

“Does Portland Need a Homophile Society?”

Gay Culture and Activism in the Rose City between World War II and Stonewall

In the april 1972 edition of the *Fountain*, Portland's first gay and lesbian newspaper, George Nichols, a local activist, reflected on the recent successful political organizing done among gays and lesbians in Seattle while lamenting the lack of such progress in the Rose City. “Those who are discouraged by the difficulties of the gay movement” in Portland, Nichols began, “will do well to take a lesson from our neighboring Seattle.” Despite its “crippling depression,” he observed, Seattle “has no less than 8 groups and institutions serving the gay community. . . . All of them manage to work together to some extent.” In conclusion, Nichols confessed that he and other activists in Portland had spent “a lot of time trying to figure out why the gay movement isn't functioning better in our city” and called upon readers to bury their excuses and look to Seattle as a model on how to make things happen.¹

Nichols's observations about Seattle and Portland also would have been true as early as 1959, when lesbians and gays in the Puget Sound area, at some public level, had been reaching out, organizing, and pushing for recognition and rights. Those who lived in Portland had remained, for the most part, inactive until about 1970, despite having had critical opportunities in both the 1950s and 1960s to plead more vociferously their case

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The Harbor Club (lower right) on Southwest First Avenue in Portland was one of the few gay bars in the city from the late 1940s, when this photograph was taken, until city officials succeeded in closing it down in 1965. Because of its reputation, soon after it opened the U.S. Navy declared the Harbor Club off limits to sailors.

before a broad public audience. As a result, by the time of New York's Stonewall riot on June 28, 1969 — an event that historians point to as the birth of the modern gay liberation movement nationwide — Seattle gays and lesbians had a considerable head start over those in the Rose City. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that gays and lesbians in Seattle would also realize some of their civil rights at the municipal level at a considerably earlier date than those in Portland did. In September 1973, for example, without much hesitancy, Seattle became the first major American city to ban discrimination against lesbians and gays in both municipal and private employment within the city's boundaries. Meanwhile, the Portland City Council delayed on a far less extensive measure and did not secure an ordinance that protected gays in municipal employment until a year later, in December 1974. Mayor Neil Goldschmidt and Commissioners Connie McCready and Charles Jordon passed the Portland ordinance

over the protests of Commissioners Mildred Schwab and Francis Ivancie, who had thrown up obstacles to the proposal for more than a year. It was not until the fall of 1991, eighteen years after Seattle's ordinance was on the books, that the Portland City Council finally extended protections to lesbians and gays in the city's places of private employment.²

Some historians argue that "modern" — that is, post-1969 — gay rights activism did not suddenly spring forth from the Stonewall uprising but, rather, built on the "homophile movement" that had commenced in 1951. Others stress that the lesbian and gay bar cultures that were forged in America's large cities between the 1930s and 1960s produced a political consciousness that was readily transformed into a broader activism outside formal homophile organizations in the socially heady times of the early 1960s, some years before the Stonewall riot. Still others maintain that the 1950s and 1960s homophile organizations depended on bar patrons for the rank and file of their organizations.³ All three explanations can help us understand not only what happened in Portland and Seattle but also why the history of lesbian and gay rights activism in the two urban centers was so different. Unlike Seattle, Portland had no organized homophile movement in the 1950s and 1960s; and when the gay liberation campaign finally did emerge in the Rose City in 1970, it did not appear to do so from a bar-based culture, as it did in Seattle. In fact, gay activists such as George Nichols denounced the Portland bars as impediments to the formation of a political consciousness among the city's lesbians and gays. Moreover, the relationship between the gay and lesbian bars in Portland and Seattle to those cities' municipal governments and local law enforcement agencies followed somewhat different trajectories. As a result, bar-based resistance of a stiffer nature, and one that was in part related to homophile organizing, emerged in Seattle and not in Portland as early as the 1950s and especially in the mid-1960s.

The reasons for the relative delinquency of Portland's gays and lesbians in organizing and thus achieving civil rights are various and interconnected. They are also difficult to account for fully. Historians understand the challenges of proving why something happened, but it is much more difficult — and some would argue impossible — to explain why something did *not* happen. Rather than attempting the impossible, this essay is instead interested in the considerably more modest task of highlighting Portland's gay and lesbian history between World War II and Stonewall, comparing it to that of Seattle and, to a lesser extent, some other western and West Coast cities, such as Tacoma, Denver, and San Francisco, which, unlike Portland had politicized gay movements in the 1950s and 1960s.

Such a comparison, it is hoped, will help elucidate the circumstances under which pre-Stonewall gay activism might or might not emerge in a particular urban setting.

By the first years of the twentieth century, prototypical gay and lesbian communities had appeared in many of America's larger towns and cities. In the Pacific Northwest, Portland, Seattle, Vancouver, B.C., and even the rather small Boise, Idaho, hosted incipient "gay" communities by the 1910s or, at the very least, possessed within their bounds spaces where those with same-sex sexual interests might meet up with each other.⁴ The socially tumultuous years of World War II built on and helped transform these and other formative gay communities and helped fashion what historians sometimes have viewed as modern gay and lesbian identities. During the war, more than sixteen million young men and women mobilized for the various branches of the armed services. Another like number of civilians made significant moves, often to another part of the country and usually in search of employment in defense industries. In larger numbers than ever before, Americans broke the bonds that traditionally structured and regulated their lives. For many, parental and familial supervision and expectations became things of the past. For others, the surveillance and constraints of small-town life were left behind. Labor shortages demanded that women enter the work force to fill jobs traditionally held by men, and most left behind the circumscribed domestic roles to which society had previously limited them. Finally, cities that hosted war industries, served as embarkation points for military personnel, or were near army and navy bases witnessed incredible growth in their permanent and transient populations as unattached men and women flocked to and through them.

These and other developments during a short and intense period of time helped forge, or at least temper, modern gay identities and communities in America. For the first time in U.S. history, when screening draftees and recruits, the military asked potential servicemen about their sex lives and whether or not they were homosexuals. Historians note that such questioning often led to soul-searching among thousands who had incipient and not well-understood feelings of same-sex desire. For many of those who were excluded from the military because of homosexuality, their "blemished" records provoked them to pursue their lives in locations and in ways far removed from their hometowns. Needless to say, many with same-sex desires made it into the service anyway, where they — as well as others in the military — worked in primarily sex-segregated situa-



Due to Portland's location relative to the Pacific War as well as its port facilities, defense workers and military personnel flooded the city during the 1940s. The fluid social situation that resulted helped vitalize gay and lesbian communities at the time. This photograph of the Pioneer post office and courthouse victory center in 1942 only hints at the magnitude of population growth in the city during those years.

tions. In those circumstances, homosexuals and those not yet fully identified as such discovered others like themselves and in the process learned more about their own feelings, forged lasting friendships with like-minded people, and engaged in sexual relationships. Similar experiences occurred in major cities where large numbers of gay and lesbian service personnel and footloose defense workers passed through and visited or, in the case of defense workers, lived and labored for significant periods of time in largely single-sex environments. It was at this time that some of the earliest exclusively gay and lesbian bars developed and other meeting places emerged, while older sites — where those with same-sex sexual interests may have

been gathering for years — received a new and vigorous lease on life. Historian John D’Emilio summed up the effects that the crucible of World War II had on American gays and lesbians when he observed that it “created something of a nationwide coming out experience.”⁵

In the Pacific Northwest, thousands of people from across the country flocked to Portland and Seattle to take up defense jobs in Henry Kaiser’s shipyards, the Boeing aircraft plant, and other war-related industries. During the early years of the war, 72,000 migrant workers arrived in Portland, and the city’s population increased by 160,000 over the course of the world conflict. Seattle witnessed slightly more growth, while Washington state gained more than a half-million people, most settling near Puget Sound. At their peak, Kaiser’s three Portland-area facilities provided jobs for 94,000 workers, Puget Sound’s shipyards paid wages to 150,000, and Boeing in Seattle alone employed nearly 50,000 at any one time. Women and young single men dominated the workforce. At the beginning of the war, for example, Seattle’s defense industries drew half of their workers from the ranks of men who were under twenty-five years old; and by 1944, women accounted for almost half of Boeing’s employees. In Vancouver, Washington, the site of one Portland-area shipyard, one dormitory furnished single and double rooms to six thousand male defense workers. Through the course of the war, both Seattle and Portland hosted thousands of sailors and other servicemen and women coming into port and leaving for locations in the Pacific. Military bases dotted the Pacific Northwest, with the Fort Lewis–Camp Murray–McChord Field complex near Tacoma constituting the largest.⁶

To serve the recreational demands of itinerant military personnel, semi-permanent defense workers who labored during the day and night shifts, and locals caught up in the excitement of the times, Portland and Seattle theaters, dance halls, restaurants, illicit gambling joints, and other legal and extralegal entertainment establishments operated around the clock. The proliferation of various vices and loose morality disturbed local authorities. In 1942, for example, Portland officials expressed concern over the myriad “taverns which have been getting out of hand,” bootlegging hard liquor and selling alcohol to minors and intoxicated persons. By January 1942, just a few weeks following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Rose City authorities already were worried about the apparent influx of prostitutes from other cities and lamented Portland’s growing reputation as a “wide open town.”⁷

The atmosphere of relative lax morality and social dislocation provided opportunities in Portland and Seattle for lesbian and gay popula-

tions and institutions to proliferate. Likewise, entrance into the armed services allowed many Northwest youths with same-sex longings the opportunity to explore their sexuality and raise their consciousness. One Marine named “Fred,” who was born in Portland in 1923, joined the service in 1940, one of the 372,000 Oregonians and Washingtonians who participated in the military during the war.⁸ He later remembered that prior to enlisting he possessed same-sex desires and, when still in high school, experienced a relatively innocent sexual encounter with a man while attending a downtown Portland burlesque show. Yet, through those years he had no consciousness of himself as a “gay” person, though he did regard himself as “different.” While serving in southern California, however, he became “aware of homosexual activities” both within the service and among the larger civilian population in Los Angeles. With those experiences as part of his background, Fred returned to Portland in 1946 and began acting on his desires and interests, meeting men for brief affairs while still living a somewhat closeted existence. However hesitant he was to embrace fully this new life, it was Fred’s war experience that helped push him in that direction. He began frequenting the few Portland drinking establishments that served gays, including the bar at the Multnomah Hotel, the Cupboard near the Broadway Theater, and — his favorite — a beer parlor on East Broadway near Fifteenth Avenue. While they were not gay bars in the strictest sense, Fred explained, men could surreptitiously pick each other up at these places and gays and lesbians could meet with few hassles from proprietors and other patrons, provided they mind themselves. Fred left Portland for Seattle in 1953 and began visiting similar bars there — the Mocambo Lounge and the Marine Room at the Olympic Hotel.

Fred reported that his wartime experiences helped him realize his long-standing feelings and, beginning in the mid-1940s, gave him the courage to participate in a gay life in Northwest urban centers. Some of the gay meeting places that he frequented had opened during the war, while others traced their antecedents to the years prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. For example, the Rathskeller — a beer parlor, restaurant, and vaudeville house — opened in downtown Portland in 1936. Only a block or so from the main bus terminal, which had served as a location for a thriving male sex trade since the 1920s, the Rathskeller provided the entry point to the city for many servicemen in the 1940s. During the war, those men away from home transformed the Rathskeller into a pickup place. Also in downtown Portland was the Music Hall nightclub, founded in 1937. In the 1940s, the Music Hall sponsored female and male impersonation acts, as its reputation among gays and lesbians grew during the later years of the decade.



By the 1940s, the bar at the Multnomah Hotel, pictured here in the 1920s, provided space where gay men could surreptitiously meet each other for socializing and dates.

By the late 1940s, lesbians also hung out at the nearby Buick Café. One police report filed in early 1949 claimed in shocked tones: “These women attempt their pick-up at the Music Hall and in case of failure before the hall closes, they then retire to the Buick Café . . . and look for other prospects. It is further reported that these women were recently ousted from San Francisco for their actions and are . . . confirmed Lesbians.” A recently discharged serviceman opened the Harbor Club tavern on Southwest First Avenue in January 1946, but the military soon placed it out of bounds to personnel because it attracted gays and lesbians. Merchant seamen during those years flocked to Portland’s Dinty Moore tavern. At the same time, a secluded gay beach developed at the eastern edge of Hayden Island on the Columbia River in Portland.⁹

In Seattle, the Marine Room, which Fred visited for the first time in 1953, developed the reputation during the war as “the place to pick up an officer, while enlisted men were to be found everywhere.” According to one

Seattle informant, “it was nothing to go down and pick up a sailor.” Robert Carter, an African American, later recalled striking up relationships with black merchant seamen at Seattle’s Double Header, which he first visited in 1946. As early as the 1930s that establishment had maintained a meeting place for gays in the basement and a straight bar on the upper level. When the “GIs returned home” after the war, another informant remembered, “the gays moved upstairs.” Yet another Seattle gay man recalled that the South End Steam Baths served as a place of convergence for same-sex interested men during the war. Within a few years, according to one news report, the military declared it off limits to servicemen, along with three bars in the area.¹⁰ Certainly, then — and to paraphrase John D’Emilio — World War II provided a coming-out experience for gays and lesbians in the Pacific Northwest, especially Portland and Seattle.

Just as many lesbians and gays came out of the closet and developed new or revitalized older meeting places, however, society reacted with ferocity, and an anti-homosexual campaign swept the nation. In the late 1940s and 1950s, Americans attempted to restore traditional gender roles, standards of morality, and beliefs about family, all of which had been seriously shaken by World War II and, immediately prior to that, the dislocations of the Great Depression. The post-war culture that flowered during those years espoused marriage, monogamy, reproduction, nuclear families, single-family dwellings, child and baby care, bread-winning fathers, and domestic mothers.¹¹ Not surprisingly, homosexuality emerged in the public consciousness as the greatest menace to all of these.

At the same time, communism emerged as what many considered the most potent danger to the American state, and homosexuality and communism became linked in the American consciousness. Through the 1950s and into the early 1960s, governmental officials at the local and state levels and in Washington, D.C., targeted gays and lesbians as threats to the nation’s security, morale, and morals. In actions referred to as “pervert purges,” local, state, and federal governments forced thousands from the civil service, teaching jobs, and the military during the McCarthy era.¹² In the early 1950s, Portland newspapers ran headlines that relayed to local readers the worries of federal authorities: “5000 Homosexuals Pose D.C. Problem,” “Sexual Perverts Said Easy Mark for Foreign Spies,” and “Perverts Listed for Federal Quiz.” The stories that ran under these tabloid-like titles agonized:

Russia maintains a list of homosexuals in U.S. government jobs who might be blackmailed into spying.

There are 3750 homosexuals in government jobs in the nation's capital. . . .

There is no doubt in our minds that homosexuals are security risks. . . .

The lack of emotional stability which is found in most sex perverts, and the weakness of their moral fiber, makes them susceptible to the blandishments of foreign espionage agents. . . .

Nazi and Communist agents have attempted to obtain information from federal employees "by threatening to expose their abnormal sex activities."¹³

And so on.

On a broader social level, the negative reactions to homosexuals during the 1950s and early 1960s took the form of a sex-crime panic, a phenomenon that demonstrates how the broader public viewed homosexuals as threats to heterosexual families and children. Although this frenzy considered "sexual deviants" of all stripes — men who molested young girls, for example — it also focused on adult males who had relations with boys. Salacious, frightening, and careless news headlines and stories lumped homosexuals together with these offenders, helping promote among the general public the belief that out of all "sexual deviants" gays and lesbians posed the greatest threat to the family.¹⁴

In Portland, the anti-homosexual campaign began as part of Mayor Dorothy McCullough Lee's crusade to clean up vice that had lingered in the city since the war. Crudely nicknamed "No Sin Lee" for her tenaciousness in shutting down local Chinese gambling establishments, Mayor Lee also went on the offensive against prostitutes, bootleggers, and municipal graft during her years in office, from 1949 to 1953. Gay and lesbian bars also felt the effects of her policies. The mayor assaulted the Music Hall, the establishment that may have been the most notorious in 1940s Portland for catering to a gay and lesbian clientele. On February 9, 1949, Sybil Plumlee and Edna Trout, two police with the Women's Protective Division, went undercover to investigate the Music Hall, hoping to apprehend lesbians who might approach them and solicit attentions. When their contacts did not materialize — after spending an hour and a half at the bar and consuming "three 7-Up and orange drinks appiece [*sic*] @ 30¢ plus 30¢ in tips" — they decided they had to return "several times until we were better known before we would be accosted." During their next two visits, they "observed several women, who were . . . what we were looking for," as well as "several male characters." Although they never succeeded in making the contacts they had hoped for, the officers did file a report about the female impersonators' "suggestive and disgusting" floorshows emceed by a

woman dressed as a man. They described one large man who impersonated Mae West and sang "Come Up and See Me Sometime" and another "obese impersonator" named "Tiny" who dressed and performed as a six-year-old girl. The undercover agents also complained bitterly of these and other performers' lewd jokes and behavior.¹⁵ The troop of performers had apparently arrived in Portland from San Francisco in about 1947.

The fare the troop dished up in their floor shows, as well as official concern over lesbians and gay males making contacts at the Music Hall (and in the alley behind the bar), proved too much for Lee to stomach. ". . . we are about fed up on it," she announced at a city council meeting, "and we don't want them back." During council proceedings to determine whether the city should provide a favorable or unfavorable recommendation on the Music Hall's alcohol license to the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC), issues such as whether or not the Music Hall actually served appropriate meals with its spirits did emerge in debates; but Lee was consumed with the issue of the floor shows and the establishment's homosexual clientele. She continually returned to the subject, quizzing the license applicant on what he had done about them. Working with the OLCC, the mayor succeeded in closing down the impersonation acts and, according to one newspaper account, eliminated its "lewd customers" from the Music Hall. In its coverage of the mayor and her campaign, the *Oregon Journal* included a front-page photograph of five of the establishment's impersonators.¹⁶

In the 1950s and 1960s, Portland police vigorously entrapped gay men in parks and public restrooms, but it was the homosexual sex-crime panic that hit the city with particular ferocity.¹⁷ It became an issue during Mayor Lee's candidacy for a second term. Using exaggerated language, Lew Wallace, a prospective candidate for mayor, publicly accused Lee in early 1952 of "neglecting her duty in failing to afford protection to little children from vicious sex criminals now roaming the streets of Portland." In an attempt to fend off such criticism, Lee immediately took up the cause as her own. On February 26, she created a committee comprised of police, judges, social workers, and parent-teacher representatives to study the problem. Three days later, the committee released a five-point plan to combat "sex deviates" at the local level.¹⁸

While such activities brought the issue to the forefront of Portland's municipal politics, general social forces made the frightening specifics of sex crimes something for the media to focus on throughout the 1950s and into the early 1960s. Editorial after editorial and article after article on the subject appeared during these years. In 1954, for example, during the holi-

day season, when family and children receive special attention, the *Oregon Journal* submitted to readers a six-day series of articles on “sex deviates.” In 1960, again in December, the *Journal* sponsored another “sex deviates” series, this time for nine days. In both series of articles, topics included surveys of sex crimes in Portland, the problem of child molestation, the laxness of Oregon sex-crime laws, the apparent inability of the psychiatric profession to help the so-called perverts, and the need for the public to become involved in suppressing the problem.¹⁹

While Portland’s media, officials, and concerned citizens responded to sex crimes in their various guises, the perceived threat of male homosexuals troubled them most. In the *Oregon Journal*’s 1960 series, for example, the inaugural story — and the only story to be illustrated — contained a photograph of a boy shooting baskets at an area park.

The caption reads: “AVOID STRANGERS; don’t play alone, is good advice for both boys and girls. Suspicious characters should be reported.” A darkly clad male figure lurks in the background. In 1952, when the mayor’s sex-deviates committee had contemplated various measures for the protection of children, it had considered showing in area schools a film entitled *Danger-Stranger*, produced by the Los Angeles Police Department. It only



Portland Mayor Dorothy McCullough Lee (1948–1952) maintained a sincere desire to restore what she believed were proper moral values to a city shaken by the social dislocation of World War II. Among other things, Mayor Lee sponsored the first anti-gay campaign at the municipal level when she attempted to close down some of the gay and lesbian bars that had been thriving in the city since the 1940s.

depicted males, portraying them as sinister characters with mustaches, talking out of the sides of their mouths.²⁰

At various times during the 1950s and 1960s, the Portland media also published shocking stories of adult males molesting youths and boys. One particularly gruesome example comes from the pages of the May 8, 1956, *Oregon Journal*, which carried an account of a twenty-eight-year-old Klamath Falls millworker who had sex with a fourteen-year-old boy and then, because he feared the youth would tell, strangled him. In graphic detail, the paper reported that the accused “had trouble snuffing out” the life of the boy, whom authorities had discovered with a “belt around his neck and a cloth stuffed in his mouth.”²¹ Also in 1956, Portland law enforcement officials arrested six men for sexual relations with eight area youths. The *Oregon Journal* announced “Homosexual Ring Nipped,” while the *Oregonian* trumpeted, “Deviate Ring Broken.” One article reminded readers that “this is the fourth homosexual ring broken up by the juvenile division . . . [in] three years.”²² In invoking the phrase “homosexual ring,” the local media both divulged and at the same time no doubt augmented society’s deep-seated worries.

Such worries, made all the more menacing because of homosexuality’s apparent furtive pervasiveness, reached new levels in a 1963 case. In October, local police made arrests similar to those carried out in 1956 and claimed to have uncovered a “state-wide homosexual ring.” One of the accused had recently been employed in Portland’s public schools. Frightening because they were also so titillating, the articles appeared for weeks. On October 26, the *Oregonian* printed an editorial entitled “They Prey On Boys.” The editorial insisted:

There are much more sinister aspects to this case. Of major concern to the public . . . should be the evidence that older, confirmed homosexuals are recruiting innocent young boys into their groups and persuading them to adopt perverted sex habits which can leave permanent mental scars and destroy their chances for normal, healthy adulthood. As one police officer, the father of several boys, bitterly remarked: “They’d be doing those kids a favor if they had just taken them out and shot them.”²³

Even as late as 1963, this hyperbole did not even thinly veil the broader societal fears evident in the post-World War II era: the fragility of traditional morality and family and the apparent belief that heterosexuality itself was contingent.

While local and national attention in the 1950s fixated on and associated male homosexuals with child molestation, lesbians did not escape the



In early 1950, Mayor Dorothy McCullough Lee launched an attack against the Music Hall, a popular gay and lesbian nightclub. She especially recoiled against the establishment's floor show, which featured these drag performers that the Oregon Journal displayed prominently on page one of its March 17 edition.

derision of society. Fern Gardiner, who attended Portland's Franklin High School during what she referred to as "the constipated 'fifties," recalled hearing "whispers about a few girls who were supposed to be lesbians; they wore ducktails, leather jackets, and tattoos, and were generally feared and pitied." The pulp fiction published at the time depicted lesbianism "in its

most degrading, dehumanizing light,” which Gardner concludes was partly responsible for promoting this image.²⁴

The 1950s, then, was a dark decade for America’s lesbians and gays, including those in the Pacific Northwest, especially when juxtaposed against the relative openness and ferment of the World War II period. One gay man in Seattle described those years as “the roughest time I think ever” in that city.²⁵ The McCarthy-era persecution of homosexuals solicited two general responses from gays and lesbians. Many chose invisibility and isolation, while others gained greater self-awareness and courage and organized in opposition to the campaign against them.²⁶ The first homosexual rights movement in the United States, generally known as the “homophile movement,” evolved from this second response. It emerged first on the West Coast, and three organizations were pioneers. The Mattachine Society arose in Los Angeles in 1951 and moved to San Francisco in 1953. In 1952, ONE, Inc. grew out of the Mattachine as a primarily educational organization and began publishing *ONE*, America’s first gay journal, in 1953. Finally, two lesbians who had met while living in Seattle moved to San Francisco where they founded the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) in 1955 and published its own journal, *The Ladder*.

By 1956, the politically more active Mattachine and the DOB had become, in the minds of many, conservative in their ends. Considering the atmosphere of the time, however, it is not surprising that they focused on ameliorating the public image of the homosexual by calling on gays and lesbians not to rock the boat; to show themselves as being not any different from heterosexuals; and to conform, integrate, and accommodate in dress, manners, and all public areas of their lives. As one Mattachine chapter newsletter reported during the era, “Just how the Mattachine Society can help rehabilitate the flamboyant type of homosexual . . . [is] a major problem.”²⁷

Outside of Los Angeles and San Francisco, chapters of DOB and the Mattachine sprang up in New York, Chicago, Rhode Island, Boston, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Washington, D.C. Only the Mattachine established a chapter in the American West outside of California, and that was in Denver, where the chapter came into being not because of the main headquarters in San Francisco but because of the efforts of local men and women. The activists began organizing in 1956, held their first membership meeting in January 1957, and soon made application to the national association. The Denver chapter, though small, was active. In September 1959, for instance, it hosted the sixth annual convention of the national organization with “New Frontiers in Acceptance of the Homophile” as the theme.

one incorporated

A non-profit corporation formed to publish a magazine dealing primarily with homosexuality from the scientific, historical and critical point of view . . . books, magazines, pamphlets . . . to sponsor educational programs, lectures and concerts for the aid and benefit of social variants, and to promote among the general public an interest, knowledge and understanding of the problems of variation . . . to sponsor research and promote the integration into society of such persons whose behavior and inclinations vary from current moral and social standards.



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ONE, Inc., a homophile organization founded in Los Angeles in 1952, began publishing ONE magazine, America's first gay journal, a year later. In the 1950s, gays and lesbians in Portland could subscribe to the journal or purchase it at a local magazine store on Southwest Washington Street, where it was kept behind the counter.

In making this selection, the Denver *Mattachine* purposely connected the topic of homosexuality to the local context as well as to that year's "Rush to the Rockies" centennial celebration in which Colorado commemorated its pre-statehood foundations. The Denver *Mattachine* sent conference notices to fifteen area newspapers, four news services, and five television and seventeen radio stations. Several made announcements, ran articles, and provided some coverage of the conference. Representatives of the DOB served on a conference panel and, most strikingly, the majority leader in Colorado's House of Representatives addressed the conferees on the issue of civil liberties.²⁸

While Denver gays succeeded in formalizing a homophile organization and movement during these years and integrated it into a certain regional consciousness, their counterparts in the Rose City were considerably more circumspect. Portlanders did have access, however limited, to *ONE* magazine and the *Mattachine* Society's *Review*. Rich's Cigar Store and Pipe Shop on Southwest Washington Street, for example, sold both periodicals but kept them sequestered behind the counter rather than displayed in broad view.²⁹ A person had to know of the magazines' existence and gather the considerable courage it took to request them. The times called for such secrecy, as Marc Thorsen well understood. Thorsen, who permanently settled in Portland in 1946, made contact with the *Mattachine* Society in the early 1950s and began distributing copies of its magazine in Portland to anyone who might be interested. When the theatrical production and the film *Tea and Sympathy* was performed in the city in the 1950s — a play by Robert Anderson that portrays a schoolboy attempting to prove his heterosexual masculinity in response to accusations of effeminacy and homosexuality — he attended showings of both. He "thought that was a rather good opportunity to go and hand out leaflets to advertise the *Mattachine Review*" to those who appeared sensitive to the issue. "I stood outside also," Thorsen recalled, "and someone I thought might be interested . . . I would approach and tell them that the magazine was so and so and give a bit of history of their objective." All the while Thorsen employed the utmost discretion to avoid suspicion by the police. When "handing out literature," he explained, "I was very cautious. I wore the mask."³⁰

The need to wear "the mask" — which in the parlance of the time meant to pass as a heterosexual — and to keep magazines such as *ONE* and the *Mattachine Review* under wraps help explain the reticence of Portland gays and lesbians to form their own homophile organization at that troubled time in American history. It took considerable daring during the 1950s to

do so. Even the Denver *Mattachine* acted with considerable deliberation. For example, its officers always used pseudonyms and — ironically, given that the group wished to gain public acceptance of lesbians and gays — sometimes offered its members advice on how to maintain their secrecy in a social setting. At a gathering on March 14, 1958, for instance, the conversation revolved about the issue of what to do when a homosexual overhears people talking in hushed tones that they suspect he is gay. “The proper thing to do,” those at the meeting generally agreed, “was to act as though nothing had been heard, dismissing the entire incident as far as possible.”³¹

Gays and lesbians in Seattle, like those in Portland, also had access to homophile publications in the 1950s. Robert Milligan’s *Rainbow’s End Mail Order House*, for example, became an agent for *ONE* in 1955. Other locals maintained direct subscriptions and shared them with friends. Janet Black, for instance, wrote to *ONE, Inc.*, in 1958 thanking the magazine for what it was “doing for the ‘Gay’ people. Your magazine has certainly been a moral [*sic*] builder to me. And also to my friends who read my copies.” Four years later, Black still subscribed to *ONE*, which gave her “many hours of enjoyment and good reading.”³²

Gays in the Puget Sound region did more than distribute, subscribe to, and read movement literature. Unlike gays in Portland, they also formalized homophile organizations. John Eccles of Tacoma led the first attempt. On November 27, 1959, he wrote the *Mattachine Society* in San Francisco declaring his “intention of doing as much as I can to stir an interest in your work . . . so that you will find it perhaps easier to organize a chapter here in the Tacoma area. . . .” Donald Lucas, the secretary-general of the *Mattachine* in San Francisco who had at one time lived in Tacoma, responded to Eccles on December 11. He intended to travel to the Puget Sound area in the spring to assist Eccles, he wrote, and gave some practical suggestions for laying the groundwork. Intermittent correspondence between the two continued over the next few months, during which time Eccles sponsored area discussions and wrote letters about the *Mattachine* to Tacoma and Seattle newspapers. He also reached out to the sympathetic president of the Washington State Psychological Association (WSPA), whose annual meeting was scheduled to take place in Tacoma on May 6 and 7, 1960. Eccles convinced the WSPA to include a panel on homosexuality with himself as one of the presenters and made arrangements for Lucas to speak about the *Mattachine Society* during the convention. Despite these auspicious beginnings, Eccles’s discussion groups, held during

the winter of 1959–1960, attracted only a handful of participants. The last official meeting occurred on February 9, 1960, and Eccles recorded that it “fizzled.” The few attendees decided to continue their sessions, but only on a social basis. Soon after the WSPA convention, Eccles left Tacoma to become vice chairman of the Los Angeles Mattachine, a position he held until resigning in 1963.³³

When Don Lucas wrote to John Eccles on March 29, 1960, he expressed his organization’s deep desire “to see an official unit of the Mattachine” form in the Seattle-Tacoma area.³⁴ That did not happen; but in making the attempt in 1959 a few gays in the Puget Sound region took a significant step, and the San Francisco Mattachine did not give up hope. In 1965, Hal Call, president of that organization, sent to gay men of the area (whose names he had obtained from *ONE*’s subscription list) announcements for a meeting at the Roosevelt Hotel in Seattle. On December 3, twenty-five men gathered at the Roosevelt in what has been described as “a missionary effort of the Mattachine Society to form a nucleus of a similar organization in Seattle.” Some of those whom Call had reached out to began their own meetings in March of the following year. They formalized the group on January 22, 1967, not as a Mattachine chapter but as the Association for Social Knowledge of the United States (ASK/US). Seattle had its first homophile organization. Unlike the Denver Mattachine that had emerged almost a decade earlier, Seattle’s ASK/US did not spring solely from local sources but was encouraged by the San Francisco Mattachine and especially the Vancouver, B.C., chapter of ASK. Bar-scene politics in mid-1960s Seattle, however, had also helped create an atmosphere that was receptive to outsiders (a point elaborated on below). In any case, at its second meeting, ASK/US changed its name to the indigenously created Dorian Society. The Dorian Society incorporated in 1969 with over one hundred members and by early 1970 had established its own newsletter, the *Dorian Columns*; opened a counseling center for sexual minorities; and supplied speakers for panels at local churches, schools, and television spots.³⁵

In one of its boldest efforts, the Dorians made the cover of the November 1967 *Seattle* magazine with a story about a member, Peter Wichern. His cover photograph showed him looking like any other businessman, sitting in a swanky office chair wearing everyday business attire, a briefcase strategically placed nearby. The caption reads: “This is Peter Wichern. He is a local businessman. He is a homosexual.” The story ran several pages, and the issue sold out on newsstands.³⁶

The homophile movement had matured in Seattle, and the Dorians boldly took the lead in organizing some of the area’s gays. Through educa-

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Seattle's Dorian Society, the first sustained gay and lesbian political organization in the Pacific Northwest, began its activist career in 1967. Among other things, that year it was able to get Seattle Monthly to feature Dorian member Peter Wichern on its cover and carry a story about him in its pages. The Dorians, like other homophile organizations of the era, hoped to publicly win approval for gays and lesbians by demonstrating that they were no different from anyone else.

tional outreach, its newsletter, the 1967 *Seattle* story, and the Seattle Counseling Service for Sexual Minorities, the Dorians helped open the closet doors for Seattle's homosexual population and raised gay and lesbian consciousness in the late 1960s. Between 1969 and 1971, however, the Dorian Society foundered as the modern gay liberation movement — more radical than the homophiles — burst into existence in the aftermath of the riot that erupted at the Stonewall Inn in New York's Greenwich Village in 1969. Across the nation, including Seattle, chapters of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) were formed, with an approach to politics that differed considerably from that of their homophile predecessors. In Seattle, the GLF openly criticized the Dorian Society, and some Dorians chafed under what they perceived to be the Society's relative conservatism.

By the summer of 1971 the Dorian Society had been reduced to only a few members, and the remaining mavericks voted to change the name of the group to the Seattle Gay Alliance (SGA). A year later, SGA founder Tim Mayhew openly criticized the homophile movement as appealing “mainly to older men and women.” Its “philosophy,” he charged, “was to appease the prejudices of the public by catering to them as much as possible, showing others that we are good according to *their* values, and ‘discreetely’ [*sic*] keeping a low profile.” Such had rendered gays, in Mayhew's estimation, as “useless as the ‘Uncle Tom’ behavior of fearful and apologetic blacks.” The GLF, however, appealed “to the young and hip.” Its “philosophy,” Mayhew explained, “. . . is to teach both gay people and the public not only that gay people are good, but that gayness itself is good, and that our only problem is the oppression of an ignorant heterosexual society. . . .” Mayhew described the Seattle Gay Alliance as an “in-between” organization, “radical in goals but moderate in methods — usually.”³⁷ Regardless of which direction the gay movement took in Seattle after 1969, the Dorian Society had successfully politicized many gays and lesbians in the region prior to Stonewall. In doing so, it laid the foundation for the demand for and acquisition of civil rights in the 1970s, catapulted Seattle into the role of pacesetter in the region, and left a lasting imprint on the shores of Puget Sound.

The Dorian Society also attempted to shake up the political complacency among gays in Portland. In early December 1967, the Second Western Regional Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations met in Seattle to help launch the Dorians, and some two dozen representatives from about half that many West Coast homophile organizations attended. The delegates raised the issue of “initiating activity” in Portland, and a representative from San Francisco's Tavern Guild suggested holding a

meeting in Portland and placing posters in the city's gay bars. Others proposed approaching personal friends and working through liberal religious organizations in the Rose City. Soon after the Seattle meeting adjourned, the Dorian Society announced the Northwest Homophile Conference for February 24, 1968, to be held at the Park Haviland Hotel in downtown Portland. The theme would be "Does Portland Need a Homophile Society?" "This meeting is being sponsored," a publicity flyer declared, ". . . with the purpose of organizing a homophile society in Portland, the only major city on the West Coast which still lacks one." The meeting apparently fell through, however, as the Dorians later asked the Park Haviland to refund their room deposits.³⁸

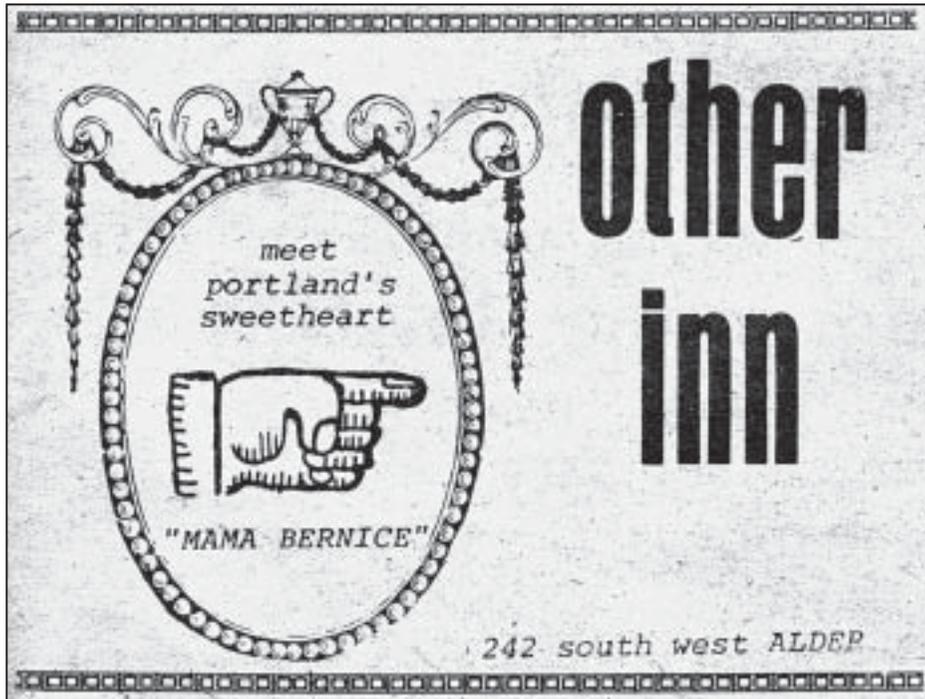
Some seventeen years after the homophile movement emerged in California with, among other things, the intention of combating the McCarthy-era stereotypes of homosexuals, Portland still had no gay rights organization or movement of its own. Not in the 1950s or the 1960s did gays and lesbians in the Rose City take up an effort to help shape public perceptions of homosexuals or to achieve solidarity as Denver, Tacoma, and Seattle had done. The failure of Portland's lesbians and gays to respond to the Dorian Society's call for activism in 1968 was not the first time they had passed up an opportunity to begin organizing. They might have acted in the 1950s — as gays and lesbians did in Denver and Tacoma — when at least some Portlanders knew about the homophile movement's activities in California. In the early 1960s, Portland's lesbians and gays might also have developed a sustained form of activism through the city's bar culture. And when presented with the opportunity to do so during a municipally launched attack against gay bars in 1964, their activism, while unprecedented, remained limited.

In a masterful study of a mid-twentieth-century lesbian community, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis argue that in Buffalo, New York, where no homophile organization existed in the 1950s, lesbian bars forged a pre-Stonewall political consciousness among their patrons. This awareness — not the homophiles — laid the foundation for the gay liberation movement that later occurred there.³⁹ Other scholars have noted the central role that bars played in not just forging a gay political consciousness but also in propelling gays into action before the Stonewall riot. In many cases they began resisting police entrapment, published literature for bar patrons explaining what to do if arrested, raised funds for those incarcerated, organized gay tavern guilds and community centers, brought lawsuits against local law enforcement agencies, and directly com-

plained to their city councils about police harassment. Historian Nan Alamilla Boyd argues that the potent brand of gay activism that grew up in San Francisco by 1965 evolved out of bar culture and came about in direct response to vigorous forms of police intimidation and harassment. Already by the mid-1960s, gays and lesbians in San Francisco had secured significant advances in their right to meet in public places unmolested by the police. As Boyd and other historians note, such advances led to San Francisco's ascendance as the gay capital of America before Stonewall but also explain why the city did not spark the radical gay liberation movement and why gays in New York City, who in 1969 did not enjoy the rights of those in San Francisco, did. Historian Martin Meeker points out — in contrast to Kennedy, Davis, and Boyd — that gay and lesbian political organizing in bars prior to Stonewall was something that the homophiles actually had a hand in.⁴⁰ Complementing and contrasting San Francisco's experience are the histories of gay and lesbian bar activism in Portland and Seattle during the same time.

Although Portland Mayor Dorothy McCullough Lee succeeded in closing down the Music Hall's catering to gays and lesbians in 1950, several other bars — among them the Harbor Club, Milwaukee Tavern, Dahl & Penne Tavern, Riptide, Derek's Tavern, Half Moon Tavern, and Other Inn — each existed for varying periods of time during the 1950s and 1960s. The prejudices of the era contributed to the importance of these bars to lesbians and gays, not just in Portland but also elsewhere in the nation. At the time, they were the most prominent and accessible social public spaces for lesbians and gays to meet. An article that appeared in the August 31, 1972, *Oregon Journal* noted how important bars were for gays: "it is your main point of contact with others of the gay community — and one of the few places where you can 'be yourself' without fear. . . . IN THE DIM of the cocktail lounge, romances . . . blossom. In the glare of daylight, those same romances ostensibly must vanish."⁴¹ Bars did not serve as a haven for all, of course, and many during the McCarthy era were driven to isolation and invisibility. A representative of the Dorian Society explained to a *Seattle Times* reporter in 1969 that "the vast majority of Seattle homosexuals do not frequent the gay bars and taverns because to do so would endanger anonymity." Alluding to the political nature of bar culture, the reporter wrote that bars provided "a symbol for their freedom" for those gays who frequented them.⁴²

It might seem counterintuitive that gay bars would exist at all during an era of the sex-crime panic, McCarthy-era purges, and increased police entrapment of gay males. And there were certainly risks to those who went



By the early 1970s, in the wake of New York City's Stonewall riot, an event that historians point to as the beginning of the modern gay rights movement, the Portland gay community became more open. At that time, newspapers such as the Fountain, which carried this 1972 advertisement for the popular Other Inn, made it considerably easier for gays and lesbians to learn of local hot spots.

to them. In cities across the country, the police raided bars and arrested their clientele on various charges. Patrons saw their names published in local newspapers for such crimes as congregating with “dissolute” persons, for dancing with same-sex partners or holding hands, and for engaging in other activities deemed illegal at the time. State liquor control commissions or municipalities denied license renewals to gay bars, causing them to shut down. It was these and other forms of police intimidation that compelled San Francisco’s gays and lesbians to rebel in the late 1950s and early 1960s and that led to the Stonewall riot in New York City in 1969.

In the 1950s, the police harassed gays at the bars in Seattle, too. The November 1958 edition of *ONE* warned: “Police intimidation reportedly running heavy in gay and half-gay bars in Seattle. Customers being asked nightly for identification and warned about nature of place. . . .”⁴³ Such treatment led the owners of one Seattle bar to resist by bringing a lawsuit against the city in 1958. The persecution of bar owners and their gay cus-

tomers did decline from the 1950s into the mid-1960s, but less because of the lawsuit's success than because bar owners paid police bribes — up to several hundred dollars a month — to be left alone.⁴⁴ The peaceful atmosphere that was purchased through such pressure no doubt made it possible for public officials in the mid-1960s to declare, from their perspective anyway, that “Seattle has become known nationally as being tolerant toward homosexuals” and that there had been an apparent increase in the homosexual population in the city.⁴⁵ In the end, however, the situation could not be tolerated. In September 1966, the police warned that Seattle’s homosexuals were “out of hand,” gave notice that “we’re not going to let this city get like San Francisco,” and launched a new attack on the bars. This time, defenders of the bars gained courage and rallied, convincing the city council that “homosexuals were less of a problem concentrated in one area than scattered” throughout the city and that gays needed an “appropriate means of social outlet,” which the bars provided.⁴⁶ The municipality and the bars struck an accord wherein the city would renew the licenses, the bars would comply with “lighting requirements,” and “the operators [would] control the conduct of patrons.” Amid this controversy in 1966 and 1967, the mainstream press helped gay bar owners publicly expose and bring about an end to the payoff system.⁴⁷ It was during this difficult period that gays in Seattle favorably responded to the Mattachine Society’s attempts to organize, which strongly suggests a connection among Seattle’s bar culture, the mid-1960s atmosphere of increased police harassment, and that city’s initial gay political activism.

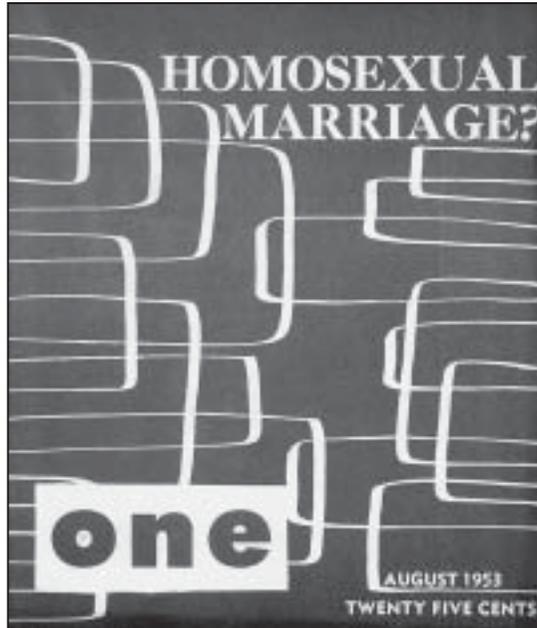
In Portland, the situation was both similar to and different from Seattle’s. After Mayor Lee’s crackdown in 1950, Portland law enforcement officials seem not to have “raided” local gay bars. This does not mean, however, that bars and their customers were left completely alone. Over the years, police made individual arrests for moral infractions and a few sex acts and occasionally influenced the OLCC to suspend licenses when bars permitted dancing and countenanced “lewd” behavior.⁴⁸ Portland police, however, had exercised what they called a “hands-off” policy, believing it was “better,” in their words, “to have deviates concentrated in a few places, where they could be watched.”⁴⁹ Commissioner Stanley Earl, for example, remembered that when he had wanted to shut down the Harbor Club in the late 1950s the Police Department had conferred with him on the side and “asked that [the bar] be allowed to stay open for this reason; that they [homosexuals] were there and they weren’t scattered and if this place were closed, they would scatter to various places, which would compound the problem actually.” In addition to this informal policy,

Mayor Lee's vice and graft crusades in the early 1950s ended the system whereby illegal and questionable entertainment establishments paid police to leave them alone. As a result, Portland's few bars and their patrons were not mired in quite the desperate situation as were those in San Francisco or even Seattle.⁵⁰

In 1964, the situation abruptly, though temporarily, changed when Mayor Terry Schrunk and the city council launched the first concerted attack against gay and lesbian bars since Lee's campaign in 1950. In part, the crusade grew out of the sensational 1963 "statewide homosexual ring" story that broke in the autumn of that year and continued to make headlines into early 1964. Personal property that the Portland police appropriated when making arrests in connection with that affair included, according to reports, "hundreds of magazines of the homosexual type, including so-called sex magazines." At the time, Schrunk spoke to reporters in shocked dismay when he learned that, in investigators' minds anyway, "young men involved in . . . homosexual activity, when questioned, admitted that the magazines described were used as triggering devices to encourage homosexual acts." "This report," the mayor added, "should be called to the attention of the public as a case in point illustrating the perverted activities many of our smut magazines arouse and thus cause a cancer in our community far more dangerous than we can imagine." Schrunk determined to prevent the spread of that "cancer" in 1964 by launching his Committee for Decent Literature and Films, which sought to eliminate so-called immoral publications from the city. The committee stepped up its activities in the fall of 1964, at the very time that the city went after gay bars as its second response to the presence of a "homosexual ring."⁵¹

In what might be viewed as an attempt by city officials to prepare for a showdown with gay bars later that year, in the summer of 1964 police officers had spoken with *Oregon Journal* columnist Doug Baker about their perception that the number of homosexuals — whom Baker referred to as the "Unmentionables" — had grown and that the number of gay and lesbian bars had recently increased in Portland from three to eight or ten. Baker told police that a local businessman by chance had recently contacted him demanding that the mayor had better take "some decisive action to curb the activities of the Unmentionables" or he and some of his colleagues would "take vigilante action of their own." Baker himself complained that Portland homosexuals "are growing stronger each week, both in numbers and in brazenness with which they flaunt their abnormality." By the end of the year, police had declared that Portland was "fast becoming a small San Francisco" and Mayor Schrunk grumbled that the reason

A hot-button issue today, the topic of gay marriage was already being considered in the 1950s — although principally within the limited gay press — as demonstrated with this August 1953 cover of ONE magazine. Although at the municipal level Portland would grant civil rights to gays and lesbians from the 1970s to the 1990s at a considerably slower pace than other West Coast cities, including Seattle, in March 2004 Multnomah County took the controversial step of offering marriage licenses to lesbians and gays.



was because homosexuals had been run out of that town due to crack-downs there and had come to Portland instead.⁵²

Apparently, the refugees from San Francisco — a city where gays and lesbians experienced considerable official harassment in 1964 — found the relatively relaxed atmosphere of Portland more inviting, but Schrank and the city council determined to roll back the red carpet, and not only through the Committee for Decent Literature and Films. In a series of protracted meetings in late November and early December 1964, the mayor and the city council scrutinized the records of Portland's gay bars and the gay culture that those establishments fostered, looking for a reason to shut them down. In their deliberations, the city fathers (they were all men) relied heavily on police reports. The police explained that lesbians at the Model Inn, for example, "caress, kiss and fondle each other in public." At the Harbor Club, they claimed, both women and men converged at one o'clock in the morning, "packing it, with standing room only. From then on, all activities, such as males openly kissing each other, fondling each other, with no attempt to cover these activities." At Mama Bernice's recent Halloween party, the police observed, "most of the persons who came in costume were male[s] dressed as female[s]." At the Milwaukie Tavern, lesbians "dress like men [and] act like men." At The Tavern, officers related that "males pair up, sitting around and conversing and in a sly

manner, will caress and fondle each other.” One patrolman testified that when he went undercover at The Tavern, he had “received a couple pats on the behind.”⁵³ Not surprisingly, the mayor and commissioners recommended that the OLCC deny alcohol licenses to six establishments that are “known taverns with heavy homosexual patronage.”⁵⁴

The council’s actions related specifically to the 1963 “homosexual ring” and the associated decency-in-literature campaign. Mayor Schrunk had harped on these subjects on the first day of the bar hearings, even though they had no relevance to the subject at hand, as one of the bar owner’s attorneys had pointed out. The mayor had made his position clear: “I consider when the policemen follow a ring of adult homosexuals that were enticing high school and grade school youngster into this act, that this is something that should arouse public indignation. I don’t appreciate some of the filth that is being peddled to lead the youngsters, some of the magazines published by the homosexuals.”⁵⁵

Especially significant to council members was the belief, abetted by the local police and recent events in San Francisco, that homosexuals and their meeting places had multiplied in the city.⁵⁶ As Commissioner Mark Grayson complained, “this Council is trying to go on record as being opposed to this many outlets.”⁵⁷ But officials also expressed the old fear that if they closed the bars the customers would simply scatter and the “problem” would continue. Grayson also grumbled: “I can see where a closure — these people are not going to disappear. They are going to other taverns.”⁵⁸ In the past, the city had grudgingly allowed a “couple” of bars to exist in order to make it easier to monitor homosexual activity. With more bars to police, Commissioner William Bowes worried about an increased burden on local taxpayers. “There has been a great number of man hours from the personnel of this Bureau” to police each “establishment,” one officer reported.⁵⁹ All of this was music to Commissioner Stanley Earl’s ears. The other council members and the police were finally singing the same tune he had chanted back in the 1950s, when he alone had cried out for the closure of the Harbor Club. “I am highly flattered,” he said, “the fact that five years later the [police] agreed with me, the way I felt five years ago.”⁶⁰ When the mayor and council voted against the bars in late 1964, their actions, as reported by one news columnist who covered the story, “represented an abrupt change in the city’s own policy. One or two bars catering particularly to homosexuals have been allowed to operate in Portland for years without objection by the council.”⁶¹

The bars under scrutiny did not take the city's decision lying down. They hired their own attorneys, including local lawyers James Damis and W.F. Whitely, who argued that shutting the bars because of the type of customers they catered to violated the recent Civil Rights Act, which protected people who assembled in public accommodations.⁶² The council nevertheless voted to recommend against the bars and passed the problem on to the OLCC. When the attorneys appealed their case directly to that agency, the OLCC found that the bars had not violated any law and that the city wanted them closed because of the nature of their patrons. The liquor licenses were renewed.⁶³

Early in 1965, Mayor Schunk wrote to Oregon Governor Mark Hatfield urging him to “personally review this problem [the renewal of licenses] with members of your Oregon Liquor Control Commission.”⁶⁴ The appeal apparently fell on deaf ears. At about the same time, the city council discovered that it had the authority to rescind the Harbor Club's food license, making it impossible for that bar to serve the food necessary to fulfill the requirements of its Class A liquor license. The Harbor Club closed. With that, the commissioners believed that “we've done everything we can do about it” and determined that the city and its police would not move against the bars in all-out assault again.⁶⁵ By January 1972, the *Fountain* could report that “police and political harassment has not occurred for years” in Portland. Only a few months before, the same newspaper had claimed: “The Portland Police are not known to the local homophile community as pigs or persecutors, but rather as a necessary force in our society to protect all the citizens of our city.”⁶⁶ The municipality's lack of action against gay bars and their patrons in the late 1960s and early 1970s also may have reflected the growing tolerance among Portland's citizens through this period. In 1972, the Center for Sociological Research at Portland State University surveyed city residents to determine how they felt about gay issues. Almost 85 percent judged that gay bars should not have their licenses revoked.⁶⁷

The air of openness, however, also apparently had helped suffocate political organizing in the city. There appeared to be no need after 1964 for Portland bars to remain active, for example, by forming a tavern guild — as San Francisco activists had done in 1962 — to present a unified front against municipal policies and actions. Because police did not constantly harass bar patrons, there was little immediate incentive to protest. In the opinion of some, the experience of Portland's bar scene in the 1950s and 1960s also would impede organizing during the post-Stonewall era of gay liberation. In 1973, Lanny Swerdlow, who hosted KBOO radio's pioneering

“Homophile Half-Hour,” interviewed representatives of Portland’s Second Foundation, a gay organization founded in February 1971, about a year and a half after the Stonewall riots. Carol Brefford, the Second Foundation’s secretary, compared her experiences in the Rose City to those she had in California. “We weren’t harassed up here [in Portland],” she remarked, “we were kind of pushed aside and not so much acknowledged.” Roy Bouse, president of the Second Foundation, had been out of the closet in Portland since the early 1950s. He concluded that in Portland there was “not a big hassle with the bars. . . . It’s just been a situation where they have tacitly allowed us to exist. . . .” Because there had been “little open antagonism toward gays,” Bouse added, “it is hard to get the backing of the gays. . . . They’ve never been hassled, so it is hard to explain to these people that there is a problem.”⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, when political organizing among both gay men and lesbians in Portland truly began in 1970, it did so in fits and starts. “Everything,” one activist declared in the spring of 1970, “has gotten off to a ragged and slow start.”⁶⁹

In this study of gay and lesbian politics and political organizing in Portland before Stonewall, it is clear that neither a homophile movement nor a sustained bar activist culture emerged in the Rose City as it did in other western and West Coast urban areas such as Denver, San Francisco, and even nearby Seattle. This was the case even though, like those cities, Portland provided a home to gays and lesbians and had a formative gay and lesbian culture prior to World War II. The war and its transformative effects boosted the openly homosexual population in Portland, helped forge a modern consciousness among them, and brought into existence some high-profile gay and lesbian establishments, such as the Music Hall. Soon after the curtain closed on the war and the nation tried to return to normalcy, a darkness rapidly descended on the gay scene in the Rose City. The city council went on the attack against the most flamboyant gay establishments in 1950, newspapers clued residents into national McCarthy-era worries about homosexuals, local police entrapped gay men in sexual transgressions, and the sex-crime panic grabbed headlines. A similar atmosphere in San Francisco, Denver, and Seattle provoked early gay organizing. In Portland, it did not.

It is difficult to know why such a different scenario occurred in Portland. The Rose City may have lacked charismatic leaders, such as those who began organizing the Mattachine, ONE, and the Daughters of Bilitis and their few affiliates in cities such as San Francisco, Seattle, Tacoma, and Denver. A more likely answer might be found in the post-1950, post-Dor-

othy McCullough Lee era of Portland history. As other historians have shown, official harassment of gay bars — bars whose culture was often nurtured by the homophile organizations of the 1950s and 1960s — played the key role in fomenting pre-Stonewall political consciousness among gays and lesbians. In pre-Stonewall Portland, police allowed a few gay and lesbian bars to exist through the 1950s and 1960s, even when some members of the city council protested, and police were prohibited from demanding payoffs from bar owners (something ironically attributable to Mayor Lee).

These conditions likely account for the lack of Portland's pre-Stonewall gay political activism in the city. Gays and lesbians in the Rose City benefited by having their bars tolerated, and the police believed they benefited by being able to keep a watchful eye on homosexuals. The situation was different in San Francisco and Seattle, where the frequent attacks on bars and their homosexual patrons in the 1950s and 1960s led, in some measure, to gay and lesbian political consciousness and resistance and encouraged membership in homophile organizations. Although the reason for Portland's lack of a sustained bar-based activist culture and homophile movement in the 1950s and 1960s is somewhat unclear, the result is considerably more apparent. After Stonewall, gays and lesbians in Portland would respond sluggishly to calls for political activism and, therefore, the city would take significantly longer than Seattle to grant civil rights to homosexuals.

Notes

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1. *Portland Fountain*, April 1972, 15.

2. *Advocate*, October 10, 1973, 1, 17; *Oregonian*, December 19, 1974, A1, 29; newspaper clippings in "Seattle Subject File," ONE Institute and Archives, Los Angeles. See also Gary L. Atkins, *Gay Seattle: Stories of Exile and Belonging* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003). There has been little scholarship on Portland's modern gay rights movement. This article is an attempt to initiate such work.

3. See in particular John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D.

Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: A History of a Lesbian Community* (1993; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1994); Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Martin Meeker, "Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10, no. 1 (January 2001): 78–116.

4. See Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Boag, foreword, in *The Boys of Boise: Furor, Vice, and Folly in an American City*, by John Gerassi (1966; reprint, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001); Boag, "Peeping Toms' and Tearooms in 1920s Boise: A Case Study of the Emergence and Suppression of Gay Male Community," *Northwest Gay and Lesbian Historian* 1:3 (Summer 1996); Atkins,

Gay Seattle, 13–52; Don Paulson with Roger Simpson, *An Evening at the Garden of Allah: A Gay Cabaret in Seattle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1–28. On the formation of gay and lesbian communities outside the Pacific Northwest, see Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather*; Boyd, *Wide Open Town*; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994).

5. D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 24. See also D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 23–31; Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Plume, 1990); Bérubé, “Marching to a Different Drummer: Lesbian and Gay GIs in World War II” in *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: Meridian, 1990), 383–94; John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence, Men’s Lives and Gay Identities: A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), 135–57; Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (1991; reprint, New York: Penguin, 1992), 118–25. Some historians have started to make the case that World War II did not present as big a break with the gay and lesbian past as this scholarship would suggest. See Boyd, *Wide Open Town*.

6. E. Kimbark MacColl, *The Growth of a City: Power and Politics in Portland, Oregon, 1915–1950* (Portland, Ore.: Georgian Press, 1979), 555, 575; Carlos A. Schwantes, “The Pacific Northwest in World War II,” in *The Pacific Northwest in World War II*, ed. Schwantes (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower Press, 1986), 5, 7, 8; Carlos A. Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History*, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 413, 415; Richard C. Berner, *Seattle Transformed: World War II to Cold War* (Seattle: Charles Press, 1999); James R. Warren, *The War Years: A Chronicle of Washington State in World War II* (Seattle: History Ink and University of Washington Press, 2000).

7. Schwantes, “Pacific Northwest in World War II,” 10–11; *Oregon Journal*, July 28, 1942; *Oregonian*, January 10, 1942; Portland City Club, *Bulletin* 28:42 (February 20, 1948): 133.

8. Fred (pseudonym), interview by author, Portland, Ore., June 6, 2002. The interviewee wished not to have his real name associated with the information he provided. Figures on those who served in the armed forces during World War II are from Gordon B. Dodds, *The American Northwest: A History of Oregon and Washington* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Forum Press, 1986), 262.

9. *Oregonian*, February 10, 1928; “City Club of Portland Report on Homosexuality in Portland,” *City Club of Portland Bulletin*, July 8, 1994, 25; “Police Say California Dev” (partial

title), December 4, 1964, clipping in “Homosexuals” newspaper clipping file, Oregon Historical Society Research Library, Portland, Ore. (hereafter OHS Research Library); Auditor, Council Documents, Item no. 1117, March 16, 1950 (quoted), Item no. 797, December 3, 1964, Item no. 4649, August 28, 1947, Item no. 4631, December 3, 1964, in City of Portland, Stanley Parr Archives and Records Center, Portland, Ore. (hereafter SPARC); “Fred,” interview by author.

10. “Fred” interview; “Caution Extinct Bars, Available Sailors: All Part of Yesteryear’s Gay Life,” *Dorian Columns*, September 1969; Robert L. Carter interview, Alice B. Theatre Collection, Box 1, Folder: “Carter.” Acc. no. 4199, University of Washington Manuscripts, Special Collection, and Archives, Seattle (hereafter UW Archives); *Seattle Lights*, June 24–July 7, 1983, 13; John Wilson, “Tolerant Reputation: Seattle Homosexual Problem Reported To Be ‘Out of Hand,’” *Seattle Times*, September 21, 1966. For a comparative context, consider John D’Emilio’s “Gay Politics, Gay Community: San Francisco’s Experience,” in idem, *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 74–95, which presents a survey of San Francisco during World War II and its impact on lesbian and gay history there.

11. See John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999); Richard R. Lingeman, *Don’t You Know There’s a War On? The American Home Front, 1941–1945* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1970); William M. Tuttle, Jr., “Daddy’s Gone to War”: *The Second World War in the Lives of America’s Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Glen H. Elder, *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Elaine Tyler May, *Homebound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988; reprint, New York: BasicBooks, 1999).

12. John D’Emilio, “The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America,” in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, ed. Kathy Peiss and Christina Simmons with Robert A. Padgug (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 226–40; D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 40–53; Allan Bérubé and John D’Emilio, “The Military and Lesbians during the McCarthy Years,” *Signs* 9:4 (Summer 1989): 759–75; Randolph William Baxter, “Eradicating This Menace’: Homophobia and Anticommunism in Congress, 1947–1954 (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Irvine, 1999); David K. Johnson, “‘Homosexual Citizens’: Washington’s Gay Community Confronts the Civil Service,” *Washington History* 6:2 (1994–1995): 44–66, 93–6; Stacy Baukman, “‘Nothing Else Matters but Sex’: Cold War Narratives of

Deviance and the Search for Lesbian Teachers in Florida, 1959–1963,” *Feminist Studies* 27:3 (2001): 553–75; James A. Schnur, “Closet Crusaders: The Johns Committee and Homophobia, 1956–1965,” in *Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South*, ed. John Howard (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 132–63.

13. “Homosexuals” newspaper clipping file, OHS Research Library.

14. George Chauncey, Jr., “The Postwar Sex Crime Panic,” in *True Stories from the American Past*, ed. William Graebner (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 167–78; Estelle B. Freedman, “‘Uncontrolled Desires’: The Response to the Sexual Psychopath, 1920–1960,” in Peiss and Simmons, eds., *Passion and Power*, 199–225.

15. Auditor, Council Documents, Item no. 1117, March 16, 1950, SPARC. See also Paul C. Pitzer, “Dorothy McCullough Lee: The Successes and Failures of ‘Dottie-Do-Good,’” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 91 (Spring 1990): 5–42.

16. Auditor, Council Minutes, Item no. 1117, March 16, 1950, SPARC; *Oregon Journal*, March 17, 1950. In 1953, President Eisenhower appointed Lee to the Federal Parole Board; three years later, he assigned her to the Subversive Activities Control Board. When she served as its chair between and 1957 and 1962, she fought for more resources to battle against the American Communist Party. See *Willamette Week*, November 3–9, 1981; *Oregonian*, February 20, 1981; Pitzer, “Dorothy McCullough Lee,” 31–3.

17. The sex crime panic had fallout throughout the Northwest. See, for example, Gerassi, *Boys of Boise*.

18. *Oregonian*, February 25, 26, 27, 29, 1952.

19. *Oregon Journal*, December 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 1954, December 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 1960. A variety of editorials and articles from the 1950s and early 1960s that appeared in Portland newspapers and related to the sex-crime panic are in the “Sex” newspaper clipping file, OHS Research Library.

20. *Oregon Journal*, December 11, 1960; *Oregonian*, February 26, 29, 1952.

21. *Oregon Journal*, May 8, 1956.

22. *Oregon Journal*, January 1, 1956; *Oregonian*, January 20, 1956.

23. *Oregonian*, October 25, 26, 1963.

24. Fern Gardiner, “Portland Lesbians: Where are You?” *Portland Northwest Gay Review*, June 1977, special insert, p. 12.

25. Carter interview.

26. D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 57–58; Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 190.

27. *Denver Mattachine Newsletter*, January 1958, 2. The standard treatment of the rise of homophile organizations is D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*; *Denver Mattachine Newsletter*, January 1958, 2 (quoted). Meeker, “Behind the Mask,” explores some of the more radical activities that the homophile movement, specifically the

Mattachine Society, engaged in behind its somewhat more conservative public activities.

28. *Denver Mattachine Newsletter*, July 1957, 2; April 1959, 8; June 1959, 8; September 1959, 7; October 1959, 3, 5, 7, 11–14.

29. Item regarding Rich’s Cigar Store and Pipe Shop in Oregon Folder, Regional Business Correspondence, ONE Institute and Archives; “A Walking Tour of Downtown Portland: A Century of Gay, Lesbian and Trans-gender Historic Sites” (Portland, Ore.: Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest, 1999), 8.

30. “Marc Thorsen and the beginning of Invert Liberation: A Personal Story,” 16, 17 (quoted), 18. During the 1950s and 1960s, Hollywood helped shape public representations of homosexuals; and, like the news media, it did so in a negative way. Period films portrayed homosexuals as lamentable creatures who were doomed forever and might depict homosexuality, as in the case of *Tea and Sympathy*, as fleeting when the afflicted is introduced to heterosexuality. Examples of other films of this genre include *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) and *The Children’s Hour* (1961). Because these were among the few public representations of homosexuality available, it is not surprising that gays and lesbians attended their showings, hoping to get some validation for their lives. Marc Thorsen understood this and quietly handed out Mattachine Society literature at these events to those he thought “might be interested.” For more on Hollywood’s historical depictions of homosexuality, see Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1981; reprint, New York: HarperCollins, 1987).

31. Elver Barker (a Denver Mattachine founder), interview by author, March 21, 2002, Denver, Colo.; D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 119; *Denver Mattachine Newsletter*, April 1958, 5.

32. Robert W. Milligan to ONE, March 21, 1955, Washington State Folder, Regional Business Correspondence, ONE Institute and Archives; Janet G. Black to ONE, January 6, 1958, and January 3, 1962, Personal Correspondence, ONE Institute and Archives.

33. Various materials in John M. Eccles Papers, Box 4, Folder 2, Accession no. 4577–1, UW Archives (hereafter Eccles papers); Atkins, *Gay Seattle*, 107–8.

34. Donald S. Lucas to John M. Eccles, March 29, 1960, Box 4, Folder 2, Eccles papers.

35. Tim Mayhew, “The Beginnings of Gay Liberation: Part II,” *Portland Northwest Gay Review*, August 1974, 18 (quoted); Atkins, *Gay Seattle*, 107; Ken Gilbert to *Vector Magazine*, July 16, 1968, Tim Mayhew Collection, Box 12, Folder 11, Accession no. 4440, UW Archives (hereafter Mayhew Collection).

36. *Seattle: The Pacific Northwest Magazine*, November 1967; Gilbert to *Vector Magazine*, July 16, 1968, Mayhew Collection.

37. Seattle GLF to Dorian Society, October 1, 1970, Box 4, Folder 4; Tim Mayhew to Jimmy Burr, June 9, 1972, Box 12, Folder 7; Mayhew to Sandy Wroe, July 12, 1972, Box 12, Folder 7, Mayhew Collection. Also see Atkins, *Gay Seattle*.

38. Western Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations, Seattle, December 1–3, 1967, Minutes, Box 7, Folder 2; flyer announcing the Northwest Conference, Box 12, Folder 10, Mayhew Collection; “A Walking Tour of Downtown Portland,” 24; *Advocate*, January 1968, 3.

39. Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather*.

40. Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 203; Meeker, “Behind the Mask,” 105–11; D’Emilio, “Gay Politics, Gay Community,” 74–95. See also Thomas Jacob Noel, “Gay Bars and the Emergence of the Denver Homosexual Community,” *Social Science Journal* 15:2 (April 1978): 59–74. Scholars who argue that the bar culture gave rise to modern gay-rights activism point out that Stonewall was a gay bar and the riot that occurred outside it on June 28, 1969, was a result of patrons finally growing tired of police harassment.

41. Dean Smith, “Gay Bars Hold Key for Homosexuals,” *Oregon Journal*, August 31, 1972.

42. Paul Henderson, “Seattle’s Homosexuals Ask: ‘Understand; Don’t Generalize,’” *Seattle Times*, December 9, 1969.

43. *ONE*, November 1958, 17.

44. Henderson, “Seattle’s Homosexuals Ask”; Rose Mesec, “A Gender and Space Analysis of Seattle’s Lesbian and Gay Communities” (M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1992), 35, 36; Atkins, *Gay Seattle*, 70–4, 76, 82–5, 88–91, 130.

45. Wilson, “Tolerant Reputation,” 48.

46. Henderson, “Seattle’s Homosexuals Ask” (quoted); Atkins, *Gay Seattle*, 96–9.

47. Henderson, “Seattle’s Homosexuals Ask”; Atkins, *Gay Seattle*, 100–101.

48. Auditor, Council Documents, Item no. 4545, November 27, 1964; Item nos. 4631 and 4654, December 3, 1964; Item no. 4543, November 27, 1964, SPARC.

49. *Oregon Journal*, June 29, 1964; “Hangouts for Homosexuals,” December 22, 1964, and “OLCC Overrides Ban On 6 Taverns,” December 18, 1964, “Homosexuals” newspaper clipping file, OHS Research Library; *Oregonian*, December 4, 1964, 21.

50. Auditor, Council Documents, Item no. 4543, November 27, 1963; Auditor, Council Minutes, Item no. 4543, November 27, 1963, SPARC.

51. *Oregonian*, October 25, 1963; *Oregon Journal*, October 25, 1963; *Portland Reporter*, November 8, 1963; “A Walking Tour of Downtown Portland,” 9.

52. Doug Baker, “Baker’s Dozen,” *Oregon Journal*, June 29, 1964; “Police Say California Sex Dev” (partial title), December 4, 1964, news-

paper clipping in “Homosexuals” newspaper clipping file, OHS Research Library.

53. Auditor, Council Documents, Item no. 4739, December 10, 1964; Item no. 4654, December 3, 1964; Item no. 4631, December 3, 1964; Item no. 4629, November 27, 1964; Item no. 4545, November 27, 1964; Auditor, Council Minutes, Item no. 4545, November 27, 1964, SPARC.

54. “2 ‘Homosexual Hangouts’ Denied Beer Renewals by City Council,” November 28, 1964; “OLCC Overrides Ban On 6 Taverns,” December 18, 1964; “Police Say California Sex Dev.”

55. Auditor, Council Minutes, Item no. 4543, November 27, 1964, SPARC.

56. See, for example, Council Minutes, Item no. 4629, November 27, 1964, SPARC.

57. Auditor, Council Minutes, Item no. 4739, December 10, 1964, SPARC.

58. Auditor, Council Minutes, Item no. 4545, November 27, 1964, SPARC.

59. Auditor, Council Documents, Item no. 4545, November 27, 1964, SPARC. See also Auditor, Council Documents, Item nos. 4628, 4629, and 4654, December 3, 1964; Item no. 4739, December 10, 1964, SPARC.

60. Auditor, Council Minutes, Item no. 4739, December 10, 1964; Item no. 4629, December 3, 1964 (quoted), SPARC.

61. “Hangouts for Homosexuals,” December 22, 1964, “Homosexuals” newspaper clipping file, OHS Research Library.

62. Auditor, Council Minutes, Item no. 4629, November 27, 1964, SPARC.

63. Auditor, Council Minutes, Item no. 4654, December 3, 1964, SPARC.

64. Jack Ostergren, “Deviate Bar Control Sought,” *Oregon Journal*, January 11, 1965.

65. Auditor, Council Minutes, Item no. 4739, December 10, 1964 (quoted), SPARC; “2 ‘Homosexual Hangouts’ Denied Beer Renewals By City Council”; “OLCC Overrides Ban On 6 Taverns”; “A Walking Tour of Downtown Portland,” 6, 16–17. By the time Commissioner Frank Ivancie launched his own anti-gay crusade in August 1971, some other commissioners and the mayor provided a counterweight that generally succeeded in shielding the bars. See various articles in the *Portland Fountain* during this time, including “Fearless Francis Ivancie Fights Faggots,” March 1972, 19, 22.

66. *Portland Fountain*, January 1972, 1, and May 1971, 2, 7.

67. *Portland, Oregon, Liberator*, June 1972, “Special 1972 Gay Pride Week Issue,” 4.

68. Carol Brefford’s and Roy Bouse’s comments are in tape 7, Lanny Swerdlow Collection, Inventory no. 4107, Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest, OHS Research Library.

69. *Portland Willamette Bridge*, March 27–April 2, 1970.