

LGBT ARCHIVES IN FRANCE

by Académie Gay & Lesbienne, France



1 - Contrary to the fact that some claim, there are initiatives in LGBT archives in France. Their story is underestimated, even not visible.

2 - Our self-financed association is active for more than eleven years. We have collected tens of thousands documents (among which of the historic archives fonds). But we have never managed to obtain neither place to warehouse, nor public subvention under diverse pretexts.

3 - We were slowed down by preconceived ideas and prejudices which continue in France. Finally what is the model of archives which public authorities wish to promote?

1 - LGBT RESOURCES IN FRANCE

From the beginnings of our association, we examined the history of the existing and past initiatives. These informations helped us a lot in the management of our own archives but also for the visibility and the public awareness on this subject. We also established a specific documentation on LGBT archives, libraries, documentation centers and museums in France and in the world ([see our catalog for example](http://bit.ly/MkWtUQ)¹).

¹ <http://bit.ly/MkWtUQ>

In France, the initiatives are very rarely evoked, even less named. They are even glossed over by certain persons to be able to justify their project or emphasize their work.

Some of disappeared associations, today forgotten, led nevertheless bravely diverse actions in a difficult context: collection and put at the disposal of documents, creation of documentary products (bibliographies and catalogs), organization of events (colloquium, exhibition, festival), interventions with media and with public institutions ...

That is why we think useful to be able to make known and recognize the work pioneer of those who preceded us and which "made the contribution". You will find in annexe a historic panorama of LGBT archives, libraries and documentation centers in France (see also, [on our website, a version with more details²](#)).

2 - ACADEMIE GAY ET LESBIENNE

[GAY AND LESBIAN ACADEMY]

AT THE BEGINNING, A PERSONAL COLLECTION

In 1975, Phan Bigotte, a young political refugee of twenty years, discovered upon his arrival in France a new much more meaning, homosexual universe in all his variety, very different of its youth in the South Viêt Nam. He began to collect all the documents which he found on the homosexuality.

In 1989, after having discovered his HIV-positivity, he sold his bookshop. The money of the sale allowed him to buy by auction of the French State a big house for a better storage of it more and more voluminous collection. He got back all the books of his former gay shelf to complete his personal library.

Then he was simultaneously an activist in two big associations of fight against AIDS, Act Up-Paris and AIDeS. He preserved numerous documents of these associations (in particular internal documents).

During the years of discouraged fight against this mortal pandemic, the prevention and the treatments were focused on the survival. He attended powerless in the

² <http://www.archiveshomo.info/annuaire/france.htm>

bit.ly/OvINq7

premature disappearance, with all hands, of numerous homosexuals. Indeed, often families threw away everything, trying to clear out any trace of the homosexuality of their parent died from the AIDS. What motivated him to plead for the necessity of the conservation of their archives: for their memories which are also ours.

After the success of the multitherapies with protease inhibitors, numerous historic homosexual activists left organizations of fight against AIDS which had professionalized. The tiredness, the bitterness or the choice to reorganize their life on the other concerns had caused these departures. Then, many documents were taken and/or thrown away causing the loss of an important part of the history of the fight against AIDS in France.

In 2000, after having waited in vain for supports, he decides to create with friends collectors an organization with their own money and funds.

On March 1st, 2001, the Académie Gay & Lesbienne is officially registered in the Prefecture in the form of non-profit organization.

TODAY, ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT LGBT FUND IN FRANCE

The name given to our fund is **Conservatoire des Archives et des Mémoires LGBT** [Conservatory of LGBT Archives and Memories]. It's today doubtless the biggest gathering of documents on the LGBT in France by its volume and its diversity.

Indeed, we collect any document concerning the LGBT:

- of any format and on any medium: including the short-lived (free intended to be thrown away);
- in all their variety: including on the prostitution, the BDSM, the pornography (excluding pedophile kind);
- from any countries;
- of any opinion: including documents anti-LGBT (homophobic pamphlets, caricatural articles).

We are also interested in the related themes of the AIDS, the sexuality, the sex and the gender.

The fund contains today:

- more than 1,700 titles of [LGBT periodicals](#)³ (since 1909) ;
- 1,100 issues of [non-LGBT periodicals](#)⁴ ;
- 2,400 books (among which [1,400 non-fictions](#)⁵) ;
- one thousand of audiovisual materials in VHS and DVD (fictions and documentaries) ;
- [archives fonds](#)⁶ of people (historic activists and anonymous) and from organizations ;
- press clippings and several hundreds of files: on organizations, persons and themes ;
- diverse collections of
 - [guides, directories, plans and maps](#)⁷ ;
 - [pamphlets and prevention material](#)⁸ ;
 - [calendars](#)⁹ and diaries ;
 - [special events documents](#)¹⁰ (shows, festivals, parties) including flyers (26 years of collection among which 11 years of systematic weekly collection) ;
 - [advertising documents](#)¹¹ (catalogs, leaflets) ;
- various objects (stickers, matchboxes, bottles, condoms packaging, placards, pins, bags, T-shirts, tickets) ...

IN WHEN AN ADAPTED WAREHOUSE FOR ARCHIVES?

The Académie Gay & Lesbienne is a small association of less than about ten persons, certain more active than the others according to their availability. It is self-financed because it doesn't still perceive a subsidy. We develop the Conservatoire des

³ <http://www.archiveshomo.info/archives/presse-lgbt/presse.htm> bit.ly/MG2XP2

⁴ <http://www.archiveshomo.info/archives/presse-diverse/straight.htm> bit.ly/MFK1Uf

⁵ http://www.archiveshomo.info/pmb/opac_css/index.php?id_thes=1 bit.ly/PdUwMK

⁶ <http://www.archiveshomo.info/archives/fonds/fonds.htm> bit.ly/MG3sZe

⁷ http://www.archiveshomo.info/pmb/opac_css/index.php?id_thes=6 bit.ly/Ofmsjd

⁸ http://www.archiveshomo.info/pmb/opac_css/index.php?id_thes=7 bit.ly/NIzbtB

⁹ http://www.archiveshomo.info/pmb/opac_css/index.php?id_thes=11 bit.ly/MEetwf

¹⁰ http://www.archiveshomo.info/pmb/opac_css/index.php?id_thes=8 bit.ly/MUUPZq

¹¹ http://www.archiveshomo.info/pmb/opac_css/index.php?id_thes=12 bit.ly/PdZsB2

Archives et des Mémoires LGBT, from day to day, thanks to the work of the volunteers, their collections, their purchases, the donations (of persons and organizations) and the exchanges with the other LGBT resources centers in France and abroad.

Archives are at present accommodated in the house of the president of the association, whom they occupy in more than half. This building allowed a long-lasting preservation of more and more voluminous documents. Regrettably we can't receive the public, for lack of real premises in the standards of security.

That is the reason why we insure, as far as our means, a remote service: supply of information, copies and digitalizations of documents; rerouting towards persons and resources places.

And we enrich [our website](#)¹² : [funds catalog](#)¹³ (not exhaustive, current computerization since 2008), digitalization of documents ([No. 1 of Akademos review](#)¹⁴ dating 1909), documentary resources ([summaries of issues of the Arcadie review](#)¹⁵)...

Our procedures to make accommodate archives, obtain a warehouse or a public subsidy failed under diverse pretexts.

3 - DIFFICULTIES: BRAKES AND PREJUDICES

HOMONORMATIVITY AND “DIRTY” ARCHIVES

They criticized us about the kind, the subjects and the origin of the documents which we keep. Some politics use this criticism emanating from some gay personalities to refuse to help us.

They think ridiculous and not at all scientist that we keep flyers for example. They consider that it's only vulgar commercial advertisements without interest, unworthy of "noble" archives.

¹² <http://www.archiveshomo.info/>

bit.ly/SStSd8

¹³ http://www.archiveshomo.info/pmb/opac_css/

bit.ly/MFKZjc

¹⁴ <http://www.archiveshomo.info/documents/akademos/couverture.htm>

bit.ly/SSssPU

¹⁵ <http://www.archiveshomo.info/doc/presse/arcadie.htm#som>

bit.ly/MEiFvP

As our archives also cover the AIDS, they blamed us for contributing to the mixture between AIDS and homosexuality and for encroaching on the domain of the organizations of fight against AIDS. They refuse to help us under pretext that we have some documentation about certain controversial subjects like pornography, BDSM or prostitution. They consider useless, even counterproductive, to keep traces of the intracommunity conflicts.

They disapprove that we agreed to preserve archives of controversial or politically incorrect persons.

Should LGBT archives only serve to tell a beautiful legend: pink (a community still united and exemplary) and black (still victim of persecutions and discriminations)?

RESERVED DOMAIN

In France, some support that archives should be conducted only by scientists and "celebrities", and not by simple collectors like us. Some have even deeply recommended to the president of our association (French with Vietnamese origin) to militate in an association of Asian user-friendliness rather than to take care of LGBT archives.

Furthermore these people insinuate that the work of volunteers qualified as amateurs would put in danger the safety of the collected funds: it would be better to use only salaried professionals.

Who exploits this argument? Persons who have no professional skills on archives, nor no experiences as volunteers! What is their goal? Compromise any voluntary work, of which ours, to be able to ask for a budget important to fund their own project.

In France, the work of the volunteers allowed the rescue and the valuation of many archives. These amateurs become more and more experimented, due to working day after day. Some have very useful skills in the other domains (for example in computing). There are also professionals (librarian or information officer) who make some voluntary work.

Should LGBT archives be managed exclusively by salaried professionals, and directed by scientists or celebrities?

STRATEGY

Our organization is independent and apolitical. But then, in France, political relays are often necessary to obtain public aids to LGBT associations. We created our association and collected archives without any outside help. Others choose to wait for the election of new gay-friendly leaders to start their project thanks to subsidies.

To our demands of help and premises, they answer us to give our archives to a controversial project of big LGBT center of archives (see annexe). This one is always unfinished and failed ten years after the launch and 100,000 euros of public subsidy from the City of Paris. Its hegemonic positioning and its setbacks blocked the financing of quite other initiative.

We think that the monopoly harms the pluralism. It's necessary to be able to have different structures of archives which have different policies of acquisition, selection, management and valuation. Furthermore this diversity offers the choice to the donors to entrust their archives according to their affinities and their convictions.

CONCLUSION

Despite these difficulties, we pursue our work of enrichment and development of our fund. Our ambition still remains to open our archives to the public: for it, we especially need a big warehouse.

We have tried to explain to you the problems with which we are confronted. Don't hesitate to give us your advice and tell us about your experiment which can help us.



*by Phan Bigotte and Thomas Leduc,
president and vice-president of the Académie Gay & Lesbienne.*

Translation by Olivier P.

→ see also on LGBTI ALMS 2012 blog: bit.ly/O5w1Cw

ANNEXE

Historic panorama of LGBT archives, libraries and documentation centers in France

1 - NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

1975: Association Laïque pour l'Étude du Problème de l'Homosexualité (ALEPH) [Laic Association for the Study of the Problem of the Homosexuality], created in Paris, in particular by Claude Courouve. It became in 1977 the **Centre d'Information et de Documentation de l'Homosexualité (CIDH)** [Information and Documentation Center of the Homosexuality]. It collected a historic documentation, put question to the politics and published in the press various documents on the legal situation of the homosexuals. Stop of the activities in 1981.

1981: Association pour un centre d'archives homosexuelles [Association for a center of homosexual archives], created in Paris by Anne Marie Grélois, Gilles Barbedette, Frank Arnal et Claudine Bouretz.

1984: Archives Recherches Cultures Lesbienes (ARCL)¹⁶ [Archives Research Lesbian Cultures], created in Paris, in particular by Claudie Lesselier. Initially in an apartment, they are accommodated since 1994 in premises at the Maison des Femmes de Paris [House of the Women of Paris] (single-sex place). They propose a lending library, a media library and archives of the feminist and lesbian movements. They managed to obtain subsidies of the City of Paris since 2004.

1984: Association Mémoire des Homosexualités [Memory of the Homosexualities], created in Paris. It became in 1987 **Association Mémoire des Sexualités** [Memory of the Sexualities]. His goal was the creation of a foundation. It collected documents (in particular Daniel Guérin's archives) and organized several public debates.

Since 1989, his subsidiary the association of management **Mémoire des Sexualités – Marseille** [Memory of the Sexualities – Marseille] took over, pursuing the collection and the debates. The initial fund results from archives of Christian de Leusse,

¹⁶ <http://arcl.free.fr/>

President and founder of the association. Archives are accommodated in his apartment in Marseille.

1994: Résister-Vivre la Mémoire (RVLM)¹⁷ [Resist-Live the Memory], created in Paris. In June and December, 1994, it organized exhibitions, movies festivals, debate and published a miscellany about homosexuality and AIDS.

1996: Janet & Co, created in Paris, has for objective to protect, to preserve, to buy the written or iconic documents and the objects having belonged to lesbians.

2001 (march): Académie Gay & Lesbienne¹⁸ [Gay & Lesbian Academy], created in Parisian suburb, after one year of prefiguration. Our fund is called **Conservatoire des Archives et des Mémoires LGBT** [Conservatory of LGBT Archives and Memories].

2001 (december): Association de Préfiguration du Centre d'Archives et de Documentation Homosexuelles de Paris (AP CADHP) [Association of Prefiguration of the Center of Homosexual Archives and Documentation of Paris] created in particular by Jean Le Bitoux, following the election of the new Mayor of Paris, the socialist Bertrand Delanoë. The City of Paris attributed him in 2002 one hundred thousand euros subsidy "to make a feasibility study" of the project of center.

Personalities, associations (ours in particular) and collectives (of whom [Archilesb! et VigiTrans](#)¹⁹) protested against: the sub-representation of the lesbians and the trans, the lack of transparency and communication, the absence of dialogue, the hiding of the existing initiatives, the eclipse of archives on the AIDS and the prostitution, an conception of the archive elitist and anti-militant...

The project sank and the AP CADHP closed its Website in 2004, dismissed his promoter (Jean Le Bitoux) and gave back its premises (obtained from the City of Paris). The only concrete result of 100,000 euros of subsidy is a report of prefiguration (which is not a feasibility study) returned to the City of Paris in 2005: 80 pages of generalities for a renamed project **Centre des Mémoires LGBT Paris Île-de-France** [Center of the LGBT Memories Paris Ile-de-France]. To be able to request new subsidies, the association organized meetings to establish a new scientific

¹⁷ http://www.archiveshomo.info/pmb/opac_css/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=4912
bit.ly/NUbqxm

¹⁸ <http://www.archiveshomo.info/>

¹⁹ <http://coalition.lgbtq.pagesperso-orange.fr/>

council. The invited personalities (of whom we were a member) finally decided to interrupt their works in front of the refusal of the association to allow to subscribe and to communicate its accounts.

In 2007, the project is taken back by Louis-Georges Tin. This one claims that the mayor of Paris entrusted to him a mission concerning the LGBT memory and that in 2009, the City of Paris requested him to manage the future center. He wrote a report intended to complete the one of the AP CADHP, where the project is renamed **Institut Arc-en-Ciel** [Rainbow Institute]. This new report always claims an ambitious project, with in particular 750,000 euros of annual overheads and maintenance charges and ten employees. Louis-Georges Tin pays there tribute in the work of the former team but declares to wish to restart "on new bases, to get over the various controversies" by the creation of a new association. He so constituted a team with persons not belonging to the AP CADHP. Since the end of 2011, he organized meetings to prepare the creation of his new association which still not exists officially.

2 - ARCHIVES AND LIBRARIES WITHIN LGBT ORGANIZATIONS

Numerous associations created within them a library (see below some significant examples). Besides there are archives held by trading companies: so the archives of the newspaper [Gai Pied](#)²⁰ (1979-1992) were acquired by Webscape, publishing company of portal [Gayvox](#)²¹, which keeps them in a storage warehouse.

1983: Fédération Nationale des Lieux Associatifs Gais (FLAG) [National Federation of the Gay Associative Places] which gathered gay places of associative type obtained from the Ministry of Culture a subsidy which allowed to equip every place of a lending library, where more than 200 books were accessible to the members and the visitors of the association organizer of the place. She published then the catalog.

1991: Obtaining of a 50,000-franc subsidy of the Ministry of Culture for the documentation department of the **Maison des Homosexualités** (de Paris) [House of the Homosexualities of Paris].

²⁰ http://www.archiveshomo.info/archives/fonds/gai_pied/historique_journal.htm

bit.ly/PFIInSF

²¹ <http://www.gayvox.fr/>

1995: Creation, within the **Centre Gai et Lesbien de Paris** [Gay and Lesbian Center of Paris] become the **Centre Lesbien, Gai, Bi et Trans de Paris et Île de France** [Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans Center of Paris and Ile de France], a [library](#)²² which is one of the most important places-resources in France today, thanks to the work of the volunteers.

2000: Opening in Lille by Patrick Cardon ([Gay Kitsch Camp](#)²³ association) of the **Centre Européen de Recherches, d'Études et de Documentation sur les Homosexualités** [the European Center of Researches, Studies and Documentation on the Homosexualities]. Become the **Centre Européen de Recherches, d'Études et de Documentation sur les Sexualités Plurielles et les Interculturalités – CEREDSPI** [European Center of Researches, Studies and Documentation on the Plural Sexualities and the Interculturalities]. The center was a room of archives and consultation within the premises of the Gay Kitsch Camp association, which also served as bookshop and as working room for the festival Question de Genre and the Publishing Question de Genre / GayKitschCamp. Because of the decrease of subsidies, the premise was closed in 2005. Patrick Cardon moved in Montpellier in a social housing where he keeps archives by hoping for a help of public authorities.

3 – ARCHIVES AND DOCUMENTATION WITHIN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

2005: The City of Lyon announced the opening of a **Centre de ressources documentaires gays et lesbiens** [Gay and Lesbian Documentary Resources Center] inside the Municipal Library of Lyon (BmL). This initiative is the outcome of the work led by Michel Chomarat, project leader “Memory” in the City of Lyon and organizer since 2002 of the Assises de la mémoire gay (become Assises de la mémoire gay et lesbienne). The fund of the center consists of present books in the various departments of the BmL and present documents within the Archives fonds of the BmL (in particular the fonds Chomarat). At the end of 2006, becomes [Centre de ressources sur le Genre : identités, sexualités, mémoire gay et lesbienne](#)²⁴ [Center of resources on the Gender: identities, sexualities, gay and lesbian memory].

²² <http://www.centrelgbtparis.org/spip.php?rubrique5>

²³ <http://www.gaykitschcamp.com/> <http://gaykitschcamp.blogspot.fr/>

²⁴ <http://www.bm-lyon.fr/lepointg/>

2012: The Association **Les Amis de Masques et Persona**²⁵ [the Friends of Masques and Persona] announced the deposit in June of the archives of the magazine **Masques**²⁶ (1979-1986) and publishing Persona to the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) [National Library of France].

4 – INTERNET

There existed and are real centers of on-line resources, as these three sites pioneers:

- la **France Gaie et Lesbienne**²⁷ [Gay and Lesbian France - France Queer Resources Directory] (since 1994) of the association Gais et lesbiennes Branchés;
- le **Séminaire Gai**²⁸ [Gay Seminar] (since 1997) by Olivier Jablonski ;
- **Kademos**²⁹ (created in 1998, regrettably disappeared since) by Jacques Girard, the author of “Le mouvement homosexuel en France : 1945-1980” [The homosexual movement in France: 1945-1980].

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<http://www.archiveshomo.info>

In English: bit.ly/P5HHnF

Catalog: OPAC = bit.ly/MFKZjc – LibraryThing = bit.ly/MBfUvm

²⁵ <http://www.revuemasques.fr/index-site.html>

²⁶ http://www.archiveshomo.info/pmb/opac_css/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=1055
bit.ly/NUd95U

²⁷ <http://www.france.qrd.org/>

²⁸ <http://semgai.free.fr/>

²⁹ <http://web.archive.org/web/20021201203648/http://membres.lycos.fr/jgir/index1.htm>

bit.ly/PW2Kqf