

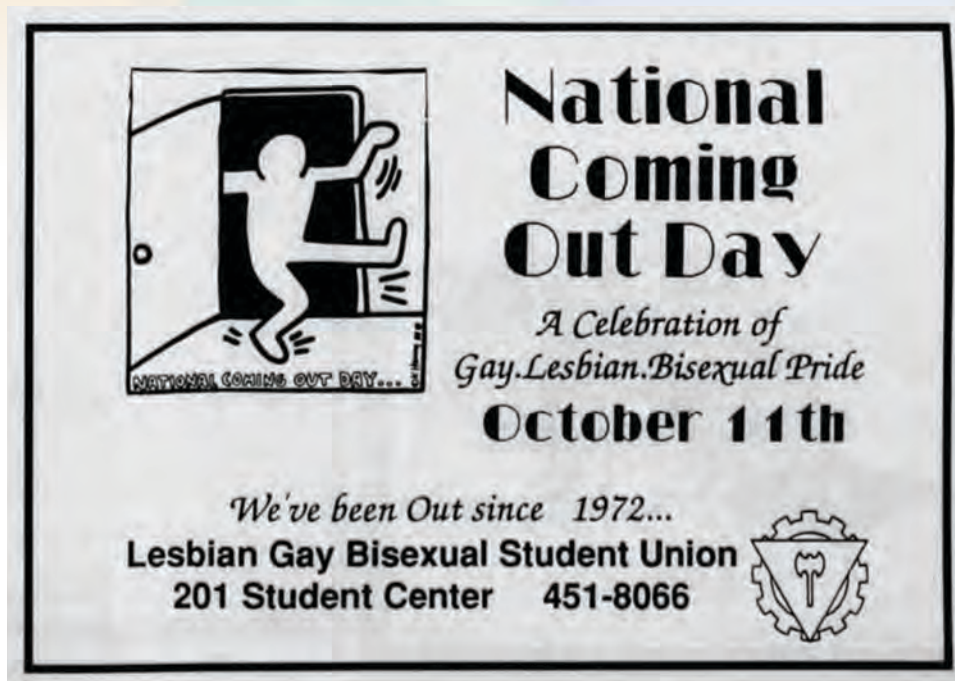


EXISTENCE IS RESISTANCE: ORGANIZING QUEER COMMUNITY IN DELAWARE



BY EXISTING OPENLY IN UNAPOLOGETIC WAYS, QUEER PEOPLE HAVE RESISTED THE CONFINES OF A HETEROSEXUAL SOCIETY.

This project seeks to explore how queer people have organized themselves over the past fifty years in Delaware. The scope of this research does not include all of the queer organizations in the state, nor does it include all of queer history. The goal of this project is to highlight a community whose stories are often underrepresented in public history.



National Coming Out Day advertisement from the LGBSU (1990) Courtesy of University of Delaware Archives and Records Management

QUEER? GAY? LGBT?

Throughout this project, you will see the word "Queer". Some people, especially those who are older, may be taken aback by this word. For a long time, "queer" was used as a derogatory term against the **LGBT** (Lebian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) community. But in recent decades, there has been a reclamation of this word. Today, "queer" functions as an umbrella term to refer to anyone who is not straight or cisgender. We chose to use this term because we felt it was the most inclusive word currently used in scholarship about LGBTQ history.

Queer is an adjective, so it is completely fine to say "queer people," but "queers" is not an acceptable term.

Cover Images

top: University of Delaware Blue Hen Yearbook (1993) courtesy of University of Delaware Records Management

bottom: Pride Celebration in Rodney Square (1998) Photo courtesy of Andrew Zeltt

KEY TERMS:

Sexual orientation (noun)- a person's emotional and sexual attraction to others.

Gender identity (noun)- a person's internal sense of their gender, whether that be male, female, both or another gender.

Lesbian (adj.)- a sexual orientation that describes a woman who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other women.

Gay (adj.)- A sexual orientation that describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender. It can be used regardless of gender identity but is more commonly used to describe men.

Bisexual (adj.)- describes a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of their own gender and people of other genders.

Transgender (adj.) describes a person whose gender identity does not match their assigned sex at birth. Also used as an umbrella term to include gender identities outside of male and female.

Non-Binary (adj.) - a person whose gender exists outside the gender binary.

Gender Binary (noun) - a system of gender classification in which all people are categorized as being either male or female.

Cisgender (adj.)- a person whose gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth.

Asexual (adj.)- describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction to others.

Queer (adj.) - an umbrella term for sexual and gender identities who are not heterosexual or are not cisgender.

Drag (verb)- the performance of one or multiple genders theatrically. Those who perform are called Drag Kings and Drag Queens.

Gender Affirming Surgery (noun)- surgeries used to modify one's body to be more aligned with one's gender identity. Also referred to as sex reassignment surgery or gender-confirming surgery.



World AIDS Day Walk, late 1990s, photo courtesy of AIDS Delaware

"EVEN IN THIS TINY POCKET OF THIS VERY TINY STATE CALLED DELAWARE, WE CAN STILL ESTABLISH SOMETHING VERY BEAUTIFUL BY PLANTING SEEDS OF COMMUNITY."

- Joe Sielski, founder of Our Night Out

AIDS DELAWARE

In 1983, Delaware reported its first cases of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, otherwise known as AIDS. This same year, the **Gay Lesbian Alliance of Delaware (GLAD)** began training their Lesbian and Gay hot-line volunteers on the AIDS virus, and how to respond to AIDS-related questions. This soon spun into something much bigger. In 1984, the GLAD health committee became the **Delaware Lesbian and Gay Health Advocates**, the state's first AIDS service agency; its name changed to **AIDS Delaware** in 1995.



For decades, AIDS Delaware has provided a multitude of services including counseling, housing, education, fundraising, and free testing. While AIDS Delaware is not a solely queer organization, many people who work at AIDS Delaware are part of the LGBTQ community. The organization continues to serve and connect with the community today.



Delaware AIDS Walk, 1999, photo courtesy of AIDS Delaware

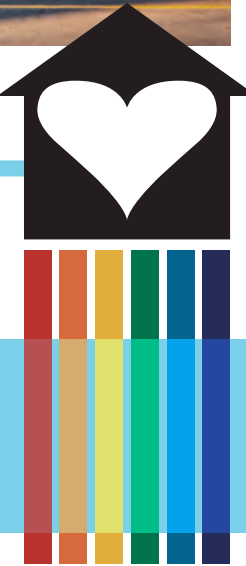


CAMP REHOBOTH

In the late 1980s, the gay bar scene in Rehoboth was booming. Every summer, gay tourists flocked to Rehoboth's sunny beaches, living in shared group homes and feeling comfortable to be out and proud. But with this influx of queer tourists, came backlash from the local residents. Car bumpers were adorned with stickers proclaiming "Keep Rehoboth a Family Town."



First Location of CAMP Rehoboth, 1991, photo courtesy of Murray Archibald.



"Whether people knew it or not, the reason they moved to Rehoboth or bought a summer home here was because of the work CAMP Rehoboth did to make this such a welcoming community."

- Fay Jacobs, former editor of Letters from CAMP Rehoboth

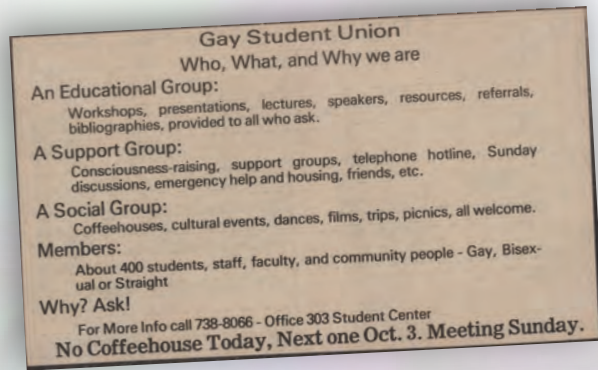
Gay residents of Rehoboth, Steve Elkins and Murray Archibald, wanted to bring together their neighbors as a way to say, "There's room for all of us." In 1991, they founded **CAMP Rehoboth** which stands for **Creating A More Positive Rehoboth**. For decades, CAMP has succeeded in bringing together gay and straight people alike through community outreach, sensitivity training, promoting political awareness, and local fundraising events. One of CAMP's most successful projects has been **Letters from CAMP Rehoboth**, the first queer newspaper in Delaware.

CAMP Rehoboth's Sundance Event, 2019, photo courtesy of Murray Archibald



QUEER PEOPLE HAVE EXISTED LONG BEFORE THE 20TH CENTURY.

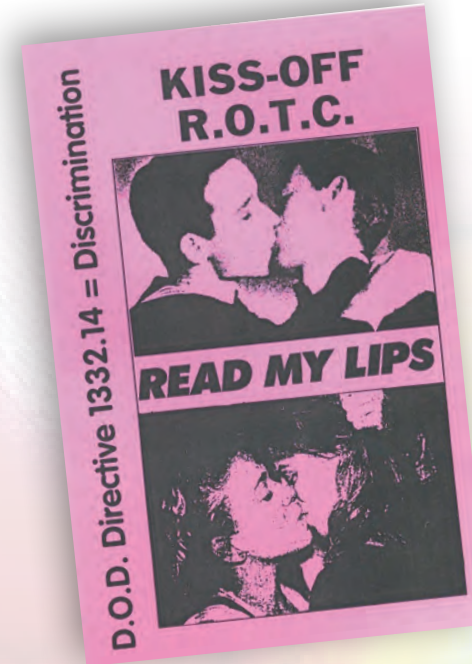
However, public queer organizations did not begin to form in Delaware until the early 1970s. The University of Delaware's **Gay Student Union** (GSU) became a registered student organization in 1972, making it one of the oldest gay college groups in the nation. The organization is now known as the **Lavender Programming Board**. Since then, queer groups on the university's campus have expanded to include organizations like **speQtrum**, a club for queer people of color, and **oSTEM**, meaning "Out in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics."



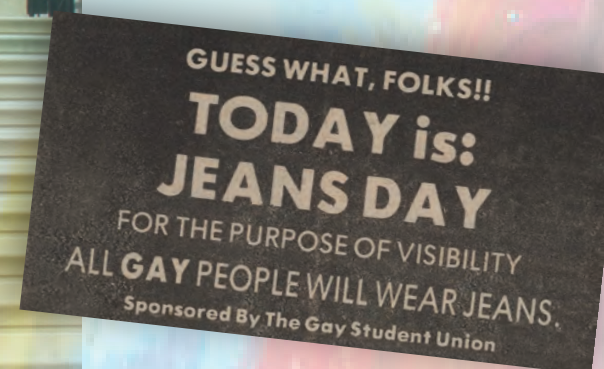
UD Review (1980) courtesy of Haven Student Organization Collection, University of Delaware Archives and Record Management

Kiss-Off R.O.T.C. Flyer (1991)
Courtesy of Haven Student Organization Collection,
University of Delaware Archives and Record Management

Department of Defense Directive 1332.14 states, "Homosexuality is incompatible with military service." The LGBSU (previously known as GSU) organized a protest of the ROTC program's discrimination against gay, lesbian, and bisexual students.



Throughout the decades, these organizations have also engaged in social and political activism. The GSU organized the first "Jeans Day" for LGBT visibility in 1980. Since then, student and local activists have participated in "Die-In" protests against homophobia, where participants lay on the ground, representing those who have died from AIDS or homophobic hate crimes. Additionally, students staged a "kiss-off" to protest the US Army's exclusion of LGBT service people, and a marry-in to advocate for marriage equality.



SpeQtrum Student Organization (2017)
photo courtesy of Taylor Mathews

UD Review (1980) courtesy of
Haven Student Organization
Collection, University of
Delaware Archives and
Record Management

QUEER LIFE ON CAMPUS

Queer student organizations functioned to bring LGBTQ people together, to discuss how they relate to each other and to the university community. The GSU offered weekly meetings, seasonal social events, and educational speakers. Members of speQtrum organized panels in classrooms to discuss the intersections of race and queer identity.



1972

Gay Student Union formed at the University of Delaware.

Although the organization began in 1972, a photo of the members did not appear in the University yearbooks until 1990 for fear of harassment or violence.



Lesbian Gay Bisexual Student Union (Formerly the GSU) University of Delaware Blue Hen Yearbook (1990)

Courtesy of the University of Delaware Archives and Records Management

1979

Fifty Delawareans participated in the first National March for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

Representatives from the University of Delaware's Gay Student Union and local activists attended the march in Washington, D.C. which aimed to bring an extension of civil rights amendments to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.



Delaware Flag at the National March for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Washington, D.C. UD Review (1979)

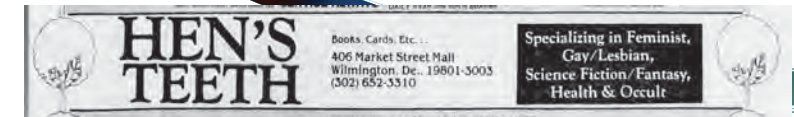
Courtesy of the University of Delaware Archives and Records Management

1982

The Gay & Lesbian Alliance of Delaware (GLAD) was founded by Ivo Dominguez Jr. and James C. Welch.

1983

Delaware's first queer bookstore, Hen's Teeth, opened on Market St. by Dominguez and Welch.



Sharing a cause, a home and a love for each other



The Morning News (1986)
Courtesy of Haven Student Organization Collection, University of Delaware Records Management

1984

GLAD's Health Committee became Delaware Lesbian and Gay Health Advocates (DLGHA) - Delaware's first AIDS service agency.



1986

Welch & Dominguez bought and renovated 214 N. Market Street to create The Griffin Community Center.

The first 2 floors became home to GLAD, DLGHA, Immanuel Metropolitan Community Church, and the meeting space for many LGBT community groups. Welch & Dominguez lived on the third floor and attic. The community center was open until the spring of 1990.



1987

First AIDS Awareness Week in Delaware was recognized and spearheaded by the DLGHA. They later sponsored the first AIDS walk fundraiser, "A Walk for Life."

First Delaware AIDS Walk at Rodney Square (1987)
Courtesy of Ivo Dominguez Jr.

1991

Murray Archibald and Steve Elkins formed the gay community center CAMP (Creating A More Positive) Rehoboth.

The same year, Letters from CAMP Rehoboth, Delaware's first gay newspaper, was published.



Steve Elkins and Murray Archibald in front of the CAMP Rehoboth Community Center (2007)
Courtesy of Murray Archibald.



Delaware Lesbian and Gay Health Advocates (DLGHA) changed its name to AIDS Delaware.

1995

1999

First annual National BLACK HIV/AIDS Awareness Day.



2001

Family Court of Delaware ruled that gay couples can legally adopt children.

2009

Congress passed the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

2010



Our Night Out, a queer social group, was founded by Joe Sielski.

Joe Sielski

2011

John Buchheit was elected mayor of Delaware City, making him the first openly gay mayor in Delaware.



2016

Trinity Neal became the first transgender minor in Delaware to have Medicaid cover her gender affirming medical care.

Trinity knew she was a girl since she was 4 years old. She was the first trans minor to be fully treated for gender dysphoria at Delaware Children's Hospital at age 9. By 14, Trinity and her mother, DeShanna Neal, created Delaware's first Youth LGBTQ Pride festival.

Trinity Neal wearing her Rainbow wig (2017)
Courtesy of DeShanna and Trinity Neal

2012

Same-Sex Civil Unions became legal in Delaware.



Photo Courtesy of Fay Jacobs

2020

Delawareans elected three openly queer people to the State's Legislature.



Senator Sarah McBride is Delaware's first transgender elected official and the highest ranking elected transgender official in the country.

Eric Morrison as Anita Mann
Courtesy of Eric Morrison

2013

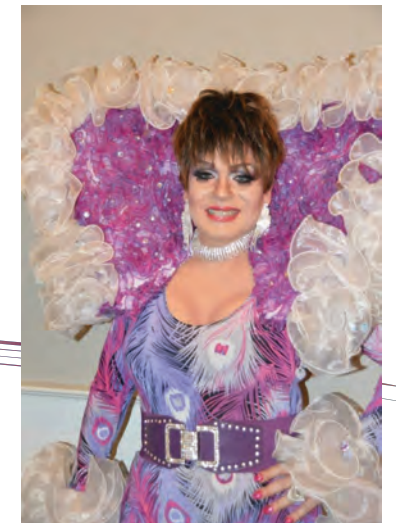
State Senator Karen Peterson came out as a lesbian on the floor of Delaware's State Senate.

Same-Sex Marriage became legal in Delaware.

The Gender Identity Nondiscrimination Act was signed by Governor Jack Markell, ensuring equal legal protections for transgender people in Delaware.



Senator Marie Pinkney is Delaware's first out-lesbian to be elected to the State Legislature. She is also the first openly LGBT African-American to be in the State Senate.



Representative Eric Morrison is Delaware's first openly gay man to be elected to the State Legislature. He is also a former female impersonator who went by the name of Anita Mann.



Marriage Ceremony of Lyndsey and Stacy Roberts at the Crimson Moon (2019)
Courtesy of Stacy Roberts

MAPPING WILMINGTON'S HISTORIC QUEER SITES






MAP DESCRIPTION:

Wilmington has remained a center of queer community in the state for decades. Each marker dot on this map represents a location significant to queer history. This image includes 10 different gay bars, a queer bookstore, a queer community center, and two formerly gay neighborhoods (Quaker Hill and Trolley Square). Of all these locations, only one is still open - "The Crimson Moon Tavern."

GAYBORHOODS:

Quaker Hill Neighborhood - Former gay neighborhood in the 1980s and 90s. At its height, at least a dozen different gay couples lived in this area at once.

Trolley Square Neighborhood - Former gay neighborhood in the 1980s and 90s.

-  **Renaissance** - 107 W Sixth Street, One of the most popular gay bars in the 1980s and 1990s
-  **Gas Lamp** - 915 Shipley Street, Speakeasy style gay bar with no signage in the 1960s and closed early 1970s.
-  **Danceland** - 913 Shipley Street, an early 1980s after-hours private membership gay dancing club.
-  **ROAM** - 913 Shipley Street, same location as Danceland, one of the most popular gay bars of the 1980s and 1990s.
-  **Everybody's Club**- 11 East 4th Street Wilmington, DE, Gay bar in the 1990s focused on serving queer people of color in Wilmington
-  **The 814** - 814 Shipley Street, One of the most popular gay bars in the 1980s and 1990s
-  **Bachelor's** - Pennsylvania Avenue and North Grant, Gay bar in the 1990s
-  **Golden Greek (Stella's)** - 8th street and King Street, Popular gay bar in the 1970s
-  **The Crimson Moon Tavern** - 1909 W 6th St, Wilmington, DE, the only gay bar in Wilmington that is still open.
-  **Hen's Teeth** - 406 Market Street Mall, Queer/Alternative Bookstore on Market Street in the 1980s.
-  **Griffin Community Center** - 214 North Market Street, Wilmington, DE. Queer community center on Market Street, opened 1986, closed 1991.



Pride 2020,
Photo courtesy
of Kary Santyana

QUEER RESOURCES IN DELAWARE:

ACLU Delaware

Website: <https://www.aclu-de.org/>

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Delaware provides legal and advocacy service for a full range of "civil liberties" issues, including LGBTQ+ issues.

AIDS Delaware

Website: <https://aidsdelaware.org/>

AIDS Delaware's mission is to support those living with HIV/AIDS in Delaware and to prevent the spread and stigma of HIV. AIDS Delaware offers free rapid HIV testing, HIV/AIDS Education, as well as a wide variety of mental health and direct services to people living with HIV like transportation, food pantries, and assistance with medical services. Though not an explicitly queer organization, AIDS Delaware has long been a partner of the queer community. AIDS Delaware has many fundraising events, most notably their annual AIDS Walk.

CAMP Rehoboth

Website: <https://www.camprehoboth.com/>

Address: 37 Baltimore Ave, Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971



CAMP (Creating A More Positive Rehoboth) is a community service organization whose mission is to build a safer, more inclusive community for LGBTQ folks living in Sussex County and surrounding coastal areas. They also work to promote cooperation and understanding among queer and straight people alike, through collaborative service projects, health programs, community outreach, education, and advocacy. In response to the pandemic, CAMP has moved their meetings virtually over Zoom.



FreeLee Life Services for Individuals & Families, Inc.

Facebook: FreeLeeFoundation

FreeLee Life Services' mission is to strengthen family and community systems, prevent crises, and help individuals develop resilience through family-life education. The foundation is now hosting the Djembe Web Exchange Project: free webinars that promote health, wellness, and life services for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) community. Djembe is a West African word meaning "Everyone Gather Together in Peace."

Lavender Programming Board

Facebook/Instagram: lpbatud

Contact: lpbatud@gmail.com

The Lavender Programming Board (LPB) is a student-run LGBTQ organization at the University of Delaware. This group began as the Gay Student Union (GSU) in the 1970s, and has since rebranded and expanded what programs and services they can provide to the queer community. All are welcome at LPB meetings and events, students or otherwise.

Orgullo Delaware

Facebook: Orgullo Delaware

Contact: OrgulloDelaware@gmail.com



Orgullo Delaware is a new organization for LGBTQ Latinx people and their families in Delaware. Orgullo provides Bilingual Gender and Sexuality-Focused Therapy, Empowerment Groups for Parents, Teens, and Adults, Foundational Intersectionality Trainings, movie and book discussions.

Our Night Out

Facebook: Our Night Out (ONO), public group.

Our Night Out is a monthly social gathering of LGBTQ folks and allies at local restaurants. Joe Sielski started this group as a way to say that the businesses of Wilmington are open to everyone and promote visibility and acceptance of the queer community in Delaware. All are welcome at these events.

PFLAG Delaware

Website: <https://www.pflagwilmde.org>

PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) offers support, advocacy, and education about LGBTQ issues. Their website provides resources such as local LGBTQ-friendly Churches, therapists, doctors, and more. Support meetings are held on the 2nd Thursday of every month virtually and in person.

Transitions Delaware

Website: <https://transitionsde.com/>

Transitions Delaware LLC offers Queer Inclusive Counselling Services. Started by Karla Fleshman, a former AIDS nurse, and Reverend, Transitions Delaware seeks to serve both within and beyond the Queer Community. In addition to counseling, Transitions Delaware also provides consultation sessions to area schools and businesses to promote supportive LGBTQ+ environments, and it also provides personalized professional development training.

The Village

Website: <https://aidsdelaware.org/services/the-village-delaware/>

The Village is a pop-up, drop-in LGBTQ community center with events for youth and adults throughout New Castle County. The Village is located in Northern Delaware, and hosts events online, and also in Wilmington. They aim to provide safe social engagements, mentorship, resources, education, and leadership opportunities for youth and adults. The Village also accepts applicants to a Fall Leadership Program for LGBTQ and allied youths, ages 13-23.





Pride Grand Marshall 2019 Sash

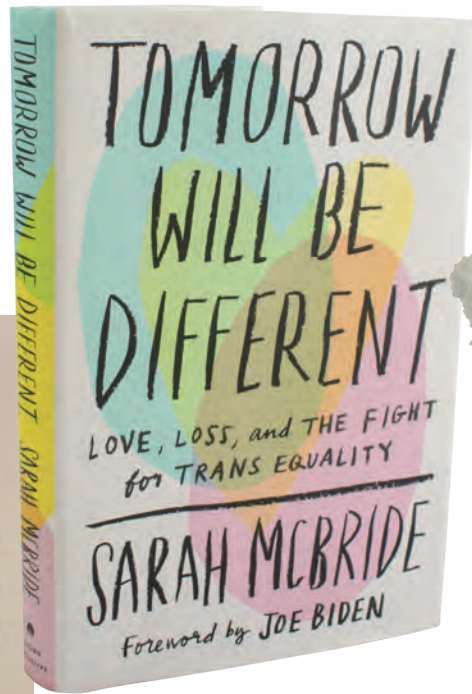
Loaned by Karla Fleshman

"Tomorrow Will Be Different"
Book by Sarah McBride



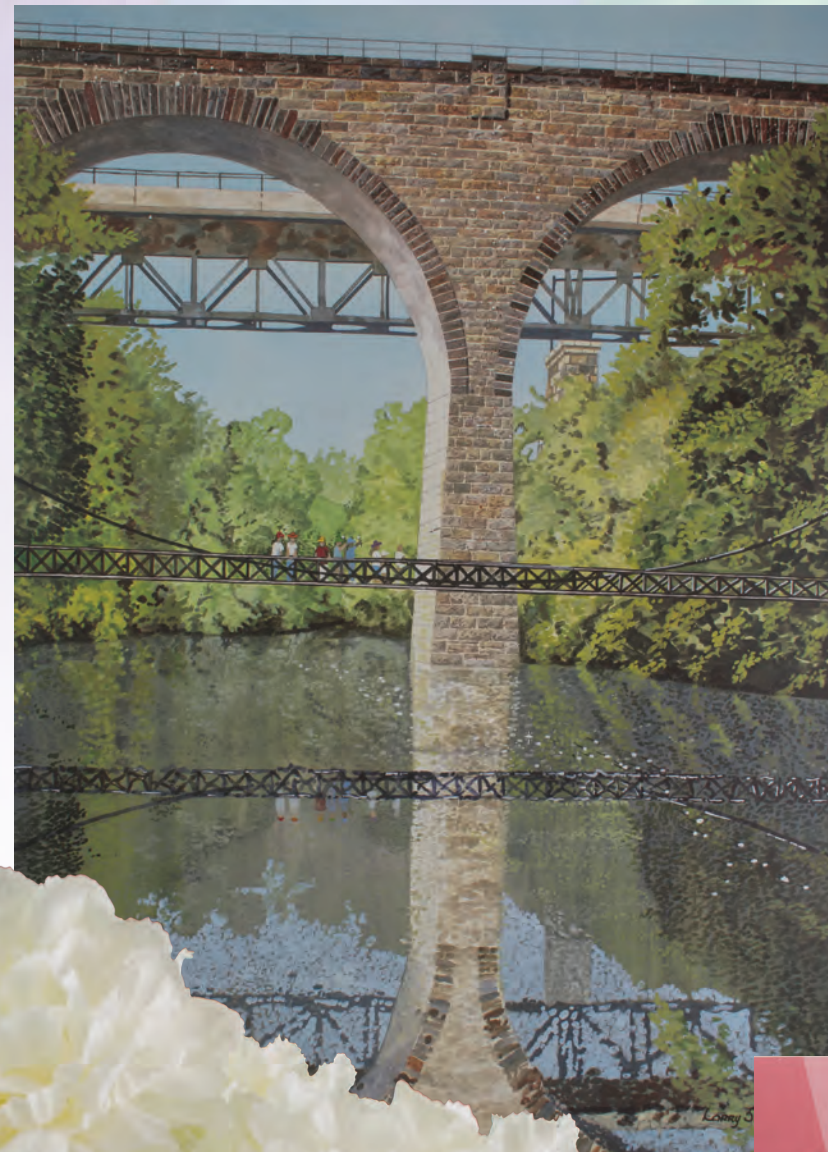
Delaware Pride Parade 2019 Photo

Loaned by Karla Fleshman. Karla pictured standing up in the car.



Sarah McBride 2020 Campaign Sign

Donated by Sarah McBride, the first openly transgender State Senator in the Country



"Moments of Reflection"
Poster by Larry Anderson

Loaned by AIDS Delaware. During the annual AIDS Walk, participants would throw white flowers into the river to represent those they had lost to AIDS.

Marie Pinkney 2020 Campaign Sign

Donated by Marie Pickney, first Black, openly gay lesbian to serve in the Delaware General Assembly



Eric Morrison 2020 Campaign Sign

Donated by Eric Morrison, the first openly gay man to serve in the Delaware General Assembly

**SARAH
MCBRIDE**

DEMOCRAT STATE SENATE

PAID FOR BY FRIENDS OF SARAH MCBRIDE

**Eric
MORRISON**

**DEMOCRAT FOR
STATE REPRESENTATIVE**

PAID FOR BY FRIENDS OF ERIC MORRISON



Rainbow Stole

Donated by Reverend Diane Fisher and used in her LGBTQ ministry work across the world.



AIDS Walk Delaware 2019 and 2020 T-Shirts

Donated by AIDS Delaware.



Our Night Out Bracelets

Loaned by Joe Sielski, creator of Our Night Out, a Delaware queer social group.



Bowl of Condoms

Donated by AIDS Delaware. During the height of the AIDS Crisis, AIDS Delaware placed boxes of condoms in gay bars to promote safe-sex and reduce the transmission rates of AIDS.



"My Rainbow" by Trinity and DeShanna Neal

This children's book is about a local transgender child finding herself and being accepted by her family through her rainbow wig.

RESEARCH METHODS

"**Existence is Resistance**" (2021) is the Delaware History Museum's first project about queer history. This research centered around how queer Delawearns built community, and it also examined how structures of power influenced how queer people were allowed to organize.

The project incorporates information from oral history interviews, archival research, and object-based research. The oral history interviews with Delawearns provided a subjective, primary resource into queer history. Additionally, utilizing the University of Delaware Archives helped to track the emergence of queer student organizations.

Because queer history has often been relegated to the margins, methods of rapid collecting and crowdsourcing of photographs were employed to provide a visual representation of the queer community in Delaware. Together, these methods scratched the surface of the rich queer history in the First State.

The logo for the Delaware Historical Society, featuring three yellow stars above the word "Delaware" in a blue serif font, with "HISTORICAL SOCIETY" in a smaller blue sans-serif font below it.



2nd Annual New Castle County LGBTQ Youth Pride Festival (2019) photo courtesy of Keonna Freeman



I am out
therefore
I am

SAT, OCT. 17

YES!
WE DO
BELIEVE
IN FAIRIES

I am o
therefor
I am

