

of his life and times presents an object lesson for both medical practitioners and the public who depend on them.

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MCLEOD, Donald W. — *A Brief History of GAY: Canada's First Gay Tabloid, 1964–1966*. Toronto: Homewood Books, 2003. Pp. 96.

Donald McLeod is one of Canada's most prolific, hardworking historians of sexuality. If you have not heard of him, the most likely reason is that McLeod is not a professional historian. He researches and writes from within a community-based setting. A librarian by day, McLeod is also a longtime volunteer at the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, a position that undoubtedly helps to explain his extensive familiarity with the primary sources of the gay/lesbian past in Canada.

McLeod's formidable skills as a historical researcher and bibliographer were amply demonstrated in 1996 with the publication of *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada: A Selected Annotated Chronology, 1964–1975*. Two years later, McLeod compiled and edited the life story of Jim Egan, *Challenging the Conspiracy of Silence: My Life as a Canadian Gay Activist*. In his most recent offering, he has unearthed and told for the first time the story of *GAY*, Canada's first gay tabloid. In addition to producing three books of gay history — something made all the more remarkable given he has done so without any of the usual institutional-material supports of the university — McLeod is also the editor of *DA*, a journal of print and design history in Canada. This holds a clue to understanding *A Brief History of GAY*. First, however, given that tabloids loom large in gay history, a few distinctions are necessary.

In addition to oral histories, tabloids have been indispensable in recuperating the lesbian/gay past, particularly for the period after World War II. The tabloids used by most historians have been mainstream publications: the "straight" sensationalist press that took great delight in printing exposés of the queer urban underworlds in places like Toronto and Montreal. McLeod, by contrast, has uncovered the history of the country's first gay tabloid. Unlike mainstream papers such as *Justice Weekly* or *Ici Montréal*, *GAY* was, as its cover invited, "for those who think gay". Another important distinction to keep in mind is that historians mining mainstream tabloids have had to read through and around their decidedly distorted messages to excavate from them rich re-creations of postwar lesbian/gay life. McLeod, however, is less concerned with what the tabloid can tell us about gay history and more with the history of the tabloid itself.

McLeod is one of only a few researchers pursuing the neglected and necessary task of piecing together the publishing history of a source widely used by historians but about which we know very little. In between the introduction, in which McLeod sketches the emergence of a gay press in mid-1960s Canada, and the conclusion, the titillating and tragic tale of Robert Mish Marsden, *GAY*'s publisher-editor, McLeod

painstakingly details the changing design and distribution of *GAY*. McLeod's focus on tabloid history is reinforced by the repeated references to issue numbers in his text. For those of us preoccupied with sorting out the minute details of tabloid publishing history, McLeod's inventory of *GAY* will be welcome. Other readers may wish for a different approach in which the tabloid is employed in the more familiar way, as a source to say something about broader themes in gay social history. This, I suggest, is to misunderstand McLeod's project.

Still, it is an interesting question: what is *GAY*'s potential as a source for social history? McLeod does suggest, for instance, that debates in letters to the editor may have reflected emerging social differences among the divergent strata in Toronto's evolving gay community. One might quibble with McLeod's designation of these incipient positions as assimilationist versus liberationist — are we not actually looking at the prehistory of that later distinction, one that in this somewhat earlier period was rendered in the language of "respectability" and perhaps class difference? — but the observation opens possibilities of using *GAY* to write a social or community history. Taking the project more on its own terms, I would like to have seen McLeod stand back from his material more to reflect on what the brief history of *GAY* tells us about, for instance, the politics of alternative print culture. McLeod characterizes *GAY* as "mostly non-political" (p. 75), but I wonder whether this is too narrow a definition of the political. Might it be more profitable to interpret *GAY* as having a politics of its own, which ran counter to or at least in a different direction from those of existing homophile publications? Certainly *GAY*'s campy style and eclectic content — articles ran the gamut from "Confessions of a Chicken Queen" to "Nazis Invade Homosexual Convention" — stood in contrast to the more stylistically staid and politically serious Canadian publications of the mid-1960s, such as the *ASK Newsletter* or even *TWO*. What were the historical meanings of these aesthetic and political differences?

These are the types of big questions raised by McLeod's little book, and they can be taken as one measure of its success. Its greatest contribution, however, is to the still largely uncharted terrain of tabloid publishing history. Beginning in the 1970s, the recovery of the gay/lesbian past emerged out of a community-based history movement. During the 1990s, a decade marked by the increasing institutionalization and professionalization of lesbian/gay studies, some worried that gay historical work would suffer by losing touch with its grassroots. While the current degree of dialogue between academic and community historians could undoubtedly be higher, one thing is certain: Donald McLeod's work demonstrates that the forms and traditions of community-based gay history are alive and well, and in very good hands indeed.

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