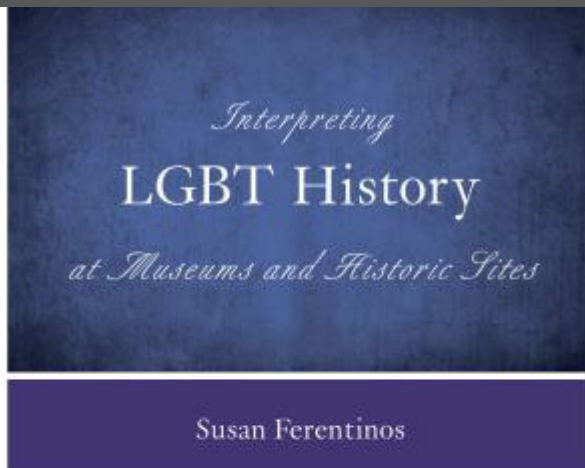


Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites by Susan Ferentinos

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We've just ended June – LGBT Pride Month. Pride is held in June in many cities around the United States to commemorate the [Stone-wall Riots of June 28, 1969](#). As we near the fiftieth anniversaries of many important [early actions](#) in the rise of the LGBT rights movements, more and more museums and local history sites seem to be [interpreting LGBT history](#). The trend is even cropping up in Ohio, from Western Reserve Historical Society's [The Victory of Self](#) exhibit on LGBT history in Cleveland, to [Columbus Historical Society's exhibit](#) celebrating 25 years of the Columbus Gay Men's Chorus, to the [Gay Ohio History Initiative](#) at Ohio History Connection. For local history sites that might be interested in engaging with these histories, but aren't sure how, Susan Ferentinos' new book *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites* is a great place to start.

Part of AASLH's *Interpreting History* series, the book builds on Ferentinos' experience with a variety of museums and historic sites to give advice and ideas to organizations beginning their journey with LGBT history. In fact, the book's introduction gives ideas about why local history organizations may want to present LGBT history and the impact that may make on communities and LGBT individuals. It is followed by a short chapter entitled "A Pep Talk for the Faint of Heart" which can be a great resource for staff or board members who are unsure about the prospect of engaging with these communities. It outlines some of the advantages and positive outcomes documented by historical societies doing LGBT history and their audiences. This section of the book also provides a primer on the language used in the book and in LGBT and queer communities.



Part two of *Interpreting LGBT History* gives a very abridged overview of the history of same-sex sexuality and gender variance in the United States. Ferentinos acknowledges that no single book can include all the research and subtleties of the growing field of LGBT history, so this section of the book is supplemented by a timeline of key events in LGBT history and a bibliography of resources at the end of the book. The author most wants to emphasize in this section both that LGBT history is much more complex than many people realize and that same-sex sexuality and gender variance have a much longer history is often assumed – but it looked very different 100 or 200 years ago than it does today. Although this section clearly cannot cover everything in U.S. LGBT history, it does give readers a sense of the major themes in the field and a springboard if they want to do further research.

In the third section of the book, Ferentinos provides case studies of how several different institutions have chosen to interpret LGBT history. One of

the useful things about this section is even though there are only three case studies, they include a variety of both types of institutions and ways of incorporating LGBT history. The Chicago History Museum is a large urban history museum that chose to create a specific temporary exhibit focusing on LGBT history in Chicago. In contrast, Historic New England is a network of house museums and historic sites, many of which are small and located in small towns or rural areas. This case study showed that different sites in the network made different choices depending on their context and overall interpretive philosophies. One historic house integrated the story of its builder's well-documented gay relationships and identity into regular house tours. Another chose not to focus on the documented same-sex

sexuality of one of many residents because it did not touch on the sexuality of any of the other residents. The final case study offers description of a partnership between the Minnesota Historical Society and the Tretter Collection, an LGBT archive at the University of Minnesota Libraries. The partnership provides an educational Summer History Immersion Program that allows high school students to do in-depth research in LGBT history.

The diversity of case studies offered highlights what this book does best: provide resources and ideas for organizations interested in delving into LGBT history. *Interpreting LGBT History* will not provide a how-to for doing LGBT history programming, but it will help you think about what kind of LGBT history programming might be best for your situation and your community.

Ferentinos, Susan. *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015. ■