Louis Graydon Sullivan papers

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**Descriptive Summary**

**Title:** Louis Graydon Sullivan papers

**Dates:** 1755-1991 (bulk 1961-1991)

**Collection Number:** 1991-07

**Creator/Collector:**

**Extent:** 9 linear feet (7 cartons, two oversized folders)

Online items available: [https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/catalog?f%5Bcollection_name_ssim%5D%5B%5D=Lou+Sullivan+Collection](https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/catalog?f%5Bcollection_name_ssim%5D%5B%5D=Lou+Sullivan+Collection)

**Repository:** GLBT Historical Society

San Francisco, California 94103

**Abstract:** Louis Graydon Sullivan (1951-1991) was a gay and transgender activist who was notable as a community organizer, lay historian, and particularly as a diarist. Sullivan's papers include extensive diaries, short stories, poems, essays, correspondence, and photographs which intimately document his life and transition. The collection also contains his personal subject files and memorabilia.

**Language of Material:** English

**Access**

Collection is open for research.

**Publication Rights**

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**Preferred Citation**

Louis Graydon Sullivan papers. GLBT Historical Society

**Acquisition Information**

The collection was donated to the GLBT Historical Society by Maryellen Sullivan Hanley in 1991.

**Biography/Administrative History**

Louis Graydon Sullivan (1951-1991) was a gay and transgender activist who was notable as a community organizer, lay historian, and particularly as a diarist. Sullivan’s diaries chronicle his social and medical transition - as well as his rich emotional and sexual life - from his teenage years in Milwaukee until his death. Sullivan was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1951, the third of six children born to a close-knit Catholic family. He attended Catholic schools, where he was a good student, and loved to take on male roles in games, which he called “playing boys.” As a teenager, his interest in masculinity coalesced into an aesthetic built around a romantic appreciation for rock stars (especially the Beatles) and tough, troubled young men. Sullivan struggled throughout his early life to understand himself and his gender, but his attraction to men was never in doubt; nor was his recognition of himself as queer. After graduating high school and beginning work as a secretary, he often wore men’s clothing and became an active member of the Gay People’s Union (GPU) of Milwaukee. By 1973, he had begun to identify as a “female transvestite,” and had begun to write publicly about his experiences in the GPU News, first with the article “A Transvestite Answers a Feminist” and then with “Looking Towards Transvestite Liberation,” which was widely reprinted in the gay and lesbian press. It remains a landmark article for its early investigation of the question of gender identity in queer culture. By 1975, Sullivan identified as a female-to-male (FTM) transsexual, the contemporary term and the one he would use for most of the remainder of his life. After he and his long-term partner moved to San Francisco, he began seeking medical transition, but was held back by a number of factors - including his partner’s disapproval, an unsympathetic therapist, and the fact that, as a gay man, he did not fit the medical establishment’s stereotypical image of an FTM. For a time, he attempted to give up wearing men’s clothing and recommit to living as a woman. Nonetheless, by 1979 and following the end of his relationship, he had begun medical and social transition. Sullivan rapidly became a leader in the trans community, both in the Bay Area and beyond. Through his involvement in support groups such as Golden Gate Girls/Guys and his volunteer work at the Janus Information Facility, he connected with other FTMs as a mentor, correspondent, and friend. In 1986, he founded the group now known as FTM International. He also began compiling his practical knowledge into a booklet he would publish as Information for the Female to Male Cross-Dresser and Transsexual, whose three editions would connect him with transmasculine people across the country. After meeting Allan Bérubé and seeing his presentation “Lesbian Masquerade,” Sullivan also became interested in trans history and began working on a biography of an early 20th century trans man, From Female to Male: The Life of Jack Bee Garland. He was a founding member of the GLBT Historical Society, whose newsletter he helped edit and publish and whose periodicals collection he cataloged for the first time. In 1986, Sullivan was diagnosed with HIV. He spent
the last five years of his life intensifying his activism and mentorship within the trans community, as well as his advocacy to the doctors and psychiatrists who had held back his own transition by failing to understand that someone could be both trans and gay. He died of AIDS-related complications in 1991, at the age of 39.

**Scope and Content of Collection**

Sullivan's papers include extensive diaries, short stories, poems, essays, correspondence, and photographs which intimately document his life and transition. The collection also includes versions of all of Sullivan's published works, including notes, drafts, and related correspondence, as well as subject files on gender, trans identity, cross-dressing, and medical transition, generally compiled from newspapers and magazines in the 1970s and 1980s. A full breakdown by series follows. Record Group 1: Biographical and Personal Writings Series 1. Biographical Materials (c. 1951-1991). Includes curricula vitae, obituaries, tributes, testimonials, and memorial service ephemera, as well as three lengthier documents notable for their biographical content: “Sullivan's Travels,” an autobiographical article that appeared in *The Advocate*; a social-scientific case study of Sullivan published by a gender dysphoria specialist; and an intake questionnaire completed by Sullivan for the Stanford Gender Dysphoria Program in 1976. Series 2. Photographs (c.1960-1990). Mostly candid snapshots of Sullivan, c. 1965-1990. The series also includes school portraits of childhood friends, Sullivan family portraits, snapshots of Sullivan's friends and lovers in Milwaukee and San Francisco, and some historical photographs, as well as photo-documentation of Sullivan's medical transition through hormonal therapy, mastectomy, and metoidioplasty. Series 3. Childhood Memorabilia (1951-1970). Birth certificate, YMCA swimming class certificates of completion, Beatles fan club card, Catholic youth organization membership cards, school report cards. Series 4. Diaries and Journals (1961-1991). Sullivan kept a diary from the age of ten until his death. These diaries present a detailed personal record of gender identity formation, transition, coming out as gay, the gay liberation movement in the upper Midwest, late-1960s and early 1970s counterculture, life in the gay male and transgender communities of the San Francisco Bay area between 1975 and 1991, the establishment of an international FTM community, and coping with AIDS. Material from 1961-1974 has been transcribed in typescript form. This series also contains typescript excerpts from the diaries c. 1966-67, pertaining to the band the Velvet Whip, and photostatic reproductions of newspaper clippings inserted into Sullivan's diaries circa 1967. Sullivan kept a separate journal of his experiences with metoidioplasty, 1986-87. Series 5. Personal Writings (1964-circa 1974). Several pieces of short fiction, poetry, and essays, much of which documents Sullivan's early preoccupation with gender identity, gay male sexuality, and sadomasochistic fantasy. The series contains material related to his adolescent love for the Beatles, especially Paul McCartney. Some of the other material was apparently written as high school composition assignments, and is notable for its well-developed social and political views. Series 6. AIDS-Related Materials (1986-1991). Sullivan's medication schedules, hospitalization records, and material related to his participation as a human subject in scientific studies of AIDS. Record Group 2: Correspondence Series 1. Medical Correspondence Regarding Sex-Reassignment (1976-1990). Of particular interest is the correspondence with the Stanford Gender Dysphoria Clinic. The other material in this series provides good documentation of the state of FTM medical transition in the 1980s, as well as Sullivan's personal quest to achieve said transition. Series 2. FTM Correspondence (1979-1990). Sullivan apparently came in contact with many of the early correspondents (c. 1979-1981) through his work at the Janus Information Facility. Although in some instances a personal relationship developed through the correspondence, most of the exchanges were rather businesslike. Still, the documents offer revealing glimpses of FTM lives across the United States and Canada. Most of the later correspondence is related to Sullivan's association with FTM International, the peer-support group he founded in 1986. Series 3. General Correspondence, (1973-1991). The series is arranged alphabetically by correspondent's last name, with two exceptions which are arranged according to subject matter, and follow the alphabetically arranged material in the physical organization of the papers. One is a folder of responses and replies to personal ads Sullivan placed in Coming Up! in 1984-85; the other is correspondence with various medical and psychotherapeutic professionals Sullivan met while attending the annual Harry Benjamin Gender Dysphoria Symposia, 1986-1989. For a list of Sullivan’s principal correspondents, see Appendix A. Record Group 3: Publications and Related Materials Series 1. Information for the Female-to-Male Transsexual and Cross-Dresser (1980-1990). Copies of all three editions of Sullivan’s guide. Some manuscript notes and revisions of first edition. Series 2. From Female to Male: The Life of Jack Bee Garland (1984-1990). Various drafts of the manuscript, working notes, some research material, images, publisher's correspondence, publicity material, reviews, and advertisements. Series 3. Short Published Works (1973-1990). The series contains copies of Sullivan's early articles and reviews in GPU News, Metamorphosis, and other queer publications. Manuscript drafts, notes, and related correspondence exist for some of the published works. One particularly rich folder pertains to Sullivan's negative review of Leslie Lothstein's Female-to-Male Transsexualism, the first major clinical investigation of the topic. The series also contains material related to a preliminary article on Jack Garland written by Sullivan for the San Joachin Historian, a local history newsletter; the article is notable for its straightforward presentation of minority sexuality in a publication not oriented toward the queer or transgender communities. Other material in the series relates to “Sullivan's Travels,” an autobiographical article published in *The Advocate*, and to “Passing Fancy II,” an article on the history of cross-dressing written for the same publication. For a bibliography of Sullivan's publications, see Appendix B. Record Group
4: Interests and Activities Series 1: Activities and Interests (1979-1990). This series contains documents related to Sullivan's participation in various groups and organizations, ranging from the Jack and Jill sex parties to the ACLU Transsexual Rights Commission. It includes records of his association with the Small Club - a group for men who considered themselves to have small penises - and C.I.P. (Cruising Impaired Persons); participation in both groups is indicative of how Sullivan dealt with issues of his physical differences from other gay men. The series contains minutes of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society (GLHS, now the GLBT Historical Society) Archives Committee and copies of the GLHS newsletter, which Sullivan helped to edit and publish. Three folders of material relate to Sullivan's FTM peer-support group. One contains flyers announcing FTM Get-Togethers and other social events; another contains correspondence and membership questionnaires concerning a medical study of the effects of testosterone on the cardiovascular health of FTMs; a third contains material related to the club's video library. The richest material in this series pertains to Golden Gate Girls/Guys, the transgender organization in which Sullivan participated, circa 1979-1981; it include membership surveys, networking directories, transgender resource guides, officers' correspondence, orientation materials, bylaws, and some business papers. Record Group 5: Research Files on Gender, Cross-Dressing, and Transgender Identity Series 1. Subject Files, (1886-1991). Sullivan kept subject files on a variety of topics, arranged by subject in rough chronological order. The series contains clippings of FTM cross-dressers and "passing women" from the late 19th century through 1990. Other files, drawn largely from sources in the 1980s, pertain to graphic images of FTMs, male-to-female cross-dressing and gender transition, and miscellaneous material about gender and sexuality. Series 2. Books, Pamphlets, and Articles (1755-1989). Sullivan collected a wide range of published works on gender dysphoria, gender transition, cross-dressing, and genital reconstruction surgery. The material contained in this series constitutes a relatively complete collection of the major academic and scientific works on these topics through 1990, as well as several rare biographies of female-to-male cross-dressers. A few folders contain correspondence and other materials related to the published work. For a bibliography of published works contained in the Sullivan collection, see Appendix C. Series 3. Miscellaneous Gender-Related Material (1980-1990). Included in this series are flyers and other ephemera, transcripts of television talk shows featuring transgender people, testosterone package inserts, the Benjamin Standards of Care, a subject file pertaining to Les Nichols and Annie Sprinkle, the script for a movie about gender ambiguity for which Sullivan was a reader, and other difficult-to-classify materials. Series 4. Bibliographies and Indexes (1967-1986). Print-outs of exhaustive online bibliographic database subject searches on transgender-related topics through 1986. Sullivan also indexed many of these clippings and articles in his research files. Series 5. Audio Tapes (1988-1990). Recordings of radio programs on transgender identity and cross-dressing, interview with Lou Sullivan about his biography of Jack Garland, recordings of presentations at FTM Get-Togethers and ETVC meetings. For a list of tapes, see Appendix F. Series 6. Video Tapes (1935-1990). Most of the twenty videotapes in this series are recordings of television talk shows that treat the topics of transgender identity and cross-dressing. Some of the videotapes are theatrical motion pictures that treat the same topics, or in which female actors play male roles. For a list of titles, see Appendix G. Record Group 6: Computer-Readable Documents Series 1: Computer-Readable Documents. Currently unusable, due to an inability to locate the software in which they were written. Most of the disks merely contain back-up files for the Jack Bee Garland biography and for transcripts of Sullivan's diaries, but there is some evidence that the computer files also contain correspondence for which no hard copy exists.

Indexing Terms
Transgender people
Gay men
Gay men's writings
Transgender people’s writings
AIDS (disease)

Guide to the Louis Graydon Sullivan papers