

**Interview with Stuart Hinds, Curator of Special Collections and Archives at the University Libraries at UMKC.** We discussed Charlotte Street 2023 Fellow Ruben Castillo's work with the Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America, which is part of the Special Collections and Archives at UMKC on Dec 13, 2023.

Question: How did Ruben work with you to develop the ideas for the work/exhibition?

Stuart Hinds:

Ruben reached out to me and said that he was interested in coming to the archive to discover what was here. And he exemplifies one of my favorite kind of researchers because he had no preconceived notion of what he was going to find. He came and allowed the materials to speak to him, and he had some very broad parameters of the kinds of things that he was looking for in terms of subject. And his work is really all about, not all about, but in large part about domestic life. And so that's what we started with and then went from there.

And that kind of subject is challenging to find in frankly, any kind of archive, but even more so in an LGBTQ archive. There's just not a lot of documentation of the domestic sphere in these kinds of collections. But we found some stuff.

There's a collection from a couple. Both of them were named Vic, Victor. Victor and Victor, Victor Gulyusa and Victor Peck. They were a couple who had been together for 62 years, and they were essentially out to their family in the fifties and both the families were very embracing of the two of them. And so there's all sorts of images in that collection of family gatherings of them at home, that kind of thing. They lived in Kansas City most of their lives, and one worked for the post office and one worked for the railroad. I forget who worked for who. Ruben was very taken with that.

And then that led to an exploration of the scrapbooks from the Spirit of Hope Metropolitan Community Church. And those were put together by a woman who was a founder of that church, Phyllis Shafer. She was the mother of the activist who started Kansas City's first gay and lesbian advocacy organization, the Phoenix Society for Individual Freedom in 1966. And Phyllis was a long-time supporter of the gay community.

We have since found documented evidence back into the mid-1950s where she was writing to some national publications about the work that she was doing with her boys, as she called them at their home in Raytown. And Phyllis put together these scrapbooks that are full of newspaper clippings and magazine clippings and responses to letters that she would write to politicians and TV people and all sorts of different figures of authority. And they span about 30 years, 35 years.

And one of the most interesting aspects of the scrapbooks is that as a frugal person, Phyllis repurposed a couple of oversized wallpaper sample books, and bless her heart. It's a preservation nightmare because the paper in the books is really, really acidic. And the newspaper clippings that she was taping in there are really, really acidic. And she was using, of course, drugstore tape. So from a preservation standpoint, they're very challenging, but from a sculptural standpoint, they're gorgeous because it's this amazing juxtaposition of this documentation on late 1960s and early 1970s wallpaper patterns. So Ruben was very, very, very taken with that just collectively as a whole.

And from what I understand from his most recent foray into these, he's really looking at the annotations that she would make on the letters and some of the newspaper clippings and that kind of thing, just the messaging that she wanted to convey or emphasize. And that's how it got started.

Question: What do you wish more people knew about what your archive is as a resource for people who are not necessarily librarians?

Stuart Hinds:

That number one, it's available to everyone and that there's a whole facet of the history of Kansas City that has been brought to light as a result of these collections, and it tells a story that not many people know about. And just diving in and exploring and learning about the things that were going on in this community that parallel and were simultaneous to the more traditional historical narrative of the city is to me an invaluable service that the archive does.