

COMMENTARY

'The importance of having our stories not just preserved, but heard': Reflections on 2SLGBTQIA+ history and pride



BY EVELYN C. WHITE
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The "Places of Pride (2026): Official First Day Cover - The Turret" and a book by Rebecca Rose and James Bentley. Credit: Canada Post/ Nimbus Publishing

She had no ties to the region.

However, Willimae Moore (1923-2007) was much on my mind while reading the recently released ***Amazing 2SLGBTQIA+ People in Atlantic Canada: Stories of Activism, Education, and Pride***, by Rebecca Rose

(text) and James Bentley (art).

For quiet as it's been kept, Moore — a Black, native New Yorker who'd once shared a Yellowknife home with Beatrice Gonzales, a white, female, public school administrator — stands as the first woman to be convicted of a sexual offence against another woman in Canada.

In “Canada’s First Capital ‘L’ Lesbian Sexual Assault,” the distinguished University of Ottawa law professor Constance Backhouse delivers a riveting account of Moore’s 1955 trial (in which a Scrabble game and an Underwood typewriter proved pivotal). The essay is among those in her 2008 book ***Carnal Crimes: Sexual Assault Law in Canada, 1900-1975.***

From Marginalization to Visibility

Backhouse’s brand of meticulous research was evident throughout “From Marginalization to Visibility: 2SLGBTQ+ Archives and Public Memory,” a conference held last month at Dalhousie University.

*The gathering was organized by a committee of volunteers from the four Atlantic Provinces, in partnership with the Community Advisory Committee of the Nova Scotia LGBT Seniors Archive at Dalhousie, and with **the ArQuives** as the national partner to assist with logistics and communications.

The event brought together dozens of community activists, academics, writers, artists, and filmmakers to discuss the role of queer archives in deepening public understanding of Canadian history.

To that end, Parks Canada historian Michelle Cinanni provided an overview of the process by which queer individuals, events, and spaces can achieve commemorated status at the federal level. She discussed **Everett Klippert** (1926-1996) whose voluntary admission in 1965 of consensual homosexual activity with adult men, led to his arrest, conviction, and sentencing to life imprisonment as a “dangerous sexual offender.”

Public outrage over Klippert’s plight — the last Canadian to be jailed for being gay — sparked the partial decriminalization, in 1969, of same-gender sex between consenting adults.

The Klippert case was officially designated as a national historic event in August 2025 and Cinanni encouraged conference participants to **submit nominations** for consideration by Historic Sites and Monuments officials.

'They are not alone'

Author of the 2019 release, *Before the Parade: A History of Halifax's Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Communities (1972-1984)*, Rose said that her new book aims “to let 2SLGBTQIA+ youth (and adults) living in Atlantic Canada know that they are not alone and what is possible not in spite of, but because of, our beautiful 2SLGBTQIA+ identities.”

The volume features short profiles of about 50 queer folk with ties to the region. Full disclosure: I am among those included.

Rose said that her work on the project (against the backdrop of a bustling life with her wife, child, and cat) was rewarded with the discovery of figures such as Charles Henry Danielle (1830-1902).

Hailed as a “great lover of men,” Danielle moved from New York to Newfoundland in the 1860s. There, the spirited actor and costume designer taught “popular and fashionable dances,” Rose writes.

He also built an eight-sided, four-storey house that he christened “Octagon Castle” and promoted as a posh resort with “a marvel of architecture and adornments,” in Paradise, Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Turret stamp

Danielle’s “castle” called to mind The Turret in downtown Halifax. Located within the Khyber Building on Barrington Street, the space served as the premier nightclub for the queer community from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s and is **now featured in a series** of “Places of Pride” Canada Post stamps.

The colourful first day of issue commemorative envelope affixed with The Turret stamp includes a note of special thanks to Rebecca Rose.

“They’re a huge hit,” said a Canada Post clerk, about the stamps. “A customer bought 10 booklets and told me that he was gifting them to friends all over the country.”

A prominent gay archivist, curator, and writer, Robin Metcalfe is among those who helped found The Turret.

Metcalfe was a panelist at the conference and led a walking tour of about 20 people to the site. He is also involved with **Take Back the Turret**, a grassroots campaign to prevent Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) from buying back the building from the Turret Arts Society.

Racialized 2SLGBTQIA+ people

I was delighted to learn more about racialized 2SLGBTQIA+ people in Rose's book; folks like Andrew Lam, a self-identified queer and trans Chinese reporter who joined CBC Nova Scotia in 2023. Rose notes that Lam was "working in banking when she first thought to pursue journalism as a career" and wasn't confident about succeeding in the profession.

Lam has now celebrated "their one-hundredth published story" on topics such as climate change, affordable housing, and support for people with disabilities, Rose writes.

The volume also includes a profile of Liane Khoury, the founder of [Queer Arabs Halifax](#) who, at age 18, moved from Amman, Jordan to Halifax to begin university. She told Rose that the group has helped her find a chosen family through activities such as coffee hangouts and the screening of Palestinian short films.

About queer and trans people from the Middle East and North Africa, Khoury proudly proclaims: "We exist."

A community archivist and historian, Dan MacKay is publisher of Wayves Magazine and the Halifax Rainbow Encyclopedia, both invaluable queer resources in the province. MacKay was on the local team that helped to run the Marginalization to Visibility conference and facilitated The ArQuives Community Ties consultation focus group.

"Seventeen people with deep and passionate interests in queer archiving from around the province were gathered around the big table," MacKay said. "One of the main themes that emerged is the importance of having our stories not just preserved, but heard."

From Lesbian Pulp to Queer Pride event July 22

Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) librarian Denyse Rodrigues was also on the planning committee for the conference, and hopes to continue conversations through a forthcoming free public event, From Lesbian Pulp to Queer Pride: Connecting Queer Generations.

(As it happens, MSVU has one of the [largest collections](#) of Lesbian Pulp Fiction in North America.)

Scheduled for July 22 at the Tantallon Public Library, the evening event will feature readings from mid-20th-century lesbian pulp novels, accompanied by commentary exploring their historical context and significance.

Participants will then have opportunities to connect with self-identified “queer elders” in a human library-style discussion.

Rodrigues noted that the gathering aims to celebrate “the many ways 2SLGBTQIA+ people have lived over time.”

On that note, writer Valerie Mason-John pays tribute to Willimae Moore in the poem “Yellowknife,” found in their book *I Am Still Your Negro: An Homage to James Baldwin* (2020).

**This article has been updated from a previous version in order to correctly identify the conference organizers.*
