

“The amount of stuff we’ve gotten has been incredible,” reports Matthew Lashua, community relations liaison for Multnomah County Commissioner Maria Rojo de Steffey. “It really shows the diversity of the people who got married last year.”

We stand over a table piled high with albums, each full of documents from the weddings of March and April 2004.

Where one year ago hundreds of same-sex couples gathered to sign their papers, now the lobby is quiet and houses a display of memorabilia from that time: handwritten cards, e-mails to the commissioners, wedding announcements, name-change cards and photographs, each plumbing a deep well of emotional resilience that characterizes the couples who were married. The Wedding Album Project was the brainchild of the commissioners who worked together to gain the right for same-sex couples to marry—Rojo, Lisa Naito and Serena Cruz.

“This was a historical and momentous event, because the marriages were halted, and we don’t know what is going to happen,” Rojo says. “This is worth archiving and noting in a particular way. I can’t think of another thing I’ve done in my career that has been historical. But this is. I think it is important for it to be noted in an important way. When we got the first submissions I started crying all over again. All those incredible people, I was back in that space. I can’t describe how I felt last year when it happened. To see all these fantastic people doing what they should be able to do. It is really moving to see it all again.”

Multnomah County is the only government

THE WEDDING ALBUM PROJECT

Multnomah County gathers memories and images

by Sarah Dougher

agency that is taking the time and effort to collect the artifacts of its citizens regarding same-sex marriage. Although *The San Francisco Chronicle* newspaper is also collecting historical artifacts, Multnomah County is alone in making a civic project of it.

The cost for the project has been minimal—only postage for invitations to the 3,022 couples who were married—especially considering the rich responses it garnered. Staffers willingly volunteered the time it took to mount the pieces into archival plastic holders and to stick them in binders.

Some objects were actually too large to fit in a traditional album: Collages, large framed photo montages, signs from the days of the weddings and even two wedding dresses were donated to the collection.

Contributions came pouring in from all over the United States when the call went out, and so the collection contains entries from Alaska to



Matthew Lashua shows guests the Wedding Album Project in the foyer of the Multnomah Building.

Arizona. Interestingly, of the 260 couples who sent memorabilia, there were three times as many female couples as male.

After its public display, the project will be moved April 1 into Room 610 of the Multnomah Building, where press and other invited guests will be invited to examine it more closely.

The collection then will move to its permanent home as part of the Gay and Lesbian Archive of the Pacific Northwest at the Oregon Historical Society.

GLAPN is a historical society and archive focusing on Oregon, Washington and Idaho. It works with existing repositories to acquire and preserve records, papers, photographs and other materials related to regional queer culture and conduct oral history interviews with members of the pre-Stonewall generation. Its Web site describes the collections it has amassed and provides several articles on regional queer history.

About 10 years ago, GLAPN began giving its collections to the Oregon Historical Society to become part of the overall research library. Materials from the collection are accessible to the general public for a small library fee. If you are interested in finding information, you need only visit the library and speak with a librarian about your interests and research needs. The collection has oral histories, film, video, photographs, journals and all other manner of ephemera from the Stonewall/gay liberation era and before.

GLAPN is used extensively by visitors to the society, particularly an award-winning piece by Peter Boag called “Does Portland Need a Homophile Society? Gay Culture and Activism in the Rose City between World War II and Stonewall,” published in Vol. 105, Issue I of *Oregon Historical Quarterly*.

The society’s Ken Dubois told *Just Out* that the idea to donate the collection came from the commissioners themselves.

“We are grateful that they thought of it; we wish more people would,” he says. “Even though some people thought that women’s suffrage was controversial when it happened, we are glad to have the materials here in our collections. So many of these struggles make up the fabric of culture that we now take for granted.”

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