

PRESERVING HISTORY: OHIO LESBIAN ARCHIVES RECEIVES LGBTQ+ MATERIALS FROM P&G

For 33 years, the Ohio Lesbian Archives has worked to collect and preserve Cincinnati's LGBTQ+ history, and a recent P&G donation sheds even more light on queer stories

By **Brianna Connock** - October 28, 2022



s LGBTQ+ history month is coming to a close, organizations including the Ohio Lesbian Archives (OLA) are working to collect, preserve and educate the public on LGBTQ+ history year-round.

The OLA was established in 1989, originally above the Crazy Ladies bookstore in Northside. Now operating from the basement of the Clifton United Methodist Church and entirely run by volunteers, the archives is a place for researchers, students and those who are simply curious to learn about LGBTQ+ history.

"For too long we've been this unknown, underground group, but we haven't been trying to be," says Phebe Beiser, co-founder of the OLA. The group organizes discussions, events, and film screenings to educate the public.

The OLA is deeply rooted in Cincinnati LGBTQ+ history. While their original focus was to tell the lesbian "herstory," they are a resource for the greater community. The organization is the only one of its kind in the tri-state, and it is one of a handful in the United States. There isn't a national museum dedicated to LGBTQ+ history, so the work of telling the story is left up to these smaller archive operations.

"I don't know of any other space in town where you can be immersed in stories and images like this. I always hope that people will feel loved, supported, and emboldened by [learning] that they do have a history," says Beiser.

The OLA has recently experienced an awakening through a newfound connection with younger Cincinnatians. They've had an influx of new volunteers eager to help—even with the most mundane tasks like filing and sorting. Now, the group is looking to expand into its own space where it can host talks and be a more comfortable learning environment.

"We want to get the volunteers more involved. We want their ideas for events coming up. We always have Pride and history month, but in between there are a lot of months still there," says Beiser. The OLA has organized a volunteer committee to update their website and online presence to make them more accessible.

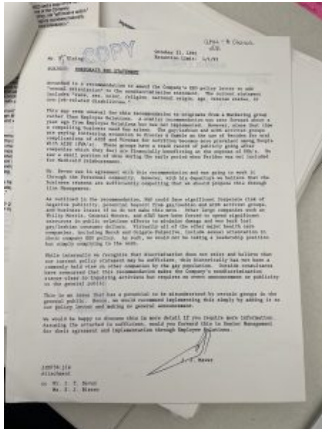
Documenting P&G's LGBTQ+ History

Procter & Gamble (P&G) is no doubt a giant in Cincinnati's community and history. The international corporation's headquarters, located right in our own backyard, also has an important LGBTQ+ history.

P&G began documenting its own LGBTQ+ history five years ago. Brent Miller, Senior Director of Global LGBTQ+ Equality at the company, started his search to uncover the story at the company's archives. After being told that they didn't have anything like what he was looking for, he turned to fellow employees for help.

"It was just a fluke that they had saved [these items]. We learned so much about our own history that we decided it was important that it was publicly available," says Miller.

Items saved by P&G employees were not all pleasant, including some negative notes they received from coworkers. Although it was sometimes a painful experience, employees from long ago had the foresight to document and preserve their experiences.



A 1991 document requesting an amendment to the EEO policy to include sexual orientation.

PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY PROCTER & GAMBLE

"It's a great way to connect with the younger generation and recognize the legacy of those people who came before us and worked so hard to create more open and supportive communities," says Miller.

In the modern world, much of our lives are spent at our jobs. This means it's crucial to preserve LGBTQ+ history, culture and community within the workplace. P&G adopted sexual orientation into their Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policy in 1992, making the company among the first 3 percent of Fortune 500 companies to do so.

Since then, P&G has been committed to supporting the LGBTQ+ community. The year 2000 marked the company's first ad depicting a same-sex couple as well as their first Cincinnati Pride sponsorship.

P&G Donates LGBTQ+ Archives to the OLA

In recognition of LGBTQ+ history month, P&G recently donated part of its digital archives that Miller and his team have compiled and a \$5,000 cash donation to the OLA. Although it may seem like an unlikely duo—an international corporation and a small nonprofit operating out of a church basement—these two organizations are working together to bring Cincinnati's LGBTQ+ history to life.

P&G worked with the OLA on film *The Words Matter*, the story of Michael Chanak's activism that eventually lead to the 1992 inclusion of sexual orientation into P&G's EEO policy.

"Our [partnership] was born out of a relationship and the fact that we have both become so committed to telling the story," says Miller. "What's fascinating about what Phebe and her group has done is that they've captured this moment that is very easily lost."

An unlikely duo on the outside perhaps, but Miller and Beiser's mission in their documentation of Cincinnati's LGBTQ+ history is the same: it's all about perspective and education.

"By doing this we hope it continues a conversation about equality and inclusion, not only in



1919 Procter & Gamble Ivory soap advertisement

PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY PROCTER & GAMBLE



An early 20th century Procter & Gamble Gillette razor advertisement

PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY PROCTER & GAMBLE



Michael Chanak, P&G employee that started the movement leading to the company's inclusion of sexual orientation into their EEO.

PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY PROCTER &
GAMBLE

importance of perspective, since many of the current volunteers at the OLA weren't even alive when this movement was taking place.

While the city of Cincinnati and our country as a whole have come a long way since Beiser began the OLA and P&G began adopting new policies, work remains to be done. The partnership between the two reflects this idea of celebrating the victories while continuing that work.

"Through all of the work that we've done in studying our history, it's very clear that progress isn't linear. It's very cyclical. There are still forces in our community that want to hold us back," says Miller.

For inquiries about visiting the Ohio Lesbian Archives, contact olarchives@gmail.com

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