



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the DC Cowboys
Dance Company Records

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by Franklin A. Robinson, Jr.

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview.....	1
Administrative Information	1
Biographical Note.....	2
Scope and Content Note.....	3
Arrangement.....	4
Names and Subject Terms	4
Container Listing.....	5
Series 1: Company Files, 1994-2013, undated.....	5
Series 2: Financial, 1996-2011, undated.....	16
Series 3: Audio-visual Materials, 1994-2012, undated.....	18

Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Creator:	DC Cowboys Dance Company.
Title:	DC Cowboys Dance Company Records
Dates:	1994-2012, undated
Quantity:	7.5 cubic feet, 21 boxes, 3 oversize folders
Abstract:	The records of the DC Cowboys Dance Company, an all-male, gay, non-profit dance company based in Washington, DC. that was active from 1994-2012. They performed nationally and internationally live and on television, "celebrating diversity through dance."
Language:	Collection text is in English.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated by Kevin P. Platte, founder and Artistic and Executive Director of DC Cowboys Dance Company in 2013.

Processing Information

Processed by Franklin A. Robinson, Jr., archives specialist, September 2013; supervised by Vanessa Broussard-Simmons, archivist.

Preferred Citation

DC Cowboys Dance Company Records, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions on Access

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Biographical Note

"History of the DC Cowboys Dance Company - Celebrating diversity through dance"

The DC Cowboys Dance Company, an all-male, gay dance company, entertained audiences around the world from 1994 to 2012. Internationally acclaimed, the DC Cowboys specialized in providing exciting, high-energy, jazz-style, dance entertainment which spanned all musical genres, from contemporary country to club dance party, pop, to classic Broadway numbers for all types of occasions. Shows were customized to the venue—both gay-specific and mainstream events—and featured anywhere from one song to multiple sets of three to four songs each. Combining a little traditional country-western with jazz, musical theater and a masculine sex appeal, the DC Cowboys' high-energy choreography made the company one of the most-sought after gay dance groups in the world.

Founder and Artistic Director Kevin Platte started the dance company in August 1994 after seeing a similar gay, country-western dance group in California. Platte recruited 11 dancers—mostly friends—from a Washington, D.C., gay, country-western bar named Remington's. He approached the best dancers based on watching them two-step and line-dance at the bar. The dancers formed the troupe for the sole purpose of performing at the Atlantic States Gay Rodeo Association's (ASGRA) annual rodeo in Washington, D.C., in September 1994.

Platte thought the performance would be a one-time event. But based on an overwhelming reception, the dancers decided to continue the group. This required weekly rehearsals, the creation of a dance "repertoire" and a larger commitment from the dancers. Of the original 12 members, only six were up to the task. These six original members then had to find more dancers and identify other performance venues. Mainstay venues soon included the Capital Pride Festival every June and the Atlantic Stampede Gay Rodeo event every September.

In September 1995, *Metro Weekly* placed them on the cover of their magazine, giving them greater exposure and more clout. The Cowboys used this coverage as a catalyst to build the brand and identity. All the while, the DC Cowboys remained volunteers and amateurs, performing solely for the love of it. Each dancer maintained a "day job," and the group only rehearsed in the evenings once or twice a week. As the warmer months seemed to be their busiest, the dancers would use the colder months to build up the repertoire and practice. Every year, rehearsals would cease for the months of November and December for the existing dancers. However new recruits that were successful in the annual auditions attended "bootcamp" rehearsals during those months to learn some of the existing repertoire. In January, the existing and new members started rehearsing together as the new season began.

During the early years, the dancers paid for all expenses out of their own pockets, and monthly dues were collected to pay for group expenses. The group would often pay for the opportunity to perform. To supplement these expenses, the group began fundraising through a monthly bar night at different gay nightclubs. Once their reputation grew, venues and events began to pay for the company's entertainment services and patron club members donated funds to support the organization and their mission. These funds allowed the organization to pay for all of their expenses including dancer costuming. In addition, the group sold merchandise which included T-shirts, performance DVDs as well as their sexy DC Cowboys calendars. Three of the more popular calendars featured the dancers without clothes in artistic poses and included the "making of the calendar" DVD.

In 1996, Platte added a charitable element to the organization. He created a mission statement which said the company would provide free entertainment to any HIV/AIDS charitable organization. Over the years, the company also directly raised funds for HIV/AIDS organizations by sharing the profits of their calendar sales. The DC Cowboys raised millions of dollars through performances for national and local non-profit organizations such as: Washington, D.C. AIDS Ride; Washington, D.C. AIDS Walk; Chase Brexton Clinic of Baltimore, Maryland; Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry; Human Rights Campaign; Whitman Walker Clinic

of Washington, D.C.; Food and Friends of Washington, D.C.; Mautner Project; Gay Latino Benefits in Metro D.C.; Harford County AIDS/Cancer Benefit, Maryland; NYFD Benefit for the New York City Fire Department.

In 1996, the company received a grant from the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts, honoring the company for its valued contribution to the Washington, D.C. arts community. The company always maintained a tax-deductible status as a 501c3 non-profit organization with a small board of directors.

During their 18-year tenure, the DC Cowboys provided an outlet for gay artists and performers in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. The company included 85 dancers, eight choreographers and three stage-managers. The company performed at 458 events in five countries. The DC Cowboys' crowd-pleasing, sexy dance style had been described as "Will Rogers Follies meets Bob Fosse." The group famously described themselves on *America's Got Talent* in 2008 as "Think Brokeback meets Broadway," which became a popular line echoed around the world. Their growth and popularity were attributed to their unique and high quality entertainment which was often copied in other cities but never equalled. In addition the dancers were talented, good-looking men who were friendly and approachable to their many fans. Their farewell season tour in 2012 visited all of their favorite performance venues and locations around the world and was dedicated to their fans who were instrumental to their success.

Typical performance venues included Pride Festivals in New York City, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and Charlotte, North Carolina; Headliners on the Gay Rodeo circuit in Washington, D.C., Las Vegas, San Diego, Atlanta, Chicago, Calgary, and Texas; Halloween in New Orleans; Mr. Gay All-American Finals; Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, Washington, D.C., concerts and events; Whitman Walker Volunteer Appreciation at Constitution Hall, Washington, D.C.; PFLAG's Gala Dinner, Washington, D.C.; HRC (Human Rights Campaign) Leadership Dinner cruise aboard the Spirit of Washington, Washington, D.C.; Human Rights Campaign National Dinner, Washington, D.C. - special reception for major donors; Annual Chef's Best Dinner & Auction for Food and Friends, Washington, D.C..

Performance highlights included *America's Got Talent* television show, season 3, NBC, semifinalists (2008); Closing Ceremonies of the Gay Games VII at Wrigley Field in Chicago (2006); RSVP's Caribbean Fantasy gay cruise (2005); Arts grant recipient from the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts (1996); The Sziget Festival in Budapest, Hungary (2009--012); *Dales' Great Getaway* television show, ITV London, England (2012); *The Podge and Rodge* television show, RTE, Dublin, Ireland (2010)."

Source

This history of the DC Cowboys Dance Company was supplied by its founder, Kevin Platte.

Scope and Content Note

The DC Cowboys Dance Company Records contain the business and financial papers of the company, such as memoranda and correspondence; choreography routines; printed materials such as press releases and articles; fundraising materials; photographs; audiovisual materials; and the pre-recorded music used for their various dance routines. The records are arranged chronologically in three series.

Series 1: Company Files, 1994-2013, undated, is arranged chronologically by year and maintains the original order received from the donor. The files cover the entire life of the company and its performances within the United States as well as internationally. The files contain correspondence, contracts, dance routines, fundraising initiatives, event information and advertising materials, travel and lodging arrangements, tourist information, and photographs.

Series 2: Financial, 1996-2011, undated, is arranged chronologically. The files contain receipts, money receipt books, financial statements, balance sheets and those materials related to the financial aspect of running the company.

Series 3: Audiovisual, 1994-2012, undated, contains compact discs (189) of pre-recorded music used for the company's various dance routines. The music was prepared for each booking and most often identified with the title of the booking and the date. Much of the music on these discs is under copyright since they are recordings done by original artists or professional covers of songs that were contemporary with the company's performance during any given year. There are also DVDs (five) detailing the production of various fund raising DC Cowboys calendars and one audio cassette tape.

Arrangement

This collection is divided into three series.

Series 1: Company Files, 1994-2013, undated

Series 2: Financial, 1996-2011, undated

Series 3: Audiovisual, 1994-2012, undated

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Cowboys
- Dance
- Dance companies
- Gay business enterprises
- Gays
- Homosexuality

Types of Materials:

- Articles--1990-2000
- Articles--21st century
- Business records--1990-2000
- Business records--21st century
- Compact discs
- Correspondence--1990-2000
- Correspondence--21st century
- DVDs
- Financial records--1990-2000
- Financial records--21st century
- Photographs--1990-2000
- Photographs--21st century
- Press releases--1990-2000
- Press releases--21st century

Container Listing

Series 1: Company Files, 1994-2013, undated

Box 1, Folder 1	Publicity, 1994
Box 1, Folder 2	Photographs, 1994
Box 1, Folder 3	Correspondence, 1994
Box 1, Folder 4	Repertoire, 1994-2000, undated
Box 1, Folder 5	Correspondence, 1995-1996
Box 1, Folder 6	Budget, 1995
Box 1, Folder 7	Contracts, 1995
Box 1, Folder 8	Notes, 1995
Box 1, Folder 9	Photographs, 1995
Box 1, Folder 10	Publicity, 1995
Box 1, Folder 11	Atlanta Gay Rodeo (Atlanta, Georgia), 1995
Box 1, Folder 12	Miss Gay America (Washington, D.C.), 1995
Box 1, Folder 13	Chicago Gay Rodeo (Chicago, Illinois), 1995
Box 1, Folder 14	Talons Nightclub (Frederick, Maryland), 1995
Box 1, Folder 15	Garage and Other Side Nightclub (Norfolk, Virginia), 1995
Box 1, Folder 16	Private party (Washington, D.C.), 1995
Box 1, Folder 17	Budget, 1996
Box 1, Folder 18	Contracts, 1996
Box 1, Folder 19	Notes, 1996
Box 1, Folder 20	Correspondence, 1996
Box 1, Folder 21	Photographs, 1996
Box 1, Folder 22	Publicity, 1996
Box 1, Folder 23	Rhinestone Review, 1996
Box 1, Folder 24	Rumors Nightclub (Dover, Delaware), 1996
Box 1, Folder 25	Gay Pride (New York, New York), 1996
Box 1, Folder 26	Lassos and Lariats Benefit (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 1996

Box 1, Folder 27	Atlantic Stampede (Washington, D.C.), 1996
Box 1, Folder 28	Rodeo (Del Mar, California), 1996
Box 1, Folder 29	International Gay and Lesbian Aquatics Championships (Washington, D.C.), 1996
Box 2, Folder 1	Notes, 1997
Box 2, Folder 2	Dance sheets, 1997
Box 2, Folder 3	Contracts, 1997
Box 2, Folder 4	Budget, 1997
Box 2, Folder 5	Sets, 1997
Box 2, Folder 6	Correspondence, 1997
Box 2, Folder 7	Photographs, 1997
Box 2, Folder 8	Mid-Atlantic Leather Competition (Washington, D.C.), 1997
Box 2, Folder 9	Gay Men's Chorus (Washington, D.C.), 1997
Box 2, Folder 10	Rodeo (Ramona, California), 1997
Box 2, Folder 11	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 1997
Box 2, Folder 12	Publicity, 1998
Box 2, Folder 13	Photographic contact sheets, black and white, 1998
Box 2, Folder 14	Photographs, 1998
Box 2, Folder 15	Budget, 1998
Box 2, Folder 16	Metro Teen AIDS (Washington, D.C.), 1998
Box 2, Folder 17	Sundance (Fort Lauderdale, Florida), 1998
Box 2, Folder 18	Hoe Down '98 (Baltimore, Maryland), 1998
Box 2, Folder 19	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 1998
Box 2, Folder 20	Atlantic Stampede '98 (Washington, D.C.), 1998
Box 2, Folder 21	Ucles, Jose Alberto, birthday party (Washington, D.C.), 1998
Box 2, Folder 22	AIDS Walk Washington (Washington, D.C.), 1998
Box 2, Folder 23	Photographs, 1998-1999
Box 2, Folder 24	Publicity, 1999
Box 2, Folder 25	Correspondence, 1999
Box 2, Folder 26	Repertoire, 1999

Box 2, Folder 27	AIDS Walk Washington (Washington, D.C.), 1999
Box 2, Folder 28	Second Millenium, Latino Community AIDS Service Organizations (Washington, D.C.), 1999
Box 2, Folder 29	Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry, 1999
Box 2, Folder 30	Splash Dance '99 (San Diego, California), 1999
Box 2, Folder 31	Atlantic Stampede (Montgomery County, Maryland), 1999
Box 2, Folder 32	Reel Affirmations (Washington, D.C.), 1999
Box 2, Folder 33	Big City Hoedown (Toronto, Canada), 1999
Box 2, Folder 34	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 1999
Box 2, Folder 35	Spring Fever (Baltimore, Maryland), 1999
Box 3, Folder 1	DC Cowboys calendar, 1999-2000
Box 21, Folder 1	DC Cowboys calendar (display copy), 1999-2000
Box 3, Folder 2	Notes, 2000
Box 3, Folder 3	Photographs, 2000
Box 3, Folder 4	Photographic contact sheets, 2000
Box 3, Folder 5	Publicity, 2000
Box 3, Folder 6	Events, 2000
Box 3, Folder 7	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 2000
Box 3, Folder 8	Notes, 2001
Box 3, Folder 9	Photographs, 2001
Box 3, Folder 10	Photographic contact sheets and negatives, 2001
Box 3, Folder 11	Publicity, 2001
Box 3, Folder 12	Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry, 2001
Box 3, Folder 13	Texas Gay Rodeo Association (TGRA) (Fort Worth, Texas), 2001
Box 3, Folder 14	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 2001
Box 3, Folder 15	Sundance (Fort Lauderdale, Florida), 2001
Box 3, Folder 16	San Diego Rodeo (San Diego, California), 2001
Box 21, Folder 2	<i>Outlooks</i> (Calgary, Alberta, Canada), 2001-2005
Box 4, Folder 1	Group photograph outtakes, 2002
Box 4, Folder 2	Photographs, 2002

Box 4, Folder 3	Schedule and publicity, 2002
Box 4, Folder 4	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 2002
Box 4, Folder 5	Logo and letterhead, 2002
Box 4, Folder 6	Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry, 2002
Box 4, Folder 7	Atlantic Stampede (Washington, D.C.), 2002
Box 4, Folder 8	San Diego Rodeo (San Diego, California), 2002
Box 14, Folder 1	Initial contact letters, 2002
Box 14, Folder 2	Website, 2002
Box 14, Folder 3	T-shirts, 2002
Box 14, Folder 4	Chef's Best (Washington, D.C.), 2002
Box 14, Folder 5	Trademark information, 2002
Box 14, Folder 6	Sponsorship information, 2002-2003
Box 4, Folder 9	Schedule, 2003
Box 4, Folder 10	Dance sheets, 2003
Box 4, Folder 11	Photographs, 2003
Box 4, Folder 12	Memorandum of Understanding, 2003
Box 4, Folder 13	Publicity, 2003
Box 4, Folder 14	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 2003
Box 4, Folder 15	Atlantic Stampede (Washington, D.C.), 2003
Box 4, Folder 16	Crir (Calgary, Alberta, Canada), 2003
Box 4, Folder 17	San Diego Rodeo (San Diego, California), 2003
Box 4, Folder 18	New York City Hoedown (New York, New York), 2003
Drawer OS, Folder 1	<i>New York Times</i> , (New York, New York), front page, 2003
Box 4, Folder 19	Big Horn Rodeo (Las Vegas, Nevada), 2003
Box 5, Folder 1	Music, 2003-2004
Box 21, Folder 4	<i>GLT Gay and Lesbian Times</i> (San Diego, California), 2003
Box 5, Folder 3	<i>Instinct</i> (California), 2003
Box 21, Folder 5	<i>Las Vegas Bugle</i> (Las Vegas, Nevada), 2003-2004
Box 21, Folder 3	<i>Update</i> (San Diego, California), 2003

Box 5, Folder 2	<i>What's On</i> (Las Vegas, Nevada), 2003
Box 5, Folder 4	Calendar production, 2003-2004
Box 5, Folder 5	Schedule, 2004
Box 5, Folder 6	Photographs, 2004
Box 5, Folder 7	Calendar marketing, 2004
Box 5, Folder 8	"Men of the DC Cowboys", calendar, 2004
Box 5, Folder 9	Publicity, 2004
Box 5, Folder 10	Rhode Island Pride Fest, 2004
Box 5, Folder 11	Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry (NOVAM), 2004
Box 5, Folder 12	Photographs, 2005
Box 5, Folder 13	Publicity, 2005
Box 5, Folder 14	Capital Pride, 2005
Box 5, Folder 15	Rock Creek Park photography shoot, 2005
Box 5, Folder 16	Atlantic Stampede (Washington, D.C.), 2005
Box 5, Folder 17	Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry (NOVAM), 2005
Box 5, Folder 18	AIDS Volunteers of Cincinnati (AVOC) (Cincinnati, Ohio), 2005
Box 5, Folder 19	Schedule, 2005
Box 6, Folder 1	Auditions, 2005
Box 6, Folder 2	Rehearsal notes, 2005
Box 6, Folder 3	Correspondence, 2005
Box 6, Folder 4	Canadian Rockies International Rodeo (Calgary, Alberta, Canada), 2005
Drawer OS, Folder 1	Canadian Rockies International Rodeo (Calgary, Alberta, Canada), posters, 2005
Box 6, Folder 5	Calgary adventure (Calgary, Alberta, Canada), 2005
Box 6, Folder 6	Gay Men's Chorus, holiday concert (Washington, D.C.), 2005
Box 6, Folder 7	Photographs, 2006
Box 6, Folder 8	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 2006
Box 6, Folder 9	Publicity, 2006
Box 7, Folder 1	Correspondence, 2006
Box 7, Folder 2	Las Vegas, Nevada, 2006

Box 7, Folder 3	Big Horn Rodeo guide (Las Vegas, Nevada), 2006
Box 7, Folder 4	Colorado Pride Guide, 2006
Box 7, Folder 5	Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, 2006
Box 7, Folder 6	Atlantic Stampede (Washington, D.C.), 2006
Box 7, Folder 7	Delaware Pride (Rehobeth Beach, Delaware), 2006
Box 7, Folder 8	The Great Big (Washington, D.C.), 2006
Box 7, Folder 9	Log Cabin Republicans (Washington, D.C.), 2006
Box 7, Folder 10	Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry (NOVAM) (Alexandria, Virginia), 2006
Box 7, Folder 11	Country Hoe-Down on the Potomac (Washington, D.C.), 2006
Box 7, Folder 12	Capital Halloween Invitational Tournament (CHIT) (Washington, D.C.), 2006
Box 7, Folder 13	Gay Games VII (Chicago, Illinois), 2006
Box 7, Folder 14	Gay Games VII program (Chicago, Illinois), 2006
Box 7, Folder 15	Baliwick Arts Center (Chicago, Illinois), 2006
Box 7, Folder 16	Baliwick Repertory (Chicago, Illinois), 2006
Box 7, Folder 17	International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (Washington, D.C.), 2006
Box 7, Folder 18	Lassos & Lariats (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 2006
Box 7, Folder 19	Capital Pride Festival (Washington, D.C.), 2006
Box 7, Folder 20	Sacramento Rainbow Festival (Sacramento, California), 2006
Box 7, Folder 21	Fire Island Pines (Fire Island, New York), 2006
Box 7, Folder 22	Costuming ideas, 2006
Box 7, Folder 23	Auditions, 2006
Box 7, Folder 24	Website, 2006
Box 7, Folder 25	Glassless mirrors, 2006
Box 7, Folder 26	Calendar, 2006-2007
Drawer OS, Folder 1	Calendar, oversize, 2006-2007
Box 7, Folder 27	<i>MetroWeekly</i> , 2006
Box 21, Folder 6	Grand Canyon and Redrock Canyon Keystone visitor guides, 2006
Box 7, Folder 28	<i>Gay Canada Guide</i> , 2006
Box 8, Folder 1	Correspondence, 2007

Box 8, Folder 2	Photographs, 2007
Box 8, Folder 3	Caribbean Princess, Caribbean Fantasy, 2007
Box 8, Folder 4	Imen summer show (Maryland), 2007
Box 8, Folder 5	Mediterranean Odyssey, 2007
Box 8, Folder 6	DVD project, 2007
Box 8, Folder 7	New rehearsal space, 2007
Box 8, Folder 8	Sponsors, 2007
Box 8, Folder 9	Hot, 2007
Box 8, Folder 10	Auditions, 2007
Box 8, Folder 11	Auditionees, 2007
Box 21, Folder 7	DC Cowboys calendar (display copy), 2007
Box 8, Folder 12	Affirmations conference, 2007
Box 8, Folder 13	Big Horn Rodeo (Las Vegas, Nevada), 2007
Box 8, Folder 14	Gay Life Expo (Washington, D.C.), 2007
Box 8, Folder 15	Atlantic Stampede (Washington, D.C.), 2007
Box 8, Folder 16	Jacksonville Pride (Jacksonville, Florida), 2007
Box 9, Folder 1	Day to Be Gay (Catskills, New York), 2007
Box 9, Folder 2	Agreement memorandum, 2007
Box 9, Folder 3	Video and photograph promotional project, 2007
Box 9, Folder 4	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 2007
Box 9, Folder 5	Brokeback Moody's Birthday Circuit Party (Washington, D.C.), 2007
Box 9, Folder 6	Fashion Aware Benefit (Washington, D.C.), 2007
Box 9, Folder 7	MCC-DC Hoe-Down Party Benefit (Washington, D.C.), 2007
Box 9, Folder 8	Artist Inn Residence bed and breakfast, photoshoot (Washington, D.C.), 2007
Box 9, Folder 9	Lancaster Pride (Lancaster, Pennsylvania), 2007
Box 9, Folder 10	Out and Equal Workplace Summit (Washington, D.C.), 2007
Box 9, Folder 11	Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry (NOVAM) (Alexandria, Virginia), 2007
Box 9, Folder 12	Youth Pride, 2007
Box 9, Folder 13	Lassos and Lariats (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 2007

Box 9, Folder 14	Cowboys, Indians and Drama Queens (Washington, D.C.), 2007
Box 9, Folder 15	Dances, 2007
Box 9, Folder 16	RSVP Cruise, 2007
Box 9, Folder 17	Mid-Atlantic Leather Weekend (Washington, D.C.), 2007
Box 21, Folder 8	<i>The Washington Post</i> , <i>Weekend</i> section, 2007 March 30
Box 21, Folder 9	<i>OITC Out in the City</i> (Jacksonville, Florida), 2007 August
Box 9, Folder 18	Advertising, 2008
Box 9, Folder 19	Memoranda of Understanding, 2008
Box 9, Folder 20	News articles, 2008
Box 9, Folder 21	Reflections of Life and Hope, Latino benefit (Washington, D.C.), 2008
Box 9, Folder 22	Kansas City Pride Festival (Kansas City, Missouri), 2008
Box 9, Folder 23	Gay Men's Chorus concert (Washington, D.C.), 2008
Box 9, Folder 24	"America's Got Talent" , 2008
Box 9, Folder 25	Delaware Pride Festival (Rehobeth Beach, Delaware), 2008
Box 9, Folder 26	Atlantic Stampede (Montgomery County, Maryland), 2008
Box 9, Folder 27	Town, release party (Washington, D.C.), 2008
Box 9, Folder 28	Northern Virginia AIDS Ministry (NOVAM) (Alexandria, Virginia), 2008
Box 9, Folder 29	Country Hoe-Down on the Potomac (Washington, D.C.), 2008
Box 9, Folder 30	General file, 2008
Box 9, Folder 31	A Country Western Hoe Down, Club 21 (Charlottesville, Virginia), 2008
Box 17, Box 5-6	Photographs, 2008
Box 10, Folder 1	General file, 2009
Box 10, Folder 2	Auditions, 2009
Box 10, Folder 3	DC Metro Dance Awards, 2009
Box 10, Folder 4-6	Photographs, 2009
Box 10, Folder 7	Outlines (Ohio), 2009
Box 10, Folder 8	Calendar, 2009
Box 21, Folder 10	DC Cowboys Wet, calendar (display copy), 2009
Box 10, Folder 9	Denver Pride Fest (Denver, Colorado), 2009

Box 10, Folder 10	IMEN (Darlington, Maryland), 2009
Box 10, Folder 11	Axis Nightclub (Columbus, Ohio), 2009
Box 10, Folder 12	Event programs, 2009
Box 10, Folder 13	Sziget Festival (Budapest, Hungary), 2009
Box 11, Folder 1	Promotional material, 2010
Box 11, Folder 2-3	Photographs, 2010
Box 11, Folder 4	Costuming, 2010
Box 21, Folder 11	Advertising, posters, 2010, undated
Box 11, Folder 5	Masquerade Mischief Purim Party (Washington, D.C.), 2010
Box 11, Folder 6	The Oscar Party (Washington, D.C.), 2010
Box 11, Folder 7	Ireland, 2010
Drawer OS, Folder 3	Alternative Miss Ireland XVI, Olympia Theatre, poster (Dublin, Ireland), 2010
Box 11, Folder 8	Vegas Live benefit (Abingdon, Maryland), 2010
Box 11, Folder 9	Beadel-Clark wedding (Washington, D.C.), 2010
Box 11, Folder 10	New Hope Celebrates Pride Festival (New Hope, Pennsylvania), 2010
Box 11, Folder 11	Utah Pride Festival (Salt Lake City, Utah), 2010
Box 11, Folder 12	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 2010
Box 11, Folder 12	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 2010
Box 11, Folder 13	Brodeo (Washington, D.C.), 2010
Box 11, Folder 14	Philadelphia Independence Day Parade (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 2010
Box 11, Folder 15	Central Pennsylvania Pride Festival (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), 2010
Box 11, Folder 16	Rehobeth Beach Theatre of the Arts (Rehobeth, Delaware), 2010
Box 11, Folder 17	Sziget Festival (Budapest, Hungary), 2010
Box 12, Folder 1	Dance School, 2010-2011
Box 12, Folder 2	DC AIDS Walk (Washington, D.C.), 2010
Drawer OS, Folder 2	Walk for Hope, DC AIDS Walk, poster, (Vankim, Julian, photographer), 2010
Box 12, Folder 3	Raleigh Is Coming Out (Raleigh, North Carolina), 2010
Box 12, Folder 4	World Gay Rodeo finals (Laughlin, Nevada), 2010
Box 12, Folder 5	Photographs, 2011

Box 12, Folder 6	Pride Guide (Washington, D.C.), 2011
Box 12, Folder 7	Capital Pride Festival (Washington, D.C.), 2011
Box 12, Folder 8	IMEN (Darlington, Maryland), 2011
Box 12, Folder 9	Sziget Festival (Budapest, Hungary), 2011
Box 12, Folder 10	DancEthos (Washington, D.C.), 2011
Box 12, Folder 11	Leading Age LGBT Reception (Washington, D.C.), 2011
Box 12, Folder 12	Miss District of Columbia Pagaent (Washington, D.C.), 2011
Box 12, Folder 13	Farewell Tour meeting, 2011
Box 12, Folder 14	Wild Wild Woolly Benefit (Washington, D.C.), 2011
Box 12, Folder 15	Dignity National Convention (Washington, D.C.), 2011
Box 12, Folder 16	Independence Day parade (Washington, D.C.), 2011
Box 12, Folder 17	An Evening with the DC Cowboys (Rehobeth, Delaware), 2011
Box 12, Folder 18	Purim Party (Washington, D.C.), 2011
Box 12, Folder 19	New Hope Celebrates Pride Festival (New Hope, Pennsylvania), 2011
Box 12, Folder 20	Victory Fund's National Champagne Brunch (Washington, D.C.), 2011
Box 12, Folder 21	Out in the Park, Hampton Roads Pride Festival (Norfolk, Virginia), 2011
Box 12, Folder 22	NBC 4, Health and Fitness Expo (Washington, D.C.), 2011
Box 12, Folder 23	Vegas Cabaret Nite, Harford County HIV-AIDS Benefit (Bel-Air, Maryland), 2011
Box 12, Folder 24	Auditions, 2011
Box 13, Folder 1	Website redesign, 2011
Box 13, Folder 2	Possible gigs, 2011
Box 13, Folder 3	Proposed project, 2011
Box 14, Folder 8	Fan mail, Banner, George E. III, 2011-2013, undated
Box 13, Folder 4-5	Photographs, 2012
Box 21, Folder 12	Oversize photographs, contact sheets, 1999-2012, undated
Box 13, Folder 6	Promotional photograph, 2012
Box 13, Folder 7	<i>MetroWeekly</i> , 2012
Box 13, Folder 8	Chattanooga Pride (Chattanooga, Tennessee), 2012
Box 13, Folder 9	Sziget Festival (Budapest, Hungary), 2012

Box 13, Folder 10	Canadian Rockies International Rodeo and Music Festival (Alberta, Canada), 2012
Box 13, Folder 11	Capital Pride (Washington, D.C.), 2012
Box 13, Folder 12	International AIDS Conference (Washington, D.C.), 2012
Box 13, Folder 13	DC AIDS Walk fundraiser (Washington, D.C.), 2012
Box 13, Folder 14	Purim Party (Washington, D.C.), 2012
Box 13, Folder 15	"Dale Winton's Great Getaway" (London, England), 2012
Drawer OS, Folder 1	"Dale's Great Getaway" , theatre plat, 2012
Box 14, Folder 7	<i>MetroWeekly</i> , 2013
Box 14, Folder 9	Bumper sticker, undated
Box 21, Folder 13	DC Cowboys, banner fragment, undated

Series 2: Financial, 1996-2011, undated

Box 14, Folder 10	Financial, 1996
Box 14, Folder 11	Financial, 1997
Box 14, Folder 12	Financial, 1998
Box 14, Folder 13	Money receipts, 1998-2000
Box 14, Folder 14	Financial, 1999
Box 14, Folder 15	Financial, 2000
Box 15, Folder 1	Financial, 2000
Box 15, Folder 2	Financial, 2001
Box 15, Folder 3	Financial, 2002
Box 15, Folder 4	Financial, 2003
Box 15, Folder 5	Financial, 2004
Box 15, Folder 6	Financial, 2005
Box 16, Folder 1	Financial, 2007
Box 16, Folder 2	Financial, 2008
Box 16, Folder 3	Financial, 2009
Box 16, Folder 4	Receipts and deposits, 2009
Box 16, Folder 5	Financial, 2010
Box 16, Folder 6	Paid receipts, 2010
Box 16, Folder 7	General expenses and deposits (rehearsal), 2010
Box 16, Folder 8	Deposit and expenses, Harrisburg Pride, 2010
Box 16, Folder 9	Expenses, Philadelphia, 2010
Box 16, Folder 10	Expenses, Budapest, 2010
Box 16, Folder 11	Receipts, Salt Lake City Pride, 2010
Box 16, Folder 12	Financial, 2011
Box 16, Folder 13	Financial, 2012
Box 16, Folder 14	Money receipt books, 2001-2004
Box 17, Folder 1	Money receipt books, 2003-2005
Box 17, Folder 2	Money receipt book, 2006

Box 17, Folder 3	Money receipt book, 2007
Box 17, Folder 4	Auction fundraiser, 2010-2011
Box 17, Folder 7	Auction cue cards, undated

Series 3: Audio-visual Materials, 1994-2012, undated

Box 18-20	DVDs <i>5 electronic discs (dvd)</i>
Box 18-20	Compact Discs <i>189 electronic discs (cd)</i>
Box 19	Audio cassette <i>1 cassette tape</i>