

Finding Aid to the Gilbert Baker Collection

(2017-18)

Repository: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society

Collection Title: Gilbert Baker Collection

Collection Number: 2017-18

Physical Description: 55 linear feet (11 cartons, 1 small oversize box, 1 medium oversize box, 3 large oversize boxes, 7 garment boxes, two large plastic tubs, and several pieces of oversize art)

Creator: Gilbert Baker

Date (inclusive): Circa 1950s-2017, bulk 1978-2017

Language of Material: English

Abstract: Gilbert Baker was an artist, drag queen, and Sister of Perpetual Indulgence who played the central role in the 1978 creation of the rainbow LGBTQ pride flag. Baker's collection consists largely of textiles, sewing supplies, art, and audiovisual materials, along with a small number of documents.

Preferred Citation:

[Identification of item], Gilbert Baker collection (#2017-18), The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society

Conditions Governing Access:

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Acquisition Information:

Gift of Ardonna Baker Cook in March 2018 with additions by the Gilbert Baker Foundation and Charles Beal in 2020 and 2021 and David Bach in January 2022.

Processing Information:

Finding aid created by Isaac Fellman in 2023, with assistance from Theodore Byshe Hardgrove.

This finding aid uses terminology for LGBTQ people that was in current use at the time of its creation. Descriptive language for queer identities evolves quickly and some of these terms may now be dated or even offensive. Finding aids are themselves historical documents; they reflect the moment in which they were written and often reflect the terms that subjects used for themselves. Please contact the GLBT Historical Society Archivist with questions or comments.

Biographical Note:

Gilbert Baker was an artist, drag queen, and Sister of Perpetual Indulgence who played the central role in the 1978 creation of the rainbow LGBTQ pride flag. Born in Kansas in 1951, Baker was drafted into the U.S. Army as a young man. He was stationed in San Francisco as a medic, remained in the city after his honorable discharge in 1972, and became a drag queen as well as an anti-war and pro-cannabis activist.

In 1978, Baker and a team of volunteers dyed and sewed the first rainbow flags for San Francisco Gay Freedom Day, as Pride was then known. The original flags had eight colors, each one standing for a different aspect of queer experience: sex, life, healing, the sun, nature, art and magic, serenity, and the spirit. Later versions of the flag would drop the pink and turquoise stripes, leading to the six-color version most commonly seen today. Baker would spend much of the rest of his career exploring flag imagery, sewing Pride flags for parades (some over a mile long) and creating drag costumes that riffed on the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, and the persona of Betsy Ross.

In 1981, Baker became a novice with the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a nondenominational order of queer nuns. The Sisters protested homophobia, distributed safe sex educational materials, and functioned as community and spiritual leaders in tongue-in-cheek drag. As Sister Chanel 2001, Baker was often seen with his friend and fellow Sister, Gilbert Block (Sadie, Sadie the Rabbi Lady). He later left the group after a dispute over his unapproved use of the Sister Chanel persona for a commercial greeting card, but he continues to be associated with the Sisters in popular memory.

As time passed, Baker increasingly turned his attention to personal protests against homophobic figures, such as his “Pink Jesus” performance piece at the 1990 San Francisco Pride parade (protesting Jesse Helms’ attempts to defund the National Endowment for the Arts) and the reimagined concentration camp uniforms he created to protest the election of Donald Trump.

Baker moved from San Francisco to New York in 1994, and died there in 2017.

Scope and Content:

Baker's collection consists largely of textiles, sewing supplies, art, and audiovisual materials, along with a small number of documents. It is broken into six series. Series 1 contains documents, including autobiographical fragments, graphics, books inscribed to Baker, and greeting cards. Series 2 contains photographs. Series 3 collects non-photographic audiovisual materials in a variety of formats, including extensive biographical documentation of Baker. Series 4 collects Baker's sewing supplies – fabric scraps, notions, patterns, half-completed projects, and two sewing machines – while Series 5 contains textiles, clothing, and drag, most of it made or modified by Baker. Series 6 contains art and artifacts, including a large fragment of the original 1978 flag, paintings by Baker, flag-themed art and recreations of the 1978 flag, scrapbooks, and a small amount of personal memorabilia. The 1978 flag is often on display at the GLBT History Museum; please contact the archives staff to find out its current status.

Indexing Terms:

LGBTQ

Gay men

Drag

Activism

Art

Pride parades

Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence

Veterans

San Francisco Bay Area (Calif.)

Container Listing

Series 1

Documents and Books

Carton 1

- 1:1 Essays and speeches, 2007-2011, undated
- 1:2 *The Rainbow Flag* by Gilbert Baker manuscript, undated
- 1:3 *The Rainbow Flag* by Gilbert Baker manuscript, publisher's mark, undated
- 1:4 Correspondence, 2008-2009
- 1:5 Graphic design materials, various campaigns, 2003-2005, undated
- 1:6 Planning documents and notes, 2007-2009, undated
- 1:7 Out to Vote campaign, 2004
- 1:8 Out to Vote campaign, 2004

- 1:9 Printouts from licensing sites, 2006
- 1:10 Printouts from licensing sites, 1997-2006
- 1:11 Cards and ephemera, 1990-2013, undated
- 1:12 White House cards, 2013-2016

Out in the Castro - Winston Leyland 2002, signed and dedicated

The Invasion of the Pines - Lorraine H Michels 2015, signed and dedicated

Carton 2

Unrepentant Whore - Collected Works of Scarlet Harlot, Carol Leigh, 2004, signed and dedicated

The Cannabis Manifesto - Steve DeAngelo, 2015, signed and dedicated

Look Up: Another Good Book, David Braun, 2008, signed and dedicated

Absolut Colors Cocktail Collection, 2013

Guest book, 2002

Series 2

Photographs

Carton 1

1:13 Photographs, 1988-1999, undated

1:14 Photographs, 1984-2003, undated

1:15 Photographs, 1978-circa 2000s

1:16 Photographs, 1988-1998

1:17 Small photographs, circa 1950s-2000s

1:18 Slides by Mick Hicks, 1995

1:19 Photographs, 1988-2010

1:20 Photographs, circa 2011

1:21 Photographs, 1997-circa 2000s

1:22 Slides by Jean-Baptiste Carhaix, Mick Hicks, and others, 1978-1995

1:23 Slides by Jean-Baptiste Carhaix and others, 1978

Carton 3

Panoramic poster of long rainbow flag being carried in parade

Series 3

Audiovisual materials

Note: All titles in this series are transcribed, including apparent errors, from the labels on the materials.

Carton 2

DVDs

Untitled

June 14th ISIS

Gilbert Baker 6/16/98

Flag Raising 1998

NYC 1994

In the Life: 40th Anniversary of Stonewall/June 2009/Episode 1809

June 15 1998 Folding N Color

Gilbert Baker Original Colors New York City

NYC – Vienna 2001

Gilbert Bauer [sic] 7/5/98

Gilbert Baller [sic] 6/17/98

Gilbert Baker 2/20/95

Gilbrt Baker [sic] June 29 1998

Gilbrt Baker [sic] June 21 1998

Gilbert Baker Original Colors New York

Gilbert Baker Original Colors

Gilbert Baker NYC 1994

Gilbert Baker 2/20/1995

Flag Raising 1998

Gilbert Baker 6/16/1998

Gilbert Baker 6/17/1998

Gilbert Baker 6/14 ISIS

June 15 1998 Folding in Color

Gilbert Baker June 21 1998

Gilbert Baker June 29 1998

Gilbert Baker 7/5/1998

NYC-Vienna 2001

Summer of Stonewall 2009

Kansas City Trucking - Joe Gage Collection

Laser Lens Cleaner

VHS tapes

Rainbow Pride, undated

The 1987 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights

Gay Pride, 1992

Over the Rainbow (documentary), 2003

Part of the USA!: National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, 1987

Heroes (presentation pilot), undated

Digital Betacam

Rainbow Pride, April 17, 2004

Carton 3

Hi-8 Tapes

NYC 94

NYC - Vienna 2001

HARP and Blank

Halloween SF

June 15, 1998 - Folding in Color

NYC Pride 1995

Amy Casey's Oscar Wilde Grace Cathedral Reading 2.20.1995 I

Amy Casey's Oscar Wilde Grace Cathedral Reading 2.20.1995 II

July 4 2001

Gilbert Baker 1.7.1999 I

Gilbert Baker 1.7.1999 II

Gilbert Baker 7.5.1998

Gilbert Baker 6.29.1998 - 7.5.1998

Gilbert Baker 6.17.1998

Gilbert Baker Flag Day June 14.1998

Oregon Charlie Football Game NYC 54

Gilbert Baker Original Colors New York City 6.22.2002

Gilbert Baker 1998 Parade Flag Raising

Prosper St. 1995

Rainbow Flag One

Rainbow Flag Gilbert Baker 2000

June 14th Isis - Venus of Avenue D 1.40

Untitled

Untitled

Untitled

Untitled

Untitled (in case)

Cassette

Over the Rainbow Demos

Mini-Cassette

Untitled

Floppy Disc

Rome 7.10.1999 Deborah Teddy

Camera Card

Untitled

Zip Drive

Gilbert Baker jpegs 24 pictures

Mini-DV

London 08

Gilbert Baker Labor Day 06 #1

Gilbert Baker Labor Day 06 #2

KSA Sandy Hook 24/05/06

Gilbert Baker USH Mystic Seaport 7/06

Gilbert UN + KSH [illegible]

Sewn on the 4th of July 2009

Gilbert Oct 13, 02

Gilbert Baker NYC 1994 [illegible]traits

Gilbert New School 07

Gilbert Baker New Paltz Pride

N. Ferrara Band 2/08/07 #1

N. Ferrara Band 2/08/07 #2

N. Ferrara 2/8/07 #1

USA Possibility

USA Regatta

Gilbert Zurich Plaza 10/09

Gilbert Zurich Speech 30:00

Gilbert + Cleve Zurich Workshop

Zurich Workshop [illegible] Gilbert

Betsy Ross House

Blank

Sewn 4/6 2009 #2

Task Force 5/8 [illegible]

Task Force 5/8 #1

Times Square army

01/Rangel/Gilbert Baker

USA + Harlem Yacht Club

Gilbert Baker USA MMD
9 Bleeker Gilbert Baker
Blue Eq Across Gilbert Baker
[Unlabeled]
KSA Regatta 08
Damaged
Blank
Blank
Blank New
Blank
Gilbert Block Nicolai Alexeev
Pride 07 USA
Pride 06 USA
Pride #1
Pride #2
Regatta
Pride Dance 3min
Fire Island
Columbia/Ibogdine
Gilbert Baker Cleve Jones
Blue Silk
Fire Island Tape 1
Fire Island Flag 2010
2005 October 31 NYC Halloween
Gilbert Baker Hop Rally 05
Gilbert Baker HOP Rally June 18/06
Gilbert Baker HOP Rally NY June 18, 2006
Gilbert Baker HOP Rally 07

Series 4

Sewing supplies

Carton 4

Fabric scraps
Thread, ribbons, zippers, and other notions
Breast pads

Carton 5

Sewing patterns, used and unused

Oversize Box 1

Rainbow flags in various states of completion

Oversize Box 8

Brother sewing machine

Oversize Box 15

Singer sewing machine

Series 5**Textiles, Clothing, and Drag****Carton 6**

Large rainbow flag

“Original Rainbow Flag, 1998 Recreation, Gilbert Baker” banner

Carton 7

Purses and shoes

Carton 8

Statue of Liberty hat

Statue of Liberty torch

Carton 9

Feather boas, feather fans, rainbow flag ephemera

Carton 10

Rainbow flag 25 t-shirt

Rainbow Diversity t-shirt

Gold rhinestone shoes

Purple “40” t-shirt with rhinestones

Two “69” rhinestone caps

Two Absolut Vodka rainbow caps

Blue and white rhinestone cap

Black beret with sequin and rhinestone decoration

Blue star hoodie

Gray wig in bag

Oversize Box 2

Statue of Liberty crown

Oversize Box 3

American flag dress and matching oversize hat
Gold sequined cloak, trousers, and shirt

Oversize Box 4

4 pairs of rhinestone shorts
Gold rhinestone dress
Black rhinestone shirt
Black sequined coat

Oversize Box 5

Blue sequined jacket
Short gold sequined top and scarf
Red sequined jacket
Blue sequined jacket
Two rainbow sequined shirts, one with matching scarf and skirt
Silver sequined ensemble

Oversize Box 6

Two “concentration camp uniform” protest costumes with pink triangles
Blue chiffon gown
Rainbow shawl
Tropical-themed shawl

Oversize Box 7

Statue of Liberty gown
Short American flag dress
Off-the-rack rainbow belt with added rhinestones

Series 6

Art and Artifacts

Carton 11

Three rainbow tambourines with rhinestones
Two black tambourines with rhinestones
Black microphone with rhinestones

Oversize Box 9

Two large scrapbooks containing photographs, clippings, and ephemera
Folder of materials for “25: Original Colors” (rainbow flag 25th anniversary celebration)
Various certificates and honors, 2008-2013
Halloween 2004 booklet, “The Quest for Booty & The Pillage of the Village”
Gilbert Baker custom notepads
Sandwich bag with joint
Key to the City of Miami Beach - Velvet Box
GLAAD Pin
Matted photo of Baker at the White House with Barack Obama, with invitation mounted on the reverse side
Formerly matted items: Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Papal Bond, “This Year” holiday card, 1982 flier for Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Red Party
Formerly framed item: 1985 Gilbert Baker portrait by Robert Pruzan, signed by Baker
Obama Pride pin
1993 March on Washington cloth bracelet
Speck G2 digital media player with SanDisk thumb drive

Oversize Box 10

8-stripe replica rainbow flag
Signed flag on short wooden pole
Two large paintings on particle board depicting rainbows with wavy stripes
Two small paintings on canvas depicting rainbows with wavy stripes
Two “Original Colors” postcards
Two world map postcards
Two large signed flag prints on paper
Two signed works on paper depicting an abstract rainbow high-heeled shoe made of cut-out paper
Two works on paper depicting an abstract rainbow cityscape made of cut-out paper
Assorted scraps of cut-out paper, apparently fragments of works in progress from the shoe and cityscape pieces
Absolut Vodka poster
Flag raising poster
Roma 2000 poster

Oversize Box 11

Two large scrapbooks of photographs and honors depicting and celebrating Baker’s work
Framed photograph of 1978 flag being raised
Two square paintings on canvas depicting rainbows with wavy stripes

Oversize Box 12

Framed, signed rainbow flag made of cut paper

Framed, signed rainbow flag made of cut paper with smaller flag superimposed

Gold and glitter painting on canvas of South America

Gold and glitter painting on canvas of Manhattan

Gold and glitter painting on canvas of Australia

Two small square rainbow flag paintings with intentional burns by Baker

Rainbow flag replica mounted on canvas

Oversize Box 13

Three large map paintings

Oversize Box 14

Duplicate copies of various flag paintings

Oversize Art

Framed, signed rainbow flag replica mounted on canvas

Painting by Baker of a night scene with rainbow flags

Large fragment of original 1978 rainbow flag