Guide to the Anne Tischer and Bess Watts Collection on Marriage Equality 2017.021

This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on January 17, 2018.

English

Describing Archives: A Content Standard
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<td>Series IV: Family Portrait Storytelling Project Photographs</td>
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Summary Information

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<tr>
<th>Repository:</th>
<th>Local History &amp; Genealogy Division</th>
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<td>Source:</td>
<td>Gay Alliance of Genesee Valley</td>
</tr>
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<td>Title:</td>
<td>Anne Tischer and Bess Watts collection on marriage equality</td>
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<tr>
<td>ID:</td>
<td>2017.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date [inclusive]:</td>
<td>1984-2013, bulk 2004-2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date [bulk]:</td>
<td>bulk 2004-2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Description:</td>
<td>8.5 Cubic Feet 9 boxes, 1 over sized box, and 86 large signs.</td>
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<td>Mixed Materials [box]:</td>
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<td>OS1-OS3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abstract:</td>
<td>This collection consists of the papers of Rochester based gay rights activists, Anne Tischer and Bess Watts. The materials date between 1984 and 2013, with a bulk of the materials dated between 2004 and 2013. The materials consist of ephemera, flyers, brochures, news articles, publications, meeting minutes, resource information, correspondence, notes, speeches, Pride at Work reports and minutes, photographs, and signs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preferred Citation

Anne Tischer and Bess Watts Collection on Marriage Equality, [box#:folder#/ item description]. Local History and Genealogy Division, Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County N.Y.

Biographical Note

Anne Tischer and Bess Watts describe themselves as accidental activists. Anne Tischer and Bess Watts are well known in the Rochester community as long time LGBT rights advocates. In 2004, Anne and
Bess were the first same-sex couple to be refused a marriage license in Rochester. As front page news, they were married anyway by Reverend Jim Mulcahy in a public act of civil disobedience. Years of grassroots organizing followed, culminating in their founding of Equality Rochester and local chapters of Marriage Equality New York and Pride at Work AFL-CIO. Launching into union leadership Bess successfully pursued domestic-partner benefits for employees at Monroe Community College where she was employed. She received MCC “Innovation of the Year” award for initiating their safe-zone project and the Rochester Labor Council “Community Solidarity Award” for the work done by Pride at Work to forge LGBT-labor unity. Today Bess is the president of Civil Service Employee Association Local 828, national vice president of Pride at Work AFL-CIO and is on the executive board of Rochester Labor Council (RLC).

Anne and Bess have been repeatedly recognized for their efforts promoting LGBT civil rights: “STAR” awards from the Empire State Pride Agenda, a “community service” award from the GAGV and the “Tenacity with Aplomb” award from Metro Justice. Deemed instrumental in achieving the successful passage of New York’s marriage equality legislation in 2011, they were given the “Mother Jones” award by the Rochester Labor council, were recognized by the LGBT Bar Association of Greater New York (LeGal), received a bi-partisan proclamation of recognition from the Monroe County Legislature and served as grand marshals of the 2011 Rochester Gay Pride Parade.

Early on the couple recognized that lack of LGBT visibility was the biggest impediment to rights advances. To educate the public and foster relationships with other groups who might become allies, they extended their outreach into the wider community and became champions of “visibility.” They set up dozens of rallies, speaker panels, and educational events, sponsored by Rochester’s first “Gay History Fair” and helped organize the first same-sex Wedding Expo in Rochester. They made sure there were obvious LGBT supporters at every progressive event and labor rally possible.

Some of the most effective tools they used to build visibility and organizational relationships turned out to be arts, crafts, and photography. Armed with a good camera and openly representing Pride at Work, Bess took pictures at events ranging from Seniors’ dances to union conferences and used social media to effectively create linkages and build a database, Anne used her artistic skills to provide hundreds of media attracting signs to any organization or union that needed them. They taught “effective sign making and visibility” classes, made issue themed center-pieces for union parties, created performance art props for progressive causes and helped organizations build award winning parade floats.

Ultimately, the years of intense relationship building paid off. As the final push for marriage legislation votes began in 2011, Equality Rochester’s volunteers and coalition partners generated 1000 letters and 300 calls for each local State Senator weekly. And Rochester’s labor community actively supported Pride at Work’s call to action. Rochester produced the first GOP legislator to publically support marriage equality. Anne is a retired social services worker and Bess is a senior library technician at Monroe Community College. In 2006 Bess and Anne legally wed in Canada after 12 years together.
Scope and Contents

This collection consists of the papers of Rochester based gay rights activists, Anne Tischer and Bess Watts. The materials date between 1984 and 2013, with a bulk of the materials dated between 2004 and 2013. The materials consist of ephemera, flyers, brochures, news articles, publications, meeting minutes, resource information, correspondence, notes, speeches, Pride at Work reports and minutes, photographs, and signs.

The papers and ephemera in this collection document the fight for marriage equality on a local and national level. It documents the Rochester, New York grassroots campaign for gay rights. The papers also show Anne Tischer and Bess Watts’ growth as activists. Anne Tischer made many annotations about the collection on sticky-notes and directly onto the papers.

The papers in the collection are related to national and local level rally’s, events, and organizations such as the Gay History Fair, the Equality Leadership Conference, Pride at Work, National Equality March, Marriage Equality New York, Human Rights Campaign for NY Marriage, “Light the Way to Justice,” and Equality Rochester.

The signs and posters in the collection were created by Anne Tischer. Anne created signs for the national and local rally’s and events. Anne also created signs for events that were not LGBT related, such as labor pickets. Her signs can be seen in associated press photos nationally.

Arrangement

This collection consists of seven boxes divided into three series:

Series I: Marriage Equality and Gay Rights Issues papers, 1984-2013
Series II: Ephemera, 2005-2012
Series III: Signs and Posters, 2005-2012
Series IV: Family Portrait Storytelling Project photographs, circa 2007
Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Local History & Genealogy Division

115 South Ave.
Rochester 14604
585-428-8370
lochistref@libraryweb.org

Immediate Source of Acquisition

This collection was donated by the Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley, 100 College Avenue, Suite 100, Rochester, New York 14607 on August 11, 2016 [Acquisition number 2017.021].

Conditions Governing Access

There are no restrictions regarding access to or use of the collection.

Conditions Governing Use

Permission to publish, reproduce, distribute, or use in any current or future manifestations must be obtained in writing from the Rochester Public Library Local History and Genealogy Division.

Processing Information

This project was made possible by a grant from the Documentary Heritage Program of the New York State Archives, a program of the State Education Department.

Processing Information

This collection was kept in the original order. The creator of the collection, Anne Tischer, annotated a substantial amount of the documents with sticky notes as well as notes on the papers. The sticky notes were un-stuck from the papers and placed in poly film sleeves to maintain the creators arrangement. The creator placed all of the documents in chronological order. All metal fasteners were removed. Wooden sticks were removed from the handmade signs.

Processing Information

According to deed of gift, any duplicates or items found unsuitable to the RPL collections and not retained should be returned to the donor. Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley, 100 College Ave., Suite 100, Rochester, New York 14607.
Controlled Access Headings

- Same-sex marriage
- Buttons (Information artifacts)
- Correspondence
- Gay rights
- Political activism
- Protest movements--United States
- Same-sex marriage--Law and legislation--United States
- Political posters
- Gay Alliance of Genesee Valley
- Pride at Work (Organization)
- Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)
- Empire State Pride Agenda
- Human Rights Campaign (U.S.). Family Project
- Marriage Equality for New York (MENY)

Bibliography


Collection Inventory

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<td>Rainbow Seniors of Western New York, 2005-2009</td>
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<td>Fortunate Families, 2010-2011</td>
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<td>Newspaper clippings re: Marriage Equality, National, 2008-2011</td>
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<td>PFLAG materials, 2009-2011</td>
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<td>Materials used in Gay History Fair, Open Arms MCC, Undated</td>
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<td>Activism chants, Undated</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous Pride related resources and newsletters, 2002-2013</td>
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<td>Marriage equality and gay rights issues, 2004</td>
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<td>Anne Tischer and Bess Watts wedding coverage and CD of photos, April 2004</td>
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<td>Equality forum, May 1, 2005</td>
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<td>Anyone and Everyone, February 3, 2008</td>
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<td>Newly Wed in New York, April 26, 2008</td>
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<td>Greece School District issue - 40 Developments and Assets, 2009</td>
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<td>Marriage equality and gay rights issues, April-May 2011</td>
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<td>HRC campaign for NY marriage - Support from businesses, 2011</td>
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<td>HRC Campaign for NY marriage - Letter signed by Chuck Shumer, 2011</td>
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<td>HRC Campaign for NY marriage - Copies of letters sent to Senator Robach, 2011</td>
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<td>Bess Watts correspondence on Domestic Partnership benefits, 2004-2012</td>
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**Scope and Contents**

T-shirt had annotated post-it note stuck to it. Read: "Open Arms MCC, Pride Parade, and Marriage Campaign." Sticky note was removed from shirt and placed in a poly film sleeve and placed with the t-shirt.

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**Scope and Contents**

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<td>MENY red umbrella, Undated</td>
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"President Obama, I Want You to Tell Congress Repeal DADT Now" white t-shirt, May 2010

**Scope and Contents**

Worn by Anne Tischer during arrest from Get Equal for DADT rally.

"Just Married" blue ribbon sashes, July 24, 2011

**Scope and Contents**

Sashes had annotated post-it note stuck to it. Read: "Just Married! from first day of marriages at City Hall 7/24/2011." Sticky note was removed from sashes and placed in a poly film sleeve and placed with the sashes.

- MENY yellow umbrella, Undated (box 2, item 8)
- Bumper sticker and decal, 2005, undated (box 2, folder 1)
- Out and Equal buttons, Undated (box 2, folder 3)
- Political support ephemera, 2006, undated (box 2, folder 4)
- Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley buttons, Undated (box 2, folder 6)
- Get Equal for DADT ephemera, May 2010 (box 2, folder 2)

**Scope and Contents**

Contains sticky note annotation from Anne Tischer.

- Human Rights Campaign ephemera, Undated (box 2, folder 7)
- MENY business cards, Undated (box 2, folder 8)
- MENY buttons, Undated (box 2, folder 9)
- Marriage Equality NY (MENY) ephemera, Undated (box 2, folder 5)

**Scope and Contents**

Ink was removed from the ball point pens for safe storage.

- Empire State Pride Agenda buttons and pins, Undated (box 2, folder 10)
- Empire State Pride Agenda stickers and decals, Undated (box 2, folder 11)
- Rochester Labor and Pride at Work buttons and pins, Undated (box 2, folder 12)
- Rochester Labor and Pride at Work stickers and temporary tattoos, Undated (box 2, folder 13)

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**Series III: Signs and Posters, 2005-2012**

box 7, OS1
Guide to the Anne Tischer and Bess Watts Collection on Marriage Equality 2017.021

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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Scope and Contents</strong></td>
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<td>Dimensions 20&quot;x16&quot;. Annotated sticky-note, removed and placed in envelope reads,</td>
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<tr>
<td>in collaboration with Jeff Campagna of RWSDA and Stuart Appelbaum to improve</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>the situation.&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;We Are One&quot; - Pride at Work, Undated</td>
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<td>Out of the closet and into the streets, February 20, 2010</td>
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<td><strong>Scope and Contents</strong></td>
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<td>Dimensions - 12&quot;x18&quot;. From LGBT activist conference at Rochester Institute of</td>
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<td>Technology.</td>
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<td>Assemblyman Joe Morelle, Undated</td>
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<td>Thank you Governor Cuomo/Promise Kept, Undated</td>
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<td>&quot;We are one&quot; - Pride at Work, Undated</td>
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<td>Marriage Now/Equality for All Families, Undated</td>
<td>OS1 folder 2 item 14-17</td>
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<td>Equality Across America - National Equality March, Undated</td>
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<td>&quot;Light the Way to Justice&quot; DOMA actions events , Undated</td>
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<td>Thank you Harry Bronson, Undated</td>
<td>OS1 folder 3 item 2-3</td>
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<td>&quot;I Do Support Marriage Equality&quot;, Undated</td>
<td>OS1 folder 3 item 4-5</td>
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<td>GENDA NOW, Undated</td>
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<td>Dignity for all students now, Undated</td>
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<td>Thank you Governor Spitzer, Undated</td>
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<td>In memoriam - Felix Cacco, Undated</td>
<td>OS1 folder 3 item 12</td>
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<td>In memoriam - Allison Dawe, Undated</td>
<td>OS1 folder 3 item 13</td>
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<tr>
<td>In memoriam - &quot;We remember those we lost…&quot;, Undated</td>
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<td>Thank you Cuomo/Duffy, Undated</td>
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<td>NYS AFL-CIO Supports Genda, Undated</td>
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<td>Hate is Not Entertainment, Undated</td>
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<td>Married in Canada... 'Single' for NY Taxes?, Undated</td>
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<td>Paladino Too Crude Rude and Lewd, Undated</td>
<td>OS1 item 7</td>
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<td>End DOMA Now, Undated</td>
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<td>Mr. Paladino Stop Anti-Gay Slurs, Undated</td>
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<td>Gay Rights are Civil Rights, Undated</td>
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<td>End the Harm From Religious Based Bigotry and Prejudice, Undated</td>
<td>OS1 folder 4 item 1</td>
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<td>NY Senate Pass Equal Marriage, Undated</td>
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<td>Shame on Maine, Undated</td>
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<td>1138 Federal Marriage Benefits, Undated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Congratulations on Your Marriage! Benefits for same-sex couples, Undated</td>
<td>OS3 item 2</td>
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</table>

**Scope and Contents**

Sign dimensions - 27”x21.5”. Annotated sticky-note removed from sign and placed in protective envelope, "Bess
Watts and Monroe Community College designed this for a workshop there. Widely used as a handout in Rochester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scope and Contents</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions of foam board sign - 27&quot;x21.5&quot; The sticky-note annotation removed and placed in a protective envelope &quot;AP photo - Todd Plank &gt; Dozen newspapers&quot;</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Box</th>
<th>Item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>18,000 Couples are in Limbo... End Prop 8, Undated</td>
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<td>Welcome Pride at Work True Colors, 2009</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Joe- Hypocrisy Will Bite You, Undated</td>
<td>OS2</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>I'll Get You My Pretty... And Your Little Flag Too, Undated</td>
<td>OS3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eat, Drink, Be Married/Thank you Alesi, Undated</td>
<td>OS3</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Love Honor Cherish Equality, Undated</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Thank you Governor Cuomo/I Love NY, Undated</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Domestic Partner Benefits Now, Undated</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Rochester Celebrates Marriage Equality, Undated</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>NY Senate Pass Equal Marriage, Undated</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>I DO...Demand Equality, Undated</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>1138 Federal Rights Denied, Undated</td>
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<td>Veterans for Marriage Equality, Undated</td>
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<td>Full Marriage Equality Now, Undated</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Senator Robach Hurt Gay Families, Undated</td>
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<td>Civil Marriage - Civil Rights, Undated</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Joe- Hypocrisy Will Bite You, Undated</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Ask Joe Why He Discriminates, Undated</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Gay Alliance of the Genesee Valley Sponser sign, Undated</td>
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</table>

"Live Loud, Feel Proud, Break the Silence". GAGV Youth DOS 2012, 2012
Scope and Contents
Dimensions 127"x34" accordion folded sign was mounted on cardboard box, removed sign from box, rolled sign, and tied with string.

Celebrate/Put a Ring On It, Undated  
Married and Happy/My Family Matters, Undated  
Repeal DOMA/Value All Families, Undated  
DOMA Demeans/Value All Families, Undated  
Celebrate/Now I Need a Honey, Undated  
Celebrate/Lesbian,Married + Proud of NY, Undated  
Gay...Proud...Happy/Marry Me?, Undated  
Equality = Rochester/Love Wins, Undated  
Celebrate/Going to the Chapel, Undated

Series IV: Family Portrait Storytelling  
Project Photographs, circa 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title/Description</th>
<th>Instances</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greg Partridge and Doug Potter black and white photograph, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg Partridge and Doug Potter color photograph, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg Partridge and Doug Potter label sheet, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginny Tucker and Sara Berger color photograph, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginny Tucker and Sara Berger label sheet, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jamie and Sally Whitbeck label sheet, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jamie and Sally Whitbeck color photograph, circa 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandra Lowery and Rosemary Rivera label sheets, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Color photograph, two un-identified people holding pride flag, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginny Tucker and Sara Berger black and white photograph, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny, Sue, Katie, and Elinor color photograph, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;New Fight for Gay Nuptials&quot; Democrat and Chronicle article, July 7, 2006</td>
<td>box 9</td>
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<td>Sample letters to senators, 2011</td>
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<td>Zoe and Rev. Dr. Sharon Jacobson color photograph, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverends Kaaren Anderson and Scott Taylor label sheet, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe Davis and Rev. Dr. Sharon Jacobson label sheet, circa 2007</td>
<td>box 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feng and Jim black and white photograph, circa 2007</td>
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<td>Feng and Jim color photograph, circa 2007</td>
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<td>Feng and Jim label sheet, circa 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeff, Jim, Alex, and Troy black and white photograph, circa 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeff, Jim, Alex, and Troy color photograph, circa 2007</td>
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<td>Jenny, Sue, Katie, and Elinor black and white photograph, circa 2007</td>
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<tr>
<td>black and white photograph, two unidentified men reading newspaper, circa 2007</td>
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</table>

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