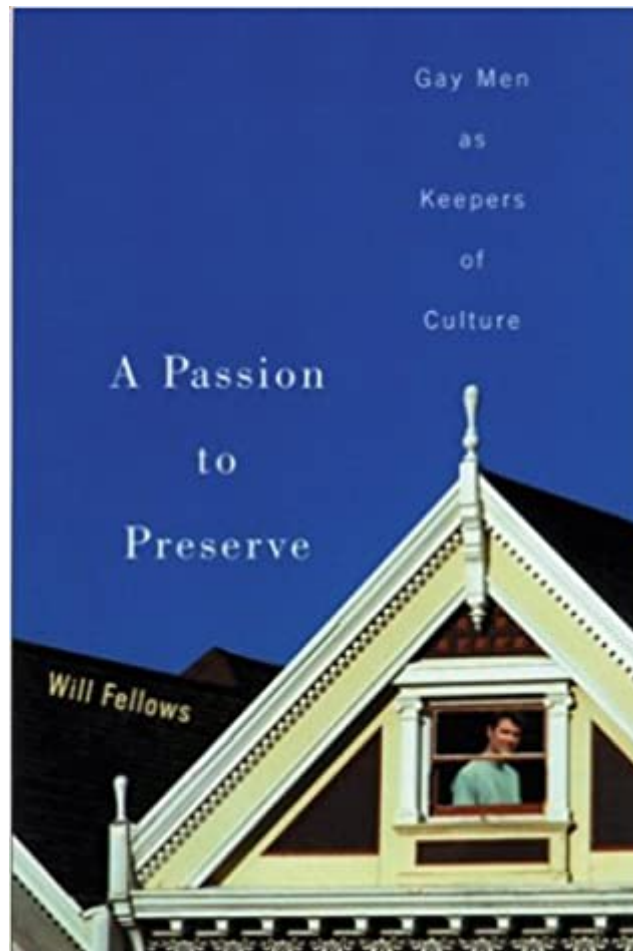




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# A Passion To Preserve: Gay Men As Keepers Of Culture



## Synopsis

From large cities to rural communities, gay men have long been impassioned pioneers as keepers of culture: rescuing and restoring decrepit buildings, revitalizing blighted neighborhoods, saving artifacts and documents of historical significance. *A Passion to Preserve* explores this authentic and complex dimension of gay men's lives by profiling early and contemporary preservationists from throughout the United States, highlighting contributions to the larger culture that gays are exceptionally inclined to make.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Compelling . . . stories and first-person accounts from gay men across the country . . . provide a colorful picture of a landscape that has not really been painted until now."—*The Advocate*; "A concept at once original and yet so obvious it is surprising that no one has attempted it before."—*Library Journal*; "A rich and detailed examination of an important and heretofore neglected aspect of our urban heritage."—*Richard Florida*, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* "Anyone who shares a love of the past will undoubtedly find this book inspirational and moving. Will Fellows has done an excellent job of...recounting the exploits of past 'bachelor uncles' and 'temperamental men' who saved buildings from the wrecking ball of progress and urban renewal."—*Bay Window* "Clearly Will Fellows has hit a nerve with many gay men, and many of them write about their collecting and preserving, from childhood on, often sacrificing friends, livelihoods, careers, and

lovers to do so. As with his previous book, *Farm Boys*, *Fellows* presents the material in people's own voices as much as possible and the best of these essays (and there are many) are wonderfully readable capsule biographies and histories."#151;Darden A. Pyron, author of *Liberace: An American Boy*

"The main strength of the project is the actual oral histories recorded here by the editor. *Fellows* is a wonderful preservationist himself; the book's impressive range of contributors speaks to the care and skill he brings to his work."--David RomÃfÂn, professor of English and American Studies, University of Southern California

We selected this book for our gay book club and we had one of our liveliest discussions about it. Many saw themselves in it and we found his research and observations to be spot on, surprising that there were others who shared the same experiences and provocative. We also explored one member who didn't seem to fit the attributes described in the book (although he too enjoyed the book thoroughly). I'd highly recommend this book (and if you're short on reading time you could skip some of the stories in the middle and move to the conclusions in the end).

Met the author in Providence. His book is an interesting read for me... a long time preservationist. Bought a copy for my massage therapist who is a gay man and he was very pleased and intrigued. Lots of men from all over the country were researched and quoted here. So many wonderful projects described.

I was watching a television preacher who is based in Roseville, California. His sermon was about how gays were destroying civilization and how, for that reason, his congregation should use California's Proposition 8 to deny California's gays equal rights and to make civil laws for everyone conform to the specific dictates of this gentleman's theology. I didn't believe the pastor at the time, but the comment about "destroying civilization" stuck in my mind. So, when I saw this book, I just had to read it to see how far the minister was "off the mark." One of the things that impressed me about this book is the chapter on Savannah, Georgia. The author says on page 80: "The official story in Savannah is that seven ladies--outraged, courageous, and fiercely resolved--joined together to save the 1820 Federal-style house and found the organization. As is typical, the uncommon men who worked with the ladies have been edited out of the story."So, now I can see how a television minister in Roseville, CA, (and others like him) gets the factually-challenged idea that gays are

destroying civilization. It's simply because the contributions of "uncommon men" are often written out of historical accounts, as stated in this book. Therefore, this book goes a long way to fill a huge, educational void. All in all, a very good book, get a copy. You won't be disappointed.

Congratulations to Will Fellows for writing a truly remarkable and highly enjoyable book! His account of his childhood and his attraction to antiques could have passed for my own. This is a subject that deserves the attention. In an age of assimilation, the author's research illuminates the gay and lesbian past and its contributions to the world at large. As the author explains; the irony is that in the process of preserving the historical architectural record, gay men erased their footprints, and like a detective, this collection of essays uncovers their tracks. I highly recommend this book.

Will Fellows is himself a sort of preservationist writer. His first book, *Farm boys*, recovered the childhoods of rural gay men in scholarly-memoir format. This time, he painstakingly identified gay men nationwide who seek to "keep culture" by restoring historically-valuable old buildings. The body of the book consists of the recorded testimonies of 29 individuals (or couples) by region, plus cameos of still others. But this body is not the book's "soul" perhaps. Which is to help clarify "what it means to be gay." "Even more than culture keeping, that's what this book is about," Fellows confirms. Specifically, he scrutinizes the suspect stereotype of gay men as gender-role atypical or nonconformist, let alone effeminate. He finds it may be an accurate image or a "sociotype" after all. That is, an image based in reality. Florists, hair stylists, interior designers? Yes, but also house restorers and antiquarians. And joining women in "fields that revolve around creating, restoring, and preserving beauty, order, and continuity." Gay men flourish in those concerns, sometimes outnumbering women. The image is true, it seems. Fellows usefully clarifies key terms.

"Homosexual" refers to sexual orientation: behavior, self-identification, fantasy and arousal. (And, I would add, emotional spiritual adhesion...) But then "gay" encompasses not only that but gender identity. Which can include gender-atypicality-being "psychologically and perhaps physically androgynous." And also "effeminacy," although this surpasses "a swishy, limp-wristed prissiness. It encompasses "qualities or characteristics generally possessed by girls and women" and may involve not only speaking gesturing walking, but also interests aptitudes values emotions. Such as the passion to conserve, preserve. As Fellows puts it, "Males have great inclination and capacity for creating and building new, but females and gay males possess the greater inclination to re-create, rebuild, restore, preserve." Due to "a decidedly feminine ethos" that values "continuity of identity, maintaining connections, remembering." So this thrust usefully helps balance clarify this contested

issue of gender-role-identity. Stereotypes, Political Correctness, social constructivism, essentialism. Now we can point to this culture-keeping quality of gay males as due to more than-more disposable income plus oppression! So the book serves at least two audiences. Specifically, preservationists and their camp followers. Generally, those interested in gay male identity, gender-role-identity. I could quibble only with the statistics? Does a "sampling error" raise its head here? Gay men into preservation, the sample, does not examine all gay males. So it might be insufficient, unrepresentative for the generalization about gay men? But it does echo prior research finding that childhood gender-atypicality and homosexuality are correlated. And indeed we recall those "special" farm boys, mavericks or outliers before puberty, amateur family genealogists, raisers of fancy poultry, and the rest... I could also wish for more meat with the potatoes? I could wish the interviews had been less storytelling and more conceptual. In Telling Our Stories concretely, we sometimes miss the interesting conceptualities behind it all. I felt yoked to the plowing team (so to speak) of autobiography on the lower field. I wished to ascend to the hilly heights of ideas about preservation, keystone issues in it. Perhaps a separate essay to learn about problems, pitfalls, potentialities, levels of competence, etc. But the reviewer shouldn't condemn a book for not doing what the reviewer personally preferred. All told, Fellows' contribution to the social psychology of sexual-role identity is really valuable. In the glut of print today, what justifies "yet another book"? Well, something truly new on an important issue, or at least not just repeating the known but advancing and clarifying it. As I found here.

This is a very important book for anybody to read regardless of their sexual identity as only gays know how to restore houses, furniture, design, etc. There should be a law prohibiting heterosexuals from doing design work, restoration, decoration as we know too well what horrendous jobs straight folks can do with a house! All the cardinal sins; vinyl windows, etc and gays have to come in and clean up the mess afterwards. Most gays can identify with this book. Too bad there are not more gays doing such positive & wonderful things in this culture. It is shocking how I can identify with most of the guys he interviewed! The book could use some pics; you know queens like pretty pictures. Will Fellows should be on HGTV to tell them a thing or two! He has done his homework! He goes to the top of my class!

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