Queer and here

BY ELIZABETH STATION | WEB EXCLUSIVES—05.20.2014

Taking a sneak peek at the University’s LGBTQ past.

A 1982 Maroon headline—also emblazoned on a T-shirt—made a bold statement: "The University of Chicago may be gayer than you think." Both shirt and newspaper are on display at Closeted/Out in the Quadrangles, Past and Present, a preview exhibition running at the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality through June 13.

The exhibit features a small cross-section of the photos, memorabilia, and oral history interviews gathered during an ongoing project to document the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) UChicago alumni, faculty, and staff. Since 2012 the project has collected 85 oral histories; they'll be transcribed and housed with related archival materials in the Regenstein Library. A larger exhibition is planned for March 2015, says Monica Mercado, AM’06, PhD’14, who coordinates the student-driven initiative with fellow history graduate student Lauren Stokes, AM’11.

The preview offers a fascinating glimpse into a campus past only recently reclaimed. “My favorite part of the exhibition is the corner sound station where you can listen to Esther Newton [AM’64, PhD’68] talking about what it was like to be on the academic job market as a self-described ‘militant feminist’ in the early 1970s, while flipping through a copy of her dissertation, her first book, and a more recent book of essays, Margaret Mead Made Me Gay,” Mercado says.

The preview is open to the public during regular business hours at CSGS (Monday through Friday, 9 to 5). Special tours can be scheduled by e-mailing
Mercado or Gina Olson. A gallery talk and reception will be offered during Alumni Weekend on Saturday, June 7, from 4:30 to 6 p.m.

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