

LGBT Center Central PA History Project



*Discovering stories of
extraordinary lives*

NEWS

Spring/Summer 2018

Work to begin on traveling exhibit

Work will soon begin on a new traveling exhibit as a collaborative effort between our History Project and other members of the PA LGBT History Network. The exhibit will travel throughout the state during 2019 in celebration of the 50th anniversary year of the Stonewall Uprising in New York City that helped spark the modern LGBTQ civil rights movement. The exhibit will chronicle the more than 50 years of efforts in Pennsylvania to obtain LGBTQ civil rights protections, and feature stories about the passage of local non-discrimination ordinances in several cities, including Harrisburg, Lancaster and York here in central Pennsylvania. A grant to fund the exhibit has just been received from the Schlegel-Deibler Foundation (see separate article below).

Grant received

A grant for \$10,000 has been received from the Schlegel-Deibler Foundation to fund the History Project's collaborative effort to produce a traveling exhibit to help commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising in 2019. We thank them for their support!

This is the second grant the History Project has received from this foundation in two years. \$8,000 was received in 2017 for general operating support of the History Project.

The Schlegel-Deibler Foundation was established by Richard Lamar Schlegel. Richard was born in 1927 in Berrysburg, PA in northern Dauphin County, and lived in several other central PA communities growing up as his parents relocated for work opportunities. He graduated from Penn State University with a B.A. in Political Science in 1949 and received a master's degree in political science and public administration from American University in Washington, D. C.

Richard got a job with the federal government, the Civil Aeronautics Administration (now the FAA) in 1952, and was rapidly promoted to high level positions and security clearances. He later transferred to a civilian position in the Department of the Army. This was the era of the House Un-American Activities Committee and FBI investigations into communist sympathizers and other “subversives” known as the “red-scare” or “McCarthyism” after Republican Sen. Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin who became the legislator most associated with leading the investigations. Soon the investigations also turned to rooting out homosexuals in what was known as the “lavender scare” resulting in more than 5,000 federal employees losing their jobs.



Richard Schlegel sitting on sofa, probably from early 1960's; from the Richard L. Schlegel papers, #7306, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library

Richard Schlegel got caught up in this as investigations of his personal life turned up evidence of attendance at a gay party and other encounters leading to a charge of “indecent and immoral conduct.” Richard lost his high level federal job in 1961. He filed suit to be reinstated, and his case made it up to the U.S. Supreme Court, which allowed the lower court ruling to stand against Schlegel.

Richard decided to come back to central PA to stay with his parents in Lewisburg, and decided on a whim to drop off his resume to the Governor’s personnel office in Harrisburg. He was given an interview and hired as the Director of Finance for the PA Department of Highways (now PennDoT) in 1963. He moved into an apartment at 205 State Street, was enjoying great success in his new job, and was traveling to Philadelphia to attend meetings of the newly-formed Janus Society, one of the few early homophile organizations in the country. In 1963 Clark Polak, president of the Janus Society urged Richard to open a chapter of the Janus Society in Harrisburg. Richard decided to do just that, and gathered several friends, held meetings and opened a post office box at the Federal Square post office in Harrisburg. This is the first known gay organization created in central Pennsylvania. But soon, this would prove disastrous for Richard, who in early 1965 was suddenly summoned to the Secretary of Highway’s office to find out that two postal inspectors had noticed Richard’s name printed in the newsletter of the Janus Society. An investigation ensued and Richard was forced to resign. Once again, he had lost a high level government position just for being gay.

Richard would go on to do accounting work in the private sector and was involved in publishing gay magazines. He became a savvy investor of his money which afforded him a comfortable retirement at his parent’s home in Lewisburg. And it gave him the resources to establish and endow the Schlegel-Deibler foundation which provides LGBT awards at American University and supports LGBT organizations and projects. He died in 2006. Richard Schlegel remains one of the little-known pioneers of LGBT civil rights, right here in central Pennsylvania.

(Note: Information for this article taken from the oral history interview of Richard Schlegel conducted by Dr. Marc Stein, 1993)

Progress continues

We continue to make progress on many fronts with the History Project, including oral history interviews, transcriptions and exhibits. We currently have oral history interviews completed with 135 individuals (and transcriptions completed for all but 9 interviews). About 100 people remain on the waiting list. We have nearly 100 linear feet of artifact and archival collections.

The history project steering committee will be having its retreat in August 2018 in coordination with the retreat process for the LGBT Center's board and staff. We have done a retreat every two years since the beginning of the history project to help us plan our future work and programs.

We are looking for a new member of the history project steering committee to help with fundraising efforts. If you are interested, please contact us at history@centralpalgbtcenter.org.

Dickinson intern making a difference

We say farewell and thank you to Emily Scheiber, our intern for the spring semester. Emily is a Women's and Gender Studies major at Dickinson College who expects to graduate next year. Emily assisted in doing transcriptions of oral history interviews, collections processing, and other projects. We are currently seeking interns for the fall semester



Emily Scheiber at work at the Dickinson College Archives

Support our friends

The Harrisburg Gay Men's Chorus and the Central PA Womyn's Chorus have been supportive friends to the History Project, welcoming us to be part of their information tables and providing free ad space in concert programs. Please check out their web sites for upcoming concert information and support them in their events.

<http://www.harrisburgmenschorus.org/>

<http://www.cpwchorus.org/>

And don't forget upcoming events at the LGBT Center: check out the full calendar of events at www.centralpalgbtcenter.org/. The LGBT Center is located at 1306 N. Third Street in Harrisburg.

LGBT Center of Central PA History Project

Founded in 2012, celebrating our 6th anniversary!

Winner of the 2014 J. Franklin Jameson Award from the Society of American Archivists

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<http://www.centralpalgbtcenter.org/lgbt-history-project>

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Working in partnership with the Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections

<http://archives.dickinson.edu/lgbt>