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National Museum of American History Acquires Archival Collection Related to LGBT Conversion Therapy

The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History recently acquired an archival collection related to the work of John J. Smid, a former minister and proponent of conversion therapy. The collection comes to the museum as a donation of the Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C., which conducts archival research and educational programs that focus on LGBT legal, political and policy history.

Smid directed Love in Action (LIA), a controversial residential gay and lesbian conversion therapy ministry and program for more than 20 years. The conversion therapy materials collected by the museum include the ex-gay handbooks used by incoming conversion "clients," a manual for phone counseling and an LIA "Addiction Workbook" that treats homosexuality as an addiction. The papers relate to Smid's ministry in Memphis, Tenn., ranging from his work as a "House Leader" in 1986 to his resignation in 2008. The archive includes manuals, handbooks, lessons, fundraising appeals, booklets, news clippings, audio and video cassettes of LIA rallies from 1988, sermons and television interviews.

"One of the most elusive aspects for the museum in documenting LGBT history is finding materials that demonstrate how people have been viewed as perverted, sick or sinful," said Katherine Ott, curator of medical history and sexuality. "The Love in Action collection provides the museum with a vivid example of one religious response to LGBT people and its consequences."

Earlier this summer the Mattachine Society also donated the original LIA conversion therapy "Handbook" issued to Garrard Conley, author of *Boy Erased* and a *Love In Action* therapy manual.

"We are grateful that John Smid wanted these materials to be preserved for future researchers and historians," said Charles Francis, president of the Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C. As

LIA's executive director, John Smid literally wrote and taught the handbooks, lessons, manuals and controversial practices of Bible-based, ex-gay conversion therapy life in Memphis."

In 2011, three years after leaving LIA, Smid recanted his ex-gay theology and views on homosexuality and now lives in Texas with his husband.

The museum's LGBT collections date back to the 19th century. The archival collections are rich in ephemera, oral histories, photographs, posters and entertainment publicity materials. The museum has mounted various LGBT history displays over the years, including two marking the 25th and 40th anniversaries of the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City and an exhibit on the 30th anniversary of the emergence of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

Through incomparable collections, rigorous research and dynamic public outreach, the National Museum of American History explores the infinite richness and complexity of American history. It helps people understand the past in order to make sense of the present and shape a more humane future. The museum is continuing to renovate its west exhibition wing, developing galleries on democracy and culture. The museum is located on Constitution Avenue N.W., between 12th and 14th Streets, and is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). Admission is free. For more information, visit <http://americanhistory.si.edu>. For Smithsonian information, the public may call (202) 633-1000.

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