



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the The Shamrock Bar: Photographs and Interviews by Carol Burch-Brown

NMAH.AC.0857

David Haberstich

2004

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	The Shamrock Bar: Photographs and Interviews by Carol Burch-Brown
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.0857
Date:	1997-2003
Extent:	1 Cubic foot (2 boxes)
Creator:	Burch-Brown, Carol
Language:	English
Summary:	The collection documents a working class "gay" bar, the Shamrock Bar, Bluefield, West Virginia, 1997-2000, through photographs and oral history interviews.
Digital Content:	Image(s): The Shamrock Bar: Photographs and Interviews by Carol Burch-Brown

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Collection donated by Carol Burch-Brown, December 2003.

Processing Information

Processed by Carol Burch-Brown and David Haberstick.

Preferred Citation

The Shamrock Bar: Photographs and Interviews by Carol Burch-Brown, 1997-2003, Archives Center, National Museum of American History. Gift of the artist.

Restrictions on Access

Collection open for research on site by appointment. Unprotected photographs must be handled with gloves.

Terms Governing Use and Reproduction

Reproduction restricted due to copyright. Requests will be referred to the photographer.

Biography

Carol Burch-Brown is Professor of Art and Humanities at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia, and is a photographer, painter, and musician. Photographer and co-author with David Rigsbee, Trailers, University Press of Virginia, 1996.

Historical

During its heyday, the Shamrock Bar in Bluefield, West Virginia was a gathering place for gays and lesbians. The photographer reported in March 2003, before donating this collection, that Miss Helen Compton, proprietor of the Shamrock, had died and the establishment had been closed.

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of Carol Burch-Brown's photographs (200 photoprints, mostly silver gelatin on fiber-base paper, but including more than a dozen digital prints), copies of tape-recorded interviews (on 26 compact discs), and transcripts of interviews (3 volumes plus a compact disc containing Word files) made at the Shamrock Bar, Bluefield, West Virginia, 1997-2002, documenting a working-class gay bar. The photographs include "drag" performances, pageants, and other activities at the bar. Many show performers applying makeup and donning costumes, including the use of prosthetic breasts. Pictures taken in the bar are often in a soft-focus, slightly blurred, high-contrast, impressionistic style. There are a number of sharp-focus portraits, however, and exterior views of the building, its neighborhood, and the town are sharply focused, detailed documentary images.

Names (usually pseudonyms or stage names) which turn up in the interviews include: Natasha Michaels, Nikki Eaves, Shea West, Cortney Collins, Taylor Made, India Dream, Clinton, Tiffany Aver, Terba Devero, Roxie Morehead, and Dorothy. The performer "Bunny" is actually the photographer's friend and colleague, Ann Kilkelly. Many of these persons are also shown in the photographs, as is Helen Compton.

Note: The audio compact disks are not original recordings, and may be played by researchers directly.

Arrangement

The collection is divided into three series.

Series 1: Photoprints

Series 2: Text (including transcripts of interviews)

Series 3: Compact discs

Other Title

It's Reigning Queens in Appalachia

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Bars (Drinking establishments)
- Bisexuality
- Gay artists -- Interviews
- Homosexuality
- Lesbian and gay experience
- Transvestism
- Transvestites
- Working class

Types of Materials:

- Compact discs
- Digital images
- Interviews -- 1980-2000
- Oral history -- 1990-2000
- Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin -- 1990-2000
- Photographs -- Digital prints -- 20th century
- Transcripts

Names:

- Kilkelly, Ann
- Shamrock Bar (Bluefield, W.Va.)

Geographic Names:

- Appalachian Region
- Bluefield (W.Va.)
- West Virginia -- 1990-2000

Container Listing

Series 1: Photoprints

200 photoprints, mostly silver gelatin, except for fifteen digital prints, on 8" x 10" fiber-base paper. Each print is captioned, signed, and dated on the verso by the photographer. The complete caption list is contained in Volume 1 of the text in the collection itself.

- Box 1 Photoprints
200 photoprints, mostly silver gelatin, except for fifteen digital prints, on 8" x 10" fiber-base paper. Each print is captioned, signed, and dated on the verso by the photographer. The complete caption list is contained in Volume 1 of the text in the collection itself. The following prints are digital, rather than silver gelatin: Nos. 155-165, 167-168, and possibly nos. 2 and 3. A few prints are duplicates; e.g., nos. 64 and 70.
- Box 1 Helen Compton, at Eva's. [Photoprint, black-and-white], [copyright 2003]
1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 10" x 8".)
[Image\(s\): Helen Compton, at Eva's. \[Photoprint, black-and-white, copyright 2003\].](#)
Burch-Brown, Carol, Photographer
Burch-Brown, Carol, Donor
- Local Numbers
AC0857-0000001.tif (AC Scan No.)
- Names: Compton, Helen
 Shamrock Bar (Bluefield, W.Va.)
- Topic: Bars (Drinking establishments)
 Lesbian and gay experience
 Transvestites
- Place: Appalachian Region
 Bluefield (W.Va.)
- Genre/
Form: Photographs -- 1990-2000 -- Black-and-white photoprints
 -- Silver gelatin
- Box 1 Through the window, entrance to Shamrock [photoprint, black-and-white],
[copyright 2003]
1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 8" x 10".)
[Image\(s\): Through the window, entrance to Shamrock \[photoprint, black-and-white, copyright 2003\].](#)
Burch-Brown, Carol, Photographer
- Local Numbers
AC0857-0000002.tif (AC Scan No.)
- Names: Shamrock Bar (Bluefield, W.Va.)

Topic: Bars (Drinking establishments)
Lesbian and gay experience
Transvestites

Place: Appalachian Region
Bluefield (W.Va.)

Genre/
Form: Photographs -- 1990-2000 -- Black-and-white photoprints
-- Silver gelatin

Box 1

Joanna and Nikki. [Photoprint, black-and-white], [ca. 1999-2003]
1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 10" x 8".)
[Image\(s\): Joanna and Nikki. \[Photoprint, black-and-white, ca. 1999-2003\].](#)
Burch-Brown, Carol, Photographer

Local Numbers

AC0857-0000003.tif (AC Scan No.)

Names: Shamrock Bar (Bluefield, W.Va.)

Topic: Bars (Drinking establishments)
Lesbian and gay experience
Transvestites

Place: Appalachian Region
Bluefield (W.Va.)

Genre/
Form: Photographs -- 1990-2000 -- Black-and-white photoprints
-- Silver gelatin

Box 1

Making up Miss Cortney. [Photoprint, black-and-white], [copyright 2003]
1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 8" x 10".)
[Image\(s\): Making up Miss Cortney. \[Photoprint, black-and-white, copyright 2003\].](#)
Burch-Brown, Carol, Photographer

Local Numbers

AC0857-0000004.tif (AC Scan No.)

Names: Shamrock Bar (Bluefield, W.Va.)

Topic: Bars (Drinking establishments)
Lesbian and gay experience
Transvestites

Place: Appalachian Region
Bluefield (W.Va.)

Genre/
Form: Photographs -- 1990-2000 -- Black-and-white photoprints
-- Silver gelatin

Box 1

Miss Tiffany Aner, piano cape open. [Photoprint, black-and-white], [copyright 2003]

1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 10" x 8".)

Image(s): [Miss Tiffany Aner, piano cape open. \[Photoprint, black-and-white, copyright 2003\].](#)

Burch-Brown, Carol, Photographer

Local Numbers

AC0857-0000005.tif(AC Scan No.)

Names: Aner, Tiffany
Shamrock Bar (Bluefield, W.Va.)

Topic: Bars (Drinking establishments)
Lesbian and gay experience
Transvestites

Place: Appalachian Region
Bluefield (W.Va.)

Genre/
Form: Photographs -- 1990-2000 -- Black-and-white photoprints
-- Silver gelatin

Box 1

"Ain't Too Proud to Beg" performers: Joanna, Carol, Pam, Lynn, Eva, Kathy, Ann. [Photoprint, black-and-white], [1999]

1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 8" x 10".)

Image(s): ["Ain't Too Proud to Beg" performers: Joanna, Carol, Pam, Lynn, Eva, Kathy, Ann. \[Photoprint, black-and-white, 1999\].](#)

Burch-Brown, Carol, Photographer

Burch-Brown, Carol, Donor

Local Numbers

AC0857-0000006.tif (AC Scan No.)

Names: Kilkelly, Ann
Shamrock Bar (Bluefield, W.Va.)

Topic: Lesbian and gay experience
Transvestites

Genre/
Form: Photographs -- 1990-2000 -- Black-and-white photoprints
-- Silver gelatin

Box 1

Patrons dancing [black and white photoprint]

1 Item (Silver gelatin on paper.; 8" x 10".)

Image(s): [Patrons dancing \[black and white photoprint\].](#)

Burch-Brown, Carol, Photographer

Print #75. Photograph taken in 1999. Carol Burch-Brown, copyright 2003.

Local Numbers

AC0857-0000007.tif (AC Scan No.)

Exhibitions Note

Displayed in Archives Center exhibition, "Archiving the History of an Epidemic: HIV and AIDS, 1985-2009," June 3, 2011-October 3, 2011. Franklin A. Robinson, Jr., curator.

Topic: Bars (Drinking establishments)
Dance
Gay bars
Gays
Homosexuality
LGBT
Sexuality

Genre/
Form: Photographs -- 1990-2000 -- Black-and-white photoprints
-- Silver gelatin

Box 2

Photoprints

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Series 2: Text

Text, three volumes, with plastic covers. Volume III includes some documentary ephemera: a November 6, 1999 35th anniversary program; a November 4-5, 1994 30th anniversary program, a picture postcard showing a mural by Larry Akers, "Beginning of an Era Gone By"; a September 6, 1997 Miss Gay West Virginia Regional Pageant program; and an article about the Shamrock Bar by Larry Yost, from the Blue Ridge Lambda Press, Sept./Oct. 2001. 26 compact disks (audio) and 1 computer CD containing Word files, in spindle container.

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Series 3: Compact Discs

27 electronic discs (cd)

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