

**The New York Public Library
Humanities and Social Sciences Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

Israel David Fishman Papers
1970-1997
MssCol 1012

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Summary

Main entry: Fishman, Israel David, 1938-

Title: Israel David Fishman Papers, 1970-1997 (bulk 1970-1980)

Size: 4 linear feet (8 boxes)

Source: Gift of Israel David Fishman, 1994-

Abstract: Israel David Fishman (1938-) is an American librarian and gay rights activist. He worked at various libraries in the New York area from 1966 to 1974. In 1970 he was the founding leader of the Task Force on Gay Liberation (later the Gay and Lesbian Task Force) of the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association. After leaving librarianship, Fishman was active in the gay rights movement.

Collection consists of correspondence and notes, newspaper and journal clippings, gay organization publications, lectures, syllabi, and bibliographies on gay themes, mostly covering the period 1970 to 1985. Personal papers include Fishman's correspondence with library professional colleagues, others concerned with gay issues, and friends and family. Some papers, 1971-1973, concern his employment and dismissal from Upsala College. Organization files and printed materials relate to the social issues and activities with which he was involved, especially the Task Force on Gay Liberation. Cassette tapes cover a variety of personal and gay activist topics. Also, artifacts and memorabilia including photographs, T-shirt and banner.

Access: Apply in the Special Collections Office for admission to the Manuscripts and Archives Division.

Preferred citation: Israel David Fishman Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Special formats Artifacts, Photographs, Posters, Sound recordings.

Biographical note

Israel David Fishman was born on February 21, 1938 in Westerly, Rhode Island. His given name was Israel Fishman; he took the middle name "David" as an adult. His parents, Minnie C. and Benjamin Fishman, were Orthodox Jews; his father was an ordained rabbi, although he never held a pulpit position or earned a living as a clergyman.

In September 1946, Israel Fishman was sent to Yeshiva Torah Vodaath in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. In letters, he described his childhood as one of much turmoil and loneliness. At the age of fifteen he was hospitalized for twelve weeks and treated with electric shock therapy. His early adult years were filled with the typical yearnings of youth and with his particular struggle to recognize, understand, and enjoy his life as a gay man. Although Fishman rebelled against the confines of Orthodoxy, in fact found them inconsistent and irreconcilable with an openly gay life, the early years, imbued with the rule-and-calendar-based thinking of Orthodox life, formed a major part of his character and were an essential part of his personal conflicts.

In 1958 he used the name "Yisroel Fishman", his Hebrew name, on a receipt; later he wrote on a scrap of paper, "I can't believe I ever used 'Yisroel'." In January 1964 a check was signed "I. Ronald Fishman" but in June 1964 he changed his name on his Social Security documents to Israel Fishman, "my original name to which I have returned." His writings are punctuated with Talmudic references and perspectives, and a recurring subject of interest, reflected in these papers, has been the lives of homosexuals under the Nazis.

According to his own resumes, Fishman worked in various New York businesses as an office assistant between the years 1956 and 1965. In 1958 he entered the City College of New York, enrolling as an evening student and working during the day. He graduated from City College with a B.A. degree, magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa, in Philosophy in June of 1965, having become a full-time day student for several years prior to his graduation. In May 1966, he received an M.L.S. from Columbia University's School of Library Science

For the next year Fishman worked as Head of Technical Services in the library at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Richmond College of the City University of New York, on Staten Island, was the location of his next job, Acquisitions Librarian, which he held until 1970. He was subsequently hired by Upsala College in East Orange, NJ.

Fishman was hired as Circulation Librarian at Upsala College, at the rank of Assistant Professor, in September 1970. In the Spring of 1973 he learned that he had been denied tenure. After considering the appeal process and other options, he requested and was granted a six month sick leave, at the conclusion of which, on January 15, 1974, his salary and all remaining benefits ended. This was to be the conclusion of Fishman's career as a library professional.

Ironically, those Upsala-era years marked his greatest influence on the profession's social awareness. It was at the American Library Association meeting in Detroit in 1970 that, according to his account, Fishman conceived the idea of a gay liberation group within the library profession, and he and a few others organized the Task Force on Gay Liberation, a section of the Social Responsibilities Round Table. The group's activities at the Dallas convention the next year (June 1971) gained national attention in the gay and mainstream press. Fishman said in his correspondence that these public activities were responsible for the demise of his career in librarianship. He was succeeded in leadership of the Task Force by Barbara Gittings, a lesbian who was not a professional librarian. The two had a mostly affectionate friendship and collegial relationship, punctuated by times of disagreement on issues of their relative power and influence.

After leaving librarianship, Fishman went to Los Angeles, California for a period of work and study at the Gay Community Services Center. He returned to New York in the winter of 1973. A course in Swedish massage led to a new career as a masseur.

On February 2, 1974, Fishman met Carl Navarro at a performance of the play "Out of the Frying Pan" at the West Side Discussion Group (a regular gathering of gay men in New York City). The two became boyfriends (their preferred term), and began living together shortly thereafter, beginning a lasting relationship. The couple's activities included, for a number of years, lengthy annual trips to Italy, where they established many friendships. They celebrated their twentieth anniversary with a festive dinner party in 1994.

Fishman's letters reveal him to be a man of strong opinions and clear expression. He gave serious and thoughtful attention to all his choices and actions. A disappointing purchase would prompt a letter to the manufacturer; so too, a disappointing action on the part of a friend often resulted in a strongly-worded reply. The same strength of feeling made him a friend whose love and encouragement was often noted.

Scope and content note

The papers of Israel David Fishman are arranged in three series, with two themes dominating the entire collection: personal correspondence with friends and colleagues; and printed materials and organizational publications, mostly documenting the gay liberation struggles of the early 1970s. Fishman was particularly interested in the media's reporting of the gay liberation issues in the library profession.

Arrangement note

The Israel David Fishman Papers are organized in the following series:

- Series I. Personal papers
- Series II. Public organization subject files
- Series III. Artifacts
- Series IV. Sound recordings

Series descriptions and container list

Series I. Personal papers

Israel David Fishman was a prolific correspondent, and it is personal letters, sent and received, in the decade of the 70s and early 80s, that comprise most of this series. Not only did Fishman save letters written to him, he made carbon copies of those he typed or hand-wrote to others. The order of the letters is clear, since nearly all letters were dated, and a revealing picture of the timing and nature of the relationships between Fishman and his friends emerges.

The correspondence has been arranged alphabetically by correspondent, with the letters in each file in chronological order. Fishman's correspondents included library professional colleagues, others concerned publicly or privately with gay issues and liberation struggles, and personal friends and family. Some of Fishman's correspondents were famous or infamous. These include Janet Cooper, a librarian who spoke and wrote about women's issues, including lesbian issues, and served on a Governor's Task Force in Pennsylvania; Susan Saxe, Janet Cooper's friend, who was imprisoned in Massachusetts for bank robbery and murder; Robert Austin Sullivan, a gay prisoner on death row in Florida (he was executed on November 30, 1983), and the head of Sullivan's defense fund, Barry Weaver; Barbara Gittings, an outspoken leader in gay and lesbian rights, and Fishman's successor on the TFGL; and Allen Young, a writer on gay themes whom Fishman visited at his country home where Young was part of an intentional gay community.

Gay issues were not the only topics of Fishman's outspoken commentary. In general correspondence, there are numerous letters written by Fishman to product manufacturers, radio stations, travel agents, and others with a commodity Fishman wished to purchase or comment on.

The period of time (1971-1973) immediately preceding, during, and immediately after Fishman's employment as a librarian at Upsala College is documented by resumes, job applications, reference letters, memoranda and a few official letters. Many of Fishman's letters to individuals during this time also comment on his employment and dismissal.

NOTE: Some correspondence has been closed until 2052 to protect the privacy of living individuals.

I.A. Correspondence

Box

1

Undated
1971-1982
1992-1994

2

Bartmess, Ken, 1974?-1980
Brozeski, Joe, 1970-1973
Childers, Steve, 1971-1974

Cooper, Janet
1971-1974
1975
1976
1977-1979
1980-1982
Eads, Steve, 1972
Ehrenberg, Ron, 1972-1977

- 3 Ferri, Michael, 1975-1982
Fichtelberg, Leo and Doris, 1973-1974, 1977, 1994
Fletcher, Larry, 1972
- Fishman family members and family business, 1971-1979
Gittings, Barbara, 1972-1976, 1992
Jendretzky, Gisela, 1971-1975
Katz, Steve
Leonard, Bradley W. (see Box 4)
Navarro, Carl
Saxe, Susan, 1976-1981
Slater, David, 1976-1977
Stoeckle, David, 1971-1976
Sullivan, Robert Austin and Weaver, Barry L., 1979-1982
Walther, Margot, 1973
Young, Allen, 1978-1982
- 4 Leonard, Bradley W., 1971-1982

I.B. Library employment

Box
5

Pre-Upsala resume and applications
Upsala employment letters and documents, 1970-1973
Upsala policy manuals
Upsala activities
Post-Upsala resume

I.C. Other personal papers

Box
5

Address books
Ephemera and memorabilia
Notes for articles and talks
Israel David Fishman and Carl Navarro 20th anniversary, 1994
Photographs

Series II. Public organization subject files

According to Fishman's own notes, the organization papers and printed materials saved by him were those that inspired and influenced him toward personal growth and toward activism on the social issues dear to him. He weeded his papers prior to donation; all that remained were those of value to him. Some gay publications have been transferred to the Periodicals Series of the International Gay Information Center (IGIC) Collection.

The Libraries subseries is dominated by the papers by and about the Task Force on Gay Liberation (TFGL) of the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) of the American Library Association (ALA). Fishman, as its founding leader, has been best known publicly for this role. Even during an era characterized by bold social challenges, the TFGL members made themselves known, and the issues they championed were featured in library journals and in other gay and mainstream publications.

Fishman saved many items published by or relating to the gay organizations proliferating in the early 1970s. They are gathered together in the Activities and Organizations subseries. These items reflect a broad cross-section, covering one-time events, religious organizations, health bulletins, theater productions, social and self-help groups, and conflicts and "zaps" (see the WBAI-Charles Pitts Folder) of establishments who were perceived to be discriminating against gay men and lesbians.

II.A. Libraries

Box

6

American Library Association
General topics
New Jersey Library Association, 1972-1973

Task Force on Gay Liberation/Social Responsibilities Round Table
TFGL bibliography
TFGL/SSRT general information
TFGL history

TFGL/SSRT papers
1970
1971
1972
1973
1974-1976
Poster for Dallas, 1971 (see Oversize materials list)

"Gay Liberation...What has your library done?" 1971 June (Poster for
TFGL booth at ALA in Dallas)

Rolled
item

Box

6

Articles on gay themes from professional publications
American Libraries, 1971-1973
Library Journal, 1971-1972
Synergy, 1970, 1973 (San Francisco Public Library)
Wilson Library Bulletin, 1971-1974

II.B. Activities and organizations

Box
7

Ari, 1973
California organizations
Flyers
Church of the Beloved Disciple
Dignity
Gay Academic Union, 1974
Gay Activists Alliance, 1971-1973
Gay Community Services Center, California
Gay Men's Health Report
Identity House
Institute of Homophile Studies, 1973
The LE-HI-HO, 1971
Mattachine Society, 1972-1973
NJ Gay Survival Kit
Religious organizations
Theatre productions
WBAI-Charles Pitts controversy, 1973
Rutgers University Homophile League, 1971-1973
WSDG (West Side Discussion Group)

II.C. Writings

Box
8

News clippings, 1971-1977
Advocate, 1971-1973
Chicago Gaypride, 1972
Double-F, 1973
Fag Rag, 1971-1973
Gay, 1971-1973

9

Gay Community News, 1977
Gay Sunshine, 1971-1974
Our Community, 1971-1972
Poems and articles
Religious writings
Syllabi, bibliographies, lectures

Series III. Artifacts

Box
10

Gay Pride 1989 T-shirt
T-shirt honors Estelle Rollins, an elderly woman who attended and supported New York's Gay Pride March for a number of years.
Gay Pride button, 1973

Series IV. Sound recordings

Unit ID

- D00347 1971 ALA Task Force on Gay Liberation, 1971 Jun (4 Sound Files (2:03:04) :
Digital, stereo ; 192k MP3)
Proceedings of the 1971 American Library Association Task Force on Gay Liberation.
Participants include Israel Fishman, Barbara Gittings, and Mike McConnell.
- D00348 Father Robert Clement at Upsala College, 1971 Sep (4 Sound Files (51:09:02) :
Digital, stereo ; 192k MP3)
Father Robert Clement of the Church of the Beloved Disciple at Upsala College
- D00350 "Sexual Factors in Library Personnel Practices" 1971 Feb 23 (2 Sound Files
(1:16:07) : Digital, stereo ; 192k MP3)
Talk given by Fishman at the Essex County Public Library
- D00351 Israel David Fishman at Upsala College, 1971 Nov 18 (2 Sound Files (1:20:56) :
Digital, stereo ; 192k MP3)
- D00352 Audio letters and diary, 1972 (4 Sound Files (1:54:34) : Digital, stereo ; 192k
MP3)
- D00353 Israel David Fishman radio broadcasts, 1973 (4 Sound Files (1:31:58) : Digital,
stereo ; 192k MP3)
- D00354 Gay Pride Rally, 1973 Jun 24 (3 Sound Files (0:56:56) : Digital, stereo ; 192k
MP3)
1973 Gay Pride Rally with speeches by Barbara Gittings and Morris Kight, hosted by
Vito Russo.
- D00355 Yom Kippur Eve, 1972 (2 Sound Files (0:33:18) : Digital, stereo ; 192k MP3)