

When the Community is You: Institutional Outreach Through Archival Exhibits

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The Library of Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) is home to the institution's Historical Collections & Archives (HC&A), which preserves and makes accessible materials covering the history of both the organization itself and health sciences more broadly. Collections include the historical records of the university, documentation and oral histories tracing the practice of health sciences in the Pacific Northwest, medical and dental artifacts dating back to the Civil War, and one of the largest rare book collections focused on health sciences found on the West Coast. As part of our public programming, HC&A curates these holdings into three or four exhibits each year that are displayed at the main entrance of the library building on the Marquam Hill campus.

In June of 2019, HC&A launched “[Queering OHSU](#),” an exhibit focused on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) history of the institution. Dating back to the early 1900s, this history had been largely undocumented in the archives' holdings. Prior to the exhibit opening, I reached out across the University community to gather records that documented this history, conducted offsite research in other local repositories, and oversaw the recording of three oral history interviews on the topic of transgender health. Through these efforts, I hoped to increase the archives' holdings, uncover hidden stories, and increase the visibility of the archives in new communities. This article speaks to



Exhibit bookmark.





Alan Hart, author image.

the work completed as part of the project and subsequent outcomes, which include developing additional archival holdings, making positive institutional connections, and bringing in a small but thankful new audience to the archives.

My first step in preparing for this exhibit was to take a deeper dive into the archives' holdings to see what we actually had that documented the LGBTQ+ history of OHSU. I already knew about an early transgender graduate (Alan Hart, class of 1917) and wanted to learn more. We had one oral history from Dr. [Ira Pauly](#), who treated transgender patients in the 1970s; and one from Dr. [David Rosenstein](#), a dentist who treated HIV+ patients (many of whom were gay) in the 1980s and 1990s. And I knew that OHSU's current Transgender Health Program (THP) was the

outgrowth of many years of deliberate work around better serving transgender communities.

In reviewing our collections of biographical and subject files, I discovered that another University of Oregon Medical School (UOMS, the precursor to OHSU) faculty member had treated Alan Hart, and wrote a very detailed account of the process in a journal article that we had in our collections. I learned that Hart went on to work as a radiologist, but also wrote a series of quasi-autobiographical novels, many of which we held in our archival book collections.

While reviewing the anachronistically-titled subject file on "Transsexuals" (now re-titled to "Transgender," as this project allowed us to review our own descriptions for outdated terminology), I found a series of photocopied *Oregon Journal* news clippings written by a transgender woman named Parish in the 1970s. Parish had seen doctors at the UOMS hospital and written about it in her articles. However, as photocopies do not make for good exhibit material, I did some further research and found that the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) held materials from the *Oregon Journal*, including a [photograph collection](#); and the Multnomah County Library held originals of the [entire run](#) of the newspaper. I visited OHS and found photographs of Parish in the collection, as well as a photograph of the same woman using the name Stephanie and dated two years prior to the articles I initially sought. This led to finding an article that hadn't been in our subject files. After I reviewed microfilmed copies of the articles and found them unsuitable for exhibit purposes, Multnomah County Library allowed me to view the original newspapers at an offsite facility. I was able to read both the 1972 article and the series of 1974 articles, and took digital images that were later reproduced and used in the exhibit.



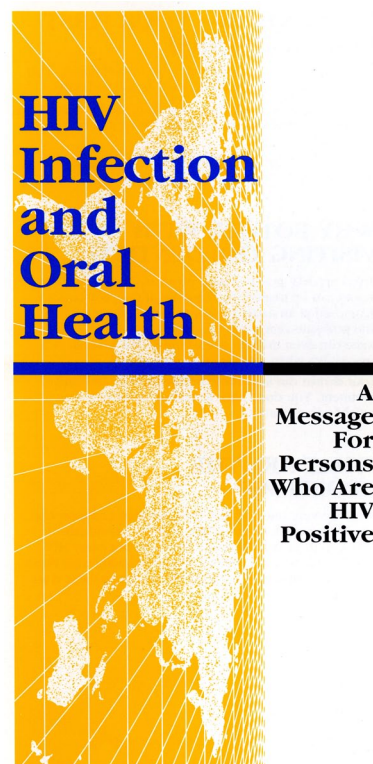
Image and excerpt from Parish's news series (*Oregon Journal*).



One of the doctors Parish wrote about in her articles was the aforementioned Dr. Pauly. By tying these two stories together and expanding upon Pauly’s research and publications in the subject area, I was able to expand the range of exhibit items further. As this research progressed, HC&A shifted the focus of our Oral History Program to document transgender health at OHSU. We recorded three new interviews: two with current doctors working with the Transgender Health Program, Drs. [Christina Milano](#) and [Daniel Dugi](#), who discussed the evolution of transgender health and medicine at the institution; and another with Dr. Toby Meltzer, who had worked at OHSU in the 1990s and performed gender-affirming surgeries at a time when the hospital was less supportive than it is now.¹ I also met with several people in the THP to gather more recent records for the exhibit and the archives. These stories demonstrate a throughline of ever-more-supportive medical practices from 1970 to today. In the 1970s, some medical professionals were treating transgender patients, but the hospital had officially banned any surgical procedures. In the 1990s, the hospital allowed them but was not supportive enough to provide sufficient time for patient recovery in the hospital. Today, the THP is nationally recognized for its supportive and inclusive practices.

In Dr. Rosenstein’s oral history interview, he discussed treating HIV+ patients at OHSU’s community dentistry clinic, the Russell Street Clinic. He talked about how beneficial their work was in the gay community of Portland, and even throughout Oregon. Patients came from all over the state, as their dentists refused to treat them once they became HIV positive. Flyers and pamphlets provided primary source documentation about their services and the importance of oral health in HIV+ patients. These records were scattered across multiple School of Dentistry collections and in a misguided “ephemera” collection (since dismantled and integrated into relevant archives collections). Institutional publications and newsletters contained articles on nurses researching and teaching about better care practices for patients with AIDS and doctors investigating potential cures. As our item descriptions are not so granular to describe article contents in publications, these articles were somewhat hidden before this exhibit highlighted them. I reached out to the Partnership Project, which started in 1995 to serve HIV+ patients and is still operating today. We added more recent records to the archives and shared stories found in our holdings with current staff who weren’t aware of them, building new bonds between HC&A and other departments on campus.

The final section of the exhibit focused on Pride, the OHSU LGBTQ+ employee resource group (ERG). I met with the president of the group, Patrick Holmes, who was also one of the founders. He filled me in on the early history of the group—how they began informally with a number of employees gathering socially and gradually



Oral care brochure.

¹ This transcript is not yet available online. To access it, please contact OHSU’s Historical Collections & Archives.





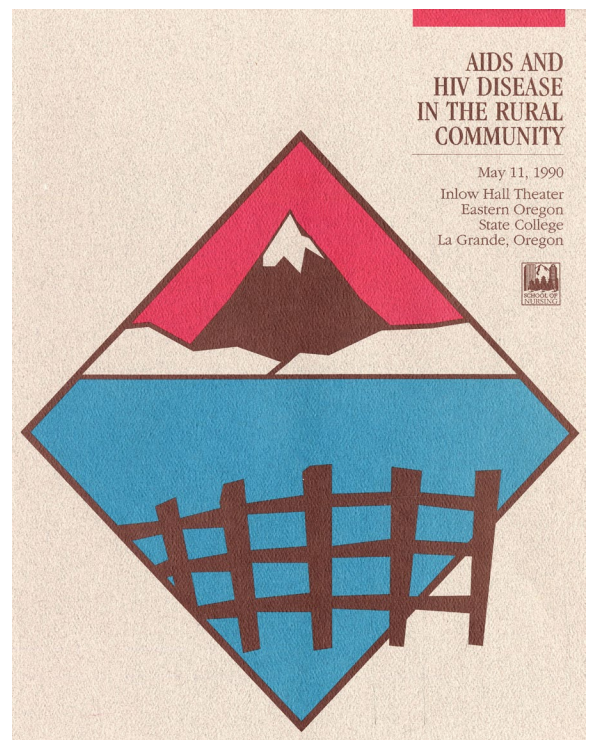
An early OHSU Pride logo.

became a more formalized group that later became fully recognized and supported by the university. Holmes transferred additional records to the archives and I donated my own *#pride* t-shirt into the collection. A few weeks before the exhibit opened, Portland's annual pride parade took place and OHSU's Pride group took part. They shared over 50 photographs to add to the archives, some of which were included in the exhibit.

As I worked with our Public Services Coordinator to bring the exhibit materials and text together, I also continued to check in with the groups that had helped build this exhibit—Pride, the Partnership Project, and the Transgender Health Program. I wanted to make sure the exhibit text was factually correct as well as culturally sensitive and used appropriate language. The THP was especially thankful for how we handled this process.

The significant focus on our oral history records also gave HC&A a perfect excuse to implement a new feature for our exhibits: an interactive kiosk purchased a month prior. I spent a great deal of time trimming, editing, and adding captions to excerpts from the videoed oral history interviews and added them to the kiosk. I worked with our library technology group to write code for the iPad app that would display the material. And I promoted the inclusion of the kiosk in a blog post after the exhibit was up and running.

Exhibit feedback was positive, though limited. Staff members appreciated the work that was put into creating this exhibit, even as far as to include writing about it in an earlier [OLAQ article](#). Members of the Partnership Project, the THP, and OHSU's Communications department—who admitted to not having visited any of our previous exhibits—came to view



Conference program on rural HIV+ healthcare.




this one during the summer and loved learning about the long history of transgender health at the institution. Members of the Pride group stated their appreciation of how we told their history and the images and records that were included. HC&A also helped them with a slide show they put together for a meeting they held around the time of the exhibit opening.

As mentioned, the archives' holdings grew through the course of this project. We added roughly half a linear foot of physical material and 3 GB of digital files from the Pride ERG—a group that had been practically undocumented in our holdings previously. We now have documentation around the early beginnings of the group and its transition to today's formalized version. Those records also document how the group was influential in OHSU becoming recognized as a leader in the Human Rights Campaign's Healthcare Equality Index. We learned more about how Dr. [Christine Tanner](#)'s legal battle for domestic partner benefits also became a foundation for legalizing same-sex marriage in the state.

Through exploring publications from the time at the height of the AIDS epidemic, we uncovered hidden stories of a wealth of HIV+ patient care and research into cures and vaccines. During a time when gay men were particularly disdained—and often refused adequate healthcare—OHSU was making strides and setting positive examples with their compassionate care. One of the articles led me to learn more about the very beginning of OHSU's Partnership Project, which has served countless HIV+ community members since it began. The few new pamphlets and 85 MB of digital files added to the archives further shows the long-term impact of their work. The THP grew out of the Partnership Project and is now documented through paper records and oral histories; its history was also virtually absent from the archives before this project began.

The early transgender history of OHSU has been brought further to light. There is more clarity around Alan Hart's transition process and his later professional life. The news articles from the 1970s, though previously in our holdings in photocopied form, are now more fully contextualized and, in addition to the work of Ira Pauly, document the less-than-favorable treatment offered at the time. The new oral history from Toby Meltzer helps fill gaps in OHSU's own transition story, from banning gender-affirming surgeries, to allowing them, to now fully supporting a multi-faceted approach to transgender health.

It can be difficult to measure the impact of efforts like this: the physical and digital size of records added is rather small, we don't have counts for the number of people that visited the exhibit, and our institutional repository does not supply metrics for how many people viewed or downloaded the oral histories (though we can see that the exhibit announcement on our blog is in our top 10 most viewed posts). I can say, however, that I managed to expand our holdings and knowledge significantly above what existed before, and I made a number of positive connections across the university through meetings with stakeholders. These interactions allowed me to explain the purpose and services of the archives, to ask for input and feedback, and to make it clear that I want to continue developing our collections in this area and collaborating on future projects. All of this raised awareness of the archives in areas of the institution that did not know we existed before, and has created a positive memory in those departments that I hope will encourage future engagement with the holdings in our care. 



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