

Jen Colletta December 24, 2014 0 Comments



The National Museum of American Jewish History is gearing up for the 50th anniversary of the Annual Reminder demonstrations with an interactive, community-involved initiative.

NMAJH last week announced the launch of “LGBT Stories: A Collecting Project,” an online exhibit that will cull and present LGBT histories. The museum is inviting LGBT Jews and allies to submit ephemera demonstrating the role of Jewish Americans in the LGBT-rights movement over the past century — writings, images of picket signs and buttons, personal photos — as well as stories and links to other websites, which will all be amassed on a Tumblr page, <http://nmajh-lgbt.tumblr.com/>.

NMAJH chief registrar and associate coordinator Claire Pingel said the museum last year met with the coordinating committee for the Annual Reminder anniversary — marking the five decades since one of the nation’s first LGBT-rights demonstrations, outside Independence Hall — led by the William Way LGBT Community Center and its John J. Wilcox Archives and Library.

“Those conversations provided us with the opportunity to implement ideas that were already percolating among our staff. We were excited to collaborate with our peer institutions and organizations around the city on this very exciting and important commemoration,” Pingel said.

The museum has explored the Jewish-American LGBT experience in exhibitions and programming, most recently through its artist-in-residence program featuring Dito van Reigersberg, who staged a multi-night cabaret as his alter ego, Martha Graham Cracker. NMAJH has also staged interactive projects, such as a story-collection initiative ahead of the American baseball exhibit that was on display earlier this year.

“Community involvement is central to this initiative and to NMAJH,” Pingel said about the LGBT effort. “The main aim of this Tumblr site, and so much of our programming, is to explore history and identity through personal stories of courage, struggle and creativity throughout history.”

The museum will also post pieces from its own collection, as well as present an exhibition on its first floor and programming surrounding LGBT history.

The initiative is expected to trace the early “homophile” movement of the 1950s and ’60s, the post-Stonewall era, the AIDS pandemic of the 1980s and ’90s up through the modern marriage-equality movement.

“The courageous story of the LGBT civil-rights movement is a vital part of America’s ongoing search for freedom, and NMAJH is proud to celebrate and share this history — with the public’s active participation,” said museum CEO and Gwen Goodman director Ivy Barksy.

Pingel noted the museum intends to keep the site operating following the July anniversary celebration.

“We are excited to let the public know about our initiative and look forward to learning about the stories they post,” Pingel said. “We definitely plan to keep the site active past the anniversary.”