. Naval Radiological Defense Lab. He was one of the nation’s leading experts on radiation. On the personal side, Schwob befriended, took nude photographs of, and mentored many men. About half of the collection consists of prints of these photographs.

Language of Material: English
Access
Collection is open for research.

Preferred Citation
Claude Schwob papers. GLBT Historical Society

Biography/Administrative History
Claude Schwob (June 16, 1910-July 24, 2000) was born in New York and grew up in France. He received his B.S. M.S. and doctorate in Chemistry from Fordham University in 1931, and taught at the University’s St. Peter’s College. He enlisted in the U.S. Army during WWII. He volunteered for the Chemical Warfare Service (soon renamed the Chemical Corps) and worked on the Manhattan Project at the University of Chicago and Los Alamos, New Mexico. He taught at Chicago’s Carnegie Institute of Technology until 1947. In 1948, he applied for a position at the U.S. Naval Radiological Defense Lab in San Francisco, where he spent the remainder of his professional life. He became one of the nation’s foremost experts on radiation and the focus of his work was safe ways of detecting, preventing, and responding to radiation exposure. According to his obituary in the B.A.R., Schwob loved San Gregorio beach, the Russian River, the pool at the Oasis, beautiful men and photography. He supported programs for homeless gay youth, such as Hospitality House. During much of his adult life, Schwob collected or took photographs of nude men and accumulated a large number of these prints. According to the donor of his papers (who owned a used magazine store), Schwob continued to be sexually active until close to his death at age 90.

Scope and Content of Collection
The Claude Schwob papers document the scientist’s professional, personal and erotic life. Schwob (1910-2000) was a research nuclear chemist who worked on the Manhattan Project. After his time in New Mexico, he relocated to San Francisco and worked at the U.S. Naval Radiological Defense Lab. He was one of the nation’s leading experts on radiation. For the rest of his professional life, he identified and taught about safety issues related to radiation. On the personal side, Schwob befriended, took nude photographs of, and mentored many men. About half of the collection consists of prints of these photographs. The erotic photographs are unusual in that most of were shot by Schwob, most depict male nudes without erections, and most were taken in Schwob’s own apartments. The collection also contains correspondence, materials about his scientific career, erotic and professional writings and paper ephemera and artifacts, such as matches and engineering tools. It is divided into five series: Correspondence; Personal Papers; Professional Papers; Photographic Materials; and Artifacts. Unfortunately, there are relatively few surviving letters and other documents within Schwob’s personal papers. Nothing is known of his early life, nor is much known about his friends or his personal interests and activities. His homes are undocumented before he moved to San Francisco in the early 1950s. Of the Professional Papers, the files on the Manhattan Project, and other papers related to the US. Naval Radiological Defense Lab are probably the most interesting. Included in the large folder accompanying this collection are front pages of two issues of the “Santa Fe New Mexican” following the drop of the first bomb on Hiroshima.

Indexing Terms
Gay men
Erotica
Photography
World War, 1939-1945