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COMING OUT OF THE SHADOWS:
A SOCIAL AND EDUCATIVE HISTORY OF MALE SAME-SEX SEXUALITIES IN
TULSA, OKLAHOMA, 1836-2006

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COMING OUT OF THE SHADOWS:
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TULSA, OKLAHOMA, 1836-2006

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP & POLICY STUDIES

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*This work is dedicated to all of those who came before, their stories lost to time, their struggles ignored, their dreams forbidden...
May this work be a witness to you.*

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Illustrations.....	vi
Abstract.....	ix
Preface.....	1
Chapter 1: <i>Hidden Roots</i>	3
Chapter 2: <i>Sissy’s in the Wide Open Town</i>	24
Chapter 3: <i>Rising from the Ashes</i>	46
Chapter 4: <i>The Old Downtown Scene</i>	71
Chapter 5: <i>Organizing in the Shadows</i>	86
Chapter 6: <i>A Time of Transition</i>	106
Chapter 7: <i>High Spirits in T-Town</i>	126
Chapter 8: <i>The War Years</i>	170
Postscript: <i>On Route 66</i>	201
Bibliography.....	210
Appendix A: Primary Sources.....	223
Appendix B: Interview Script.....	230
Appendix C: Participant Demographics.....	234
Appendix D: Institutional Review Board Approval Letters.....	235

List of Illustrations

Illustration 1. Moonlight on the Arkansas	3
Illustration 2. Vasco Nunez de Balboa	5
Illustration 3. Employments of the Hermaphrodites	7
Illustration 4. <i>Dance of the Berdache</i> by George Catlin	10
Illustration 5. Rev. Loughridge	12
Illustration 6. Looking south on Main Street in Tulsa in 1889	13
Illustration 7. Cattle Traveling Through Early Tulsa	14
Illustration 8. The Frisco Depot in Tulsa	15
Illustration 9. Two Cowboys in the Tulsa area, c. 1905	17
Illustration 10. Male same-sex affection c. Late 1800s	18
Illustration 11. Male same-sex affection c. 1840s	19
Illustration 12. Civil War Soldiers Dancing Stag	21
Illustration 13. Cowboys dancing stag c. 1910	22
Illustration 14. Sue Bland No. 1	24
Illustration 15. The Glenn Pool Oilfield c. 1912	25
Illustration 16. Vaudeville female impersonator, Julian Eltinge	35
Illustration 17. Julian Eltinge in character	36
Illustration 18. Karyl Norman in character	37
Illustration 19. The beautiful Orpheum Theatre c. 1921	38
Illustration 20. Grand Theatre	39
Illustration 21. Empress Theatre	39

Illustration 22. A WWI example of same-sex affection	41
Illustration 23. Two WWI Army soldiers in khaki uniforms dancing together	43
Illustration 24. Parade at the end of WWI in Tulsa	45
Illustration 25. The Greenwood District on Fire	46
Illustration 26. The Ku Klux Klan riding in Tulsa	47
Illustration 27. A Portrait of Bruce Goff	50
Illustration 28. The Boston Avenue Methodist Church.....	51
Illustration 29. Downtown Tulsa c. 1930	55
Illustration 30. A Youthful Lynn Riggs	58
Illustration 31. Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg	68
Illustration 32. The Tropical Gardens in 1942	69
Illustration 33. Tulsa skyline in the 1940s	71
Illustration 34. Douglas Plant	72
Illustration 35. WWII sailors dancing stag	77
Illustration 36. A pilsner beer glass from the Blue Note Lounge	79
Illustration 37. Milwaukee Inn	81
Illustration 38. The Tulsa Little Theatre c. 1932	83
Illustration 39. Tulsa skyline in the 1950s	86
Illustration 40. Bishops Bar and Restaurant.....	99
Illustration 41. Bishops Bar and Restaurant.....	100
Illustration 42. The Bamboo Lounge c. 2015.....	101
Illustration 43. The Majestic Theatre.....	104

Illustration 44. The Rialto Theatre.....	105
Illustration 45. A 1960s Tulsa in the Darkness.....	106
Illustration 46. Tulsa’s inner-dispersal loop c. 1960s.....	107
Illustration 47. The 8 th Day and Gala Location.....	118
Illustration 48. Tulsa jail cell in 1965.....	119
Illustration 49. Tulsa jail cell (another view).....	120
Illustration 50. Mohawk Park restroom.....	123
Illustration 51. Restroom warning sign.....	123
Illustration 52. The Alvin Plaza Hotel.....	124
Illustration 53. The Stonewall Inn.....	126
Illustration 54. The city of Tulsa in the 1970s.....	129
Illustration 55. The Circle Theatre in 2015.....	134
Illustration 56. The Trails of Turkey Mountain.....	135
Illustration 57. People protesting Bryant and the State Capitol.....	148
Illustration 58. A typical paddy wagon of the era.....	165
Illustration 59: The Human Immunodeficiency Virus.....	171
Illustration 60: The AIDS Memorial Quilt.....	195
Illustration 61: Tulsa skyline in 2015.....	201
Illustration 62: The Dennis R. Neill Equality Center.....	203
Illustration 63: Club Majestic.....	205
Illustration 64: The Tulsa Eagle.....	207
Illustration 65: Sunset on the Arkansas River.....	208

Abstract

This dissertation presents an educative history of male same-sex sexualities in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Using archival sources and oral history interviews of men who experienced some of these turbulent times, it provides insight into the development of gay culture and social life. From the Native American two-spirit roots in the mid nineteenth century to the twentieth century when white settlers developed the settlement into a booming oil city, this work gives a socio-educational voice to a community that has historically been overlooked.

Preface

In 1997 residents of Tulsa celebrated a centennial year of Oklahoma statehood. Danney Goble, an area historian, was about to publish his groundbreaking book: *Tulsa! A Biography of the American City*. On November 18, 1997 of that year one LGBT (Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, and Transgender) organization, Tulsa Oklahoman's for Human Rights, issued a press release where they expressed discontent after having pled to be mentioned in the book like many other minorities of the city were. In spite of efforts to have their historical presence acknowledged, the LGBT community was unfortunately not included and remained invisible.¹

Almost twenty years later... what follows is *a* history of male same-sex sexualities in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Using twenty-five oral histories, numerous newspaper articles, court house records, and other archival, primary, and secondary sources, this study seeks to give a voice to a community that has – for far too long – been overlooked.² Still, this dissertation is not without its errors. After all, no historical work can encompass every memory, detail, or depiction of the past. But I have done my best to provide an accurate depiction of each era discussed based upon the sources that were available at my disposal. One of the most difficult challenges with LGBT historical work is the lack of a historical record the farther one goes back in time. Thus, a

¹ See “Oklahoma’s Oldest Gay Organization Condemns Biography for Anti-gay Bias,”; “Gay, lesbian group protests Tulsa Centennial book,” *Broken Arrow Daily Ledger* (Broken Arrow, OK), November 20, 1997. Both documents are located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Dennis Neill Box*.

² Thus, the research in this work is informed heavily by the texts of Gary McCulloch, *Documentary Research in Education, History and the Social Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 2004) and Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2005). For a full list of archival sources, see Appendix A.

reoccurring component of many of these types of works is *oral history* – those personal memories that when lost, are gone forever. All oral historical participants for this study were required to be given pseudonyms to protect their identities, and although this detracts from the historical value of their recognition and leadership, it attests to the fact that we still live in a time where having a same-sex sexuality is a stigmatizable trait.

As a native Tulsan, I spent my childhood playing on the banks of the Arkansas River, exploring the lush hills of Osage County, and walking in the shadows of the historic Art Deco downtown area. Coming from an education background, my aim throughout this work has been to take readers on an educative journey into the past. And because too many academic works are fraught with jargon and theory, I have attempted to make the following story readable for both youth and elders of diverse backgrounds.³

Finally, when I was a gay youth I remember feeling like I had no history to hold onto. If nothing else, I hope that these pages come to life in such a way that they enlighten the hearts and minds of their readers. The history of Tulsa is a profound story of a city that sprouted from a Native American settlement and bloomed into a booming metropolitan city reminiscent of those of the northeast. The many diverse peoples that have come to call the city home include those of us who just so happen to have a same-sex sexuality. Our kind has experienced many ups and downs over the last 150 years. We have traveled across uncharted territory with no maps to make sense of ourselves, and we have faced hostile terrain along the way – but like some of our ancestors who built a community here along the Arkansas River so long ago – we somehow managed to survive. The pages that follow are a testament to that survival.

³ In essence, this work is an act of public education. For more information, see Lawrence Cremin, *Public Education*. (New York: Basic, 1976).

Chapter 1: *Hidden Roots:*

Male Same-Sex Sexuality in the Tulsa, Oklahoma Area, 1836-1899

Introduction

It could be said that gay men and women have been a part of the fabric of this land and have served as an integral and productive segment of American culture and society since time began.⁴ Same-sex sexualities have been present in most societies known throughout history such as those located in Asia, the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and Native America— to name a few.⁵ In the area that is now Tulsa, evidence has existed that same-sex sexualities have been present since its first known native inhabitants arrived in the nineteenth century.



Illustration 1: Moonlight on the Arkansas c. 1910. Public domain photo (before 1923). Real photo post card. *Courtesy of the Authors Collection.*

Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory

The Creek tribe was originally located in the southeastern region of North America. As European colonists arrived and grew in number, they increasingly desired

⁴ Terminologies used to refer to same-sex sexualities have changed over time. In this chapter I refer less to a community “identity” and more to the “act” of same-sex sexuality and explore how it has evolved in Tulsa, as well as within the cultures of this area. In this case, I claim that sexualities are *biological* traits whose expression are subject to a particular time, place, and context. In later chapters, I may use other identifying terminologies to correlate with a historical period as group identity cohesion become apparent in the historical literature (i.e. homosexuals or gay men).

⁵ Will Roscoe, ed., *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 1; Will Roscoe, *Changing Ones: Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 213-47; Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History, and Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 3-13.

the lands that the Creeks called home. As early as 1825, certain bands of the Creeks accepted removal from their lands and began moving westward toward the Arkansas area. Many other Creeks were opposed to removal and chose to not leave their indigenous lands. As more encounters with and pressures by advancing colonists became commonplace, social and political conflicts occurred more frequently within the factions of the tribe.⁶ Discussions ensued within the tribes about what was to be done about the European advancement southward from the colonies and later, forced assimilation.⁷

At some point during the eighteenth century, a band of non-assimilationist Creeks departed from the area and formed a new town called Lochapoka in Alabama. On March 28, 1836 resistance became futile when United States diplomatic tribal chiefs met at the town and made provisions for many of the remaining thousands of Creeks to head west toward a newly formed Indian Territory. Those Creeks that refused relocation were met by White settlers eager to lay claim to their lands and many were slaughtered. The indigenous town sites were burned as the Native inhabitants fled into the swamps. For the long journey westward, which became known as the “Trail of Tears,” the tribes were given government-issued rifles, ammunition, and blankets.⁸

The Creeks traveled toward the hills of Indian Territory. Tragically, between 1830 and 1836 the tribe lost more than 40 percent of its members on the journey. It was in 1836 that the small band from the town of Lochapoka arrived at a bend in the

⁶ Courtney Ann and Glenn Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills: Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1984), 5-24.

⁷ Beryl Ford et al., *Historic Tulsa: An Illustrated History of Tulsa & Tulsa County* (San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2006), 7-10.

⁸ Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills*, 12-3.



Illustration 2: Vasco Núñez de Balboa executing indigenous Panamanians by war dog[s] for same-sex practice by Theodor de Bry. *Courtesy of the New York Public Library, Rare Book Room, De Bry Collection, New York*

Arkansas River in Indian Territory.

According to legend, the Lochapoka brought with them wood (or coals) from their native lands and held a sacred fire under a giant oak tree that still stands today at 1730 South Cheyenne Avenue.⁹

Government contractors in the area had given the name Tallassee to the area, but the Lochapoka did not like that name so

they called the site for their new village “Tulsee Town.”¹⁰ Through blood, sweat, tears, and very few tools to work with, the Lochapoka rebuilt their town site and community in what is known today by whites as downtown Tulsa. The early Creek inhabitants of this area brought with them what remained of their culture and traditions from their Native lands.¹¹

Roots of the Two-Spirit in Native American Communities

The Creeks and many other tribes had diverse cultures that included identities and social roles not bounded by gender or sexuality. In 1564 before the Native Americans had met many Europeans, Le Moyne (a French explorer) encountered indigenous tribes in the American Southeast. While observing their culture he encountered what he described as “hermaphrodites” and “berdache,” which we have come to understand as two-spirited people – LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and

⁹ Ibid., 13. This is known in modern times as the Council Oak tree.

¹⁰ Ford, *Historic Tulsa*, 8.

¹¹ Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills*, 13-4.

Transgender) Native Americans.¹² Importantly, the “two-spirit” identity is one that has historically fallen outside the understandings of Western civilization and culture.

Terminologies used for these individuals have been troublesome, because Europeans did not have a word to describe an identity that included diverse views of gender, sexuality, social, and spiritual roles. In effect, the identity was difficult to interpret for the Western explorers, but that did not stop them from making their own interpretations of these individuals. Accounts in the Americas have documented some of these peoples as being torn apart alive by dogs or burned at the stake by the hands of European colonizers.¹³

Many tribes had unique socially constructed understandings of how two-spirited people contributed to their societies. Sometimes they were seen as healers, some served specific roles in their society, and many times they blurred gender lines through their outward dress, action, and appearance. While it is not possible to simply state that these

¹² It must be noted that the terminologies used to describe these individuals were complex and difficult to understand. Due to the fact that Western Europeans did not have a word to encompass the identity, they forced their own cultural understandings upon these groups when encountering them. Many explorers sometimes incorrectly referred to these Native individuals, who appeared outwardly androgynous in clothing and action, as a “hermaphrodite.” Later, French explorers called them “berdache,” a derogatory term. Sometimes, if homosexual activity was observed, they were referred to as “sodomites.” In many conquests of the Americas there are documented cases of two-spirited people being tortured and killed at the hands of the conquistadors. On this note, many Native American tribes had cultures that had developed well outside of the understandings of those of Western Society and had developed sometimes multiple understandings of mixed gender roles (sometime even four genders) and understandings of sexuality, which are starkly different from the “male-female” and “heterosexual-homosexual” binaries that we subscribe to today. In effect, these two-spirit roles were legitimized by many of their indigenous cultures as having a *rightful place* in the social order. In addition, there were tribes who held these individuals in *esteemed* spiritual positions such as shaman, medicine men, woman warriors, and spiritual leaders.

¹³ Susan Stryker and Stephen Wittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader*. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 208.

were all “homosexual” Native Americans, it is essential to note that same-sex sexuality did occur in most (if not all) tribes to some degree and thus have become an important root in the discussion of Creek Tulsa.¹⁴

In fact, the earliest surviving depictions of two-spirit Natives came from the writings of two explorers (Rene Goulane de Laudonniere and Jacques Le Moyne) who were on an expedition in Florida sanctioned by the French government. Le Moyne described a scene in which he observed the two-spirits in the Timucua Tribe:

Hermaphrodites, partaking of the nature of each sex, are quite common in these parts, and are considered odious by the Indians themselves, who, however, employ them, as they are strong instead of beasts of burden. When a chief goes out to war the hermaphrodites carry the provisions. When any Indian is dead of wounds or disease, two hermaphrodites take a couple of stout poles, fasten cross-pieces on them, and attach to these a mat woven of reeds. On this they place the deceased, with a skin under his



Illustration 3: Employments of the Hermaphrodites. Theodor de Bry, 1564. Courtesy of the State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory, <http://floridamemory.com/items/show/254224>

¹⁴ This is because the Creeks and other tribes brought their culture with them to the land that became Tulsa. It would be gravely erroneous to suggest that many Native American two-spirit individuals did not practice same-sex sexuality. Even today, as evidenced by two-spirited societies across the nation, these Native individuals identify most closely with the LGBT community, suggesting that this understanding of the cultural element was not entirely lost to history. In fact, in 1951 a study called *Patterns of Sexual Behavior* was published and devoted a whole chapter toward the discussion of male-on-male sexual activity within a number of North American tribes. The authors “collected information on homosexuality in seventy-six societies and found that male homosexual activities were regarded favorably in forty-nine (or 64 percent). Among these favorably inclined cultures [were] the following American Indian groups [such as] the Creek, Crow, Hopi...” See Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A* (New York: Avon, 1976), 490-91.

head, a second bound around his body, a third around one thigh, a fourth around one leg. Why these are so used I did not ascertain; but I imagine by way of ornament, as in some cases they do not go so far, but put the skin upon one leg only. Then they take thongs of hide, three or four fingers broad, fasten the ends to the ends of the poles, and put the middle over their heads, which are remarkably hard; and in this manner they carry the [de]ceased to the place of burial. Persons having contagious diseases are also carried to places appointed for the purpose on the shoulders of the hermaphrodites, who supply them with food, and take care of them until they get quite well again.¹⁵

Another source provided insight into the role of the two-spirited person in the regional culture of the Lochapoka:

Le Moyne and other early visitors to the Timucua described "berdaches", male transvestites and/or "hermaphrodites" that dressed as women and had very specific tasks... Not uncommon, berdaches were general "beasts of burden, since they are strong";... they carried the dead to the burial grounds on stretchers using tumplines, and some may have been curers or herbalists. Berdaches were also responsible for taking the produce and dried foodstuffs to the storehouse... The berdaches were between genders; although most were probably males physiologically, they transcended the gender roles of both men and women... Berdaches were not necessarily homosexual, although male and female homosexuality (or bisexuality) was not uncommon... The assimilation of aspects of both men's and women's gender roles and productive activities, as well as particular chores that only they performed, indicates that berdaches occupied a specific status niche within the community, where they were held in esteem...¹⁶

Other observations by scholars show that they (two-spirit people) also served special roles during celebration:

In most tribes' social dances, women dance in one section and men dance in another. Berdaches usually dance in the women's section. This is true among the Navajos, as well as the Lakotas. One informant told me, "Pete Dog Soldier always danced with the women. He danced at the head of the circle, leading the women." This is also the case among the Creeks and Seminoles. Berdaches in

¹⁵ John Reed Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 373; Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*, 431-32.

¹⁶ Ruth Troccoli, *Colonization and Women's Production: The Timucua of Florida* (Gainesville: University of Florida), 98, <http://anthro.appstate.edu/sites/anthro.appstate.edu/files/documents/ebooks/gender/ch10.html>

those groups wear turtle-shell leg rattles worn by the women, and lead the female turtle-shell dancers...¹⁷

It is important to note that the Creeks were not the only tribe that was present in this area. Also, there was the Osage and Sac (or Sauk) & Fox, among numerous others. Cultural conceptualizations of two-spirit people were socially constructed by each tribe. For instance, “the Osage term for berdache, *mixu’ga*... literally means ‘moon-instructed’ (from *mi*, ‘moon’ and *xu’ga*, ‘to instruct’). The most frequently cited skills were those of beading, quillwork, and the manufacture and decoration of a myriad of products made from animal skins.”¹⁸

The Osage two-spirits were reported to have had visions or dreams of a moon goddess that legitimized their identity and also, as they believed, gave them unique and special abilities. Osage two-spirit people appear to have used feminine forms of speech.¹⁹ In 1828 Isaac McCoy, an explorer, visited the Osage and wrote a more judgmental account of two-spirited persons:

Among some of the uncultivated tribes to the north, there are instances, though rare, of men assuming the office of women. They put on women’s apparel, and mingle with them, and affect the manner and appearance of females as much as possible, and continue this folly during life. While I was at the Osage villages, one of these wretches was pointed out to me. He appeared to be about twenty-five years of age, was tall, lean, and of a ghost-like appearance. His presence was so disgusting, and the circumstances of the case so unpleasant, that I spoke not a word to him, and made few inquiries about him. He was said to be in a

¹⁷ Walter Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 70. These historical accounts suggest that two-spirited people existed in at least the Southeast region and served special purposes in the tribe by aiding with burials, everyday work, healing, and enjoyed a higher social rank in their societies.

¹⁸ Roscoe, *Changing Ones*, 13. These were often the roles that women assumed in Native American culture.

¹⁹ A. Fletcher and La Flesche, “The Omaha Tribe.” (Washington: *Smithsonian Institution 27th Annual Report*), 1911. 132-33.

declining state of health, and certainly his death would not have been lamented.²⁰

There is also an account by Victor Tixier of an Osage two-spirited person living as a possible second wife to an Osage chief where Tixier stated that:

In the Head Chief's lodge lived a warrior named *la Bredache*. This man, who a few years before was considered one of the most distinguished braves, suddenly gave up fighting and never left Majakita [the Head Chief] except when the latter went to war. The extremely effeminate appearance of this man, and his name, which was that of an hermaphrodite animal, gave me food for thought. Baptiste [an Osage] accused him of being the lover of the Woman-Chief; but the Osage tell only half of what they think.²¹

Tixier was said to have been approached sexually by some Osage warriors around 1839-1840:

When bathing in the river with Osage men, Tixier reported, "The warriors



Illustration 4: *Dance of the Berdache* by George Catlin. This work is in the public domain, because it was created before 1909 and it has been over one hundred years since Catlin's death (1872). Courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

bothered us with indiscreet questions.... If we swam along beside them, they asked us to let them examine our bodies; we had to tell them very sternly to be of more decent behavior." Tixier was quite irritated by their "habits of sodomy, which their curiosity seemed to announce and

²⁰ Katz, *Gay American History*, 451-52.

²¹ Victor Tixier, A. Salvan, and J. McDermott eds., *Travels on the Osage Prairies* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 234; Katz, *Gay American History*, 930.

which they exercise, according to what they say, on their prisoners. These sons of nature are extremely lascivious.”²²

The Sac (or Sauk) and Fox, who were also relocated to Indian Territory, celebrated same-sex sexualities. The famous painter George Catlin depicted a two-spirited person in one of his paintings (*Dance of the Berdache*) based on sketches he made while visiting the tribe. Williams stated that:

Among the Sauk and Fox, Catlin attended a feast to the *I-coo-coo-a*. “For extraordinary privileges which he is known to possess, he is... looked upon as *medicine* and sacred, and a feast is given to him annually; and initiatory to it, a dance by those few young men of the tribe who can, as in the sketch, dance forward and publicly make their boast (without the denial of the Berdache), that...” Here Catlin switches to writing (ostensibly) in the Sauk and Fox language. However, linguistic analysis shows the lettering to be meaningless gibberish. Nevertheless, it is clear from the context that Catlin means only those men who had had sexual relations with the berdache could dance. “Such, and such only, are allowed to enter the dance and partake of the feast... It will be seen that the society consists of quite a limited number of ‘odd fellows.’” Catlin concludes his discussion with a condemnatory statement, claiming that the Indians made the berdache “servile and degrading.” In imposing his own values on the Sauk and Fox, Catlin missed the significance of the event he had witnessed. While some anthropologists have used Catlin as evidence of the berdache’s low status, there are many contradictions in his claim. Simply by virtue of being offered a feast, the berdache was accorded high status. And the men who voluntarily got up to dance did so because there was a certain status in being the sexual partner of the *I-coo-coo-a*. But an even more important element of this dance is that it offered the berdache an opportunity publicly to humiliate any man who dared to dance. Simply by denying past sexual relations, the berdache could make a man’s dance seem an empty boast. This surely served as a powerful weapon whereby the *I-coo-coo-a* could ensure that his partners would not mistreat him. All he had to do was to *deny* having sex with them!²³

²² Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh*, 168-69. It is here that one might become confused by the accounts listed so far. Many of the early explorers, unable to make meaning of the cultural differences between Native American tribes that they encountered thus cast their own interpretations on two-spirited individuals and this is reflected in their negative vs. positive narrative accounts.

²³ Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh*, 107-08.

Positive spaces for same-sex sexualities were part of the culture of the tribes that came to this area and they marked the beginning of the history of same-sex sexualities in Tulsa.

Encroachment of Euro-American Ways in Tulsa

The Tulsee community that came to form present day Tulsa flourished up until the Civil War years. By 1848 a mission school had been formed and was sanctioned by the Creeks under Presbyterian Reverend Robert M. Loughridge, a missionary to the area. Loughridge and his assistants created the first school in modern day Coweta. In this way, the Creek people of Tulsa were formally assimilated into Western European society – through the social institution of education.²⁴

While it is not apparent exactly when the cultural understanding of two-spirit identities began to diminish in the tribe, by the time the school began operation on January 1, 1850 under Rev. Loughridge, school children were separated by gender and visitation by the opposite sex was forbidden at all times. The subjects of reading, arithmetic, geography, algebra, natural philosophy, history, declamation, and Latin were studied by the students. Evidence of white influence had infiltrated deep into the Creek tribe by 1867.

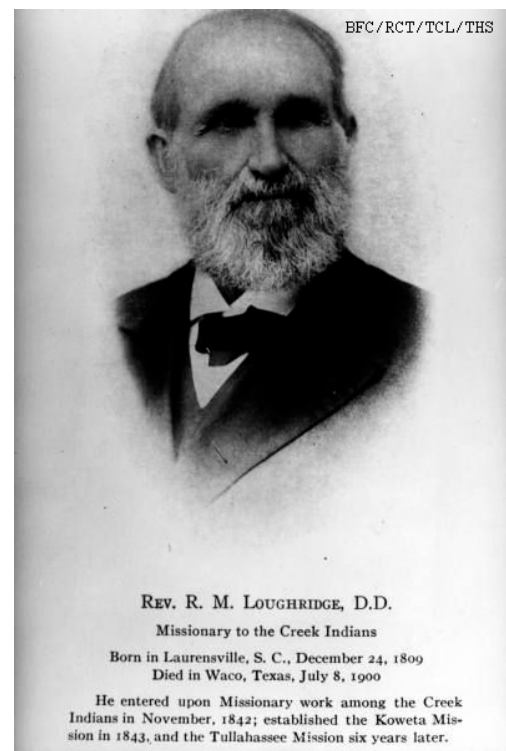


Illustration 5: Rev. Loughridge. Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

²⁴ Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills*, 21-4.

Ultimately, the mission school marked the beginning of a new Christianized chapter for the tribes surrounding Tulsa; one that did not make room for the transference of

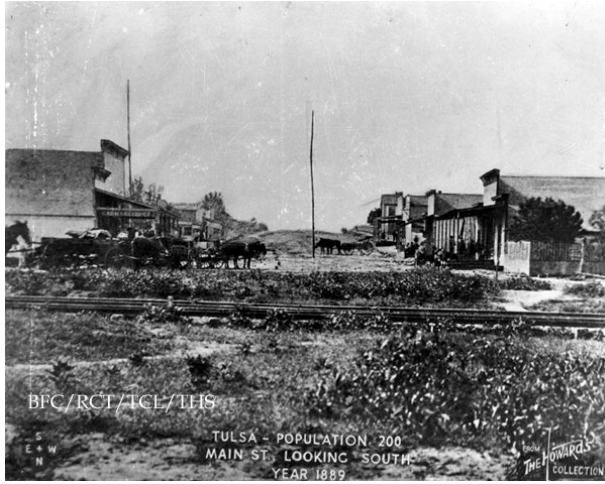


Illustration 6: Looking South on Main Street in Tulsa in 1889. Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

knowledge of the two-spirit identities found in their ancestral culture.²⁵

The Cattle Town Hub

From the mid to late 1800s, Tulsa (as it became referred to out of honor to the Creeks) became the center for cattle production – a lucrative industry at the time. By the late nineteenth century, large ranches had

formed around the area. The year 1882 was a turning point for the town when the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad eagerly began laying tracks into Indian Territory and later the St. Louis and San Francisco (Frisco for short), extended the railroad from present day Vinita to the Arkansas River. In particular, the Frisco railroad quickly put Tulsa on the map, because it allowed for the frontier town to become the hub at the end of the cattle drive where cattle would be shipped northward for markets.²⁶ According to Beryl

Ford:

Tulsa's first traffic jams were caused by cattle. Herds literally took over the streets when cattlemen arrived. Historian Fannie Misch described the scene, "Train load after train load of cattle were unloaded at the town stockyards... and the uproar of milling longhorns and yelling cowboys disturbed people for days as the cattle were spread out fanwise for the Osage pasture or the Big Pasture

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 25-49; Also see the work of Robert Wiebe for more information about the social atmosphere during this time in the country. Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 1-75.

southeast.” Early merchants were glad for the influx of business that the proliferation of cattle herds brought. However, the rowdiness had a downside. Misch wrote, “When ranch paydays arrived and the range riders galloped their ponies up Main Street shooting out lighted windows, the settlers quickly learned to close the stores, blow out the lamps, and lie on the floor. Even the train depot remained closed!”²⁷

Thus, the early days of Tulsa were ones of lawlessness, hard work, and growth. By the late 1800s, Tulsa had its first Post Office under Josiah Perryman and trading stores largely run by Native Americans had formed throughout the area. While Tulsa did have a law enforcement entity in the form of a Sherriff, Shelly Lemons noted:



Illustration 7: Cattle Traveling Through Early Tulsa. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

[the position] was typically left vacant [and law enforcement was pretty much non-existent]. Ranch hands terrorized locals as did bands and gangs of outlaws who flocked to the area. During the 1880s and 1890s, several gangs started to filter into Tulsa. Many of them came into Indian Territory to escape persecution in the bordering states. Horse thieves, train robbers, and other criminals belonging to the Glass, Barnett, Cook, Buck, Dalton, and Doolin gangs made their way to the city [including the notorious Belle Starr]. In the earliest days of Tulsa's history, most gangs—though filled with known criminals—were never asked to leave the city [before statehood].²⁸

With the growth of the cattle industry, early Tulsa experienced further development. Main Street quickly became important to traders and settlers as it held stores and a stable for horses. On August 7, 1882 workers arrived and lived in canvas

²⁷ Ford, *Historic Tulsa*, 17.

²⁸ Shelly L. Lemons, “Down on First Street: Prostitution in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1900-1925.” (PhD dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 2004), 42.

tents in the area until construction began. And as more traffic entered the area due to the new Frisco railroad extension, buildings and stores run by whites for the purpose of trading goods began to take shape.²⁹ In 1887 Tulsa's first grocery store opened and by the mid-1890s, the first bank opened in Tulsa. Three new newspapers also began operation: the *Tulsa Review*, the *Indian Republican* (later became the *Tulsa World*), and the *Tulsa Democrat* (later became the *Tulsa Tribune*).³⁰ The first hotel to open in Tulsa was called the Tulsa House and included twenty-two rooms (later renamed the St. Elmo). Here many workers and visitors to the new frontier town stayed during the early



Illustration 8: The Frisco Depot in Tulsa. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

days of the city. The first church to be formed was the First Presbyterian Church on October 5, 1885.³¹ In addition to these developments, on April 22, 1889 the Federal Government

opened up the unassigned lands in North Central Oklahoma and this became known as the first land rush. By 1896 the federal government had opened most of the rest of the Indian Territory to white settlements through four land runs.³²

²⁹ Ford, *Historic Tulsa*, 2006

³⁰ Danney Goble, *Tulsa!: Biography of the American City* (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1997), 44.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

³² Arrell Morgan Gibson. *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 176-80.

On January 18, 1898 the Federal Court incorporated the city of Tulsa. However, soon after, the Curtis Act was passed and effectively ended tribal government and declared tribal lands under the Dawes Commission (including the Creeks three million acres) as property of the Federal Government. Most of these lands were deeded to Creek citizens in 160-acre lots. The remaining 16,000 acres where towns such as early Tulsa existed were to be sold – many of which left the market at auction prices. Proceeds from these land sales, which typically went for very low prices, were deposited as credit to the Creeks. Although the government had betrayed Native Americans in Indian Territory once again, Tulsa was poised to become a city.³³

In 1901 two brothers who had come from Tennessee, Harry C. and James Monroe Hall, laid plans for the first white town site. And after Tulsa was surveyed and platted by two brothers, Gus and Dan Patton, it was decided that the Frisco railroad was to be the edge of the town and that the city would lay parallel to it. The Patton brothers:

laid out avenues arranged alphabetically by the names of American cities. Those east of Main took names of places east of the Mississippi (Boston, Cincinnati, Detroit, et cetera); those west of Main honored cities west of the river (Boulder, Cheyenne, Denver, et cetera). Similar practicality dictated that the streets parallel to the Frisco track would be numbered (First, Second, Third, et cetera). This originally was true on both the track's north and south sides, although Tulsans soon would rename the north-side thoroughfare to honor pioneer settlers and the like, again in alphabetical order (Archer, Brady, et cetera).³⁴

Due to the fact that Tulsa laid parallel to the Frisco railroad, the city would forever appear slightly askew on maps.

Early Tulsa also experienced some religious growth. Christian influences entered the area “after about 1856 and when Reverend J. Ross Ramsey traveled to

³³ Goble, *Tulsa!*, 46.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

preach at “Tulsee-town” late in the summer of 1856, he called it ‘a remote part of this nation...where the people are yet very wild and superstitious.’”³⁵ Interestingly, Robert M. Loughridge gave the first sermon in Tulsa in the spring of 1883 and had to yell loudly because gamblers and card players gathered in tents nearby and made a loud ruckus disturbing his sermon. In 1887 a Christmas Eve service was even interrupted by drunk Whites and Native Americans who were roughhousing on the balcony of the church. Later, they threw whiskey bottles at the Christmas tree and broke many of the ornaments and gifts. Shelly Lemons noted that this was a common occurrence in Tulsa during the late 1800s:

While family entertainment -- dances, socials, and church picnics—were abundant, hardworking cattlemen enjoyed a rougher sort of fun in the city. Alcohol, gambling, and "cavorting until early morning hours" were not uncommon. Each and every payday was cause for disturbances. Every time the cowboys received their pay, Tulsans knew illegal whiskey would be drunk, lights all over town would be shot out, and Sunday services would be interrupted with shots fired over the congregations' heads just to hear the women scream.³⁶

A Cowboy Culture in Early Tulsa

As a cattle town, Tulsa became a central space for the rugged frontiersmen who came to the area – these men later became romanticized through the image of the



Illustration 9: Two Cowboys in the Tulsa area, c. 1905. Public Domain Real Photo Postcard (Before 1923). Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

³⁵ Lemons, “Down on First Street,” 40.

³⁶ Lemons, “Down on First Street,” 41.



Illustration 10: Male same-sex affection c. Late 1800s. Subjects Unknown/Photographer Unknown. Cabinet Card Public Domain Tintype (before 1923). Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

“cowboy.” Cattle became a big business that quickly developed early Tulsa. Many head of cattle were driven to the city and shipped by railroad to markets north and eastward by the help of the cowboy. These men led a hard life while herding cattle on the new frontier of Indian Territory in what were lawless and untamed lands. Many times they struggled to get by financially. The early cowboys were drawn to Indian Territory, as the area was a place where they could be one with the land, enjoy freedom from responsibility, as well as experience unrestrained

individualism and lawlessness. Saloons where whiskey was served and Houses of Ill Fame (or prostitution) did exist here and flourished in what came to be known as the red light district on Main and First Streets. This area ultimately legitimized citizen’s senses of masculinity, femininity, and claims to respectability that soon became a hot topic of argument in the city in later years.³⁷

Early Tulsa was a haven for those who had same-sex sexualities due to the wide open lawlessness – a *liberty* not afforded to them in more established larger cities of the east. In many ways, Tulsa mirrored early San Francisco during the Gold Rush years in this manner, as it was also a “wide open town” full of lawlessness.³⁸ This wide-open mentality opened the door for the expression of same-sex sexualities and love.

³⁷ Ibid., 160-61.

³⁸ Nan A. Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1-19.

Interestingly, historian John D’Emilio suggests that the Western Frontier was full of same-sex sexuality. In fact, D’Emilio noted that:

The West provided extensive opportunities for male-male intimacy. Some men were drawn to the frontier because of their attractions to men. All men were thought to have strong innate lusts, and the absence of women may have channeled these desires to other men. Cowboy lore suggests that both long-term attachments and temporary sexual unions could form in the Wild West. ... A limerick jokingly insinuated that older cowboys occasionally initiated younger men sexually: “Young cowboys had a great fear / That old studs once filled with beer / Completely addle’ / They’d throw on a saddle, And ride them on the rear.” At least one territorial court case reveals that cowboys attempted to hire younger men to spend the night with them. In the frontier army, where soldiers often purchased the services of female prostitutes, some men clearly sought male partners as well.³⁹

Further, historian Chris Packard suggested that it was common for early cattle herders to go into partnerships with a fellow cowboy in order to work together and cast away the loneliness that was so common for these workingmen. In some of these cases, it was argued that these partnerships were a way for same-sex sexual acts to occur.⁴⁰

Packard stated that:

Some have called this figure [the cowboy] an American Adam, living in peaceful cohabitation in the wilderness, a neo-Rousseauian savage; still others, a dastardly rapist of virgin landscapes who massacres Indians, Mexicans, and buffalo in the name of Manifest Destiny. In all these interpretations, scant attention has been given to the rather wide variety of sexual and erotic discourses used and practiced by cowboys and other frontiersmen while they are

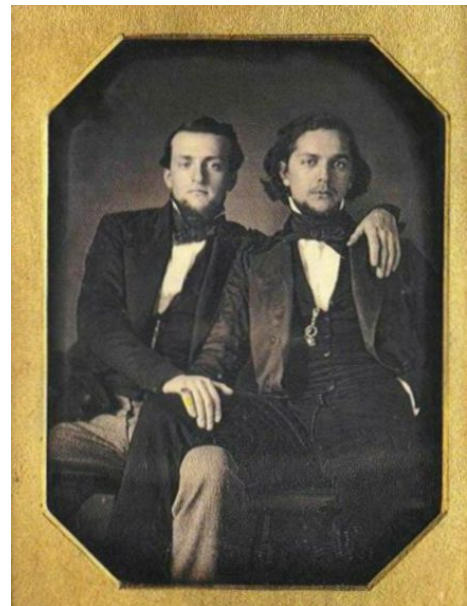


Illustration 11: Male-same sex affection c. 1840s. Subjects Unknown/Photographer Unknown. Location: New Orleans. Daguerreotype. This photo was created before 1923 and is in the public domain.

³⁹ John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 124.

⁴⁰ Same-sex sexual acts can occur without full acceptance or realization of one’s own sexual orientation.

“out there” on the frontier. Most people, if they think about it at all, assume that the cowboy in history and in literature practiced sexual abstinence until he arrived in a town, where he practiced the acceptable vice of dalliances with female prostitutes. But this explanation is counterintuitive and is not supported by the literary record. Particularly in Westerns produced before 1900, references to lusty passions appear regularly, when the cowboy on the trail with one of his partners, if one knows how to look for them. In fact, in the often all-male world of the literary West, homoerotic affection holds a favored position. A cowboy’s partner, after all, is his one emotional attachment, aside from his horse, and he will die to preserve the attachment. Affection for women destroys cowboy *comunitas* and produces children, and both are unwanted hindrances to those who wish to ride the range freely.⁴¹

In addition, historian Walter Williams explained how sexuality might have played out based on early oral-historical accounts in Oklahoma:

One early twentieth-century Oklahoma cowboy, who decades afterward moved to California and became a sailor, later recalled how the trail boss urged each cowboy to pair off with one other man: “Always take another puncher along,” urged the boss, “In a cow outfit, you and your fellows are members one of another.” In his private correspondence, this cowboy confessed that these partnerships often became sexual: “At first pairing they’d solace each other gingerly and, as bashfulness waned, manually [i.e., mutual masturbation]. As trust in mutual good will matured, they’d graduate to the ecstatically comforting 69 [mutual oral sex]... Folk know not how cock-hungry men get.” He pointed out how sex on the range was mostly mutual masturbation and oral sex, but it was not limited to what he called “cockulation.” Attraction for another cowboy, he wrote, “was at first rooted in admiration, infatuation, a sensed need of an ally, loneliness and yearning, but it regularly ripened into love.”⁴²

⁴¹ Chris Packard, *Queer Cowboys: And Other Erotic Male Friendships in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 3.

⁴² Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh*, 159.

Also, some men during the late 1800s and early 1900s had secret code words that they would use to signal others to know that one had a same-sex sexuality. For instance, “if someone evoked anything associated with Walt Whitman – the name, image or writings of the famous American poet – it signaled they shared Whitman’s preference for men.”⁴³ However, it is important to note here that expressions of same-sex affection were different in the late 1800s than they are now. It was not uncommon for men of *any sexuality* to be seen touching or being affectionate to one another in ways that may be interpreted as taboo today.⁴⁴ One example of this were “stag dances” that occurred throughout the late 1800s. With the absence of women on the frontier, many men would drink and dance with one another. While this behavior did not necessarily equate the participants as having a same-sex sexuality, it clearly provided a space for those who *did*. For example, on February 6, 1864 *Harper’s Weekly Journal* provided an explanation during the civil war period by stating that:

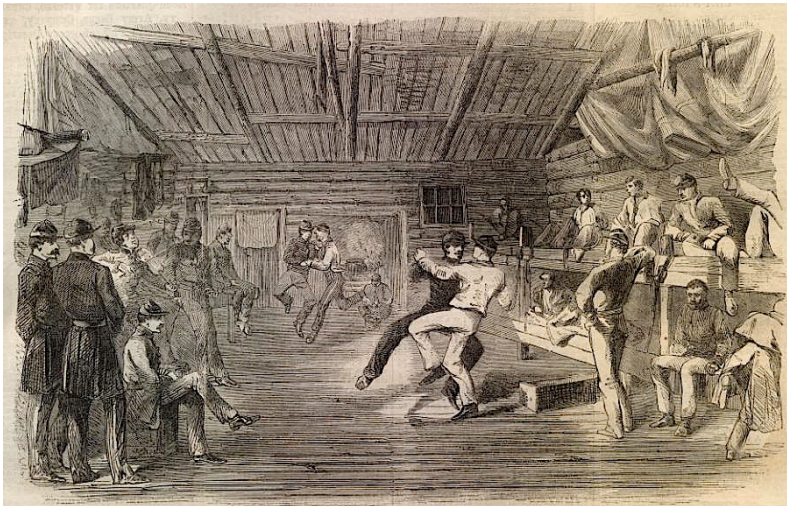


Illustration 12: Civil War soldiers dancing stag. Public domain photograph (before 1923). Courtesy of *Harpers Weekly*, Vol. III, No. 371, 1864.

OUR soldiers believe in the literal interpretation of the dictum of the Wise Man that “there is a time to dance.” But to put their faith into works is not the easiest thing in the world, owing to the lack of partners of the feminine persuasion. However, by imagining a bearded and pantalooned fellow to be of “t’other kind,” they succeed in getting up

⁴³ Jana Bommersbach, “Homos on the Range: How gay was the West?” *True West Magazine*, November 2005, <http://www.truewestmagazine.com/homos-on-the-range/>

⁴⁴ For more information about this, see David Deitcher, *Dear Friends: American Photographs of Men Together, 1840-1918* (New York: Abrams, 2001), 13-150.

what they call a “Stag Dance,” which is better than none, as is shown by the intense interest evinced by the spectators.”⁴⁵

Still, there were *undoubtedly* some frontiersmen in Tulsa who not only showed



Illustration 13: Cowboys dancing stag c. 1910. Public domain photograph (before 1923). Photographer/location unknown. This photo was created before 1923 and is in the public domain.

homoerotic affection or committed same-sex sexual acts, but also in fact experienced same-sex love (or “friendship”). Consider the example in the poem “The Lost Pardner” by

Badger Clark, an American

cowboy, from his book of poetry *Sun and Saddle Leather* that was published between

1915 and 1919. Badger wrote:

I ride alone and hate the boys I meet.
Today, some way, their laughin’ hurts me so.
I hate the steady sun that glares, and glares!
The bird songs make me sore.
I seem the only thing on earth that cares.
‘Cause Al ain’t here no more!
And him so strong, and yet so quick he died,
And after year on year
When we had always trailed it side by side,
He went – and left me he re!
We loved each other in the way men do.
And never spoke about it, Al and me,
But we both *knowed*, and knowin’ it so true
Was more than any woman’s kiss could be.
What is there out beyond the last divide?
Seems like that country must be cold and dim.
He’d miss this sunny range he used to ride.
And he’d miss me, the same I do him.
It’s no use thinkin’ – all I’d think or say

⁴⁵ “The Stag Dance,” *Harpers Weekly* VIII, no. 371 (1864): 93.

Could never make it clear.
Out that dim trail that only leads one way
He's gone – and left me here!
The range is empty and the trails are blind,
And I don't seem but half myself today.
I wait to hear him ridin' up behind
And feel his knee rub mine the good old way.⁴⁶

Obviously, both men were aware of their intimate feelings for one another.

Considering this, it is realistic to assume that other men traveling the frontier of the American West might also have experienced feelings for one another. As the nineteenth-century came to a close, a new era was poised to begin that would transform same-sex sexuality in a new Tulsa – the discovery of oil. As the city begins to grow rapidly and forge its own unique cultural identity, the stage would be set for Tulsa to become a thriving melting pot of the Great Plains.

⁴⁶ Katz, *Gay American History*, 769-70; Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh*, 158.

Chapter 2: *Sissy's in the Wide Open Town:*

The Oil Boom and World War I in Tulsa, Oklahoma 1900-1919

Growth of the Oil City

While Tulsa experienced some growth in its early years due to the cattle industry, much work was to be done in the city to help it rise ahead of nearby towns. Cattle ranching and unrestrained residents largely occupied the area until the turn of the century. By 1900 the city had just over 1,300 residents.⁴⁷ However, a new chapter of Tulsa's history was poised to begin with the discovery of black gold, as well as cultural and economic expansion that residents could have never dreamed was possible.

For many years, ranchers and Native Americans had seen crude oil in the area of

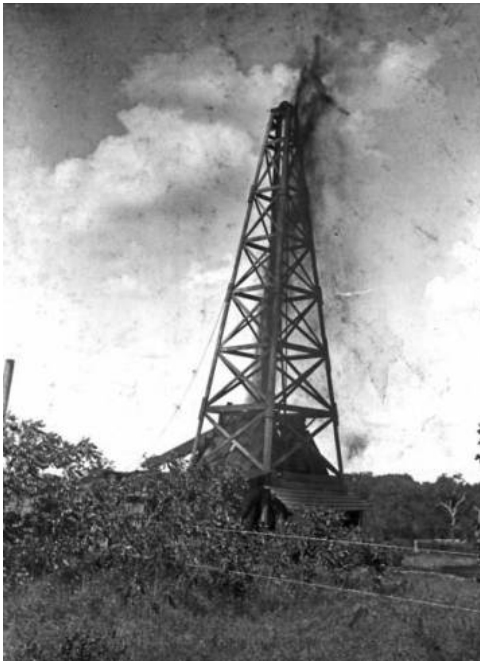


Illustration 14: Sue Bland No. 1. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

Tulsa as seeping from the ground and sometimes even into the natural waterways such as the Arkansas River. However, before the turn of the century it was of little interest to many of the tribes and white settlers who lived here due to the simple fact that they had little need for it. Many people still traveled via horseback and lamps were usually burned using whale oil. As soon as the industrial revolution gained traction in Tulsa, petroleum products became increasingly popular and the city would come to

⁴⁷ Lemons, Shelly L., "Down on First Street: Prostitution in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1900-1925." (PhD Dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 2004), 40.

be viewed as a potential site for oil drilling.⁴⁸

On June 24, 1901 the first well ruptured a gas pocket in the area of Red Fork, just outside of Tulsa across the Arkansas River. The well, known as the Sue Bland No. 1, shot oil into the sky and although the drillers attempted to keep the find a secret for a while, the news quickly made local and national headlines attracting oil seekers from around the country. New businesses such as restaurants, shops, hotels and brothels began to rise along the skyline of the city.⁴⁹

It did not take long for the news to get around the nation that Tulsa had become an oil mecca. Such large numbers of people migrated to the city that there were not

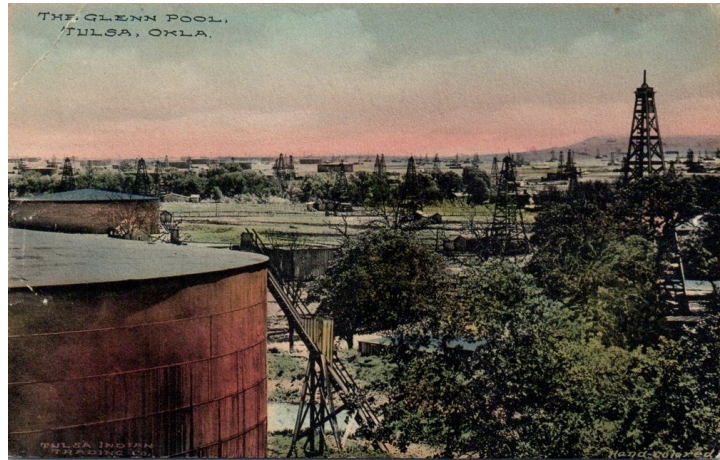


Illustration 15: The Glenn Pool oil field c. 1912. Public Domain real photo postcard (before 1923). Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

enough rooming houses, hotels and residential spaces to house them, with many sleeping wherever they could (including the oil derrick floors). Soon companies such as Texaco, Standard Oil, Prairie Oil and Gas Company, Sinclair-White Oil Company, and later Skelly Oil were actively working in the oil fields. By April of 1907, one pipeline alone carried over twenty thousand barrels of crude oil a day. Tulsa quickly became the largest producer of oil in the United States. Patrick C. Doyle even relocated his printing

⁴⁸ Courtney Ann and Glenn Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills: Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1984), 51-3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 54-62.

press to the city in 1908 and formed the *Oil and Gas Journal*.⁵⁰ The eyes of the country were on Tulsa!

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the city had a population of over 18,000 – an exponential jump from a population of just 1,300 in 1900. The city reached 72,000 residents by 1920. The influx of activity in the Tulsa area contributed to exponential growth almost overnight. Buildings were erected to house oil company offices and by 1920; Tulsa had more than four hundred oil and gas companies. These companies employed almost 15,000 residents. For many migrants, Tulsa had become a city of wealth, riches, and opportunity.⁵¹ Leaders hoped to retain, civilize, and modernize the frontier image of the city. Whilst some of the influx of settlers to the city during the oil boom came from former confederate states such as Texas and other states in the Midwest, more than half of the city's early leaders came from Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The Tulsa Commercial Club (formed in 1901) became a major player in the development of early Tulsa.⁵² Many of the early leaders in the Commercial Club actually spearheaded the transformation of the city into a place that resembled metropolises of the northeast since many of the early leaders were from those regions.⁵³ The club became a powerful force in changing and shaping the city's image. The result was large increase of people migrating to the area in search of a piece of the pie of oil prosperity.⁵⁴ The city had new services by 1913: a modern bank, new hotels, arts venues, religious institutions and social clubs, an institution of higher education and

⁵⁰ Danney Goble, *Tulsa!: Biography of the American City*. (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1997), 89.

⁵¹ Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills*, 64-5; Goble, *Tulsa!*, 95.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 65-77.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Goble, *Tulsa!*, 51-69.

learning facilities, and seventy-one miles of paved streets.⁵⁵ The days of livestock running on the streets were over!

The Spectacle Down on First Street: An Influx of Diverse Citizenry

The oil boom also brought many new and diverse residents to Tulsa. While it became a “city of riches,” it also became a city of many different types of people from all over the country – a melting pot of the prairies. The city was a place of opportunity for those with same-sex sexualities as well. A large portion of these new residents included blue-collar oilfield workers who spent their days working in the oilfields who then commuted back to Tulsa for an evening of pleasure. And there were many Blacks and former slaves who came to the city: Throughout the 1900s, the Black community grew exponentially alongside the rest of the city. They had even built their own business district off Greenwood Avenue. Many Whites and Native Americans held a

⁵⁵ See Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills*, 78-98. By 1900, Tulsa had plans by citizens for its first Fire Department. Petroleum investors Harry F. Sinclair and Pat J. White opened Exchange National Bank (formerly Farmers National) with a board made up of oil executives. John and Cass Allen Mayo who were furniture storeowners from Missouri built the Mayo building in Tulsa at 5th and Main in 1910. By the late 1910's there were over twenty hotels in Tulsa with two being over six stories high: The Robinson and Hotel Tulsa. Theaters included the Dreamland Theater (1908) and the Lyric Theater. Also, there was the popular Grand Opera House (1906). In 1914 the Tulsa Philharmonic was formed. Christian churches included the older Presbyterian Church, North Methodist, and Methodist South. Social clubs were also being formed and becoming popular such as the Daughters of the American Revolution, Thimble Club, Tulsa Women's Club, the Council of Women, and the Tulsa Library Association. The first May Festival and Concert was held in May of 1907. Public schools also expanded greatly with primary and secondary schools being built in both North and South Tulsa. After statehood, public schools in Tulsa became completely segregated. By 1908 Kendall College had its first building already constructed. Henry Kendall College would later become known as the University of Tulsa. By 1913, oil revenue allowed the Women's Tulsa Library Association to raise enough money for a new Central Public Library. By 1907 Main Street had been paved with asphalt. Tulsa would later go on to have over seventy-one miles of paved streets by the start of World War I. By May of 1907, Tulsa's first street cars were running along rails on First Street.

growing fear that the bustling Black community would eventually exert legal power in the city. So in 1908 a new city charter legalized Jim Crow laws, making Tulsa the first city in Oklahoma to do so. At one point there were even discussions of having racial population quotas in place to deal with the growing numbers of Blacks. Tensions were mounting in the city.⁵⁶

Blacks and Native Americans were not the only minorities that were growing. In addition to Catholics, many Jews had migrated to Tulsa and erected houses of worship such as the (then orthodox) B’Nai Emunah congregation (1903) and Temple Israel (1914).⁵⁷ Tulsa, a new city quickly becoming a diverse metropolis, had become split across partisan lines on the issues and was not dealing with the changes well.

Nevertheless, many early residents took full advantage of the frontier-era ethics and lawlessness that had already existed in the city in previous decades. New citizens of Tulsa quickly found the freedom in the form of sexuality, bootleg alcohol, and gambling. Of particular importance, with statehood on September 17, 1907, Oklahoma became a “dry” state where liquor and beer was deemed illegal. In a twist of fate, the counties on the eastern side of the state tended to be opposed to prohibition laws (such as Tulsa) versus the western side which was more accepting of them.⁵⁸ Importantly,

⁵⁶ Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills*, 95.

⁵⁷ “Virtual Jewish World: Oklahoma, United States,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed: September 20, 2015, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Oklahoma.html>

⁵⁸ Although prohibition was passed with the state constitution in 1907, the use of bootleg whiskey flourished in Tulsa as exhibited through numerous courthouse records post-statehood. These can be found at the Tulsa County Courthouse criminal indexes. Oklahoma would continue to be a dry state until 1933 when 3.2 percent beer would eventually be allowed to be sold, and it would not be until 1959 when liquor would come back legally to Oklahoma. “Blue laws” also went into effect regulating the types of work that one could do on Sundays (the Christian Sabbath).

many white Oklahomans also believed that it was necessary to keep spirits away from Blacks and the Native Americans for “his protection and that of society.”⁵⁹

While Tulsa shifted from a cattle town to an oil city, both blue-collar oilfield workers and white-collar petroleum executives enjoyed the lawlessness that the city provided. Notably, the local red light district provided residents and visitors with copious options to indulge in. And while there were some Tulsa residents who wanted city leaders to “clean up the town,” no one ever did. The pleasures of prostitution, drinking, and gambling were appealing not only to the Tulsa residents, but to others who were attracted to a blossoming oil town. Thus, in many elections leaders promised to conquer vice in the city, but due to a fear of competitions from nearby oil towns it never came to pass. In fact, the red light district also served as a boundary between White Tulsa and Black Tulsa (known as Greenwood). From 1900-1919 the mere presence of a vice district in the city legitimized the view of more conservative residents that Satan existed; all one had to do was stroll down onto First street!⁶⁰ It is around this period that the first sodomy cases for same-sex sexuality appear in the Tulsa County Courthouse records. At first, these cases were limited to crimes of sodomy involving adults of all sexualities with children. As awareness and fear of homosexuality would spread in future chapters, so too would sodomy arrests in the city for those adults caught engaging in male-on-male sex acts.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Jimmie L. Franklin, *Born Sober: Prohibition in Oklahoma, 1907-1959*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), XIII.

⁶⁰ Lemons, “Down on First Street,” 63, 66-117.

⁶¹ This evidence can be found in the Tulsa County Courthouse indexes dating back to statehood. These are located on the second floor in the court clerk’s office, criminal and traffic division.

Oklahoma Sodomy Laws

Sodomy laws in Oklahoma came with the passage of the State Constitution in 1907 as being termed a “crime against nature.”⁶² However, criminal codes were theoretically in force from 1890 to 1906 and explicitly suggested that “crimes against nature” were applicable to everyone – regardless of sex, marital status, or age. Any type of penetration could be deemed as a “crime against nature” and the penalty could be up to ten years in prison. In 1917 the case of *Ex Parte De Ford* added fellatio as falling under the “crime against nature” statute. In 1935 the decision in *Roberts v. State* expanded the statute definition to include cunnilingus and also included “a carnal knowledge, committed against the order of nature, with mankind or with a beast.” *LeFavour v. State of Oklahoma* (1943) upheld the standard that a “crime against nature” could be committed by *both* heterosexuals and homosexuals alike.⁶³

⁶² Also, see the most recent Oklahoma Title 21 Statutes §21-886 - 888 for *Crimes Against Nature and Sodomy* as defined by Oklahoma State law. Changes in sodomy laws will be explored chronologically in future chapters. The information presented here is valid through 1945. For those who may not be aware, sodomy refers to the biblical story of Sodom & Gomorrah that some Christians believe refers to homosexuality and God’s vengeance on it. While the sexual act is understood as sodomy, the term “sodomite” was used to refer most commonly to a “perverse” identity before the term homosexual was coined by the psychological and scientific community in 1870 with the article by Westphal. See Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 42-3.

⁶² Unfortunately, criminal indexes located on the second floor in the court clerk’s office were one of the only research resources offered by the courthouse. It is likely that there were many cases that never made it to the criminal level of which no records currently exist. In later chapters, the homosexual community becomes a targeted group in the 1950s and 1960s in Tulsa.

⁶³ George Painter, “Oklahoma,” *Sodomy Laws*, accessed: June 20, 2015, <http://www.glapn.org/sodomylaws/usa/oklahoma/oklahoma.htm> Also, in 1933 Oklahoma enacted a sterilization law for repeat offenders of “moral turpitude.” Although this law was on the books until 1943 when the Supreme Court of the United States struck it down, it is unclear how many individuals experienced sterilizations during this period.

Age was another factor in considering cases of sodomy. One had to be old enough in order to give his or her consent to a sex act. Views on the age of consent have shifted many times over the years. In the early American colonies various communities defined understandings of consent differently. During the eighteenth century, the legal understandings of consent were focused on the activities of girls and the age tended to range from ten to twelve years old depending on the colony. By the end of the nineteenth century, child labor laws helped monitor child prostitution and for most states the age of consent ran between sixteen and eighteen years of age.⁶⁴ In Oklahoma, the age of consent to this day rests at sixteen years of age for young men and women.⁶⁵

Same-Sex Sodomy Arrests

Notably, the earliest mention of sodomy in the *Tulsa Daily World* was on December 18, 1913 when it reported that a grand jury had been looking into cases of vice in Tulsa. It was reported that:

The grand jury was in session for seventeen (17) days, during which time it examined more than three hundred (300) witnesses. Most of our time was devoted to the investigation of violations of the prohibitory liquor and gambling laws, and that inquiry has been limited almost entirely to the city of Tulsa. Other

⁶⁴ Therefore it is necessary that we keep in mind these social shifts on moral social norms as the first sodomy cases are discussed in these first few chapters. While today some might view these sexual relationships as predatory, or as sex crimes, at that time in history it was not uncommon for people to get married in their early teen years. Social norms were much different than today for people of all sexualities, and of course, there were many men who engaged in relations with individuals of their same age. In Tulsa these first “crimes against nature” were simply focused on those involving children, including homosexual and heterosexual activity. Nevertheless, they serve as the first cases for same-sex sexual activity in the historical record that has been found to date.

⁶⁵ Stephen Robertson, "Age of Consent Laws," *Children and Youth in History*, Item #230, accessed: July 7, 2015, <http://chnm.gmu.edu/cyh/case-studies/230>

violations of law have been considered, including murder, forgeries, embezzlement, false pretenses, petty larceny, and sodomy.⁶⁶

The first cases of same-sex sexuality began to be found in the criminal indexes at the Tulsa County Courthouse in 1913 – involving mainly incidents of adults with children. A case was made against a thirty-nine year-old resident of Tulsa, Joe Rogers, who was an Irish white male and was born in Iowa.⁶⁷ Rogers had committed sodomy with a ten year old. He was tried by a grand jury of three individuals: Clyde Talkins, Raymond Talkins, and Mrs. Fannie McElroy. It was written in the district court file that Joe Rogers was indicted for:

Willfully, unlawfully, and feloniously attempt to commit the detestable and abominable crime against nature in manner and form as follows to-wit: the said Joe Rogers did then and there willfully unlawfully and feloniously attempt to penetrate the anus of one Clyde Talkins a male child of the age of ten years, with the penis of him the said Joe Rogers, with the intent then and there upon the part of the said Joe Rogers to commit the detestable and abominable crime against nature.⁶⁸

How Rogers pled and outcome of the case was unclear, as it appears that those documents have not survived the test of time. However, on February 28, 1915 the *Tulsa Daily World* mentioned a Joe Rogers in an article after he was apparently arrested for male prostitution on the east side of town. At the time of his sentencing, Judge Clark of Tulsa County was reported to have said:

“I cannot see any difference between a male and a female harlot,” said Judge Clark of the municipal court yesterday morning, summing up the case of Joe Rogers. “I will assess the customary fine for prostitution, \$10.” Rogers was

⁶⁶ *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK), Dec. 18, 1913. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

⁶⁷ 1910 Census Tulsa, s.v. “Joe Rogers,” Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, accessed through *Ancestry.com*.

⁶⁸ Tulsa County District Case #367

found in an east side of prostitution where, officers testified, he makes a custom of lodging.⁶⁹

This case was one of the first of its kind to echo across the chambers of Judge Clark. The date of this article suggests that the prior sodomy case involving a child was likely dismissed due to the fact that Rogers was clearly in Tulsa doing sex-work less than two years later. Judge Clark's judgment also suggests that prostitution acts by both sexes seemed to be treated equally in the eyes of the law at this time – at least by the attitude of the judge in *this* case. Based on this account, Rogers had a regular supply of clientele, which leads one to believe that there were likely many men looking for others such as themselves. Two things are also particularly important to note here: 1) these early cases prove that same-sex sexualities existed in Tulsa and 2) Tulsa County law enforcement officials did not appear to be especially interested in specifically targeting those crimes of vice that involved two adult males.⁷⁰ Rather, they were more interested in arresting those who committed sex-crimes with children. Of particular importance, this would begin to change in later years and sex crime statutes would be used to criminalize same-sex sexual behaviors between adults and their identities.

These conclusions are mirrored by historian Aaron Bachhofer's work on the history of the Oklahoma City gay and bisexual male community, where there were men who were arrested for prostitution around the same time period. Both Tulsa and Oklahoma City offered a vice culture that served a social need and it is likely that many

⁶⁹ *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK), February 28, 1915. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

⁷⁰ Rather, they appeared to be more concerned with the fact crimes involving children (as they defined a child during those years).

men traveled between cities to either do sex-work or to partake in its rewards.⁷¹ After all, for men who had no way to interpret their same-sex sexual desires, finding an outlet was a natural response – even if it meant seeking out prostitutes. It is also equally probable that men with same-sex sexualities engaged in sex acts performed in public spaces. In fact, for heterosexuals this was a social norm in the Tulsa red light district.⁷²

In addition, citizens of both Black and White communities were aware of the act of sodomy. On March 16, 1918 *The Tulsa Star* (an African American newspaper) published a letter that mentioned sodomy. An evangelistic preacher, S. D. McDuffie, (claimed to be from New York) had been in the city running a Christian revival. He considered himself to be “the worlds renown most imminent and noted evangelist of the [African American] race.” The letter to the editor was a response to an article posted where a woman had accused McDuffie of accosting her and throwing her out of a revival tent, which enraged the newspaper and the community. A fervent reader, J.W. Wilkins, provided his insight into other actions of McDuffie:

Dear Sir – I notice in this week’s issue of your paper an account of an incident that occurred in the A. M. E. church of your city. This incident reminds me of one similar which occurred. If I not be [*sic*] mistaken, is the same person of Rev. S. D. McDuffie who then claimed he was from Providence, R. I., at the time I speak of on or about first of January 1918 at San Antonio, Texas. This same man who carried on a meeting at Rev. Sim’s A. M. E. church and he was arrested for flogging a boy about 18 years old. This boy made a charge in open court against Rev. S. D. McDuffie of sodomy (hobbering with him). Do you get me? Good colored citizens got together and squashed his case with the law, and he, Rev. S. D. McDuffie, evangelist, made a very hasty retreat from San

⁷¹ For more information on early male same-sex sexualities in Oklahoma City, see Aaron L. Bachhofer II, “The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 1889-2005,” (PhD Dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 2005), 1-28.

⁷² For more on sex acts in Tulsa see Lemons, “Down on First Street,” 74-5.

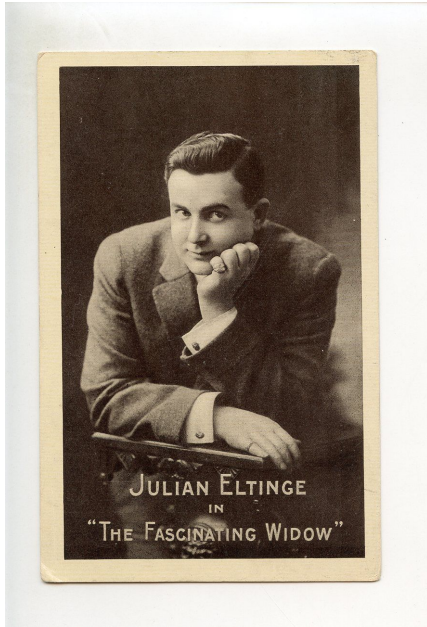


Illustration 16: Vaudeville female impersonator, Julian Eltinge. Real photo post card. Public domain (before 1923). Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

Antonio, Texas. I am of the belief that this man is a degenerate.... Very Respectfully Yours, J. W. Wilkins⁷³

While “degenerates” conducted the act, most men and women (including those with same-sex sexualities) in Tulsa went about their daily lives concealed by a shroud of invisibility unless they were caught in the act of “hobbering” with someone of the same sex. This was the only instance found in *The Tulsa Star* using of the term “sodomy” through the early twenties. The fact that the author of the letter implies McDuffy’s same-sex sexual act in a

discreet manner suggests that this was not a common topic of discussion – at least in the Black community through the period of World War I in Tulsa.

Vaudeville in T-Town: Early Gender Impersonators

During the early twentieth century vaudeville was a popular source of entertainment for Americans and early Tulsans. The pastime allowed for a diverse variety specialty acts to visit the growing city and entertain local residents – especially those more wealthy locals. During the first two decades of the 1900s places such as the Orpheum, Empress, Grand, Palace, Dreamland, and Yale theatres opened in the city and offered vaudeville entertainment both live and on the silver screen. One form of

⁷³ *The Tulsa Star* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK), March 16, 1918. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

entertainment that was enjoyed by residents was that of gender impersonators.⁷⁴ Three female impersonators made appearances in the city from 1913-1922: Hal Johnson, Karyl Norman, and the famous Julian Eltinge. Another act, a male impersonator known as Collis Le Page, graced the stage at the Yale Theatre as early as January 1914.⁷⁵

One of the most famous female impersonators of the era was that of Julian Eltinge. He first put on female clothing at the age of ten and soon thereafter found himself immersed in the art of female impersonation in vaudeville circuits by age twenty-three. His beauty garnered him the nickname of “Mr. Lillian Russell,” and according to Anthony Slide:

His vaudeville success can be attributed in large part to the glamorous costumes he used, which apparently won over completely the female members of the audience, and to a creditable singing voice, far superior to that possessed by other female impersonators of the period... In a 1909 interview, Eltinge explained that he spent two hours transforming himself into a woman with the help of his male Japanese dresser, Shima. Almost an hour would be devoted to his makeup, and Eltinge noted, “It depends on where you put the paint, not how much you splash on.”⁷⁶



Illustration 17: Julian Eltinge in character. Real photo post card. Public domain (before 1923). Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

⁷⁴ Today, this would be known as “drag,” or impersonation of the sex opposite of ones birth. In this type of art, female impersonators were biological men who would perform under the visible appearance of a woman. Whereas, male impersonators were biological women who would perform with the visible appearance of a man. While their gender non-conformity was as an aspect of their career, it did not necessarily equate to the performer as having a same-sex sexuality – even though it was often assumed by many that they did.

⁷⁵ “Yale Theatre,” *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK) January 29, 1914. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

⁷⁶ Anthony Slide, *The Encyclopedia of Vaudeville* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 159.

Eltinge was known by the likes of famous people such as Milton Berle and Rudolph Valentino. On October 11, 1917 “The Countess Charming” starring Eltinge was displayed on the silver screen at the Palace Theatre, and in January of 1922 he performed live at the Orpheum theatre. Eltinge was advertised for the event as “America’s Foremost Delineator of Feminine Characterizations.”⁷⁷ Julian’s career in vaudeville also garnered questions about his sexuality. According to Anthony Slide:



Illustration 18: Karyl Norman in character. Public Domain (Published in 1922). Courtesy of the Tulsa World (Tulsa, OK), September 3, 1922 and the Library of Congress

Julian Eltinge went to extraordinary lengths to stress his masculinity; there were endless stories of his beating up stagehands, members of the audience, and fellow vaudevillians who made suggestive remarks with regard to his sexual preference. Certainly, there was never a public hint that he was a homosexual, and if he had a lover, male or female, there is no record of that person’s existence. He never married and for the last years of his life lived with his mother on his ranch in Southern California...⁷⁸

Another popular female impersonator was that of Karyl Norman, known as “the Creole Fashion Plate.” Norman came to Tulsa and performed with Neil O’Brien’s Minstrels at the Grand Theatre on October 30th of 1915.⁷⁹ He was so popular that

gossip about his personal life even made the front page of the *Morning Tulsa Daily World* on August 31, 1922 after his brief engagement with a fellow vaudeville tomboy

⁷⁷ Palace Ad, *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK) October 11, 1917. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database; “Orpheum,” *The Morning Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK) January 20, 1922 From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 160.

⁷⁹ Photo Caption, *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK) October 28, 1915. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

gymnast was broken off. The gossip about the broken engagement took up a whole page in the *Morning Tulsa Daily World*.⁸⁰ Another article likened the engagement as doomed from the beginning, as if between an opposing eagle and dove. The *Tulsa Daily World* reported that, "on stage his naturally frail appearance is even more accentuated by his costumes. He is the epitome of fastidious femininity -- coy, shrinking super-refined. He is the violet, the cutglass, the rare china -- the dove!"⁸¹ Norman was said to have gone on to perform at a famous drag club in San Francisco known as Finnochio's.⁸²

Hal Johnson, another female impersonator appeared at the Empress theatre as early as 1913 and performed a musical



Illustration 19: The beautiful Orpheum Theatre c. 1921. Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

called "Oh! Look Who's Here." He was said to be "The only Rival of Julian Eltinge..."⁸³ In January of 1915 he came to the city again to perform another musical comedy dubbed "The Little Modiste" at the Empress. It was reported by the *Tulsa Daily World* to be "... one of the cleanest musical shows ever here, Johnson is a big hit, and

⁸⁰ "Why the Weirdest of Engagements has Been Broken Off," *Morning Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK) August 31, 1922. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

⁸¹ "Why the Strangest of Engagements has Been Broken Off," *The Morning Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian, Territory, OK) September 3, 1922 From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

⁸² Slide, *The Encyclopedia of Vaudeville*, 375.

⁸³ "Empress," *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK) November 9, 1913. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.



GRAND THEATRE.

Illustration 20: Grand Theatre. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

his mammoth production of the latest musical comedy success, "The Little Modiste," stands without a peer as an impersonator of the present-day type of American society women [*sic*]. Unlike Mr. Eltinge, Mr. Johnson is blessed with a slight and rather girlish figure. With dainty hands and feet, possessed of the quickness, lightness of foot and grace of a premier ballet dancer, he fairly amazes his audience. Johnson is not effeminate off the stage -- on the contrary, he is decidedly masculine, and this fact makes his stage characterization all the more remarkable...⁸⁵

Sissy's in Tulsa: 1900-1920

It is also important to understand how those men same-sex sexualities were viewed in

the nation during this period. One way of doing this is by looking at other forms of



Illustration 21: Empress Theatre. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

his Spanish dance gains him many encores...⁸⁴ On January 13, 1915

a humorous advertisement was written to exhibit competition with the popular Julian Eltinge.

The Empress Theatre ad in the *Tulsa Daily World* reported that:

With all due respect to Julian Eltinge and his acknowledged art, Halton Powell [producer] claims that Mr. Hal Johnson, the star of

⁸⁴ "Empress," *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK) January 15, 1915. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

⁸⁵ "Empress," *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK) January 13, 1915. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

entertainment, such as media and films of the period. While the early decades of the twentieth century were a time of a social awakening to the presence of the “homosexual,” many men with same-sex sexualities were depicted in film as feminized and humorous figures commonly called “sissy’s.” Sissies were not typically sexualized; rather they symbolized a fun-loving stereotype, much like the comedy performances of the vaudeville impersonators that visited the area. Their characters were “fey,” or fairy-like. They were innocent in the movies, but also were ultimately a threat to masculinity. The sexologists of this period referred to those with same-sex sexualities as “inverts” or a reversal of gender and sexual roles.⁸⁶ Vito Russo in *The Celluloid Closet* suggests that sissy’s also served as yardsticks of masculinity for many men. Later, as future chapters discuss, as the realization of the existence of the homosexual as a “diseased” person spreads across the United States this role will begin to shift into depictions that are more sinister in nature.⁸⁷ Moreover, while the term “queer” was viewed as something that was strange or out of place through the World War I period, the semantics of this term began to shift in the thirties and began to be understood as a derogatory term for males with same-sex sexualities.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Sexologists such as Magnus Hirschfeld of Germany and Sigmund Freud, a psychoanalyst, were among these scientists. Freud viewed homosexuality through a mostly sympathetic lens although many of his peers increasingly pathologized homosexuality. The medical communities discussion of homosexuality increasingly drew away from the body and towards the psyche. These views would play a minor role until the 1940s when the Kinsey reports would come out. See John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 16.

⁸⁷ Vito Russo. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 16, 4-59.

⁸⁸ Evidence of this historical claim was found in the oral histories conducted for this project in combination with historical newsprint published from 1900-1919 using the term “queer.”

While inquiries into Tulsa newspapers for words such as “homosexual,” “sodomite,” “sodomy,” and “queers” presents few results, a search for “sissy” produces over 147 references in the *Tulsa Daily World* alone through 1922. The public understanding of the “sissy” was alive and well in Tulsa through the twenties. In fact, in one issue of the *Tulsa Daily World*, a 1915 advertisement for Brown & Blazer at 216 South Main boasted that: “Men know what men like as gifts. No ‘Sissy’ salesmen here!



Illustration 22: A WWI example of male same-sex affection. Unknown Subjects/ Photographer. Public domain photograph (before 1923). Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

No ‘Sissy’ merchandise, either. Manly gifts for manly men—and plenty of them here.”⁸⁹

Another “humor” column from 1916 titled *Sun Grins* by D.B. Hamilton joked: “Do you know the sissy boy with the long finger nail? You do! Well, he uses it to pick the wax out of his bally ears.”⁹⁰ Later he writes, “Free advice: Never hit a nigger on the head with your fist.” Clearly, being a sissy or an African American was not considered to be a positive trait in

Tulsa during these early decades. Importantly, these tensions would come to a head in future years as residents would begin to crackdown on their interpretations of the vice culture in the city.⁹¹

⁸⁹ “Sun Grins,” *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK), Dec. 15, 1915. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

⁹⁰ D.B. Hamilton, *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK), Oct. 9, 1916. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

⁹¹ During this period a growing social trend in Tulsa viewed African Americans as embodying the heart of the vice culture in Tulsa. This would come to a head with the 1921 Race War in Tulsa as discussed in the next chapter.

In addition to these examples, a poem was published in the *Tulsa Daily World* that suggested how a “sissy” might cast off the social stigma of male femininity. On December 16, 1917 the poem titled “Khaki” read:

Bill as never any ringer for Adonis,
He was easier to look at after dark,
And so useless in the schoolroom that
He hung around a pool room
And amassed a reputation as a shark.
But they picked him up and poured him into khaki,
And it gives the girls a jumpy little thrill
When they see him lead the column,
Marching mightly straight and solemn,
For the uniform that made a man of Bill,
You can pick ‘em here and there around the village
Camouflaged as local pests and corner bums,
But you’ll find there’s something to ‘em when on dress parade you view ‘em
Marking time, with earnest footwork to the drums.
All they needed was an int’reast in some business,
And a bunch that there was something they could do.
Line the loafingest rapscallions into squadrons and battalions
And don’t worry any more; for they’ll go thru
Percy’s pals were rather prone to call him “Sissy,”
He was always on the side-lines in a scrap.
He was shy and sort of girlie and his hair was soft and curly,
Just a weak and wishy-washy little chap.
But he buckled up and butted into Plattsburg.
And he’ll be among the first to go to France,
And the Honuses and Hermans and the other kinds of Germans
Will get theirs as soon as Percy gets his chance!
You can never tell the way they look beforehand,
But as soon as they are in the olive drab
You don’t ever need to doubt ‘em; there’s a somethingness about ‘em
That convinces you that what they want they’ll grab,
Look at any squad that marches to the landing;
Take another look, and then, well look again,
And you’ll see they’ve changed their bearing with the uniform they’re wearing,
For the Khaki makes ‘em able fighting men!
--Pittsburgh Post.⁹²

⁹² “Khaki,” *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK), Dec. 16, 1917. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

Putting on a uniform and going to battle in the impending war would become a way for the “sissy” to reclaim his masculinity. The war was a path toward individual transformation. Many men held these associations between being a masculine soldier during this period.

As the war closed in, President Woodrow Wilson was elected for a second term.

On April 6, 1917 the United States officially entered into World War I (known as “The Great War”) with allies Britain, France, and Russia. Although many Americans were not in favor of the war, those with same-sex sexualities and other male residents of Tulsa were sent to fight and its impact was felt across the city. Notably, oil from Tulsa played a major role in the war. Ford noted that, “oil became the lifeblood of the Allies effort in winning World War I. One Allied leader said, ‘The Allies floated to victory on a sea of oil.’... Oklahoma supplied one-third of the nation’s oil during World War I.”⁹³



Illustration 23: Two World War I Army soldiers in khaki uniforms dancing together. Unknown Subjects/Unknown Photographer. Public domain real photograph (before 1923). Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

At home, the city had become more divided along lines of race and class. One explanation for this was the general fear that surrounded the war itself and paranoia of an invasion of the central powers. There were several reasons for this change in social

⁹³ Beryl Ford et al., *Historic Tulsa: An Illustrated History of Tulsa & Tulsa County*. (San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2006), 31.

climate. First, at one point during the war the city formed the Tulsa Council of National Defense, an organization that existed to “investigate” draft evaders and those who dissented to the war.⁹⁴ Those citizens who stayed at home during the war and showed less than absolute enthusiasm were considered disloyal and anti-American. Second, across the nation Blacks were unhappy with the fact that they were required to fight for their country and in turn they experienced segregation and discriminatory acts against while in service. In effect, racial tensions rose. Third, while the oil boom had brought with it the steadfast industrialization of the city, it had also brought large numbers of blue-collar workers that were sometimes not skilled. Many Tulsans found these individuals to be a threat to the prosperity of the city. In response, some residents became very anti-union during this period and viewed unions as stifling to the patriotic principles of free enterprise and individualism.⁹⁵ Fourth, another organization called the Knights of Liberty formed and traveled throughout the city while masked and cloaked in black robes rooting out disloyalists, beating and whipping them.⁹⁶ Tulsa had officially become a city where the wealthy ruled and the poor were seen as an existential threat to a more well to do patriotic citizenry. This social shift in the city is evidence that ultimately “nationalism became confused with submission, and patriotism

⁹⁴ In addition, they advocated the sale of Liberty Bonds to citizens and local businesses to help support the war effort. They also investigated claims of military men who were “slackers” and provided aid to soldier families. By 1919 the group “had found eighty-four cases of disloyalty, caught twelve deserters, and made twenty unpaid Liberty Bond holders “see the light.” See Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills*, 102.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ For example, on November of 1917 “a mob calling itself the ‘Knights of Liberty’ whipped, tarred and feathered, and drove from the city seventeen agents of the Industrial Workers of the World [union] who had attempted to organize laborers in the Oklahoma oilfields.” See Charles C. Alexander, *Ku Klux Klan of the Southwest*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 24.

gave way to paranoia. If Tulsa's elites did not cause that, neither did they stop it. In fact, some of them celebrated it."⁹⁷

Those men with same-sex sexualities who either went to war or stayed at home

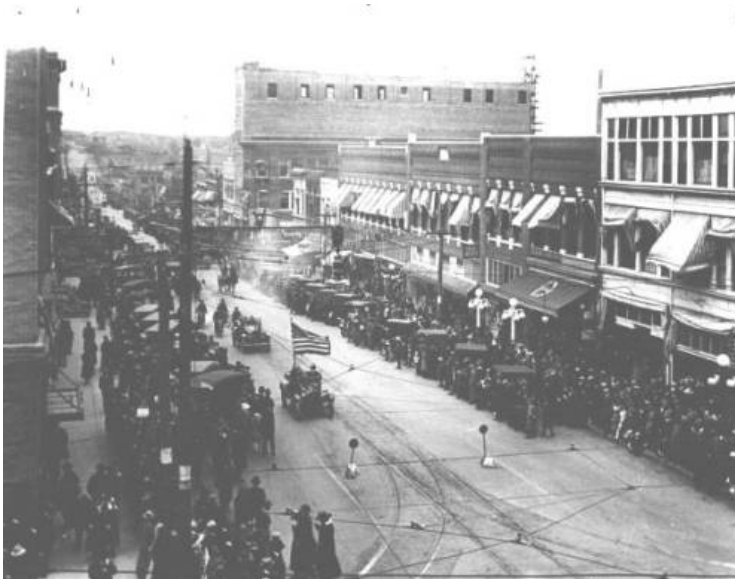


Illustration 24: Parade at the end of World War I in Tulsa. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

saw the booming oil town of

Tulsa shift socially and politically as paranoia grew in the city. Ultimately, residents began to negotiate ways to deal with the many groups and cultures that came to call this place home

– including the “sissy’s.”

While the war may have

been over, conflicts over issues of race, gender, sexuality, and vice in Tulsa were just beginning to get heated and what had been a relatively peaceful coexistence was about to become an all out war. Tulsans with same-sex sexualities were about to ride the social roller coaster that was the roaring twenties with the rest of the city.

⁹⁷ Goble, *Tulsa!*, 117.

Chapter 3: *Rising from the Ashes:*

A Spark of Homosexual Community Identity in Tulsa, Oklahoma 1920-1939

The Lashback: Tulsa in the 1920's

By 1921 the wealthiest of Tulsa's oilmen were worth millions of dollars. Many of these men distrusted authority figures unless it was someone who was related to them.⁹⁸ While not all of citizens were worth millions, Tulsa was still seen as an oasis in the nation – a place for opportunity and happiness.

As both Black and White soldiers returned from World War I, fears of change and continued lawlessness increased as racial and religious diversity expanded. During and after the war, impending paranoia and growing fear increased in White Tulsa as the middle-class Black community grew. The Black population of Tulsa had risen from

1,429 in 1907 to almost 11,000 in 1921. Like Whites, Blacks across the nation received the messages of prosperity and had flocked to the area, which included “two [segregated] Black



Illustration 25: The Greenwood District on fire. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

schools (Dunbar and Booker T. Washington); two Black newspapers (*The Tulsa Star*

⁹⁸ Danney Goble, *Tulsa!: Biography of the American City* (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1997), 113-33.

and *The Oklahoma Sun*); three Black lodges (the Masons, Knights of Pythias, and Odd Fellows); thirteen Black churches; two Black theaters; one Black hospital; and one Black library.” Known as “Black Wall Street,” Tulsa had become not one city, but in fact two: one Black, one White.⁹⁹

In May of 1921 tensions with growing diversity came to a head in a race war that left Black Wall Street in smoldering ruins. The conflict left 1,115 Black families homeless, 35 city blocks destroyed, and countless numbers slaughtered. By the time



Illustration 26: The Ku Klux Klan riding in Tulsa. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

martial law was declared and the National Guard arrived, the damage had already been done.¹⁰⁰

While Blacks were left to rebuild life in a new “tent city,” the Klan was set to become a powerful force in Tulsa. The Imperial Knights of

the Ku Klux Klan were a group of middle-class white men and women who sought to restore law, order, and ultimately, Victorian morality. Those who were in their way

⁹⁹ Ibid., 123.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 127. See a more thorough account in Courtney Ann and Glenn Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills: Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1984), 106-14. For other accounts see Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 45-70; Hannibal B. Johnson, *Black Wall Street: From Riot to Renaissance in Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District*, (Austin: Eakin Press, 1998), 27-79.

included: Blacks, Jews, Catholics, radicals, and foreigners. The Klan has been remembered for their fear mongering and acts of hate, but for White Tulsa the Klan was, at first, seen as a positive influence. They did charity work and even organized events for White children during the holidays. By the spring of 1921, powerful chapters already existed in Oklahoma cities such as Tulsa, Muskogee, Oklahoma City, Lawton, and Enid.¹⁰¹ What lawlessness city officials had failed to handle, the Ku Klux Klan cleaned up – *or so they believed*. And because Klan member identities were kept hidden, many easily infiltrated all levels of social and political life, becoming a powerful force to be reckoned with in Tulsa during the twenties. Klan members abducted, whipped, injured, and killed those they viewed as threats. Numerous cases occurred in Tulsa. For instance, in 1922 a prominent black man named John Smitherman was abducted from his home and taken outside of town where Klan members whipped him, cut off his ear with a pocket knife, and tried to get him to eat it in an attempt to scare him into leaving town.¹⁰²

The Klan largely operated unrestrained until late one night in August 1923 when they abducted a young Jewish veteran named Nathan Hantaman. After being treated with narcotics for war injuries he had become addicted. Like many veterans in similar situations, he was accused of drug trafficking. According to Alexander, Hantaman was taken out off a road in nearby Sand Springs into the woods and was strung up in a tree and lashed mercilessly with a black bullwhip. At one point during the lashings, his penis

¹⁰¹ Charles C. Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 66.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

was even split open.¹⁰³ After hearing of the event, Governor Walton in Oklahoma City effectively declared martial law on the entire city. Later, he censored the *Tulsa Tribune* for voicing concerns about his actions.¹⁰⁴ Tulsa was under military rule for a few weeks during which time the Governor set up military tribunals to look into the actions of the Klan. Although a few were arrested, most were never identified or held accountable for any of their actions. Nevertheless, as the end of the twenties drew near, the Klan's influence began to wane.¹⁰⁵

Social unrest came to define Tulsa's history in the twenties and they were not the only negative forces. For instance, in June of 1923 a natural disaster hit the city and its surrounding communities: the Arkansas River broke its banks and flooded low-lying areas – including homes. Yet, progress was made due to a second oil boom that created over 1500 oil-related companies. The city also began the International Petroleum Exposition, and in 1929 the famous “mother road,” Route 66, was completed. By the end of the decade balance seemed to be restored for (White) Tulsa.¹⁰⁶

The “Roaring Twenties” for Gay Men and Women in Tulsa, Oklahoma

Same-sex sexualities existed in Tulsa in the twenties as it did in previous decades. Residents during the decade also witnessed the emergence of male leaders who were forced to acknowledge their same-sex sexuality. This is evident by reviewing the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 142-43.

¹⁰⁴ Goble, *Tulsa!*, 133. Supported by Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills*, 114-15.

¹⁰⁵ Alexander, *Ku Klux Klan of the Southwest*, 207-08. Also see David J. Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 89-139.

¹⁰⁶ Beryl Ford et al., *Historic Tulsa: An Illustrated History of Tulsa & Tulsa County*. (San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2006), 34-5. Balance was anything but restored for Black Tulsa. During this period many Blacks lived in poverty in their former bustling community as they struggled to rebuild. See Goble, *Tulsa!*, 140-47.

notable figures that later were found to have lived “in the closet,” as well as through cases of “crimes against nature” in Tulsa that increased during this period.

Bruce Goff

In the late 1920s one of Tulsa’s notable figures, Bruce Goff, came into view. In 1929 one of Goff’s most praised architectural designs, the Boston Avenue Methodist Church, finished construction in downtown Tulsa. Designed by the highly esteemed Bruce Goff and Adah Robinson, the building is now registered in the National Register of Historic Places.¹⁰⁷

Goff was born on June 8, 1904 in Kansas. He was a prominent architect of the early twentieth century who was known for his unique architecture that sought to exemplify the “continuous present.” He did most of his work in Oklahoma, Chicago, and parts of Texas. During his career as an

architect, he saw many of his architecture designs used in building projects across the country. He drew his inspiration from Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Sullivan, and Erich Mendelsohn among others. In addition to his architecture projects, he composed piano music and was an artist of other visual forms of art. Later in his career, he taught architecture at the University of Oklahoma and even served as Chair of the Architecture



Illustration 27: A portrait of Bruce Goff.
*The Oklahoma Publishing Company
Photography Collection. Courtesy of the
Oklahoma Historical Society.*

¹⁰⁷ Today, the Boston Avenue Methodist Church is viewed as one of the best examples of art deco architecture in the United States. Dianna Everett, "Boston Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, accessed: November 13, 2015, <http://www.okhistory.org>



Illustration 28: The Boston Avenue Methodist Church.
Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

Department for a period in the early 1950s – inspiring and mentoring the students he taught.¹⁰⁸ Scanlan noted that:

Despite his purist, “continuous present” approach, however, there are recurrent themes in Goff’s work that reveal a lot about his understanding of people’s domestic needs - and perhaps a little about being a gay Oklahoman architect during the Eisenhower era. It has to be mentioned that in 1955, at the relative height of his success and popularity, Goff was entrapped and arrested for “endangering the morals of a minor,” forced to resign his chair at the University of Oklahoma and - in true Wild West fashion - asked to leave town.¹⁰⁹

One of Goff’s former students

remembered Goff and his accomplishments in retrospect:

I do not remember the fact that BG [Bruce Goff] was gay ever influencing our dealings with him. He commanded a deep and special respect. It didn’t enter my mind. Only in later years did I hear stories about BG and gay activities with other students they had obviously kept quiet at the time. It had been suspected, however, because in 1955 BG resigned his chairmanship after being obviously set up for inappropriately touching a minor in the public exhibition area of the school with a policeman, just by chance, on hand to catch him. President Cross and most students and faculty encouraged him to fight the charge, but he decided to leave instead. In BG’s time homosexuality was not accepted either legally or socially. Gay people risked being fired from their jobs if found out.

¹⁰⁸ “Bruce Goff Archive,” *Art Institute of Chicago*, accessed: November 13, 2015, <http://www.artic.edu/research/bruce-goff-archive>

¹⁰⁹ Joe Scanlan, “No Place Like Home: The Architecture of Bruce Goff” *Frieze Magazine*, January/February 1996, no. 26; Supported by Carol Mason, *Oklahoma: Lessons in Unqueering America* (New York: SUNY Press, 2015), 111-37.

We know much more about sexuality than we did in 1955, and thankfully institutions and individuals are much more accepting.¹¹⁰

The early twentieth century in Tulsa was ripe with social paranoia and the brutality of the Ku Klux Klan; therefore many men with same-sex sexualities kept their sexualities a secret and attempted to hold onto their privacy. Similar to Goff, many men struggled with their sexualities as most knowledge on the issue focused on the sex act itself and did not include a space for positive identity development. Further, there was strong social stigma and internalized shame tied to homosexuality as a deviant behavior. Thus, many homosexuals were closeted from the public and many struggled to make sense of their sexualities.

Because Tulsa was, on all accounts two cities (one Black and one White), if an underground community of “friends” did exist it may have existed separately in both Black Tulsa and White Tulsa. However, while no evidence has been found of diverse same-sex sexualities in the Greenwood community for this era, there is evidence that same-sex sexuality did exist in White Tulsa if one reviews the news and court records from the period.

Sodomy in T-Town

In late September of 1921, an advertisement in the *Morning Tulsa Daily World* made the news for W.M.O. Nease, an Evangelist preacher who was giving a speech about “The Modern Sodomites Doom.”¹¹¹ In another issue of the *Morning Tulsa Daily*

¹¹⁰ Herb Greene, “Recollections of Bruce Goff as Teacher.” *Architecture Design* 48, no. 10 (1978): 52-4.

¹¹¹ “The Modern Sodomites Doom,” *The Morning Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK), June 29, 1921; “The Modern Sodomites Doom,” *The Morning Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Indian Territory, OK) June 22, 1921. From *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Library of Congress Online Database.

World, W.M.O. Nease described the sodomites' predicament for families and children of the Tulsa area:

Watch Old Mrs. Lot as she concludes that her daughters, who are comparatively smart girls of the city, are being lost. See the course of music and dancing lessons from famous professors at Gomorrah to bring these girls up to date. See Old Sister Long Tongue in the circles of modern society as she trains up and trims her girl for the modern market and future damnation. Think of the modern man who has gone so far in his sensual wickedness until he is utterly without restraint. What must the fatherhood be that will arise out of the present generation? The picture is too dark for prediction. What kind of motherhood will the modern jazz girl offer the men of the coming generation?¹¹²

Clearly, the vice culture, prostitution down on First Street, and the changing role of women in the nation was being recognized by a more conservative religious community.

The first documented case found occurred on February 8th 1926 when a defendant named B. O. Hall presented himself before Tulsa County Judge C. S. Walker after being accused of:

Willfully and feloniously commit[ing] the detestible [*sic*] and abominable crime against nature in the way and manner as follows, that is to say: Said defendant did then and there unlawfully, wilfully [*sic*] and feloniously take into his mouth, the penis of one G. G. Carter, Jr., a male child of the age of twelve (12) years, and then and there sucking the same.¹¹³

Halls bail bond was set at \$3,000. After he initially entered a plea of not guilty, Hall later withdrew a plea of not guilty and pled guilty. He was sentenced to five years imprisonment at the state penitentiary in McAlester. Later, on November 6th of 1926 Judge C.S. Walker saw another defendant, W. H. Melton, who was accused of oral

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Tulsa County District Case #3633

sodomy with a Walter Eugene Walker, Jr., “male child of the age of eight years.”¹¹⁴ The case was later dismissed by the court for unknown reasons.

In 1926 a man named William Adams was given the pseudonym “John Doe” by the courts and was charged with sodomy based on information submitted to the courts. However, the defendant pled not guilty and the Tulsa County attorney eventually dismissed the case.¹¹⁵ The next year on April 1st 1927 a twenty-four year old defendant named Joe Combas stood in front of County Attorney Bryan Kirkpatrick and Judge Edwin R. McNeill and was accused of:

Willfully and feloniously in a way and manner as follows, that is to say, said defendant being then and there a male person, commit the abominable and detestable crime of sodomy, in the manner and form as follows, to-wit: said defendant did then and there insert his private organ into the rectum of one, Odis, Houston, a male person of the age of fourteen years, then and there and thereby in way and manner as aforesaid unlawfully, willfully and feloniously committing the abominable and detestable crime of sodomy.¹¹⁶

Joe Combas ended up pleading guilty and was sentenced to one year of hard labor at the state penitentiary in McAlester.

Interestingly, it appeared that cases involving either anal or oral sodomy were prosecuted with the same fervor regardless of the sex of the parties involved. This suggested that during the twenties, male on male sodomy crimes were still treated similarly under the law as male on female crimes. For instance, on March 29th of 1928 Jack Long was accused of forcible oral sodomy on a female child of the age of five years. He was given seven years at the state penitentiary in McAlester.¹¹⁷ These findings were similar to those that were occurring in Oklahoma City at the time

¹¹⁴ Tulsa County District Case #3870

¹¹⁵ Tulsa County District Case #3760

¹¹⁶ Tulsa County District Case #3974

¹¹⁷ Tulsa County District Case #4342

suggesting that cases on adult/child sodomy were treated the same under the law in Oklahoma generally – regardless of the sex or sexuality of the parties involved.¹¹⁸

In May of 1929 the earliest case of consensual male adult same-sex sexuality was brought before the courts. Defendant Tandy Brown was indicted and pled not guilty to the charge of:

Knowingly, willfully, unlawfully, wrongfully and feloniously commit[ing] the detestible [*sic*] and abominable crime against nature with one William Devore a male person of the age of sixteen years, and did then and there unlawfully, wrongfully, willfully and feloniously have carnal knowledge of the body of the said William Devore.¹¹⁹

Unfortunately, the outcome of this case was unclear as there were pieces that did not withstand the test of time. It should be noted that the language of the rulings listed for the 1920s suggest that those who were ages fourteen or older were considered to have been “persons,” and those younger than fourteen were viewed as “children.”¹²⁰

The Depression Years

As the thirties approached, religious extremism and paranoia disguised as patriotism waned. The strong influence of the Ku Klux Klan in Tulsa also began to disintegrate.



Illustration 29: Downtown Tulsa c. 1930. Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

¹¹⁸ Aaron L Bachhofer II, “The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 1889-2005,” (PhD Dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 2005), 37.

¹¹⁹ Tulsa County District Case #4761 and #16690; This illustrates another shift in moral norms.

¹²⁰ Even today the age of consent in Oklahoma is age sixteen; See Oklahoma, Consent of a Minor. OUJI-CR 4-138; Oklahoma, Title 21. § 21-1111-1114; § 21-1123.

Prior to the Depression, Tulsa was considered one of the richest and most powerful cities in the world. Prosperity was at its peak and it had become the Magic City of oil!

However, dark times were about to descend upon the nation. On October 24, 1929 Wall Street crashed. Many referred to this day as “Black Tuesday.” The crash was the most devastating stock market crash in the history of the United States. When the price of oil plummeted in the early thirties and the Great Depression began to spread across the nation, Tulsa was (for a time) shielded by its prosperity. The Tulsa International Airport had been built in in the summer of 1929 and the city had just passed two bonds for the building of new infrastructure, two hospitals, five fire departments, and new parks/playgrounds. However, as the 1930s progressed, many blue-collar Tulsans began to struggle because the city did not have enough jobs for existing citizens. Also, the city’s reputation attracted poor migrants to what they believed was an “oasis on the plains” – an image city leaders had intentionally spread before the crash of 1929. Due to the fact that Tulsa’s main industry centered on petroleum and its derivative products, its businesses began to feel effects after 1930 when oil began to sell for a mere one-cent a barrel.¹²¹

Faced with the Great Depression, residents and city government officials struggled to make the ends meet. As the situation grew worse in Tulsa towards the late 1930s, many blue-collar workers began to become impatient with the city and the inaction of the wealthy oil companies to alleviate their ills. At one point there was even a strike at Mid-Continent Oil Company, protestors destroyed some pipelines in the fields, and some children of wealthy oilmen and women were even ridiculed in local

¹²¹ Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills*, 125-41.

schools. As a result, many Tulsans shifted their political party and began to dislike President Hoover and the Republican Party, marking a notable shift in Tulsa that would go on to last until another dissent occurred at the end of the decade at which time Tulsa took a turn back toward Republicanism.¹²²

The city eventually would make efforts to help residents. They offered free medical services through American Red Cross, held food drives, and the city even put together a committee to help fix the issues that residents were struggling with. In October of 1932, Tulsa issued the Mohawk Plan, a make-work program to help struggling Tulsans provide for their families. There was even a special ration system (like food stamps) that went into effect. By 1933 President Roosevelt had come into office and had taken a struggling nation under his wings. In that year he signed the Federal Emergency Relief Administration Act (FERA), which provided grants for public make-work projects in state and local governments such as Tulsa. In 1935 the Works Project Administration (WPA) replaced the FERA Act and provided work for many Tulsans in the building of new bridges, a new Central Fire Station, two new High Schools (Webster and Rogers), apparel manufacturing, gardening and canning projects, drainage systems, and new roads such as Quanah Avenue. Unemployment declined by 11 percent in Tulsa in 1939 and recovery arrived slowly.¹²³

Depression Life for Homosexual Men

For Tulsans with same-sex sexualities the Depression Era came as a breath of fresh air. Much of the social turmoil of the twenties had passed and social concerns turned toward the economy. Residents were not as focused on issues of difference as

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

they had been in previous decades. Similarly to their heterosexual peers, many blue-collar homosexual men and women of this period were affected disproportionately on the basis of social and economic class. The thirties in Tulsa ushered in a new era of a different kind of peace and prosperity, where notable figures such as Rollie Lynn Riggs and Lucius Beebe came into focus. And a new term came into use: “the homosexual.”¹²⁴

Rollie Lynn Riggs & *Oklahoma!*

Future playwright Rollie Lynn Riggs was born in Claremore, Oklahoma on August 31, 1899 and his father was known as an early cowboy in the area. His mother



**Illustration 30: A Youthful
Lynn Riggs. *Sooner Yearbook*,
1922. Courtesy of the University
of Oklahoma.**

was a mixed-blood Cherokee who, unfortunately, died a year after he was born. While Riggs experienced family turmoil with his newly remarried father and stepmother, he went to live with his aunt who owned a boarding house in Claremore. After attending high school in the area, he later moved to New York and Los Angeles where he sought work in Hollywood. In 1919, Lynn returned to Oklahoma and for a short period worked for the *Oil and Gas Journal* in Tulsa.

¹²⁴ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015. Also, prior to this point I have referred to same-sex acts (same-sex sexuality) and have tried to not use terminologies that insinuate group-cohesion and identity formation (i.e. homosexuals, gay community, etc.) It is important to note here that while many scholars view periods before the late 1800s as periods whose inhabitants had little to no sense of sexual identity, I do not suspect this to be the case in Tulsa. Therefore, I do not share the generalized claim that individuals did not realize same-sex love or have the ability to understand oneself as having an immutable sexuality that could not be changed. From this point forward through the 1960s, I shall refer to this group as “homosexuals” – a label that ushered in a new era where the majority of the American public began to see people with same-sex sexualities as a group that had a mental illness from the 1940s into the 1960s, which I shall explore in later chapters.

Later, he attended the University of Oklahoma and during his senior year (age twenty-four) he experienced a mental breakdown and left for Santa Fe, New Mexico to find himself. While in Santa Fe, Riggs came to recognize his own sexuality and in line with the culture of the times, he struggled to make sense of it. He found solace in the liberating and magical place that he believed Santa Fe to be. It could be said that throughout his career, Rollie largely kept his private activities separate from his public image, but it appears that many of his closest friends knew of his sexuality. His friend, a poet named Witter Brynner, came out of the closet publicly in 1931, when he wrote a love poem about his long-time same-sex partner. Also, Riggs was very close to actresses Bette Davis and Joan Crawford and even escorted them to many high society functions even though they had husbands at the time. (Joan Crawford also gave Riggs his longtime canine companion, a Scottish terrier named “The Baron.”) Throughout his life he had male companions (usually artists and playwrights he worked with) the most notable being that of Mexican artist Enrique Gasque-Molina (pseudonym Ramon Naya) with whom he lived and traveled. He even built a studio for Gasque-Molina above the garage of his Santa Fe home so that he would be more comfortable after moving in with him. In later years, the two collaborated on writing the play *The Vine*. While he did write some beautiful poetry, Riggs was mainly known for being a playwright and produced over 20 plays and short stories including *Roadside* (1929), *Green Grow the Lilacs* (1929), *The Cherokee Night* (1930), *The Year of Pilar* (1938), and *Toward the Western Sky* (1951). Many of his works explored the New Frontier, the expansion Westward, and early Pioneer struggles. Riggs saw Oklahomans as a distinct people with unique experiences worthy of artistic inquiry. In 1931, the Theater Guild opened his

play *Green Grow the Lilacs* on Broadway and it ran for sixty-four performances. In 1942, he was drafted into the United States Army and was stationed in Ohio. In 1943, Rogers & Hammerstein II turned *Green Grows the Lilacs* into the musical *Oklahoma!* The musical became an immediate sensation eulogizing the white pioneer image of the frontier of Oklahoma.¹²⁵ Although it is claimed that he never publicly or explicitly acknowledged his sexuality in his works, it is argued that many of them contain “coded messages” dealing with his own internal struggles of growing up in the Tulsa area during the first decades of the twentieth century. He had a bittersweet relationship with his Oklahoma past, and a lifetime struggling as a homosexual Native American man. In many of his letters to friends, he discussed his closeness to his companions, notably that of Enrique. He also was known to joke with friends using “camp” humor in some of his letters, a popular genre of humor used by many homosexual men during the 1930s - 1950s.¹²⁶ In the early fifties he was diagnosed with cancer and he died in New York on June 30, 1954 at the age of fifty-five.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, his contributions to Oklahoman’s were such that he put the state and its people in the minds of the nation and also taught us a little about what it was like to be a homosexual Native American Oklahoman. Sadly, many Oklahoma residents of future generations would have no idea that the song

¹²⁵ Phyllis Cole Braunlich, *Haunted by Home: The Life and Letters of Lynn Riggs* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 1-188, 202-08; Thomas A. Erhard, "Riggs, Rollie Lynn," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, accessed: November 14, 2015, <http://www.okhistory.org>; Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 271-303; Mason, *Oklahomo*, 18-20, 51.

¹²⁶ This type of humor is also illustrated in the quotation at the end of the chapter by Lucius Beebe when he refers to Clegg as “she” suggesting that large nationwide networks of homosexual men had been solidly established nationally by the late 1930s enough to transfer elements of cultural identity and humor.

¹²⁷ Womack, *Red on Red*, 271-303.

Oklahoma! was inspired by a play written by a man with a same-sex sexuality from the Tulsa area.

Memories of Coming of Age in the Depression Era Boomtown

Prior to and during the thirties overt same-sex sexuality in Tulsa was not something to be seen or discussed publicly; it was typically hidden and not well understood.¹²⁸ Like Riggs, many youth struggled to make meaning of their sexualities and having little to no understanding of the topic, many times they were left on their own to struggle with their identities. If there were discussions, they were generally quite negative. Two men who grew up during this period recalled that something was simply *different* about them at a very young age. Both interviewees reported a feeling of confusion. Lewis Brady, a retired kitchen design consultant, remembered being chastised by a nanny when she walked in on him and a friend experimenting. Brady stated:

I started early. I got caught at age five [which was in 1935 or 1936]. I had a little playhouse in the backyard and my neighbor across the street who was six and I were in there and [were experimenting] and the maid came out and looked in the window and she took us in and she washed our mouths out with soap and she said, "You're not supposed to do that!"... And the very next day Bobby and I were out there doing it again at ages five and six. She never told my parents and I don't know that it was ever discussed with my parents.¹²⁹

Fred, who is retired, also had similar experiences at age five. He said:

I had the feeling before I realized it. I was doing a show at Longfellow grade school [around 1938], which is now demolished, and I was doing portraits and statues. I was the boy in the Pioneer woman, and I had to stand still for three whole minutes... and if you've ever heard of a boy who could stand still for three whole minutes! [laughter]... I got an applause and that's what started me.

¹²⁸ This also might explain why we have very little records from prior eras of American history. Interviews with Fred and Lewis suggest these conclusions.

¹²⁹ Lewis Brady (Retired Kitchen Planning Consultant) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

At that time there was a sixth grader that passed by me for the first time and I got this strange feeling all over me... It was [pause] I didn't know what it was! But I know what it was now. I got hot, I got sweaty... got nervous... but I was five years old and I had no idea. And now when I look back on it... I know what it was!¹³⁰

Fred also remembered the messages he received at such a young age about what it meant to be someone like himself:

I was called queer, faggot, and some other things I probably won't mention. How it became gay, I have no idea. That's what it was when I grew up, it was faggot or a queer... [and] ... There was a professional tennis player here in Tulsa and he picked up someone in downtown [and was caught]. It ruined his career. I was twelve or thirteen at the time.¹³¹

Fred's memory suggested that derogatory terminologies were beginning to be used in the thirties as a means to mark deviance from norms of sexuality. It also suggests that homosexual men were classified as a group by the larger Tulsa society by the forties.

Changes in Sodomy Laws and Practices

Before the 1920s, Tulsa law enforcement officials seemed to express little interest in sodomy crimes unless it involved children – regardless of the sex of the parties involved. In the thirties this trend began an upward climb in both the number of cases and ones involving parties of the same sex (all fifteen cases are described here).¹³²

On April of 1930 a man named James Genro (defendant) who was a thirty-four year old riveter from Sand Springs, was said to have committed oral sodomy with a child of the

¹³⁰ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² As the 1930s progressed, many more sodomy cases entered the district courts – fifteen in all during this decade alone versus seven total in previous decades to statehood in 1907. In the 1930s, whereas only five cases were dismissed, eight were convicted as guilty, and in two cases there was no verdict found in the existing records.

age of twelve years who was named Ray Wallen.¹³³ Genro pled not guilty and paid over \$4,000 in fees (including a \$1,500 bond) before it was all said and done. Eventually, the case was dismissed.¹³⁴ To be arrested for a “crime against nature” was a costly experience for many.

In another case in April of 1932, an accused Bob Red Cloud (Alias) whose real name was Frank, pled guilty to the charge of sodomy with another man named Allen Harkey. His bond was set at \$3,500. The text read that Frank:

...did then and there unlawfully, willfully and feloniously commit the abominable and detestible [*sic*] crime against nature in the way and manner as follows, that is to say: said defendant did then and there unlawfully, willfully and feloniously commit the crime of sodomy with an Allen Harkey, by way of the rectum of the said Allen Harkey.¹³⁵

Frank was found guilty under Judge Thurman S. Hurst and was sentenced to three years in prison at the state penitentiary in McAlester.

Another case occurred on August 3rd 1934 when defendant Johnnie Holmes was accused in court of “unlawfully, willfully [*sic*] and feloniously, having unnatural and carnal copulation in the rectum with one Dora Holmes.”¹³⁶ Holmes bond was initially set at \$2,500 and he pled not guilty. Although the case was set to go to trial, records of it do not appear to exist today.

On July 11th 1935, a defendant named O.S. Maiden (who lived in the Oklahoma Hotel)¹³⁷ was accused of:

¹³³ 1940 Census Sand Springs, s.v. “James Genro,” Sand Springs, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, accessed through *Ancestry.com*.

¹³⁴ Tulsa County District Case #5033

¹³⁵ Tulsa County District Case #5791

¹³⁶ Tulsa County District Case #6778

¹³⁷ 1932 Tulsa City Directory, s.v. “O.S. Maiden,” Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, accessed through *Ancestry.com*.

Wilfully [*sic*] and feloniously commit[ing] the detestable and abominable crime against nature, to-wit: sodomy, by then and there taking the penus of one Bobby Howe into his mouth and sucking the same.¹³⁸

Maidens bond was set at \$1,500 and when calls went unanswered to the defendant and the bail bondsman, a bench warrant was issued. Later, the case was dismissed.

On May 20th 1936 a more interesting case came into view. A defendant, Sam Blevins, was accused of oral sodomy with a man named Clarence Pike. Blevins bail was set at \$1,500 and he was represented by two legal counsels: Harold Moles and Preston Davis. He was allowed to pay his own bail and the case was eventually dismissed by the courts.¹³⁹

In July of 1936 two cases appear to have been opened against one man who used the pseudonym “John Smith.” On July 19th of 1936 John Smith had been accused of receiving oral sodomy from a man named George Sawyer.¹⁴⁰ In the next case, the very same day, he was accused of “attempt[ing] to take the penus [*sic*] of one Cecil Garbey into his mouth, but was intercepted and prevented in the penetration thereof.”¹⁴¹ John Smith was represented by his legal counsel, Frank Hickman, in both cases and his bond for each case was initially set at \$5,000. Both were eventually dismissed “for good cause shown.”¹⁴² As these records suggest, it paid to have a good lawyer in Tulsa.

On October 7th 1937, a twenty-eight year-old white single man named Edward Duane (under alias Douglas Caley) was accused of anal sodomy with a man named Martin Pierce. The 1940 census states that Duane had four years of college education

¹³⁸ Tulsa County District Case #7255

¹³⁹ Tulsa County District Case #7706

¹⁴⁰ Tulsa County District Case #7817

¹⁴¹ Tulsa County District Case #7818

¹⁴² Tulsa County District Case #7817

and was originally from Massachusetts.¹⁴³ Duane was provided a public defender. While he initially pled not guilty, when present in open court he withdrew his plea of not guilty and entered a guilty plea. At the recommendation of the county attorney Dixie Gilmer, Duane was sentenced to ten years in the state penitentiary at McAlester for anal sodomy with another man.¹⁴⁴

Another case in July of 1937 involved twenty-three year old R.T. Pennington (given pseudonym Jack Townley) who was accused of having anal sodomy with a man named Goyle Glazebrook. Like Duane, Pennington was given a public defender and entered with a not guilty plea. Later he changed his plea (for whatever reason) in the courtroom and was prosecuted by County Attorney Dixie Gilmer. R.T. was found guilty and sentenced to five years hard labor at the state penitentiary in McAlester.¹⁴⁵

In December of 1939 Oklahoma native Leo Bailey, a married twenty-eight year old man who had an eighth grade education, was accused of anal sodomy.¹⁴⁶ The initial statement read:

On the 6th Day of October, A.D., 1939, and prior to the filing of this information [Leo Bailey] did then and there willfully and feloniously, commit the detestible [*sic*] abominable crime against nature, to-wit: sodomy, committed in way and manner as follows, that is to say, by then and there having unnatural and carnal copulation in the rectum with one Ray Pfleeger.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ 1940 Census Tulsa, s.v. "Eduard Duane," Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, accessed through *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁴⁴ Tulsa County District Case #8237/#8241

¹⁴⁵ Tulsa County District Case #8253

¹⁴⁶ 1940 Census Tulsa, s.v. "Leo Bailey," Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, accessed through *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁴⁷ Tulsa County District Case #9534

Pfleeger who was around eighteen years of age at the time of the offense signed the preliminary statement.¹⁴⁸ After a lengthy trial and almost twenty-four hours of deliberations by the jury, Leo pled not guilty but was ultimately found guilty of sodomy. Leo was sentenced to eight years hard labor in the state penitentiary in McAlester. Although his representation asked for a retrial, his request was denied.

Coincidentally, in October of 1939 another man named Dan Dignan was arrested for sodomy and put on trial. At the time of his arrest, Dan also had an eighth grade education.¹⁴⁹ Interestingly, the preliminary charges were similar to Bailey's:

On the 8th Day of October, A.D., 1939, and prior to the filing of this information [Dan Dignan] did then and there willfully and feloniously, commit the detestible [*sic*] and abominable crime against nature, to-wit: sodomy, committed in way and manner as follows, that is to say, by then and there having unnatural and carnal copulation in the rectum with one Ray Pfleeger.¹⁵⁰

Dignan and Bailey clearly shared the same attraction for Pfleeger, but it was one that would have consequences. Dignan pled guilty and was given five years hard labor at the state penitentiary in McAlester.

In another sad case, a young white single man named Elmer Critser who was only twenty years old was charged with sodomy in December of 1939. At the time, Critser held an eighth grade education. His bond was set at \$5,000. Under the advisement of his legal counsel A.C. Elliot, Elmer had initially pled not guilty but in court changed his plea to guilty of the crime of sodomy with another man. Elmer was

¹⁴⁸ 1940 Census Tulsa, s.v. "Ray Pfleeger," Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, accessed through *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁴⁹ 1940 Census Tulsa, s.v. "Dan Dignan," Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, accessed through *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁵⁰ Tulsa County District Case #9535

sentenced to imprisonment at the state penitentiary for five years. Sadly, two years after his proposed sentence would have ended, Elmer died in 1947 at age twenty-seven.¹⁵¹

Perhaps one of the more interesting cases involved an explicitly consensual sexual relationship between two men that faced the court. In September of 1939, Charles Brasher was found to have been “acting in concert with Cecil Howerton” to “commit the detestable and abominable crime against nature” by “having unnatural and carnal copulation in the mouth, with each other.”¹⁵² Interestingly, there was no record found of Cecil Howerton being tried and the preliminary information was actually supplied by the County Attorney Dixie Gilmer. In the end, Brasher was appointed representation by the state, a Tom Wallace, and ended up pleading guilty to the crime of sodomy. He was sent to the state penitentiary for one year.¹⁵³

The sodomy cases of the depression era are indeed saddening for readers today. As the years progressed, the records appear to illustrate increased penalties for men with same-sex sexualities – even between those of consenting adults. While it is not entirely clear how this transition occurred, as men sought out others like themselves, they learned from each other that they must do so in a discreet underground fashion (which also increased the risk of being caught). Of particular interest, it appears that during this period those who tended to have more education and wealth to afford a good attorney stood a better chance of getting a lesser penalty or having their charges dismissed altogether. Those, like Edward Duane who were given a public defender, appear to have received harsher penalties than those who did not. Overall, the increased number of

¹⁵¹ U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600-Current, s.v. “Elmer Critser,” Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, accessed through *Ancestry.com*.

¹⁵² Tulsa County District Case #9536

¹⁵³ Tulsa County District Case #9498

cases (as well as the fact that Ray Pfleeger engaged in sex with two of the defendants) suggests that these men had developed networks and spaces where they met one another and were sometimes caught by law enforcement officials.¹⁵⁴

The Tropical Gardens

As early as the late 1930s, homosexual men would meet others like themselves in Tulsa in dark or hidden spaces such as public restrooms, parks, and at least one bar



Illustration 31: Lucius Beebe (Left) and Charles Clegg (Right). Photographer Unknown. *Courtesy of the Authors Collection.*

space that men felt safe.¹⁵⁵ Also, a prominent New York columnist named Lucius Beebe once visited Tulsa with his lover Charles Clegg and mentioned a particular tavern. Clegg was a military radio specialist stationed in Stillwater, Oklahoma and

Lucius was a journalist and railroad historian, who in his book *Snoot If You Must*, mentioned visiting a homosexual-friendly nightclub in Tulsa:

Wednesday evening the phone would ring and Charles would whimper over the wires that she had just heard about stingers and there was no white crème de menthe in Oklahoma at any price, and Thursday would find me in a sample of

¹⁵⁴ Thus, these discreet networks served as a *natural outlet* where some men would meet one another to engage in sexual encounters. Although this may be viewed as odd today, until recently this was one of the only outlets for men who had no other way to meet others like themselves. In future chapters, as places where men with same-sex sexualities congregate draw the eye of law enforcement officials, these arrests will increase significantly.

¹⁵⁵ These types of meeting spaces mirror the experiences of gay activist Harry Hay during his experiences as a youth in college and early Los Angeles. See Stuart Timmons, *The Trouble with Harry Hay: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement*. (Boston: Alyson, 1990), 36-138.

the Wright Brother’s folly, headed vaguely for Tulsa with two suitcases of prefabricated stingers or sidecars or whatever droll arrangement the louey-commander’s wife had read about last. Tulsa was not without it’s charm. There was, for instance, a nightclub that had formerly been a gasoline filling station and beer flowed out of all the compressed air hoses. There was, too, an aged and highly solvent religious fanatic who haunted the public places of the town and took a great fancy to Charles. He labored under the impression that the roomy was a sort of sea-going clergyman. To the old gentleman, the radioman’s insignia on his arm represented God’s thunderbolts, and he was forever seeking us out and buying free drinks in the nearest saloon, of which, Oklahoma being a legally arid commonwealth, there was a generous multiplicity. (239)¹⁵⁶

The tavern described in Beebe’s book was known as the *Tropical Gardens* and operated in a converted filling station that was run by two sisters (or possibly lesbians).¹⁵⁷ It is

the first known homosexual-friendly establishment in Tulsa. Although there is no evidence found that suggests that the *Tropical Gardens* was a “homosexual bar” per se, it was at the least friendly to its same-sex loving clientele and was a



Illustration 32: The Tropical Gardens in 1942.

Courtesy of Vachon, John, photographer. “[Tulsa, Oklahoma. Gas Station and garage converted into a nightclub c. 1942]” Photograph. Washington, D.C.: Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information. From Library of Congress: *Farm Security Administration – Office of War Information Photograph Collection*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/owi2001012102/PP/> (accessed March 15, 2015).

¹⁵⁶ Lucius Beebe, *Shoot If You Must* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1943), 239.

¹⁵⁷ Toni Broaddus, “Gay-ety in T-Town,” *Gayly Oklahoman*, June 1985; Tim T., “Flash from the Past,” (Unpublished Document, Tulsa Historical Society Vertical Research Files); Also found at Tim T., “Blast From The Past,” accessed: June 15, 2014, <http://www.timsplayroom.com/blast.html>

popular venue of the time where evidence exists that men met one another and socialized.¹⁵⁸ It also served as a marker of the early beginnings of a new era for men with same-sex sexualities, where they would begin to navigate public spaces in the Tulsa area.

¹⁵⁸ In his work *Gay New York*, George Chauncey makes historical claims about these types of spaces in New York as places where men met, created kinships, and what they coined “gay male [social] worlds.” Ultimately, they were social institutions of education where gay men met, most likely in a discreet fashion, and socialized with one another. These spaces will become more and more apparent as the forties progress in the next chapter. See George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, (PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 1990), 164-268.

Chapter 4: *The Old Downtown Scene:*

World War II and the Beginning of a Homosexual Community in Tulsa, 1940-1949

The Journey Through World War II

In 1939 when Judy Garland starred in *The Wizard of Oz*, the film received a welcoming applause in Tulsa. In the film Dorothy Gale, a young Kansas girl, was whisked away by a tornado with her dog Toto to a magical place called Oz where she explored a dreamlike world. While the film was a welcomed diversion from the struggles of the depression era, it also signaled the changes to come for homosexual men, including Tulsans. Just as the tornado had taken Dorothy away to the Land of Oz, the Second World War was set to ship many young men overseas to fight against the axis powers. Only this time Hitler was the wicked witch and the Nazis and the Japanese were the flying monkeys. The lives of men with same-sex sexualities were about to change in ways that they had never imagined.¹⁵⁹



Illustration 33: Tulsa skyline in the 1940s. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor occurred on December 7, 1941.¹⁶⁰ The very next day President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared war on Japan announcing that

¹⁵⁹ Judy Garland would go on to become an advocate and icon for men with same-sex sexualities through the 1960s. See Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis: 1940-1996* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 192-97.

¹⁶⁰ “Japs Strike With Murderous Effect at U.S. and Britain In Pacific War; President Broadcasts Message Today,” *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, OK), December 8, 1941 in Pat

December 7th was a day that “would live in infamy.” Most Tulsa residents foresaw and avidly supported the war against the axis powers of Nazi Germany, Japan, and Italy.¹⁶¹ Tulsa mothers sent over six thousand of their young sons to the front lines and others, including girls and women, took on the roles that were vacated by men who went to war. The spread of a “Rosie the Riveter” consciousness drastically reshaped gender roles in American society in ways that would have a profound impact on future decades.¹⁶² Many residents who stayed home held aluminum drives for the troops overseas – the first of these being conducted on July 6, 1941 where over forty thousand



Illustration 34: Douglas Plant. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

pounds of aluminum was collected. During the war, residents in Tulsa experienced a food stamp rationing program similar to the one during the depression era and some sixteen million American troops overseas were sent food, fuel, and other

Atkinson, *History in the Headlines: Significant Front Pages from the Tulsa World* (Tulsa: World Publishing Co., 1982).

¹⁶¹ “Allies Are Ready to Fight,” *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, OK), September 2, 1939 in Pat Atkinson, *History in the Headlines*, 1982.

¹⁶² History.com Staff, “Rosie the Riveter,” *A&E Networks*, accessed: November 3, 2015, <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/rosie-the-riveter>

essential goods that they would need while they were fighting for freedom in not only America, but the entire world.¹⁶³

The war meant sacrifice for many residents of all sexualities, but it also ushered in a new economic boom. On January 7, 1941 almost exactly one month after the war declaration, Douglas Aircraft Company made the announcement that it would move to Tulsa to produce aircraft and equipment for use in the war.¹⁶⁴ This allowed for the building of a \$15 million dollar plant that would be opened on May 2, 1941. The Douglas plant provided jobs for over ten thousand residents (including women, men, and people of color). The aircraft included: Boeing B-17s, Dauntless Dive-Bombers, B-24 Liberators, A-26 Invaders, and C-47 Skytrains that would go on to invade Normandy on June 6, 1944.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, mastermind oilman John Paul Getty returned to the city and joined the new booming aviation industry. Getty went on to help to invigorate and lead the Spartan School of Aeronautics, which trained many British and American pilots who fought in the war. Many of these men would perish, while only some of them would return. The aviation industry had arrived to Tulsa with World War II and it was a welcomed breath of newfound prosperity for many Tulsans who were struggling at the end of the thirties.¹⁶⁶

On September 2, 1945 World War II finally ended revealing the massive atrocities committed by Nazi regime. The profound impact of Hitler and the Third Reich upon the world was just beginning to be discovered. In the end, over six million

¹⁶³ Courtney Ann and Glenn Vaughn-Roberson. *City in the Osage Hills: Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1984), 146-48.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Danney Goble, *Tulsa!: Biography of the American City* (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1997), 178.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Jews were literally exterminated by Hitler and his regime. Over ninety thousand homosexuals had been arrested, fifty thousand were sent to prison, and some ten to fifteen thousand were sent to the concentration and death camps where they wore upside-down pink triangles. Many were subsequently shipped *back* to prison after they were “liberated” from the camps by the allied forces. Even today, the exact number of homosexual deaths in the holocaust is unknown.¹⁶⁷

A Homosexual Awakening: The Impact of World War II

In the beginning of the war, men with same-sex sexualities in America had constructed underground “friendship networks” that proliferated but had not reached the status of an organized community. Typically, unless they were arrested for a “crime against nature,” many homosexuals existed largely in a discreet fashion outside of the public eye. Sexuality was not a topic often discussed in newspapers or even households. However, words that were “associated with homosexuality [included:] ‘vice,’ ‘damage,’ ‘social cancer,’ ‘monster,’ ‘unnatural,’ ‘moral leper,’ ‘pervert,’ ‘degenerate,’ ‘evil,’ ‘unscrupulous,’ ‘contemptuous of decent people,’ and ‘sinister.’”¹⁶⁸ When “World War II began, gay people in America had no legal rights, no organizations, a handful of private thinkers, and no public advocates.”¹⁶⁹

The American Psychiatric Association and the U.S. government held screenings for many young enlistees to ensure a military force fit for service. In particular, the military preferred unmarried and single males – a category that included a large number of homosexual men. The screenings were an effort to “weed out” homosexuals from

¹⁶⁷ Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis*, x-xi; Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals* (New York: Henry Holt, 1986), 13-9.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, vii.

entering military service. By 1941 men and women were required to undergo physical exams and answer questions including how they *felt* about the opposite sex. If they answered “wrong,” they were disqualified for service. Effeminate behavior and occupations that were not considered masculine were also factors used by the Army to disqualify enlistees. As a result of the war, a new popularized realization that regarded homosexuals as “sick and diseased” and a new identity label “sexual psychopath” emerged in both medical and psychiatric communities.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the efforts of the military were not successful. Many gay men and women ended up serving in the war and once they passed the screenings, they had a lot of experience “passing” as heterosexual. Those men who had not encountered the term homosexual left the screenings with a new awareness of a self-identification that they had not had before.¹⁷¹

While overseas many soldiers became exposed to new ways of life and saw their lives flash before their eyes as they faced the realization of mortality. For some enlistees, “the war years represented a unique period of experimentation between adolescence and marriage; for others it was a transformative experience with same-sex relations.”¹⁷² Same-sex sexual activity was not uncommon during the war and some of these men were identified and discharged for homosexuality during this time. Peter Hennen stated:

¹⁷⁰ Throughout the 1940s and 1950s the social institution of medicine commonly would treat homosexuality in a number of exploratory ways. Some homosexuals experienced Freudian psychoanalysis, shock treatments, castration, and in some cases even lobotomies. See Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Avon, 1976), 197-306.

¹⁷¹ Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis*, xii, 4-62.

¹⁷² Peter Hennen, *Faeries, bears, and leathersmen: men in community queering the masculine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 138.

In 1943-1944 the military revised its policy on discharging homosexuals in a way that may have indicated to some an increase in social tolerance. At that time the service personnel who were suspected of being homosexuals were issued a special “blue” discharge [certificate], which was neither honorable nor dishonorable. This replaced the “yellow” discharge [certificate] that had been used previously [for homosexuals] and indicated that the discharged person was “undesirable.”¹⁷³

The new policy for discharging men with same-sex sexualities during this period was provocative in that it caused them to begin to imagine themselves in a different light – not so detestable in the eyes of at least *this* law – and “of course, in true Foucauldian fashion these official certificates... may have also abetted the formation of resistant communities, as they provided a material rallying point for a discourse reversing the narrative of pathology.”¹⁷⁴ The discharges also provided more widespread emphasis on a new clinical term “homosexual” that effectively placed people who committed sodomy into a new social group based on the premise that homosexuality was a medical condition – a sickness.¹⁷⁵ While gay men who were discharged with blue certificates avoided prison sentences - both men and women were so stigmatized by a less than honorable discharge that they either left home or tried to kill themselves.¹⁷⁶ For others, active duty allowed for the *realization* of their sexualities, an effect that was not foreseen by the U.S. Government. While it is known that many gay and lesbian men and women created their first active communities in San Francisco, New York, and

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 128-254. In addition to “homosexual,” the term “gay” began to be used during this period throughout parts of the United States. The term “gay” likely came from the French term *gaie*, which had been used to refer to homosexuals during the sixteenth century. However, this term was probably not used regularly in Tulsa until much later in the 1950s and 1960s. See Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis*, p. xii.

¹⁷⁶ Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis*, 229.

other port cities after the war, what is not known is that by “the late 1940s gay bars opened for the first time in such medium-sized cities as Kansas City, Missouri; Worcester, Massachusetts; and San Joe, California.”¹⁷⁷ They also began to carve out their own spaces across the landscape of Tulsa, and they became part of secret and “underground” activities across the nation in bars, parks, and other dark spaces where they discreetly identified and met one another.¹⁷⁸ The war had served as a major paradigm shift, an awakening of sorts, ushering in the *beginnings* of a new era of gay consciousness. One respondent for this study, Fred, remembered being approached by a Drill Sergeant after the war:

My earliest remembrance was a feeling and I didn’t know what it was until I went into the service. I was approached by a drill sergeant and it scared me half to death! This was not allowed in the service. No don’t ask don’t tell... just don’t do anything! I was scared half to death and he knew. He knew. Why... I don’t know... it’s an activity he knew. He really wanted me to have sex with him and I said no. When it came time to pick people out of the line to do anything... I never had to do anything. My mother knew though. My mother always knew, but it was never discussed. I am one of three siblings. My other two siblings were married with numerous kids and I was the only bachelor in the family.¹⁷⁹

The war had initiated a widespread collective consciousness for people with same-sex sexualities. In the



Illustration 35: Location Unknown/Photographer Unknown. Real photograph. Navy sailors dancing together aboard a ship during the World War II era. Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 271.

¹⁷⁸ Stuart Timmons, *The Trouble with Harry Hay: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement* (Boston: Alyson, 1990), 55-77.

¹⁷⁹ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

service, they found numerous others such as themselves by using non-verbal cues such as the eye gaze. Upon returning home, they forged social networks and communities while trying to fit in with the social and moral norms of the city.

Promptly after the war many young homosexual men returned home and took full advantage of their GI Bills, which had been afforded to them through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. Their influx at Oklahoma Universities opened the door for them to create spaces for socialization and to experience sexual encounters with other men. One interviewee recalled memories of an underground network of men at the University of Oklahoma in the late 1940s:

OU was fun. Fall of 1948 I went to OU for two years.... [At OU] there was quite a bit of an undercurrent deal where the presidents of about eight of the fraternities were gay. You'd go to open houses with them and so forth. I had a roommate who was terrific and we caught a night that neither of us had a date and we caught that 5:15[pm] train into Oklahoma City and had dinner and went to a movie at the old Home Theater which is now another building. Anyway, we went to this movie and all of the sudden I was getting my leg rubbed and [one thing led to another]. OU was "busy" if you knew the right people. You'd meet in the Union building at several Johns and there was a John on the west side of the North Oval in an old building... Chemistry building or something... that had a terrific glory hole.¹⁸⁰

At the University of Tulsa there were similar public spaces where men met in secret. These spaces included places like public restrooms, the library, and student union.¹⁸¹ Places also existed this early at Oklahoma State University as well as other institutions in the state, and they became increasingly trafficked by the 1950s and 1960s. Sometimes men also had mentor-like figures who introduced them to the underground "downtown scene" in Tulsa. Fred experienced this as early as the 1940s:

¹⁸⁰ Lewis Brady (Retired Kitchen Planning Consultant) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

I worked with somebody, a great guy. I was dancing at the Tulsa Opera at the time and he use to come by after work and watch me workout, you know and we got to be good friends. Very, very nice guy and he took me out. It was my first experience getting into the gay world. [The interviewee claimed that later this man went to work as a psychologist in Denver for the Air Force]¹⁸²

The “Old Downtown Scene:” An Early Gay Community

In the mid forties there was a bustling heterosexual downtown nightlife scene where many men met more discreetly, particularly at night in venues such as: *The Tropical Gardens, The Blue Note Lounge, The St. Moritz, and the Milwaukee Tavern*



Illustration 36: A pilsner beer glass from The Blue Note Lounge. Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

(mostly lesbians). Homosexual men and women navigated the nightlife to have fun, meet a lover, or simply socialize with others like themselves. Bing Cosby, Frank Sinatra, Billie Holliday, Ella Fitzgerald, Big Band, Jazz, and Swing became popular music selections during this period.

One of the first pivotal figures in the gay community of Tulsa was M.C. Parker. He established many of the first bars, including what is arguably the first gay-owned speakeasy that served the local community, *The Blue Haven Drive-In*.

According to Toni Broaddus:

A self-described “café society man,” M.C. Parker [lived] and played in Tulsa since 1949, when he opened his first gay establishment, the Blue Haven Drive-In. Those were the Prohibition days, and beer was the only alcoholic beverage sold legally. Bootleg whiskey was available, of course; M.C. sold it out of a briefcase in half-pints. The Blue Haven was located southwest of Tulsa, near where is now Town West Shopping Center. It was one of four gay bars in Tulsa at the time— though it also had a weekday heterosexual clientele comprised of nearby residents. M.C. explains, “[Gays] couldn’t come out on weeknights. Back in those days, not everybody had wheels... even the 24-25 year-old boys

¹⁸² Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

didn't have cars." After only about three months, the Blue Haven closed—a victim of the miles in a time when mobility was not easily attained.¹⁸³

Most of the bars were located in the downtown area, which had been a popular vice region of the city since the early years of Tulsa.¹⁸⁴ Further, with the exception of the *Blue Haven*, most of the bar venues were owned by heterosexuals and predominantly catered to a heterosexual clientele by day and a homosexual clientele by night. Only 3.2 percent beer was legally sold in these spaces, and it was not until 1959 that liquor would be permissible in Oklahoma establishments.

The Blue Note Lounge was one of the earliest venues in the late forties. Broaddus noted that:

The gay community hung out downtown, sometimes at the Blue Note [Lounge] on [514 N. Denver], more often at the St. Moritz [off South Main Street]. The St. Moritz was located in the center of the block where Cathey's Furniture is today, and according to M.C., was "the number one place to go." Lesbians had their own bar, the Milwaukee Tavern, which was somewhere in the vicinity of 15th and Cincinnati. For the most part, however, gay men and lesbians ran around together, certainly it was good public relations to be seen with a member of the opposite sex.¹⁸⁵

Fred also recalled his first experience going out to the *Blue Note* when gay men were congregated there:

The first time I went out I was scared to death. This platonic friend of mine took me to the Blue Note! It was not a gay bar, it was gay friendly. They didn't dare say they were gay, because they'd be closed down. You could go in there and you could have good conversation. You might be able to pick up somebody but

¹⁸³ Toni Broaddus, "Gay-ety in T-Town," *The Gayly Oklahoman* (Tulsa, OK), June 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

¹⁸⁴ The old downtown scene was a remnant of the red light district days of lawlessness that made Tulsa so popular.

¹⁸⁵ Toni Broaddus, "Gay-ety in T-Town" *The Gayly Oklahoman* (Tulsa, OK), June 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

you didn't touch anybody. You weren't allowed to touch hands, hold hands - whatever. You couldn't do it or you were out.¹⁸⁶

During this period it appeared that gay men and lesbians did sometimes go to the same bars together in an effort to “pass” as heterosexuals, but they also had their own spaces. The *Milwaukee Tavern* existed as early as the late 1940s and



Illustration 37: (Left) Milwaukee Inn. What is believed to be the Milwaukee Tavern. Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

was primarily a lesbian space.¹⁸⁷ Unfortunately, no records were located depicting what life was like at this tavern.

Another downtown bar space, *The St. Moritz*, was one of the most popular venues for gay men.¹⁸⁸ Fred recollected going to a bar believed to be the *St. Moritz*:

There was a place downtown [likely *the St. Moritz*] that had a little dance floor in the back. It was gay, but it wasn't known as gay. Every time somebody would come in, they would have a little light that would flash with curtains. If a light flashed on you wouldn't touch anybody, you couldn't dance together and so on. But if the lights weren't on, you could ballroom dance together. If anyone came in like the cops or something it was like you were out... don't touch anybody.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

¹⁸⁷ This gender separation would become more commonplace in the 1960s and 1970s as the gay community of Tulsa further developed.

¹⁸⁸ Toni Broaddus, “Gay-ety in T-Town” *The Gayly Oklahoman* (Tulsa, OK), June 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

¹⁸⁹ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

A third space men met, *Bishops Bar and Restaurant*, would also be located downtown in the forties, but this venue would not become heavily trafficked by homosexual men until the fifties. Nevertheless, World War II had brought with it a wave of social change for people with same-sex sexualities in Tulsa. This new wave of “underground consciousness” provided to them not only self-awareness and community identity, but also more diversified spaces of socialization and education.

When the Kinsey Reports Became Popular

Homosexual consciousness received a boost in 1948 when Alfred Kinsey published his reports on male and female sexual behavior. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* became one of the most popular household books of the time and even was on the *New York Times* bestseller list. The study had found that many of the long-held beliefs about morality and sexuality were simply not true. For instance, the age of male sexual encounters was fifteen – younger than what people had originally thought, and nearly half of all husbands interviewed were having extramarital affairs. The most startling result was the prevalence of homosexuality in the nation – a result that would surprise even Kinsey himself. Using his Kinsey Scale, he measured the sexualities of his some 5,300 white male participants (versus 5,940 white females), and he found that 10 percent of white American males were more or less exclusively homosexual (versus 2-6 percent for white females). Also, 37 percent of males had a homosexual experience that led to an orgasm (versus 13 percent for white females). Suddenly, the eyes of the nation had become focused on the presence of the *homosexual* in American society. Similar to World War II, the studies would have a profound effect upon the identity

development of homosexual men and women across the nation. Suddenly, the gay community had a more widespread identity label (homosexual) with which they could identify and secondly it was relatively common. In general, the American public found the studies to be of particular interest. Newspapers and magazines began to publish on the topic of sexuality for the first time. Unfortunately, when many Americans began to believe that sexuality deserved to be studied, there also came a pathology of homosexuality that included prefrontal lobotomies.¹⁹⁰

Navigating Spaces: Verbal and Non-verbal Communication Rituals

The homosexual community became a bigger presence in Tulsa by the end of



Illustration 38: The Tulsa Little Theater c. 1932. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

the forties. Many men met through other people and through friendship networks, notably in the downtown area. In the presence of one another, they often talked about where they went and whom they met.¹⁹¹

Meetings would happen by chance, if they “were in the right place at the right time,” and it was

during this time that some men began to drive the streets of downtown looking for

¹⁹⁰ 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), 33-7.

¹⁹¹ Lewis Brady (Retired Kitchen Planning Consultant) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

others such as themselves. This activity would later become known as “cruising.” Those men driving the streets of downtown would recognize others like themselves, because it was “something automatic” that they felt. (This circle of streets became known as the “Fruit Loop” in later years.) Naturally, most homosexual men were drawn to places that they felt comfortable and knew they could meet others like themselves. Although many men were not “out of the closet,” they shared knowledge of these spaces with one another – forming complex communication channels that operated in an undercover and discreet fashion. Yet, while progress had been made, it was still socially unacceptable to be a homosexual in the 1940s.¹⁹² Fred remembered meeting others like himself at the *Tulsa Little Theater* during its first musicals:

The Tulsa Little Theater was on fifteenth and Delaware. It’s been around since the thirties or something like that. I did the first three musicals at the Tulsa little theater. Practically everyone in the musicals, in the cast... you knew they were [homosexual]. As I say... just look ‘em in the eye and you know. Direct contact with the eyes will tell you more than you want to know.¹⁹³

Participants in this study suggested the “eye gaze” and other rituals were prevalent in Tulsa during the forties. This form of non-verbal communication served as further proof of the developing social networks and the early transmission of elements of an emerging wider American gay culture.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

¹⁹⁴ These rituals of the “eye gaze” and an “automatic feeling” when meeting one another are elements of gay culture are evidence that a gay community with social networks was beginning to form. I speak more about this in the next chapter while covering the 1950s. This was a national phenomenon during this time. See Timmons, *The Trouble with Harry Hay*, 36.

A Steady Rise in “Crimes Against Nature” in Tulsa

Sodomy arrests also steadily rose, mirroring an increased social consciousness of the existence of “the homosexual.” For instance, by 1943 Oklahoma had outlined a “lewdness” statute in *Landrum v. State of Oklahoma* that also was used to arrest and to punish persons for sex acts, which furthered the stigmatization of same-sex sexualities. Thirty-five cases of “crimes against nature” had made it to the district level as criminal cases – a number which was 43 percent higher than had occurred in the 1930s. However, there were many other arrests that never made it into the indexes at the Tulsa County Courthouse.¹⁹⁵

All in all, the period had brought a Second World War that had awakened the consciousness of gay Tulsans. New bar spaces allowed men to meet others such as themselves, which in turn allowed them to form a web of communication networks with one another. And with an increased public knowledge of “the homosexual”, sodomy arrests were on the rise as the gaze of Tulsa law enforcement turned towards their communities. This minority group grew even larger into the fifties, and it became an all out crackdown on people with same-sex sexualities.

¹⁹⁵ See Appendix A for a complete list of the cases found in the Tulsa Courthouse indexes.

Chapter 5: *Organizing In The Shadows:*

An Emerging Homosexual Community in Tulsa, 1950-1959

Prosperity in the Climate of Fear and Conformity

After World War II the nation experienced a period of unprecedented growth, peace, and prosperity. Citizens found renewed optimism and leisure time to pursue the American Dream. The GI Bill passed during the war helped many young men achieve college degrees, and a more highly educated workforce emerged to shape American



Illustration 39: Tulsa skyline in the 1950s. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

society. A 37 percent increase in the economy allowed for unprecedented growth of the middle class and a sharp rise in consumer spending. Highways and shopping centers were developed and people enjoyed kitchen conveniences such as dishwashers, washing machines, and pre-packaged food mixes. The television also became popular and

replaced the radio in many homes. By 1955, 50 percent of all households in the United States had a black and white television set. Adults enjoyed new shows such as *Ozzie & Harriet* and *Leave it to Beaver*; for children the *Mickey Mouse Club* and the *Lone Ranger* were popular selections.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ “Economy in the 1950s,” *The 1950s*, accessed: October 26, 2015, <http://www.shmoop.com/1950s/economy.html>; Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994), 3-60; Courtney Ann and Glenn Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills: Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1984), 143-59; Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on*

Along with the rest of the country, Tulsa was also going through major social changes. The city's population doubled to 251,685 as the aviation industry flourished, and a new generation of residents was more interested in culture than oil. In particular, they wanted to see the city become recognized for its culture and educational offerings. The city already had the Philbrook Museum of Art and soon city leaders acquired Thomas Gilcrease's famed collection of more than 200,000 items of Americana. The museums quickly became popular for people of all ages.¹⁹⁷ In 1954 when the Court handed down *Brown v. Board of Education*, many Tulsans reacted negatively.¹⁹⁸ The prosperous lifestyle enjoyed by many Whites perpetuated a privileged view of heterosexuality, White superiority, and the nuclear family. In turn, this furthered the marginalization of groups such as homosexuals and African Americans.

Yet, fear and the rise of conformity were also prominent social forces that residents witnessed. The 1949 detonation of the atomic bomb by the Soviet Union brought a fear of communist Russia and with the increasing control of law enforcement officials came widespread conformity. The trial and conviction of Alger Hiss, a man accused of being a U.S. traitor spying for the Soviets, further exacerbated the fears of many Americans and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began

TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 51-84, 203-83; Mitchell Stephens, "History of Television from Grolier Encyclopedia," accessed: July 25, 2015,

<https://www.nyu.edu/classes/stephens/History%20of%20Television%20page.htm>

¹⁹⁷ The Tulsa Philharmonic Orchestra, Tulsa Opera Club, and Tulsa Ballet also began operation and the Tulsa Library System opened branches in forming suburbs around the city. Danney Goble, *Tulsa!: Biography of the American City* (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1997), 186-87; Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills*, 1984, 143-59.

¹⁹⁸ "Southerners React Bitterly to Ruling by High Court Against Separate Schools," *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, OK), May 18, 1954 in Pat Atkinson, *History in the Headlines: Significant Front Pages from the Tulsa World* (Tulsa: World Publishing Co., 1982).

investigating reports of communist activities in Hollywood. People believed that *something* had to be done before the country fell to the Soviets.¹⁹⁹

Soon Riesman's *Lonely Crowd* (1950) was an anthem for the social shift from the frontier individualism of previous decades to the social conformity of the fifties. Under the charismatic leadership of Senator Joe McCarthy (R-Wisconsin), many homosexuals were investigated for suspected involvement in communist activities.²⁰⁰ In fact, anyone dissenting from the status quo was labeled as a communist and was seen as a threat to national security. Tulsa and the rest of the country watched from their couches as McCarthy denounced "fairies" and "pansies" on national television. People with same-sex sexualities were forced deeper into the closet. One interviewee noted, "people [in Tulsa] didn't discuss gay people or gay communities. If someone [got] killed or something, maybe they were a homosexual, but you didn't hear about it."²⁰¹ Homosexuals were often referred to as "communists," "queers," "sexual perverts," or the "homosexual menace." The FBI tracked them across the country through letters written at the post office, local Vice Squads, arrest records, newspapers, and they even compiled lists of homosexual bars and other spaces where people met. At one point the U.S. Senate even authorized an investigation into the employment of homosexuals in government offices and many were dismissed from civilian and military posts in

¹⁹⁹ Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3-36.

²⁰⁰ McCarthy believed homosexuals flourished under the administrations of Roosevelt and Truman.

²⁰¹ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

increasing numbers throughout the decade. It was not until December 2, 1954 that McCarthy was censured by the United States Senate.²⁰²

Emergence of the Homophile Movement and Mattachine Society

The first social movement for same-sex sexualities in the nation was organized in this climate of prosperity, fear, and conformity. It emerged as an effort to bring national visibility and understanding to the struggles of homosexual persons, who had suffered decades of abuse and were increasingly stigmatized as social outcasts. The first organization was founded in 1950 by a group of friends behind closed blinds in Los Angeles. Known as the “Society of Fools,” it later changed its name to *Les Mattachines* after a real medieval French Society whose members disguised their true identities during the renaissance enabling them to speak out and spur social change at the grassroots level. Valuing anonymity and decision-making through consensus, the Mattachine Society “adopted a secret, cell-like structure that, by protecting members from exposure, allowed them to participate with relative safety in a gay organization.”²⁰³ The founder, Harry Hay, conceptualized people with same-sex sexualities as a cultural minority of androgynous beings with a unique and essential social relationship with the societies for which they had lived throughout history: as crafters of social change and spiritual healers – roles that they had been playing for

²⁰² David Riesman, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1950); Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 42-5.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 58.

centuries. Hay and other founding members made the case that they were different from the traditional heterosexual community. Instead, they believed they had their own set of values, norms, and roles for which they could be proud.²⁰⁴ These assertions allowed the organization's members to replace the shame of being gay with a pride of belonging to a minority that contributed to society. Quickly becoming a nationwide organization, it grew to over two thousand members between 1952 and 1953, but as it became larger with chapters in some of the larger cities, its ideology shifted to a conformist platform as new members took leadership positions. They sought to appeal to the larger society as acceptable law abiding citizens and by the close of the decade, an apologetic organizational platform was in place. With such quick expansion, the organization fractured and crumbled out of existence, but not before it founded an office in Tulsa. In later years, other organizations such as the Gay Liberation Front took its place with more aggressive positions (see chapter seven).²⁰⁵

Tulsa inquired about having a chapter at a time when there were only 550 subscriptions to the *Mattachine Review* (the organizational publication) nationally and there were only four recognized chapters in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago. In fact, Tulsa was one of just a few prospective chapters along with: Denver, Washington D.C., Boston, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Vancouver, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Baltimore.²⁰⁶ Residents were actively in contact with the headquarters

²⁰⁴ Will Roscoe, ed. and Harry Hay, *Radically Gay* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 17-76.

²⁰⁵ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States - 1940-1970*, 58.

²⁰⁶ James T. Sears, *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles and the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2006), 355.

during the time that the Society was in a state of flux.²⁰⁷ On August 11, 1953 a local man named Henry (pseudonym) wrote a lengthy letter where he described his feelings on homosexuality, the role of religion, and provided a glimpse into gay Tulsans' lives.

In part of the letter, he stated:

...The following you might call my 'Credo:'
I believe in homosexuality as a Way of Life. I feel no sense of guilt or shame. I know that I, as a homosexual, can be an asset to the community in which I live and a good citizen of the land which gave me birth. Realizing that others may not understand my way of life and that they may seek to deprive me of my social and civil rights, I can still say with all sincerity, 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do!' I affirm my undying conviction in the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, and the Immortality of the Soul. I pledge my utmost to the task of securing equal rights for those of my people who merit and desire it. I abhor any form of totalitarianism which seeks to enslave the spirit of man. I pray that the injustices and misunderstanding of our people will soon be a thing of the past. I believe that no nobler bond of affection exists than that love which unites the hearts of two men. With these ideals I know that I can be a happy, satisfied, well-integrated individual whose life will merit the respect of mankind...²⁰⁸

Mattachine Chairman, Ken Burns, responded positively and forwarded Henry materials for forming a chapter of the organization on September 3, 1953. A year later on September 29, 1954, Henry responded to Burns and suggested that he was experiencing difficulty in locating potential members. He stated that:

At the time of our initial correspondence, I attempted to contact a number of people in Tulsa who I thought might be interested. I deliberately avoided the "queen" or "bitch" element since I do not think them capable of entertaining a serious thought above the waist-line. And, although I am known to a number of our local "queens" and at one time associated myself briefly with the "general" group in Tulsa, I have long since ceased attending "parties", etc: (This doesn't mean, however, that I have lacked for experience in meeting people!) I don't

²⁰⁷ There was also evidence that Elk City, Oklahoma had two individuals (a member and non-member) of the Mattachine Society that were interested in the organization as well.

²⁰⁸ Mattachine Society Project Collection, Box 7:11, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, California.

think that I ever felt “at home” among the transvestites and effeminate element. I have always tried to look at life seriously, and as a consequence I turned, at an early age, to religion and the church for an explanation. Later, after my military service and subsequent college career, I endeavored to understand myself and our people in terms of philosophy, psychology, sociology and history. In recent years I have selected ‘individuals’ for my friends who were capable of a serious thought on occasion and who were not ‘obvious’ to the general public. A year ago, when I first wrote to you, I was not able to locate a single person who was interested in the society. I could have gone to the ‘bitch’ element with my message, but I feel that they would have broadcast it hither and yon, thus causing more harm than good; and, those individuals that I did approach, felt that their security would be violated if they associated themselves with the society; so that I was left very much alone in my good intentions. I still find that those persons who would make the most desirable chapter members are the very ones who are scared to death of associating themselves with the movement for fear that “someone might say something” and ‘let it get out!’ They have expressed the ideas, too, that they can’t see what the movement hopes to accomplish; or that they can’t see why belonging to the society would be of any tangible benefit to them. I’m afraid that I haven’t been able to convince them as well as I should have since I, through my own ignorance, didn’t know too much. I have tried to appeal to them in terms of ‘working for the common good” and “helping others with problems identical to ours.’ This, I’m afraid, hasn’t moved them out of their complacency. Each one always seems to want to know ‘What’s in it for me?’ ‘How will it help me?’ etc: They can’t seem to understand that anything which helps our people in general will also help them. They haven’t the [*sic*] vision of being their “bothers keeper”! (I have been tempted to think that the church, with her message of ‘individual’ salvation, is partly to blame for this!) Or perhaps it is an attitude developed out of living in a ‘mental and social ghetto!’ ...²⁰⁹

Henry also said that he and his boyfriend had two friends – a couple who were interested in joining and recruiting other interested parties as they encountered them. He stated that he felt they should cautiously and “deliberately move slowly at first” orienting themselves to the “spirit and ethos of the movement... [learning] all that we possibly can about the principles, aims, policies, history, organization and practices of the society” before they attempted to bring in new interested parties. In 1955, Chairman Burns responded to Henry commending him for choosing “quality over quantity” with

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

regards to membership and invited him and other interested parties to a Mattachine Convention in Los Angeles to be held in May of 1955.²¹⁰

By 1957 Henry had made contact with another member named Alex (pseudonym) who was living in Denver at the time (the closest chapter) and was able to pledge membership to the organization on July 24, 1957 with his mother as his witness. Alex eventually made plans to relocate to the local area and on June 11, 1958 Tulsa was recorded as having a group of nine committed individuals to form a prospective chapter. Also, a local female police officer sent a letter to the national organization asking for more information about it.²¹¹

On July 16, 1958 the prospective group had a post office box (#2561) under the title *Mattachine Society Inc., Tulsa Office*.²¹² While this was the last surviving piece of correspondence, it is likely that the Tulsa organization fell apart at some point after getting their post office box. This occurred around the time the Mattachine Society began to dissipate and splinter off into smaller regional groups.²¹³

Navigating the Fifties as a Homosexual

Despite the hope that came with efforts to join the national society, for most homosexual Tulsans the decade depicted a depressing, frightening, and lonely time. In line with the conservatism that had spread across the nation, sexuality was not a topic

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid. The letter suggested that her inquiry was to gain general information. No motive for the inquiry was mentioned.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ The July 11, 1958 letter was the last piece of surviving correspondence. Some interviewees also suggested that other individuals in Tulsa had begun the creation of a chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis, a national lesbian organization, in Tulsa during the 1950s. However, there were no records located during this study to substantiate these claims.

that was often discussed in households and many times youth struggled to learn about and understand their sexualities. Typically, they learned through one another or by subliminal messages in the media. For example, Peter recalled the general atmosphere:

Oh it was always negative. This was the country and it was never mentioned. There was a book that I had that my grandmother had that I hunted and hunted and it was written in the 1920s, because it was written about sexuality, and I remember finding that book. It said if you were tall you had a little dick and if you had long fingers you would have a big dick... [Laughter] And... but that's was what was in the book! And it talked about masturbation and it talked about how you would get hair down your arms and on your paws [if you did that]! After I graduated and went to college I was just like "Where is that book?!" I went through everything in my parents' house and I could never find that book. Also it talked about homosexuality and that was something I would go in there and read about... That it was a disease basically. It said homosexuals were very effeminate and you know were cross dressers... it didn't use that term. But it was always very negative.²¹⁴

Some youth also formed their first crushes while watching children's shows on their new televisions. Bart described hearing negative things about homosexuality from his mother and mentioned his first experience with a peer while in high school:

About first grade [he had his first realization of his sexuality]. I had a crush on another boy and also on a TV character named Pinky Lee. It was called the Pinky Lee Show and it was an afternoon children's television program. That was early television and it was black and white. It was something that wasn't discussed. The only thing I can remember was when I was in junior high there was a [*sic*] couple guys that lived two blocks from us and she [his mother] would say bad things about them. She never used the word homosexual or anything but just said that they were disgusting but I sort of picked up on it. [Late 1950s] After that my first experience was when I was in high school. I was in stagecraft class at Central High School and the older student who was trusted enough to have keys... the older Central had a big swimming pool and we went down there at night and he was just like showing me around the building and we were finished with whatever it was that we were supposed to be doing. It was a social time and we went down by the pool and that was my first sexual experience. I was freshman in high school and that continued on sporadically for the next couple of years until I graduated when I graduated I went into the Marine Corps immediately after high school. I still wasn't using labels or anything. I just knew that I enjoyed that. I didn't really think too much about it,

²¹⁴ Peter Poppins (Florist) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

it was just something that happened from time to time but with no labels and people didn't talk about being gay and I didn't relate it to being something else. [He did remember the derogatory label "queer" being used.]²¹⁵

For the youth of the fifties, there were few outlets to make sense of their sexualities, but as they neared adulthood more options were available. For example, a homosexual community continued to flourish away from the public eye. But as the fear of the homosexual community became more widespread in Tulsa, they were forced to create a more discreet and cloistered means for socialization. One such means was through private parties and brunches.²¹⁶ David recalled a story his heterosexual grandfather told him of wild homosexual parties held in Tulsa:

He started telling me stories about that in 1959 the newest sheikest place to live was the Olympia Apartment Complex on Riverside Drive. At the time I was dating a guy who lived there. My grandparents were original tenants of this apartment building and so was their gay best friend. And there was a pool. He said once a month there a gay pool party and one month it would be everyone would wear a wig and another month would be in heels and this was in 1959! In the 1980s when he was telling me this story [he remembered thinking]... I was sure my friends wouldn't throw a heels party at that pool and we live there now! You know... we think we've come so far! And then he pointed out that in 1959 [a prominent city official was seen attending these parties].²¹⁷

Other get-togethers were held in the homes of men such as Joe (pseudonym), who was also said to have held open dinner parties at his home for anyone who wanted to attend:

When University [Apartments] opened that's the round building down there. A real good friend that lived down there and worked for [a major bank in Tulsa] who was named [Joe] used to have "Sundays at [Joe's Last Name]" and he never knew how many people were coming. You could take as many people you wanted to there and they didn't have to know Phil and he would make a meal for everybody. He always said he was going to make a cookbook called "Cooking for six or sixty" because he never knew how many were going to show up. He was really a great guy. He died a number of years ago. Anyway, when he died it

²¹⁵ Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

²¹⁶ Kenneth Wiley (Cosmetologist) in discussion with the author, August 6, 2015.

²¹⁷ David Aaronson (Real Estate) in discussion with the author, March 12, 2015.

was a tradition that went on... The story was that Phil had been let go from the [a major bank in Tulsa] because he was gay...²¹⁸

Other outlets were created by the young World War II veterans who began attending local state universities under the new GI Bill. They created complex underground networks in order to meet others like themselves, establish friendships, and engage in sexual encounters. One interviewee, Moses, remembered the communication rituals that had been developed at the University of Oklahoma:

When I was at OU I became aware of other people who had the same feelings that I had but there again I did not know, I had never heard the term gay. I remember one time getting on the elevator and a guy looking at me and him saying, "Are you gay?" and I said, "No, I'm [Moses]." [Laughter]. I don't recall them using any other word before the word gay was used but it came into being I think when I was at OU.²¹⁹

He also recalled seeing men congregating in restrooms on campus, which provided a cover for their exploration:

I was in ROTC before I went into the Army and we were all in uniform on the parade grounds and it poured down rain and they dismissed everyone and we all ran to the nearest shelter. I was living in a fraternity house about six blocks off campus so I didn't try to return there, I went to the student union building, which I had been into many times before. But this time I went into it and I went into a restroom by the offices and I had never been in that restroom before and I was using paper towels to wipe the water off my head. A man came in and kind of looked at me funny and went back to the very last stall and he kind of kept looking at me. I wasn't the least bit attracted to him but it donned on me and I thought, "What does that guy want?" So I went back there and I don't think I touched him or that he touched me but I immediately left. I went back to the fraternity house and took a good shower and called my girlfriend and asked her on a date. [Laughter] I just felt like I needed to do something like that. But then I knew that was where these people hung out, at the restrooms down there. I went back and I went into the restroom downstairs and it was quite active.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Moses Silverman (Retired Attorney) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

Some students at the University of Tulsa found a creative outlet through the “beat movement” that valued individualism, art, and writing. In 1959 a small group of Central High School and University of Tulsa students, who were influenced by the works of major figures in the Beat Movement, formed a literary journal known as the *White Dove Review*. They included works submitted by well-known writers such as: Alan Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Peter Orlovsky. One young man by the name of Joe Brainard grew up in Tulsa, attended Central High School, and went on to be the art director for the *White Dove Review*. As a homosexual youth, Brainard was described by a fellow Beat colleague “as being shy, sweet, passive, soft-spoken... and determined to take control of his life.” Later, many of these students moved to New York City and Brainard went on to become a very talented and well-known writer and artist of collages and assemblages. Some of his works are in places such as the Museum of Modern Art as well as the Metropolitan Museum to the present day.²²¹

Out of the Shadows: Finding Place and Community

The fifties also signaled the beginnings of new era of socialization for Tulsa men with same-sex sexualities. By September 1, 1959 prohibition finally ended and liquor could be sold along with beer in local establishments.²²² This allowed men to

²²¹ While following his dreams, Brainard had a number of lovers one of the most notable being with a Beat peer named Kenward Elmslie that proved to be a lasting relationship. Their relationship lasted until Brainard died of AIDS related complications of pneumonia on May 25, 1994. Joshua Kline, “White Dove Review,” *This Land Press*, November 12, 2010, accessed: July 27, 2015,

http://thislandpress.com/11/12/2010/white-dove-review/?page_num=1; Ron Padgett, “Bio: About Joe,” accessed: July 28, 2015, http://www.joebrainard.org/BIO_MAIN.htm

²²² Covey Bean, “Liquor Legal by Sept. 1 Assured As House Puts Final Approval on Senate Measure; \$2.40 Tax OK’d,” *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, OK), June 23, 1959 in Pat Atkinson, *History in the Headlines*, 1982.

seek out bars and other more private places where they could be more open in the company of others like themselves.

Homosexual men continued to attend heterosexual spaces downtown, where they listened to Rock & Roll tunes such as Elvis and Buddy Holly, traditional pop music including Nat King Cole and Frank Sinatra, and new country music by singers such as Johnny Cash and Patsy Cline. Rhythm and Blues were also a popular selection during the decade. While *The Blue Note*, *St. Moritz*, and *Milwaukee Tavern* still existed for those men who preferred to socialize undercover, those who were younger and bolder frequented such places as *The Little Mexico*, *The Doghouse*, *Bishops Bar & Restaurant*, and the *Bamboo Lounge* where the atmosphere was more open.²²³ *The Little Mexico Bar* was described as:

... “That was a wild, pissy-elegant place,” ... [where]... “People just crammed into the Little Mexico Bar—so much fun. The windows were Spanish style... they opened out. We crawled in and out of those windows because it was so crowded we couldn’t get through the front door!”²²⁴

The Doghouse had a rear entrance where many entered out of privacy reasons. It was said that:

... If one of you was having a lovers’ quarrel, it was a good place to wind up – in the Doghouse, get [in there]! It’s main decoration was a huge reprint of the famous painting of dogs of all breeds having a poker game.²²⁵

Moses recalled:

²²³ The *Taj Mahal* located downtown opened as early as the late 1950s as a primarily heterosexual place, but in later years became a gay bar. Toni Broaddus, “Gay-ety in T-Town,” *The Gayly Oklahoman* (Tulsa, OK), June 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Dick S., “Looking Back On The Bars: A Brief History” (Unpublished Document, Tulsa Historical Society Vertical Research Files, 1990).

...It was a beer bar. At nighttime, especially when the hockey games were being played you'd have to elbow your way through. I remember going there and getting a kick out of the fact that I would see couples, a guy and a girl, come in and the guy would say, "Is there women here?" and they would say, "Oh they're in the back" and they would push through and then they'd come back and he'd have a really confused look on his face and the girlfriend would have an angry look on her face.²²⁶



Illustration 40: Bishops Bar & Restaurant. Courtesy of The Tulsa Historical Society.

One of the more unusual places was *Bishops Bar & Restaurant*, a heterosexual place where many men met undercover. One side of Bishops was a bar and one side was a diner where people of all sexualities ate regularly.²²⁷ While Bishops had been around since the early 1900s, gay men had been socializing there since at least the 1940s. Bishops was known for its Brown Derby sandwich, waffles, cheeseburgers, and "hot rolls so light they floated away."²²⁸ At one point it even offered 24-hour service, making it a prime space for men to meet in a discreet fashion. Fred said that:

Bishop's was not [a homosexual place], it was friendly [it was a place men felt comfortable meeting one another more discreetly]. It was a regular restaurant, it was an after-hours restaurant. It was on Main Street and they had the best Brown Derby's in the whole southwest. You know the brown derby's they used to have

²²⁶ Moses Silverman (Retired Attorney) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

²²⁷ Places like Bishops were heterosexual joints where gay men met discreetly. No records were found of bars for men with same-sex sexualities until the opening of the *Bamboo Lounge* in 1959.

²²⁸ Tulsa Gal, "Bishop's Restaurant," February 27, 2011, accessed: July 29, 2015, <http://www.tulsagal.net/2011/02/bishops-restaurant.html>



Illustration 41: Bishops Bar & Restaurant. Courtesy of the Tulsa Historical Society.

in California? They did it here at Bishop's. It was a restaurant, but they had the bar separate from the restaurant. It was an after-theater bar. You know people would go to the theaters and plays downtown and then they would always go to Bishop's. After the theater downtown, Bishop's was full.²²⁹

Bishops was the place to go after

dressing nicely to see a movie downtown at the popular *Majestic Theater* or *Rialto*.²³⁰

One man had fond memories of the venue:

“Bishop's bar was quite gay—it was mixed,”... “It was very typical (during that time) to find good places that were mixed. In other words, you didn't go into Bishop's Bar as a screaming queen. You didn't go in there dressed in cutoffs. Women didn't even wear slacks in those days.” Indeed, the style for women was dresses and high-heeled spikes, suits and ties for men. The curb in front of Bishop's was a gathering place for the 21-25 year old crowd. There they'd hang around waiting for someone to come along and maybe offer them a ride to the Blue Haven, or even the few blocks over to the St. Moritz, where the jukebox played the big band sounds of Glenn Miller and Tommy Dorsey. Dancing, however, was not allowed: Oklahoma law prohibited dancing where beer was served.²³¹

Lewis also pointed out that there were certain places in Bishops where gay men knew they could meet others like themselves:

²²⁹ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

²³⁰ Lewis Brady (Retired Kitchen Planning Consultant) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

²³¹ Toni Broaddus, “Gay-ety in T-Town,” *The Gayly Oklahoman* (Tulsa, OK), June 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

Bishops, I didn't think of it as a bar, it was a restaurant. I have many fond memories of Bishops. [Homosexual men] met around the counter... [laughter] One remembrance of Bishops was sitting at the counter one night and the loud speaker came on PAGING... PAGING... Nellie somebody. So you look around the bar and people were grinning! You'd go there after a movie or you'd go in for coffee or a sandwich... you looked around the bar and there were people you knew.²³²

The Bamboo Lounge opened July 5, 1959 and was the first bar that specifically catered to the homosexual male community. It was owned by a man named Gene (1923-1999). He served in the US Army in World War II as a Private First Class soldier, and like many men of the post-war era, he was



Illustration 42: The Bamboo Lounge as of 2015. Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

arrested for sodomy in 1947 after returning from war service.²³³ However, that did not deter Gene and he eventually decided to open *The Bamboo Lounge* just over a decade later. One interviewee, Fred, remembered what it was like to visit the *Bamboo Lounge*:

I didn't go to any of those places where people met [restrooms and parks] because I had a reputation here in Tulsa and at that time I was scared to death to do anything like that. You would have been chastised, it would have been crazy. But I remember going to the Bamboo in 1959 and that was the first gay bar and

²³² Lewis Brady (Retired Kitchen Planning Consultant) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014. This incident also serves as another reminder that gay men were recognizing camp humor terminologies such as "nellie." This suggests that men in Tulsa had already developed extensive communication networks with other communities throughout the country during the 1940s and 1950s.

²³³ "Gene H. K.," accessed: July 20, 2015, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=pv&GRid=131745379&PIpi=116697654>; Tulsa County Case #13016

Gene was the greatest man in the world. He made people feel so much at home there and that was the first gay bar in Tulsa. It's still there, different now, but Gene made people feel really at home there.... Same location, been through three different owners since then. It was all kind of tropical. He had artificial bamboo trees in there and the patio in the back was a dirt floor and they had this big fireplace out back. It looked like a tropical place, it really did. It was mostly older people at first and when they got so popular, naturally younger ones came in that like older people [Laughter].²³⁴

Gene, the owner of *The Bamboo*, was known to be an interesting character:

Oh my God... it was so overdone and so much fun! Well, that was Gene's personal style. The part I think is significant was that Gene's personal home, a modest house was also on Pine [Street], [and] you know most of Pine had become commercial but when Pine was built that was Gene's house. It couldn't have been more visible. Just decked like you can't believe... you didn't need to mow [the yard] because there was no grass to grow between all the ornamental shit in the yard! And at Christmas time you've never seen something so overdone. You know he had statues on the roof... I mean the place was so fucking gay! I don't know what it was about Gene but he lived out and proud when nobody did. Oh my God!... You just can't believe how gay it was! [Laughter]²³⁵

Peter recalled the eccentricity of the establishment. It definitely "made a splash" as the first homosexual bar in Tulsa:

When I first moved to Tulsa I loved the Bamboo and I would start going there all the time. And I had met some football players and stuff that went to TU... they would go there. It was a real artsy bohemian old people, young people, and prostitutes would come in there all the time. The police would come in there all the time. And there was this one guy named Gene that owned it. I'm sure you've heard 1,000 stories of him. But he would always pull this dildo out of his pants! There used to be dildos all over the walls.... ALL over the walls! And in the aquariums he had like probably five because it was the Bamboo and everything was like Tiki, right? But there would be dildos in the aquariums! I swear to God... this is not made up. With like air coming out of the pissholes! [Laughter] And he would always come out. I was young aback then and he wasn't... he was old then... but he would come out and uh... you would get him going and he would just get drunk. He would like to be talked into putting his tap shoes on and he would get on the bar and tap dance and it was a hoot!.... But that was the "in" place back then and it was because he was such a character and a big mess!

²³⁴ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

²³⁵ David Aaronson (Real Estate) in discussion with the author, March 12, 2015.

But you would take people there because you knew he was going to pull that dildo out! [Laughter]²³⁶

Steve remembered Gene's appearance and piano skills:

The Bamboo Lounge was just campy and hilarious. The owner was just a hoot! Oh my god he was a comedian and an amazing pianist and he would just sit down and bang the hell out of that piano! And he had a ring on every finger just as big as Liberace! He was a hoot!²³⁷

Drag Queens in the Fifties

As can be seen in the accounts of homosexual parties from this period, there was already some "camp drag" that had become acceptable at least within some circles. The Tulsa Mattachine correspondence made it clear that the label "queen" was beginning to be used to refer to a subset of the gay population. This cultural slang became much more pronounced and visible as the decades progressed. One interviewee, Bart, remembered seeing drag queens downtown on the Fruit Loop while on a drive with his family:

I remember one time going through town in my parent's car. Both my mother and my father were in the front seat and I was in the back seat and my dad was pointing out, "Those aren't really women!" That was when I was in Junior High School. It was on Main [Street]... it was right in front of where the Zebra [Lounge] ended up [in the 1960s].²³⁸

Tulsa Cracks Down on Homosexuality

Similar to previous decades, men with same-sex sexualities struggled to make sense of their sexualities in an atmosphere that was devoid of positive education and role models. Moreover, the growing conservatism of the fifties recognized no space for homosexual residents to be open about their sexualities and men had to discover and

²³⁶ Peter Poppins (Florist) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

²³⁷ Steve Sanders (Interior Decorator) in discussion with the author, July 15, 2014.

²³⁸ Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

explore their sexualities on their own. Many of these men did so as closeted adults. As mentioned above, bars and other more private places existed for anonymous sexual encounters such as on the trails of Mohawk Park or the Rialto and Majestic theaters downtown.²³⁹ In addition, some men “cruised” the streets of downtown in a circle of streets called “The Fruit Loop” or walked down Main Street where hustlers frequented.²⁴⁰ Moses, an attorney, represented several gay men who were arrested for “crimes against nature” or “lewdness.” He recollected a number of places where same-sex sex acts were occurring in an underground fashion:

A place I got calls from clients on was a truck stop out east of town. Another was the Mayo Building downtown. One was in the Medical Arts building. Usually it was a bathroom on a given floor. It used to drive the tenants crazy... they could never get into a stall! [Laughter] There was a lot of that going on.



Illustration 43: The Majestic Theater. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

The University of Tulsa’s old union building was also active. What was really an active place was the Fruit Loop down in downtown Tulsa. I remember it being active in the late 1950s. That was a place to meet somebody but you had to be very, very careful. I remember one guy in particular, he heard about it on the radio or saw on TV about it with the police and he went down there and he got arrested too! [Laughter] [On the Fruit Loop...] If you saw somebody you were interested in you’d follow them around or they’d follow you around and you’d get out and talk about the weather or what not and that’s how it worked.²⁴¹

By 1955 the case of *Berryman v.*

State of Oklahoma mentioned an increase of cases dealing with “homosexuals and other

²³⁹ Lewis Brady (Retired Kitchen Planning Consultant) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

²⁴⁰ James Smith (Postal Worker) in discussion with the author, March 10, 2015.

²⁴¹ Moses Silverman (Retired Attorney) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

sex deviators” and made note of the Kinsey reports.²⁴² Mirroring this increased activity, the sodomy records at the Tulsa County Courthouse depicted the decade as one of increasing police surveillance into the sexual activities of gay men. Forty-three cases had reached the courts – a number that was 23 percent higher than the number of cases that occurred in the 1940s.²⁴³ By 1959 Tulsa effectively began to take severe measures against the sexual activities of homosexual men in Tulsa.

Thus, while the fifties was an era of increasing fear and conformity, those with same-sex sexualities were beginning to realize that they were no longer alone in their pursuit of happiness. Private parties were organized and homosexuals could be found emerging from the shadows at places that were not necessarily heterosexual bars, such as *The Bamboo*



Illustration 44: The Rialto Theater. *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

Lounge. While they found ways to connect with each other, their sexualities were still not seen as a legitimate way of life. The spark of community connectedness that the Tulsa Mattachine Office had started would ignite in future years, but as the 1960s approached, they began to see a glimmer of light through the curtain of fear and oppression.

²⁴² George Painter, “The Sensibilities of Our Forefathers,” August 10, 2004, accessed: October 28, 2015, <http://www.glapn.org/sodomylaws/sensibilities/oklahoma.htm>

²⁴³ In the 1930s and 1940s arrests of gay men had been on an uphill climb as men began to emerge and seek out one another in greater numbers (especially in the post-war years). It is important to note that the numbers of cases listed here represent *only* those cases that went to the courts. Realistically, there were likely much larger numbers of men who were arrested that got their cases dismissed. See Appendix A for a complete list of the cases.

A Decade of Social Conflict

By 1960 elements of fear and oppression continued to haunt American society.

Youth were introduced into a world crafted out of consumerism, a growing middle class, and an expanding suburbia. Before long the era of conformity began to explode into pathways of individualism that characterized the decade. Thus, civil rights activists, a youth counterculture, second wave feminists, sexual revolutionaries, student protestors, and anti-Vietnam dissidents became visible on the landscape of American culture.²⁴⁴



Illustration 45: A 1960s Tulsa in the darkness.
Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

At first much of the dissent was peaceful and focused on non-violent efforts such as the Montgomery Bus Boycotts inspired by Rosa Parks and Lunch Counter Sit-Ins held at Greensboro, North Carolina. In August of 1963, Martin Luther King gave his famous civil rights speech to over 200,000 Americans during the March on Washington, and *The Feminist Mystique* ushered in a new women's movement. According to Susan Douglas, the FDA also authorized "the pill" for contraceptive use, and citizens worried less about having unwanted pregnancies – a signal that men and women were sexually liberated. A year after the tragic assassination of John F. Kennedy (1963), the Free Speech Movement was underway when students at Berkeley held a sit-in on the campus

²⁴⁴ David Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 3-12.

to protest for academic freedom. That same year, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law, which prohibited discrimination in public places (including schools) and employment practices based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The act also pushed further for the de-segregation of schools.²⁴⁵

Towards the middle of the decade peaceful protests took a back seat to more



Illustration 46: Tulsa's Inner-Dispersal Loop. c. 1960s. Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

radical measures such as rioting, and violence became more commonplace. With the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, the Black Panthers and Black Nationalism were born. Police abuse and riots occurred at the Chicago Democratic Convention and

there were young protestors who were beaten and whisked away in paddy wagons.

When Anti-Vietnam War resistance became a central focus, Columbia University students protested by taking over university buildings. The decade ended on a positive

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 134-88; Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Random House, 1994), 61-81; Rory Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008), 57-101. Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis: 1940-1996* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 135-202; "Red Castro Ally Charged in Kennedy Assassination," *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, OK), November 23, 1963 in Pat Atkinson, *History in the Headlines: Significant Front Pages from the Tulsa World* (Tulsa: World Publishing Co., 1982).

note with Neil Armstrong landing on the moon. Nevertheless, it was characterized by much dissent.²⁴⁶

Meanwhile, Tulsa became divided along lines of class and race. Located on the north side was the impoverished African American community; on the east side was the middle class; the west side was home to the working class; and expansion southward drew in the more wealthy white families from all around the city. As suburbs grew parallel to highway expansion, the downtown area experienced a major retail exodus. Buildings were left vacant by retailers who moved to large shopping malls in the suburbs. The metropolitan area also experienced continued prosperity, becoming Oklahoma's leading manufacturing center, which catered to the airline industry and many other types of businesses.²⁴⁷

Finding Identity and Community

While Tulsa began to recognize the existence of people with same-sex sexualities, it was not a central focus in the city's movement for civil rights. "Homosexual" was still a term that was commonly used and those who preferred to be more discreet referred to one another as "The Sisters of Dorothy." (To be a "Sister of Dorothy" was to insinuate that one was gay without *saying* the word itself.)²⁴⁸ Residents with same-sex sexualities in the city slowly gained a new sense of identity and a

²⁴⁶ "Martin Luther King Slain," *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, OK), April 5, 1968 in Pat Atkinson, *History in the Headlines*, 1982; "Old Glory Hoisted By First Moon Men," *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, OK), July 21, 1969 in Pat Atkinson, *History in the Headlines*, 1982; Burner, *Making Peace with the 60s*, 49-216.

²⁴⁷ Danney Goble, *Tulsa!: Biography of the American City* (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1997), 244-52.

²⁴⁸ Steve Sanders (Interior Decorator) in discussion with the author, July 15, 2014. They were referring to their icon Judy Garland, an advocate who had starred in the *Wizard of Oz*. This phrase was said to be popular in the 1960s and 1970s in Tulsa.

community began to emerge from the shadows along with the new positive identity label “gay.” Underneath a veil of social and religious stigma, few gay residents could have imagined that the Stonewall Uprising was about to occur.

Negative Portrayals of Homosexuality

A rise in public awareness of homosexuality caused some people to see it as more of a threat, and labels such as “sissy,” “pansy,” “nancy,” and “queer” became more commonly used. Residents, including some law enforcement officials, continued to see gay men as “deviants,” “sexual predators,” and “perverts” and sought to arrest and expose them. The American Psychiatric Association, who still viewed homosexuality as a mental disorder, reinforced many of these beliefs.

According to Vito Russo, the media and film industry continued to reflect and mirror these attitudes. In previous decades, homosexuality was considered so deviant the word was not even mentioned. Rather, they were portrayed indirectly as vampires and villains. For example, vampires took on characteristics that were associated with lesbians in *Dracula's Daughter* (1934) and in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948) two men with stereotypical traits played the roles of murderous lovers. By the sixties homosexuals were depicted as shameful, unhappy, and suicidal individuals, and some died horrible deaths on the screen. In fact, Hollywood had banned homosexuality in many films. Most never knew that in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) James Dean and Sal Mineo's characters had an underlying love story. Similarly, most never knew that the popular bible film *Ben-Hur* (1959) insinuated a homosexual relationship between the characters played by Charles Heston and Stephen Boyd, because they weren't allowed to say “the word” on screen. Finally, most never knew that the film *Spartacus* (1960)

had a deleted scene in which the main characters were bathing one another and discussing their sexualities. Instead, American audiences were exposed to films such as *Advise and Consent* (1962), where gay men were characterized as hiding in the shadows and as prime subjects for blackmail should their sexualities be “found out.” One of the worst, *The Detective* (1968), equated homosexuality with suicide.²⁴⁹

For gay Tulsans the messages were no different. Sam shared his memories of what the social atmosphere was like:

For the most part it was very, very bad. I did hear stories about gay bashing... you know where straight guys would go by a gay bar and pick up a gay guy and take him out in the woods, beat him up, rob him, and sometimes leave him naked to make his way back home. So there was a very, very negative side about it... it was very risky... and you had to be careful about all of that or you could end up hurt. There was no notion of coming out, none whatsoever that I can remember. That was a lot later. Coming out at that point was getting caught. It was essentially dangerous and excessively despised.²⁵⁰

James remembered getting negative messages from television and newspapers:

Sex was not really talked about in my family. My family did not really comment about anything about it whatsoever. So I really just relied on what tidbits you would hear in the media or something. In that era it was always very obscured. I remember one time on TV, and the reporter was on a beach and they were arresting people at a restroom for having sex in the restroom. They were showing people who had come there and their families or their wife [sic] and they would sneak off and... that kind of public information was the first time that I really began to get sort of an inkling of what it meant. There was something in Ann Landers way back then and it was sort of obscured... it didn't say it but I knew that I somehow related to that circumstance [in the letter].²⁵¹

Ann Landers, a syndicated columnist, was one of the first major figures to approach the topic of homosexuality in local newspapers. One letter stated:

²⁴⁹ Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 62-123.

²⁵⁰ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

²⁵¹ James Smith (Postal Worker) in discussion with the author, March 10, 2015.

DEAR ANN LANDERS: I'm a happily married man who needs an outside opinion. A fellow I've known since childhood recently moved to this city. He was a brilliant student when I knew him, talented, well thought of and popular. I was proud to be his friend. He has done well in a creative field, is a sparkling conversationalist, a deep thinker and a thoughtful, kind person. The problem is he's a homosexual. His effeminate manner, his haircut, as well as his flamboyant manner of dress leave no room for speculation. I asked my wife when I could invite him to dinner and she said "I forbid you to have him in this house. In fact, I don't want you to be seen talking to him. It will ruin us socially." I love my wife and don't want to make her unhappy, yet I feel like a heel ignoring him. Please give me your thinking. – DETROITER

DEAR DETROITER: You wouldn't snub a friend because he was crippled by polio, would you? Well, your boyhood friend is an emotional cripple. He may have matured intellectually but in the area of sexual behavior he is a case of arrested development. Many homosexuals lead useful lives and enrich society through their creative efforts. Homosexuals of past decades have contributed handsomely to the arts and sciences. A person so afflicted, if he behaves in a socially acceptable manner, should not be insulted or snubbed. Explain it to your wife in this way. If she is unable to accept it, don't insist on having him over. Your first obligation is to her.²⁵²

A little over a month later, Landers wrote about letters she had received from around the country. She said:

DEAR READERS: During the five and a half years that I have been writing the Ann Landers column I have received hundreds of letters which dealt with homosexual problems. I have counseled these readers through the mail. On February 7 [1961] the first letter on homosexuality appeared in print. So far as I know, every client newspaper ran it. Not a single publisher phoned or wrote to complain. The reaction from the readers, however, was mixed.

Landers included example letters. Some people praised her for speaking of the subject and others chastised her. Six years later, Landers published another letter titled, *Is Homosexuality Inherited Trait?* It read:

DEAR ANN LANDERS: On a recent visit to my hometown I learned that my oldest brother's son is a homosexual. I discussed this with another brother and he said it was "unavoidable"- that homosexuality is an inherited trait. This made sense to me because two of my sisters have sons who are extremely effeminate. I know very little about the subject, but I have read magazine articles which said

²⁵² Ann Landers, *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, OK) Feb. 7, 1961; Ann Landers, *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK) March 14, 1961.

homosexuality is not inherited – that it is the result of environment. My husband and I have been married only a few months and we want a family, but the thought that I might have a homosexual child frightens me to death. Please tell me if homosexuality is inherited. – IMMOBILIZED

DEAR IMMOBILIZED: Most experts say homosexuality is not inherited – that it is a psychological disorder and that the roots of the difficulty go back to early childhood. The youngster’s feelings about one or both parents is usually the key factor. To deny yourself a family because you are afraid of producing a homosexual child is poor thinking. P.S. About those “effeminate” nephews – don’t jump to conclusions. They may be perfectly normal. A high-pitched voice, fluttery hands and traits often associated with girlishness are not proof of homosexuality. Outward appearances can be woefully misleading.²⁵³

In addition to perversion, homosexuality was now widely seen as a mental illness – a *sickness*. These types of stereotypical and negative messages proliferated throughout the decade, and same-sex sexuality continued to be seen as a threat to heterosexuality, male masculinity, and a good moral and responsible citizenship.

Boyhood in the Sixties

More telling examples occurred in the memories of those men who spent their boyhood growing up in the city. For instance, Sam recalled:

It [homosexuality] was a taboo thing, but I realized at that point that I liked having sex with boys and that I was at least [bisexual] if I wasn’t gay... I had an older cousin and it was my mother’s sister’s oldest son and he was kicked out of the house at age fifteen for being gay. He did go out to California and made it on his own. But it was a big scandal in the family and that’s how they treated it. It was that serious that they threw their own son out and he was on his own. Probably in high school I remember hearing stories of people going to Tulsa in different places to park and have sex. That was the earliest [memory]. That would have been in the late 1960s.²⁵⁴

Dylan remembered getting negative messages from a parent at an early age:

I think early on that I had probably had – I guess you might say – some playtime as early as probably first grade with a friend of mine and my mom actually caught us and made it clear that that was inappropriate behavior. From then on I

²⁵³ Ann Landers, “Is Homosexuality an Inherited Trait?” *Tulsa Daily World* (Tulsa, Okla.) January 6, 1967.

²⁵⁴ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

continued having some childhood experiences with a couple friends and I never really engaged seriously with the female sex... I would say I probably knew about my sexual orientation very early and began thinking about it more as time went on... By the time I went to Oklahoma State University when I started in 1970 that's when you really [began] to get exposed to a world other than the heterosexual world.²⁵⁵

Sam also recalled the impact of social stigma and the creative methods young men invented to understand and explore their sexualities:

I was probably in eighth grade in Catoosa around 1968, and there was this fourteen year-old kid, and he had got caught [having sex], and it was so stigmatizing that he had to leave the school and go to school somewhere else. Everyone was just shocked by it. I think parents had put pressure on the school so that their kids wouldn't "turn out gay." When I was really young, gay people were so stigmatized. Kids found ways to keep it from being as stigmatized. It was pretty homoerotic because it was boys mostly. And we played games like strip poker and things like that to be able to be with each other and see each other. A lot of people would say, "well that's just an exploration," but for me I can remember yearning for that and hoping that I would lose the game and have to be naked and you know... The way you'd do it is if you lost the game you had to take off your clothes and perform or do something. It was all exciting for me, none of that was stigmatizing for me. We did it quite often. The big thing was going camping and getting to play these games. Thinking back on it, we were going through all these motions to keep from being queer. It [gay sexuality] was a taboo subject. Even sex itself was a taboo subject.²⁵⁶

Leaving Home as a Young Gay Man

Taking the first steps in Tulsa as a young gay man was not an easy task. Just like heterosexual males, these young men faced two main choices: to continue their education or go into the armed forces. However, for homosexual youth, the path was difficult and not one that had been traveled like that of their heterosexual peers. For example, when Peter went to college he remembered seeing the struggles of another gay youth:

²⁵⁵ Dylan Scott (Senior Program Officer) in discussion with the author, March 17, 2015.

²⁵⁶ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

When I went to college there was a gay guy there who was very effeminate. Of course I'm saying "a" gay guy... I was always gay but I never realized it. I never was effeminate and I mean I could grow a beard within like two days when I was fourteen. So I could always fit in and I had a girlfriend and that stuff... but he didn't. He uh... I think he tried to commit suicide two or three times.²⁵⁷

Sam recalled the lively community that persisted at Oklahoma State University and how it allowed him to connect with others like himself:

What happened to me was I was living in a more rural community outside of Tulsa. There, I was completely cut off, and my dad worked us a lot. So I didn't really have much contact in the high school years. Every time I got a chance to go to Tulsa to park or something like that, I was looking [for other men like himself]. My contacts were few and far between until I went to college. When I went to OSU it was.... It just was made completely available!²⁵⁸

The United States involvement in Vietnam lasted during the entire decade with the most involvement by troops toward the end of the decade. Either by the draft or their own choice, many young men served in the war. One Veteran, Bart, remembered meeting someone like himself during his service:

I had one sexual experience while in the Marine corps. Actually in Vietnam in a foxhole with a guy who was not an American citizen... he was a Canadian. Foreign nationals could join the U.S. forces and he was from Canada. A plump little guy despite all the rigors of the marine corps. His name was T.D. G. and on his nametag was T.D. G. and since TD is the nomenclature for "touch down" in football we called him "touch down."²⁵⁹

He also recalled going to a gay bookstore and learning more about his identity while in the service:

In the Marine corps while in San Diego I was in this store... it wasn't a USAO... it had a strong gay influence and there were books and I bought a book called *Quatrefoil* and it was a book about two people in the military and I went back to that place (it was sort of like a pride center or something) and bought another

²⁵⁷ Peter Poppins (Florist) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

²⁵⁸ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

²⁵⁹ Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

book called *Frontrunner* about a coach and a track star and read them repetitiously.²⁶⁰

Tragically, Joe recalled that many veterans including some of his gay friends "... had Agent Orange sprayed on them as they were clearing out the jungles... [and later] died from it..."²⁶¹

Building a Gay Community in Tulsa

After the 1959 opening of *The Bamboo Lounge*, numerous bar spaces emerged outside of the downtown area, and the desire to go to gay-friendly bars gave way to a need for more places that served a predominantly gay clientele. These spaces expanded across the growing landscape of Tulsa, allowing for greater autonomy and community building.²⁶² Gay bars became major spots of socialization and education, and they allowed men (and sometimes women), to meet, have fun, and establish a heightened connectedness to community life. While some bars included women (such as *The Gala*), most of the bars served a predominantly gay male clientele.

Socializing in Gay Bars

A generational change was also beginning to occur between men with same-sex sexualities in the city. Typically, older men preferred places where they could be more discreet such as *Bishops*, because it was less identifiable as a gay space (see chapter five) and some younger men gravitated more towards gay bars. Popular places

²⁶⁰ Ibid. As this example illustrates, gay men were learning about their sexualities through not only the media but also books that they read.

²⁶¹ Joe Stephens (Artist) in discussion with the author, July 16, 2015.

²⁶² It is of particular interest to note that the gay bars that emerged outside of the downtown area were located in spaces not far from it. The furthest bar was *The Bamboo Lounge*, located on the northeast side of Tulsa off Pine. This is important considering how Tulsa developed. There were no documented spaces found in the suburbs or in the wealthier South Tulsa area.

mentioned by younger men included: *Pete and Bobs*, *The Eighth Day* and *Gala*, *The Zebra Lounge*, the *Taj Mahal*, *The Glory Hole*, and *Friends Lounge*.²⁶³ By using door “buzzers” and “door slides” many places had developed unique ways to deter those who they did not want entering the bar, such as police or possibly less-supportive heterosexual patrons.

In the early part of the decade there was a bar downtown known as *Pete and Bobs*. Kenneth shared the impact it had on his identity:

... You knocked on the door and it was on the corner and the door slid across. Back then it was a speakeasy so you had both those things. Even though there was a fear involved there was excitement! It was like riding a roller coaster. [Laughter] So anyhow, we got in the first door and there was just this big empty room and there was another door and they slid it across and inside there was a lot of people dancing and it was a small bar, but it was so much fun and exciting! It was the first time I had seen men dancing together... It was so foreign to me and unbelievable.²⁶⁴

Another place, the *Zebra Lounge*, was a small piano bar. It was first owned by “Bob” and later Bill who turned it into a gay bar. Fred remembered that it was known for its pool tables, which “...were all pink. That’s the one thing that people remember! You’d go down to play pool and they were all pink...[laughter]”²⁶⁵

The *Taj Mahal* was also located downtown. A heterosexual woman named Norma started it as a heterosexual bar in the Adams Hotel and later she moved to a building space independent of hotel. After a while it had a straight clientele by day and

²⁶³ Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015. This suggests that by this point the gay community offered a number of spaces where people would congregate based upon taste. It also illustrates the prevalence of a generational rift in not only American society, but within the emerging gay culture of Tulsa.

²⁶⁴ Kenneth Wiley (Cosmetologist) in discussion with the author, August 6, 2015.

²⁶⁵ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, July 10, 2015.

a gay clientele at night. Eventually, it catered specifically to the gay male community.²⁶⁶

It had two levels: On the first level was a bar with stools and booths, and while the second level was only open on occasion, it had a large dance area. It was within walking distance of the *Zebra Lounge*, which was just down the street.²⁶⁷ Moses remembered his friendship with Norma and her activist spirit:

Norma was a fascinating woman, she really was. She was very good and very kind. She had three children, a daughter and two boys. I remember there was one occasion where someone got a phone call that four gay guys had gotten arrested up around the Grand Lake area. One was arrested for drunk driving and the other three were arrested for public drunk. They put them in jail and wouldn't let them even call anybody. They slept in the jail and they didn't know what to do. It was so funny because one of them woke up in the morning and said, "[Moses], goodness gracious are we still in this terrible place?" It was so funny... they got a note written and threw it out the window and some kids picked it up and called some people up there that knew them and it got back to Tulsa that they were in jail. I called to see if I could get them out because I was an attorney but they wouldn't let me do it since it wasn't in Tulsa. They had an outrageous bond, I don't remember what it was. But they had to raise the money and I remember it was a Sunday morning and Norma went down to the bar and she met one of the guys aunts who helped her count out the money and they gave the money to me to go bail the guys out. I was very fond of her. She was well into her 90s when she died. She was very gay friendly and of course her son was gay.²⁶⁸

In another memorable account, one man explained that Norma and her bartender had a sense of humor:

... She told the story of how some of her lady friends saw her downtown shopping and said they just couldn't believe she was running a gay bar, to which she replied, "Of course I am.... All of my customers are happy." The next two I heard myself. A young man with a University of Hawaii T-shirt, and obviously the timid type, walked in one afternoon during happy hour and sat at a table next to me. Norma came over to wait on him, and he looked up before ordering and

²⁶⁶ Moses Silverman (Retired Attorney) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015; James Smith (Postal Worker) in discussion with the author, March 10, 2015.

²⁶⁷ Dick S., "Looking Back On The Bars: A Brief History" (Unpublished Document, Tulsa Historical Society Vertical Research Files, 1990); Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

²⁶⁸ Moses Silverman (Retired Attorney) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

asked, “Ma’am, is it safe for queens in here?” Norma replied, “My Lord, yes, honey chile, they have those in England. We don’t have them in this country.” He got up and ran. Shortly after the Holiday Inn was opened across the street, a man who obviously had looked out the window and saw the bar, walked over. Janie, one of Norma’s longtime friends, was working happy hour that afternoon. Janie [was] about 4-foot-9, if [she was] that tall, and on the buxom side. The visitor from across the street observed what was going on for a few minutes, and to an outsider, some of it could have been pretty shocking, and then stood up. Making sure he had the floor, he said, “Obviously this is a gay bar, but who is that (pointing to Janie), Mickey Rooney in drag?” He finished his beer and left us with one of the best laughs ever. Janie took it in stride.²⁶⁹

Other popular places were located outside of the downtown area. The *Eighth Day* and *Gala* were two bars that took up most of a city block, and shared a parking lot with a walkway between them. Patrons could enter in through the back doors, so they were less identifiable.²⁷⁰ Moses explained:

In those days you didn’t really want to be seen going into a gay bar. So a lot of times you might park maybe a block away and go into the alley through the back doors. I remember there were a couple of girls who ran the dance bar that faces on 11th street and one night she said to me, “[Moses], I’d like you to come in here but I’d like for you to be outside so that when they come in and get me you can get me out of jail!” ... I remember one time the Vice Squad came in. I noticed the guy, there was just something about him that got my attention. He



Illustration 47: The 8th Day and Gala location (on either side of corner) under the Meadow Gold sign. Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

²⁶⁹ Dick S., “Looking Back On The Bars: A Brief History” (Unpublished Document, Tulsa Historical Society Vertical Research Files, 1990).

²⁷⁰ Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

walked over to the pay phone on the wall and made a call and no sooner than he hung up the phone, the doors opened and the police came in. So what they were doing was saying that there were underage people coming in there drinking. There were a lot of underage people in there but a good part of them were not drinking and there were cases where the police would try to arrest someone for public drunk and most weren't drinking and you might say, "Hey! This is a coke, you want to taste it?" [Laughter]²⁷¹

One man recalled the relationship between gay men and lesbians at those bar spaces:

Bob W. had the Eighth Day and Gala at the same time, but Fran and Jodie soon would take over. Fran, a former lady wrestler, had no trouble keeping the peace, although some of the pieces did get out of hand once in a while. Those were the days when the bars were mixed – girls and guys. I could be more specific by saying dikes and queens. The best fights were always by the dikes. Shirley always used part of her Indian money on her birthday to throw a big party at the Gala. And those were the days when you always knew when it was about time to leave. Fran or Jodie would yell out, 'Hotel, motel time.'²⁷²



Illustration 48: Tulsa jail cell in 1965. Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

Kenneth remembered a

new slang phrase and the police conducting a raid on the two bars:

That's where the phrase got started, "Grab a dyke." And when the police came in they'd say, "It's the police, grab a dyke!" And so you'd grab a girl... there was lots of girls in there and they were all lesbians. You'd grab a lesbian immediately so you wouldn't be taken off to jail. This guy was a ballroom dancer and we were ballroom dancing and he dipped me way down and he said, "Oh shit! It's the police!" And there was a policeman standing right there and he

²⁷¹ Moses Silverman (Retired Attorney) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

²⁷² Ibid.

just dropped me and I just fell on the floor. And the policeman grabbed me and everyone else was just scurrying around looking for a dyke or running out of the bar and the owner of the bar who was Jodie (Jodie and Fran owned the bar) and Jodie came over and said, “Let him go, he’s a good guy!” And the policeman let me go and I went home and I said, “I will never go out in public again, I will



Illustration 49: Tulsa jail cell (another view). *Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.*

never go to a gay bar as long as I’m alive!” I was terrified and then an hour and a half later when somebody called and said, ‘Well it’s all over and they’re gone... come back over!’ and I said, “OK!” [Laughter] But I was terrified...²⁷³

The Glory Hole was one of the more unusual spaces, because the name carried with it a “secret message” that only gay people could interpret at that time. A bar

owner remembered that it had a “balcony and the whole works... The straights had no idea what a glory hole was, but newly arriving gays knew instantly.”²⁷⁴

Friends Lounge also emerged as a popular place. Owned by a man named Tracy, the bar was frequently raided by police. One bar owner commented that, “he ran a tight ship and a good bar. He worked hard and loved giving the kids a safe place off the streets.” He also stated that *Friends Lounge* was:

... Famous for its Friday night drag shows and was a coming out place for hundreds over the years. Unfortunately, much of the potential profits went for court costs and attorney fees over time. Frequent police raids and obvious, blatant incidents of harassment were much too frequent and it was my first

²⁷³ Kenneth Wiley (Cosmetologist) in discussion with the author, August 6, 2015.

²⁷⁴ Tim T., “Flash from the Past,” (Unpublished Document, Tulsa Historical Society Vertical Research Files); Also found at Tim T., “Blast From The Past,” accessed: June 15, 2014, <http://www.timsplayroom.com/blast.html> This is also an indicator of non-verbal communication and cultural symbolism. For those who do not know, glory holes (usually located in public restrooms) were use for purposes of fellatio.

personal experience of bigotry, political and social intolerance. I was amazed to realize that at the same time I had discovered a multitude of others of the same sexual orientation, I was also unknowingly transcending from a safe, accepted majority into that of an often misunderstood and shunned minority. The battle, for me, had begun. Tracy did a lot toward gay acceptance in Tulsa and for Oklahoma. Most of which today's generation will never realize. But Tracy never wanted the spot light, he only wanted to be left alone and given an opportunity to make a living and provide a place for gay people to go. Equal treatment to straight bars. I will never forget, with amusement, one time when Tracy was to appear in court on a trumped up charge of some kind, I asked him if he had a good attorney and he told me he didn't need one. When I asked why not, he told me to show up in court and see for myself. Tracy showed up in court with five stunning, outlandish, drag queens and the case was thrown out before they had a chance to parade to the witness stand. The Judge didn't want his courtroom turned into a circus, although the police had already taken the first step towards that end.²⁷⁵

Certain restaurants were also popular. For instance, many patrons dined at *The Chicken Coop* after they left their nightlife venue of choice, because it was open twenty-four hours.²⁷⁶ One man recalled going to *The Chicken Coop* with his lesbian friends:

The Chicken Coop... was an after-hours eating place for a lot of us, preceding Baker's by a few years. And C.J. would regularly solicit business by yelling out, "Who's going to the Chicken Shit?" C.J., now deceased, was about as butch as they came, even sprouting a mustache once. Oh yes, she worked as a truck driver. And Peggy was as pretty a femme as you ever would see.²⁷⁷

A few years later *Baker's Restaurant* also became a popular dining place for men and women.

Entertainment in the Gay Bars

Music was an important aspect of nightlife for people of all sexualities. Both men and women enjoyed several genres and artists including: The Beatles, Sonny &

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Dick S., "Looking Back On The Bars: A Brief History" (Unpublished Document, Tulsa Historical Society Vertical Research Files, 1990).

Cher, Judy Garland's "Over the Rainbow," the Supremes, Gladys Knight, Aretha Franklin, the Beach Boys, Bob Dylan, and Janis Joplin. Another fond memory was that of a talented elderly pianist named Gracie, who frequented some of the gay venues:

Gracie would first enter the scene when Bill had the *Zebra* downtown... Gracie, already in her seventies, played the piano every Saturday night. The oldies were her specialty, but she had a little novelty number on the risqué side that she would gladly play, putting whoever's name was requested in the lyrics. It started out with the name submitted, say, 'James,' and went like this: 'James couldn't get it started...' The laughter started immediately and "James" soon became embarrassed. But it was fun and we all loved it. Gracie later moved her act to the *Bamboo* and most of us followed. It gave Gene a partner. He was a solo dancer of some merit in those days – I watched him dance from one end of the bar to the other one night to the complete Carole King 'Corazon.' He was not the Latin from Manhattan but he gave a good imitation.²⁷⁸

Peter remembered Gracie being at the *Bamboo* as well, and recounted that one time he was at *The Bamboo* and something happened that shocked everyone:

There was this lady named Gracie and she played the piano every Wednesday there and she was old. And all of these older people... You know it was a gay bar and with all this stuff there and all this weird craziness going on... she would have a group of twelve to fifteen people in their 70s or 80s and they would stand up and sing these songs together that were from the 1920s and 1930s while she played the piano. I had no idea what the songs were but they knew all of the words! Now this is a true story, we were there one night and she had a heart attack and she died at the *Bamboo*. She died there and they came and carried her away. I thought, "If I could die like that then I would be happy!" I didn't see her go "uhhh! And fall down..." no... I was in the other room and like all of the sudden she was playing and [suddenly] she stopped and then they tried to give her water and EMSA was there and she was gone. She may not have died that second but she had a massive heart attack and passed away...²⁷⁹

According to Peter, at the time of her passing, patrons felt that she died doing what she loved.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Peter Poppins (Florist) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

The Backlash: Attempts to Control a Growing Gay Community in Tulsa

In spite of their progress in building gay identities and an accepting community,



Illustration 50: Mohawk Park restroom allegedly used by men. *Courtesy of the Authors Collection.*

same-sex sexualities were still considered taboo among many in the public. Men had to find ways to explore their stigmatized sexualities outside of the public eye and law enforcement officials

seemed particularly interested in targeting gay activities. For example, James

remembered the police routinely patrolling the *Taj Mahal*:

... You could be in the *Taj Mahal* and people would come in and say, “Well the police are outside taking down the license tags of the cars in the parking lot...” and they were! You know... [Laughter] So everyone would stay in the bar. Sometimes the police would come in to the *Taj Mahal* or some of the other bars and they would check ID’s. It wasn’t something that happened every day but it was something that happened and it was a concern for you.²⁸¹



Illustration 51: Restroom sign close-up warning (Mohawk Park). *Courtesy of the Authors Collection.*

Still, there were those more fearful and

oppressed men who sought out places to have quick impersonal encounters with one another. Private

places (such as public restrooms, known as “tearooms”) became more heavily trafficked as they tried to emerge out of the shadows to seek out others like themselves in greater

²⁸¹ James Smith (Postal Worker) in discussion with the author, March 10, 2015.

numbers.²⁸² Hoping that these more private places would afford them a more discreet alternative to the more public gay bars, some men even came up with complex and creative ways to evade getting caught. Sam explained:

Sometimes if there were multiple guys in the restroom we would have a lookout and he would stand outside and signal to us if someone was coming in so that we could stop having sex. I didn't want to get to know anybody because I was afraid that if I got caught... what the consequences would be. The consequences were horrific, I could have been just like my cousin and kicked out. I knew that was a possibility.²⁸³

During the decade there were a total of fifty-four cases at the Tulsa Courthouse that went to the criminal level, and although some of these men were repeat “offenders,” the

number was 25 percent higher than had occurred in the fifties.²⁸⁴ Moses, an attorney, bailed many men out of jail and got other cases dismissed before they ever went to the criminal level. In fact, he gave out his card, and several men carried it around with them



Illustration 52: The Alvin Plaza Hotel (restroom located inside). Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

²⁸² According to Laud Humphrey's, this was a common reaction for many men with same-sex sexualities – who otherwise led socially “acceptable” lives. Interestingly, many of the men Humphrey's interviewed in the “tearooms” (or bathrooms) identified as heterosexual men. Thus, the social stigma attached to same-sex sexualities was so pervasive that it left no space for more fearful men to explore and understand their sexualities in a more positive manner. Naturally these men sought relief in these types of spaces from what they believed was not only a socially unacceptable identity, but also *criminalized* sexual desires. Laud Humphreys, *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places* (New York: Aldine, 1975).

²⁸³ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

²⁸⁴ See Appendix A for complete list of cases.

in the event that they needed his help. They were even sharing his contact information with other gay friends and acquaintances. At one point, he had two phone lines put in his house so that clients could get through on the second phone if the first was in use.²⁸⁵

Thus, the social conflicts of the sixties had awakened a gay community in Tulsa in such a way that it allowed some men more autonomy to emerge from the shadows, form their own identities in communities, and create numerous bars of their own. The backlash of the heterosexual majority and increasing police harassment forced some gay Tulsans to stay “in the closet,” but the presence of the homosexual community could not be denied.

²⁸⁵ Moses Silverman (Retired Attorney) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

Chapter 7: *High Spirits in T-Town: The Era of Gay Liberation*

The Birth of Gay Liberation in America

In the early morning hours of June 28, 1969, the national gay and lesbian community finally reached its tipping point. As police raided the *Stonewall Inn* (a gay bar located in Greenwich Village), young patrons fought back and unrest lasted for days. The uprising was a pivotal moment in the lives of Americans with same-sex



Illustration 53: The Stonewall Inn.
Courtesy of Diana Davies, the New York Public Library, and Wikimedia Commons.

sexualities.²⁸⁶ Residents knew it was going on because they heard about it in the media.²⁸⁷ In fact, one Tulsa native was living there and witnessed it first hand as an observer. He stated:

We would go to this little restaurant down in the Village on Greenwich Street called *The One Potato*... terrible little place... but the food was good at that time. [Laughter] ... We heard all this loud commotion and we got up from dinner and we went outside and I was absolutely shocked. I was amazed. I had been in Stonewall one time before that... I wasn't there when it started, but I was there when the police were going into the [the bar]. Those guys in the Stonewall... man... they just said, "We aren't going to take it anymore!" And those guys came out and they locked the police in the building and set fire to it. There were guys jumping out of the second

floor window. The bathrooms were on the second floor and they were jumping out of the [window]. It was horrific... [crying] it changed my whole life... and I've supported them ever since... We were closeted [back then]... In those days you had to do it, you had to be closeted... But from that point on I was out of the closet.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Marking of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 231-33.

²⁸⁷ Lewis Brady (Retired Kitchen Planning Consultant) in discussion with the author, August, 2014.

²⁸⁸ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, July 10, 2015.

A new movement – *gay liberation* – was forming while the uprising made national headlines and by July of 1969 a new national organization, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), was founded in New York City. Inspired by other movements like civil rights and women’s liberation, followers sought to emphasize difference and to transform views on gender, sexuality, race relations, and marriage.²⁸⁹ They valued authenticity and some even held separatist views. As awareness of “gay” identity spread, the movement blazed across the United States towards smaller cities such as Tulsa – inspiring a social and cultural awakening.²⁹⁰

The following year the first Pride Parades were held “in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles” on June 27-28, and the film *The Boys in the Band* became the first motion picture to cast gay characters in a positive light. (However, same-sex sexualities were not depicted sympathetically until 1987 in the film *Maurice*.)²⁹¹ The United Church of Christ ordained the first gay minister in 1972 and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) began to offer “family members greater support roles” for dealing with children who were “coming out of the closet.” When Harvey Milk was elected to San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors in 1978, he

²⁸⁹ This is in stark contrast to the earlier homophile movement of the 1950s, which sought social tolerance through more apologetic approaches.

²⁹⁰ The movement spread through college campuses around the nation. This was true for Oklahoma, too. See John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 233; Don Teal, *The Gay Militants: How Gay Liberation Began in America, 1969-1971* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1971), 22-97. Karla Jay and Allen Young eds., *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), xi-xxix; 330-42.

²⁹¹ “Gay Rights Timeline: Key Dates in the Fight for Equality,” *NBC News*, accessed: November 28, 2015, http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/03/23/17418872-gay-rights-timeline-key-dates-in-the-fight-for-equality; *The Celluloid Closet*, directed by Aldo Fabrizi and Jeffrey Friedman (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2001), DVD.

became a major leader but was assassinated after less than a year in office causing uproar in San Francisco. And on October 14, 1979 the first March on Washington for Gay Rights occurred and drew in almost 100,000 demonstrators calling for civil rights and protections.²⁹²

In 1973 the fabulous Liberace drew large crowds to watch him prance around on stage and play on the piano and the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder. Soon psychological theories of identity development began to emerge such as the Cass Model (1979), signaling a new era in the ways the psychological community understood sexual identity and diversity.²⁹³ Terry recalled noticing how this shift impacted his youth:

I went through that whole thing with my family where I tell them, “I’m gay”... and my dad says, “No, you’re not” and my dad was like John Wayne and it was the antithesis of everything he was. He refused and would not deal with it... So they came to me and said, “We acknowledge this [his sexuality], will you at least go see a psychiatrist?” So I said, “Sure, why not, what possible harm could it do?” So we go [to the] office and after I talk to the psychiatrist for about forty-five minutes to an hour maybe, the psychiatrist comes back into the room where mom and dad are waiting and says, “As a psychiatrist it is my job to help people who are unhappy to change and do some changes that will help them be happy. After talking to your son, he is not unhappy and I can’t help because that’s not in my job description.” That was around 1976 or 1977. They had to be let

²⁹² Bonnie Morris, “History of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Social Movements,” *American Psychological Association*, accessed: November 20, 2013, <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/history.aspx>; “Gay Rights Timeline: Key Dates in the Fight for Equality,” *NBC News*, accessed: November 28, 2015, http://usnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/03/23/17418872-gay-rights-timeline-key-dates-in-the-fight-for-equality

²⁹³ In 1957 Evelyn Hooker paved the way for the development of such research through her study, “The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual.” In her study, she found that the homosexual participants she included were no less mentally stable and adjusted than their heterosexual peers. Vivienne Cass’s work sought to develop a stage model of identity development. See Vivienne Cass, “Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 4 no. 3, (1979): 219-235; Evelyn Hooker, “The adjustment of the male overt homosexual.” *Journal of Projective Techniques* 21, no. 1 (1957): 18-31.

known that psychologically there was nothing wrong with me. They were the ones who had to make the adjustment and accept me as their son.²⁹⁴

Yet, not all of America viewed the social changes occurring in the country as signs of progress. In fact, some conservative Christian religious groups viewed the movements as a threat to their continued existence, which gave rise to the formation of

the “Religious Right” – a merging of religion and politics. Powerful lobbies that formed in the wake of American social change (such as Focus on the Family, the Moral Majority, and the Christian Crusade) ultimately sought to restore traditional family life, gender roles, and sexual practices. The Right became even stronger with the influence of the Tulsa-



Illustration 54: The City of Tulsa in the 1970s. Courtesy of The Beryl Ford Collection/Rotary Club of Tulsa, Tulsa City-County Library, and Tulsa Historical Society.

based Oral Roberts ministry, who at one point claimed to have had a vision from God where he was told to build a City of Faith that healed and taught. The complex eventually became Oral Roberts University, a private Evangelical school, and his statue of praying hands became a constant reminder to the lives of gay residents.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Terry Landers (Disabled) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2014.

²⁹⁵ Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 344-60. Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982), 324-35. Tanya Erzen, *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 183-215; Courtney Ann and Glenn Vaughn-Roberson, *City in the Osage Hills: Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1984), 172.

Gaiety in T-Town

The wave of gay liberation that hit Tulsa in the early seventies reached a climax in the early part of the 1980s. Social shifts occurred gradually as right-wing religious opposition became more widespread in the city. To counter, residents with same-sex sexualities organized as a collective, and were optimistic that change was just around the corner. They experienced much progress including: renewed activism, increased diversification, as well as profound community and cultural growth. Gay bars became integral to the development of community life and the sexual freedom movement that paralleled the era manifested itself uniquely in the city despite resistance from law-enforcement officials and growing elements of conservatism. An era of high spirits had arrived.

Juggling Multiple Identities

The gradual advancement of gay consciousness in the city forced men to negotiate ways to manage their newfound identity, which by then also carried meanings of community affiliation and culture, juxtaposed against negative stereotypes. Despite growing hopes for progress, men with same-sex sexualities were still stigmatized in the city and those who were in the closet often found themselves caught between two social worlds: a “double life,” where one had to negotiate when, where, and to whom it was socially acceptable to be open about their identity.²⁹⁶ Carl recalled what it was like in the early 1970s:

You still had to be very closeted and had to hide who you were to the general public. There really wasn't anybody you could talk to. If you talked to them you had to do it more or less in private. You couldn't have open conversations in public or in a business [other than gay bars or] they might ask you to leave.

²⁹⁶ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014

There were restaurants where, if you walked in, they might not serve you. There were places you would go in and they just wouldn't do business with you. Getting beat up was always right over your shoulder, because there was nothing to stop anybody from doing something to you. People could still get their houses burned and their cars torn up or whatever, and it was nothing. There was nothing you could do about it. It was really, really hard to be yourself.²⁹⁷

Nevertheless, men felt more liberated to “come out” in greater numbers as the eighties approached.²⁹⁸ For minorities of color, juggling identities was more difficult. One African American man named Joseph said homosexuality was not a topic discussed regularly in North Tulsa (an area where many African Americans resided in the city). The influence of the anti-gay Black Churches in the area made no space for these men. Rather than being called “gay,” he and his friends recognized the term “punk.” Facing multiple oppressions, Black men in the city encountered racism from the dominant majority along with homophobia in the Black community. If men living in that part of the city were to explore their gay identity, it was likely because he or she entered into the more White gay spaces where it was said that they generally found acceptance.²⁹⁹

In the minds of some, the hangover of conservatism in the early part of the era was no competition for the excitement and freedom growing in larger cities. Gay communities in metropolises such as San Francisco, New York, Dallas, and Houston became major forces to enjoy as the momentum of the movement progressed, and some moved to those cities for what they believed was a better life. Still, there were many who opted to stay closer, and it was common for men to visit neighboring gay

²⁹⁷ Carl White (Special Event Coordinator) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015; Supported by Steve Sanders (Interior Decorator) in discussion with the author, July 15, 2014.

²⁹⁸ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014

²⁹⁹ Joseph Washington (Artist/Teacher) in discussion with the author, July 11, 2015.

communities that were also developing in smaller cities such as Oklahoma City and Kansas City.³⁰⁰

Connecting with Each Other

Over time gay liberation generated excitement and feelings of freedom in Tulsa. The first noticeable changes were in the form of communication and culture, which made it easier for men to connect with one another in an oppressive environment. Sam remembered:

As the seventies progressed into 1978 and 1979, you realized everything was changing and changing rapidly. There were gay writers, theater, gay art, there was gay pornography – in a large scale. It was this huge scale. It was like a dam burst and so culturally, everything that you could imagine that gay men were interested in just bloomed and came to life. It was a great feeling because you knew that this was going somewhere. If you weren't acknowledged and accepted yet, you knew [you were] was going to be very quickly. I remember feeling that way. I realized the world had changed. That was before AIDS and the eighties and there was this really upbeat feeling that we were going to be somebody. There was this really high point, this golden age. There was even sexual liberation in the straight community at this time.³⁰¹

New recognizable symbols also emerged such as the rainbow flag (1978), inverted pink triangle (reclaimed from the Holocaust), the Lambda (1970), and gender symbols also began to be popular. The sexual freedom movement elevated the excitement that residents felt and provided numerous outlets for some men. As greater numbers of residents were more open about their identities toward the end of the era, other safer means for connecting with each other appeared.

³⁰⁰ James Smith (Postal Worker) in discussion with the author, March 10, 2015; Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

³⁰¹ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014; Supported by Steve Sanders (Interior Decorator) in discussion with the author, July 15, 2014.

Non-verbal Messages

The identity struggles that some men faced forced them to continue to develop complex non-verbal cues and rituals to discreetly identify each other in public. Many times these trends were spread through word of mouth in the city.³⁰² Similar to previous decades, the “eye gaze” was common:

That was very prevalent... To me that was better described as something that you felt. It was something you didn't even have to work at; it was something that you sensed... It made you take a second look at people. It would make you turn your head and look at someone and you either felt brave enough to respond to it or not... I picked up on it when I was mostly in college like when I was walking down the sidewalk... and [he would] suddenly zoom in on somebody and they didn't break the stare... That was another thing there was “the stare,” because gay guys wouldn't look away and straight guys would. The next thing you would do, which was the natural response was say, “Did something just pass between us?” A lot of gay guys would recognize this phrase and respond positively to it if they were interested in you... I had it happen several times, people would come up to me and say that, it wasn't always me going up to them.³⁰³

The trendy western apparel of the time inspired some men to use colored bandanas known as “The Hanky Code” to discreetly communicate with one another, either in public or even in bars. The placement, color, and pattern of the bandanas carried different coded messages.³⁰⁴ Carl recalled how some men learned about it:

Back then it was nothing to walk into the bars and the “Hanky Code” [would be] up on a spin wheel on the wall and all the different colored hankies [were] up there folded really nice in triangles and it went around. *Tim's Playroom* [a local gay bar] had it. At the top it would say what each one was and what it was for... On the left side you were the butch and on the right side you were the fem...³⁰⁵

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014; Supported by James Smith (Postal Worker) in discussion with the author, March 10, 2015; Peter Poppins (Florist) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015; Steve Sanders (Interior Decorator) in discussion with the author, July 15, 2014.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Carl White (Special Event Coordinator) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

The placement of men's earrings also became signals:

Sometimes gay guys had an earring and the rule was that left was right and right was gay, you know. If you had an earring in your left ear that was OK, but if it was in the right then that was an indication that you were gay. If a guy had earrings in both ears, then that typically meant that they were [bisexual]...³⁰⁶

Sexual Liberation

The advancement of gay liberation crafted an environment where many men were able to connect with each other in ways that they had never imagined before. The sexual revolution that impacted American culture in prior years inspired some people of



Illustration 55: The Circle Theater in 2015. *Courtesy of the Authors Collection.*

all sexual orientations to experiment sexually.³⁰⁷ After all, many sexually transmitted infections were curable, and for men who had sex with men pregnancy was not a concern. Drug use was also relatively common.³⁰⁸ As a result, the atmosphere of sexual

freedom encompassed the movement and allowed for even more fearful men to emerge, explore, and seek out others like themselves as they struggled to negotiate their identities. Other than gay bars, pornographic movie theaters and adult bookstores became popular and there were residents of all sexualities who made use of their

³⁰⁶ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014; Supported by Terry Landers (Disabled) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2014; Carl White (Special Event Coordinator) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

³⁰⁷ Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened*, 20-37; Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell*, 65-79.

³⁰⁸ For instance, "poppers" (made of the chemical known as amyl nitrate) became wildly popular. Users would snort fumes of the chemical out of little bottles in order to get a rush while they engaged in sex or a night of dancing on the disco floors.

services. Notably, both the historic *Majestic* and *Circle Theater* screened adult films during the era. Across the nation, bathhouses became social institutions for gay men and they were also places where one could engage in casual encounters.³⁰⁹ The nearest bathhouse, The Renaissance Athletic Club (R.A.C.), was only a short drive away in Oklahoma City and was open twenty-four hours. Peter remembered the feelings of sexual freedom that some men felt:

This was pre-AIDS so nobody had a concept that you could go out and like fuck and die... I remember it was like, "Oh, maybe I'll get syphilis." I used to go to the baths in Kansas City, because I traveled a lot with my job... I had sixteen t-shirts from different cities where they had Club Baths. There was Houston, Denver, Kansas City, Oklahoma City, San Francisco, Dallas, New Orleans, Atlanta, [and] Key West... the Club Baths was a chain and went full blast... When I would come back sometime every three or four months, I would go to the County Health Department. You could go in and say, "You know... I think I have something!" [Laughter] They would just give you penicillin and I never ever had anything, but it was just different [back then]. It was a precaution that people would take...³¹⁰



Illustration 56: The Trails of Turkey Mountain. Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

For those who did not feel

comfortable meeting others at places like gay bars, bathhouses, or bookstores, a number of new options were available in the city. Places such as the rest stops off of the I-44 Turnpike, the Williams Center (restrooms), River Parks, and the trails of Turkey Mountain Park drew heavy traffic. Also, some gay men (including heterosexuals)

³⁰⁹ There were also bathhouses and sex clubs marketed to heterosexuals in the 1970s America, but they did not take off in popularity and eventually withered. Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell*, 73-4.

³¹⁰ Peter Poppins (Florist) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

engaged in impersonal sex at a new scenic Arkansas River “Lookout” off of the Keystone extension outside of Sand Springs until it was eventually shut down by authorities.³¹¹

Still, there were major risks associated with sexual activities in such places by the seventies. For instance, arrests at Mohawk Park were reported in local newspapers and some men experienced robberies. The police department increased their arrests, too. In the first eight months of 1976, vice squad officers had made “43 sex-related arrests involving male homosexuals.” Police Captain Bob Stover was reported by the *Tulsa World* to have said that, “The only time we act on them (homosexuals) is when we are getting a lot of complaints...” and “Up at Mohawk Park they’re just hanging around the restrooms now. The downtown area gets bad every once in a while and people call in and complain...” He also said that they would “run them off for a while” but they always came back. Many of the men arrested were reported to have been “... people who can’t afford to have it known they’re homosexuals,” and that many arrested were “professional men.”³¹² Moses, an attorney, corroborated these findings. He stated that there were, “[Laughter] A lot! A lot. There were times I was called out at least three times in one night. That was very normal.” The multiple phone lines in his home were constantly ringing because so many men needed to get bailed out of jail. Sometimes, the

³¹¹ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014; Peter Poppins (Florist) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015; Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015; James Smith (Postal Worker) in discussion with the author, March 10, 2015.

³¹² “Homosexual Arrests Increase at Mohawk Park,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), August 8, 1976 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

jail employees “even gave [his] name to people so [he] could get them out [more quickly].”³¹³

Gay Newspapers & Magazines

Safer ways to connect with one another came forward in the early eighties. For example, beginning on October 25, 1980 the first issue of *Another World Magazine* was published by a long-standing community leader named M.C. Parker. The publication served the Tulsa area and included news, humor/gossip columns, bar ads, and a gay-owned business directory.³¹⁴ The magazine was the first step towards connecting the city’s gay readership. By October of 1983, the *Gayly Oklahoman* also began publishing their newspaper that covered issues relating to the state’s gay population. The *Gayly* became a major force in uniting the diverse gay communities of Oklahoma. At first it was focused mainly on issues in Oklahoma City, but soon it incorporated sections that catered specifically to Tulsa. The publication routinely provided national and local news, political developments, opinion columns, artwork, creative writing, bar and business advertisements, comics, and lengthy personals ad sections. By 1989 it had an “estimated readership of thirty-thousand to forty-thousand.”³¹⁵

Organizing and Igniting Activism

The era also breathed new life into younger community activists – especially those at universities – as they observed the social shifts occurring in gay communities

³¹³ Moses Silverman (Retired Attorney) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

³¹⁴ Toni Broaddus, “Gay-ety in T-Town,” *The Gayly Oklahoman* (Tulsa, OK), June 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

³¹⁵ Guild, Thomas E., et al. “Oklahoma’s Gay Liberation Movement.” In “*An Oklahoma I Had Never Seen Before: Alternative Views of Oklahoma History*,” edited by Davis Joyce (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 328-38.

across the country. The University of Oklahoma in Norman led the way as students formed an organization called the Gay Activist Alliance, and they fought to be recognized by the University. The flames quickly spread to other cities like Oklahoma City and Tulsa.³¹⁶ In response, numerous new community groups began to form in the cities. Initially, many of these organizations focused on social activities that helped bring gay people together for the purposes of socialization, organization, and the public good. Later, some of them found themselves struggling to overcome systematic chains of metropolitan oppression in the city.

Tulsa Gay Alliance

The initial impulse of the gay liberation in Tulsa was the Tulsa Gay Alliance.

Formed in 1973 with the help of a nineteen year-old, the founder noted that:

... I had read about and written to a new gay group at Oklahoma University in Norman and a man there... put me in touch with a religious man, as I recall a seminarian, here in Tulsa who was forming a gay liberation group. So there we were in the late summer of 1973: A group of gay men and my feminist friend Jan, spread around the living room of this seminarian's apartment at London Square, inventing our first gay political group... The energy was incredible as we addressed issues like -- what to call ourselves. Were we homosexuals, gays or the more radical moniker -- queers? We would avoid a rigid hierarchy and take turns leading meetings, we could reserve a room at the Tulsa Library, we would post notice and let everyone know that gay people would be gathering openly. We would tell the world who we were. Tulsa Gay Alliance was taking shape as we brainstormed. We accepted ourselves and that was the seminal spark. There weren't a large number of us at those first public meetings [Held at the Tulsa Central Library]. As I recall there were only a handful, maybe seven or eight folks. I recall a Germanic dark-haired lesbian named [Tay C.], the seminarian, a former Tulsa policeman, an older man who managed a gay bar and his friend, me and my straight friend Susan with her baby Jasmine in tow. There were just two or three more young men involved. I suppose we were trying to present ourselves as a public service when we scheduled our first guest speaker: A man from the Tulsa Health Department who lectured us on Sexually Transmitted Disease. I recall a drag show fundraiser at a gay bar named *The Eighth Day*... Barbara Streisand, Diana Ross and Judy Garland [female

³¹⁶ Guild eds., "An Oklahoma I had Never Seen Before", 332-34.

impersonators] showed up. And I remember going to Southroads Mall with my friend Jan to canvas political candidates appearing there and asking them about their stance on gay rights.³¹⁷

Later, the organization appeared on a local television show called “Generation Rap.”

Two men and a lesbian went before the show and declared that they had been gay since birth.³¹⁸ Such a statement was a milestone for the city.

Gay Awareness Program (GAP)

At some point in the mid-seventies after the Tulsa Gay Alliance appeared to disintegrate, another group called the Gay Awareness Program (GAP) emerged. Bart, a founder, recalled that:

I’m not sure exactly how it started. I think there was an attempt at a gay newspaper that was published by a straight couple. The word got out and we met one Sunday afternoon at Cardos Cadillac. It was a restaurant... Some gay person knew the owner or worked there and had some connection and managed to get the building for a Sunday afternoon and we probably had about forty people show up. There were three of us that were elected to be co-chairs or Presidents or whatever word they wanted to use. It was all pretty loose so that no one would have too much uncontrollable power that way. We met at Cardos for a time. [This was around 1975 or 1976] And then we started meeting at [a members] house. We turned out quite a few people and several of us were interviewed on a thirty-minute program for Channel Six back then. But [there was also] a news reporter on Channel Six and [he] had a 30-minute program about things going on in Tulsa in the afternoons. Some of us who were out [of the closet] in Tulsa agreed to be on his show...³¹⁹

The GAP was more interested in spreading awareness and understanding. Members sought to build bridges with the larger community.³²⁰

³¹⁷ Ronnie L. “Tulsa Gay Alliance -1973,” *The Tulsa Forum by TulsaNow*, accessed: August 28, 2015,

<http://www.tulsanow.org/forum/index.php?action=printpage;topic=18045.0>

³¹⁸ Ibid; Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Dennis Neill Box*.

³¹⁹ Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

³²⁰ Ibid.

The Tulsa Gay Community Caucus (TGCC)

While the G.A.P. was holding meetings another organization, the Tulsa Gay Community Caucus, was also meeting regularly. The TGCC (led by community member John Faires) soon became entrenched in their approaches to social change.³²¹ The shift toward more pro-active positions came as a response to address anti-gay attitudes in the city. According to Toni Broaddus:

...In the early Seventies, a series of hostile editorials appeared in the *Tulsa World*. “They were all very anti-gay, blatantly so, for no reason,” remembers John, a co-founder of TGCC who soon became its primary leader and spokesman. “Gay Lib[eration] had never been whispered about in the city in any way.” The last editorial finally angered John to the point that he felt compelled to reply. He wrote a letter to the editor, a rebuttal, which stated facts but never mentioned his own homosexuality. “That’s really kind of what started it, strange as it may seem,” explains John about the beginnings of TGCC. “There had always been problems... as far as housing, and police harassment.” John’s letter was printed the day he left for a two-week vacation. When he returned, the embryo group for TGCC was formed. John discussed the group and the situation with his boss, assuring him that John would never bring the company name into it. “It took them three weeks, but they figured out a way to get rid of me.” John promptly went to the *Taj Mahal* and spent the afternoon getting drunk on free beer. Since he had already lost his job, John became the primary speaker for TGCC’s newly formed Speaker’s Bureau, appearing before churches and civic groups. “John was very upfront,” says Tay Clare, a member of TGCC’s inception group. “He was absolutely the best advocate for gay rights.” John received surprising support for his efforts – as well as some disappointing lack of support. “We got more support from the non-gay community than had been expected.”...³²²

Pushing for a City Non-Discrimination Ordinance

Eventually, the TGCC tried to address the discriminatory concerns and overall negative climate that plagued the local gay community by pushing the City to create a

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Toni Broaddus, “Gay-ety in T-Town,” *The Gayly Oklahoman* (Tulsa, OK), June 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

non-discrimination ordinance, which included sexual orientation. According to Toni Broaddus, the Caucus had “decided it was time to sink or swim. Gay bars were being busted nearly every night, and letters to various city officials obtained no results. So, in March, Mr. Faires appeared before Tulsa’s Board of Commissioners:”

On March 19, 1976, Mr. John Faires, of the Tulsa Gay Community Caucus, appeared before the city’s Board of Commissioners to speak on the matter of gay civil rights. Mr. Faires said... ‘on behalf of the gay population of Tulsa... (we) respectfully ask that the Tulsa City Commission adopt a Municipal Ordinance which will guarantee the rights of all homosexuals in this municipality so that fear and repression will no longer enslave the minds of one of the largest minorities in this community... As we look back to the past, we find it hard to understand the hatred and injustice, which affected other minorities within this country. Why should a person be forced into a role of second or third class citizenship because of his color, religion or economic standing? In the same way, how can any rational, educated person justify oppression and hatred of a person because his natural orientation allows that person to love an individual of his own sex... Gentlemen, we ask for no special treatment... What we do ask is equality... Just as other minorities have been guaranteed their just rights, those of jobs, housing, public accommodations, it still remains out of reach of the open or ‘suspected’ homosexual...’³²³

In response to the plea, the City Board of Commissioners (including the Mayor and Chief of Police) voted 4-1 to refer the issue to the Community Relations Commission (CRC – a sub-commission of the board) for an investigation and report on the conditions the city’s gay community faced before they made a decision on the matter. Also, they authorized an internal group known as the Sexual Preference Task Force to deal with issues concerning the gay community and to gain access to data involving the experiences of those residents. On November 30th 1976 the Commission published the *Sexual Preference Study of 1976*.³²⁴

³²³ Ibid.; Victoria A. Myers, *Sexual Preference Study* (Tulsa: Community Relations Commission, 1976), 11.

³²⁴ The study was the first of its kind in not only Tulsa but the entire nation. Stephen J. Logue, “Plea for homosexual rights due study,” *Tulsa Tribune* (Tulsa, OK), December

When the landmark study was released, it made news headlines across the state. It included a comprehensive investigation of laws on homosexuality across the country (including Oklahoma), a literature review, as well as a review of psychological and sociological theories looking at same-sex sexuality. The statistical results of the investigation included a detailed survey of the attitudes of businesses (public accommodations, housing, and employment) in the Tulsa community toward homosexuals, a second survey was given to members of the gay community of Tulsa, and a random telephone survey of the public was conducted. In general, the gay male community was more represented than the lesbian community, and people of color were especially underrepresented. Overall, the results made it clear that an oppressive environment existed for people with same-sex sexualities in the city. They encountered high levels of discrimination in public accommodations, housing, and employment. Some of the most startling statistics were reported to be police harassment, with the most concerning involving people of color.³²⁵

A Fire Ignited: The Aftermath of the Study

Notwithstanding the evidence supporting a non-discrimination ordinance, city leaders seemed reluctant. In January of 1977 the CRC met to discuss the policy. They were greeted by citizens yelling “sodomites.” Once the meeting began, some members tried to dismiss the proposal by arguing that including sexual preference into the city’s non-discrimination policy would be in conflict with state sodomy laws (same-sex sexual acts were illegal). They alleged that a motel owner could hypothetically be legally

21, 1976 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”; Janet Pearson, “Fairness Found for Homosexuals” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), December 21, 1976 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

³²⁵ See Myers, *Sexual Preference Study*, 12-26, 60-80.

implicated if gay patrons committed the “crime” of sodomy while staying in a room. Victoria, the author of the study, attempted to silence the board commotion by stating, “SO I IMAGINE all of you in this room are criminals.”³²⁶ Before the proposal could be presented for a full vote, it still had to be approved and recommended for a full vote to the City’s Board of Commissioners. Against all expectations, the Sexual Preference Task Force voted to not recommend a city ordinance.³²⁷ One member, Bart, recalled why:

[A major city official] came to us privately (five or six of us actually went to his home) and... he said, “You can do this probably. But I’ll tell you... you’re going to have a new mayor [soon] and you’ve never heard of this guy but he’s going to be your next mayor... He will appoint a new Commission and he will do away with your [sexual preference] task force. And... new city commissioners will remove the ordinance [if it passed]. You can have your victory for a couple of months, but in the public’s mind people remember what they see last and what they will see last is your defeat.” And he said, “So it’s up to you.” The way we were seated in the room... the gay people were all to my left and the straight people... [were on the right and] came around and back to me. We decided to take a vote on whether to pursue the ordinance or not. The first one said no, the second no, the third said no, the fourth said no, and so forth. All of the straight people’s mouths were wide open. They [the heterosexual members] couldn’t believe that all of the gay people themselves were saying no to it, but they figured, “Well, whatever’s going on here we might as well get on the bandwagon, too!” So all twelve of us said no. We passed a “No” recommendation up to the [Community Service] Commission and they never pursued it since they had no recommendation.³²⁸

Later in 1978, outside pressures from the gay community mounted and the “... Commission [eventually] recommended a *voluntary* policy statement, which meant that

³²⁶ Stephen J. Logue, “Civil rights guarantee urged for homosexuals,” *Tulsa Tribune* (Tulsa, OK), January 18, 1977 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

³²⁷ “Homosexual Ordinance Turned Down by HRC,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), January 18, 1977 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

³²⁸ Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

companies doing business with the city could not discriminate against employees on the basis of sexual preference. It passed...”³²⁹ The statement:

.... [enforced] the city’s policy of homosexual rights through educational programs and voluntary compliance rather than passage of a nondiscrimination ordinance. The commission emphasized it was not promoting an alternate lifestyle – homosexuality – but was protecting human and civil rights of a ‘legitimate minority group’³³⁰

The Community Relations Commission stated that they would review the decisions in the future to see if voluntary compliance was effective, but that never came to pass. By August of that year, Republican Jim Inhofe was elected Mayor of Tulsa, and “... [he was] quoted in the *Tulsa Tribune* as saying, “I don’t think it’s the governments place to be giving attention to the issue of homosexuality, particularly when it is treating homosexuals as a minority, which means you give preferential treatment to the concept.”...”³³¹ By the end of the year, Inhofe had “named a number of new members to the [City’s Board], who questioned the [sexual preference] task force’s existence.”³³² In the end, efforts toward an ordinance were effectively squelched when Inhofe became Mayor.

³²⁹ Toni Broaddus, “Gay-ety in T-Town,” *The Gayly Oklahoman* (Tulsa, OK), June 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

³³⁰ Ralph Marler, “Gay Rights Policy Compliance Urged,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), February 21, 1978 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

³³¹ Toni Broaddus, “Gay-ety in T-Town,” *The Gayly Oklahoman* (Tulsa, OK), June 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

³³² Yvonne Rehg, “Inhofe raps task force on gays” *Tulsa Tribune* (Tulsa, OK), August 22, 1978 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

Tulsa Oklahomans for Human Rights (TOHR)

By the end of the seventies, the Tulsa Gay Community Caucus seemed to have almost been run into the grave after its struggles with the city. But in 1980 a more permanent organization, Tulsa Oklahoman's for Human Rights (TOHR), emerged to carry the torch. Its parent organization, Oklahoman's for Human Rights (OHR), originally catered to the Oklahoma City area, but soon after their formation some close-knit friends began a chapter in Tulsa. The fact that the organization did not have the term "gay" in its title was intentional in an attempt to be inclusive of those who might be leery of being a part of a gay organization. The men who organized the group wanted to do more for the community such as organize social events and fundraisers. Dylan, the local chapter founder, remembered the formation of the organization:

Originally, as you might know, it was [formed] as a chapter of Oklahoman's for Human Rights [out of] Oklahoma City, because I'd been networking with the group in Oklahoma City, including [their organizer] who had been instrumental in setting it up a few years before we set up TOHR... He was definitely a big inspiration to me. I was active with the ACLU at that time and I was going to quarterly meetings of the ACLU... and connected with him and I brought the idea back about forming a chapter... That was probably the fastest way for us to get organized, because we wouldn't have to form our own 501c3. So the four of us started dialoguing with these other folks and we decided to just get this thing off the ground... We had our first meeting either that December of 1980 or that January of 1981... We met in the basement of the Harweldon [mansion] and had our first speaker. [He] was a well-known psychologist/psychiatrist in town, and he was very open about "It's [homosexuality] not a choice." We started developing these monthly meetings and [eventually] started meeting at All Souls Unitarian [church] and [later] moved to the Aronson auditorium [in the Tulsa County Library]. At times we'd have meetings of 150 to 180 [people in attendance]... We were originally [called] Oklahomans for Human Rights and since Oklahoma City started having financial issues we decided to separate to avoid liabilities... We disassociated and formed our own 501c3 as Tulsa Oklahoman's for Human Rights in [1985].³³³

³³³ Dylan Scott (Senior Program Officer) in discussion with the author, March 17, 2015.

During its first year, “TOHR conducted voter registration and political surveys, sponsored a softball team and tournament, and conducted a health clinic...” Soon after its establishment, the organization offered a public Gay Information Line (743-GAYS) that was manned by volunteers in a back office of a local gay dance club, known as *Zippers*. The purpose of the phone line was to give the public a way to connect to the gay community and acquire educational information. At first volunteers were overwhelmed by harassing phone calls from religious groups.³³⁴ Dylan recollected how the organization progressed:

We realized back in the early 1980s that we weren’t going to break down the barriers in the workforce being in Tulsa and Oklahoma, but we could certainly break down the barriers between ourselves [and] our close friends and families... So socialization was definitely a part of it. We certainly got some criticism from the lesbians in the community that we weren’t as inclusive as we should have been. But TOHR pretty quickly started involving women and women’s sporting events too. I mean it mainly took us a few years to kind of get that traction going and then our board became pretty balanced...³³⁵

The Roots of Tulsa Pride

TOHR eventually became involved in hosting the areas gay pride celebrations. Earlier in the mid-1970s community members had organized annual “Pride Picnics” in Mohawk Park to commemorate the Stonewall Uprising. Dylan stated:

They [the bar owners] were kind of the head of the party circle and fun times. The bars would have what was called Pride Events in Mohawk Park and that was considered our pride celebration... They [the bar owners] would provide and supply food and music and just hang out in the park and play soccer or volleyball or whatever. It wasn’t really considered a published pride event [but] everyone knew about it and they would go.³³⁶

³³⁴ “History of TOHR,” at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Dennis Neill Box*.

³³⁵ Dylan Scott (Senior Program Officer) in discussion with the author, March 17, 2015.

³³⁶ Steve Sanders (Interior Decorator) in discussion with the author, July 15, 2014.

By 1982, TOHR took the reigns and put on the first annual “Gay Pride Week,” a week of celebratory activities commemorating Stonewall. They organized special bar events, a live showing of the *Oklahoma!* musical at Discovery Land, and gay skate nights at a local skating rink in suburban Sand Springs. The annual picnic was moved from Mohawk Park to Chandler Park since the Mohawk location had garnered a reputation for misconduct.³³⁷ The *Tulsa World* published information saying that the event would be “low profile,” and a female TOHR member was reported to have said, “We are not asking for acceptance. We’re not asking for approval or disapproval (from heterosexuals). This is for our benefit.” The article did not publish the date or location of the events in order to prevent hate crimes from occurring.³³⁸

On July 11, 1982 a few weeks after the pride events drew the gaze of the public, the *Tulsa World* ran a full spread of hostile stories about its gay population. The headline put the “area’s homosexual faction... at 50,000.” In one part it stated: “America’s Most Beautiful City ranks not far behind San Francisco in homosexual statistics. Moral Majority spokesmen have called the city ‘the Sodom and Gomorrah of the United States, the armpit of a perverted movement.’” However, the data used to support the numbers was acquired through interviews with local vice squad members, bar owners, and the public – highly unreliable sources for statistics. The series also had a piece that showcased “the dark side” of the Fruit Loop downtown where the reporter, after interviewing a local male-prostitute, presented a distorted picture of gay residents as a public menace lurking in the darkness. Hence, the aims of the series seemed to be

³³⁷ Since Mohawk Park was a place where many men sought impersonal encounters, they moved the event to Chandler Park to allow for a safer environment.

³³⁸ “Tulsans to Observe Gay Pride Week,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), June 18, 1982 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, Scrapbook.

to cause alarm in the heterosexual community, but the fact that the series drew so much attention spoke to the progress that was occurring as gay residents became increasingly visible in the city.³³⁹ By June of 1988, the state's first Pride Parade was held in Oklahoma City and citizens from Tulsa and other parts of the state attended the celebrations.³⁴⁰

Attempts to Snuff Out the Fire: Anita Leads The Way

Tulsans also witnessed other rights struggles from those that opposed gay social and political advancement. The Religious Right increasingly used children as a rallying



Illustration 57: People protesting Bryant at the State Capitol. *The Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.*

point against homosexuals, whom they depicted as moral and social perverts.

For example, the city made national headlines in 1976 when Anita Bryant (a native Tulsa singer and Florida orange juice spokeswoman) led her “Save Our Children” campaigns in Dade County

Florida. She was opposed to a

commissioners proposal to end discriminatory practices in housing, public accommodations, and employment for gay men and lesbians of that county. When she came to Oklahoma City in 1978, she was greeted at the State Capitol by protestors from

³³⁹ Ken Jackson, “Area’s Homosexual Faction Put at 50,000,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), July 11, 1982 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, Scrapbook.

³⁴⁰ Associated Press, “Gays expect no trouble at first rights parade,” *Tulsa Tribune* (Tulsa, OK), June 15, 1988 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Oklahoma.”

all over the state.³⁴¹ As a result, some resident's boycotted Florida Orange Juice products like other gay communities in the nation, and members of Tulsa's GAP made bumper stickers as a protest to Bryant's actions. Bart said:

We had [a bumper sticker] that was orange letters on a white vinyl background. The ink... we got ripped off on because they faded just instantly. But it was the time of Anita Bryant and there was a state representative from Muskogee named John Monks who was that era's version of Sally Kern. We came out with a bumper sticker, the GAP did, that actually made it onto the Johnny Carson show. Anita Bryant was the spokeswoman for the Florida Orange Juice Commission and we came out with a bumper sticker that said, "Let She Who Is Without Sin Cast the First Orange!" [around 1978 or 1979]³⁴²

Bryant's influence eventually crumbled, but her impact reverberated in the state and popularized the awful stereotypes that gay men "recruited" others and that they were risks to the well being of children.

The Fear of Gay Teachers

Rep. John Monks of Muskogee and Senator Mary Helm of Oklahoma City also authored a bill (HB 1629) that came to be known as the "Helms Bill." Essentially, it sought to allow for the dismissal of teachers who advocated public or private "homosexual activity." Rep. Monks was said to have suggested that the bill covered "both queers and lesbians," that he "was born and raised on the farm and spent a lot of time around the barnyard... and [he] never saw two bulls chasing each other." He argued that the bill "will keep these sick and deranged people from influencing our most

³⁴¹ "Gays Rally Out in Cold as Anita Bryant Spoke to the Senate," *The Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), February 22, 1978 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, "GLBT Oklahoma."

³⁴² Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

precious treasures, our children.” It passed the House with a vote of 88-2.³⁴³ The bill eventually went to the Senate and passed by a 42-0 vote and later became law in 1978.

³⁴⁴ The National Gay Task Force took the reigns as plaintiff on behalf of gay teachers in the state and in March of 1984 parts of the bill were found unconstitutional by the Tenth Circuit of Appeals on the grounds that the definition of “advocating homosexual activities” portion of the law was too vague. However, the Circuit found no issue with the dismissal of teachers who were found to be publicly “engaging in public homosexual activity” and went on to define activity as engaging in indiscreet public sex acts. On the other hand, they also found the broad nature of the law was unconstitutional because it seemed to inhibit the free speech of teachers. They concluded that, “... free speech extends to all issues of public debate, including whether or not to decriminalize certain behaviors.” Finally, in 1980 the *National Gay Task Force v. Board of Education of the City of Oklahoma City* case went all the way to the Supreme Court of the United States, and on March 26, 1985 the Court affirmed the Tenth Circuits ruling.³⁴⁵ By 1985 the word “homosexual” was removed allowing only

³⁴³ David Averill, “Anti-Gay Teacher Bill Passes House” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), February 8, 1978 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

³⁴⁴ “Anti-Gay teachers bill passes Senate” *Tulsa Tribune* (Tulsa, OK), March 16, 1978 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa”; “Anti-gay teacher bill OK’d” *Tulsa Tribune* (Tulsa, OK), March 7, 1978 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

³⁴⁵ Guild et al., “*An Oklahoma I had Never Seen Before*”, 334-36; Jeffrey Kosbie, “NGTF v. Oklahoma and Early Gay Rights,” accessed: December 2, 2015, <http://jkosbie.com/2014/12/30/ngtf-v-oklahoma-and-early-lgbt-rights/>; “Supreme Court Strikes Down Law,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), March 27, 1985 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa”; “Gay ouster law faces challenge,” *Tulsa Tribune* (Tulsa, OK), October 14, 1980 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa”; “Firing of Homosexual Advocates Rules Out,” *Tulsa*

those teachers who were involved in “criminal [and public] sexual activity” to be fired. Gay residents rejoiced in their success to overcome the discriminatory law.³⁴⁶

A Change in Oklahoma’s Sodomy Law

Another heated struggle involved a local case of *Post v. State of Oklahoma*. In 1986 the state Court of Criminal Appeals ruled that sodomy could not be applied to consensual private sexual activities between consenting adults of the opposite sex, but allowed for the continued criminalization of private consensual same-sex sexual acts.³⁴⁷

The Court stated:

We stress that our decision today in no way affects the validity of 21 O.S. 1981 § 886 [21-886] in its application to bestiality, forced sexual activity, sexual activity of the underaged, or public or commercial sexual acts. We do not reach the question of homosexuality since the application of the statute to such conduct is not an issue in this case.³⁴⁸

The case made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court of the United States, who earlier that year held in another case, *Bowers v. Hardrick*, that a state could criminalize oral and anal sex acts conducted in private between consenting adults of the same sex. The case was sent to the U.S. Supreme Court to make sure that:

... the privacy right did not protect extramarital heterosexual sodomy (its case) any more than it protected homosexual sodomy... Burger, White, and Rehnquist, who lobbied very hard for the Court to take the [*Bowers v. Hardrick*] appeal to stop judicial activism protecting homosexuals, had no interest whatsoever in stopping judicial activism protecting unmarried heterosexuals. Rejecting law clerks’ suggestions that the court should vacate the *Post* judgment and remand the case to Oklahoma courts... these conservative justices voted to

World (Tulsa, OK), March 27, 1985 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

³⁴⁶ Toni Broaddus, “Legislative Update,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), August 1985 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

³⁴⁷ William N. Eskridge, Jr., *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy laws in America 1861-2003* (New York: Viking, 2008), 260-61.

³⁴⁸ “*Post v. State*,” *JUSTIA*, accessed: December 2, 2015, <http://law.justia.com/cases/oklahoma/court-of-appeals-criminal/1986/6361.html>

deny review altogether... Only Justice O'Connor raised any objection; at her behest, *Post* was carried over to the conference for October 10, 1986. In a memorandum reportedly circulated among the justices, she wondered whether *Bowers* swept more broadly than the Oklahoma court had surmised... O'Connor was right, of course... That none of her male colleagues was willing to agree underscores the rhetorical purpose of *Bowers*'s obsessive focus on homosexual sodomy. For some of the Brethren, it was important to create a constitutional as well as a moral distance between what degrading homosexuals do (homosexual fellatio) and what normal husbands and wives do (heterosexual fellatio), a firm differentiation that would have been threatened by reversing *Post*. O'Connor got the message from her conservative Brethren, and on October 10 she joined them in voting to deny review in *Post*.³⁴⁹

The choice effectively left the ruling, which "invalidated heterosexual but not homosexual sodomy" in the State of Oklahoma.³⁵⁰ The outcome was a let down for the gay community.

Media Censorship

There were also battles against other forms of discrimination. In the mid-eighties a series of programs that were supposed to be aired on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) about gay history and education (*Before Stonewall* and *The A.I.D.S. Show*) were censored by the Oklahoma Education Television Association (OETA), but were shown in other states.³⁵¹ After much dissent from the gay community, some future programs on gay issues were aired.³⁵² And on June 21, 1989 community members protested the *Tulsa World* after it refused to run an advertisement for *Two's Company*, a bookstore that catered to the gay community. It was reported that the *Tulsa World* refused the ad,

³⁴⁹ Eskridge, Jr., *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy laws in America 1861-2003*, 260-63.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 279.

³⁵¹ Harry Livesay, "O.E.T.A. Continues to Intercept Gay Programming," *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), January 1987 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

³⁵² "O.E.T.A. Continues to Intercept Gay Programming," *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), January 1987 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

because it had the word “gay” in it.³⁵³ With battles mounted against them, the struggle for equal rights was not abating for gay residents.

Community Development: Exploring Similarities and Differences

Apart from renewed activism, residents became increasingly involved in recreational activities some of which included the Tulsa community at large. In fact, they organized places for worship, softball leagues, gay rodeos, and PFLAG – an organization to help support youth and their families.

The Metropolitan Community Church: Connecting Through Faith

One of the first notable achievements was the formation of a local Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) formed around 1974. It began as a small home church that served as a sanctuary for gay people who had been turned away by many other Christian churches. According to James Smith, it had a “standard down the middle of the road protestant service. The minister was up front and sometimes wore robes, singing, offering, prayer times, testimonials, scripture readings, sermon, and at the end, communion service.” At first, church members met at a Methodist church downtown across from where the Midtown Adult Theater was located. After their first meeting they managed to acquire a public space (Odd Fellows Hall), but were later kicked out of the building after it became known that many members were gay. Eventually, they rented a home from someone in the gay community. For a year they met there and held socials and services. James noted, “We would have thirty or forty people and then in

³⁵³ “Tulsa World Refuses to Run Gay Ad,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), August 1989 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

1975 we were looking for a building. We wanted to move into a more visible place.” A building was found Northeast of the downtown area:

But we found this one old building... maybe it had been a bar at one time... we didn't know but it was three to four blocks east of Harvard just before you get to that little shopping center that's still there but almost defunct... It [the building] was a mess... it was literally a mess. We worked for two or three weeks cleaning it and painting it and dividing the rooms to have fellowship and a sanctuary and everything... That was Spring or Summer of 1975. The mount of trash that we hauled out in front was taller than the building and it was a rickety little building, but we paid \$250 a month. It had two back doors but there was one back door back [that was more hidden from the public] and we left that unlocked for the service for the people who were afraid to walk in the front door. Some people did, including our organist... she didn't want to be seen walking in... she got over it... people got over that pretty fast. For that reason we just put the letters on the front [of the building]... we put a cross and “MCC” on the front. At that time we would have thirty-five to forty-five people in our services, but we actually at the opening had a district conference for the Texas, Oklahoma, and part of Arkansas [area] and we had the district conference there. We probably had around two hundred people and they were standing outside the door and everything. At that time in the church it was a big deal to have new people and we stayed there for five years until we bought [a new more permanent] building.³⁵⁴

On January 15, 1978 the MCC made headlines made the local news. The article described the church and how it provided a place for gay people to worship that had been excluded by other churches in the area. It stated that:

... Because of the wide variety of church backgrounds out of which MCC members come, ‘our worship services (at 11 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. Sundays) are a combination of the various traditions. Our communion service is more of a Catholic-Lutheran-Episcopal combination, and sometimes we have a very Pentecostal music service, but my preaching is basically Southern Baptist-oriented. I suggest to prospective members that they look on it like an international buffet. They may not like Chinese food, but they can leave that for those who do, and go on to a kind they do like.’ Because opportunities for homosexuals in Tulsa to gather for fellowship have been very limited (except in bars) until recently, MCC is ‘Heavy’ on ‘social type events.’ ‘We had large Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners and since I’ve been here we’ve had a wiener roast, box supper, chili supper and we’re planning on a Valentine’s party. Despite my Southern Baptist training, we have not thought of these as

³⁵⁴ James Smith (Postal Worker) in discussion with the author, March 10, 2015.

evangelism efforts, but just to provide get-acquainted and fellowship events. Most of our people are very lonely.”³⁵⁵

The church held bible studies and “rap nights” on Wednesdays where cakes and snacks were served. It also gave some people a place to belong, and helped them find peace with themselves and their identity. He recalled the impact the Church had on the community:

At times we would have eight to one hundred people. It touched people’s lives. What I would see would be that a lot of people would be emotionally troubled and they would come there and find something that they needed and then they would move on. I think that was kind of a typical process for a lot of people [at that time].³⁵⁶

Other places of worship developed as the eighties began. In March of 1984 two new religious groups formed a joint organization that offered activities to Catholics and Episcopalians, known as Dignity/Integrity. “Dignity” catered to gay Catholics, and “Integrity” catered to Episcopalians in the community. Later, gay residents also found welcome arms in other local places of worship such as All Souls Unitarian Church and Temple Israel, a Jewish place of worship.³⁵⁷

The Formation of Softball Leagues

Those men who enjoyed sports created more active outlets. At first, the softball teams started out as sport competitions between gay community organizations in the state who would challenge one another to a sports duel. The pastime quickly became a

³⁵⁵ Beth Macklin, “MCC Grows Gay-ly With New Pastor” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), January 15, 1978 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ “Tulsa Religious Groups Forming,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), March 1984 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1; “Gay and Catholic Not a Contradition with Dignity,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), November 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

craze across the region, and by 1981 Tulsa Oklahomans for Human Rights had formed its own softball league: the Sooner Softball League of Oklahoma.³⁵⁸ Anyone could join, regardless of their sexual identity, and women had leagues as well. The most successful of these teams within the early Tulsa League was that of Tim's Outlaws (sponsored by Tim's Playroom bar), The TMC Miners (sponsored by Tulsa Mining Company bar), and the OHR Blueboys (sponsored by Tracy's bar).³⁵⁹ An annual softball tournament, the Southwest Invitational, became increasingly popular and drew in teams from major cities across the nation. It also received prominent sponsorships from companies such as the Budweiser/Golden Eagle Distributing Company.³⁶⁰ Dylan shared a memory of the league getting started:

We had a guy that was so interested in sports and particularly softball. He later served as President. There was a growing interest regionally and attempts in Kansas City and Houston, and Dallas and other places where softball was becoming popular and we were all kind of building teams at the same time. It really took off in Tulsa. We hosted a couple of regional softball events that were quite successful and we had parties for the events and the bars really went all out to entertain and later we took our team down to Houston for a tournament there. I think it was just a growing movement in this part of the country involving the gay community. Then there were the girl's teams too. We were fortunate enough that we were organized enough to participate in this regional development... Volleyball took off around this time too.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ "OHR Sponsored Gay Softball Tournament To Be Annual Event," *Another World Magazine* 1, no. 2 (1980-1981): 16.

³⁵⁹ It is unclear why OHR was part of the name. "SportsSection," *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), April 1984 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

³⁶⁰ Aaron L. Bachhofer II, "The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 1889-2005," (PhD Dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 2005); "OHR Sponsored Gay Softball Tournament To Be Annual Event," *Another World Magazine* 1, no. 2 (1980-1981): 16.

³⁶¹ Dylan Scott (Senior Program Officer) in discussion with the author, March 17, 2015.

The Oklahoma Gay Rodeo Association (OGRA)

Cowboys, or men of the western lifestyle, also found their own pursuits. Gay Rodeos had originated in 1975 in Reno, Nevada as an effort for people ban together for fun to raise funds for community charitable organizations. Quickly becoming a nationwide phenomenon, most affiliates were non-profits. The OGRA was founded in 1984 in Oklahoma City and connected men and women with similar interests across the state – including those in Tulsa. In August of 1986, gay people of the state held their first gay rodeo that was dubbed “The Great Plains Regional Rodeo.” Humorously, it “had a false start occasioned by a conflict in dates with a Jerry Falwell convention.” As years progressed, the organization became extremely popular drawing larger crowds annually.³⁶²

Drag in T-Town

Drag, a type of gender non-conformity, also increased in visibility. Whereas sightings of drag queens (female impersonators) had occurred since the vaudeville acts of the 1910s, the seventies seemed to be the decade that brought the local “queens” out! “Camp drag,” or gender parody, became even more popular as the era forged into the eighties. For instance, it was not uncommon for some men (who were not necessarily drag queens) to don a feather boa, large sunglasses, or heels to a gay bar during special events such as Halloween.³⁶³

³⁶² Guild et al., “*An Oklahoma I had Never Seen Before*”, 332; “The History of Gay Rodeo,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), May 15, 1992 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1. By the year 2000 Tulsa had its own group for men and women of the western lifestyle, the Sooner State Rodeo Association, and finals to the International Gay Rodeo were held in the city.

³⁶³ Carl White (Special Event Coordinator) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015; Terry Landers (Disabled) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2014.

Those men who were interested in female impersonation carved out their own niches as entertainers in gay bars and many places routinely scheduled drag shows as entertainment to patrons. It was said that the appearances of drag queens during the seventies mimicked the sixties. Queens of that time were less concerned about impersonation and more about parody, glitz, and glamour. Terry recalled, “at [that] time drag was a very old Cleopatra thing, Liz Taylor, black eyeliner, beehives, and 1960s stuff... in the beginning [drag] names rhymed because of personalities...”³⁶⁴ Some notable early queens were remembered to be “Cianti, Buttons Douche, Paula Beaver, and Meko.”³⁶⁵ Carl recalled that many performers frequented bar spaces in the downtown area:

I was taking night classes at TJC (which is TCC now) [and] where I had to park there were two gay bars really, really close... and well the queens were always out... they were always somewhere. I believe the bars were the *Zebra Lounge* and *Caruso's*. *Caruso's* was located one street over from TCC and *The Zebra* was just north of it. But the girls were always out and they were always playing with us and of course in that hour when the classes would get out around 10:30[pm] [they] would be out catcallin' us, which I thought it was really funny. Back then they weren't that pretty by any means! [laughter] By nowadays standards they would be just skanky lookin', but back then they would just do their own thing. And of course you had the glamorous ones who would have the hair piled up on their head and [all] the rhinestone jewelry... But I just thought they were neat and that it was interesting...³⁶⁶

He also recalled the singers they tried to emulate and struggles with makeup:

The 1970s still gave you a lot of Mo-Town and stuff you would see on Soul Train on television... the things you would see on those types of shows. You would emulate Diana Ross, Tina Turner... any of those concerts or performances that you might catch on [shows] like Ed Sullivan and you would try to recreate them and put them on stage. Dress, costume, hair... makeup is the

³⁶⁴ Terry Landers (Disabled) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2014.

³⁶⁵ Toni Broaddus, “Gay-ety in T-Town,” *The Gayly Oklahoman* (Tulsa, OK), June 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1; Carl White (Special Event Coordinator) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

biggest change as well... Maybelline was not our friend back then at all! It was just terrible. It was cheap, thick, and it smelled terrible and it didn't last very long...³⁶⁷

There were other notable drag queens such as Taja and Lady Dianne. Terry remembered the popular entertainer Lady Dianne:

I had seen shows of people that I enjoyed as a great deal as performers. One of them was named Taja and one was named Lady Dianne. If I laid claim to someone who I looked upon as a mentoring figure, [it would be him]. He was here many years until 1988 when he moved to San Francisco – Cecil was his name, and he indeed took me under his wing. I would go to his house, a two-story house that he owned, and he showed me things about drag, especially his costumes and I would look at them and think, “Oh my God these things are horrible.” He put them together with staple guns and Elmer’s glue but of course it didn’t matter because when they were on stage lit up he looked like Diana Ross and I was like wow! Because I’d seen those up close and I knew what they look[ed] like. He’s also the person who instilled in me my work ethic as a female impersonator and he said, “I don’t care where you go or what you look like... you give the same performance whether you are at a hole-in-the-wall bar or at the Cesar’s Palace in Las Vegas. You don’t just blow it off because you’re at a smaller place, and that gave me that ethic and I owe that to him. It’s a part of my heart and it’s stayed there ever since.” [Lady Dianne, who was also African American, was a popular entertainer in the late 1960s and 1970s in Tulsa.]³⁶⁸

The First Miss Gay Tulsa pageant was held at *The Gala* in 1970 and the winner went by the name “Queen Sandy.”³⁶⁹ One local drag artist, Trudy Tyler, eventually went on to become the very first to win the first Miss Gay Oklahoma America pageant that was held at the Out-Rigger in Oklahoma City in 1978. Her mother and sister were in attendance and watched her get crowned. With the influence of those such as Tyler, a new form of drag became popular in Tulsa toward the end of the 1970s: illusion drag. Rather than emphasizing appearances for their comedic value, this form of drag sought

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Terry Landers (Disabled) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2014.

³⁶⁹ Toni Broaddus, “Gay-ety in T-Town,” *The Gayly Oklahoman* (Tulsa, OK), June 1985 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

to create an “illusion” where the drag artist would erase their masculine features by using their creative abilities. Also, it raised the bar by creating a demand for performers who emphasized their talent and appearance. As the eighties neared, illusion drag and pageant systems became extremely popular and drag names gradually shifted from comedic plays on words to “...family set names... like fashion-house names.”³⁷⁰ With the presence of after-hours bars in the eighties, a drag performer could frequent multiple venues in one night and make more money.³⁷¹ In 1983 the annual Miss Gay Oklahoma pageant made the news when it was held at the Camelot Hotel in Tulsa, a popular hotel of the time that looked like a medieval castle. More protestors showed up for the event than patrons did, and many carried signs condemning homosexuality on religious grounds. Forty people sent in letters with concerns, some about HIV/AIDS.³⁷² Soon, there were male pageants (known as *Mr. Gay Oklahoma*) that became popular where even men competed with one another.

The Leather Community - T.U.L.S.A.

The leather community also emerged in Tulsa. The community originally came onto the national scene in the post-war fifties as an answer for veterans with same-sex sexualities who wanted to celebrate their masculinity and brotherhood by joining biker clubs.³⁷³ If Tulsa had a leather community before the 1970s, it was one that was

³⁷⁰ Terry Landers (Disabled) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2014.

³⁷¹ Carl White (Special Event Coordinator) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

³⁷² “Church members will picket gay pageant,” *Tulsa Tribune* (Tulsa, OK), August 29, 1985 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa”; “Miss Gay Pageant Draws Contestants and Protestors,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), September 1, 1985 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

³⁷³ Peter Hennen, *Faeries, bears, and leathermen: men in community queering the masculine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 136-44.

underground. The event that seemed to make the leather community more visible in the city was the opening of *The Toolbox* (a leather/levi bar) in the early 1980s. By the end of 1988 interested residents had formed the Tulsa Uniform and Leather Seekers Association (T.U.L.S.A.):

...[twenty-five to thirty] men and women gathered together to socialize in the name of friendship and the brotherhood/sisterhood of the leather community. In August of that same year, [four local men] had the idea to form the Tulsa Uniform and Leather Seekers Association [T.U.L.S.A.] after attending the Great Plains Drummer Contest and held their first meeting on October 29, 1988.³⁷⁴

It served those “interested in uniforms, leather, Levi’s, motorcycles, and the celebration of [their] special interests.”³⁷⁵ The next year, the organization held the first annual Mr. Oklahoma Leather contest on October of 1989 at the *Toolbox II* bar. The winner went on to compete for an international title, International Mr. Leather (IML), held in Chicago, Illinois. Eventually, the organization became a charitable 501c3 organization and sought to provide goods, services, and money to needy groups as well as education on the leather lifestyle. It continued to function in this capacity into the twenty-first century.³⁷⁶

The Tulsa Chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)

Finally, the struggles of youth with same-sex sexualities inspired one heterosexual couple in the city to create a system of support services. The national organization of Parent’s and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) began in 1972 and provided advocacy, support, and services to lesbian and gay youth and their families. At

³⁷⁴ “History of T.U.L.S.A.,” *Tulsa Uniform and Leather Seekers Association*, accessed: December 1, 2015, http://tulsaleather.com/?page_id=70

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ad for Contest, *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), November 1989 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

that time, Tulsa Public Schools was dealing with youth suicides. One administrator, who had just found out she had a lesbian daughter herself, found hope in the newly organized organization. Debra recalled:

We were dealing with these suicides. And... [there were] too many of them at Booker T. [Washington]. Of course, that was a school that I had developed and I was in charge of the recruitment and placement. And subconsciously what I was doing was [pause] I was placing kids there who needed to have a different kind of experience, and many of them were gay and lesbian. But there was nothing there for them – to help them. [1985 or 1986] So then I started reading and becoming hopefully more knowledgeable about it... I think generally speaking, gay kids (and when I say gay I'm inclusive OK) tend to do that. They're mostly national merits, they've got good grades, and they do this [overachieve] because they're so afraid that if they do something wrong their parents won't love them and so they try to compensate in this way... So then in all of that reading I had done, I had read an article about PFLAG. It was written by a mom whose son had (she had two sons) and one had died of AIDS and she wrote about this organization. So on January 2, 1987 I called the National Office. This was the conversation they said, "Well... we don't have anyone in Oklahoma, or Texas, or New Mexico, or Kansas, or Missouri that can talk to you. And I thought, "Oh my God, I'm the only mother in this region who has a lesbian daughter!" And then I learned that the national organization was just really emerging. It was becoming a national organization and they had a part-time secretary in a Washington Office, which was one room. And that's who I got, it was just one response. And then she called back and said, "Well, I've done some checking and there's this woman... in Colorado who can talk to you." [She also] had a daughter who was gay and she was just immediate past president of the national board as they were getting re-organized and it was like a lifeline for me. I mean could finally talk to another mother and she could tell me a little about what it was and she gave me some books to read.³⁷⁷

Eventually, in 1988 after educating herself and getting a recommendation from the organizational representative in Colorado, Debra and her supportive husband decided to start a chapter of PFLAG in the city to help youth and their families. They connected with TOHR by attending one of the organizations meetings at the Tulsa Library and found welcome arms. Debra recalled that at their first meeting they had only one youth who came, "It was a young man who had picked up information someplace and he was

³⁷⁷ Debra Simpson (Ed. Admin.) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

from Muskogee and [was in high school] and wanted to know what advice we could give him.” Later, after realizing they needed to meet in a more discreet place, the meetings had much higher attendance. She stated:

Many of them [youth that came] were gay and lesbian, bi[sexual]... [and] we had a trans[gender] person come... A lot of gays and lesbians would come to PFLAG because there wasn't any other place or open and affirming church with the exception of MCC and there wasn't any place [for them to go]. So they'd go to the bars or they'd come to PFLAG. So we did a lot of social activities and slowly but surely it really became a pretty viable organization.³⁷⁸

Gay Nightlife in the City

One of the most recognizable changes of the era was in the form of nightlife that served the area's gay and lesbian population. The seventies shaped an environment where gay bars were cornerstones in the development of community life and education.³⁷⁹ The common practice was “BYOL” (Bring Your Own Liquor) and many places were private-members-only clubs. Although nightlife reinvigorated the downtown bar scene in the 1970s, residents experienced their last hurrah in that area as the eighties approached. Popular gay dance clubs (known as “discos”) finally drew the market into other parts of the city. Many establishments still used door slides, buzzers, and sometimes the DJ's at bars would even flicker lights to alert patrons of a police presence as they played popular music selections in the seventies including: ABBA, Queen, Elton John, Bette Midler, Barbara Streisand, Donna Summer, and Diana Ross – to name a few.³⁸⁰

In addition to *The Zebra Lounge* and *The Taj Mahal*, other new bars opened in the downtown area such as *The Tiffany Club* (1975), *The Queen of Hearts* (1974),

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Terry Landers (Disabled) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2014.

³⁸⁰ Ibid; Steve Sanders (Interior Decorator) in discussion with the author, July 15, 2014.

Caruso's, *New York, New York*, *911 Club*, and *Papillon* (1976). Many were in walking distance of one another. *The Tiffany Club* was located next to *The Queen of Hearts* and there was also a place where patrons frequented called *Mary's Wine Bar* that was nestled between them.³⁸¹ Other heterosexual places in the downtown area that men wound up at after a night on the town included heterosexual after-hours restaurants like *Bakers*, *Coleman's*, and *Jerry's* that were at least "gay friendly."³⁸²

A bar owner remembered opening *The Queen of Hearts*, one of the more popular downtown spaces:

... With a lot of ambition, sweat, learning experiences and a little borrowed money, Tulsa's grandest, most beautiful Art Deco Disco to date (one of the first) opened with a frenzy. I'm thinking that it was about 1974. Bright red walls and bar lined with metal flake padding, mirrors out the ying yang and a beautiful Art Deco stage with Silver Lamé curtains, *The Queen of Hearts Club and Cafe* would be short lived, but it introduced Tulsa to a new era of national advertising, dance clubs with professional sound and light shows, DJ's, pageants, national entertainers like the Laughing Kahunas from Hawaii and Sami Joe Cole known for her hits, "Tell me a Lie" and "It Could Have Been Me", and brought hundreds more out of the closet in Tulsa and OKC. It also began to draw more attention from the city fathers, which meant more media coverage, more cops... more lawyers...³⁸³

In 1977 Tulsa came very close to having a Stonewall moment. Bart remembered hearing the story of the major police raid at *The Queen of Hearts*:

The story about *The Queen of Hearts* bust was that the police came in around midnight. There was a back room and it had a mop closet and then sort of like an old-fashioned speakeasy the guy opened the little slot and let people in. Anyway, the police came in and they said that they caught an underage girl

³⁸¹ B. F., *Memories: A History of Gay Bars, Clubs, and Friendly Establishments in Tulsa, Oklahoma Late 1940-2014* located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, Unpublished Document; Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

³⁸² James Smith (Postal Worker) in discussion with the author, March 10, 2015.

³⁸³ Tim T., "Flash from the Past," (Unpublished Document, Tulsa Historical Society Vertical Research Files); Also found at Tim T., "Blast From The Past," accessed: June 15, 2014, <http://www.timsplayroom.com/blast.html>

hiding in the mop closet. Now what an underage girl or a girl period (it was strictly a male bar) would be doing in a mop closet, or why the police were there at all, or why they would think to look in the mop closet, or why an underage girl... I mean it was all preposterous! They used that as an entre with the bartender and they said, "Look we don't want to cause any trouble, its late and after midnight already... why don't you just call it a night and shut her down early and we will call it even." So they turned the lights on and ushered everyone out... Everybody, or however many people there were went out into the anti room, the foyer, before exiting the main door out onto Main. There was a church down there that had a parking lot on the west side of Main and the bar was on the East side... and when the people came out the door... there was police, two paddy wagons, and lots of police cars along the street. They were motioning for people to come across the street and when they did they arrested them all for jay walking. One guy saw the trap and he walked down to the next corner and waited on the light and crossed with the light and then walked back up to the block to where the police were... they got him for disobeying the orders of an officer. All these guys were late to work the next day, someone had to bond them out, you know... it was uhh... the police were like that back then.³⁸⁴

Tulsa newspapers reported that thirteen men were arrested for jay walking in front of *The Queen of Hearts* club. Seven men pled guilty and five pled no contest to the charges. One man refused to show up in court and a warrant was issued for his arrest. Those arrested were fined \$25 dollars in court costs. The *Tulsa Tribune* stated that, "some Tulsans have called the arrests an example of



Illustration 58: A typical paddy wagon of the era. *The Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection. Courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.*

police harassment of homosexuals who reportedly frequent the night spot [*The Queen of Hearts*], and [they] have filed an informal complaint with the city's Department of Human Rights."³⁸⁵ Two months later, the *Tulsa World* reported that city officials

³⁸⁴ Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

³⁸⁵ "Homosexuals claim police harassment," *Tulsa Tribune* (Tulsa, OK), July 22, 1977 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, "GLBT Tulsa."

responded by stating that the raid “was not conducive to the best interests of our police or organization.” The newspaper reported the Police and Fire Commissioner said that the officers involved in the arrests were spoken to and that in the future citations were more appropriate than arrests [under such circumstances].³⁸⁶

There were also a large number of bars available to residents outside of the downtown area. In addition to older lounges, newer clubs opened across the decade and included *The Club* (a mixed gender bar), *Le Cabaret* (a popular drag show bar), *The Doors*, *Tracy’s New Edition*, *Tim’s Anything Goes Club*, and the *New Plantation Club*.³⁸⁷ And two other places, *Tim’s Playroom and Dance Hall* and *Zippers*, opened in 1978. These two disco dance clubs became the hot spots in town.³⁸⁸ The owner of *Tim’s Playroom and Dance Hall* recalled different forms of harassment that occurred:

... The Playroom would offer a diverse crowd a variety of entertainment and events. From a Cruise Bar at noon to a wild, thumping Dance bar at night Tulsa got it's first feel of Cerwin Vega Earthquake speakers in a bar that pounded away at the fifty year old brick walls causing them to crumble. It also got a close up look at dozens of Tulsa's Police Officers who constantly toured with flashlights in their hands and disgust and smirks in their faces. It was an ongoing battle. We had it set up so that whichever of the staff went to jail for whatever trivial or trumped up reason, Team B would contact the attorney to bail out Team A and reopen immediately. During the seven years of operation there were more than fifty arrests of myself or staff members and resulted in NO CONVICTIONS. Imagine that. Eventually, with the help of KOTV Channel Six who did a thirty minute segment on Tulsa gays, most of which was filmed in my bar and called "Strangers In The Night" (*of which they no longer recall or can find a copy of in their archives*), and aired it during prime time, a face to face discussion with [A Police Chief] and a meeting with a nationally recognized

³⁸⁶ “‘Gay’ Bar Arrests Rapped by Kerpan,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), September 20, 1977 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, “GLBT Tulsa.”

³⁸⁷ More established places like *The Bamboo Lounge*, *Friends Lounge*, *The Gala*, and *The Eighth Day* still existed at the beginning of the decade

³⁸⁸ B. F., *Memories: A History of Gay Bars, Clubs, and Friendly Establishments in Tulsa, Oklahoma Late 1940-2014* located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, Unpublished Document; Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

attorney who could not represent us because of conflicting interests, but made a strong recommendation to the Police Department Internal Affairs that they cease the harassment and change their policy and treatment toward gays or face another Stonewall or worse, a lawsuit.³⁸⁹

Zippers, the other popular disco club, went on to become a major attraction for the more upper-class younger crowd and the bar attracted a very mixed clientele with a diverse crowd of patrons including heterosexuals and women.³⁹⁰

In fact, police harassment began to decline in the eighties after much dissent from more vocal members of the gay community and allowed for an explosion of options for people with same-sex sexualities in the city.³⁹¹ Gay men and lesbians mostly separated out into their own places.³⁹² When Liquor by the Drink was passed on May 1st 1985, the law had major impacts on gay nightlife in the city.³⁹³ Terry recalled:

Club wise they became prettier, more higher class. More attention [was] paid to details and the décor, seating, and floor plan. You had to market the club and be prepared to have it critiqued. That didn't happen until the 1970s. It rose up a couple of notches to where it wasn't a place where people hid and were embarrassed by where they were going. They were very comfortable clubs compared to anywhere in town. I found out that coming out that it was not that way. It was almost a throwback to the days when you had to be a club member before liquor by the drink was passed. That's what really changed things in my minds eye... is when we got liquor by the drink clubs suddenly shot up. Their expectations, their standards, and the décor and so on. That's what really brought the club scene back competing with more disco oriented clubs in town... keeping up with the Jones's.³⁹⁴

³⁸⁹ Tim T., "Flash from the Past," (Unpublished Document, Tulsa Historical Society Vertical Research Files); Also found at Tim T., "Blast From The Past," accessed: June 15, 2014, <http://www.timsplayroom.com/blast.html>

³⁹⁰ Dylan Scott (Senior Program Officer) in discussion with the author, March 17, 2015; Peter Poppins (Florist) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

³⁹¹ Tim T., "Blast From The Past," Accessed: June 15, 2014, <http://www.timsplayroom.com/blast.html>

³⁹² David Aaronson (Real Estate) in discussion with the author, March 12, 2015; Agreed by Peter Poppins (Florist) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

³⁹³ Jim Young, "22 Counties Pass Liquor By the Drink," *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), May 1, 1985.

³⁹⁴ Terry Landers (Disabled) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2014.

Since the laws prohibited alcohol to be served in bars after 2:00am, there was a surge of new places that opened that were commonly referred to as “juice bars.”³⁹⁵ They allowed non-alcoholic beverages to be served, and extended the party for a few more hours. It was also common for men to spend the whole weekend out with friends, doing the “tea dance.” Peter remembered:

Tea dances [were] a big deal. You would stay out at the bars until 2:00am. The [juice bars] would open up at 2:00am and stay open until around 5:30am and then they would all [close] and then people would come back on Sunday.³⁹⁶

Some of the popular places during the decade were *Rick’s Restaurant and Bar*, *J. Michaels* (1983), *Pete’s Taj Mahal*, *Over the Rainbow* (1984), *Schlitz’s* (1984), *Sparky’s* (1986), *Strokes* (1987), *Sterling’s* (1988), *Dante’s*, *The PlayMor*, *Tims*, *Buddies*, *Coral Lounge*, *Seekers Choice*, *Our Den* (1988), *The Tiki Nook* (1986), *Phone Booth Lounge’s I & II*, *LAFFS* (1988), *Club Dominoes*, *Underground* (1986), *Renegades* (1988), and *the Tool Box I and II* (leather/levi bars). The first “juice bar” was the *Tulsa Mining Company* and soon others offered after-hours like *The Max*, *Exile* and *Crash Landing*, which was popular for younger people. For lesbians, the *Rustic Club* and (later) *TNT’s* garnered attention.³⁹⁷

Thus, the wave of gay liberation that Stonewall created in June of 1969 formed a tsunami that reverberated across the country and hit Tulsa, transforming life for local residents. In spite of a growing Religious Right and law enforcement officials that

³⁹⁵ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

³⁹⁶ Peter Poppins (Florist) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015; Supported by Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

³⁹⁷ B. F., *Memories: A History of Gay Bars, Clubs, and Friendly Establishments in Tulsa, Oklahoma Late 1940-2014* located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, Unpublished Document; Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

struggled against the tide of social change, residents began “coming out” in even larger numbers than ever before. They embraced gay culture, and it took shape in a way that was unique to the city: forming their own community publications; re-igniting community activism; and forging new recreational activities to enjoy with one another outside of just the bars. Above all, they enjoyed their nightlife with declining police harassment as the era progressed and they felt a sense of freedom, prosperity, pride, and hope for the future. Sadly, they could never have foreseen what was about to happen.

Chapter 8: *The War Years*:

The Beginnings of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Tulsa, Oklahoma

The Silent Invasion

In 1980 *Cruising* (starring Al Pacino) hit theaters across the country. The film was a thriller whose plot involved a serial killer on the loose in San Francisco's leather sub-culture, but it was protested in many cities for depicting a stereotypical image of the gay community. Yet, its release exhibited the awareness of the public to the diversity of liberated sexualities that had become present in the United States. The next year, in the Castro district of San Francisco, patrons gathered and looked at Polaroid photographs attached to the window of a local pharmacy. The pictures showed horrific purple lesions on the inside of a young man's mouth, and a note nearby warned onlookers that *something* was out there.³⁹⁸

In 1981 Americans witnessed a conservative shift in government with the election of President Ronald Reagan. By June of that year, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) published a report that mentioned mysterious cases of a rare form of parasitic pneumonia called *Pneumocystis carinii* (PCP) and other opportunistic infections in some patients, indicating that their immune systems had been depleted. A month later the *New York Times* reported that a rare and aggressive form of cancer, known as Kaposi Sarcoma (KS), had been diagnosed in forty-one gay men in the states of New York and California.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁸ *We Were Here* directed by David Weissman and Bill Weber (2011; Portland, OR: Weismann Projects), DVD.

³⁹⁹ "A Timeline of AIDS," accessed: December 1, 2015, <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/aids-timeline/>; Lawrence K. Altman, "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals," *New York Times* (New York, NY), July 3, 1981.

The State of Oklahoma had one diagnosed case by 1982 – a white male between the ages of fifty and fifty-four. The CDC in Dallas claimed that 519 cases of the disease had been documented nationally, and 40 percent of those had already died. By that time,

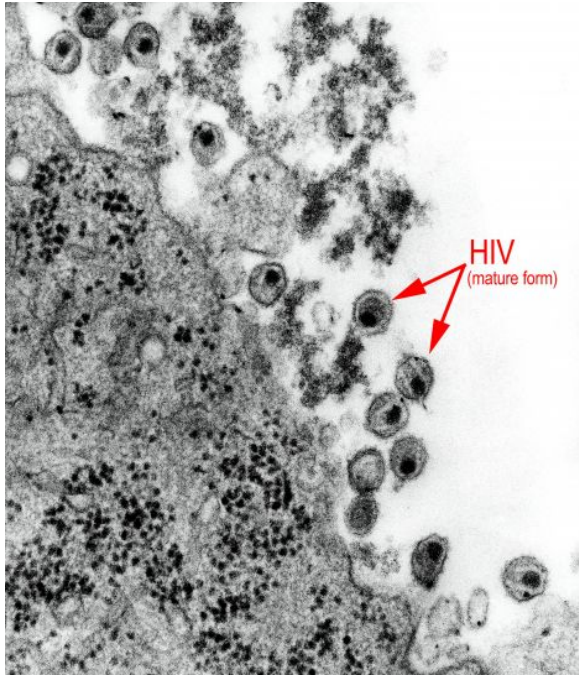


Illustration 59: The Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Public domain photograph. *Courtesy of USCDPC.*

the mysterious epidemic had shown up in groups other than gay men such as heterosexual men, Haitians, hemophiliacs, and drug users.⁴⁰⁰ Health officials struggled to identify the cause as the growing disease made news headlines and cases multiplied across the nation. The CDC officially called the disease “AIDS” (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) for the first time in 1982, and they provided precautions

for healthcare workers on modes of transmission (ruling out casual contact as a risk factor). Also, Congress passed the first legislation allowing for \$12 million dollars in research, but other congressional groups criticized the government for not having a

⁴⁰⁰ The first case in the state was in Oklahoma City. Due to the fact that the disease initially appeared to affect gay men, it became known as “the gay cancer” and “GRID” (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency). US Department of Health and Human Services (US DHHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention (NCHSTP), AIDS Public Information Data Set (APIDS). US Surveillance Data for 1981-2002, *CDC WONDER On-line Database*, December 2005. Accessed: December 1, 2015, <http://wonder.cdc.gov/aids-v2002.html>; Joann Schulte, “Epidemic Disease Striking Mostly Men Baffles Experts,” *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, TX), August 15, 1982 located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, Scrapbook; “A Timeline of AIDS,” accessed: December 1, 2015, <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/aids-timeline/>;

better response to the epidemic. Soon gay communities around the nation realized that they had to help their own at the grassroots level, because conservative leaders in the government were not addressing the issue.

By the end of 1983, both an American (Dr. Gallo) and French scientist (Professor Luc Montagnier) announced that they had discovered the same retrovirus called “HTLV-III” and “LAV” (later known as the Human Immunodeficiency Virus – HIV). And after it became apparent that some gay men who were infected frequented bathhouses, those places began being shut down in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York.⁴⁰¹ As obituaries became significant parts of news publications across the country, the Religious Right used the crisis as a rallying point – condemning the gay population and contributing to widespread panic among a misinformed public.⁴⁰²

It was not until September 17, 1985 that President Reagan (a Republican) ever mentioned the disease publicly – after some 12,529 people had already fallen victim and countless others had become infected. When actor Rock Hudson died in October of 1985 due to an AIDS-related illness, the moment seemed to draw understanding and sympathies from large parts of American society for the first time. The caring response of Elizabeth Taylor (a gay advocate) helped to calm some of the hysteria, and later that year a new antibody test became available to help diagnose the disease. The first real

⁴⁰¹ “A Timeline of AIDS,” accessed: December 1, 2015, <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/aids-timeline/>; “New HIV/AIDS News,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), September 1986 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1; Supported by Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 498-559.

⁴⁰² Tina Fetner, *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 59-60. Supported by Aaron L. Bachhofer II, “The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 1889-2005,” (PhD Dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 2005), 312-37.

medication to help patients did not come until 1987. *Azidothymidine*, known as AZT, was the most expensive drug in history at more than \$10,000 for an annual supply of doses. Suddenly, those with the disease found themselves divided along lines of class – “have’s” and “have not’s” – and pharmaceutical companies realized they could make large sums of money from those affected. Later, when Indiana middle-school student Ryan White was refused entry to his school because he had the virus, the news reports helped to humanize some with the disease in the eyes of the public.⁴⁰³ In 1987 the struggle to draw awareness, legislation, and research funding inspired the creation of a new national group (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, or ACT-UP), and followers organized protests and demonstrations around the country. By February of 1989, the AIDS epidemic had killed more Americans – 48,582 – than had died in combat in the Vietnam War.⁴⁰⁴

Facing the Enemy

In 1980 Tulsans with same-sex sexualities could not have imagined that a major pandemic facing their community was getting closer. Suffering from so many decades of oppression, they were just beginning to fully blossom in Tulsa. After all, they had been experiencing a climax of gay liberation and even after the epidemic began to make the news, it was not as visible as it was in other major cities. However, by 1986 more

⁴⁰³ “A Timeline of AIDS,” accessed: December 1, 2015, <https://www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/hiv-aids-101/aids-timeline/>; “Thirty Years of HIV/AIDS: Snapshots of an Epidemic,” accessed on December 1, 2015, <http://www.amfar.org/thirty-years-of-hiv/aids-snapshots-of-an-epidemic/>; “Test Detects Potential AIDS Victims,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK) October 1984 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

⁴⁰⁴ It was reported that 47,355 men died in combat while in Vietnam. “AIDS Deaths Surpass Number Killed in Vietnam,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), February 2, 1989.

local residents began to get sick, and the era of peace, prosperity, and high spirits was derailed by a new war against HIV/AIDS.

News of the disease first trickled down through newspapers and television.

Moses recalled:

The first time I ever heard about HIV or AIDS I was up at *Ricks Restaurant and Bar*. I was there with a friend of mine who was a doctor (he's no longer living) and he was reading an article about a strange disease that kept striking gay men... a skin cancer [Kaposi Sarcoma]. Slowly it got bigger and bigger and was everywhere.⁴⁰⁵

In the beginning of the epidemic, there was little information known about the disease or how it was spread. The first reports suggested that it impacted major cities on the coasts, so it is understandable that many gay men in the city did not see it as a local threat. Carl remembered:

Nobody knew what AIDS was until it was too late. Everyone was like, "Oh it's not coming here, we're in Oklahoma... it's in New York or it's in Florida... It's not going to be here, it's no big deal... those guys are just getting sick it's just like something else... or it's just government propaganda." So we didn't worry about it. I'm very lucky because if I would have become positive earlier then I would have been dead. There was no treatment whatsoever. There was nowhere to go, no counseling, no understanding, no drugs, no nothin'. I mean when you got sick they would put you in a hospital and they didn't know what it was [either]. They would treat you with all this stuff that they found out later was actually hurting you. So I am very, very lucky to live through that first eight years unscathed. We did have a lot of people, though who did get sick and didn't know what was going on, and we lost them very quickly.⁴⁰⁶

On January 3, 1983 the Oklahoma Blood Institute (OBI) began turning away men with same-sex sexualities who wished to give blood out of fears that they would contaminate the state blood supply. But few in the gay community still could imagine what was

⁴⁰⁵ Moses Silverman (Retired Attorney) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

⁴⁰⁶ Carl White (Special Event Coordinator) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

lurking in their midst.⁴⁰⁷ One drag entertainer remembered trying to educate local communities about the disease through her performances, but she encountered barriers.

She stated:

In 1984 when I competed for Miss [Gay] America... my talent [had an HIV/AIDS theme]. I had a big project[ed] slide show and I was behind stage and they were showing the slides. The slides were pictures of the magazine covers that were saying “The Gay Plague”... always trying to circle it back to the gay community and I was making a statement about this and was trying to tell people that now – more than ever – we needed to establish solidarity as a movement or else they were going to cook us. You know... it was a call to arms. Y’all [*sic*] get ready for it and do something about it now... lets start being proactive at this very moment. You know... they were already shutting down bars and bathhouses in San Francisco and New York because it was a health epidemic - what have you. After I did the slide presentation of all the gay parades and horrible magazines and telling them about this over the microphone while I’m backstage... trying to reach them, you know, to say we got [*sic*] to get this word out... I came out and sang, “You’ll Never Walk Alone” by Dionne Warwick and they just kind of looked at me, because they hadn’t come to Oklahoma in such numbers that they were scared or worried about it.⁴⁰⁸

Aside from some elements of denial, a close inspection of the data available from the CDC helped bring light to other reasons why residents in the city did not see the disease as a major threat in the beginning of the 1980s. The initial two diagnosed cases of the disease in Tulsa occurred in 1982. The first case was in February – a white female between the ages of 20 and 24. The second was April – a black male who identified as bisexual between the ages of 35 and 39. In 1983, a third case (a white male between the ages of 20 and 24) emerged. As the decade progressed, some men witnessed their friends (and sometimes themselves) get sick with unusual infections. Community members began to realize that the disease had arrived by the middle of the

⁴⁰⁷ Bachhofer, “The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,” 315; “Male Homosexuals Discouraged From Donating Blood Because of Risks,” *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), January 3, 1983.

⁴⁰⁸ Terry Landers (Disabled) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2014.

decade. For instance, diagnoses rose each year in the city: 1984 (six); 1985 (five); 1986 (twenty); and 1987 (thirty). In 1988, the number of cases jumped to 53 and stayed steady until 1991 when the number of diagnoses jumped to 108. Diagnoses peaked in 1992 (148) before declining and stabilizing throughout the nineties to under 100 cases each year.⁴⁰⁹

The Emergence of Multiple Foes

Gay residents also faced growing levels of anti-gay messages in the city. Because the epidemic was depicted as a “gay plague” in the beginning, widespread fear and ignorance descended upon the metropolis. Men remembered it first was called “the gay cancer” and “GRID” – Gay Related Immune Disease.⁴¹⁰ Thus, after many decades of slow progress, gay residents faced a frightening health crisis and a reversal of the acceptance that the community had worked so hard to achieve. By the middle of the decade, those residents who were more openly gay experienced heightened levels of discrimination that originated from widespread ignorance and a growing Religious Right. That resulted in reactionary acts of legislation from local and state leaders.⁴¹¹

Religious Damnation

As the media began to cover the issue with greater frequency, those more conservative religious residents felt threatened by the disease and gay men. They

⁴⁰⁹ US Department of Health and Human Services (US DHHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention (NCHSTP), AIDS Public Information Data Set (APIDS). US Surveillance Data for 1981-2002, *CDC WONDER On-line Database*, December 2005. Accessed: December 1, 2015, <http://wonder.cdc.gov/aids-v2002.html>

⁴¹⁰ Steve Sanders (Interior Decorator) in discussion with the author, July 15, 2014.

⁴¹¹ My findings on Tulsa closely parallel those reactions in nearby Oklahoma City. This is supported by the dissertation work of Bachhofer, “The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,” 312-37.

responded with fear-mongering, biblical condemnations, and calls for discriminatory acts. Sam recalled:

Probably about 1982 I remember being at a straight friend's house and they said, "It looks like the gays have finally found something they can't run away from and it's killing them left and right on the East coast and soon it will be here." But it wasn't. There [were] a few isolated cases in Oklahoma in the early eighties, but it was not a big deal yet. It wasn't until around the mid to late 1980s that it became an issue. Initially it was thought that it was something that only happened to queers and then the religious community jumped on it and considered it to be "Gods Revenge" on gay people....⁴¹²

Randy remembered hearing someone say, "it [was] killing all of the right people."⁴¹³

Another area editorial published by the *Daily Oklahoman* proclaimed, "The sexual revolution has begun to devour its children."⁴¹⁴ According to Keith Smith, a contributor to the *Gayly Oklahoman*:

The New Christian Right (Jerry Falwell et. al.) has decided that AIDS is a sign of divine wrath and has made "the gay plague" the basis of its opposition to civil rights for gay people. Unfortunately, many ill-informed people in all sections of society are listening and reacting from their own fear. Consequently, the AIDS epidemic and bigotry continue to spread....⁴¹⁵

Later in the article, Smith provided an example:

Paul Cameron, a psychologist from Lincoln, Neb., appeared before the Oklahoma and Texas Legislatures lobbying for legislation that would incarcerate (lock up) homosexuals "until they can be cleaned of their medical problems." In Chicago recently, Cameron warned that homosexuals were potential murderers and that AIDS could mean the demise of Western civilization.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹² Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

⁴¹³ Randy Gentry (Architect) in discussion with the author, October 2, 2014.

⁴¹⁴ "Awful AIDS Is Natures Retribution," *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), May 26, 1983. From Bachhofer, "The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma," 315.

⁴¹⁵ Keith Smith, "Guest Editorial: AIDS VERSUS IGNORANCE," *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), October 1983 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

Other men remembered similar outrageous proposals. Sam stated that, “there was some talk about gay men being quarantined in 1982 or 1983, like internment camps...”⁴¹⁷

Bart heard lots of religious condemnation. He said:

[They believed] it was divine retribution. Just with conversations with people my parent’s age it was like, “Those queers just deserve it... this is just proof that they shouldn’t be that way.” Yeah umm... it was a pretty negative atmosphere here in Tulsa because of AIDS. And safe sex didn’t happen immediately. It didn’t happen [until later]... It took them a while to realize that there was something you could do to avoid that problem [they did not realize it was sexually transmitted]...⁴¹⁸

By May of 1989 when the numbers of cases had almost reached a peak in the city, a resident wrote a vicious letter to the editor of the *Tulsa Tribune* responding to a sympathetic story about a man who had died of HIV/AIDS. It read:

Editor, The Tribune:

With reference to the Page 1 story May 19, "Love, pride ease AIDS death," by Victoria Ninninger:

Apparently the writer and the family of Stan [M.], who died from AIDS, approved of his lifestyle. How could anyone have been proud, as Stan [M.] and his family apparently were, of someone who helps to spread a disease that is killing people? Why not point out the fact that his was not an alternate lifestyle, but a perverted one, and also stress the point that he and other homosexuals are the root cause for the spread of AIDS? - Sapulpa C. MITCHELL⁴¹⁹

Sadly, anti-gay religious messages such as these had profound impacts on some men’s identities and self-perceptions. There were even men who began to wonder if the religious condemnations were true. Sam recalled:

Everyone was scared to death. It was a death sentence... We went from this high point in the 1970s... we went from this kind of feeling of freedom [and] you just can’t imagine what that was like, and we haven’t experienced anything like it since – to one of [caution], “Oh we have got to be careful, have sex with one person, do all this stuff, or we die.” It was terrifying for everyone. The whole

⁴¹⁷ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014. Supported by Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, 228, 559.

⁴¹⁸ Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

⁴¹⁹ “The Cause of AIDS,” *Tulsa Tribune* (Tulsa, OK), May 26, 1989.

idea about sex was suddenly deadly. It just took one person in the community to bring a whole community down, you know?... And [with HIV/AIDS] we almost went back to self-hate [of earlier eras] and many began to wonder... [pause]... I think that there were several gay people who were still somewhat religious who began to wonder if what these people [Religious Right] say is really true, is this the “gay plague?” Is this why all these people are dying?⁴²⁰

Widespread Fear and Ignorance

Gay community members struggled to make sense of the battle into which they had been thrown, but they tried their best to educate within their own communication networks. For instance, from October 1983 through the late 1980s, the *Gayly Oklahoman* had increasing numbers of articles about the epidemic. Regular news columns appeared such as “AIDS Updates,” and one infectious disease specialist in the state offered a regular editorial dubbed “Dear Dr. W,” where readers could mail in letters with questions about the HIV/AIDS. For example, one letter read:

Dear Dr. W: I am gay, but I have been spared HIV infection, thank God. I am so afraid of HIV that I have become asexual, except for masturbation. Does that make sense? Now I hear that you can catch HIV from your dentist or doctor. Is this true? – Worried⁴²¹

Clearly, the epidemic had major impacts on the sexual practices of many men. Accessing compassionate healthcare services was also a traumatic experience for those affected. Due to the fact that there was little known about HIV/AIDS at this time, local hospitals were not well educated on how it was spread, and they took the only precautions they knew to take. In addition, while some doctors who accepted gay clients, there were many who refused to treat patients with HIV/AIDS in the early years. Terry recalled how one hospital dealt with it:

⁴²⁰ Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

⁴²¹ “Dear Dr. W,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), February 15, 1991 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2.

I worked in a hospital as a hairdresser and I went up to cut a couple of patient's hair that had AIDS and they made me wear complete outfits. Masks and gowns and rubber gloves... and they weren't that kind of contagious, but they didn't know [that] yet.⁴²²

Soon these messages of ignorance and fear were transferred into actions. For example, in July of 1983 the Tulsa Chapter of Oklahoman's for Human Rights (TOHR) held a party at a public pool located at Manion Park. After park officials realized that the party was for a gay organization, they drained and disinfected the pool "... to be on the safe side."⁴²³ In addition, state lawmakers tried to come up with sinister ways to deal with the disease. In March 1986 state legislators reportedly tried to pass House Bill #1698, which classified the spreading of HIV/AIDS as a felony. Another bill (House Bill #1935) sought to require the mandatory testing of those who applied for marriage licenses in the state.⁴²⁴ By May 1, 1988 the State of Oklahoma had enacted a law, which mandated the reporting of the identities of those who tested positive for the HIV virus. Understandably, the law caused some men to be leery of getting tested – fearing the loss of their confidentiality.⁴²⁵

Those men who were more public about their sexuality faced new false stereotypes like *all gay men* had the disease. For instance, in 1987 a man sued the Tulsa-based Bama Pie Corporation for discrimination. The well-known company had

⁴²² Kenneth Wiley (Cosmetologist) in discussion with the author, August 6, 2015. Supported by Keith Smith, "Meet #9," *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), January 1985 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

⁴²³ Jim Myers, "Gays Use Manion Pool; City Drains It," *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), July 19, 1983 located at Tulsa Library Annex, Vertical Files Adult Ref, "GLBT Tulsa."

⁴²⁴ Kevin Gabel, "Legislative Update," *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK) March 1986 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

⁴²⁵ Keith Smith, "Mandatory Name Reporting in Oklahoma And How It Will Affect You," *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), May 1988 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

allegedly offered him a job and then rescinded their offer after he accepted it due to a false rumor that he was HIV-positive. He "... brought [a] \$2.1 million dollar lawsuit because he [was] denied work elsewhere and [had] 'suffered the stigma and humiliation of being an alleged AIDS victim among the public at large.'"⁴²⁶

Sadly, the stigma attached to those with HIV/AIDS was not put there solely by the heterosexual community, either. Men were stigmatized for being HIV-positive (or *believed* to be positive) by *some* members of the gay community.⁴²⁷ While many of these reactions were due to fear and uncertainty, they forced HIV-positive men to become recluses and hide away in their homes as they began to exhibit more visible symptoms. Carl remembered that it took a long time for the community (as a whole) to address the stigma:

Diagnosis of it was so slow that if you were diagnosed with it and anybody found out about it you got that big "A" [Scarlet Letter AIDS] on your back, more [or] less. You were labeled, you were shunned. In the clubs.... Nobody would talk to you – if they would even let you in the door. This was in the early 1980s and up into the later 1980s. And back then with no treatment, a lot of people were getting sick enough to where it was obvious very quickly. Loss of weight, the sores, the sickness, just general health decline. You could tell really fast. Nobody dared go on a diet then, because they would get labeled so fast. I don't remember a great deal of caring, talking about it, or anything until about 1989 or 1990. We all knew it was out there, and we all knew it had begun to come through. And people would be... if they saw you talking to somebody that they thought or they'd heard or was rumored.... Oh they'd just walk right up to you and [say], "Why are you talking to them? They have AIDS!" Or if they saw

⁴²⁶ "Tulsa Man Sues Bama Pies for AIDS Discrimination," *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), June 1988 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

⁴²⁷ Larry M. Prater, "AIDS Update: To Detest or Not to Detest?" *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), September 1986 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1; This suggests that the atmosphere surrounding HIV/AIDS created multiple oppressions for gay men in the city. Not only were they detested by some for having a same-sex sexuality (as in previous decades), but also some people in both the heterosexual and gay male communities now saw them as a health threat. Misinformed views such as these would progress into future decades.

you talking to a group they'd walk right up and say, "Okay y'all [*sic*] be careful now... this one has AIDS." They'd just blurt it out. It was nothing to hear that. It was devastating to people. And of course once you were labeled, you were labeled. It was done, you were fried. There was no way to disprove it.⁴²⁸

Bart recollected:

The bars were packed with people during that time and a lot of people were getting sick. Once they did, they were just cast off. They were like lepers. Of course once [they got sick], they stopped coming to the bars. So you didn't see it in the bars much... it wasn't visible.⁴²⁹

Those more fearful closeted men who realized they were HIV-positive found themselves in a difficult predicament: come out *or* stay hidden in the shadows and deal with the disease alone. It was not uncommon for these men to cut off contact with their families voluntarily, because they did not want them know that they had the disease *or* that they had a same-sex sexuality.⁴³⁰ By 1989 the *Tulsa World* reported that the disease disproportionately impacted minorities such as Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans due to "...a greater risk of poverty, political powerlessness, and despair..."⁴³¹ In one example, Sam remembered that there was male resident of a local Native American reservation who found out he had the disease. Feeling he had no other option and facing a scary future, he opted to propel himself in front of an oncoming train to his own death.⁴³²

⁴²⁸ Carl White (Special Event Coordinator) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

⁴²⁹ Bart Baxter (Adjunct Instructor) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.

⁴³⁰ "Tulsa Physician Addresses U.S. House on AIDS," *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), June 1988 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

⁴³¹ Cathy Milam, "Experts Say AIDS Creating 'Holocaust' Among Minorities," *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), August 11, 1989.

⁴³² Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014.

Memories of Those On the Front Lines

Amidst the turbulence of the era, there were other heart-wrenching accounts shared by men who saw their loved ones lose their battle with the disease. Carl shared a story of a young man who caught it early on:

One boy... his mother enclosed a shed on the side of the garage, and she put him out there. She passed his food to him through the window... He was in his twenties... beautiful... oh my god... he was beautiful! Little bitty guy. He lived in the shed. Instead of laundry, he would put anything that was dirty in bags and she would double the bags and ... they were thrown away and she would buy new... she would never wash his laundry. Everything was new. It was always paper plates, plastic ware, Styrofoam, or paper cups. (Anything that could be thrown away.) She would never wash anything that he would touch. She did not touch him the entire time that he was in that shed. ... If he had sores or anything like that... she would put [his food] in Tupperware, and she would put it in through the window to him and he would have to do it [eat] on his own. I do remember that they would come and take him to the doctor, but she would never touch him. She would go and talk to him through the window... she was there... but she would never touch him again. The only human touch that I know of that he ever got was through the doctors, and then eventually the hospital. But she was so scared... she didn't know. Her motherly instinct was to take care of him and she did the best that she knew how to do. I definitely am glad that she did that, but she wouldn't let anyone else. She wouldn't let any of his friends come over or do anything. We could come talk to him through the window... we could show him pictures... and stuff. He couldn't leave. She was scared the neighbors would be scared of him... she was afraid that kids would be playing out in the neighborhood... she was scared that it was airborne. She was petrified that it was airborne.... It was about three years later that he died.⁴³³

James had a friend who was forced to live with his conservative parents. He stated:

One of the first people I knew that died of it... I was just getting to know him. We were friends... it was nothing physical... we were just being friends and getting to know each other and suddenly you hear that he's dead. Within two weeks he had died. My best friend [name omitted]... he had moved to Houston and had come back and his parents ran the feed store [in a rural Tulsa suburb]. I would go out there to visit him and get him for church at times. One Sunday I called to take him to church and take him out to dinner and he said he wasn't feeling well and that he didn't feel like doing it. I said, "Well why don't George and Jim and I come visit you after Church?" and he said that was great. Then he

⁴³³ Carl White (Special Event Coordinator) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

called back later and said that his mother didn't want us to, because she didn't want people seeing gay people come there... I never got to see him again... That type of fear and prejudice was such a common thing.⁴³⁴

Debra recalled a teacher at a city school:

I never will forget this. One of our most talented music teachers... oh my God he was a fantastic musician... he came up to my office one day and he was just in tears. And he said, "They just fired me, because I'm HIV-positive and I don't have insurance and I don't know where to go." And so our gay teachers were just petrified. And if you were HIV-positive you were really petrified, because [some men] didn't identify [themselves] as gay. Oh my God... and to access your insurance for AIDS medication... the director of personnel would fire you. They would fire you because of the sodomy law in Oklahoma... They fired them because they were [seen as] criminals. I took [him] up to a nursing home in Tahlequah and he died there... The director of personnel fired him on the spot, and he had no recourse, because he was identified as a criminal. He had lied on his application [about his health status]. [Around 1989]⁴³⁵

During this time, it was common for many men to realize that protections did not exist for their relationships. Peter said:

There was one friend [in the mid-1980s] and his lover... when he died... The family came in and kicked the guy out [of the house] and sold it. And [his partner] died a few months later. There [were] no protections. The father or brother or sister would just go in and kick [the lover] out. The straight people were awful. The gay people... it basically brought us together finally. It wasn't like that at first. It was a very fearful time.⁴³⁶

Some men who tested positive or had AIDS were shunned by their families. In some cases, they were completely cut off. Kenneth shared:

I remember one boy. He was so handsome and he had a lover. He was so handsome. He looked like a poster child. Just the handsomest man, and he had AIDS. He was a Catholic and his family lived like in New Orleans. He had been a professor at Loyola and the father had told the family that he had died. But he wasn't [dead]. And all he wanted during his illness was to talk to his mother or father. And when he would call (and this is the truth), they would hang up instantly... That was common. Families disowned people. Belief systems just disowned you. [Later a support organization in the city eventually contacted his

⁴³⁴ James Smith (Postal Worker) in discussion with the author, March 10, 2015.

⁴³⁵ Debra Simpson (Ed. Admin.) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

⁴³⁶ Peter Poppins (Florist) in discussion with the author, March 24, 2015.

sister (who thought he was dead) and she flew to Tulsa to be with him while he passed.]⁴³⁷

The disease hit all parts of the gay community. Fred remembered how it impacted his circle of friends:

The only thing about AIDS that I can tell you is.... [pause] I had a group of about twelve cloggers [clog dancing]... the OK Country Cloggers [a local dance group]. They were all men, young men... very vivacious... very extraordinary – you know – and all that sort of stuff... and when you're that way you're very open to a lot of things. They were very social. I was like their father and [they] were my kids. I was this disciplinarian, don't do this [etc.]... [but] I didn't get involved in their social life at all. Out of my twelve cloggers... [crying] seven of them died of AIDS. I'm so sorry!! I've been to so many funerals... I just can't go anymore.⁴³⁸

Another man, Terry, recalled the medical struggles one friend faced:

One of my best friends was named [name omitted] and his lover... was the first Doctor in the City of Tulsa to address that clientele. He was an infectious disease specialist. At that time the only [medication] they had was AZT. [Around 1982] The reason I know so much about that was because [it] was my best friends' lover that died, and it was an excruciating death, because he contracted spinal meningitis and there wasn't anything [the doctor] could give to him except... AZT. He couldn't even address the headaches that [he] had when he would lay on the floor and scream and writhe, and it was horrific. I mean... Oh My God... horrific! And there [was] nothing you [could] do. Once spinal meningitis passes the blood barrier in the brain there is nothing to hold it back. There is nothing that can ease the pain. It reminded me of something from the dark ages...⁴³⁹

Not all the stories were entirely sad. Debra remembered how some families in the African American community reacted to their sons who faced the disease. She said:

The things that happened in the Black community were phenomenal. It's interesting, the Black community has such resistance to homosexuality... the Black churches... and yet the Black families would bring their sons home to die. We had white families who didn't want to have anything to do with them... [they would] just reject them. Not in the Black community.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁷ Kenneth Wiley (Cosmetologist) in discussion with the author, August 6, 2015.

⁴³⁸ Fred Madrid (Retired) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

⁴³⁹ Terry Landers (Disabled) in discussion with the author, October 7, 2014.

⁴⁴⁰ Debra Simpson (Ed. Admin.) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

A Call to Arms

Major responses to the crisis in Tulsa came once the disease began to emerge in the city. In spite of the anti-gay messages and stigma that threatened their progress, community members courageously banded together and took the battle against HIV/AIDS into their own hands. Among their accomplishments, they formed a testing clinic, sought to educate the public, held fundraisers, pushed for housing options for those affected, coordinated with national HIV/AIDS organizations, and helped to create numerous other organizations to respond to the crisis.⁴⁴¹

Early Responses

Shortly after the news of the epidemic began to be disseminated, a representative from TOHR and a local infectious disease specialist attended a national medical conference in Denver. Dylan remembered:

We were just then getting used to the issue that he [the doctor] was already familiar with about it being a blood-borne disease and how important it was for us to come back to Tulsa and educate our communities about same-sex practices. That was about summer of 1983. That allowed us to work with the board, people in our community, and our health department was so supportive. We were [already] doing the swabs in the bars with mobile clinics by late 1980 and 1981 with help from the Tulsa Health Department. They did training on how to do the STD swab tests in cooperation with [the Tulsa Health Department]. They would volunteer and do nightly clinics usually on a Friday or Saturday night and offer swab tests and testing for STD's [not HIV]. To encourage them [to get tested], we would offer them poppers or a drink coupon or whatever. By 1983 we realized we really needed to step up our outreach for HIV. We held a TOHR meeting when we first got back and we had people standing up in the isles of the auditorium... Within four or five months we started having people who were affected coming to our meetings. One of the first people affected I remember was an African American guy that came in a wheelchair... and by

⁴⁴¹ The epidemic brought lesbians, gay men, and heterosexuals together to fight the disease in support of one another. The following consists of some notable responses and is not exhaustive. There were many efforts both within the gay community and the larger Tulsa community to combat the disease. Some are listed in this section of the chapter.

late 1983 or early 1984 he was gone. Then we started noticing some of our friends were starting to get sick too and certainly lost some in that 1984/1985 time frame. And we realized that we needed to start another group, because there was only so much we could do with our... TOHR volunteers since we didn't have any staff.⁴⁴²

The group eventually started the first anonymous HIV-testing center in Northeastern Oklahoma, and after it acquired state funding from the CDC in 1989 they established a Tulsa Chapter of the Oklahoma City-based AIDS Support Program (ASP). It was run by a full-time coordinator who helped to extend HIV education and testing efforts.⁴⁴³ In 1998 the TOHR testing clinic was split from the organization and became H.O.P.E. (Heath, Outreach, Prevention, and Education) after “the Oklahoma State Health Department... blocked over \$30,000 in AIDS education contracts to Tulsa Oklahoman’s for Human Rights because of fears expressed by State Senator Frank Rhodes (R-Catoosa) that the federal funds would be used to subsidize other activities for the Tulsa gay community than AIDS education.”⁴⁴⁴ Ultimately, the rationale behind the split was to allow both organizations the ability to follow their own respective missions. H.O.P.E. went on to provide not only HIV-testing, but also counseling services as well.⁴⁴⁵

Hospice Care

The year 1984 brought more changes as the fight against the disease gained strength in the city. Soon Catholic Charities got involved and provided services and end

⁴⁴² Dylan Scott (Senior Program Officer) in discussion with the author, March 17, 2015.

⁴⁴³ “AIDS Support Program in Tulsa,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), November 1988 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

⁴⁴⁴ Harry Livesay, “State Senator Blocks TOHR AIDS Funding: Tulsa Group Considers Alternatives to Continue Programs,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), August 1988 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

⁴⁴⁵ “History of TOHR,” at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Dennis Neill Box*.

of life housing through St. Josephs Residence, a hospice home for those with AIDS.⁴⁴⁶

Some prominent city residents also held social events and fundraisers to help called *The Candlelight Home Tours*. Joe recalled:

We started doing social events that incorporated straight Tulsa. We raised millions of dollars for AIDS and HIV... We made the money from the Candlelight Home Tour. We would do a home tour every year of four or five houses many of which [a popular area interior designer] was working on and my house, which was interesting, and other people's houses and more gay peoples houses. So this was one way of introducing to the city [to] one segment of the population that they really didn't want to talk about [gay residents]. They were hoping they didn't have to see [them], but they saw every week at church. [1984 or 1985] It happened fast, we raised \$25,000 and we had started a hospice here with Catholic Charities. They provided us the building and then [he and the interior designer] called in on the design community to come in and decorate this place for those who were dying who had no place to be... they were going to die in a beautiful and loving and healthy environment. I had a friend who came from California from Los Angeles who didn't tell his family he was sick and [he] was living in his car for months and months and... he just got sicker and sicker. Finally, he called his brother and said, "I need help." And then he brought him home... It wasn't very long before he began living at St. Joseph's Residence. And in fact, it became the hospice and at one point was completely full... But we did this year after year and people were paying thousands of dollars to go to this thing [the Candlelight Tours] and then there would be a patron's dinner and they'd pay another \$1,500 or \$2,000 or whatever to go to that. So we were making some serious money for the AIDS community and the Gay community. You know this was straight Tulsa supporting gay Tulsa. We did it really from 1984 to as far as 2002... [St. Josephs] was done in beautiful toile and every night they went into a dining room that had a glass top table and a rock crystal chandelier and beautiful paintings. ...It was a beautiful room. Any of us would want to have it as our own [home]. This is where they had their dinner[s] – the people who the lived in the house. All the rooms were done by a different designer... Everyone did it for free. Nobody charged – it was all to take care of their [gay] brother[s]. One of the decorators who did it... died of AIDS and he was in his room [that he decorated] when he died. So it was almost as if he knew [somehow].⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁶ Debra Simpson (Ed. Admin.) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

⁴⁴⁷ Joe Stephens (Artist) in discussion with the author, July 16, 2015.

In 1991 another group, Hospice of Green Country, provided at-home medical care for patients and their families.⁴⁴⁸ And by July of 1995 another live-in home was opened called the “Rainbow Village” house, which provided housing, meals, and transportation to some who were struggling and living with the disease.⁴⁴⁹

Shanti-Tulsa, Inc. (The Shanti Project)

The Shanti Project (meaning “inner peace in Sanskrit”) was formed in 1986. It was modeled off of a national organization out of San Francisco, and it offered support to those who were HIV-positive, those who had AIDS, and their families. Like most other HIV/AIDS groups, they provided assistance to all of those affected – regardless of sexual orientation. They conducted fundraising efforts, provided education, and other social services such as:

... information and referrals and emotional support services through groups and buddy services. Shanti also address[ed] basic needs through its storehouse for persons [who were] disabled by AIDS. Shanti stress[ed] the importance of staying healthy and informed, thus reducing the risk of becoming ill. Information on a personal level, focusing on the client’s personal health issues [was] also provided... Intake and referrals assist[ed] clients with Social Security claims, Medicare/Medicaid insurance claims, nursing aid services, chore assistance, health care, psychological and pastoral counseling, and transportation for health and personal needs....

Aside from a food bank and multiple other services, the Shanti Project provided much needed education in the form of training to individuals called a “Buddy Match,” who were “non-professional volunteer[s] who [were] trained to act as an advocate, helper, and friend to the client...” as the disease progressed. In 1990 alone, Shanti served

⁴⁴⁸ “Hospice of Green Country Provides Support,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK) January 15, 1991 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2.

⁴⁴⁹ David Harper, “Rainbow Village House Dedicated,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), July 9, 1995.

approximately twelve hundred individuals, had an average weekly group attendance of twenty-eight people, and thirty-seven buddy matches.⁴⁵⁰

Coordinating Efforts: The Umbrella Organizations

In 1986 an umbrella organization emerged called the Tulsa AIDS Task Force to help coordinate health care providers and community organizations who were providing assistance to those in the HIV/AIDS community. The group “assisted in coordinating a speakers bureau with the Red Cross, published newsletters, served as a spokes[persons] before the Tulsa media, and organized the publication of a resource and reference manual.” After it became difficult for the organization to continue in its capacity, it was absorbed by the United Way funded Community Service Council of Tulsa.⁴⁵¹ In 1990 when the Ryan White CARE (Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency) Act was passed by the federal government, it “poured hundreds of millions of dollars into organizations that treated all aspects of HIV/AIDS.”⁴⁵² The next year, community leaders applied for and received funding from the Act and another umbrella organization (Tulsa CARES) carried the torch. Debra remembered:

The [City of Tulsa] Community Service Council looked into issues of health and human services. They helped to organize HIV/AIDS response in Tulsa in the

⁴⁵⁰ “SHANTI Program Introduced,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), August 1986 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1; Quote from “Shanti Serves Tulsa Community,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), January 15, 1991 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2; “Shanti, Inc. Storehouse Project,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), August 1989 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1. Supported by Kenneth Wiley (Cosmetologist) in discussion with the author, August 6, 2015.

⁴⁵¹ “Tulsa AIDS Task Force To Be Put To Work,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), January 1989 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

⁴⁵² Bachhofer, “The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,” 330.

late 1980s. They applied for the first Ryan White money after it was released to State organizations and they got it. They got the grant and they wanted to organize a space. They were continually denied spaces to rent when the renters found out that they were trying to find a space to help people with HIV/AIDS. Eventually, the first space was offered from within the community. The United Way also gave funds to Tulsa CARES and funded it around 1996 or 1997 and then it took off and stood on its own.⁴⁵³

Tulsa CARES went on to offer numerous coordinated social services such as care, health care navigation, counseling, housing assistance, and food/nutrition.⁴⁵⁴

The Regional AIDS Interfaith Network (RAIN) Teams

Another response was one that had broad-reaching effects. The Regional AIDS Interfaith Network (RAIN) began as a statewide organization in 1990 by an Oklahoma resident who had a son with AIDS. The purpose of the organization was to provide pastoral care and counseling to those with the disease. According to RAIN:

Through training and education, we helped to dispel the fear surrounding HIV/AIDS and provide[d] trained, caring people to help with practical support functions that are vital to the life of a person living with HIV/AIDS. Those functions... include[d] preparing meals, running errands, cleaning the house, mowing the lawn, giving rides to doctor's appointments, taking the dog to the vet and providing a shoulder to lean on. A RAIN Team often became extended family for a person living with HIV/AIDS, offering the emotional support so important to those who suffer with the disease.⁴⁵⁵

By the early 1990s, RAIN teams in the state had descended on Tulsa to provide services, education, and assistance to those affected. Initially, it “targeted faith-based organizations, private schools and colleges, and professional groups for education about AIDS. It was a volunteer-based group, staffed by members of the gay and lesbian

⁴⁵³ Debra Simpson (Ed. Admin.) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

⁴⁵⁴ “Our History,” Tulsa CARES, accessed: December 2, 2015, <http://www.tulsacares.org/our-story/>

⁴⁵⁵ “History con’t,” RAIN, accessed: December 3, 2015, <http://www.rainoklahoma.org/history-cont>; Bachhofer, “The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,” 328-29.

community, and was administered statewide...” as a privately funded organization. They also offered case management services to provide better access to medications, assistance in housing, nutrition assessments, and HIV-testing.⁴⁵⁶

Safe Houses and Pet Services

Other notable organizations emerged, too. Our House, a safe house for people with HIV/AIDS, came about in 1990 after three men discussed the idea during a backyard barbeque. Carl remembered how the men were discussing how they could create their own social network to help one another:

We were all sitting there and we came up with the idea of having a house. A house that was a working household where people could come and stay, [where they] could do meals, game nights, movies, and a backyard for get together’s. We didn’t know what we were going to call it or where it was going to be, but we decided we were going to do this. It took roughly about a year. We found the house and [the owner] who would let us have the house and [he took] the tax write-off for the rent. We had the house and we got it painted and set up and were getting furniture and it was coming together. It was just off Eleventh and Peoria – a couple houses just South of the Diner. We didn’t know what we were going to name it, we had no idea....⁴⁵⁷

Eventually, a founder wrote “Our House” on an envelope that contained the funds for the house – and the name stuck. Our House opened and remained in operation for years and later, after the first Our House closed; Our House Too was opened until it also closed. A major fundraiser for Our House was “Drag Queen Bingo,” which is a charity fundraiser held annually in the city.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁶ Bachhofer, “The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,” 328-329; “RAIN to Host Fundraisers,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), October 15, 1991 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2.

⁴⁵⁷ Carl White (Special Event Coordinator) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

In the early nineties another organization (A Friend for a Friend) was started by a local woman who lost her son to the disease. It provided much needed pet services (such as food, grooming, exercise and veterinary care) to those living with HIV/AIDS who required pet care assistance in times of need. In addition, the service allowed for patients to keep and care for their animal companions throughout difficult times and hospital stays.⁴⁵⁹

Fundraising

Fundraising was also a major need of the era. Due to the fact that many organizations struggled to acquire funding from the state early on before the Ryan White Care Act was passed, a large portion of their funding was garnered from private sources.⁴⁶⁰ Concerned community members banded together to raise monies for much needed help. For instance, TOHR held annual “Follies” by the late 1980s, which offered various forms of entertainment to draw in funds that were distributed to various area organizations.⁴⁶¹ The leather, rodeo, and drag communities also held numerous fundraisers for non-profits serving those affected by the disease. For instance, one bar (Renegades) held the “Red Ribbon Revue” and “Drag Queen Bingo” became popular.⁴⁶² More prominent men in the city pulled strings to raise funds by organizing

⁴⁵⁹ Stacy Pettit, “A Friend for a Friend,” *Tulsa Pets Magazine*, accessed: December 3, 2015, <http://www.tulsapetsmagazine.com/2013/07/a-friend-for-a-friend/>; “A Friend for a Friend” accessed: December 3, 2015, <http://www.tulsalibrary.org/tos/friend-friend>

⁴⁶⁰ Bachhofer, “The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma,” 329-30.

⁴⁶¹ “Follies ’89 TOHR’S Biggest Fundraiser,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), August 1989 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

⁴⁶² “New Age Renegade to Hold Benefits,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), May 1990; “Mr. Oklahoma Leather Contest to Be Held Oct. 19-21,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), October 15, 1990; “Mr. Oklahoma Leather Contest Oct. 18-20,”

elite black tie dinners at Southern Hills Country Club, which actively included heterosexual segments of Tulsa's society.⁴⁶³

Another activity, known as the Black and White Parties, eventually helped to raise some funds as well. The parties had begun before HIV/AIDS became a threat, but eventually they gave some residents a source of fun and relief during a time of sorrow and despair. The original Black and White Party was held in May of 1980 at the Spotlight Dinner Theater and of course where attendees wore black and white. Although the parties were a separate activity from TOHR, many of the founders who formed the organization helped to run the events. One of the first organizers noted that they "... wanted to have a party not just for the gay community, but [also] for the [larger] community." They wanted to build bridges between people with diverse sexual identities in the city. At first, the parties were more exclusive – by invitation only. Subsequently, they became the annual talk of the town in both heterosexual and gay social circles. Dylan remembered:

We went out with a bang in 1990 and brought in the Village People. It didn't start off as a fundraiser and was mainly a social thing and then we started having suggested donations that we started splitting [them] between TOHR and the testing clinic. By the end of the event, we did have a charge. We did try to give back to the community... [At] the last one we had twelve hundred [people] at the fairgrounds, and it had become a huge party, and a lot of stores [in Tulsa] put out black and white clothing to sell to participants. The reason we stopped... was because we were getting older and because of the liability issues.⁴⁶⁴

Gayly Oklahoman (Oklahoma City, OK) September 15, 1991 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2.

⁴⁶³ Joe Stephens (Artist) in discussion with the author, July 16, 2015.

⁴⁶⁴ Dylan Scott (Senior Program Officer) in discussion with the author, March 17, 2015.

In the early nineties the black and white parties were restarted and renamed the Black and White Charities. They were open to all residents in the community and also held their own black tie dinners that helped to raise money for the HIV/AIDS community.⁴⁶⁵

Later Responses:

An Army of Organizations

Other efforts of community members and residents were provided by an array of diverse groups. By 1988 the Oklahoma Health Department began a 24-hour 1-800

hotline to educate the public about HIV/AIDS. Three months later residents were flooding the hotline with calls requesting information about “AIDS transmissions, its symptoms, and how condoms are used.”⁴⁶⁶ Caremark Connection, a business that provided medical supplies to those living with AIDS, and Nutrico Buyers Club nutritional supplements (another business) existed in Tulsa by the late eighties and served those affected. In September of 1990, the city’s gay community formed its own ACT-UP chapter and held meetings, boycotts and protests demanding a greater



Illustration 60: Part of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in Tulsa, OK. Located at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center. Courtesy of Mootsey Photography.

⁴⁶⁵ David Aaronson (Real Estate) in discussion with the author, March 12, 2015.

⁴⁶⁶ Harry Livesay, “Health Department Starts 24-hour AIDS Hotline,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK) May 1988; Quote from Harry Livesay, “Oklahoma Callers Flood ‘800’ AIDS Line,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK) August 1988 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

response to the epidemic.⁴⁶⁷ Between November 30 and December 2, 1991, eight hundred panels of the NAMES Project Memorial Quilt were displayed at the city convention center opening the eyes of residents to the impact of the disease. Eventually, Tulsa had its own chapter of the NAMES Project and local volunteers created memorial panels to remember those who lost their lives.⁴⁶⁸ By October of 1993 Tulsa held its first AIDS Walk fundraiser and while only 50 walkers attended the event due to cold weather, they raised \$3,000 for area HIV/AIDS organizations.⁴⁶⁹

The Struggle for AIDS Education in Schools

A major development toward the end of the eighties was when legislators in Oklahoma pushed an amendment to mandate HIV/AIDS education in the state. However, it did not pass without its own struggles. The bill (HB 1476) was originally proposed by a former schoolteacher from Norman. According to Aaron Bachhofer:

... HB 1476 seemed broad enough to appease conservatives who prized home rule, and specific enough to appease those seeking to educate Oklahoma students about all aspects of AIDS, so [the bill writers] hoped [it] would sail through the capitol. Their initial optimism quickly gave way to the reality, and enormity, of what passing a bill like that would require. Not only did they have to craft the bill, work tirelessly to drum up support, but they had to educate many lawmakers about AIDS, as in many cases they were under-informed about essential facts associated with the disease. The debate over HB 1476 was intense. [The writers] introduced statistics issued by the OSHD that showed

⁴⁶⁷ “Nutrico International,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), September 1988 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1; “Caremark Connection,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), January 15, 1991; “ACT UP/Tulsa Continues Growth,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), October 15, 1990 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2.

⁴⁶⁸ “The Quilt Comes to Tulsa – A Personal View,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), January 15, 1991; “NAMES Project Begins Tulsa Chapter,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), May 1990 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2.

⁴⁶⁹ “Tulsa AIDS Walk,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), November 1, 1993 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2.

AIDS treatment would cost Oklahoma taxpayers over \$50 million annually by 1991, and that forty percent of those with AIDS were indigent. Moreover, teenagers would be the next high-risk group soon, so it made sense to educate them now, and heterosexuals would soon see a twenty-fold increase in HIV transmission statistics if trends did not subside through education. Republicans in both houses argued that the bill amounted to mandatory sex education, something they believed was a parental responsibility, and it would essentially teach and encourage adolescents to engage in sex. Worse yet, the bill would require discussion of homosexuality and homosexual practices in public schools, something they adamantly opposed, and might be viewed as condoning an immoral lifestyle... [An] anti-abortion activist... testified that AIDS education would not stop the spread of AIDS, just as sex education in Oklahoma had not prevented STD spread or unplanned pregnancies... In an obvious attempt to sink the bill, at one point during the debate Representative Mike Morris, a Republican from Ripley, introduced sections from a pamphlet called "Safe Sex Guidelines" he received from an anti-abortion group that detailed explicit sexual practices, and he tried to goad [the author] into reading passages aloud. The pamphlet, created by a San Francisco group, was obviously intended for adults, and would never be presented to students in Oklahoma schools in such a frank and demeaning way... House leaders sanctioned Morris and suggested that he apologize for his profane display....⁴⁷⁰

Eventually, the bill passed the House by a vote of 55-42. When it went to the Senate, modifications were made to the bill in order to get it passed such as: emphasizing abstinence, and explaining how the disease was transmitted: "... students must be told that [HIV] is most easily contracted through intravenous drug use, promiscuous sexual activity, and contact with contaminated blood." The bill mandated "that students would be taught about it between the seventh and ninth grades, and once between the tenth and twelfth grades, and parents had the right to examine course materials and to prevent their children from participating in the program..." Governor Bellmon, a supporter of the bill, signed it into law on April 25, 1987 but unfortunately, "the AIDS education act did not translate into immediate action, nor was it universally applied. The state

⁴⁷⁰ Bachhofer, "The Emergence and Evolution of the Gay and Bisexual Male Subculture in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma," 323-25.

legislature failed to fund the program annually, and the Oklahoma Department of Education rarely monitored the program with any diligence.”⁴⁷¹

A War With No End

Over time the epidemic proved to city residents that it was indiscriminate in its choice of victims regardless of demographic factors. While feelings of panic slowly dissipated, the stigma of the disease persisted into later years. The impact of the initial stages of the epidemic had profound effects on the national gay community. After wiping out almost a whole generation of gay elders (and many youth), the disease brought a return to more conservative views in the gay community. Sam recalled:

[Gay culture] didn't kind of shift, it radically shifted. It shifted towards what old normality [was] before [the 1970s]. It shifted back to [emphasizing] things like monogamy, more standard ethics, and norms and values found in the 1960s heterosexual society. That's what it was... It shifted back towards a hetero-society [social norms] because it was considered to be a safer society...⁴⁷²

The conservative change came swiftly, ushered in by appeals for help from a society for which the gay liberation movement had begun to critique in the former era. Some people viewed these changes as positive. For instance, according to Patrick O'Henry, a contributor to the *Gayly Oklahoman*:

Having recently attended the funeral of a friend who died of AIDS, it is hard to imagine anything positive that could be said about the dread[ed] disease. But there are several positive developments that I can think of. One positive factor is that the venereal disease rate among gays has dropped and safe sex is now being practiced by a large percentage of the gay community. By the same token there

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 325-27; “House Panel Votes to Require Education on AIDS,” *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), March 12, 1987; “AIDS Bill Passes after ‘Safe Sex’ Talk,” *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), March 18, 1987; “Senate Panel Oks AIDS Education Bill,” *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), April 7, 1987; “AIDS Education Required in Schools,” *Daily Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), April 25, 1987.

⁴⁷² Sam Goodson (Professor) in discussion with the author, August 8, 2014; Supported by Kenneth Wiley (Cosmetologist) in discussion with the author, August 6, 2015.

is increased emphasis within our community on seeking relationships and trying to make existing relationships work. AIDS has forced our community to re-evaluate its thinking about itself. There is much evidence that the heterosexual lifestyle [or culture] particularly the aspect of relationships in that lifestyle, is beneficial to the population. Such factors as married people living longer than single people points out the need for relationships. There is still another factor about AIDS that has helped our community. AIDS is forcing some of us, primarily its victims, to admit their homosexuality to the community, and to their friends and families. In other words it is forcing some of us out of our closets. If Rock Hudson had not contracted AIDS, do you suppose his homosexuality would ever have been as publicized as it was? I have no doubt that his admitting he had AIDS, even though he never admitted to being gay, has helped a lot of homosexuals deal with their closeted situations. Perhaps it has also changed the minds of many straight people who never could believe a hunk like Rock could love another man....⁴⁷³

The epidemic even changed how men socialized with one another. Beginning in the late 1980s, personals ads in the *Gayly Oklahoman* and meeting places around the city decreased in number, and phone-meeting services increased in popularity. By the early 1990s, there were phone lines where men could call and talk to others like themselves based on preference. Some ads advertised companionship, while others emphasized phone encounters. The fact that these ads took up multiple pages in the newspaper and the sheer numbers of them spoke to the fearful atmosphere of the period. Essentially, these lines provided men with safer ways to connect with one another without the risk of sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV.⁴⁷⁴ By the mid-nineties flickers of hope seemed to cast light on the horizon in the dark fight against the disease. New “cocktails” (or combinations) of multiple HIV/AIDS antiretroviral drugs began to

⁴⁷³ Patrick O’Henry, “Death Should Not Be Our Final Closet,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), March 1984 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1.

⁴⁷⁴ See Ads, *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), December 1990. For more examples see April 1988, August 1989, and July 1990 issues. Found at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1 and 2.

transform perceptions of the disease as a death sentence to a more manageable condition.⁴⁷⁵

Thus, the *war* came to Tulsa in diverse forms: through a disease caused by a virus, through ignorance, and also through messages of damnation by followers of a thriving Religious Right in the city. Yet, residents responded courageously by creating an arsenal of organizations to help fight against the epidemic. Although there were many who lost their battle against AIDS, the resilient gay community that emerged from the battlefield was much stronger, and they began to look toward the future with feelings of hope and determination.

⁴⁷⁵ “Thirty Years of HIV/AIDS: Snapshots of an Epidemic,” accessed: December 1, 2015, <http://www.amfar.org/thirty-years-of-hiv/aids-snapshots-of-an-epidemic/>

Postscript: *On Route 66*

The Road to Equality



Illustration 61: Tulsa skyline in 2015. *Courtesy of Mootsey Photography.*

This social and educational history ends with the HIV/AIDS era, but there would be notable positive changes that the community would face in future years.⁴⁷⁶ In the wake of a

decimating disease, the

focus of the national movement turned toward *legitimizing* gay people and fighting for civil rights within the existing social system (rights we learned were a priority during the epidemic years). The struggle for legitimization (rather than the differentiation of the gay liberation era) paved the way toward a new movement known as *The Equality Movement*. Since then, organizations that focus on lobbying for certain civil rights and protections such as marriage equality, adoption, and the creation of anti-discrimination laws have persisted.⁴⁷⁷

Hollywood and the film industry would help ease some of pain of earlier decades and point the way to progress. For instance, in 1997 Americans witnessed Ellen

⁴⁷⁶ Due to the fact that historical research typically does not approach the present day, this postscript runs roughly through 2006, but also covers some major legal struggles that have occurred more recently. It is hoped that work in the distant future will expand this work to the present day.

⁴⁷⁷ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 236-42. Most of the activism that occurred during epidemic era became focused on the disease, saving lives, and demanding the governments aid through organizations such as ACT UP and the Human Rights Campaign (1980).

DeGeneres come out of the closet on national television in her popular show *Ellen*, and the moment inspired discussions in American households on the topic of same-sex sexuality. In 1999 *Will & Grace* became the first television show to have gay characters that were central figures.⁴⁷⁸ In 2005, *Brokeback Mountain* (starring Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger) broke the hearts of citizens, as the plight of gay oppression became accessible to the public for just over a period of two hours in a movie theater.⁴⁷⁹ In general, the institutions of entertainment, medicine, and psychology began to ease the dominant heterosexual majority into accepting sexual minorities as groups not so different from themselves – and their cultural values. Also, the millennial generation of youth began to be told that they are just like everyone else – except with a different immutable *sexual orientation*.⁴⁸⁰

Some of the most provocative advancements would involve issues of legalizing and legitimizing same-sex sexuality and love. In 2003 the United States Supreme Court struck down archaic sodomy laws (*Lawrence v. Texas*) across the country that had been in place for half a millennia, and in 2004 Massachusetts became the first state to legalize same-sex marriage.⁴⁸¹ A ban on gay military service members (Don't Ask Don't Tell – or DADT) was repealed in 2011 and by the summer of 2015, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling of *Obergefell v. Hodges* went on to strike down marriage

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ *Brokeback Mountain* directed by Ang Lee and Annie Proulx. (2005; New York, NY: Scribner), DVD.

⁴⁸⁰ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 236-42

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

bans across the nation allowing for same-sex couples to attain marriage rights like their heterosexual peers.⁴⁸²

Finding a Seat at The Tulsa Table

The equality era would enable gay Tulsans to slowly find recognition at the community table in the city. These progressive changes were gradual in the nineties, but by the time the twenty-first century arrived, residents had built a strong and diverse community situated in the rolling hills of Green Country. They continued to grow and strengthen their organizations, create safe spaces for youth, and further explore their

differences and similarities. Ways to connect with others became safer as the years progressed and numerous options for socializing with others became available to area locals. In addition, the umbrella acronym LGBT

(Lesbian Gay, Bisexual and

Transgender) began to be used regularly to refer to people with same-sex sexualities.

Community Organizations

Throughout the next twenty-five years, Tulsa Oklahoman's for Human Rights would persist as the major organization serving the city's LGBT population. In 1996 the organization opened the first LGBT Community Center in the Brookside area of Tulsa.



Illustration 62: The Dennis R. Neill Equality Center in Tulsa, OK. Courtesy of Mootsey Photography.

⁴⁸² “Obama Signs ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Repeal,’” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), December 22, 2010; “Supreme Court Rules 5-4 to Lift Bans on Gay Marriage,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), June 26, 2015.

In 2000 the organization received major grants from the Collins Higgins and Gill Foundations and began a one million dollar fundraising capital campaign (known as the Pyramid Project) to purchase a permanent building. By 2005 community leaders attained an eighteen thousand square foot building in the downtown area and officially open their doors two years later. The organization was renamed Oklahomans for Equality (OKEQ), and the new center was dubbed the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center. OKEQ went on to become a cornerstone and spokesperson for the city's LGBT community offering residents numerous resources, education programs, a helpline, a large library, retail store, historical archives, meeting spaces, as well as serving as a second home to many community members and social groups.⁴⁸³

The organization would also become instrumental in coordinating LGBT Pride events in Tulsa. By 1997 leaders organized the first Pride march with sixty participants, and on June 12, 1999 the organization spearheaded the city's first Pride Parade with openly gay House Representative Barney Frank (D-Mass) as the first Grand Marshall. The events were a major milestone for the community and the parade became a new annual celebration.⁴⁸⁴

Youth and Education

Other efforts would bring about support for struggling LGBT youth in the city. By the early nineties, counselors at Youth Services of Tulsa organized a support group. While the group was not widely publicized out of fear of a backlash, young people

⁴⁸³ "History of TOHR," at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Dennis Neill Box*; "About us," *Oklahomans for Equality*, accessed: December 15, 2015, <http://www.okeq.org/about.html>

⁴⁸⁴ Randy Gentry (Architect) in discussion with the author, October 2, 2014; Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *First Gay Pride Parade Permit*, Unpublished document.

discovered information about the group in LGBT-related library books after counselors placed information cards about the meetings in their pages. There was also a youth helpline published in the city phone book.⁴⁸⁵ Eventually, another group (Open Arms Youth Project) formed by 2002 and made an array of support and recreational services available to struggling youth and their families, including Saturday night dances. These groups became a safe-haven for those youth who struggle to make sense of themselves.⁴⁸⁶

Also, some of those more liberated youth were inspired by the national organization GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) to form upwards of eighteen Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) and similar diversity groups at area schools.⁴⁸⁷ Essentially, groups such as these sought to offer students a safe and educational outlet and their youth activist leaders emerged to help spearhead the fight



Illustration 63: Club Majestic. Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

for acceptance and equitable treatment in area education systems. In fact, in 2001 Jenks High School students was protested by the Topeka-based Westboro Baptist Church, and in 2004 they returned after an

⁴⁸⁵ Sandy Peters (Counselor) in discussion with the author, August 2, 2015.

⁴⁸⁶ The author of this work began the Gay-Straight Alliance at Charles Page High School in Sand Springs, Oklahoma.

⁴⁸⁷ Debra Simpson (Ed. Admin.) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.

article was published in *The Washington Post* about progressive activism in Sand Springs schools, a suburb.⁴⁸⁸

Continued Social Differentiation

The equality era would also usher in unprecedented growth and further diversification. In 1990 (after over 150 years) LGBT Native Americans founded the Tulsa Two Spirit Society, a non-profit group that would “seek to affirm and embody positive traditional and modern Two Spirit identities” as valuable members of their communities. The organization educates the public, preserves their cultures, and provides advocacy. During the early nineties, a club for bike riders (known as the Spoke Club) became popular. Other new notable organizations also formed, including: Tulsa Area Prime Timers (1993), Council Oak Men’s Chorale (1997), Sooner State Rodeo Association (2000), the Imperial Court of Oklahoma (2007), Green Country Bears (2010), and The Tulsa Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence (2012). Those groups started during the former era of gay liberation grew, too. For instance, softball experienced renewed popularity, and the drag and leather communities continued to exist as a visible and active segment of the city’s gay community. They provide entertainment at local places and even have developed their own cultural norms. Finally, the transgender community began to emerge from the shadows and bring attention to issue of gender

⁴⁸⁸ Melissa George, “A Place to Belong,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK) April 27, 2001; Barbara Allen, “Protest helps student raise funds to end anti-gay bias,” *Tulsa World* (Tulsa, OK), May 25, 2001; Anne Hull, “In the Bible Belt, Acceptance is Hard-Won,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), September 26, 2004; The New York Times also did a story about being a gay middle school student in Sand Springs. See Benoit Deniet-Lewis, “Coming Out in Middle School,” *New York Times* (New York, NY) September 23, 2009.

identity, and a support group (the Gender Outreach Program) began to be held regularly at the Equality Center.⁴⁸⁹

Connecting with One Another

Options for socialization would greatly expand into the twenty-first century. By the early nineties a new newspaper serving the Tulsa gay community emerged called the *Tulsa Family News*. Later, with the popularity of the Internet, men began to meet and network with one another in chat rooms and found romance through online personals. Such outlets provided a means for those more fearful men to connect with

others like themselves in

safer environments. In

addition, bars continued to

be popular such as new

places like *The Silver Star*

Saloon, Tops, Concessions,



Illustration 64: The Tulsa Eagle. Courtesy of the Authors Collection.

⁴⁸⁹ Tulsa Two Spirit Society, accessed: December 20, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/Tulsa-Two-Spirit-Society-164444053595892/info/?tab=page_info; “OK SPOKE CLUB,” *Gayly Oklahoman* (Oklahoma City, OK), October 15, 1990 located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2; “Brief History of Council Oak Mens Chorale,” *Council Oak Mens Chorale*, accessed: December 21, 2015, <http://www.counciloak.org/about-us>; “Sooner State Rodeo Association,” accessed: December 21, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/Sooner-State-Rodeo-Association-278654505586262/>; “Our History,” *The Imperial Court of All Oklahoma, Inc.*, accessed: December 21, 2015, <http://www.impcourtok.org/about-us>; “Welcome to the Green Country Bears Cyber Cave,” *Green Country Bears*, accessed: December 21, 2015, <http://www.greencountrybears.com/>; “The Tulsa Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence,” *The Abbey of the Light of Joy*, accessed: December 21, 2015, <http://www.thetulsasisters.org/>; “Transgender Resources and Support,” *Oklahomans for Equality*, accessed: December 21, 2015, <http://www.okeq.org/transgender-support.html>

CW's, and *the PlayMor Lounge*.⁴⁹⁰

By the 2000s new places would re-emerge in the downtown area after renewed development in the Brady Arts District. *Club Majestic* (a high energy mixed-gender dance club) and *Club 209* (the first non-smoking lounge) would be two of the bars that would become particularly popular. The visibility of these places allowed for even more bridges to be built with the heterosexual community (who also would have nightlife spots in the area). Other notable places were still located outside of downtown like *Club Mavericks* (country and western bar) and later, the *Tulsa Eagle* opened and became particularly popular among the bear and leather communities. The *New Age Renegade* persisted as a gay institution of social life and became known for its theatrical productions, and the *Bamboo Lounge* continued to serve the Tulsa gay community at the same location after over half a century of operation.⁴⁹¹

An Evolving Future

Men with same-sex sexualities would eventually look back and reflect upon the numerous ups and downs that they (and their forefathers) have experienced over the past 150 years. They have struggled to emerge from the shadows over the years, but have begun to be viewed by the public as an oppressed minority of human beings. They have built a uniquely formed and diverse community of LGBT-folk situated in the Bible

⁴⁹⁰ Oklahoma Historical Society Archives, Newspaper Catalog, *Tulsa Family News* 12/01/1993-07/31/1999, Roll No. 27,805-3008; Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2; B. F., *Memories: A History of Gay Bars, Clubs, and Friendly Establishments in Tulsa, Oklahoma Late 1940-2014* located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, Unpublished Document.

⁴⁹¹ Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2; B. F., *Memories: A History of Gay Bars, Clubs, and Friendly Establishments in Tulsa, Oklahoma Late 1940-2014* located at Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Archives, Unpublished Document.

Belt of America: One that reflects the diverse values of the many groups that make up the mosaic of boomtown Tulsa. While their future is a journey to an unknown destination down the historic Route 66, one thing that is certain is that they aren't going



Illustration 65: Sunset on the Arkansas. *Courtesy of the Authors Collection.*

anywhere, they will persevere, and they are here to stay for the ride!

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Appendix A
Primary Sources

Dennis R. Neill Equality Center Finding Aid – Archives Contents

1. *24 Hollinger Boxes (15.25"x5"x10.25") = 10.008 Linear ft.*⁴⁹²

Box Labels:

LGBT History Project

Tulsa Leather

Oklahoma in the News

Pride Center Groups

Flyers

Religious Groups

Demographics

Members

Tulsa AIDS Walk/Run

Surveys

Youths

Arts

Political

Crisis Intervention

Speakers

Visitors

Southwest Invitational

Community Hero

Pyramid Project

The Star

PFLAG

Newsletters

Other History Projects

2. *13 Hollinger Boxes (11"x17") = 11.921 Linear ft.*

Box Labels:

OHR Reporter

Community Relations

Transgender

Fundraising

Follies

TOHR History Project

Legal

Helpline

Human Rights

Hope/Shanti

HIV/AIDS

Tulsa CARES

⁴⁹² Some of these Hollinger boxes listed are more full than others.

3. *Two 11 ½" x 12" Binders = 0.5 Linear ft.*

Binder Labels:

Rural Men

TOHR Board Minutes

4. *Newspapers Housed in Archive:*

The Gayly Oklahoman (Full set): November 1983 – Present

- *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 1

- *Gayly Oklahoman*, Box 2

Metro Star (Full set): 1990s – Present

TOHR Reporter: 1990s – Present

5. *Unmarked or Unsorted Boxes* (16 - 24" x 15" x 10" Boxes = 20 Linear ft.)

- Dennis Neill Box

6. *Multimedia* (2 Boxes 6.5" x 1" x 4": 0.666 Linear ft.)

- Photos & Slides

7. *Scrapbook* (4 Linear ft.)

8. B. F., *Memories: A History of Gay Bars, Clubs, and Friendly Establishments in Tulsa, Oklahoma Late 1940-2014*, Unpublished Document.

9. First Pride Permit (Framed Document)

Other Archived Materials

1. *Tulsa Library Annex (Filing Cabinets under "Annex Adult Reference")*

- Newspaper articles found in "GLBT Tulsa" Vertical File, Tulsa Library Annex
- Newspaper articles found in "GLBT Oklahoma" Vertical File, Tulsa Library Annex

2. *The Tulsa Historical Society (Located in the Vertical Files)*

- S., Dick. *Looking back on the bars: A brief history*. Unpublished document.
- T., Tim. *Flash From the Past*. Unpublished document.

3. *ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives (Los Angeles, California)*

- Mattachine Society Project Collection, Box: 7:11.

4. *Beryl Ford Collection*. Tulsa City-County Library, <http://tulsalibrary.org/bfc>

Other Newspapers

1. *The Tulsa World* (See Bibliography)

2. *The Tulsa Tribune* (Microfilm Located at the Tulsa City-County Library Annex)

3. *The Daily Oklahoman* (See Bibliography)

4. *Tulsa Family News* (Located at the Oklahoma Historical Society)

5. *The Tulsa Star* (See Bibliography)

Tulsa County Courthouse Criminal Index Records*

Year	Name	Case #
1913	Rogers, Joe	DC997
1914	Eubanks, R. L.	SC427
1914	Hawkins, Frank	888
1914	Rogers, Joe	367
1915	Eubanks, R. L.	579
1923	Harvey, James	2911
1926	Hall, B. O.	3633
1926	Melton, W. R.	3870
1926	Adams, Wm.	8916
1926	Melton, W. R.	9950
1927	Adams, Wm.	3760
1927	Combos, Joe	3974
1927	Combos, Joe	10852
1927	Coker, E.	12181
1927	Hampton, Otto.	12181
1928	Long, Jack	4342
1928	Doe, John	14907
1928	Doe, John	14908
1928	Long, Jack	13536
1929	Brown, Tandy	4761
1929	Brown, Tandy	16690
1930	Genro, James	5033
1932	Red Cloud, Bob	5791
1934	Holmes, Johnnie	6778
1935	Maiden, O.S.	7255
1936	Blevins, Sam	7706
1936	Edwards, Willie	7599
1936	Smith, John	7817
1936	Smith, John	7818
1937	Caley, Douglas	8237
1937	Caley, Douglas	8241
1937	Pennington, R. T.	8253
1939	Bailey, Leo	9534
1939	Brasher, Charles	9498
1939	Crister, Elmer	9536
1939	Dignan, Dan	9535
1939	Dignan, Dan	9423
1939	Outlaw, Ed.	9340
1940	A., Bill	9599
1940	D., James	10035

1940	E., Davis	10035
1941	B., W. H.	10598
1941	C., A. L.	10578
1941	C., A. L.	10552
1941	E., William	10319
1941	E., Willie	10320
1942	F., Jack	10961
1942	L., Bess	10711
1942	M., Virgil	10842
1942	M., Robert A.	11098
1943	R., Raymond H.	11427
1944	L., Robert Claud	11906
1945	B., Theodore "Alias"	12258
1945	C., Rex Eugene	12124
1945	H., Richard C.	12055
1945	S., Lester J.	12022
1946	A., Karl	12165
1946	A., Karl	12193
1946	B., George Franklin	12497
1946	G., George S.	12460
1946	H., A. M.	12603
1946	H., James	12664
1946	M., James E.	12491
1947	K., Gene	13016
1947	M., Ray	12949
1947	M., Will	13027
1948	C., C.V.	13339
1948	C., Harold	13263
1948	F., Willard Sam	13424
1948	M., John L.	13341
1949	A., Raymond E.	13026
1949	J., Alfred E.	13593
1949	K., James	13873
1950	B., Vertis A.	14285
1950	C., C.V.	14434
1950	C., Clifford C.	14257
1950	E., James Cliftes	14421
1950	H., T. Ester	14321
1950	H., Ray	14402
1950	H., Ray	14400
1950	M., Melvin	14438
1950	M., Leon	14433
1951	C., Lindy B.	14825

1951	M., John Joseph	14825
1951	M., Homer	14838
1952	D., Lawrence	15074
1952	R., Bob	15077
1954	H., Bobby Lee	15753
1954	M., Earl	16025
1954	M., Earl	16026
1954	P., Ranson E.	15783
1955	G., Denny	16555
1955	G., Robert	16556
1955	H., M.C.	16182
1955	K., Horace L.	16191
1955	K., Horace L.	16192
1955	M., Fred	16563
1955	M., Fred	16564
1955	S., Chester Franklin	16609
1956	A., Lee Burd	16836
1956	C., Richard	16837
1956	D., Ollie Ray	16678
1956	M., David Frank	16565
1956	M., David Frank	16566
1956	M., David Frank	16567
1956	S., Gene Alfred	16745
1956	T., Bernal Jack	16610
1956	T., Bernal Jack	16611
1956	T., Bernal Jack	16612
1958	B., Benjamin E.	17861
1958	H., Jack	17543
1958	T., Lonnie	9324
1958	T., Lonnie	9325
1959	D., Kenneth Ray	18315
1959	S., Phil Eugene	18302
1959	W., Daryl	18304
1960	F., Donald	18728
1960	M., Donnie	18729
1961	D., Doyle Clark	18914
1961	R., Jack Clark	19008
1961	S., David Robert	18910
1961	L., Earl Williams	19186
1962	C., Joe	19693
1962	C., Joe	19694
1962	G., David Phillip	19493
1962	G., James Gregory	19687

1962	H., James Gregory	19688
1962	M., Ronald Role	19672
1963	B., Roby Jr.	20245
1963	B., Charles	19847
1963	G., Homer George	20019
1965	B., Tommy	21533
1965	B., Tommy	21603
1965	C., Donnie Wayne	21504
1965	C., Donnie Wayne	21455
1965	C., Obie Jr.	21206
1965	D., Lonnie	21453
1965	D., Charles	21241
1965	D., Charles	21243
1965	D., Charles	21488
1965	D., Roger	21456
1965	K., Clayton James	21504
1965	L., Edgar	21300
1965	L., Alber Gene	21309
1965	M., Larry	21601
1965	M., Fred H. Jr.	21372
1965	P., Donnie Wayne (Alias)	21455
1965	P., Donnie Wayne (Alias)	21504
1965	T., John	21454
1966	W., Donald Artwell	22260
1967	B., Lewis	22771
1967	L., James	22770
1967	P., Reginald	22644
1967	R., Bobby Dee	22850
1967	T., Robert Ellis	22786
		CRF-69-
1968	B., Theodore	1772
		CRF-69-
1968	H., Earl	2022
		CRF-69-
1968	L., Walter Joseph	70
		CRF-69-
1968	L., Ralph	2022
		CRF-69-
1968	M., Johnnie Ray	1894
		CRF-69-
1968	M., Tommy	2022
		CRF-69-
1968	P., Edwin	2022
1968	P., Dewell	23528

1968	P., Dewell	23529
1968	P., Dewell	23530
		CRF-69-
1968	P., William B.	1737
		CRF-69-
1968	P., Wayne	1737
		CRF-69-
1968	S., John Arthur	1208
		CRF-69-
1968	W., Willard	1738
		CRF-70-
1969	H., Joe Earl	136
1923	Doe, John	147
None		
Listed	R., Nathaniel	10486
None		
Listed	U., William	6484
None		
Listed	V., Carl Edward	13341
None		
Listed	W., W. M.	11149
None		
Listed	W., R. G.	8338
None		
Listed	W., Dan Earl	14321
None		
Listed	W., Robert	12981
None		
Listed	Y., Oscar Martin	15317

*These indexes are public records and are located on the second floor of the Tulsa County Courthouse in the Court Clerks office, Criminal and Traffic Division. The cases listed here are for the crime of sodomy. A manual search of the records was conducted to attain this list. Even though criminal cases are public domain in Oklahoma, the last names from the 1940s forward have been abbreviated using the last initial to provide a sense of anonymity for those arrested.

Appendix B

Oral History Questions

Note: These are general questions. Probes will be asked depending on the responses of the participants and all questions may not be asked.

Pseudonym:

Date of Interview:

Optional Demographic Questions

Age:

Gender:

Race/Ethnicity:

Occupation:

Sexual Orientation:

Religious Affiliation/Denomination:

Questions about the Interviewee

1. Tell me about you _____. Where did you grow up in Tulsa? Or move to Tulsa?
2. How did you learn about the gay community or what was your earliest memory of it?
3. How did others learn about the gay community that you can remember? Mentorship?

Decade Specific Questions

4. What was life for someone with a same-sex sexuality during specific decades? (Ask about specific decades.)
5. What was it like to be a man with a same-sex sexuality during these periods: (Tulsa Race Riot, World War II, Period of McCarthyism, the 1960s/70s, HIV/AIDS)
6. Were there any defining or influential people, moments, or events that you can remember in Tulsa?

7. Do you ever remember hearing stories from other men about decades before you experienced the community? What were they? Why were they memorable?
8. How were men in Tulsa viewed by others during this period? Do you have any stories?
9. How were other groups in the umbrella viewed? Lesbians? Bisexuals? Transgender? Races/Ethnicities?
10. Were there stereotypes or trends that existed within the gay community during specific decades?
11. What was considered normal behavior back then outside of the gay community? What was considered proper? What was viewed as deviant?
12. Do you remember any particular figures or groups that were anti-gay during this period? Did you ever hear about or see violence? Explain.
13. Did you ever see or hear of discrimination or hate crimes? Explain.

Questions on Spaces/Places

14. Where did men with same-sex sexualities go or congregate during (specific periods)?
15. Did you ever visit or hear about other cities or places? What were these experiences like when compared to Tulsa's gay community?
16. Were there any gay-friendly parts of Tulsa or the surrounding area? Explain.
17. How did a guy meet other guys like himself during this period? Was there a gay 'area' in Tulsa? Was there ever?
 - Were there any bars, parks (Turkey Mountain or Lookout Mountain?), or other places (Discoveryland)?
 - Do you remember the *Fruit Loop*? Explain.

- Did Tulsa ever have a “strip” similar to Oklahoma City? Did you ever go to Oklahoma City? How did it compare to Tulsa in your opinion?

18. What were the bars that were popular for men back then?

- Do you remember any raids by police in those bars?
- Where did gay men in Tulsa go if they wanted to meet other men? Cruising?

Cultural Questions

19. How did gay men refer to themselves back then? How were they referred to by heterosexuals? Were there any derogatory terms?

20. Was there non-verbal communication between gay men when they’d cross paths during this time? Cruising? Eye gaze? Gaydar? Explain.

21. Were there any newspapers or publications for men with same-sex sexualities?

22. Do you remember any gay friendly, symbols, or colors (or flags)?

23. Was there ever a gay slang during this period? What were some of the words used then and what did they mean?

24. What were any anti-gay words used at this time?

Questions about HIV/AIDS

25. Do you remember when you first heard about HIV/AIDS? Where were you/how did you find out about it? What did you think? What did others think? Explain.

26. How did the Tulsa gay community view HIV/AIDS during this time?

27. What did the gay community in Tulsa call HIV before the term was coined?

28. What was gay Tulsa’s response? What was the response of the heterosexual Tulsa community? Were there any community organizations that helped?

29. How do you think people viewed HIV/AIDS then versus now?

Questions about Subcultures

30. Do you remember a presence of the leather community, bear community, or drag community? Others?

- If so, when do you first remember this community showing up in Tulsa?
- What was that particular community like then vs. now? Places/congregate?

31. How was this community viewed by the rest of the mainstream gay community?

32. How were you treated in the gay community? Outside the gay community? Stories?

Questions about Activist Organizations

33. Do you remember any activist/political organizations (OHR, TOHR, OKEQ, others?) this time in the gay community? What did they stand for?

34. How were these organizations received by the gay community? The heterosexual community?

35. Is there anything else that you would like to share that we have not covered?

Appendix C Participant Demographics

Number	Pseudonym	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Occupation	Religious Affiliation
1	Lewis Brady	84	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Retired Kitchen Planning Consultant	None Listed
2	Fred Madrid	83	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Retired	Universal
3	Moses Silverman	82	Caucasian	Male	“?”	Retired Attorney	Jewish
4	Bart Baxter	69	Caucasian	Male	Gay/Bisexual	Adjunct Instructor	Fellowship Congregational, United Church of Christ
5	James Smith	67	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Postal Worker	Protestant
6	David Aaronson	55	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Realtor	Jewish
7	Peter Poppins	65	White/Cherokee	Male	Gay	Florist	Spiritual
8	Steve Sanders	56	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Interior Decorator	None Listed
9	Dylan Scott	63	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Senior Program Officer	Unitarian
10	Sam Goodson	57	Caucasian/Native American	Male	Gay	Professor	Baptist
11	Joseph Washington	65	African American	Male	Gay	Artist/Teacher	None Listed
12	Terry Landers	56	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Disabled	Spiritual
13	Carl White	55	White	Male	Gay	Sp. Event Coordinator	Christian
14	Debra Simpson	79	Caucasian	Female	Straight	Ed. Admin.	None Listed
15	Sandy Peters	53	Caucasian	Female	Straight	Counselor	None Listed
16	Joe Stephens	61	White	Male	Homosexual	Artist	Unitarian
17	Kenneth Wiley	79	White	Male	Homosexual	Cosmetologist	Unitarian
18	Randy Gentry	49	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Architect	Methodist
19	Daniel Childers	56	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Design Work/Instructor	None Listed
20	Adam Livingston	50	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Social Worker	None Listed
21	Jerry Stone	53	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Remodeler	Congregation
22	Eugene Dibbs	62	White	Male	Gay	Graphic Designer/Anesthesia Tech.	Spiritual
23	Doug Davis	67	Caucasian	Male	Straight	Finance	Christian
24	Follow Up: Fred Madrid	83	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Retired	Universal
25	Dustin Florence	29	Caucasian	Male	Gay	Educator	Jewish

Appendix D Institutional Review Board Letters



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Approval of Initial Submission – Expedited Review – AP01

Date: June 19, 2014

IRB#: 4401

Principal Investigator: Brenton Wimmer, BS

Approval Date: 06/19/2014

Expiration Date: 05/31/2015

Study Title: An Educative History of the Gay Male Community of Tulsa, OK

Expedited Category: 6 & 7

Collection/Use of PHI: No

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and granted expedited approval of the above-referenced research study. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lara Mayeux'.

Lara Mayeux, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board



Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Continuing Review – Expedited Review – AP0

Date: May 08, 2015 **IRB#:** 4401

Principal Investigator: Brenton Wimmer, BS **Approval Date:** 05/08/2015
Expiration Date: 04/30/2016

Expedited Category: 6 & 7

Study Title: An Educative History of the Gay Male Community of Tulsa, OK

Based on the information submitted, your study is currently: Active, open to enrollment. On behalf the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and approved your continuing review application. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
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- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

You will receive notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date noted above. You are responsible for submitting continuing review documents in a timely fashion in order to maintain continued IRB approval.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lara Mayeux'.

Lara Mayeux, Ph.D.

Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board