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Review: Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada

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Project

Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada

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Project URL

<https://lglc.ca/>

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Project Overview**Constance Crompton and Michelle Schwartz**

The Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada project (LGLC) is building an interactive digital resource for the study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) history in Canada from 1964 to 1981. The project took two books, Don McLeod's chronologies *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada Volumes 1 and 2* (3100 events, ECW Press, 1996; Homewood Books, 2017) and converted them into a database that allows users to explore the people, places, events, and publications that defined Canadian lesbian and gay liberation history.

By leveraging the power of TEI-XML and a graph database, LGLC illuminates the connections between people, organizations, demonstrations, places, and the political actions and lobbying that led to historic legal reforms in Canada. The LGLC project team has supplemented the historical research conducted by Don McLeod with records about the organizations, periodicals, people, and places of the gay liberation movement. The [lglc.ca database](#), housed by the Ryerson University Library Digital Collaboratory, now contains over 34,000 records. It was created by converting the project's TEI-XML to cypher, the neo4j query language as part of the project's intellectual effort to think through how to represent the activism in our records in hierarchical XML and graph form. The lglc.ca frontend consists of a node.js app with pages generated by jade.js/pug.js templates. The project, which includes as its output publications, conference presentations, Wikipedia editathons, community events, and

more, extends beyond the website. Its analysis arises from the neo4j database and the project TEI-XML, both of which contain more data and more sophisticated analysis functionality than we make available on the site.

Constance Crompton (University of Ottawa) and Michelle Schwartz (Ryerson University) co-direct Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada. The project was catalyzed by a SSHRC Insight Grant (2014–20). Grant partners include Susan Brown, Director of the Canadian Writing Research Collaboratory (CWRC University of Guelph); Don McLeod (University of Toronto Libraries); Elise Chenier, Director of the Archives of Lesbian Oral Testimony (ALOT Simon Fraser University); and M.J. Suhonos (Ryerson University Library & Archives). The project has been built out with the support of 16 paid research assistants since 2014. Their scholarship has included archival research, encoding (including the ontological debates that encoding requires), UX, TEI-XML conversion, frontend design, and implementation. Twelve of the research assistants have been funded to present their scholarship at conferences and two have been article and book-chapter co-authors. The most notable use of the LGLC website has been by Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada's Gender and Sexual Diversity Employee Network in support employee diversity training. We are grateful for the support of Ryerson's Centre for Digital Humanities, the Ryerson Library Collaboratory, the University of Ottawa's Labo de données en sciences humaines/Humanities Data Lab, the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and Compute Canada.

The twin goals of the next phase of the project are 1) to expand LGLC's coverage of LGBTQ+ women's and Francophone Canadians' gay liberation activism and 2) to create machine-readable code (ontologies + RDF) that shape how authoritative, archival-research backed information about people, political movement, and the history of ideas is recorded on the Semantic Web. The [LGLC prosopography](#), which shows connections between people and throws off JSON-LD using schema.org and the cwrc ontology, is in beta.

Project Review

Becky Yatsuknenko and Nina Gary

The Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada Prosopography project (LGLC) is an interactive digital resource based on the *Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada* Volumes 1 and 2 by Don McLeod. It provides information on LGBT history in Canada

from 1964 to 1981 via a searchable biographical database of over 3,000 people who appear within Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada, facilitating research on the people, places, events, and publications that were a fundamental part of Canadian lesbian and gay liberation history. Historians, scholars, government organizations, health organizations, archivists, among others whose work intersects with queer studies all can find use in this type of data collection.

This project argues that documentation of queer history is necessary in an accessible, easily navigated form in order to support current queer activism and rights. Originally built as an excel worksheet, the current LGLC utilizes TEI-XML to encode and represent the bibliographic data model. The project authors are to be commended for publishing their data model, which allows users to browse the controlled vocabularies used when representing individuals and their connections. They also signal the in-progress nature of this work by highlighting their philosophy when developing a prosopographical resource: “We are working to address the “fuzzy” nature of data about people, and avoid either “squeezing... many shades of gray into a limited number of categories” or including so many categories as to make sorting the data in any meaningful way impossible.”

LGLC is positioning itself well to contribute to the growing community of linked open data projects. Their finished project will provide machine-readable data that can be utilized to provide more information on people, events, etc. on the internet through LOD protocols. This would be a very valuable tool that could enhance many databases and provide more accurate information to those interested. Their invitation to users to collaborate signals their commitment to grow the project. There is more accuracy, focus on ethos, thoughtfulness, and meaning established in the data being documented by striving for openness. Given the importance of these individuals to queer Canadian history, the project might also consider how to embrace contributions from non-specialists via a public contributions function where users could add their individuals beyond those recognized by McLeod. This would complement their existing plans to expand their dataset to incorporate the francophone gay liberation in Canada along with more LGBTQ+ women’s activism as oftentimes the main discourse surrounding queer studies is focused on English-speaking gay men.

Though this project is rooted in queer activism, it transcends this framework and offers benefits from its carefully-considered approach. The LGLC project has been used for employee diversity training by Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada’s Gender and Sexual Diversity Employee Network. With their strong base of

research and precise, significant objectives, they are producing a meaningful tool and database with immense potential for providing access to these important figures in Canadian history. This project is an impressive feat and necessary for digital humanities engagement..