

Emma Wiley
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LGBTQ+ Communities in Wheeling, West Virginia

Project Description

The objective is to create a record of oral histories regarding the visibility and experience of LGBTQ+ communities in Wheeling, West Virginia in the early 21st century. The oral histories will challenge the often-presumed invisibility of LGBTQ+ individuals and communities in West Virginia and provide complexity to what it means to be part of LGBTQ+ communities in Appalachia. Due project constraints, this collection focuses on leaders of The Friendlier City Project and city councilperson, Rosemary Ketchum. The oral histories and related documentation will hopefully become part of the records at the Ohio County Public Library Archives and Special Collections for use by future generations in the Wheeling and larger West Virginia community.

To Start

- An oral history is a little bit different than a regular news or journalist interview-- think of it like we are creating a historical document.
 - I'm having you sign the release form after the recording because you cannot release something you haven't created yet!
 - If all goes well, after we do the oral history today, I'll write up the transcript and send it to you for a review to make sure everything is reflected accurately before sending you a final copy for yourself and the Library a final copy to put into their archives and special collections.
- The way it's going to work is that once I click record, I'll ask for your consent to record and I'll ask you to say your name and where you are for the record and then we'll get into some questions.
- This is your oral history--I have questions to steer the story, but if there are aspects or stories that you think are particularly important within the theme, please feel free to bring those out.
- Make it clear she does not have to answer any question she doesn't want to or feel comfortable doing so
- Silence cell phones/limit background noise

Lead

Do I have permission to record this interview? Please state your full name for the record and where in the world you are calling in from.

[Narrator's response]

This is the interviewer, Emma Wiley, and I am currently in my house in the Cleveland Park neighborhood in Washington DC. It is November 3, 2023 and we are on a video call today to talk about Mikaya Green's experience with LGBTQ+ communities in Wheeling, West Virginia and more broadly the Ohio Valley.

Childhood/Adolescence and Coming to Wheeling

- Can you tell me about when and where you were born?
 - If different, where did you grow up?
- Can you describe your family?
- Can you tell me about your childhood?
- Please describe the neighborhood or community you grew up in.
 - In what ways were you taught--either by your family or communities--to think about gender and sexuality?
 - Did you know about LGBTQ+ individuals or a community growing up?
 - Did you feel part of any LGBTQ+ communities?
- Can you tell me about your experiences going to college?
 - What did it feel like to leave the Ohio Valley?
 - How did leaving the Ohio Valley and experiencing other LGBTQ+ communities outside the area affect your understanding of community in the Ohio Valley?
- As you transitioned out of college, what did you do post-graduation?
 - What made you come back to Wheeling?

Finding Community in Wheeling

- Can you describe Wheeling, West Virginia?
- Can you describe the overall state of LGBTQ+ communities in Wheeling?
- On average, Wheeling's population tends to skew older...can you talk a little bit about what it is like to be a young queer person in Wheeling?
 - How do you think age affects LGBTQ+ visibility or communities in Wheeling?
- How did it feel to physically navigate and exist in Wheeling? How did you think about your own self-expression?

Development of The Friendlier City Project and Other Initiatives

- Can you describe what The Friendlier City Project is?
 - Can you give a brief synopsis on the types of activities, events, or initiatives that The Friendlier City Project is involved in?
- Can you give me a roadmap of how The Friendlier City Project came to be?
 - What factors motivated you, as a group of people, to form The Friendlier City Project?
- What is the reception of the larger Wheeling community to the activities of The Friendlier City Project?

- How does the visibility of The Friendlier City projects and events physically change the space in Wheeling?
- What do you think the impact of The Friendlier City project has been in Wheeling?
 - Do you think it has a larger impact in the region/West Virginia?
- What is next for The Friendlier City Project?
- Are there other distinct LGBTQ+ communities in Wheeling or the Ohio Valley? How would you describe them?

The Future of LGBTQ+ Community in Wheeling/Conclusion

- In your opinion, how did Rosemary Ketchum's election to city council impact the visibility of LGBTQ+ individuals and communities in Wheeling?
- How do you feel about the visibility of LGBTQ+ communities in Wheeling today?
- What (if anything) do you wish was different about the visibility or reception of LGBTQ+ communities in Wheeling?
- How do you think stereotypes of Wheeling, or West Virginia more broadly, affect LGBTQ+ communities in Wheeling?
- What is next for you?

Closing

- Are there any other questions you think I should have asked, any topics you would like to discuss in more detail, or anything else you would like to add to this oral history before we conclude?
- Thank you very much for taking the time and being willing to do this interview with me today. I appreciate your candor and thoughtfulness--your interview will be a valuable contribution to more thoroughly understanding and documenting the presence and visibility of LGBTQ+ communities in Wheeling.