

GAY, BISEXUAL, LESBIAN, AND TRANSGENDER (GBLT) COMMUNITY OF STATEN ISLAND  
COLLECTION

A Special Collection in

The Archives and Library of

THE STATEN ISLAND MUSEUM

75 Stuyvesant Place, Staten Island, New York 10301

Arranged and Described by

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## PROVENANCE:

On January 29, 2005, Mitchell Grubler, a former Board Member of Lambda Associates of Staten Island (also a former employee of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, former Director of the Alice Austen House, and current President of the Queens Historical Society), gave a large collection of papers relating to Lambda Associates of Staten Island (LASI) to the Staten Island Institute of Arts & Sciences.

## HISTORICAL NOTE:

Lambda Associates of Staten Island was formed in 1982 by a group of gay women and men. It was to serve the needs of the gay and lesbian people of Staten Island. A non-profit organization, LASI focused on social, educational, and political activities. With the onset of the AIDS epidemic, the organization became increasingly involved in HIV/AIDS awareness. This involvement branched off further to include promotion of the general health of the GBLT community of Staten Island. Overseen by a Board of Directors, LASI provided activities, discussion groups, and political awareness outreach to the general public, elected officials, and members of the GBLT community. The LASI membership was mainly composed of Staten Island GBLT residents, many of whom hoped to provide "a face" to the straight Staten Island community which was, and still is, considered by many to be right-wing and homophobic. It was also hoped that the GBLT individuals of Staten Island would coalesce around LASI in order that all would be encouraged to "come out of the closet" to form a solid community. Mostly, LASI hoped to provide, and did provide, a safe haven for individuals who felt alone owing to their gay, bisexual, lesbian or transgender orientation.

The word "Lambda" in the group's name comes from the eleventh lower case letter of the Greek alphabet and is the basis for the letter "l." The symbol itself evolved to represent the concept of balance and equilibrium. The Lambda symbol would eventually become the international symbol of the gay movement in the 1960's, not only because it represented balance and equality, but also because it symbolized justice, the connection of opposites, unity, and freedom of the individual.

## SCOPE & CONTENT:

The collection contains a vast array of documents relating to various aspects of LASI's history, including Board Meeting minutes, newsletters, internal memos, social activities, the AIDS epidemic, finances and more. There is specific documentation on the Alice Austen and Gertrude Tate Photo Exhibition that was held in 1997, and prejudice and bias attacks against the GBLT community. This includes background information on the murder of Charleston resident James Zappalorti, who was killed in 1990 solely because he was gay.

The LASI portion of the collection concludes with the group's demise circa 2000. LASI was never officially disbanded. As with many organizations, it simply faded away.

In 2003, Curator of History Patricia M. Salmon began archiving information related to the GBLT community of Staten Island. Consisting mainly of newspaper articles relating to the community, this portion of the collection focuses on a number of relevant topics including: prominent

individuals in the community (including Alice Austen, Gertrude Tate, Jim Smith, Chris Bauer, Sal lacullo, Wayne Steinman, Allison Sandbek, Robin Garber, Anthony Wilkinson, Matthew Titone, and others), marriage and family equality, social activities, transgender issues, the Staten Island Pride Parades of 2005 and 2006, and more. A collection of articles printed by the *Staten Island Advance* regarding GBLT news from beyond Staten Island has also been included in order that researchers get a sense of what concerned Staten Islanders from 2003 and onward. Op-ed pieces from both the editorial staff of the *Staten Island Advance* and the Staten Island community (both GBLT and straight) are included in order that researchers will again understand (to some extent) the thoughts, moods, and logic of all concerned with GBLT issues, news, activities, etc.

An important component of this collection is documentation relating to the Staten Island AIDS Task Force (SIATF). Founded in 1989, the Task Force evolved into Community Health Action of Staten Island by the end of 2004. SIATF was initially formed to “promote the health of the Staten Island community and to ensure access to and quality of HIV-related services.” The organization gave information on HIV/AIDS, provided advocacy and services for HIV issues, and offered crisis intervention and case management for individuals with HIV/AIDS and their families, friends, and partners.

An official letter from Executive Director Diane Arneth was distributed during November 2004 to inform the public that the Staten Island AIDS Task Force was now Community Health Action of Staten Island. Ms. Arneth noted that the words “task force” were dropped because the organization was “here to stay,” while AIDS was also removed so that those with the illness could seek services without fearing “the word ‘AIDS’ on our door.” The items in the GBLT Collection relating to SIATF and Community Health Action reflect the founding and evolution of the organization as well as the history of HIV/AIDS on Staten Island.

Patricia M. Salmon

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