

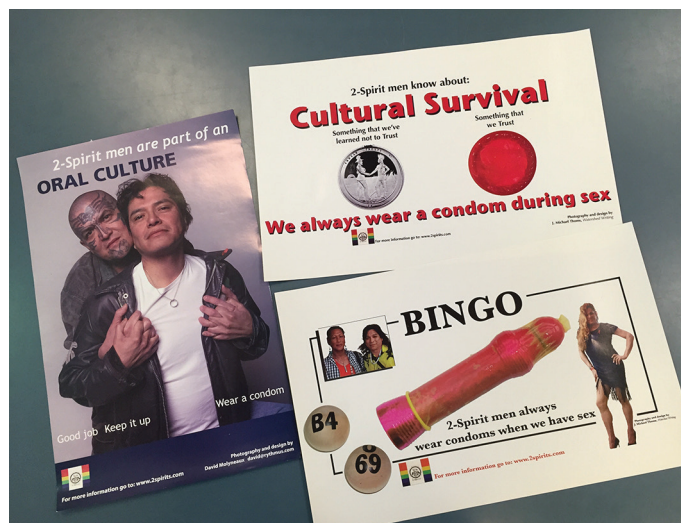
Cool Things in the Collection:

The Two-Spirited Collection

by Brett Lougheed
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The documentary heritage of Canada has undoubtedly been traditionally rooted in a Eurocentric/Anglicized perception of Canadian society that is reflective of the types of records archives acquired. In recent years, many archives have made a concerted effort to document those segments of society that have traditionally been marginalized in the historical record. Collection mandates and acquisition strategies of many archives have been augmented to ensure the inclusion of these communities in their holdings in an effort to record a more accurate representation of Canadian society and to support the growing demand of researchers for access to these records. As a result, archives have turned their collective attention to the stewardship of records by and about Indigenous people, as well as those of other ethnic, religious, socio-economic, and cultural communities that have been thus far underrepresented in cultural heritage organizations.

The University of Winnipeg Archives is home to a collection that documents a segment of the Indigenous population that is grossly underrepresented in society—individuals who self-identify as Two-Spirited rather than lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. According to Albert McLeod, the donor of the collection, the term “Two-Spirited” has its origins in a gathering of North American LGBT Indigenous persons in Winnipeg in 1990. McLeod defines the term as having “the ability to reflect the male and female energies (genders and sexes) and forces that create life (e.g., humans, animals and plants) and that diversity within this realm is considered sacred and a component of the natural order (meant to be).”¹ According to Indigenous tradition, prior to European colonization, Two-Spirited people held ceremonial roles and were regarded with high-esteem—as having a gift.² Following colonization, homophobic European beliefs were enforced within Indigenous cultures creating artificial heteronormativity amongst Indigenous people. The Canadian Residential School system further engrained this



Two-Spirited Collection, oversize box, series 4, University of Winnipeg Archives

Safe sex campaign posters, 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, circa 2007.

heteronormativity within Indigenous society and culture. Recently, the Two-Spirit liberation movement has gained traction as part of the decolonization process occurring amongst Indigenous communities. In 1988, the first official gathering of North American LGBT Indigenous people, called The Basket and the Bow, was held in Minneapolis.³ In 1990, the gathering was held in Winnipeg and the term “Two-Spirited” was first adopted. The term came in a vision to one of the participants prior to the event and was ceremoniously accepted by those in attendance.⁴ Today, the term “Two-Spirited” is widely accepted and used by the North American LGBTTTQ community to refer to Indigenous gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people who don’t identify with the Eurocentric descriptors of gender and sexuality.

In 2011 and 2013, Albert McLeod donated a collection of material pertaining to the Two-Spirit movement in Manitoba to the University of Winnipeg Archives. McLeod, who is a descendant of the Nisichawaysihk Cree Nation and the community of Norway House in northern Manitoba, identifies as a Two-Spirited, gay male. Since 1986, he has been actively involved in the Two-Spirit Movement, and as a human rights advocate. He has actively advocated for the rights of Indigenous LGBTTTQ people, has pushed for their visible and meaningful inclusion in the Canadian Indigenous Movement and the LGBTTTQ Liberation Movement, and has fought against pervasive homophobia and racism. He has helped co-ordinate a



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The Two-Spirited Collection

number of Two-Spirit conferences and gatherings as a way to enable Two-Spirited people to meet with each other in a safe, encouraging environment where traditional cultural practices are integrated with educational workshops. In 2006, McLeod co-founded Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc., whose mission is to improve the quality of life of Two-Spirited people in Manitoba, which includes raising funds for and assisting in the provision of appropriate advocacy, education, health services, housing, employment training and cultural development.⁵

The Two-Spirited Collection consists of newsletters, journals, magazines, reports, newspaper clippings, correspondence, poetry, photographs, posters, art, textiles, books, videocassettes, and other ephemera that document the Indigenous Two-Spirit Movement in Manitoba and throughout North America. The collection was described and a finding aid was uploaded to the Manitoba Archival Information Network to facilitate access.⁶ It is believed to be the most comprehensive collection of material on the Two-Spirit Movement in North American archives. The collection is subdivided into seven series and documents the origins, rise and struggles of the Two-Spirit Movement.

The first series consists of published textual materials related to the Two-Spirit Movement, including books, journals and magazines, newsletters from Two-Spirit organizations, reports and pamphlets on AIDS, reports

and articles on the Two-Spirit Movement, and newspaper clippings. The materials were published in both the United States and Canada, but were predominantly created in Manitoba. The second series contains non-published textual records related to the Two-Spirit Movement, including obituaries and memorial service programs for Two-Spirited Manitobans, drafts of poems written by a number of Two-Spirited individuals, and correspondence, mainly addressed to Albert McLeod or the organizations he co-founded, and pertaining to the creation or description of Two-Spirited organizations. The third series contains records from various Two-Spirited organizations and gatherings in North America, including programs, budgets, and notices of gatherings and conferences. Also included are mandates, meeting minutes and job postings of many Two-Spirited organizations.

The fourth series is comprised of graphic material including photographs, prints, drawings and posters. Many of the photographs depict Two-Spirited people at gatherings, likely held in either Vancouver or Manitoba. Several of the posters originate from a 2007 campaign promoting condom use among Two-Spirited people, while others advertise gatherings. The series also includes 330 digital photographs of the 22nd Annual Two-Spirit Gathering in Winnipeg in 2010, three t-shirts and one embroidery, as well as mementos from the first Truth and



Two-Spirited Collection, box 1, folder 4-3, University of Winnipeg Archives, photo by Trevor Stratton.

22nd Annual International Two-Spirit Gathering Pow Wow, Winnipeg, 2010.



Two-Spirited Collection, box 1, folder 5-2, University of Winnipeg Archives

Albert McLeod canoeing at 2nd National Aboriginal AIDS Conference, Vancouver, 1991.

Reconciliation Commission sharing circle in 2010. The fifth series is comprised of a scrapbook, which contains a variety of both graphic and textual materials, including photographs, as well as newspaper and magazine clippings, gathering notices, and poetry related to the Two-Spirit Movement in Manitoba and across North America. The photographs consist mostly of unidentified people related to the Two-Spirit Movement in Manitoba, but also Two-Spirited gatherings like the Basket and the Bow, Spirituality in the 1990s, and Two-Spirits and HIV in New York City.

The sixth series is comprised of both graphic and textual materials in a variety of formats, including photographs, photocopies, magazine clippings, drafts, notes, and a painting, related to McLeod's research on traditional Indigenous clothing and adornments. The seventh, and final, series consists of several books and four films, including *Honored by the Moon*, a documentary produced in 1990 by Mona Smith for the Minnesota American Indian AIDS Task Force about gay and lesbian Indigenous peoples, which through interviews and footage of gatherings, details their place within the Indigenous and LGBT communities historically and more recently. The other films comprising this series are unedited footage from the Manitoba Aboriginal AIDS Conference in 1992, a Popular Theatre Alliance of Manitoba dress rehearsal shoot in the early 1990s, and footage of a Passing of the Legacy gathering in Vancouver in July 2002.

The Two-Spirited Collection is a truly unique body of records in Canada and the University of Winnipeg Archives is committed to expanding the collection in the hopes of becoming a respectful home and research hub for Two-Spirit material in the province. Through the stewardship of these records and the promotion of this collection, the University of Winnipeg Archives hopes to assist Indigenous people in the ongoing decolonization process by facilitating Indigenous reclamation of this proud element of their history, culture, and spirituality. ✨

Notes

1. Albert McLeod, "Two-Spirited Collection," 2013, Two-Spirited Collection, box 1, folder 3-7, University of Winnipeg Archives.
2. "Two-Spirited," n.d. Two-Spirited Collection, box 1, folder 1-6, University of Winnipeg Archives.
3. Albert McLeod, "History of Two-spirited People in Manitoba," in Alley Yapput, *Two-spirited Outreach Project. Final Report*, Ottawa: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, 2004, 5, Two-Spirited Collection, box 1, folder 1-7, University of Winnipeg Archives.
4. McLeod, "Two-Spirited Collection".
5. University of Winnipeg Archives, "Two-Spirited Movement (McLeod, Albert)," *Manitoba Archival Information Network*, <http://nanna.lib.umanitoba.ca/atom/index.php/mxq> (accessed 12 February 2016).
6. The collection-level description for the Two-Spirited Collection can be accessed at <http://nanna.lib.umanitoba.ca/atom/index.php/two-spirited-collection>. More detailed finding aids are available by request to University of Winnipeg Archives staff.

Two-Spirit National Aboriginal Day Celebration

Thursday, June 21, 2012
4:00 - 8:00 pm
222 Furby St.
Crossways-In-Common

- Prize Bingo Games
- Memorial Ceremony
- Food
- Raffle prizes

Featured Aboriginal Artists & Activists:

- Lorne Olson - Videography
- Kevin Lee Burton - Photography
- Ryan Richard, Kelly & Erin - Dance
- Wanda Wilson - Music

Contact: Albert
T: 204-783-6424

<https://www.facebook.com/events/310941262317490/>

Hosted by the Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc. www.twospiritedmanitoba.ca
Financial Contributors: West Broadway Development Corporation, City of Winnipeg, MacDonald Youth Services, Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre Inc., New Directions, Sexuality Education Resource Centre, UW Global College

Two-Spirited Collection, box 1, folder 3-7, University of Winnipeg Archives

Two-Spirit National Aboriginal Day Celebration poster, 2012.