

Investigating Kentucky's LGBTQ Heritage

Subaltern Stories from the Bluegrass State

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ABSTRACT: The Kentucky LGBTQ Heritage Context Study illustrates the promise and challenges of early investigations into LGBTQ history in a state in which queer life has rural and urban dimensions. In 2015–16, researchers from the Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research at the University of Louisville partnered with an LGBTQ-equality organization to examine the history of LGBTQ people in Kentucky. Outcomes included the nation's first statewide LGBTQ context narrative, amendments to two National Register of Historic Places nominations, and new attention to underrecognized dimensions of LGBTQ experience. The project demonstrates the importance of existing relationships with LGBTQ communities and the difficulty of collecting archival material within the time constraints of a grant-funded project.

KEY WORDS: LGBTQ, rural/urban, social movements, conservatism, oral history, partnerships

Introduction

During the past two decades, scholars have placed questions about social geography at the center of LGBTQ history.¹ In 1999, in a pioneering study of queer men in the twentieth-century South, historian John Howard chastised the field for a “bicoastal bias” and urged attention to people outside urban centers. Historians of gay and lesbian culture, he observed, had focused overwhelmingly on large coastal cities of the West and Northeast while leaving queer experiences in other areas largely unexplored.² In the decades since, LGBTQ history has grown

¹ Because language has held such power in shaping lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer (or LGBTQ) lives, we begin with a note about its use in this essay. Throughout, we use “LGBTQ” and “queer” interchangeably and in an inclusive sense. On occasion, we also use “gay” in that same inclusive sense—mostly when the source in question uses that terminology or in reference to eras when that usage was common.

² Howard discusses the concentration of early queer histories on cities in New York and California in his *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 11–12. Others have commented similarly, ranging from early scholars such as Brett Beemyn, ed., *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories* (New York:

to encompass a richer, more varied literature. Scholars such as Kevin Murphy, Emily Kazyak, E. Patrick Johnson, Brock Thompson, Scott Herring, Mary L. Gray, and others have produced important studies of LGBTQ communities in the Midwest, the South, rural areas, and smaller cities.³ Collectively, this scholarship counters stereotypes of queer life as predominantly or quintessentially metropolitan. Still, considerable work remains to be done to better understand the experiences and histories of LGBTQ people. A full accounting of the variations among regions and among places of differing sizes and scales remains elusive, and perhaps nowhere is this more evident than at the state and local levels. Contrasts and commonalities among communities within “the South,” “the Midwest,” and “the rural” remain largely uncharted, effectively forming an understudied frontier in LGBTQ history.

We became acutely aware of this problem in the course of working on the recently completed Kentucky LGBTQ Heritage Context Study, the first of its kind in the United States.⁴ In 2014, the Kentucky Heritage Council (KHC) and the Fairness Campaign (FC), a nonprofit organization dedicated to fighting LGBTQ discrimination, received \$25,000 for a statewide LGBTQ historic context through

Routledge, 1997), 1, to more recent ones such as Mary L. Gray, Colin R. Johnson, and Brian Joseph Gilley, eds., *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 1–21, for example.

³ Studies of LGBTQ life in the Midwest include Karen Lee Osborne and William J. Spurlin, eds., *Reclaiming the Heartland: Lesbian and Gay Voices from the Midwest* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Ricardo J. Brown, *The Evening Crowd at Kirmser’s: A Gay Life in the 1940s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Chad Heap, “The City as a Sexual Laboratory: The Queer Heritage of the Chicago School,” *Qualitative Sociology* 26, no. 4 (December 2003): 457–87; Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Larry Knopp, eds., *Queer Twin Cities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); St. Sukie de la Croix, *Chicago Whispers: A History of LGBTQ Chicago Before Stonewall* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012); Jill Austin and Jennifer Brier, eds., *Out in Chicago: LGBT History at the Crossroads* (Chicago: Chicago Historical Society, 2012); Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Emily Kazyak, “Midwest or Lesbian? Gender, Rurality, and Sexuality,” *Gender and Society* 26, no. 6 (September 2012): 825–48; and the special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* on the theme of “Queering the Middle: Race, Region, and a Queer Midwest,” ed. Martin E. Manalansan IV, Chantal Nadeau, Richard T. Rodriguez, and Siobhan B. Somerville, vol. 20, nos. 1–2 (January 2014). On queer life in the South, see Howard, *Men Like That*; James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); E. Patrick Johnson, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Wesley Chenault and Stacy Braukman, *Images of America: Gay and Lesbian Atlanta* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2008); Brock Thompson, *The Un-Natural State: Arkansas and the Queer South* (Little Rock: University of Arkansas Press, 2010); Reta Ugena Whitlock, *Queer South Rising: Voices of a Contested Place* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2013). On rural gays and lesbians, see Scott Herring, “Out of the Closets, Into the Woods: RFD, Country Women, and the Post-Stonewall Emergence of Queer Anti-Urbanism,” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (June 2007): 341–72; Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Mary L. Gray, *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Colin Johnson, *Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013); Gray, Johnson, and Gilley, eds., *Queering the Countryside*.

⁴ Megan Springate, e-mail message to authors, July 23, 2018.

the National Park Service (NPS) Underrepresented Communities Grants program. The program, new that year, directed half a million dollars toward more inclusive histories, targeting designation of historic sites associated with LGBTQ people, African Americans, Latinx, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. Of thirteen grants funded in the inaugural cycle, two—Kentucky and New York—received support for LGBTQ history projects.⁵

Following a request for proposals, the project sponsors selected Catherine Fosl of the University of Louisville as the principal investigator for the study, to begin in August 2015. Fosl, a professor of women's, gender, and sexuality studies and director of the university's Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research (ABI), had written previously on Louisville LGBTQ history and had conducted an oral history project with forerunners and founders of the FC.⁶ Daniel Vivian, an assistant professor of history at the University of Louisville with extensive historic preservation experience, helped to conceptualize the research design and served as part of the resulting research team. By the time the project reached completion a little more than a year later, we had produced a 126-page context narrative; amended two National Register of Historic Places listings; identified nine properties with potential for National Register designation or recognition through similar programs; and stimulated new interest in Kentucky LGBTQ history.⁷

The Kentucky LGBTQ Heritage Context Study unfolded amid a groundswell of interest in the histories of US queer communities. In recent years, interest in queer history has soared, spurred on by legal and legislative battles, debates about same-sex marriage, and the continuing strength and visibility of the LGBTQ equality movement, which often advances queer history as a movement-building strategy.⁸ In 2014, the National Park Service made headlines by announcing an LGBT (later renamed LGBTQ) Heritage Initiative, and two years later, the release of *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History* put the National Historic Landmarks program at the forefront of efforts to recognize and protect sites associated with LGBTQ

5 For a full listing of funded projects and locations, see <https://www.nps.gov/articles/upload/News-Release-Underrepresented-Communities-Grants-2014.pdf>. The New York project surveyed and documented LGBTQ sites in New York City.

6 Catherine Fosl, "It Could be Dangerous!": Gay Liberation and Gay Marriage in Louisville, Kentucky, 1970," *Ohio Valley History* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 45–65; Catherine Fosl and Lara Kelland, "Bring your Whole Self to the Work: Identity and Intersectionality in the Louisville LGBTQ Movement," *Oral History Review* 43, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2016): 138–52.

7 The context narrative is available at <https://www.nps.gov/articles/kentucky-statewide-lgbtq-historic-context-narrative.htm>. The amendments are Elks Athletic Club (Additional Documentation), October 25, 2016, US Department of the Interior, Washington, DC, and Whiskey Row Historic District (Additional Documentation), March 13, 2017, US Department of the Interior, Washington, DC. See also Andrew Henderson, "LGBT History 'Reclaimed' in Louisville Properties," *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), July 10, 2017. In July 2017, Vivian left the University of Louisville to become chair of the Department of Historic Preservation at the University of Kentucky.

8 Lara Kelland, *Clio's Foot Soldiers: Twentieth-Century U.S. Social Movements and Collective Memory* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018).

peoples.⁹ Meanwhile, cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles have completed citywide surveys of LGBTQ history, and an extraordinary number of oral and community history projects strive to capture the diversity of voices and experiences of LGBTQ people.¹⁰ Collectively, these initiatives constitute a sustained effort to record and make visible histories long held in abeyance.

Queer history, like so many other dimensions of queer life, long existed mainly in private, within the confines of close-knit social networks bound together by a combination of fear, secrecy, and mutual support. With the progress of gay liberation and growing acceptance in mainstream culture, queer history has become increasingly public, simultaneously serving as an affirmation to many LGBTQ people and as a vehicle for placing them at the center of the American story. Yet the basic nature of LGBTQ history presents difficulties that, although not entirely unique to the field, require methodologies suited for mining an uneven, often sparse historical record. Because most gender and sexual nonconforming relationships historically took place under clandestine circumstances, documentary sources are often lacking. Establishing trust with oral informants is of particular importance because of past misconceptions or neglect. Moreover, the same race, gender, and class divides that mark US society are evident within LGBTQ communities, making histories of queer people of color, women, and trans people more difficult to access, especially by those who do not identify as such.

Our project encountered all of those challenges. Our research benefited from strong enthusiasm for queer culture in parts of Kentucky and the tireless efforts of LGBTQ history enthusiasts who had begun collecting ephemera and firsthand recollections long before the KHC and FC sought NPS funding. Assets that jump-started our work included the sizeable Williams Nichols Collection of LGBTQ manuscripts and ephemera at the University of Louisville Archives and Special Collections; the volunteer expertise of its founder; a handful of Kentucky-centered or Kentucky-inclusive LGBTQ historiographies; previous oral histories with LGBTQ Kentuckians; and a sizeable body of information on Lexington's

9 On the LGBT Heritage Initiative, see <https://www.nps.gov/articles/upload/LGBTQ-National-Park-Service-Press-Release.pdf>. *LGBTQ America* is available at <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingamericansstories/lgbtqthemestudy.htm>.

10 GPA Consulting, *SurveyLA: LGBT Historic Context Statement* (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles, 2014); Donna J. Graves and Shayne E. Watson, *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco* (San Francisco: City and County of San Francisco, 2015). On recent queer community history projects, see Gregory Rosenthal, "Make Roanoke Queer Again: Community History and Urban Change in a Southern City," *The Public Historian* 39, no. 1 (February 2017): 40–41. Among other examples, see the Central PA History Project (<http://www.centralpalgbtcenter.org/lgbt-history-project>), the Colorado LGBT History Project (<http://glbtcolorado.org/colorado-lgbt-history-project/>), and the Rainbow History Project (<http://rainbowhistory.org/>). LGBTQ oral history projects abound. See, for example, the LGBT Oral History Digital Collaboratory (<http://lgbtqdigitalcollaboratory.org/>), the Oberlin College LGBT Community History Project (<http://www.oberlinlgbt.org/>), the Transgender Oral History Project at the University of Minnesota Libraries (<https://www.lib.umn.edu/tretter/transgender-oral-history-project>), and StoryCorps' OutLoud initiative (<https://current.org/2014/07/storycorps-launches-initiative-to-collect-lgbt-oral-history/>).

LGBTQ history, much of it in the privately held Faulkner-Morgan Archive.¹¹ Although the importance of these resources was apparent from the beginning, their significance became increasingly clear as the project unfolded.

At the same time, everyone involved with the undertaking recognized that the paucity of archival sources and informants in other Kentucky communities precluded development of a narrative with better geographic representation. Persistent efforts to forge connections with persons in western and southern Kentucky, for example, yielded little. Time and funding constraints prevented us from thoroughly investigating some promising leads or, in many cases, from developing relationships that might have produced useful information. Although most historical projects end with pangs about unexamined sources and desires to know more, such feelings proved especially pronounced this time around. While all members of the research team felt a great sense of accomplishment, we also recognized that our effort was fledgling in many regards.

The Kentucky LGBTQ Heritage Context Study illustrates the challenges of investigating LGBTQ history within parameters typical of grant-funded projects with significant public-engagement requirements. An ambitious timetable, an open-ended agenda, and limited resources shaped the entire undertaking. Reflecting critically on the study offers lessons for similar projects. In particular, it illustrates the importance of access to existing archival collections, established relationships with knowledgeable informants, alignment of project goals and expectations with capacity, and engagement with the full spectrum of LGBTQ communities. It also suggests strategies that might be productively employed in similar undertakings. In retrospect, several seemingly obvious steps became apparent to the project team only as our work neared completion. Looking forward, lessons from this endeavor may aid researchers, activists, and would-be project sponsors at a time of fervent interest in LGBTQ history.

Background

Situated at the border of the South, North, and Midwest, Kentucky is a geographically diverse state that encompasses several distinct regions and portions of two time zones. Southern, midwestern, and Appalachian cultural influences commingle, with the eastern part of the state closely tied to the mountain cultures of Appalachia, and the Bluegrass and Western Kentucky predominantly culturally southern, especially as regards race.¹² Politically, Kentucky exemplifies the deep

¹¹ On the Williams Nichols Collection, see <https://library.louisville.edu/archives/lgbtq/> manuscript. Information on the Faulkner-Morgan Archive, also sometimes known as the Faulkner Morgan Pagan Babies Archive, can be found at www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/inst/f4752g788.

¹² Catherine Fosl and Tracy E. K'Meyer, *Freedom on the Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 1–3. See also Lowell Harrison and James Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997); James Klotter, *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox, 1900–1950* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1996); Hamblen Tapp and James Klotter, *Kentucky: Decades of Discord, 1865–1900*

divisions and conservatism of the Trump era. In 2015, Matt Bevin, a conservative “tea party” Republican whose attitude toward the mainstream media often draws comparisons to Donald Trump, won election to the governor’s office. The following year, Republicans gained control of the state House of Representatives for the first time in ninety-five years and sent enough delegates to Frankfort, the state capitol, to take supermajorities in both houses. During the 2017 General Assembly session, Republican leaders pushed through a spate of legislation that included a charter schools bill, a right-to-work law, new restrictions on abortions, and expanded oversight of higher education.¹³

Social norms mirror the state’s political culture. Although Democratic Party strength at the local and state level lasted longer in Kentucky than in other southern states—and persists in some urban areas—Kentucky has become a bastion of conservatism in the past two decades, firmly “red” on most social and economic issues. In the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump won the state with more than 62 percent of the vote, and the influence of senators Mitch McConnell and Rand Paul in national affairs reflects their popularity at home. Polling consistently shows Kentuckians as more conservative on social and religious issues than national norms. Moreover, most commentators place Kentucky in the “Bible Belt”—a region where large numbers of evangelical Christians have considerable influence. Conservatism on social issues, especially sexuality, is common.¹⁴

Yet amid these circumstances, Kentucky also exemplifies a kind of “purple politics” wherein red and blue coexist. LGBTQ cultures have thrived in many Kentucky communities, and gay social movement activists have made important gains in towns and cities. Louisville and Lexington, Kentucky’s two largest cities, have long been recognized as “gay friendly.” Until Mayor Jim Gray left office earlier this year, Lexington was the third largest city in the United States with an openly gay chief executive. The Louisville metropolitan area is home to the eleventh largest concentration of LGBTQ residents in the United States, and in 2016, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) identified Louisville as one of fifty-one US communities to receive a perfect score on its relationship with its LGBTQ population. Louisville and Lexington are both medium-sized by national standards, with metropolitan populations of 1,283,566 and 472,099, respectively, and both cities lie in the north-

(Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1977); Marion Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: From Slavery to Segregation, 1790–1891* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 2003); George Wright, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky: In Pursuit of Equality, 1890–1980* (Frankfort: Kentucky Historical Society, 1992).

¹³ Sheryl Gay Stolberg and Alan Blinder, “Maverick Puts G.O.P. in Control in Kentucky,” *New York Times*, November 4, 2015; Tom Loftus, “GOP Marks Historic Shift,” *Courier-Journal*, November 9, 2016; Tom Loftus, “What Passed, Failed in Legislature,” *Courier-Journal*, April 3, 2017.

¹⁴ Kentucky Results, Election 2016, *New York Times* online, <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/kentucky>. For recent polling data on social issues, see Joel Turner, “The Big Red Poll: The 2016 Kentucky General Election,” Western Kentucky University Social Science Research Center, https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/20161101_KY.pdf; Joel Turner, “The Big Red Poll: Politics in the Commonwealth 2017,” <http://wkusrc.blogspot.com/2017/10/politics-in-commonwealth-2017.html>.

central region of the state, separated by a seventy-five-minute drive.¹⁵ To the west and south are agricultural regions historically dominated by tobacco, while a significant portion of eastern Kentucky lies in the Appalachian Mountains.

The state is substantially rural, ranking as one of seventeen nationally in which 30 percent or more of the population resides outside an urban area.¹⁶ Queer Kentucky is both an urban and rural phenomenon. Since the late 1990s, eight Kentucky towns and smaller cities have adopted ordinances prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and, in some cases, gender identity. In 2013, the eastern Kentucky town of Vicco made national headlines when it became the smallest municipality in the nation to adopt an ordinance outlawing discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. The town's openly gay mayor, Johnny Cummings, became a celebrity overnight, derided by a handful of conservative firebrands and celebrated by a feature broadcast on the Colbert Report.¹⁷

In recent years, relations between LGBTQ Kentuckians and the rest of the state's population have combined coexistence and open conflict. On the one hand, communities such as Louisville, Lexington, and Covington (a suburb of Cincinnati) have well-established LGBTQ communities and vigorously promote equality. Vocal constituencies elsewhere also show strong support for LGBTQ people. In addition to the FC, which was founded in Louisville more than twenty-five years ago, organizations such as the Kentucky Equality Federation and the statewide Fairness

¹⁵ Population statistics from the US Census website, <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>. On Louisville as a liberal city, see the introduction to Tracy E. K'Meyer, *Civil Rights in the Gateway to the South: Louisville, Kentucky, 1945-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009). Numerous sources consulted in the course of this research identified modern Louisville and Lexington as gay-friendly. One speaker at the study-hosted Lexington LGBTQ History Harvest, held on January 26, 2016, called Lexington the "lesbian mecca of the South" over the past half century (recording in possession of Kentucky LGBTQ Heritage Initiative files, University of Louisville Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research, University of Louisville Ekstrom Library). On demographics that have led Louisville to be viewed as LGBTQ-hospitable, see Andrew Wolfson, "Louisville 11th in Rate of Gay Residents," *Courier-Journal*, March 22, 2015. Lexington also received a favorable rating in the 2016 HRC assessment.

¹⁶ Kentucky does have other urban areas, including the southern suburbs of Cincinnati, Ohio. Tanvi Misra, "A Complex Portrait of Rural America," *Citylab*, December 8, 2016: <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2016/12/a-complex-portrait-of-rural-america/509828/>. Rurality can be defined in various ways. This article draws from the US Census Bureau and defines "rural" as areas with less than 2,500 residents in a given radius. Kentucky is losing population most heavily in its rural counties and ranks forty-third in the nation in percentage of population that is urban, according to one source: see <http://www.newgeography.com/content/005187-america-s-most-urban-states>. Kentucky is also substantially poor, possessing the nation's fifth lowest median incomes as of the 2010 census, according to AmericanFactFinder 2016.

¹⁷ Dan Barry, "Sewers, Curfews, and a Ban on Gay Bias," *New York Times*, January 29, 2013. The eight communities with fairness ordinances are (year of adoption specified in parenthesis): Louisville (1999), Lexington (1999), Covington (2003), Vicco (2013), Morehead (2013), Danville (2014), and Midway (2015). See <https://www.fairness.org/issues/lgbtq-non-discrimination-laws/>. Henderson, in western Kentucky, adopted an anti-gay discrimination ordinance in 1999 but rescinded it eighteen months later after a public outcry. See Peter Smith, "Small Cities, Big Ideas," *Courier-Journal*, December 3, 2012.

Coalition champion the cause of sexual and gender equality. On the other hand, efforts to pass a statewide LGBTQ anti-discrimination law have repeatedly stalled, and about three-quarters of Kentuckians live in areas without LGBTQ protections.¹⁸ In 2013, the Kentucky General Assembly passed a religious freedom bill that many commentators saw as partly designed to allow discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. In 2017, the legislature passed Senate Bill 17, a follow-up measure designed to protect religious expression in public schools. Although the bill was inspired by the removal of a Bible verse from a school production of “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” civil rights advocates quickly recognized that it could be used to target non-heteronormative students.¹⁹

We began work on the Kentucky LGBTQ Heritage Context Study acutely aware of the political controversies swirling around us. Planning began in the summer of 2015, in the immediate aftermath of the US Supreme Court’s landmark *Obergefell v. Hodges* ruling that legalized gay marriage. On the one hand, that case, which included six Kentucky couples among its plaintiffs, galvanized Kentucky queer communities. On the other, Rowan County Clerk of Court Kim Davis began a highly publicized refusal to issue marriage licenses to LGBTQ couples. Chris Hartman, director of the FC, missed several team meetings because of immersion in court challenges to Davis’s actions and related press events. Although such resistance to gay marriage seemed to present a challenging moment for launching an LGBTQ heritage project, our work proceeded largely unencumbered. The political climate weighed heavily on the entire research team, but no one involved experienced harassment, opposition, or any negative pressure, not even after Bevin—an outspoken critic of gay marriage and defender of Kim Davis—became governor in late 2015.²⁰

Project Summary

Upon learning of the grant award in July 2015, assembling a team capable of enacting our ambitious agenda of research and community engagement became the first priority. Fosl acted as lead oral historian, editor, and publicist, and directed the project’s many moving parts, including the partnership with the FC. Vivian advised on National Register procedures, identified and investigated sites with possible LGBTQ significance, and directed work on the two National Register amendments. Two University of Louisville students—Wes Cunningham, an MA history student, and Kayla Reddington, an undergraduate history major—served as part-time research assistants, conducting much of the archival and secondary-source research and assisting with oral history interviews, social media research,

¹⁸ About 26 percent of Kentuckians were covered by such protections as of 2017, according to the Movement Advancement Project: see www.lgbtmap.org/equality_maps/profile_state/KY.

¹⁹ Joseph Gerth, “Religious Freedom Act,” *Courier-Journal*, March 20, 2013; Loftus, “What Passed, Failed in Legislature.”

²⁰ Craig Potts, e-mail message to authors, September 27, 2017.

and public meetings.²¹ A few months into the project, we also hired a part-time researcher based in Lexington to develop more content on central Kentucky. Historian Jonathan Coleman is co-founder and co-curator of the Faulkner-Morgan Archive in Lexington. The Anne Braden Institute became the headquarters for the study, providing administrative and public relations support. With a mission of “bridging the gap between academic research and social action,” the ABI provided a gathering space, office supplies, dedicated phone access, recording equipment, a copier, and a network of academic, public, and media contacts.²²

Because of the grant’s short timetable, assembling a team with strong historical research skills became a priority, and the limited pool of available students resulted in a less diverse group than we originally sought. The resulting team members identify variously as heterosexual, gay, bisexual, and queer. All resided at the time in one of the state’s two largest cities, and all are white, although we did have some research assistance from an African American doctoral student.²³ Chris Hartman, a white gay Louisvillian who is highly visible across Kentucky as FC director and chief lobbyist, was not a researcher in the study, but as the FC’s only fulltime program staff, he became the sole community-based facilitator in many aspects of the project.

First steps on the research included producing an inventory of important state-wide contacts and a survey of relevant source materials. We also held an early series of meetings with project sponsors in order to develop a shared timeline that would enable us to gather as much information as possible through engaging Kentucky publics effectively, all the while conforming to the constraints of both the FC, whose small staff was spread thinly by other advocacy priorities, and those of the KHC, whose State Historic Preservation Review Board meets only twice per year. The push to have products ready for those two annual meetings and the strained resources of the FC remained tensions in the project, however.

Initial research began in the Williams Nichols Collection, an archive of LGBTQ materials dating back at least to the flamboyant writer Oscar Wilde’s visit to

²¹ Cunningham and Reddington have since graduated. We would like to thank them here for their many contributions.

²² For more on the ABI, see www.louisville.edu/braden. A small portion of the grant supported Jamie Beard, ABI administrative assistant. We are grateful to Jamie for her help. A secondary research partner to whom we owe thanks is the University of Louisville Archives and Special Collections, which houses the Williams Nichols Collection and the university’s Oral History Center. In support of the context study, the University of Louisville’s Office of the Executive Vice President for Research waived this grant’s indirect costs, which are typically charged by universities in order to seek and manage grant dollars. Without such a waiver, our proposal would likely not have been competitive—an important consideration for universities wishing to pursue similar grants. We thank William Pierce and Judy Bristow for that support. We especially thank Brian Buford, an assistant vice provost who headed the university’s LGBT Center and helped steer our request through the appropriate channels. Marty Perry, e-mail message to Catherine Fosl, April 13, 2015.

²³ We also thank Antron Mahoney of the Department of Pan-African Studies, who served as an ABI graduate assistant in spring 2016. His assistantship made him unavailable to receive grant support that would have enabled a larger role, but he provided valuable background research for the study.

Louisville in 1882. David Williams, a gay writer and history enthusiast who compiled the collection and donated it to the University of Louisville, served as our guide to its contents. Most of the contents center on Louisville, but the collection also contains material on the rest of Kentucky, particularly Lexington and the Kentucky suburbs of Cincinnati. We started with folders of materials copied in Fosl's previous research, and our graduate assistant plumbed the collection further with direction from Williams.

Meanwhile, our undergraduate assistant created an inventory of Lexington-specific historic places, relying mostly on Jeffrey Jones's 2001 University of Kentucky geography dissertation, "Hidden Histories, Proud Communities, Multiple Narratives in the Queer Geographies of Lexington, Kentucky, 1930–1999."²⁴ The majority of places identified in Jones's study are bars, an important property type in LGBTQ history, but certainly not the only one. Recognizing this emphasis motivated us to search specifically for other types of queer places in an effort to achieve balance.

Simultaneously, we developed promotional materials that invited the public to share memories, send facsimiles of documents and artifacts, and suggest LGBTQ historic sites to explore. Hartman promoted the project by using the FC social media network and by establishing a specific email address that we publicized as a central site through which interested contributors could contact us or send materials. By late fall 2015 we had distributed invitations through newspapers, radio, and social media across Kentucky and by generating press releases and short features, some of which were picked up by news services and circulated regionally.²⁵ Those overtures widened our reach considerably, and both current and former Kentuckians contacted us with documents or stories to tell. We located our oldest narrator through those avenues: Harold Mann, a gay Floridian who had spent his youth in Kentucky and had attended the University of Kentucky in the mid-1950s, phoned and agreed to a telephone interview. Mann imparted poignant insights on his experiences as a young man, and on the routine pronunciations from those around him of his sexuality as something to be cured.²⁶ Ultimately, we received more phone calls than we could reasonably manage, with the result that not everyone who called or emailed with a story

²⁴ Jeffrey Jones, "Hidden Histories, Proud Communities: Multiple Narratives in the Queer Geographies of Lexington, Kentucky, 1930–1999" (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2001).

²⁵ See, for example, Catherine Fosl, "Project Seeks LGBT Histories and Historic Places," *Courier-Journal*, November 30, 2015, <http://www.courier-journal.com/story/opinion/2015/11/30/project-seeks-lgbt-histories-and-historic-places/76557756/>. See also Cheryl Truman, "UnCommonwealth: Researchers Seek Stories, Places Important in Kentucky LGBT History," *Herald-Leader* (Lexington, KY), December 28, 2015, <http://www.kentucky.com/living/article51925960.html>. One example of regional outlets that picked up some of these short features from news affiliates is Sheldon Shafer, "Effort Afoot to Gather Kentucky LGBT History, Artifacts," *Florida Today*, January 27, 2016, <http://www.floridatoday.com/story/news/local/2016/01/27/effort-afoot-gather-kentucky-lgbt-history-artifacts/79398322/>.

²⁶ Harold Mann, telephone interview with Catherine Fosl, January 29, 2016, recording held by Kentucky LGBTQ Heritage files.

to tell actually got interviewed. Through media networking, we also gathered more leads on early gay bars through communicating with a journalist who had serendipitously published an article earlier that year reflecting on gay subcultures in Louisville in the 1970s and '80s.²⁷

Supplementing such findings by means of Google and Facebook searches (the effectiveness of which was heightened by the resourcefulness of our young student assistants), we tracked down more queer people and places. Such processes proved time-consuming and sometimes frustrating. For instance, Williams introduced Cunningham to the administrator of a Facebook group through which mostly gay men reminisced about Louisville's gay bar scene of the 1960s-80s, and Cunningham subsequently received permission to join the group. Resulting exchanges were often lengthy, and although some eventually led to new details and useful interviews, he was also stood up on at least two occasions and several queer performers abruptly cut off contact.²⁸

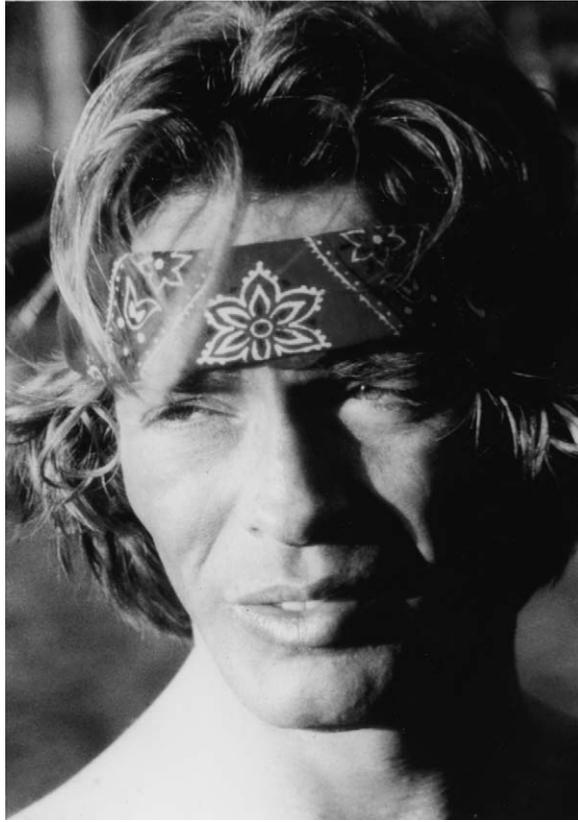
Some such efforts produced significant finds, however. Using references in published sources, for example, we located, communicated with, and later interviewed surviving family members of Lige Clarke, an eastern Kentucky native who had as a young adult been a key leader in the Mattachine Society (the nation's first gay advocacy organization, established in 1951) in both Washington, DC, and New York City.²⁹ Clarke, who helped launch "out" gay journalism after the Stonewall uprisings of 1969, died young in 1975. We worked closely with his nephew Eric Rhein, a New York resident and native Ohioan who also claimed Kentucky roots from vacationing as a child in the family hometown of Hindman. Rhein, one of the first visual artists in New York City to come out as HIV-positive in the 1980s, was eager to see his uncle recognized, as were his sister Jamie and their mother, Shelbiana Rhein (Lige Clarke's sister). We coordinated dates so that in January 2016, the three of them drove from Ohio to meet our research team in Hindman, where they showed us Clarke's grave, his family home, and other sites of importance.

From various longstanding contacts, supplemented by responses to our many invitations for contributors, we communicated with a number of queer Lexingtonians who augmented our findings from the Jones dissertation. Foremost among them was Coleman, who joined the research staff with the agreement that he would provide three-to-five manuscript pages of theme- and site-based content for the context study. Coleman contributed in other ways also, serving as a sounding board for ideas, facilitating programming, and allowing us to include reproductions from the Faulkner-Morgan Archive in the context narrative. In

27 Michael Lindenberger, "The Vanishing Terrain of Gay America," *New Republic*, June 23, 2015, <https://newrepublic.com/article/122089/vanishing-terrain-gay-america>. Lindenberger and Fosl continued to correspond as he worked on a book on this topic.

28 Reasons for these difficulties remain unknown. We suspect the anonymity of Facebook facilitated initial exchanges but may have made the prospect of meeting an unfamiliar researcher in person off-putting.

29 For more on Clarke, see 65–72 of Fosl et al., *Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative* 2016. On Eric Rhein, see 71, n. 149.



Elijah “Lige” Clarke (1942–75), a native of Hindman, Kentucky, became an activist in the Mattachine Society in Washington, DC, in the mid-1960s and then a major voice in out gay journalism in New York City in the years surrounding the Stonewall uprising. (Photo courtesy of Shelbiana Clarke Rhein, donated at the Hindman LGBTQ History Harvest, January 13, 2016)

return, we shared oral history recordings and scanned documents for inclusion in the Faulkner-Morgan Archive. Other key Lexington resource people included Reinette Jones, a librarian at the University of Kentucky who had assembled a virtual history exhibit in 2015 entitled, “A Pictorial History: African American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Persons in Kentucky.” The exhibit revealed new leads, insights, and sources on the experiences of queer African Americans in Kentucky. Jones also joined us later for a local history reflection program in Lexington at which she shared her own background as a black lesbian from a rural area.³⁰

The grant guidelines required at least four stakeholder meetings to be held in locations across the state to solicit wider public input and publicize the project. To

³⁰ The exhibit and more information about it can be viewed at https://uknowledge.uky.edu/black_history_month_2015/. Retired University of Kentucky archivist Kate Black also deserves our thanks for helping connect Fosl to local lesbian feminists.

make these gatherings as productive as possible, we adopted a format based loosely on the “history harvest” model developed by William G. Thomas and Patrick D. Jones at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.³¹ A history harvest is a program that invites residents of a given community to bring memorabilia and stories on a common historical topic together in a common location to be scanned, reproduced, or recorded. Project sponsors lobbied for these sessions to happen as soon as possible, yet careful planning to allow sufficient organizing time was paramount when we met initially with our FC partner to develop a collaborative work plan. Although geographic representativeness was an important consideration, the availability and strength of particular FC groups were equally decisive factors in choosing locations since success depended on local coordination and support.

Between November 2015 and late January 2016, with lead co-sponsorship by local FC affiliates, we convened five LGBTQ history harvests. These were held in the state capital of Frankfort, in Bowling Green in western Kentucky, and in Hindman in the eastern region of the state, as well as in both Lexington and Louisville, and in that order. Each harvest was open to the public and publicized through local and statewide social and traditional media, especially among LGBTQ networks. To each session we dispatched multiple researchers who brought a portable digital scanner and iPad, interviewing equipment, and the accompanying requisite releases and certificates of gift. Some of these sessions coincided with a regular local FC meeting, while others became part of a panel discussion specifically focused on that community’s LGBTQ heritage. In Lexington, for example, a panel of four local lesbians and gay men reflected on the city’s queer past as a prelude to a community conversation about our research, followed by an open house during which one of us scanned contributors’ documents while another did short oral history interviews.

Collectively, these meetings were successful on a number of levels, including directing wider public attention to the project and generating valuable stories, artifacts, and leads, many of which would not have become available otherwise. From the five harvests, we conducted thirteen interviews and could have done more had we had additional time and interviewers.³² Local organizers were critical connectors in other ways as well by helping to set up interviews such as the one with Vicco Mayor Johnny Cummings, for example, one of Kentucky’s three openly gay mayors and the galvanizing figure in his tiny community’s endorsement of a fairness anti-discrimination ordinance in 2013.

Yet the approach also had some limitations. According to Thomas et al., who have used the method extensively with several kinds of histories, history harvests

³¹ See William G. Thomas, Patrick D. Jones, and Andrew Witmer, “History Harvests: What Happens when Students Collect and Digitize the People’s History?,” *Perspectives on History: The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, January 2013, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/january-2013/history-harvests>.

³² This number includes recordings of the history panel reflections. Unfortunately, only two team members were able to attend what turned out to be two of the most populous harvests.

“must be organic, grassroots, and local.”³³ Our harvests were somewhat grassroots and local, yet despite having local contacts as co-coordinators, research team members were neither local nor well-known to target communities outside Louisville and Lexington. Hartman, the only convener familiar to nearly all invitees, could not attend the Bowling Green or Hindman gatherings due to competing commitments. Although their specific contours were shaped by local priorities, our programs also did not arise organically, since they had to conform to specific time frames connected to several calendars and required negotiating with a geographically and professionally wide spectrum of participants.

Although we tried to plan ahead and to work closely with local community leaders, our experiences reinforce how pivotal relationship building is for a successful history harvest. Cultivating community relationships takes time, and the need to establish trust and mutuality may be especially pronounced when it comes to unearthing queer history since it has traditionally been at best private and at worst scorned or suppressed. Even the program’s description as a “harvest” evoked negative connotations for a couple of people who distrusted our outsider status, making it necessary to specify on the promotional flyers that we had no desire to take people’s original memorabilia, only digital facsimiles of documents or recorded memories that they freely wished to share.

Even the failures at relationship building had lessons, however. The least successful history harvests were also the earliest, which had allowed the least advance planning time with local leaders. We were unable to find any LGBTQ elders in Bowling Green even to invite to share their memories during a program that was attended thinly and mostly by young adults. That evening generated only one oral history interview and no historical documents at all, and follow-up discussions suggested that the seeming lack of enthusiasm bespoke a widespread local silence on the part of an older generation of white gay men who held some political power but preferred—and allegedly encouraged others—not to discuss matters of sexuality openly. In both Frankfort and Bowling Green, not a single attendee recalled twentieth-century LGBTQ life, revealing a gap between the current generation of queer activists and people whose past experiences we wished to document.

The three harvests that included more formalized programs were far more successful, as we necessarily developed or strengthened more relationships in those communities. Each gathering attracted several dozen participants who collectively contributed plenty of rich information, and vibrant conversations spawned more leads and connections in the weeks that followed. In Lexington, for example, the lead local convener was a gay man, and when we heard rumors of concerns that the impending program was too “male heavy,” we were able to intervene to invite more lesbian participants. Whether those concerns were well-founded or not, addressing

³³ Thomas et al., “History Harvests: What Happens when Students Collect and Digitize the People’s History?”



Researcher Catherine Fosl is pictured here at the Louisville LGBTQ History Harvest examining historic documents brought by longtime lesbian couple Barb Howe (now deceased) and Vicki Catlin (right), both of whom Fosl subsequently interviewed. This history harvest took place on January 31, 2016, outside the Archives and Special Collections Reading Room at the University of Louisville's Ekstrom Library. Looking on, to the extreme left of the photo, is Delinda Buie, curator of the Williams Nichols Collection, an enormous archival collection that proved crucial to the project's success. (Photo courtesy of Tom Fougrousse, University of Louisville)

them increased the turnout, taught us about longstanding divisions between LGBTQ men and women in that community, and provided an opportunity to try to bridge them.

The case of the one harvest in Appalachian eastern Kentucky, set in Hindman, the most rural of the meeting locations and the farthest from our Louisville base, is worth unpacking because it reflects strengths and weaknesses in the model as well as larger dynamics relevant to unearthing Kentucky queer history. In planning that program, local organizers preferred to develop the history harvest as one part of an ongoing dinner gathering series ("A Seat at the Table") devoted to informal policy discussions on topics of interest to progressive thinkers and doers in Appalachian Kentucky. Enthusiasm for the program, which people drove from several counties away to attend, reflects a thirst for conversations on queer life. The majority of the thirty attendees were under forty, and they told us that programs on local queer experiences are too rare. Although they were eager to hear about the project and in particular about the life of Hindman gay pioneer

Lige Clarke, the resulting dialogue focused far more on contemporary queer lives. People had questions, yet few had anything to add about concerns of the twentieth century or earlier. As our lead local contact wrote to us the week before the harvest, “I am really worried that it’s not going to provide you with much fodder for your project. Everybody to whom I talk about this agrees that most LGBTQ folk of that age are either dead, moved away, or silent. I’ve shared the flyer where I could and hopefully you’ll at least make some contacts. . . . However, the event itself is shaping up to be lots of fun.”³⁴

And it was. The discussion that evening was rich insofar as Eric Rhein engaged attendees with stories of his uncle, a previously unknown local figure, and Fosl shared with the group other vignettes from our research. Informal dinner conversations were lively, giving us new leads and the chance to display, discuss, and scan gay history artifacts the Rhein family had brought from Ohio. We also interviewed all three Rhein family members about their memories of Lige Clarke, but those were the only oral histories collected that night. The greatest success of the harvest lay mostly in its planning and aftermath, as well as in the local television coverage of it, which presented a rare media opportunity to highlight the problem of violence against trans people.³⁵

The history harvests produced mixed and unanticipated results. Our previous communication with the Rhein family, for example, is what brought them to Hindman to participate in the program. Both the oral history interviews and our travels with them earlier in the day to places and people Clarke held dear would have happened with or without the harvest gathering. Connecting the Rheins, and with them Clarke’s significance, to the local community became an unexpectedly meaningful element of the harvest, but not necessarily for the immediate outcomes we sought.

As the history harvests took place, preparation of the two National Register amendments began separately. In October 2015, Vivian began drafting the amendment to the nomination for the Elks Athletic Club in downtown Louisville, a Neo-classical building occupied by the Henry Clay Hotel from 1928 to 1963 and later by the Young Women’s Christian Association. Listed in the National Register in 1979 for its architecture and social significance, the same building became home to a bar called the Beaux Arts Lounge in 1947. By the early 2010s, a few local activists recognized the Beaux Arts as one of Louisville’s earliest gay-friendly bars. The amendment recounted the history of the Beaux Arts, the development of gay social networks after World War II, and the rise of gay nightlife in Louisville during the 1940s and 1950s. We submitted the amendment to the KHC in February 2016, and the State Historic Preservation Review Board approved it three months later. Following minor revisions, the NPS accepted it on October 25, thereby making

34 Jenny Williams, e-mail message to Catherine Fosl, January 10, 2016.

35 “A Seat at the Table’ Takes a Closer Look at LGBT Life in Kentucky,” WYMT website, <http://www.wymt.com/content/news/A-Seat-at-the-Table-takes-closer-look-at-LGBT-life-in-Kentucky-365234201.html>.

the Elks Athletic Club the first site in Kentucky to be federally recognized as significant in LGBTQ history.³⁶

Cunningham took the lead in amending the nomination for the Whiskey Row Historic District, a collection of bourbon warehouses listed in the National Register in 2010 for architectural and industrial significance. In the mid-1970s, one of the buildings in the district became the second home of The Downtowner, a nightclub that is remembered as Louisville's first openly gay bar and its longest-lasting (1954–89). The Downtowner originally occupied a storefront at 320 West Chestnut Street. In 1975, it moved to a vacant warehouse on West Main Street and quickly grew to become one of the city's leading LGBTQ institutions.³⁷ We submitted the amendment to the KHC on September 30, 2016, and received notice of its acceptance by NPS in March 2017.³⁸

As Cunningham mined the Williams Nichols Collection, he compiled careful notes about places mentioned in oral interviews, newspaper articles, newsletters, and other printed matter. He and Vivian then conducted fieldwork to determine the condition of buildings and sites from that list. This process yielded six additional properties with potential for recognition through the National Register or local designation, and Coleman's research on Lexington supplied several others. Ultimately, a list of nine properties in or near Louisville or Lexington deemed "worthy of further investigation" appeared as Appendix A of the historic context narrative. In this fashion, the context narrative provides a starting point for research on properties that may merit recognition of one kind or another.

A second appendix to the context narrative identified five property types that repeatedly arose during our research. This typology encompasses common locations of LGBTQ activity and thus offers a guide for those working to identify sites of possible significance in communities beyond those discussed in the narrative. The list is not exhaustive nor is it intended to be: instead, it names the most common locations at which important activities took place and thus provides a basis for connecting local histories with themes and periods discussed in the context narrative.

Writing of the narrative itself, which was principally Fosl's responsibility, began in the early spring of 2016, and was not completed until late in the life of the project. Despite the rich troves of primary sources and some scholarship on both Louisville's and Lexington's queer pasts, our own inquiries reminded us constantly of the lack of any previous look at the two cities together, never mind

36 Elks Athletic Club (Jefferson County, KY), National Register of Historic Places nomination, July 16, 1979, US Department of the Interior, Washington, DC; Elks Athletic Club (Additional Documentation), October 25, 2016, US Department of the Interior, Washington, DC. See also <https://www.nps.gov/places/elks-athletic-club.htm>.

37 Henderson, "LGBT History 'Reclaimed' in Louisville Properties."

38 Whiskey Row Historic District (Jefferson County, KY), National Register of Historic Places nomination, June 4, 2010, US Department of the Interior, Washington, DC; Whiskey Row Historic District (Additional Documentation), March 13, 2017, US Department of the Interior, Washington, DC. See also <https://www.nps.gov/places/whiskey-row-historic-district.htm>.

a synthesis of Kentucky's statewide queer heritage. In response, we opted to produce a substantive social history of the commonwealth's LGBTQ experience over several centuries, set in a context that also offers some synopsis of US queer history and demonstrates where Kentucky people and events figure prominently. The result was a far longer, more detailed essay than the sponsors had initially envisioned.

The narrative details a number of historical episodes previously unknown to queer history scholars and collectors. Our major challenge was to tell a coherent story that documented Kentucky's queer heritage for the first time and highlighted some of its central people, moments, and places. From the beginning, Fosl believed the narrative could become an important symbolic tool to celebrate Kentucky's queer history and establish it as a legitimate field of inquiry. Achieving that objective required the addition of some introductory discussion for an expanded understanding of historic places in light of an often-clandestine LGBTQ past. It also entailed weaving existing secondary sources with powerful but spotty primary findings that were heavily skewed toward urban and twentieth-century data, particularly from 1970 through the end of the century. Discussions of pre-twentieth century eras relied more heavily on historiographical sources and necessarily included some informed conjecture—about cross-dressing practices in frontier Kentucky, for example, and the romantic lives of nineteenth-century settlement house women reformers. Due to the patchwork of information uncovered, the narrative relies heavily on vignettes—profiles of intriguing or significant individuals and historical flashpoints (such as, for example, the first-ever lesbian marriage trial in 1970) that situate Kentucky's LGBTQ history through the end of the twentieth century in relation to larger social, political, and cultural developments.

The narrative is organized largely chronologically and includes a table of contents that is searchable using the vignettes, allowing parts to be read or used separately. Its introduction outlines four major themes that recurred in our primary research in ways largely consistent with regional historiography: race, religion, rurality/regionalism, and privacy. We adapted the first three from John Howard's foundational work in southern queer history, amending his concept of "rurality" to "rurality/regionalism" to reflect 1) the historic rivalry between our two major cities, and 2) the constant circulation of queer people and ideas back and forth between the city and countryside in our relatively small state.³⁹ Privacy emerged as a fourth theme because it came up repeatedly in everything from a southwestern Kentucky court's strict interpretation of sodomy in a 1909 legal appeal that freed two gay men from prosecution to the reserve with which many Kentuckians interviewed for this project continue to discuss issues of sexuality.

The other major challenge of the context narrative involved completing it in a timely fashion, and even determining an appropriate endpoint. KHC staff had

³⁹ Howard discusses these themes in the introduction to his edited anthology, *Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 5.

pushed for submission of a draft by April in anticipation of their Spring 2016 board meeting, but what they received covered only until the mid-sixties, on the eve of the gay liberation movement. Although the history harvests were complete by the end of January 2016, several remaining interviews, as well as archival and social media research and interpretation of the information generated from the harvests, continued while Fosl composed a full draft.

Concluding data collection and analysis to shape findings into a final product is a challenge in any research, and in this case, some branches of our investigation continued to bear fruit far into the grant's fourteen-month period (which ended September 30, 2016), and even beyond. Persisting through various informal networks, for instance, Fosl finally made contact with Dick Leitsch, a native Louisvillian who had made national headlines as an early Mattachine Society leader in New York City, where he instigated a "sip-in" three years before Stonewall. Fosl interviewed Leitsch in mid-summer of 2016, and was able to include his story even though that portion of the narrative had already been drafted.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the findings also compelled Fosl to extend the period of coverage past the original 1980 endpoint for the narrative. Vivian, Coleman, and Williams reviewed her full draft that September, and we submitted it to project sponsors on October 3, 2016, even as other information continued to drift in too late for inclusion.

We also requested community review of the draft, a process orchestrated by Hartman. He distributed the narrative to a limited group of FC leaders for "community vetting," and he added a few points of his own related to recent legal gains.⁴¹ We added illustrations and modified appendices and footnotes as late as December. With Hartman and Williams attending for moral support, Fosl presented a summary of the narrative to the State Historic Preservation Review Board on December 12, 2016, and the board unanimously endorsed it. In part because of the political changes in both state and nation that fall, no FC or KHC public event ever heralded the project's completion as originally planned, but the KHC posted the narrative on its website during the spring of 2017. By mid-year, the NPS added it and the two National Register amendments to the section of its website on the LGBTQ Heritage Initiative.⁴²

Project Assessment

The context study fulfilled its immediate goals and recovered more Kentucky LGBTQ history than anyone had imagined possible at the outset even as it also left considerable ground untilled. Examining the project's achievements,

⁴⁰ Dick Leitsch, telephone interview with Fosl, July 11, 2016, recording in Kentucky LGBTQ Heritage files.

⁴¹ Chris Hartman, e-mail message to Catherine Fosl, November 4, 2016.

⁴² See <http://heritage.ky.gov/natreg/> and <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/tellingallamericansstories/lgbtqheritage.htm>.

challenges, and shortfalls offers a basis for considering difficulties inherent in exploring LGBTQ history, especially in settings new to these explorations.

Extant Resources: It is hard to overstate the value of extant LGBTQ history resources in enabling the project's outcomes. The Williams Nichols Collection and the Faulkner-Morgan Archive proved decisive in providing readily accessible information. The guidance provided by the respective founders of those archives further expedited our research. At one point, for example, David Williams scoured early-twentieth-century Louisville newspapers for all coverage of "homosexual" and thirty-four other pejorative terms historically used to describe people and activities that would later be called "gay" (from "pansy" to "bugger" to "moral pervert"). As Fosl crafted the narrative, Coleman supplied newspaper clippings on early-twentieth-century gender-nonconforming Kentuckians. Along with other sources, Williams's and Coleman's findings offered a lens into policing practices and public discourses about gay and cross-dressing people at a time when many saw LGBTQ people as deviant and diseased. During preparation of the National Register amendments, Williams tracked down information about short-lived early bars and clubs that informants recalled as gay friendly, and Coleman provided detail about several Lexington sites. Put simply, existing archival collections and the assistance of their originators proved invaluable.

Existing LGBTQ oral histories played a similar role. Between 2005 and 2012, Fosl conducted twenty-three interviews that are now housed at the University of Louisville's Oral History Center. The research team also had access to a handful of oral histories done by Williams and snippets of others from Coleman. Collectively, these accounts offered a starting point for understanding, narrating, and examining the experiences of LGBTQ Kentuckians from the immediate post-World War II-era onward.

What the absence of such collections might mean for similar projects deserves consideration. Put simply, existing archival collections and oral histories made a huge difference. Without access to comparable information or adequate time to compile it, similar projects might struggle to deliver meaningful results.

Insider/outsider status: In our experience, questions about insider-outsider status relative to Kentucky LGBTQ communities operate along several axes, including general familiarity in a given community as well as social identities such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and age. All of these variables required constant negotiation.

Many queer people, especially elders, recall the stigma of being judged as "perverts" and may be understandably wary about sharing personal information with strangers, no matter how seemingly well-intentioned. Fosl's established connections with gay and lesbian Louisvillians, especially with those in the FC, provided an inroad for earning trust, and Hartman's leadership provided access to other contacts. The participation of Williams and Coleman also helped. Had the research team needed to begin community relationship building from scratch, it is difficult to imagine that such efforts would have yielded much in the way of useful information.

The Lavender Letter INC.

LOUISVILLE'S FIRST NEWSLETTER COMMITTED TO INFORMING THE GAY AND LESBIAN COMMUNITY OF NEWS ITEMS WHICH CONCERN THEM

VOLUME 5, NO. 8

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

AUGUST, 1985

"Blood Sisters" In Louisville

The AIDS crisis has resulted in shortages of blood supplies at the American Red Cross across the country, as gay men have been asked to cease donating blood until a cure for the AIDS virus has been found. (Does that tell you anything about who the major blood donors of the country are?)

In light of these shortages at the Red Cross here in Louisville, several members of Louisville's gay and lesbian community have been in contact with the Red Cross concerning rumors that they will not allow lesbian women to donate blood. The Red Cross has assured them that they would be more than happy to accept donated blood from lesbian women.

A group of women in California started a "blood sister" program many months ago to help AIDS victims and others needing transfusions. It helped to bring the community together as the men and women combined efforts in this time of crisis.

If you would like to be a "blood sister," here in Louisville, please call Pamela Starr at 969-1908 after 5pm, and she'll fill you in on all the details.

Craftswomyn Wanted

Any craftswomyn interested in selling their work at the WomensPlace brunch on Sunday, August 25, please call Susan or Deborah at 425-3093.

Gay Men and Lesbians, 55 and Older

Previous research in the gay/lesbian community has indicated a preference for retirement housing and long-term care facilities which are homosexually oriented. To elicit more detailed and accurate information concerning interest in such facilities for older lesbians and gay men, a nationwide survey is being conducted by Dr. A.J. Lucco, Fellow in Geriatric Medicine at The Johns Hopkins University school of Medicine in Baltimore.

Gay men and lesbians who will be at least 55 years old by the end of the current calendar year are needed to complete an anonymous, self-administered questionnaire which asks for demographic data as well as opinions in regard to retirement housing options and prefer-

ences. If you qualify and are willing to participate, please contact: A.J. Lucco, M.D., The Beacham Center, 5200 Eastern Avenue, Baltimore, MD 21224.

Organizations willing to distribute questionnaires are also asked to reply.

The study is being funded privately by the principal investigator. Results will be compiled and made available to gay/lesbian organizations around the country which are interested in developing retirement facilities for older lesbians and gay men.

"Safe Sex" Workshop

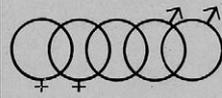
The Lavender Letter will be sponsoring a workshop on Wednesday, Aug. 21 at 7:30pm. The topic of the workshop will be "Safe Sex."

Paul B., who is with AIDS-Atlanta, has been in Louisville for several weeks and has held workshops on "Safe Sex" for various groups around the city. His humorous approach to AIDS-preventive sexual activity, a not-so-humorous topic, will leave you smiling, with an unforgettable, lasting impression. We have asked him to do just one more workshop, and are inviting any interested person to attend. (Both men and women are welcome.)

The workshop is free. For location and/or more information, call Pam at 969-1908 or 239-3788.

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Copies also available by mail for a \$7.00 yearly subscription fee, or by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope (39¢) to the LL office.

The *Lavender Letter*, one of the holdings of the Williams Nichols Collection at the University of Louisville, was a monthly lesbian newsletter published in Louisville from 1982 until the 1990s. This August 1985 issue highlights the work of local lesbians who joined gay men in organizing to provide services to AIDS patients and to raise consciousness locally about the devastating effects of the disease and the lack of resources to combat it. (Williams Nichols Collection, University of Louisville)

Unfortunately, those existing networks had limited reach beyond Louisville and Lexington. The scarcity of contacts elsewhere and the inability to develop relationships with informants statewide proved disappointing. Moreover, although both the Williams Nichols Collection and the Faulkner-Morgan Archive include some materials relating to women, both are stronger with regard to gay men's history.

The challenges of negotiating intersecting identities are familiar terrain for queer history scholars, as exemplified in Allan Bérubé’s classic 2001 essay, “How Gay Stays White and the Kind of White It Stays.”⁴³ With hindsight, it might have been wiser to prioritize assembly of a research team that was more geographically and racially diverse and more fully representative of the L, the G, the B, and the T in queer identities. Checking all those boxes may not have been realistic even if we had been more determined to do so, however. As it was, the team’s collective whiteness made it hard to obtain information on queer Kentuckians of color, except in cases in which their contacts with law enforcement received media coverage—a dynamic we know from contemporary events is racially disproportionate and results in negative representations.

There were notable exceptions: for example, James Herndon, a gender-bending African American man born in the late nineteenth century who became known widely as “Sweet Evening Breeze,” is one of the most iconic figures in Kentucky’s LGBTQ history. Many Lexingtonians of several generations, queer or not, recall “Sweets” from his strolls through downtown Lexington wearing full or partial drag, or from his performing the part of a bride at one of the many “womanless weddings” popular in Lexington and other parts of the South in the first half of the twentieth century. Sweets—who might later have identified as trans—frequented the city’s gay bars and later became involved in the movement for LGBTQ equality. Sweet Evening Breeze was one of the few historical figures of color about whom we had detailed information from several sources. His home is still standing and became one of the properties identified as deserving further investigation.

We gathered relatively good information on gender non-conforming Kentuckians, but much of it came from written sources or extant oral histories, whereas a trans researcher would likely have gotten more. Perhaps in part due to issues of identity, we also had trouble building relationships with queer performers, both black and white.

A more unexpected barrier was that of age or generation. In Hindman, Bowling Green, and Frankfort, those active in the Fairness movement were typically too young to recall twentieth-century queer life, and many had little contact with older LGBTQ locals. We were surprised by how few older LGBTQ people attended the harvests that took place outside Louisville or Lexington, leaving us with painfully few written or oral source materials from those ventures.

Capacity: Our project, like so much LGBTQ research, was driven by passionate commitments, making it ambitious, at times overly so. The most salient shortcoming of the context study is its incompleteness in representing the full range of statewide LGBTQ history. The lack of sources from or about many parts of the state are evident in the narrative, which focuses heavily on Louisville and

43 Bérubé’s essay first appeared in *The Making and Unmaking of Whiteness*, ed. Birgit Brander Rasmussen, Irene J. Nexica, Matt Wray, and Eric Klinenberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 234–65.

Lexington; includes discussion of select events in south-central, eastern, and northern Kentucky; and offers little on the western part of the state. Despite sustained efforts, the goal of developing statewide contacts proved elusive. Whether a more accommodating timetable would have yielded a different outcome is difficult to say. Certainly, more time would have allowed for further outreach, but whether that would have obtained useful information is an open question. Because of the difficulty of earning trust in LGBTQ communities, further effort might have produced results, but without sustained relationship building, it might just as easily have yielded little of use.

Funding limitations imposed related constraints. Since the project budget did not include money for significant overnight travel, we were mostly confined to making the stakeholder meetings single-day excursions. For a team whose members were outsiders on many levels, fully exploring promising leads within those short time frames proved impossible. Archival research also suffered from these limits. The context narrative discusses several episodes, for example, that would benefit from further investigation. One is the fascinating relationship between Captain Robert Craddock and Peter Tardiveau, two Revolutionary War heroes who never married, lived out their lives together on Craddock's farm in Warren County, Kentucky, and were buried side by side, apparently at their request. A 1930 biographical sketch noted, "tradition says they were queer."⁴⁴ Whether the men actually had a romantic relationship is uncertain, but it is entirely possible. Further research might not provide definitive answers about their sexuality and relationship, yet the entire matter begs for additional investigation into local sources.

Another episode that left our team intrigued but frustrated is a series of court cases stemming from the 1909 arrest of two African American men, C. H. Poindexter and Frank Moore, in Caldwell County, in southwest Kentucky. Authorities charged the pair with sodomy, and both men pled guilty in county circuit court and were sentenced to two years each in the penitentiary. Poindexter and Moore's counsel subsequently requested a new trial on the grounds that his clients had not engaged in sodomy but merely what would today be described as oral sex, an act not expressly prohibited by Kentucky's 1860 sodomy law. The court abrogated the earlier verdict and granted a new trial in which the convictions were overturned. The commonwealth's attorney appealed to the Kentucky Court of Appeals, which also ruled in the defendants' favor on the basis that sodomy, as defined in legal texts of the era, required penile-anal penetration and did not include "penetration of the mouth."⁴⁵

44 Thomas Crittenden Cherry, "Robert Craddock and Peter Tardiveau: Two Revolutionary Soldiers of Warren County, Kentucky," *Filson Club History Quarterly*, 4 (April 1930): 87.

45 The decision left oral sex technically legal until 1974. More detail on the case appears on pp. 32–34 of the context narrative. For a portion of the trial records, see http://uknowledge.uky.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=0&article=1001&context=black_history_month_2015&type=additional.

Commonwealth v. Poindexter, &c.

junction obtain it. Mt. Sterling Oil & Gas Company v. Ratliff (Ky.) 104 S. W. 993, 31 R. 1229.

The injunction in the instant case was properly granted. Wherefore the judgment is affirmed.

CASE 12.—C. H. POINDEXTER AND FRANK MOORE WERE CONVICTED OF SODOMY. THE VERDICT WAS SET ASIDE AND THE COMMONWEALTH APPEALS.—May 7, 1909.

Commonwealth v. Poindexter, &c.

Appeal from Caldwell Circuit Court.

J. F. GORDON, Circuit Judge.

Defendants convicted and appeal.—Affirmed.

Sodomy—Nature of Offense—"Buggery."—The word "sodomy" is derived from Sodom, where the crime was prevalent and the crime consists in carnal copulation by human beings against nature, with penetration, but penetration of the mouth is not sufficient to constitute the crime, and consent does not affect its criminality, but makes the consenting party an accomplice; and buggery is the same offense between a man and a beast.

JAMES BREATHTITT, Attorney General, and TOM H. McGRUDOR, Assistant Attorney General, for the Commonwealth.

There is no statute defining the offense charged in the indictment. An indictment following the approved and ordinary common law form for the offense will be good. Robinson's Criminal, Sec. 593; 22 Am. & Eng. Ency of Law 1, Ed. 336.

It seems to us that this indictment sufficiently charged the common law offense of sodomy and that the verdict of jury on the trial below should not have been disturbed.

OPINION OF THE COURT BY CHIEF JUSTICE SETTLE—
Affirming.

The appellees, C. H. Poindexter and Frank Moore, both negroes, were indicted in the court below for

Commonwealth v. Poindexter was a 1909 court case in rural Caldwell County in western Kentucky that limited the state's sodomy law. This cover sheet of the brief is available online and was located in the course of this research as part of a 2015 University of Kentucky digital exhibit entitled, "A Pictorial History: African American Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Persons in Kentucky," curated by Reinette Jones for Bluegrass Black Pride. (University of Kentucky Law Library)

Like the Craddock-Tardiveau friendship, the events surrounding this 1909 case merit closer scrutiny. Several phone calls and emails revealed nothing about the whereabouts of case records, however, and the town of Princeton, site of the trial, is 180 miles from Louisville. Would research in local newspapers and public records turn up additional information about the trial or the men's lives? Because of time and budget limitations, these questions remain unanswered.

A final consideration about capacity pertains to partner organizations. Supporting any research project with a public engagement agenda takes time and effort.

Although the FC assisted our work in multiple ways, it is a small grassroots organization with limited capacity. Its mission is advocacy, not history, and the Kim Davis controversy and other events curtailed Hartman's ability to support the project as planned. Organizations considering involvement in LGBTQ history projects, especially groups with limited human or fiscal resources, need to be realistic about the commitments involved.

In retrospect, it is clear that constituting a standing committee of history-minded FC volunteers would have been effective in bolstering Hartman's support. Ideally, a project of this scope would have begun with a pre-planning or "incubator" stage that would have represented our constituency more fully, extended our ally network, and built a sufficiently sturdy infrastructure to extend and sustain LGBTQ public history in the face of difficult political headwinds.

Critical reflection: This field report has underscored for us that critical reflection should be part of any LGBTQ public history project. Consistent with Noel Stowe's conception of reflective practice, opportunities to meet with project partners and evaluate overall accomplishments should be built into project schedules.⁴⁶ Too often, these are talked about or planned for, but go unrealized or get abbreviated or postponed indefinitely—as did ours—because of time constraints, fatigue, and competing commitments. Not engaging in critical reflection limits opportunities to view achievements in perspective, to connect theory and action purposefully, and to develop plans for further research, engagement, dissemination, and creative funding ideas that can keep the work moving forward.

Conclusion

As scholars, activists, and interested amateurs continue to press the cause of LGBTQ history in communities nationwide, the need for critical dialogue about methods, strategies, and goals becomes increasingly apparent. The array of projects underway will almost certainly mark a watershed in public interest in the queer past. For the materials produced to have durability and influence, discussions across projects and among those involved are essential. Community-based inquiries yield the strongest returns when they contribute to shared knowledge about effective methods and practice. Discussions about sound use of scarce resources, engaging disparate communities, and exploring underappreciated dimensions of LGBTQ history offer potential for better-informed, more engaging inquiries that empower communities, challenge prevalent stereotypes, and bring vital questions to light. The enthusiasm and creativity behind many LGBTQ history projects is an extraordinary force by itself, yet those qualities alone will not ensure that future inquiries are better planned and executed. Learning from individual and collective experiences is the only way to achieve those goals.

⁴⁶ On reflective practice, see Noel J. Stowe, "Public History Curriculum: Illustrating Reflective Practice," *The Public Historian* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 39–65.

As the first statewide project of its kind, the Kentucky LGBTQ Heritage Context Study represents a milestone in explorations of US queer history. The focus on contrasts and connections between urban, rural, and small-town settings illuminates important, under-recognized dimensions of LGBTQ experience. As much as scholarship on LGBTQ history has advanced since the era of “bicoastal bias,” the intricacies of LGBTQ life in many parts of the country remain poorly understood. Who would have expected to find a cross-dressing African American man in the 1950s who is recalled today by many in a Kentucky college town as a local celebrity of sorts, beloved by many? Or a pair of early national-era “friends” whose brotherhood may have reached beyond conventional boundaries? By charting major themes and developments in Kentucky’s queer past and identifying queer historic sites, the context study reclaimed long-neglected histories. It established an agenda for further research and augmented the range and amount of source materials available to Kentucky LGBTQ historians.⁴⁷ These are significant accomplishments in their own right. Public interest inspired by the history harvests and media coverage of the study added impact. The untold numbers of people who learned that Kentucky has a queer past, let alone one worthy of study, figure among the project’s most important achievements.

The overall influence of the context study will not be clear for years. Already, members of the research team have launched follow-up projects. During the fall 2016 semester, Fosl introduced a Queer Oral Histories course at the University of Louisville. Students collected two dozen additional interviews, adding to the collection more voices of trans people, people of color, and rural queers. Another student has compiled a digital map of Kentucky grounded in the context narrative. Coleman is writing a book on central Kentucky queer history and compiling another of images of queer Lexington from the Faulkner-Morgan Archive. A statewide advisory committee on LGBTQ history is a logical next step from the work chronicled here. The full significance of our study will become clear only as people across the state use its findings to explore LGBTQ history and recognize associated places in their communities. Making connections between local and national trends and recognizing sites with a role in each will make Kentucky’s queer past tangible, giving it a presence commensurate with histories traditionally deemed worthy of commemoration.

As Mark Meinke observes in the preface to *LGBTQ America*, the NPS theme study, like every LGBTQ history project, is an exercise in legitimating histories previously known principally only to small numbers of scholars and activists.⁴⁸ Whatever the eventual outcomes, the project profiled here is part of a movement to deliver greater visibility to the stories of LGBTQ people and places in Kentucky

⁴⁷ Interviews and their supporting documentation as well as archival sources from the project and the related course were deposited at the University of Louisville Archives and Special Collections.

⁴⁸ Mark Meinke, “Why LGBTQ Historic Sites Matter,” in *LGBTQ America*, vol. 1: 1–13.

and beyond. Like the many other LGBTQ history projects underway, the Kentucky LGBTQ Heritage Context Study marks a step forward in giving queer history its rightful place in the nation's historical consciousness.

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