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## Finding Aid - LOOT Oral History Project collection (10-080)

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# LOOT Oral History Project collection

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## Summary information

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<b>Repository:</b>	Archives et collections spéciales/Archives and Special Collections
<b>Title:</b>	LOOT Oral History Project collection
<b>Reference code:</b>	10-080
<b>Date:</b>	1988-1990 (creation)
<b>Physical description:</b>	60.9 GB of sound recording (wav)
<b>Language:</b>	English

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## Administrative history / Biographical sketch

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### Note

The Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT) was founded in 1976 and was Toronto's first openly lesbian feminist group. LOOT grew out of an October 1976 meeting convened in the C.H.A.T. (Community Homophile Association of Toronto) offices on Church Street. Fiona Rattray, an original member, estimates the meeting was attended by 30-60 lesbians. Members present at this meeting decided to rent part of a house, to develop a multi-use lesbian centre. LOOT was different from other lesbian organizations in many ways; its concept was to be an “umbrella organization open to all lesbians regardless of class, religion, race, political affiliation, degree of openness, or age.” (Ross, Becky, “The House That Jill Built”, p. 76) It was also unique in the fact that it operated in the first lesbian centre in Canada. The collective also included Eve Zaremba, who would later become one of Canada's first notable openly lesbian writers, and Lynne Fernie, a noted documentary filmmaker.

Situated at 342 Jarvis St., The Lesbian Organization of Toronto shared the three-story building with two other compatible organizations; The Other Woman, one of Toronto's longest lasting feminist newsmagazines, and the Three of Cups Women's Coffeehouse. LOOT moved into the house on February 1, 1977. The dream of LOOT members was to provide a space that “would serve to raise the profile of lesbians and lesbian activism, and provide a feminist alternative to the bar scene.” (Ibid, p.76) The organization regularly provided peer support, telephone counselling, dances, social & political activities, a lending library, a newsletter, potluck socials, brunches, concerts and performances by well-known feminist and lesbian musicians like Ferron, Alix Dobkin, Mama Quilla II, and Beverley Glenn Copeland. LOOT participated in several marches, and with its telephone line seems to have helped many women in their struggle of coming out.

In its brief history, it is most remembered for its co-organization of the 1979 Toronto conference *A Fine Kettle of Fish: Lesbians and Feminists in the Women's Movement* as well as the 1979 Bi-national Lesbian Conference/Conférence lesbienne bi-nationale in collaboration with the International Women's Day Committee, on the University of Toronto campus. The organization, due to diverging political ideas and failure to be an “umbrella organization” for all lesbians, was forced to disband in 1980 soon after the Bi-national Conference.

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La Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT) a été fondée en 1976 et a été le premier groupe féministe ouvertement lesbien de Toronto. LOOT est né d'une réunion organisée en octobre 1976 dans les bureaux de la C.H.A.T. (Community Homophile Association of Toronto), rue Church. Fiona Rattray, l'une des premières membres, estime que 30 à 60 lesbiennes ont participé à cette réunion. Les membres présents à cette réunion décident de louer une partie d'une maison pour y aménager un centre lesbien polyvalent. LOOT était différent des autres organisations lesbiennes à bien des égards ; son concept était d'être une "organisation parapluie ouverte à toutes les lesbiennes sans distinction de classe, de religion, de race, d'affiliation politique, de degré d'ouverture ou d'âge". (Ross, Becky, "The House That Jill Built", p. 76) Il était également unique en ce sens qu'il opérait dans le premier centre lesbien du Canada. Le collectif comprend également Eve Zaremba, qui deviendra plus tard l'une des premières écrivaines lesbiennes notables du Canada, et Lynne Fernie, une réalisatrice de documentaires de renom.

Située au 342 Jarvis St., la Lesbian Organization of Toronto partage l'immeuble de trois étages avec deux autres organisations compatibles : The Other Woman, l'un des magazines féministes les plus anciens de Toronto, et le Three of Cups Women's Coffeehouse. LOOT a emménagé dans la maison le 1er février 1977. Le rêve des membres de LOOT était d'offrir un espace qui "servirait à rehausser le profil des lesbiennes et de l'activisme lesbien, et offrirait une alternative féministe à la scène des bars" (Ibid, p.76). (Ibid, p.76) L'organisation proposait régulièrement un soutien par les pairs, des conseils par téléphone, des danses, des activités sociales et politiques, une bibliothèque de prêt, un bulletin d'information, des repas-partage, des brunchs, des concerts et des spectacles donnés par des musiciennes féministes et lesbiennes bien connues comme Ferron, Alix Dobkin, Mama Quilla II, et Beverley Glenn Copeland. LOOT a participé à plusieurs marches et, grâce à sa ligne téléphonique, semble avoir aidé de nombreuses femmes à faire leur coming out.

Au cours de sa brève histoire, on se souvient surtout de sa co-organisation de la conférence de 1979 à Toronto, A Fine Kettle of Fish : Lesbians and Feminists in the Women's Movement, ainsi que de la Bi-national Lesbian Conference/Conférence lesbienne bi-nationale de 1979, en collaboration avec le Comité de la Journée internationale de la femme, sur le campus de l'Université de Toronto. L'organisation, en raison de ses idées politiques divergentes et de son incapacité à être une "organisation parapluie" pour toutes les lesbiennes, a été contrainte de se dissoudre en 1980, peu après la Conférence lesbienne binationale.

## Custodial history

The Becki Ross' Lesbian Organization of Toronto Oral History Project was donated to the Archives and Special Collections as part of the Canadian Women's Movement Archives collection in 1996.

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## Scope and content

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In 1989, Becki Ross a PH.D student in sociology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto began doing research for her thesis by conducting interviews with former members of the Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT). In her interviews she specifically questioned what the political, social, racial and class structures were at LOOT and the reason for the disbanding of LOOT. She carried her interviews with twenty-eight members from 1988 to 1990.

With these interviews, Becki Ross was able to obtain an oral history of the organization, in which each member tells her point of view on the successes and failures of LOOT. With these and other documentation Becki Ross went on to write an article entitled "The House That Jill Built: Lesbian Feminist Organizing in Toronto, 1976-1980" as well as a book *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation*.

The Becki Ross' Lesbian Organization of Toronto Oral History Project provides valuable information on the way in which LOOT functioned from its conception to its demise. She recorded interviews on 49 audio cassettes with prominent members of LOOT. The interviews provide candid information on the nature of LOOT and the way in which each member recalls and interprets the events surrounding LOOT and the lesbian community of Toronto. They discuss a variety of subjects such as the internal political and social functions at LOOT and its eventual demise. They also discuss several events in the Toronto area such as the Bi-national Lesbian Conference, Anita Bryant and the Body Politic article "Men Loving Boys Loving Men".

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En 1989, Becki Ross, étudiante en doctorat de sociologie à l'Institut d'études pédagogiques de l'Ontario de l'Université de Toronto, a commencé sa recherche en menant des entretiens avec d'anciens membres de la Lesbian Organization of Toronto (LOOT). Dans ses entretiens, elle a posé des questions spécifiques sur les structures politiques, sociales, raciales et de classe de LOOT et sur les raisons de la dissolution de LOOT. Elle a interrogé vingt-huit membres entre 1988 et 1990.

Grâce à ces entretiens, Becki Ross a pu obtenir une histoire orale de l'organisation, dans laquelle chaque membre donne son point de vue sur les succès et les échecs de LOOT. À partir de ces documents et d'autres, Becki Ross a pu rédiger un article intitulé "The House That Jill Built : Lesbian Feminist Organizing in Toronto, 1976-1980", ainsi qu'un livre intitulé *The House That Jill Built : A Lesbian Nation in Formation*. Le projet d'histoire orale de la Lesbian Organization of Toronto de Becki Ross fournit des informations précieuses sur le fonctionnement de LOOT, de sa conception à sa disparition. Elle a enregistré des entretiens sur 49 cassettes audio avec des membres éminents de LOOT. Ces entretiens fournissent des informations franches sur la nature de LOOT et sur la façon dont chaque membre se souvient et interprète les événements entourant LOOT et la communauté lesbienne de Toronto. Ils abordent une variété de sujets tels que les fonctions politiques et sociales internes de LOOT et son éventuelle disparition. Elles évoquent également plusieurs événements survenus dans la région de Toronto, tels que la conférence binationale des lesbiennes, Anita Bryant et l'article de Body Politic intitulé "Men Loving Boys Loving Men" (Les hommes aiment les garçons aiment les hommes).

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## Notes

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### **Immediate source of acquisition**

Canadian Women's Movement Archives

### **Location of originals**

Original records were on audio cassette and are maintained at ARCS.

### **Restrictions on access**

Any quotations must have written permission from the person identified on the tape. Judith Bennett must be contacted in particular.

### **Conditions governing use**

Restricted

### **Related material**

The CWMA fonds (10-001) contains additional material on the Lesbian Organization of Toronto. See Series 1, File 1482 to 1514.

The Morriset Library contains both the book and the article written by Becki Ross based on these interviews:

“The House That Jill Built: Lesbian Feminist Organizing in Toronto, 1976-1980”, *Feminist Review*, 35, 1990, pp. 75-91. (HQ 1101. F38)

*The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1995. (HQ 75. 6C3 R678 1995)

### **Note [General]**

Set of 49 cassette tapes that have been digitized into 26 audio files.

### **Other notes**

- **Publication status:** Published
- **Description identifier:** CA
- **Institution identifier:** ON0034

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### **Access points**

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- Sound recording (electronic) (documentary form)
- Women's Archives / Archives des femmes (subject)

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### **Collection holdings**

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