Beyond the Historic Facade:
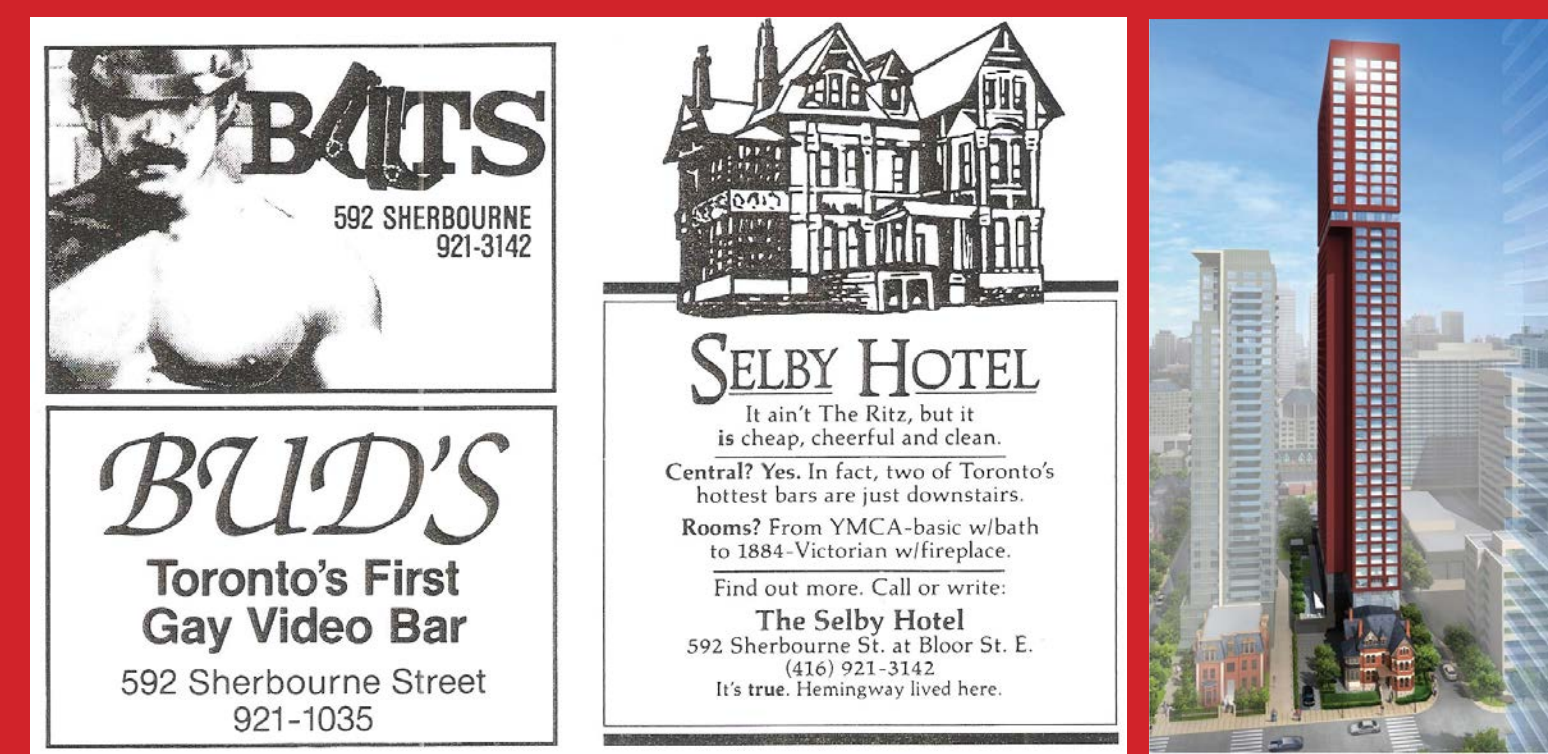
Skyscrapers, Scapegoats, and the Digital Reclamation of Toronto's Queer Streetscapes

The LGLC Project

The Lesbian and Gay Liberation in Canada project reconfigures Donald McLeod's remarkable two-volume work, Lesbian and Gay Liberation In Canada: A Selected Annotated Chronology, 1964-1981 as a TEI-encoded resource and graph database. The prototype database, available at http://lglc.ca consists of event, publication, person, and place records spanning from the founding of the first homophile associations in Canada through to the start of the AIDS crisis. The LGLC project extends McLeod's codex form in order to data mine and represent queer history spatially and temporally. The project not only makes a much-neglected part of Canadian history available for mainstream scholarly use, it also provides a foundation for modeling identity and representing time and space in digital form.

Mapping Rationale

Before and After

Gentrification takes many forms, depending on the city. In Toronto, gentrification is facadist: the hollowed brick skins of Victorian storefronts and homes are preserved in orderly rows, with great glass office buildings or condos sprouting up through their once-solid roofs and porticos. Gentrification, however, does not just shape the streetscape, it shapes the outlook of city dwellers in a way that obliterates urban history, especially the history of marginalized communities.

Gentrification, according to contemporary theories of urban living, is caused not simply by the influx of new people, but when those people come to cities "not to join in or to learn and evolve, but to homogenize," bringing "the values of the gated community and a willingness to trade freedom for security" (Schulman 30). Gentrification "replaces most people's experiences with the perceptions of the privileged and calls that reality" (Schulman 161). In the words of artist Penny Arcade, "There is a gentrification that happens to buildings and neighborhoods and there is a gentrification that happens to ideas." In reflecting on and responding to urban history, there is room for digital humanities projects to resist the flattening of both the meaning of our
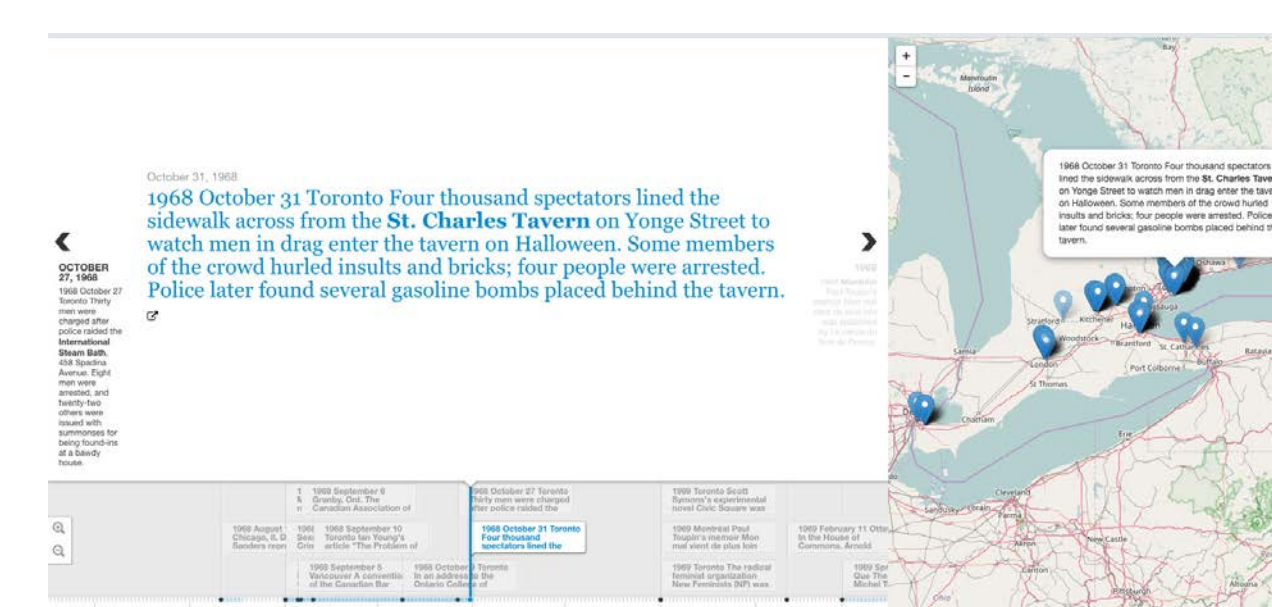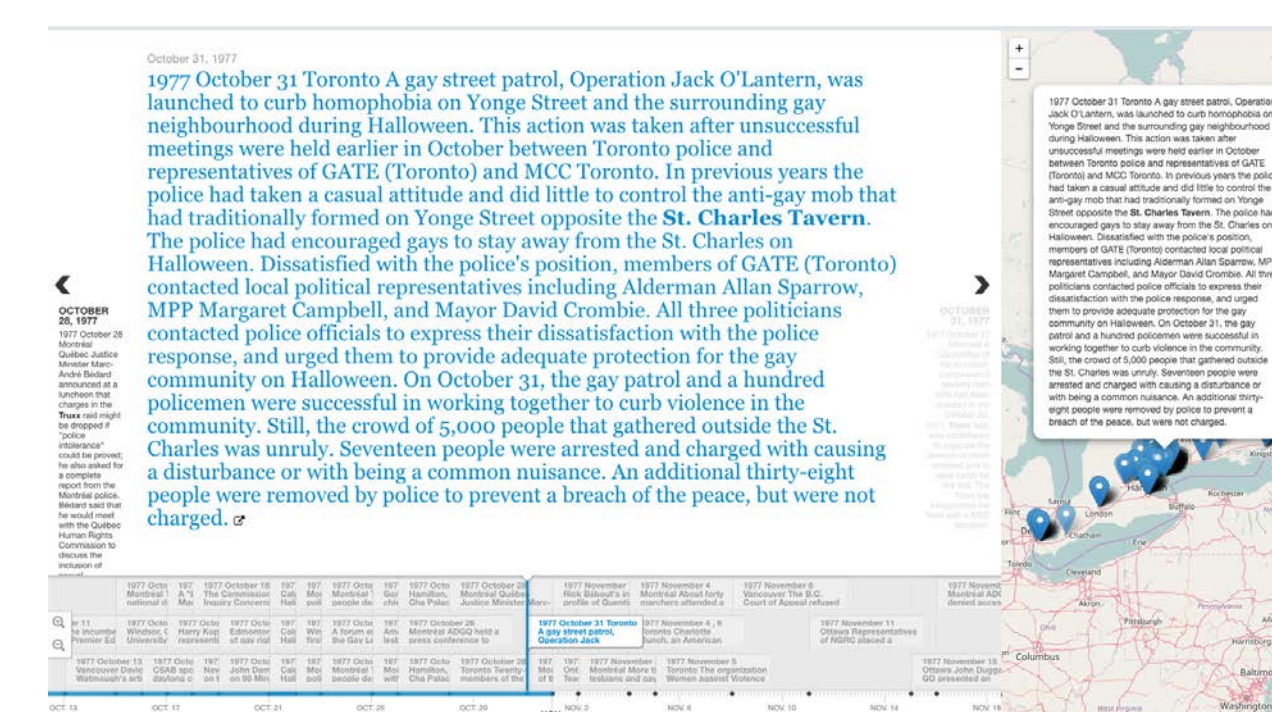

Before and After

projects and their potential to reveal the digital humanities' heterogeneity (Earhart, Sample).

In Toronto, a Canadian city that was at the heart of the gay liberation movement, the building boom of the last decade has left only the facade of much of the diverse local history. What is behind the facade represents a completely different model for a city, one that prioritizes neoliberalism, conservative values, and the homogenization of thought. Buildings that long served as cornerstones of the gay community, home to bars that hosted drag shows, Pride parties, and dance nights, are now the sites of massive condo projects. The developers do not seem keen to acknowledge or commemorate the darker side of that history – violent, homophobic mobs, corrupt police departments, and unsolved murders.

Our goal in publishing this history online, not only in text, but in map form, is to make it accessible to an audience of users both inside and outside the academy. By developing accompanying pedagogical tools to guide users through the map, we hope to engage local residents, as well as the thousands of students at nearby universities and schools, in working to reclaim that lost history, and undoing some of the effects of the gentrification of the mind.

The LGLC Web App and Maps

http://lglc.ca & http://bit.ly/lglc64-74 , http://bit.ly/lglc75-77, http://bit.ly/lglc78-79

The LGLC project attempts to balance sustainability with innovation by using TEI as its base language for representing the 34,000 entities (people, places, events) in the project, and the relationships between them. The LGLC web app at http://lglc.ca is backed by a graph database rather than a relational database, and are bypassing the LAMP stack in favour of an all JavaScript environment. The our database, housed on a virtual machine by our national high performance computing service provider, Compute Canada, expands the modelling potential offered by more traditional relational databases. We welcome discussion of our stack, web app design, and mapping choices, especially where there are paths to improve the app and the map's accessibility.

Works Cited

BKL Architecture. "New development of 592 Sherbourne Street, currently a Clarion Hotel Selby by MOD Developments and Tricon Capital." Urban Toronto. http://urbantoronto.ca/database/projects/selby

Canadian Lesbian & Gay Archives. "Ads for establishments owned by Rick Stenhouse, circa early-1980s." Then & Now: Toronto Nightlife History. http://thenandnowtoronto.com/2014/12/then-now-boots/

Earhart, Amy E. "Digital Humanities Futures: Conflict, Power, and Public Knowledge." Digital Studies / Le champ numérique 6.1 (2016): n. pag. Web.

Moldenhauer, Jearld. "Gay Pride 1972." 1972. http://www.jearldmoldenhauer.com/toronto-gay-pride-week-1972/

Salmon, James. "St. Charles Tavern." Toronto Public Library. 1955. http://torontoist.com/2016/06/historicist-the-st-charles-tavern/

Sample, Mark L. "Difficult Thinking about the Digital Humanities." Samplereality. Web.

Schulman, Sarah. The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination. Los Angeles: U of California P, 2013. Web.

Quadrangle Architects. "484 Yonge, View from the Northeast." Urban Toronto. 2015. http://urbantoronto.ca/news/2015/02/484-yonge-renderings-depict-reinvigorated-heritage-clock-tower

LGLC
LESBIAN AND GAY LIBERATION IN CANADA

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada   Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada   Canadä
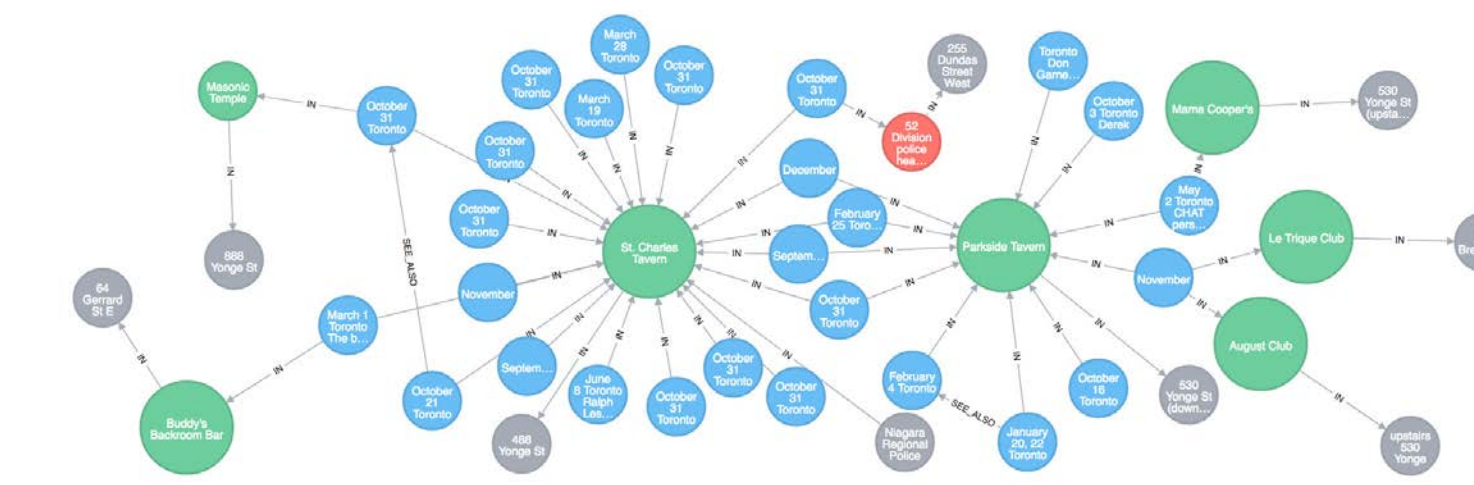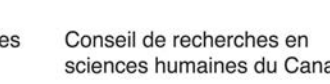
Method

The LGLC maps draw on the final stages of the LGLC workflow: we encode text in TEI, convert it via XSLT into cypher to populate a Neo4j database, and pull the text, latitude, longitude and event URLs from the database to populate the spreadsheets that drive TimeMapper. The project originally turned to TimeMapper as a prototype mapping platform, as a way to offer readers spatially and temporally linked points of access into the LGLC text base, but quickly outgrew the space available in a single TimeMapper map.

"There is a gentrification that happens to buildings and neighborhoods and there is a gentrification that happens to ideas."

Contact

Michelle Schwartz michelle.schwartz@ryerson.ca | Constance Crompton constance.crompton@uottawa.ca