

Portland State University
PDXScholar

Young Historians Conference

Young Historians Conference 2018


Apr 18th, 9:00 AM - 10:15 AM

The Rise of Gay Culture and Why Portland is Different

Lucas Y. Morimoto
Lakeridge High School

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/younghistorians>

 Part of the [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Morimoto, Lucas Y., "The Rise of Gay Culture and Why Portland is Different" (2018). *Young Historians Conference*. 9.
<https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/younghistorians/2018/oralpres/9>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Young Historians Conference by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

THE RISE OF GAY CULTURE AND WHAT MAKES PORTLAND DIFFERENT

Lucas Y. Morimoto

Dr. Karen E. Hoppes
HST203: History of the United States
Portland State University
March 11, 2018

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

THE RISE OF GAY CULTURE AND WHAT MAKES PORTLAND DIFFERENT

The start of the 20th century marked a new chapter in America’s history. With the greater industrialization of the American landscape and a shifting of the population to more compact, urban areas there allowed for the intermingling of different types of people. This type of environment allowed for the easier coalition of social organizations. One minority group that greatly benefitted from this urban environment was the LGBT community, a community that previously did not have the word “gay” to stand on and to the common person, was unknown to exist.

Portland, Oregon, in the present day, can be considered one of the most gay-friendly cities in the country, ranking among other well-known metropolis’s such as Seattle, San Francisco, and New York. However, almost half a century ago in 1970, Portland was far behind other cities in terms of homophile activism. There was a lack of organization through the bars and clubs characteristic of other movements, as well as a seeming lack of motivation. Police did not perform the same amount of maintenance raids on Portland’s bars as they did in other cities, as Roy Bouse, president of the Second Foundation, said: “it is hard to get the backing of the gays...They’ve never been hassled, so it is hard to explain to these people that there is a

1 problem.”¹ This did not mean, however, that raids never happened, as Norm Costa in his oral
2 history suggested that the “harbor club” as he calls it, “was never bothered by the police, they
3 must have paid pretty well. And in the tavern they’d come and pull you off the bar stool and
4 roust you every once in a while.”² Just as anywhere, Portland needed activism. Portland’s gay
5 community was experiencing just as much prejudice and oppression as any other, the police
6 often simply did not hassle the patrons of gay bars as to keep all the “deviants” in the same place
7 in order to more easily keep an eye on them. To investigate how in less than half a century
8 Portland became a gay metropolis, certain base knowledge must be established of the time
9 leading up to the electric events of the 1970s, but perhaps more importantly, the responding
10 activism of other cities, and whether or not they influenced Portland’s eventual movement.

11 It is no secret that gay and lesbian culture had, until the late 20th century in America, been
12 mostly hidden. The sexual nature of these men and women was largely kept to simple unspoken
13 love affairs. The 1920s allowed for a greater amount of freedom to those who were living in
14 large cities, particularly New York City. The freer social norms allowed for a homosexual
15 underground, and there existed a pervasive attitude among young people that breaking the law
16 was “the thing to do”. There were many establishments in Harlem that with a large black
17 population, contained a freedom of community and self-expression that seemed attractive to gay
18 men and women. These establishments, secretive as they were and flashy in nature, facilitated
19 the rise of early “Bohemian” gay culture. The 1930s, too, was a time in which homosexual

¹ Peter Boag, “Does Portland Need a Homophile Society?” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 105: 1 (2004), 35.

² Norm Costa, interview by Stephanie Munly and Ruben Reynaga, 13 November 2000, Portland, OR, tape recording, accessed 1 March 2017; available from <https://digitalcollections.ohs.org/oral-history-interviews-with-norm-costa-sound-recording-01>; Internet.

1 behavior was, in very specific circumstances, tolerated. For those in the military during World
2 War II, homosexual behavior was attributed as one of the many vices that soldiers were forgiven,
3 greater emotional connection between those of the same gender too was forgiven on the basis of
4 war-time stress.³ Despite all this, it was not until the 1950s that gay activist and homophile
5 organizations began to emerge in America, and not until the late 1960s and 1970s that these
6 organizations were able to come into greater public view.⁴ The 1920s and 1930s simply
7 represented enough freedom for gays and lesbians to be allowed casual sexual interaction,
8 nothing more. The events in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, forced gay activism into
9 the forefront of popular view. To many historians aiming to cover the modern history of gay
10 activism in America, there are two distinct eras: the time preceding June 27, 1969, and the time
11 to follow. Such a distinct punctuation of the two eras was due to the events on June 27 and the
12 weeks to follow at the Stonewall Inn in New York City.

13 Pre-1969, homophile organizations largely worked as small organizations, and there was
14 little coordination between the groups. The leaders were also notorious for having conflicting
15 interests with each other: Shirley Willer, the president of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first
16 lesbian rights organization in America, found Clark Polak and Guy Strait, other gay political
17 leaders to be, “brash and brassy... a living symbol of all that is wrong with the movement.”⁵ On
18 the east coast there existed a collective of organizations known as ECHO, or the East Coast
19 Homophile Organizations, which represented the majority of homophile work being done in that

³ Taken from an interview from the 1985 documentary: *Before Stonewall*. Directed by Greta Schiller.

⁴ The Mattachine Society, founded in 1950, was one of the earliest homophile organizations in the United States and it was the first to be exclusively dedicated to that cause.

⁵ Martin B. Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York City: Dutton Press, 1993), 149.

1 region. Though they were technically united under the title of “ECHO”, it was evident that the
2 leaders had little intention of cooperating, this was displayed when Dick Leitsch, the president of
3 the Mattachine Society, stated that he opposed the “breast-beating, navel-contemplating and
4 smugness that characterized ECHO meetings.”⁶ Many of the self-proclaimed proponents for gay
5 rights also opposed to any sort of committal policy for the betterment of gay peoples. February
6 1966, a conference of east coast homophile organizations was held, many of the speakers there
7 voted in opposition to the establishment of a national organization. Furthermore, when Clark
8 Polak pressed for the organization to make a statement that “homosexuality ‘must be considered
9 as neither a sickness, disturbance [nor] neurosis,’ some delegates thought the matter best left to
10 ‘experts’ in mental health.”⁷ In the late 1960s, before the events of Stonewall, the unorganized
11 and submissive policies of homophile organizations seemed to be making little impact. By the
12 end of the 1960s there were numerous people that desired the movement to shift towards a more
13 militant stance. By 1969 this had become more of a viable option as there was already rapid
14 social changes being made via militancy by other social organizations. The United States was in
15 an ugly and long-lasting war with Vietnam, Martin Luther King Jr was assassinated, and the
16 assassination of Robert Kennedy seemed to be the absolute end for peaceful domestic reform.
17 Militancy in activism became the usual, with the rise of groups such as the Black Panthers; black
18 students took over Cornell University administration offices while brandishing rifles; feminists
19 invaded the Miss America pageant, and incidents of arson and violence were commonplace. It
20 was not long until the militancy characteristic of seventies-era activism caught up with the gay
21 rights movement.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 147-148.

1 It had always been routine for the police to raid gay bars and to make arrests on patrons
2 and employees, and the management of the Stonewall Inn had come to expect them about once a
3 week. Routine raids often ended with nothing more than police barging in and looking sternly at
4 patrons. Raids were tipped off to the Stonewall management ahead of time and did little if
5 anything to damage the business of the Inn. This was because the Stonewall was a mafia run bar,
6 and the payments that the Mob made to the local police force as tribute allowed the Inn to be
7 relatively safe. However, the events of June 27, 1969 were anything but routine: The raid was
8 carried out by eight of New York's First Division detectives. Inspired by the federal agents of the
9 Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the raid was planned without the knowledge of the
10 local police force. The police met with a surprising amount of resistance and quickly the patrons
11 began to turn to violence, the crowd morphed into a mob and people began to throw whatever
12 they could, whether that was bottles, coins, or trash. Craig Rodwell, a proponent for militancy in
13 gay activism was at the Inn to see it begin, realizing that this was the visibility that the gay rights
14 movement needed, he called up all three of New York's daily papers: the *Times*, the *Post*, and
15 the *News*. Then ran to his apartment to get his camera. The riot became so violent that the police
16 were forced to hide inside of the Inn. They were not used to this kind of anger and violence from
17 the people who they had previously known as "cowering gays."⁸ Eventually, the fighting ended,
18 but the story did not, all three of the dailies wrote about the melee, and the *News* put it as story
19 one. Local television and radio reported it as well, word spread all Saturday and protesters began
20 to write signs and slogans on the boarded front window of the Inn, "THEY INVADED OUR
21 RIGHTS, THERE IS ALL COLLEGE BOYS AND GIRLS HERE, LEGALIZE GAY BARS,

⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

1 SUPPORT GAY POWER.”⁹ This was the most publicity that any gay rights event had ever
2 received, and for the next week regular riots relating to gay rights, containing upwards of several
3 thousand people continued into the streets around the Stonewall Inn. These riots allowed for the
4 gay rights movement to become something more real to the public eye, allowing it to take part
5 with the other social movements of the day: “[Craig] told Leitsch [the leader of the Mattachine
6 Committee] that the events at Stonewall had opened up the opportunity for an alliance between
7 gays, blacks, and antiwar activists that could work to restructure American society”.¹⁰

8 The events of Stonewall paved the way for gay activism for the rest of the 20th century,
9 inspiring the organizations in other cities to take the visibility that they needed to make a change.
10 The movement became so well known that by 1978, San Francisco was able to put Harvey Milk,
11 an openly gay man, into office as one of the cities supervisors. Milk became a symbol of
12 progressiveness, not only for gay rights, but also for the welfare of the average person. As an
13 example, Milk sponsored a bill requiring dog owners to clean up after their pets. The number one
14 complaint about city life at the time was the prevalence of dog feces. By getting on the front
15 page over and over, he accomplished one of his biggest goals: educating the public as to the
16 normality of gay people: “All over the country, they’re reading about me and the story doesn’t
17 center on me being gay. It’s just about a gay person who is doing his job.”¹¹ Seattle, too was
18 able to take full advantage of the atmosphere of visible activism that Stonewall provided. Like
19 many urban centers containing gay bars, Seattle found a growing patronage and community in

⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹¹ Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York City: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 203-204.

1 these places starting around the 1950s. A community that did not exist in Portland during the
2 same time, “gay activists such as George Nichols denounced the Portland bars as impediments to
3 the formation of a political consciousness among the city’s lesbians and gays.”¹² By 1973,
4 Seattle passed anti-discrimination laws for gays and lesbians for both municipal and private
5 employment, and the homophile organizations that had already existed since the 1950s were able
6 to further grow in strength.

7 How, then, did Portland compare? In comparison to New York, San Francisco and
8 Seattle, it becomes more evident that Portland was far behind it’s contemporaries. In many of the
9 *Oregonian*’s articles circa 1970 discussion on the topic of homosexuality is greatly limited, aside
10 from passing remarks such as the one by Dr. Levine a professor of sociology discussing the
11 changing roles of women with Mary Jean, an active feminist: “Women can no longer find a
12 dominant, assertive man. It is true, of course, that a strong, compulsive woman will look for a
13 weak, submissive man. And they may call this love. They usually rear an effete and increasingly
14 homosexual young man.”¹³ Even on articles in which homosexuality was the main focus the
15 headlines were usually laced with prejudice such as another from 1973, “Dear Abby:
16 Homosexuality risked.”¹⁴ Portland would not find any leaders nor allies in politics, Portland had

¹² Peter Boag, “Does Portland Need a Homophile Society?” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, VOL. 105, no. 1 (2004), 8.

¹³ “Militant Feminist Organizations Pursue Total Equality For Women At Home, Work,” *the Oregonian*, CIX: 34,158 (January 30, 1970), sec. III, 29.

¹⁴ “Dear Abby: Homosexuality risked,” *The Oregonian*, CXXI: 35,058 (January 2, 1973), sec. I, 28.

1 no Harvey Milk to turn to. In fact, it was not until 1994 that Oregon elected it's first openly gay
2 representative, and not until 2009 that it would have it's first openly gay mayor.¹⁵

3 The basic level of discrimination that Portland, Oregon, and the rest of the country
4 suffered from was discrimination at the legal level. The prohibition of homosexual contact
5 through the explicit illegalization of "sodomy", and in some cases, eugenics laws targeted
6 towards homosexuals were the base-line that many homophile organizations had to work against.
7 Sodomy laws in the United States were largely determined at the State level. What qualified as
8 "sodomy", who could commit sodomy, and the punishments for sodomy were all determined at
9 the state level. Thus, the process of decriminalization of same-sex sexual intercourse in America
10 was a long process that started in the early 1960s and continued to even the 21st century.^{16 17}
11 Oregon was surprisingly one of the first (before New York in 1980 and before even California in
12 1976) to decriminalize as a result of legislative repeal in 1972. This small triumph, however,
13 meant little for the homophile movement in Portland, as they also had to fight for other legal
14 protections such as the anti-discrimination laws being passed in Seattle around the same time.¹⁸

¹⁵ George Eighmey, elected to the Oregon House of Representatives in 1994, was the first openly gay Oregon Representative. Sam Adams, elected into office 2009, became Portland's first openly gay mayor.

¹⁶ The first state to decriminalize same-sex sexual intercourse was Illinois in 1962. This was done through legislative repeal of their homosexual sodomy laws.

¹⁷ Same-sex sexual intercourse was finally decriminalized at the federal level in 2003 when the Supreme Court case, *Lawrence v. Texas* invalidated the sodomy laws in the remaining 14 states (Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Virginia), finding such laws to be unconstitutional.

¹⁸ It took Portland until the Fall of 1991, eighteen years after Seattle's equivalent of this law was passed, before job discrimination against gays and lesbians at both a private and municipal level was banned.

1 Portland, beyond even the technical constraints of law, suffered from a legacy of exceptionally
2 conservative and anti-gay policies and leaderships.

3 Possibly the most relevant influencer on the topic of homosexuality in Oregon before the
4 1970s was Portland Mayor Dorothy McCullough Lee. Lee at the time of her election into office,
5 was the first female mayor of Portland, and the second woman to serve as mayor of a major U.S.
6 city. “The forces of evil are pretty deep-seated in this city” as Lee said, in the late 1940s.

7 Portland was a city crawling with vice; illegally run bars, brothels, gambling halls, and gay clubs
8 were all part of Portland’s distinct underground culture. Lee embodied the spirit of the 1950s
9 and beginning January 1, 1949, she began her quest to “clean up” the city.¹⁹ By her second day
10 in office, she had appointed a new chief of police in Portland, Charles P. Pray, Lee was quoted
11 to have chosen the 70 year old retiree for the role because of his, “proven ability and integrity.”²⁰
12 Over the next couple of months, Pray raided several illegal Chinese gambling houses,
13 establishing with his officers and the public that each officer would be personally responsible for
14 responding to complaints, reemphasizing their “duty to make immediate arrests for any
15 violations of law committed in their presence.”²¹ Over the next couple years, Lee and Pray shut
16 down numerous burlesque houses, brothels, and gay clubs. These actions taken against
17 homosexuals were largely justified at the time, as Oregon newspapers in the 1950s portrayed
18 most all homosexuals as dangerous criminals, linking homosexuality with pedophilia, rape, and
19 murderer. The zero tolerance approach she took towards vice earned her the nickname “No Sin

¹⁹ The date that Dorothy McCullough Lee took office.

²⁰ “Mayor Lee Promises Free Hand,” *The Oregonian*, LXVIII: 1 (January 2, 1949), sec. X, 1.

²¹ “New Chief Abolishes Vice Squad,” *The Oregonian*, LXXXVIII: 27,527 (January 8, 1949), sec. IV, 1.

1 Lee”, and immortalized her in the collective memories of gay men and women in Portland. So
2 pervasive was her influence that in a several hour long oral history of Norm Costa, a gay man
3 that lived through this era, Lee was mentioned less than 6 minutes into the recording. In a
4 mocking tone, Costa rehearsed words that any gay man may have heard countless times, that
5 “she was going to clean Portland up of all vice, and everything else.”²² Her actions towards the
6 gay community along with the nation-wide scare, linking homosexuals with communists in the
7 1950s destroyed any sort of potential for homophile organizations in Portland for several
8 decades.

9 By the 1970s the topic of homosexuality had changed tones, the “threat” of
10 homosexuality was no longer on the forefront of the public’s mind in quite the same way. In
11 other cities, the influences of Stonewall and the following wave of gay rights movements may
12 have been at the very least known in the collective consciousness, but because of the events of
13 the 1950s, “homosexuality” in the early 1970s in Portland had two types of associations. The
14 first and most prevalent interpretation of homosexuality was as the subject of pity and shame.
15 Almost never in the title of articles nor headline of newspapers, but rather as a passing comment,
16 homosexuality was an illness as a result of improper parenting,²³ or the cause of trouble for a
17 saddened bride to a homosexual man,²⁴ it is in this circumstance that homosexuality is the cause
18 of gossip. The second understanding of homosexuality that can be seen from Portland’s

²² Norm Costa, interview by Stephanie Munly and Ruben Reynaga, 13 November 2000, Portland, OR, tape recording, accessed 1 March 2017; available from <https://digitalcollections.ohs.org/oral-history-interviews-with-norm-costa-sound-recording-01>; Internet.

²³ “Dear Abby...,” *The Oregonian*, CX: 34,169 (February 12, 1970), sec. II, 49.

²⁴ “Dear Abby...,” *The Oregonian*, CIX: 34,160 (February 2, 1970), sec. II, 22.

1 newspapers is the homosexual as the entertainer, a side character or something similar meant to
2 provide comedic relief, whether that is the “kooky homosexual”²⁵ from Broadway production
3 *Next*, or “a pathetic schizophrenic, homosexual boy”²⁶ in Frederick Wiseman’s documentary
4 *Hospital*. It was from this secondary understanding of gay men as symbols of entertainment that
5 the gay rights movement could find a foothold in Portland.

6 To see how the homophile movement could have come to the Rose City, attention may be
7 turned towards Walter Cole. Now 88, Cole, or more commonly known as “Darcelle XV” is
8 America’s oldest still performing drag queen. At the time, Cole was known for being the owner
9 of a local tavern similarly named “Darcelle’s”. For a time, this tavern was only known by those
10 who learned of it by word of mouth. In time, however, Darcelle’s would become one of the most
11 iconic locations in downtown Portland. It was not until 1977, when it first got recognition in *The*
12 *Oregonian*, that it was placed into public view. It’s first mention was during a short article
13 recounting the events of Portland’s annual “Pub Crawl” in which patrons went to several
14 different participating taverns during a single evening, a portion of the proceeds of that evening
15 going to a particular charity. Given a meager paragraph in the article, Darcelle’s was mentioned
16 as “the hottest place in town,”²⁷ with generally positive reviews of the patrons, though including
17 no indication of the homosexual nature of the tavern. After it’s initial reference, it seemed that
18 Darcelle’s slowly started to seep into mainstream consciousness as a year later, the tavern was

²⁵ “Author of Long-Running Off Broadway Comedy Ready To Make Screenwriting Debut,” *The Oregonian* (April 25, 1970), sec. I, 21

²⁶ “Wiseman Scores Again With ‘Hospital,’” *The Oregonian*, CIX: 34,148 (January 19, 1970), sec. II, 28.

²⁷ “In one ear: Pub Crawl lowdown adds up to fun for opera’s benefit...” *The Oregonian*, XCV: 22 (May 1, 1977), sec. I, 26.

1 referenced five separate times in *The Oregonian*,²⁸ and a year after that, was given its first
2 completely dedicated article, “Darcelle’s Impersonates Genuine Entertainment.”²⁹ The headline,
3 though seemingly made in mockery, is actually a strangely worded expression of praise. The
4 article was an immensely favorable review of the tavern, even going as far as promoting it to the
5 heterosexual masses: “Although the mass of society in town probably considers Darcelle’s a gay
6 bar, Cole emphasizes that his club appeals to more straight than gay people. ‘People can be very
7 apprehensive when they first come in, but after 15 minutes of the show, they realize it’s all in fun
8 and they relax and have a good time.’”³⁰ Cole does well in his comment, suggesting that his
9 tavern may be a good time for the heterosexual masses, as this inclusive outlook makes the
10 whole idea of a business run and owned by a flamboyantly gay man less threatening. Darcelle’s
11 was allowed to succeed because it fit in the entertainment role that homosexuals were portrayed
12 in. Unlike other gay bars that were exclusively for homosexuals and that served the sole purpose
13 of catering to homosexual clientele, Darcelle’s was racy enough to gain newspaper coverage, but
14 also tame enough as to not greatly offend the public.

15 After its first dedicated article in late spring of 1979, *The Oregonian* was not shy about
16 advertising the ever more frequent events and guest celebrities that Darcelle’s drew from across

²⁸ “Opera group set for annual Pub Crawl,” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,762 (April 14, 1978), sec. II, 17., “The people’s own corner; Not so gay,” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,768 (April 21, 1978), sec. VI, 38., “Crawler finds cause to carp,” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,771 (April 25, 1978), sec. IV, 48., “In one ear: Good luck charms desert Blazer fans in Seattle,” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,774 (April 28, 1978), sec. I, 31., “Theatrical party waits in wings for Portland,” *The Oregonian*, 128: 36,923 (October 20, 1978), sec. I, 22.

²⁹ “Darcelle’s impersonates genuine entertainment.,” *The Oregonian*, 129: 37,090 (May 4, 1979) sec. II, 77.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

1 the country. As Cole said, Darcelle's was greatly accessible to the heterosexual audience, for the
2 first time in Portland history, an establishment that advertised itself as being outwardly gay was
3 being celebrated. The large heterosexual patronage didn't exclude the fact, however, that Cole
4 and the character of "Darcelle XV" took immediate advantage of the publicity that he was
5 earning. The summer after the initial article was a busy one for Darcelle XV: mid-June,
6 Darcelle was invited for an interview to be aired Sunday morning on one of Portland's most
7 prominent radio stations: "'Lifestyles.' Host Steve Johnson interviewed female impersonator
8 'Darcelle' about his career and how society views his lifestyle."³¹ The very next day, *The*
9 *Oregonian* ran an article about how Darcelle's was hosting live performances with Christine
10 Jorgensen, American actress and first person to become widely known for having sex
11 reassignment surgery.³² From then on, every couple of months, Darcelle's hosted performances
12 by actors, singers, and celebrities who were either gay, or known for being activists for gay
13 rights, people like Michael Greer,³³ Sharon McNight,³⁴ Samantha Samuels³⁵ among others. The
14 popularity of Portland's most famous gay bar seems to correlate with the mentions of gay rights
15 in Oregon's newspapers. Early 1970s, the mention of "gay rights" in *The Oregonian* is almost
16 non-existent, and the few mentions are either laced with ridicule or confusion. Closer to the late

³¹ "RADIO HIGHLIGHTS," *The Oregonian*, 98: 29 (June 17, 1979), sec. II, 198.

³² "Jorgensen funny, intriguing," *The Oregonian*, 129: 37,128 (June 18, 1979), sec. II, 22.

³³ "Darcelle XV Productions Presents: Michael Greer," *The Oregonian*, 130: 37,314 (January 25, 1980), sec. VIII, 70.

³⁴ "Darcelle XV Productions Presents: Sharon McNight," *The Oregonian*, 130: 37,422 (May 30, 1980), sec. V, 40.

³⁵ "Melodic bass blends well with dinner mood," *The Oregonian*, 130: 37,545 (October 21, 1980), sec. I, 69.

1 1970s and throughout the 1980s, Oregon newspapers began to run stories of the movement's
2 actions in other cities, familiarizing Portland with the concept of gay rights. 1977,
3 Massachusetts Representative Elaine Noble gave a speech on gay rights and legislation at
4 Portland State University,³⁶ that same summer, Mayor Neil Goldschmidt designated June 25 as
5 Portland's first "Gay Pride Day", receiving intense backlash.³⁷ Fast forward a year at a time, and
6 it can be seen that as the decade ended, more pressure was being put on legislation for the
7 passing of gay rights laws, and as the 80s began, the topic of "gay rights" in Portland became an
8 increasingly hot issue. 1985, at the Lucille Hart Dinner, an annual fundraising event for gay
9 rights, Darcelle XV was honored with the Lucille Hart Award in front of a sellout crowd.³⁸ A
10 fitting award, as Darcelle's seemed to be the beacon for gay Portland, a haven not only for
11 LGBT peoples, but also a business able to get the attention of the heterosexual masses.

12 It may be presumptuous to assume that Darcelle's was the driving factor of the gay rights
13 movement in Portland; however, Darcelle's most definitely was the vehicle for it's publicity.
14 This tavern was the perfect representation for the health of the movement, if one desired to know
15 the strength of the gay rights movement in Portland, they need only look at the popularity of
16 Darcelle's. Through the early 1970s, the Portland area had a limited number of active homophile
17 organizations. One of the prohibitors being Portland's homosexual scare which linked "deviant"
18 acts with horrific crimes, and the specific local attention given by the Mayor and police chief in

³⁶ "Gay legislator hails Portland; day proclaimed," *The Oregonian*, 126: 36,514 (June 24, 1977), sec. I, 25.

³⁷ "Mayor gets flood of calls over gay day," *The Oregonian*, 126: 36,515 (June 25, 1977), sec. III, 8.

³⁸ "Metro Notes: Fund Dinner Success," *The Oregonian*, 135: 44,535 (October, 9 1985), sec. I, 58.

1 the 1940s and 1950s to squash any sort of homophile organizations that could have developed,
2 organizations that were in development in cities such as New York and Seattle. Portland further
3 suffered from the lack of a distinct gay bar culture, in the early 1970s. These bar cultures, while
4 seen as brash and disorganized, provided the needed gathering places for gay rights supporters in
5 other cities. The intense municipal attack on gay bars in the 40s and 50s stunted their initial
6 growth, the situation growing worse with a smaller municipal attack on gay bars in Portland in
7 1964.³⁹ Done under the Mayor-ship of Terry Schrunk, who, similar to Lee, wished to clean up
8 the gambling dens, brothels, and unlicensed bars of mid-20th century Portland. It's because of
9 Darcelle's growing popularity in the late 1970s that there was finally a positive beacon for gay
10 representation in the city. The tavern provided a large amount of the publicity needed to make
11 any sort of change, and also facilitated a haven for LGBT representation and activism unlike any
12 other in the city. New York had the Stonewall riots, gaining the publicity of the entire nation,
13 San Francisco had Harvey Milk gaining a place in office, Portland was fortunate enough to have
14 Darcelle's. The tavern not only helped familiarize Portland with the concept of homosexuality in
15 a positive light, and allowed a gathering place for gay rights activists, but further was allowed to
16 thrive as a legitimate business while doing so, as unlike many clubs in other cities, it was not a
17 place exclusive to homosexual men.

18 When comparing Portland's gay rights movement to the movements of other cities not
19 only did Portland begin to gain momentum much later than other cities, but Portland's movement
20 functioned in a method backwards to others of it's time. Portland's gay movement began in
21 entertainment, first normalizing the public with the idea of homosexuality, then moving on to
22 political activism as the years went on. Cities like New York or Seattle gained momentum first

³⁹ Boag, 27.

1 through overtly political means: riots, protest, and activism, only seeking acceptance once their
2 political goals had been achieved. Though homosexuality had gained a place in Portland's
3 entertainment, with Darcelle's providing a positive platform for homophile performers, opinion
4 of homosexuality outside of entertainment, and in the context of politics remained relatively
5 unfriendly. The plain fact that gay rights was gaining a place in Portland newspapers on a more
6 and more frequent basis, however, was the signal that homosexuality was no longer a taboo area
7 of discussion. Almost 8 months after Portland's first gay pride day in 1977, *The Oregonian's*
8 "DAY" section published a four-part series on the subject of gay rights and homosexuality.
9 From January 16 to January 19, 1978, the newspaper gave up entire pages to articles written
10 about aspects of the gay community that were previously unknown to many, articles on
11 privacy⁴⁰, gay marriage⁴¹, being gay as a teacher⁴², and religion⁴³, among others. The series also
12 talked about the vocal opposition that the gay rights movement was facing, whether it was from
13 religious officials or from the "Citizens United to Protect Our Children Committee"⁴⁴ in
14 Portland. This series for the first time in Oregon newspapers portrayed a sympathetic view of
15 gay rights and homosexuality as a whole. This series of articles suggests that in 1978 public
16 opinion on the topic was slowly changing. Once gay rights in Portland gained a foundation to

⁴⁰ "Homosexuals divided on whether to reveal lifestyle," *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,689 (January 16, 1978), sec I, 21.

⁴¹ "Portland men no longer hide their 25-year 'marriage,'" *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,690 (January 17, 1978), sec I, 29.

⁴² "Gay teachers stay secret to assure jobs," *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,691 (January 18, 1978), sec I, 45.

⁴³ "Church ministers to gay community," *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,692 (January 19, 1978), sec I, 31.

⁴⁴ "Rights battle breeds vocal opposition," *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,689 (January 16, 1978), sec III, 21.

1 stand on in the late 1970s and 1980s, (a foundation supplemented by Darcelle’s as an
2 entertainment and community figurehead) the path for political activism in Portland was already
3 largely paved by the movements of other cities, as it seemed that legal and occupational
4 protections were simply a matter of time.

5 The final chapter on how Portland became the “gay-friendly” city it is today lies in the
6 election of Mayor Sam Adams. May 20, 2008, Adam’s won the primary election with 58
7 percent of the vote, and January 1, 2009 he took office, becoming the first openly gay mayor of a
8 major American city. Adam’s was a “bread and butter” candidate, he focused on mainstream
9 issues: job creation, local businesses, economic development and the like. Unlike politicians
10 like Harvey Milk, he did not particularly put an emphasis on gay rights or diversity, and he never
11 really made an issue of his sexuality. In an interview with *The Oregonian*, he said “I don’t want
12 to be a gay mayor, I do want to be a great mayor. There is no gay pothole and no straight
13 pothole. They’re just potholes.”⁴⁵ Despite this, the fact of his sexuality was still politically
14 impactful. Adams served more as a symbol than anything, by being elected into office, he
15 demonstrated what was possible for a gay man to accomplish in 2008, just as how Milk
16 demonstrated what was possible in 1978, before he was murdered 11 months into his first term:
17 “If they knew nothing else about Sam as a candidate, they knew he was gay and that is a
18 powerful thing.”⁴⁶ By electing an openly gay mayor into office, Portland created for itself the
19 persisting image that it was a “gay-friendly” city. Adams saw his victory as a testament to

⁴⁵ Mark Larabee, “Sam Adams’ goal is to be ‘mayor of everybody,’” *The Oregonian*,
(accessed 11 March 2018); available from
http://www.oregonlive.com/news/index.ssf/2008/12/sam_adams_goal_is_to_be_mayor.html;
Internet.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

1 Portlanders' progressive values, and perhaps he was correct. The election of Mayor Sam Adams
2 served as an accumulation of all the social and political changes brought on by the gay rights
3 movements of the 1970s and 1980s, and the election of an openly gay man into office became
4 the symbolic final stage for Portland's transformation into the gay metropolis that it is known as
5 today.

6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10 BIBLIOGRAPHY
11
12
13

14 “Author of Long-Running Off Broadway Comedy Ready To Make Screenwriting Debut,” *The*
15 *Oregonian* (April 25, 1970) sec. I, 21

16
17 Boag, Peter. “Does Portland Need a Homophile Society?.” *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 105:
18 1 (2004).

19
20 “Church ministers to gay community” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,692 (January 19, 1978), sec I,
21 31.

22
23 Costa, Norm. Interview by Stephanie Munly and Ruben Reynaga, 13 November 2000, Portland,
24 OR. Tape recording, accessed 1 March 2017; available from
25 [https://digitalcollections.ohs.org/oral-history-interviews-with-norm-costa-sound-](https://digitalcollections.ohs.org/oral-history-interviews-with-norm-costa-sound-recording-01)
26 [recording-01](https://digitalcollections.ohs.org/oral-history-interviews-with-norm-costa-sound-recording-01); Internet.

27
28 “Crawler finds cause to carp.” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,771 (April 25, 1978), sec. IV, 48.

29
30 “Darcelle’s impersonates genuine entertainment.” *The Oregonian*, 129: 37,090 (May 4, 1979),
31 sec. II, 77.

32
33 “Darcelle XV Productions Presents: Michael Greer” *The Oregonian*, 130: 37,314 (January 25,
34 1980), sec. VIII, 70.

35
36 “Darcelle XV Productions Presents: Sharon McNight” *The Oregonian*, 130: 37,422 (May 30,
37 1980), sec. V, 40.

38
39 “Dear Abby...” *The Oregonian*, CIX: 34,160 (February 2, 1970), sec. II, 22.

40
41 “Dear Abby...,” *The Oregonian*, CX: 34,169 (February 12, 1970), sec. II, 49.

42
43 “Dear Abby: Homosexuality risked.” *The Oregonian*, CXXI: 35,058 (January 2, 1973), sec. I,
44 28.
45

1 “Gay legislator hails Portland; day proclaimed” *The Oregonian*, 126: 36,514 (June 24, 1977),
2 sec. I, 25.
3
4 “Gay teachers stay secret to assure jobs” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,691 (January 18, 1978), sec I,
5 45.
6
7 “Homosexuals divided on whether to reveal lifestyle” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,689 (January 16,
8 1978), sec I, 21.
9
10 “In one ear: Good luck charms desert Blazer fans in Seattle.” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,774
11 (April 28, 1978), sec. I, 31.
12
13 “In one ear: Pub Crawl lowdown adds up to fun for opera’s benefit...” *The Oregonian*, XCV: 22
14 (May 1, 1977), sec. I, 26.
15
16 “Jorgensen funny, intriguing” *The Oregonian*, 129: 37,128 (June 18, 1979), sec. II, 22.
17
18 Mark Larabee, “Sam Adams’ goal is to be ‘mayor of everybody,’” *The Oregonian*, accessed 11
19 March 2018; available from
20 [http://www.oregonlive.com/news/index.ssf/2008/12/sam_adams_goal_is_to_be_mayor.ht](http://www.oregonlive.com/news/index.ssf/2008/12/sam_adams_goal_is_to_be_mayor.html)
21 [ml](http://www.oregonlive.com/news/index.ssf/2008/12/sam_adams_goal_is_to_be_mayor.html); Internet.
22
23 Martin B. Duberman. *Stonewall*. New York City: Dutton Press, 1993.
24
25 “Mayor gets flood of calls over gay day” *The Oregonian*, 126: 36,515 (June 25, 1977), sec. III,
26 8.
27
28 “Mayor Lee Promises Free Hand” *The Oregonian*, LXVIII: 1 (January 2, 1949), sec. X, 1.
29
30 “Melodic bass blends well with dinner mood” *The Oregonian*, 130: 37,545 (October 21, 1980),
31 sec. I, 69.
32
33 “Metro Notes: Fund Dinner Success” *The Oregonian*, 135: 44,535 (October, 9 1985), sec. I, 58.
34
35 “Militant Feminist Organizations Pursue Total Equality For Women At Home, Work.” *The*
36 *Oregonian*, CXI: 34,158 (January 30, 1970), sec. III, 29.
37
38 “New Chief Abolishes Vice Squad” *The Oregonian*, LXXXVIII: 27,527 (January 8, 1949), sec.
39 IV, 1.
40
41 “Opera group set for annual Pub Crawl.” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,762 (April 14, 1978), sec. II,
42 17.
43
44 “Portland men no longer hide their 25-year ‘marriage’” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,690 (January
45 17, 1978), sec 1, 29.
46

- 1 “RADIO HIGHLIGHTS” *The Oregonian*, 98: 29 (June 17, 1979), sec. II, 198.
2
3 Randy Shilts. *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk*. New York City:
4 St. Martin’s Press, 1982.
5
6 “Rights battle breeds vocal opposition” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,689 (January 16, 1978), sec III,
7 21.
8
9 “Theatrical party waits in wings for Portland.” *The Oregonian*, 128: 36,923 (October 20, 1978),
10 sec. I, 22.
11
12 “The people’s own corner; Not so gay” *The Oregonian*, 127: 36,768 (April 21, 1978), sec. VI,
13 38.
14
15 “Wiseman Scores Again With ‘Hospital’” *The Oregonian*, CIX: 34,148 (January 19, 1970), sec.
16 II, 28.