The San Diego History Center, founded as the San Diego Historical Society in 1928, has always been the catalyst for the preservation and promotion of the history of the San Diego region.

The San Diego History Center makes history interesting and fun and seeks to engage audiences of all ages in connecting the past to the present and to set the stage for where our community is headed in the future. The organization operates museums in two National Historic Districts, the San Diego History Center and Research Archives in Balboa Park, and the Junípero Serra Museum in Presidio Park. The History Center is a lifelong learning center for all members of the community, providing outstanding educational programs for schoolchildren and popular programs for families and adults. The Research Archives serves residents, scholars, students, and researchers onsite and online. With its rich historical content, archived material, and online photo gallery, the San Diego History Center’s website is used by more than 1 million visitors annually.

The San Diego History Center is a Smithsonian Affiliate and one of the oldest and largest historical organizations on the West Coast.

**Front Cover:** Streamers mark the entrance of the San Diego History Center’s exhibition, LGBTQ+ San Diego: Stories of Struggles and Triumphs. They highlight the interpretive panel “What are Your Identities?” and are a vibrant call to contemplate who we are and how we define ourselves. The exhibition will run to January 2020. ©SDHC.

**Back Cover:** The AIDS Memorial Quilt, under custodianship of The NAMES Project Foundation, Inc., was displayed at San Diego’s Golden Hall from April 12-13th, 1988 as part of a 20-city national tour. *Names Project*, Mary Wickline. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.

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Dear Members, Readers, and Friends,

Since 1955, the San Diego History Center (San Diego Historical Society) has presented The Journal of San Diego History, the singular scholarly resource for dissemination of the history and its impacts upon the region we call home. Today the Journal is one of the remaining few, and among the most respected, publications of its kind in the United States. For the past 14 years, the Journal has been under the steady stewardship of Drs. Iris Engstrand and Molly McClain. We are grateful for their devoted service.

With this issue, it is my pleasure to introduce our new co-editors of The Journal of San Diego History, Drs. David Miller and Theodore Strathman. Both have impressive backgrounds and bring significant experience to their new roles.

This issue of The Journal also places a spotlight on the struggles and triumphs of San Diego’s LGBTQ+ Community and is published in conjunction with the exhibition LGBTQ+ San Diego: Stories of Struggles + Triumphs on view through January 2020 at the San Diego History Center’s museum in Balboa Park.

The Journal of San Diego History would not be possible without the financial contributions of the Ellen Browning Scripps Foundation and the Quest For Truth Foundation. We thank them for their critical and sustaining support. Your contributions to, and membership in, the San Diego History Center will ensure that The Journal continues into the future.

For 90 years, the San Diego History Center has been preserving, revealing, and promoting how the San Diego we know today has been shaped by its past and where we, as a community, are headed in the future. We welcome you to join us and hope you enjoy learning more about our region through The Journal of San Diego History.

Bill Lawrence
President & CEO
San Diego History Center
Co-Editors

David Miller began his education in San Diego, attending local elementary, middle, and high schools. He completed his undergraduate studies with Honors in History and Political Science at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill in 1998. After a year working in the Long Beach School District in 1999, David returned to San Diego to begin graduate studies. He received his Ph.D. in History from the University of California, San Diego in 2007. His doctoral dissertation explored the cultural legacy of John C. Frémont and Kit Carson. Dr. Miller is currently a full-time lecturer in the Department of History at the University of San Diego, where he teaches courses on United States history, with an emphasis on issues of race, immigration, culture, and the nineteenth century. He has also taught in the History Departments at UCSD, California State University San Marcos, and Mesa College. He is extensively involved in the San Diego historical community, giving lectures to local clubs and organizations, speaking at area high schools, and serving as the history internship coordinator at USD. Dr. Miller served as the assistant book reviews editor for The Journal from 2007 to 2019.

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Andy and David have been colleagues since graduate school at UCSD in 1999.
LGBTQ in San Diego:
A History of Persecution, Battles, and Triumphs

Lillian Faderman, Ph.D.

LGBTQ1 San Diegans had long been victims of widespread discrimination born of ignorance, and they suffered persecution under local and state laws. But in the 1970s, they began to understand themselves as an oppressed minority, and as a community they formed organizations to fight for their rights; that fight has been on-going. Prejudice against them has not been totally eradicated, yet their successes in battles to become first-class citizens have been truly remarkable.

California’s history of persecution of people who did not conform sexually or in terms of gender goes back long before statehood. Some eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Spanish explorers and missionaries professed to be appalled by their discovery that indigenous people up and down California were “addicted to the unspeakable vice of sinning against nature,” as Captain Pedro Fages declared in 1775.2 “Horrible customs,” Father Geronimo Bóscana wrote when he discovered that among the Indians of Alta California men were permitted to marry men, and some males dressed and behaved “so that in almost every particular, they resembled females.”3 Father Pedro Font vowed that “the Holy Faith and Christian religion” would eradicate such “nefarious practices” among the natives.4

In 1850, when California became a state, a statute was immediately adopted which aimed to eradicate such behaviors among everyone. The penalty for those who committed sodomy was set at five years to life in prison. The 1872 Penal Code of

Lillian Faderman, Ph.D., is the award-winning author of several books of LGBTQ studies. Three of her books, Surpassing the Love of Men (1981), Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers (1991), and The Gay Revolution (2015) were included on the New York Times annual list of “Notable Books of the Year.” Her most recent book, Harvey Milk: His Lives and Death, was published by Yale University Press in 2018. Dr. Faderman is the curator of the San Diego History Center exhibition, LGBTQ+ San Diego: Stories of Struggles and Triumphs.
California confirmed the punishment. A 1915 law also targeted sexual acts between women. Those found guilty of oral copulation (cunnilingus as well as fellatio) would be sentenced to up to fifteen years in prison. Similar laws appeared in San Diego. For example, in 1917, a sweeping local ordinance addressed fornicators of all stripes, criminalizing any sexual behavior outside marriage with a fine of up to $300 and/or 150 days in jail.

Yet despite draconian laws that threatened to sweep up anyone hapless enough to be caught in a homosexual act, same-sex love flourished in San Diego, even in the city’s highest social circles. In 1885, Jesse Shepard, thirty-seven years old and an internationally known pianist, met Lawrence Tonner, a young man of twenty-two. Together, in 1886, they moved to San Diego at the invitation of two wealthy real estate investors, William and John High, who offered to build them a mansion—Villa Montezuma—in which Shepard could hold musical salons for the elite of the city. Shepard and Tonner remained a couple until Shepard’s death in 1927.

A female couple, Alice Lee and Katherine Teats, were also among San Diego’s early upper crust. Transplants from the east, they settled in San Diego in 1902. Lee became president of the San Diego Museum, president of the Balboa Park Commission, director of the Natural History Museum, and a leading civic figure. In 1905, the two women commissioned the city’s preeminent architect Irving Gill to build them a home, where they entertained such luminaries as Theodore Roosevelt, who was Lee’s cousin by marriage, as well as President and Mrs. Grover Cleveland. Though San Diego society did not put a label on their relationship, in the 1930 census,
Teats is listed as Lee’s “partner.” The two women remained together until Lee’s death in 1943. Protected by their socio-economic status from dishonor and prosecution, upper class couples such as Lee and Teats or Shepard and Tonner did not suffer from stigma or the punishing laws with which less fortunate homosexuals of their day had to contend.

During World War II, the population of America’s port cities expanded with an influx of military personnel and defense industry workers. Gay historian Allan Bérubé has famously suggested that America’s
war effort also served to bring together many gays and lesbians who had hitherto been isolated in small towns and cities all across America, and a significant subculture was thus on its way to being formed.10 Bérubé’s thesis is borne out in the history of San Diego. For instance, gay bars such as Bradley’s and Blue Jacket in the Gaslamp District proliferated during the war years; locker clubs such as the Seven Seas Locker Club and Jack’s Steam and Locker Club became not only facilities where military men could change into civvies before a night on the town but also cruising grounds where those who were gay found sexual opportunities.11 Many gays and lesbians who had been introduced to port cities such as San Diego during the war chose to settle in them after the war because they had learned they could feel freer there than they had back home.12

By 1952, there were so many venues in downtown San Diego catering to gay men that the city was featured in USA Confidential, a sensationalistic book about America’s “sin spots.” “The fairy fleet has landed and taken over the nation’s most important naval base,” the authors Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer proclaimed, facetiously lamenting for the “B-girls and other hussies...mooidly getting drunk alone” while sailors queued up on the streets to get into the “fairy dives.” The authors singled out the Cinnabar “in the 800 block on 5th Avenue, [where] waiters are prancing misfits in peekaboo blouses with marcelled hair and rouged faces,” who “flirt and make love with sailors.”13 Lee and Mortimer intended their fulminations to shock and titillate, but surely a collateral effect was to inform even more gay people of San Diego’s thriving gay life and to draw them to the city.

The San Diego Police Department (SDPD) was informed too—and because homosexuals were presumptive criminals under state and local laws, the SDPD went to great lengths to hunt gay men down, even staking out the streets where gays were known to cruise. One such instance occurred in 1962, when vice squad officers on Fifth and Market Streets spotted a black man, Eldridge Rhodes, walking in the company of a white man, Thomas Earl. Officers Grimm and Beaudry tailed the couple for a block and a half to a shabby hotel, watched them take the stairs up to the second floor, and then flashed their badges at the hotel clerk and demanded to know the men’s room number.

Though the door to room 214 was closed, the officers heard a bed squeaking and “kissing-type” noises, as they later claimed in court testimony. Officer Grimm ran downstairs and demanded the clerk give him a stool so he could peer over the transom. The court judged that the officers were justified in breaking down the door to arrest the men because Grimm had spied them engaged in oral copulation. Earl and Rhodes were found guilty of violating Penal Code 288a, which made oral copulation a criminal offence. However, in lieu of being sentenced to jail for up to fifteen years, as the law specified, they were sent to Atascadero—California’s state
hospital for mentally-disordered sex offenders—for an indeterminate period.\(^{14}\)
That was not an uncommon penalty for homosexuals found guilty under the law.\(^{15}\)

People who did not conform to what was considered appropriate gender presentation were also harassed by the SDPD. Many cities, big and small, had cross-dressing ordinances on their books since the mid-nineteenth century.\(^{16}\)

Surprisingly, San Diego had no such law until 1966, when Ordinance 9439 (Section 5619) prohibited the appearance “in a public place, or in a place open to public view, in apparel customarily worn by the opposite sex, with the intent to deceive another person for the purpose of committing an illegal act.” Such a law was deemed necessary in 1966, defenders of the ordinance claimed, because young sailors were passing through San Diego on their way to the war in Vietnam, and they might be victimized by men posing as women who would take them to a hotel room and rob them.\(^{17}\)

But the potential victims of the cross-dressing law were trans people (men and women: some straight; some gay) who wore the clothes in which they were most comfortable. The SDPD felt justified in criminalizing them because in an era when no distinction was made between sexual orientation and gender identity, it was assumed that all trans people, \textit{ipso facto}, committed illegal homosexual sex acts. The 1966 ordinance remained in place until 1998, when—in very different times—the LGBTQ community succeeded in convincing the San Diego City Council to overturn it.\(^{18}\)
By that time, San Diego’s LGBTQ community was strongly political, but the road to successful politicization had been a long one. It began with the social upheavals of the 1960s, when the black civil rights movement, the feminist movement, and the anti-war movement captured headlines everywhere. Those movements inspired incipient attempts by gays and lesbians in San Diego to organize. In 1967, Rev. Ed Hansen, a closeted minister at San Diego’s Chollas View Methodist Church, who had recently completed an internship at San Francisco’s ultra-liberal Glide Memorial Methodist Church, started San Diego’s first organized gay group, “Daughters and Sons of Society.” The group offered much-needed emotional support to the community, but as its neutral name suggests, members essentially kept who they were a secret, which meant that they could have little impact in fighting discriminatory laws and homophobic prejudice. Early in the last year of that tumultuous decade, Bill Gautier, who identified as Glenda the “drag queen,” founded Gays United for Liberty and Freedom in his 30th Street apartment. It was a noble, pioneering effort, but Gautier got little help with it because few gay people in San Diego were ready to work openly on behalf of the community.
But at the start of that summer, an event at a gay bar in New York triggered a transformation in the way gay people everywhere would view themselves and their right to freedom and equality. In the early hours of June 28, 1969, the police raided the Stonewall Inn. But instead of going quietly into the paddy wagon as gay people had almost always done when arrested in police raids, the patrons, influenced by the many dramatic protests of that decade, fought back and sparked four nights of riots. As one wit dubbed the riots, they were the “hairpin drop heard round the world.” A week after the riots, a group of young radicals in New York founded the Gay Liberation Front, named to evoke the communist National Liberation Front of Vietnam, an organization admired by many young American leftists. Gay Liberation Front (GLF) groups were eventually established in cities across the country.

San Diego was among the first. In March 1970, radical gay and lesbian students at San Diego State College founded a GLF group on campus. “The Gay Liberation Front hopes to promote communications between homosexuals and heterosexual students,” the Daily Aztec, San Diego State’s newspaper, modestly announced. The organization’s goals were in fact less modest. GLF was focused not on “promoting communications” with straight students but on serving gay students. It set up a hotline to foster community among gays in the student body and to help them navigate problems in a homophobic world. Volunteers even hung posters all over campus announcing that “San Diego’s First Gay-In”—a public celebration of gayness—would be held at the Eucalyptus Grove in Presidio Park. (The Gay-In marked the first time in San Diego that a group of self-declared gays and lesbians

dared to show themselves openly in the daylight.) In the spring of 1971, thanks to promotion by the GLF, the San Diego State Experimental College—established to permit students to explore non-conventional studies—offered one of the first gay studies courses in the country, “The Homosexual and Society.”

Word of GLF reached Chancellor Glenn Dumke, the head of the California State College system, who informed San Diego State’s president, Malcolm Love, that no group called “Gay” may be associated with a California State College campus. President Love, not unsympathetic to GLF, told the group’s leadership that he would continue to approve their status as a campus organization if they would only excise the word “Gay” from their name. They refused and chose instead to move off campus, to the Good Neighbor Center of Rev. Hansen’s Chollas View Methodist Church.22

The move gave GLF more freedom. On November 28, 1971, they staged San Diego’s first gay protest: about fifteen GLF members marched in front of the San Diego Police Headquarters carrying signs that demanded an end to harassment and mockingly declared “10% of You Are US” (a reference to the Kinsey statistic that revealed that one-tenth of Americans were practicing homosexuals at any given time). GLF activist Jess Jessop announced to all the local news media that would listen (KOGO TV, KFMB, and The San Diego Union were there), “We are standing together to meet this problem [of police harassment] and will continue to do so in ever increasing numbers until all policemen learn that gay people are no longer...
easy targets for their sadism. We are not afraid of their threats, their clubs, or their jails.”23 San Diegans had never before heard such militancy from the city’s gays.

But the FBI was hearing it, too. An April 1972 report reveals that the FBI knew of the Gay-In, knew of the Homosexual in Society course—indeed, had been tracking everything the GLF was up to since its inception. Simply being openly gay was radical and therefore reason for the FBI to keep an eye on GLF, but the FBI had a further excuse too: their investigation of Gay Liberation Front groups, including the one in San Diego, was intensified because the FBI feared that gay radicals would disrupt the 1972 Democratic National Convention in Miami by invading the convention hall and demanding civil rights for homosexuals.24

In San Diego, police harassment of gays continued as usual. One of the worst instances occurred in the summer of 1974, when SDPD officers hid themselves behind a phony air vent constructed so they could watch the goings-on in a men’s restroom of the May Company in Mission Valley. They had been informed that the restroom was a gay trysting place. Thirty-one men were arrested and charged with

The Imperial Court donates funds raised through drag balls for charitable giving. Photo courtesy of Lambda Archives of San Diego.
sexual perversion, lewd conduct, and solicitation. The San Diego Union publicly shamed the men even before they were tried in court in an article that ran the length of the paper and included their names, ages, addresses, and occupations. Among the arrested were several who were married and did not identify as gay, including Gaylord Parkinson, an El Cajon gynecologist and prominent Republican strategist who had been Richard Nixon’s campaign director.25

The next month, on October 5, carrying signs that read “SDPD Watches While You Pee” and “I Prefer Gay Company to the May Company,” the Gay Liberation Front staged a march from the May Company to The San Diego Union parking lot, where members held a rally. The protestors made clear that they were not condoning public sex but rather were condemning entrapment and public shaming. GLF encouraged the arrested men to fight the charges against them. They did, and all but one of the cases were dismissed on the grounds that the search warrant was too broad and permitted the police to spy on anyone entering the restroom.26

The boldness of the young radicals of the Gay Liberation Front gradually gave courage to a broader cross-section of the gay community, and “mainstream” gay organizations began to emerge. In 1975, gay lawyer Bob Lynn founded the San Diego Democratic Club.27 The Teddy Roosevelt Republican Club was started by
activist Nicole Murray-Ramirez in 1977. In 1979, Dr. Al Best, who helped found San Diego’s Gay Alliance for Equal Rights, ran for a seat on the City Council. Best finished fifth in a field of eleven—clearly San Diego was not yet ready for an openly gay politician. But the next year, Dr. Brad Truax founded the United San Diego Elections Committee, a gay political action group that would work to help gay and gay-friendly politicians get elected.

Dr. Best could contemplate making a serious run for elected office as an openly gay man in 1979 in part because gay organizations in big cities across the country had been making significant inroads towards changing institutions and public perceptions. In 1973, thanks to gay protests, debates, and appeals, members of the American Psychiatric Association voted to take “homosexuality” per se out of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the psychiatrists’ bible that defined who was emotionally sick. By a stroke of the pen, “homosexuals” achieved immediate health. The United States Civil Service Commission had kept gay people out of government employment since 1950 with the justification that gays were so repellent to society that they could be blackmailed into divulging state secrets. But in 1973, the Civil Service Commission declared that an individual may no longer be deemed “unsuitable for federal employment merely because that person is a homosexual or has engaged in homosexual acts.” Again by a stroke of the pen, gays ceased being “subversives.” In 1975, the California legislature repealed the state’s sodomy laws—and so by another stroke of the pen, gay people in California ceased to be outlaws.

*Lovers, at the San Diego Pride Parade, 1976. Photo courtesy of Dr. Sharon Young.*
It was beginning to seem that gay progress was unstoppable. In 1978, the voters of California rejected a ballot proposition that would have prohibited homosexuals from teaching in the public schools. 1979, San Diego’s assistant police chief Bob Burgreen announced that the SDPD would hire openly gay and lesbian officers. Gay people were coming closer than ever before to winning first-class citizenship.

Organized community life and social life also burgeoned for San Diego’s gays and lesbians in the 1970s. A congregation of the Metropolitan Community Church, which had been established in Los Angeles in 1968 to serve Protestant gays, was formed in San Diego in 1970. In 1973, members of GLF opened the Gay Center for Social Services not only to support gay people in crisis and to help them find employment and housing, but also to be a place where the gay community could gather for social events. No longer were the bars or semi-public cruising areas the only places where gays might socialize or make romantic and erotic contacts. Organizations were established to serve diverse demographics of the community. The Imperial Court de San Diego was founded to celebrate “drag queens” and through its gala Coronation Balls—annual events that showcased drag pulchritude—to raise money for charities. Gay newspapers and magazines such as The Prodigal, San Diego Son, San Diego Update, Pacific Coast Times, and The Inside Scoop proliferated.

The grandest statement of community, San Diego’s annual Pride Parade, began modestly in 1974, when a small group of gays and lesbians paraded without a permit—marching on the sidewalks and stopping for red lights to avoid confrontation with the SDPD. Nicole Murray-Ramirez recalls that when he and activists Jess Jessop and Tom Homann had gone to SDPD headquarters to request a permit the sergeant in charge told them, “There will never be a homosexual pride march in this city, and you guys are deviants and you’re queers and if you don’t get out of here we will arrest you.” In 1975, gays again applied to the SDPD for a parade permit. This time, after some delay, they received one. On June 28, 1975, four hundred of them marched from Hobo Park to Balboa Park, for the first official Pride Parade and Rally. It was the start of gigantic annual celebrations of gayness and demands for equality in San Diego. The parades have grown exponentially: in the 1980 parade there were seven hundred participants. There were 100,000 in 1997; 200,000 in 2017; and 300,000 in 2018.

But the successes of the community also ushered in complications. One was a split between lesbians and gay men. In earlier decades, when the community was small and homophobia was rife, San Diego gays and lesbians, like their counterparts elsewhere, often formed friendships based on shared interests, genuine affection, and a common enemy. When necessary, they would “front”
for one another—passing themselves off as heterosexual couples at office parties, family dinners, or anywhere that their homosexuality would have created problems. In the 1970s, as hostility towards homosexuals lessened, it became less necessary to pretend to be straight—which meant that lesbians and gay men were no longer crucial “beards” to one another.

An even more significant cause of the split between the two groups in the 1970s was the radical feminist movement. To lesbian feminists everywhere, gay men were deemed to be as guilty of male-chauvinist piggery as straight men. San Diego lesbian feminists made their feelings known by breaking away from gay men to form their own organizations such as Tres Femmes and the San Diego Lesbian Organization. They published their own exclusively lesbian periodicals, such as Goodbye to All That and Thursday’s Child. They established their own lesbian-run hotline and their own “cultural center,” La Hermanas Women’s Cultural Center and Coffee House. It would take a major tragedy to lessen the rift that was ubiquitous between lesbians and gay men.

That tragedy began early in the next decade. As the Centers for Disease Control announced in its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report in June 1981, five previously healthy young men in Los Angeles had been diagnosed with a rare pneumocystis pneumonia. Two of them had already died. Soon after, doctors discovered cases
of another rare disease, Kaposi’s sarcoma, among men in New York.36 All those who were stricken appeared to be homosexual, and the disease was dubbed Gay-Related Immune Deficiency Syndrome (GRIDS). When intravenous drug users and patients who had had blood transfusions were also found susceptible it was renamed Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

A month after the CDC report appeared, two San Diegans were diagnosed with the disease. In the next four years, seven hundred more San Diegans were diagnosed, and four hundred died. (From the first outbreak to the present, AIDS has killed approximately eight thousand San Diegans.) In 1984, the Bible Missionary Fellowship, a fundamentalist church in Santee, responded to the tragedy by sending a contingent of parishioners to Hillcrest. Wearing hazmat suits to make their hysterical point that you could catch AIDS if the infected so much as breathed on you, they positioned themselves in the way of heavy gay foot traffic and displayed placards declaring AIDS to be a sign of God’s displeasure with homosexuality.

The government did not do much better. The AIDS crisis continued to deepen in San Diego as elsewhere, but it was not until 1985—with the death of screen star Rock Hudson, who had been a personal friend of Ronald Reagan—
LGBTQ in San Diego

that the President of the United States even uttered the word “AIDS.” Taking a cue from the Commander-in-Chief, Congress dragged its collective feet in funding research for a cure. In 1987, the Senate finally agreed to an appropriation of $300 million for AIDS education, but it came with an amendment stipulating that “education” meant teaching “sexual abstinence only.” Right-wing Senator Jesse Helms (North Carolina), who had introduced the amendment, admonished his fellow senators about homosexuals: “We’ve got to call a spade a spade and a perverted human being a perverted human being.”

With so little sympathy from the outside world, gays had to learn to help one another. In San Diego, the community mobilized to assist people with AIDS in their every need. The Imperial Court staged galas to benefit an AIDS Assistance Fund which provides direct services for those living with AIDS. An annual AIDS Walk was established to raise money for multiple AIDS agencies. Mama’s Kitchen and Special Delivery prepared meals for people with AIDS. Auntie Helen’s Fluff ‘n Fold took care of their laundry. Lesbians—even lesbian feminists who had severed relations with gay men in the 1970s—concluded that the entire community must pull together in the face of such a disaster. Since gay men were prohibited from giving blood while the plague raged, San Diego lesbians formed Blood Sisters and gave their own blood which could be used for transfusions if needed by their gay brothers with AIDS.

The unsurpassed tragedy of AIDS united gay communities more closely than ever before. The lessons they learned about unity and persistence during the AIDS crisis would be invaluable as they continued to struggle for civil rights. Before the crisis most gays, not ready to deal with the stigma that persisted in many places, remained closeted. But the epidemic brought large numbers of people out—not only those who were infected and so could not hide, but also those who realized that in the face of such catastrophe, the choice to hide was trivializing. The open community expanded to become far more representative of a diverse population. In the 1970s, the San Diego gay movement had seemed to be primarily, in the words of a leading activist of the day Jess Jessop, “a white middle class movement,
with white male privilege.”38 But the 1980s witnessed a diversification of the San Diego movement: Latinos founded the Gay and Lesbian Latino Organization; African Americans founded Lesbians and Gays of African Descent United; Native Americans founded Nations of the Four Directions; Asian Americans founded Gay/Lesbian Asian-Pacific Islanders Social Support; transgender people founded Neutral Corner.

Diversity sometimes brought conflicts and complaints about insufficient representation in the larger community. For instance, from time to time groups splintered from the San Diego Pride Parade and staged their separate events such as Ebony Pride and Latin Pride. But common enemies brought factions together. The battle against the 1986 LaRouche Initiative, which qualified for the California ballot as Proposition 64, is a case in point. If passed, Prop 64 would have given state officials the authority to quarantine HIV-positive patients. The gay community feared it was the start of homosexual concentration camps—and their fears were exacerbated when The San Diego Union reported that it had conducted a poll which found that San Diego Republicans supported the Proposition 58% to 27%, and that undecided voters leaned “in favor of the measure.” “County Support for Prop. 64 Seen Heavy,” the headline announced.39 Gays united to form San Diego Says No on 64 to raise money for a campaign to educate voters.40 Gay communities all over the state united in similar groups. On November 4, the LaRouche initiative
went down to resounding defeat, 71% to 29%. “Prop. 64 Loss Is Win for Gays,” a San Diego Union headline proclaimed.

The San Diego Union was right. Though the suffering and deaths caused by AIDS were devastating in the 1980s and ‘90s, those years also became a turning point in gay progress. The exodus from the closet of so many who were gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans during that time forced the straight community to understand that “homosexuals” were not “sickos” who lurked in the shadows waiting to pounce on underage victims, as the hurtful stereotype went. They were sons and daughters and beloved friends and neighbors and co-workers. Allies multiplied as more and more heterosexuals learned that they knew and loved someone who was lesbian, gay, or trans. Prejudice did not disappear entirely, but it was greatly mitigated. Doors began to open. In 1985 San Diego Mayor Roger Hedgecock appointed Susan Jester, an out lesbian, to his Advisory Board on Neighborhoods. An openly gay man, Dr. Brad Truax, was appointed that same year to the San Diego County Human Relations Commission. In June 1986 Maureen O’Connor took office as mayor, and in July she became the first San Diego mayor to march in the Pride Parade—a remarkable official statement of support for the gay community.

More remarkable events occurred in the early 1990s. Representatives of the San Diego Police Department—which had long evoked fear and loathing among gay people—marched, in uniform and with friendly smiles, in the 1991 Pride Parade. In 1992, Police Chief Bob Burgreen placed himself at the head of the SDPD contingent in the Parade. That December, the San Diego County Sheriff’s Department announced that it would “officially forbid discrimination...
or harassment against lesbians and gay men,” and that deputies would undergo “several hours of ‘cultural awareness’ training.”

That same week, the Board of Trustees of the San Diego Unified School District voted unanimously “to ban discrimination against gay and lesbian students and employees.”

As could be predicted, not all San Diegans were happy with the trustees’ decision. Several came to the board meeting hearing carrying Bibles. “This may be politically correct in the 1990s, but I believe it is morally wrong,” they testified. “This policy would directly conflict with the biblical principles I try to teach in my home.” But the trustees stuck by their vote—which was followed by a prolonged standing ovation from those in the audience who favored the policy.

The next year, 1993, saw another tremendous milestone. San Diegans elected an out lesbian to the City Council, the first openly LGBT elected official in the county. Christine Kehoe had been the San Diego County chair for the campaign to defeat Proposition 64 in 1986. The following year, she had worked as the aide to openly-gay candidate Neil Good in his bid for a seat on the City Council. (He lost the primary by 385 votes.) By the time Kehoe ran, voters had approved district elections. She vied to represent District 3, which stretched from Balboa Park to Kensington and City Heights. It was the district that included San Diego’s largest swath of gay people, and the gay community was determined that this time one of theirs would win. With the help of gay organizations such as the San Diego Democratic Club, the campaign money she raised exceeded that of any of the other candidates.

Kehoe had made it very clear in her campaign that yes, she was a lesbian, but she hoped to serve all her constituents by working on issues that concerned everyone: she would reduce crime, and she would increase public services. The reporters for The San Diego Union, however, were interested mostly in the lesbian part. Throughout the campaign, they could hardly write a news story about her without mentioning her sexual identity. Nevertheless, Kehoe won the primary by beating nine other candidates, and she won the general election by five percentage points. As promised in her campaign, she was not a one-issue councilmember. She led the charge to have a $4 million mid-city police substation built. She convinced state and federal legislators to fund the completion of Interstate 15. She fought for bright street lights in high-crime neighborhoods. And she also won domestic partner benefits for gay city employees. When she ran for a second term on the City Council, she won with 79% of the vote.

Chris Kehoe had brought about a sea change in San Diego. Her exemplary work taught voters, even those outside gay and liberal neighborhoods, to think beyond old prejudices. In 1994, Bonnie Dumanis, an out lesbian (who would later become the first openly gay district attorney in the country) won her first
LGBTQ in San Diego

election bid as Municipal Court judge. By then, thanks in large part to Kehoe, sexual orientation seemed less relevant to one’s candidacy, and the media barely mentioned that Dumanis was a lesbian. In 2000, sexual orientation was absolutely a non-issue for San Diego voters. Chris Kehoe was elected to the California State Assembly with 61% of the vote. She became the founding chair of the Assembly’s LGBT Caucus. She also became Assembly Speaker pro Tempore. In 2004, Kehoe was elected to the California State Senate, where she served until 2012.

The seat that Chris Kehoe vacated on the San Diego City Council when she won her bid for the State Assembly has since been filled only by gay people. Toni Atkins, an out lesbian, was the first to follow Kehoe. Elected in 2000, she ran again in 2004 and won by a landslide. In 2010 Atkins ran for the Assembly, and again she won by a landslide. In 2014, she became the first lesbian Speaker of the Assembly. Two years later she was elected to the State Senate with 63% of the vote, and in 2018 she became the first woman and first out LGBTQ person to serve as the Senate’s President pro Tempore.

San Diego voters also sent a gay man to the State Assembly. Todd Gloria served for two terms as District 3 representative on the City Council before winning his 2016 Assembly bid with a 37-point margin of victory. His rise has been meteoric: In 2018, the thirty-nine-year-old Gloria was named by the Speaker of the Assembly to the position of Majority Whip. In early 2019, he announced that he would be a candidate for San Diego mayor.

It has long ceased to be unusual to have an LGBTQ presence on the City Council. In 2008, the year Todd Gloria was elected from District 3, another openly gay man, Carl DeMaio, was elected from District 5, an affluent area that includes Scripps Ranch, Carmel Mountain, and Sabre Springs. In 2016, Georgette Gomez, who identifies as queer, was elected to represent the predominantly Latino District 9, and a gay man, Chris Ward, replaced Todd Gloria in District 3. In 2018, an out lesbian, Dr. Jen Campbell, was elected to represent District 2, which includes areas such as Pacific Beach and Point Loma. Of the present nine members of the San Diego City Council, one-third belong to the LGBTQ community. At the end of 2018, Georgette Gomez was unanimously elected President of the City Council.

But such tremendous victories have not entirely ended homophobia, neither in San Diego nor anywhere else. In 1991, the same year that members of the San Diego Police Department showed their support for the community by marching in the Pride Parade, Hillcrest witnessed thirty attacks motivated by hatred of gay people. The worst occurred on December 13, when three high school students were walking to the Soho, a coffeehouse on University Avenue that was popular with both straight and gay teens. They were jumped by combat-boot-wearing “skinheads” who screamed “faggot” while beating and kicking them.
The assailants had been on a rampage in the neighborhood that Friday night and had already beaten gay men in two other incidents. When seventeen-year-old John Wear (who was straight) fought back, one of the assailants pulled a knife and stabbed him in the chest. Wear died of his wounds.49

San Diegans were again reminded of the pockets of hate in 1999, only months before Chris Kehoe was overwhelmingly elected to the California State Assembly. At that year’s Pride Parade an unknown assailant threw a military-style tear gas canister into the seventy-person Family Matters contingent, which included small children and babies in strollers. Though only three people had to be hospitalized, the emotional scars were widespread.50

And the reminders do not stop. The 2016 massacre of forty-nine people at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida horrified LGBTQ communities everywhere. In San Diego, the giant rainbow flag on University Avenue and Normal Street was lowered to half-staff and thousands attended a candlelight vigil memorializing the victims. The tragedy had made clear that despite significant triumphs in recent years, the LGBTQ community had cause to feel vulnerable as of old.

But there is reason for hope, even in this regard. In other eras, gay tragedies had brought little response from the straight world. For instance, the 1973 arson fire that killed thirty-two people at the Upstairs Lounge, a New Orleans gay bar, was ignored by the media and became the subject of heterosexuals’ sick jokes. (“Where do you bury the ashes?” one joke started. “In the fruit jar.” “Did you hear about the weenie roast?” went another joke.) Though the arson at the Upstairs Lounge had caused more fatalities than any fire in the history of New Orleans, the mayor of the city kept mum.51 In contrast, the Orlando massacre was followed by official expressions of empathy for the victims and strong condemnations of homophobia from the White House down. In San Diego, Mayor Kevin Faulconer was emotional in assuring the community that “San Diego stands united with the people of Orlando.”52 Even ultra-conservative San Diego congressman Darrell Issa—who had opposed same-sex marriage and supported discrimination against LGBTQ people on religious grounds—proclaimed in urgent tweets that society had an obligation to make resolute efforts “to find and stop those who plan and commit these unacceptable acts.”53 Martin Luther King’s hopeful observation seems very apt with respect to the history of San Diego’s LGBTQ community: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”
1. For much of the twentieth century, the word “gay” was an underground umbrella term that described men and women who were attracted to members of the same sex, and also those whose gender identification was different from their biological sex. In the early 1970s, at the height of the women’s movement, lesbians wanted to distinguish themselves from gay men: the operative term thus became “gay and lesbian.” The terminology continued to expand as each segment of the community wished to be named. In the late 1970s, bisexuals were acknowledged (LGB). In the next decade, transgender people were acknowledged (LGBT). In the 1990s, the term “queer,” which had been an insult, was reclaimed by young people in the community (LGBTQ). The expansion continued and now includes Intersex, Asexual, Polyamorous, etc. The initialism is often presented as LGBTQ+. In this essay, I have generally tried to use the terms or initialisms that were current in the periods I describe.


5. *Statutes and Amendments to the Codes of California 1915*, page 1022, ch. 586, enacted June 1, 1915.


12. It is impossible to determine specifically how many gays and lesbians settled in San Diego after being introduced to the city during the war, but from 1940 to 1950, the general population of San Diego increased by almost 65%.


16. I. Bennett Capers, “Cross-dressing and the Criminal,” Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities, volume 20, issue 1, article 1 (2008); digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjih/vol20/iss1/1/
18. Ibid.
20. The name was changed to San Diego State University in 1974.
21. The Daily Aztec reported GLF’s request to be recognized as a student organization and the approval of that request on March 19, 1970 and April 24, 1970.
24. FBI Report: FBI Director to the Domestic Intelligence Division (with information from the Investigative Support Unit of the San Diego Police Department), April 25, 1972: https://archive.org/.../GayLiberationFront/Gay%20Liberation%20Front%2004_djvu.txt
27. Author interview with San Diego Democratic Club founder, Bob Lynn, June 6, 2016.
28. Rev. Raymond Broshears, column, Gay Crusader, April 1977, 2. The following year it became the Log Cabin Club and then the Log Cabin Republicans.


45. Ibid.


53. Twitter: @darrellissa, June 12, 2016.
Recording Struggles and Beauty:  
The Photography of Mary Wickline

Introduction by Christine Kehoe

San Diego photographer Mary Wickline donated her collection to the San Diego History Center in August 2018. The extensive collection of color and black and white photographs explores people and places across San Diego, the city Mary loved and in which she resided for more than 40 years.

Mary Anna Wickline was born June 11, 1955, in Dixon, Illinois. Before she was two years old, her family moved to Candor, New York, where she grew up. Like many children of the fifties and sixties, Mary grew up reading *LIFE* magazine every week. “*LIFE* is the reason I’m a photographer,” Mary said. “I wanted to be Margaret Bourke-White and Gordon Parks.”

Mary graduated from Candor Central High School in 1973 and immediately joined the U.S. Navy in order to study photography. “That was my only reason to go in,” Mary said. “Looking about 14 years old and barely 100 pounds,” Mary headed to boot camp in Orlando, Florida, and then studied photography in the Navy’s A School in Pensacola, Florida.

After completing her training, she was stationed in San Diego, where she worked as a Navy photographer until she was honorably discharged in June 1977. Mary stayed in San Diego after her military service. She worked as a photographer for Multi-Image, a San Diego company that produced multi-media convention presentations for corporate clients. After leaving Multi-Image, she briefly worked as a freelance photographer and then for the Navy as a civilian photographer.

Mary then spent eight years as a photographer for Rohr Corporation, shooting commercial and industrial subjects. She was Rohr’s first woman photographer.

*Christine Kehoe* was the first member of the LGBTQ community elected to public office in San Diego. Kehoe represented Balboa Park and portions of San Diego over nineteen years in elected office as a city councilmember, a California Assemblymember, and Senator. She thanks Jeanne LaBella, Sue McGuinness, and Pamela Wilson for their kind assistance.
in San Diego, a situation similar to her time in the Navy when Mary was one of the very few, and sometimes the first, woman to be placed in her assignment.

Outside of her “day jobs,” Mary photographed some of her favorite music groups and did volunteer photography for the San Diego Gayzette newspaper. She documented major moments in San Diego’s LGBTQ civil rights struggle and AIDS awareness movements in the 1980s and 1990s. Her visual talent and dedication to detail brought a new sensibility to the Gayzette’s news and social photos.

Mary was a voracious reader with a large personal library that included books on contemporary issues, gender, politics, feminism, race, biography, art, and photography. The shorter list would be what was not in her library. Her intellectual interests underpinned her photography. She pursued her formal education while working and earned an Associate’s degree in Liberal Arts from San Diego City College and a Bachelor’s degree in Visual Arts at the University of California, San Diego. She also studied computer programming at Coleman College. Later, she earned a Master’s in Education at San Diego State University and a Master’s in Library and Information Science at UCLA.

After working for twenty years as a professional photographer, Mary launched a new career. Her life partner, the late Dr. Sharon Grant-Henry, observed Mary’s resolve to research questions big and small at all hours of the day and night. With Sharon’s encouragement, Mary pursued her library science degree and in October 2006 she joined the UC San Diego Medical Center Library as Nursing and Allied Health Librarian. Her work as a librarian at UC San Diego had deep impact. She supported hundreds of nurses and other healthcare professionals with their research and, ultimately, their care of patients. She served as the countywide librarian for the San Diego Evidence-Based Practice Institute, teaching research techniques to more than 600 participants throughout San Diego County. Mary also served as the librarian on the 2017 Society of Critical Care Medicine Family-Centered Care Guidelines. With this work she set a precedent in her field, becoming the first librarian to be named a co-author of guidelines by this organization. In recognition of her many achievements and contributions to the UC San Diego Library and the library profession, Mary was promoted from the rank of associate- to full librarian in July 2018.

But she never lost touch with photography. From 2003 to 2017, Mary taught photography and darkroom techniques in evening classes at San Diego City College. Although her own approach was precise and disciplined, she appreciated and encouraged serious experimental work, an outlook that made her a favorite of many of her students.

Mary’s photography speaks to her passions. Her superb technical skills are evident in her photographs. She was a tenacious worker, applying extensive
Recording Struggles and Beauty: The Photography of Mary Wickline

analysis to her use of lighting, exposure, and movement in rendering each image. Her spunk and creativity helped her tell a rich story with each picture.

Her personal photography reflects her deep devotion to racial, gender, and LGBTQ equality, and to her affection and respect for people struggling to defeat discrimination in any form.

Mary’s landscape photography represents her strong aesthetic sense and her love of people and the natural and urban beauty of San Diego. Her love of music is reflected in numerous studies of San Diego musicians, many of whom were close friends.

When Bill Lawrence, executive director of the San Diego History Center, first viewed her meticulously organized collection he remarked, “These photographs are just what we need. Mary’s photos fill a gap during this period of San Diego history. The Mary Wickline photo collection will enhance the History Center’s photo archive for future generations.”

Currently, the History Center staff is processing the Mary Wickline collection. They will create a database from the nine bankers’ boxes of negatives, contact sheets, prints, and slides that comprise the collection. SDHC archivist Chris Travers estimates the project will be completed by this summer and available to scholars and the public.

In the words of her daughter Atiya Slaughter, “Mary’s incredible photographic skills came from her time in military service to her country. Through Mary’s lens, the struggle for justice came into focus. Mary had the unique ability to wrangle universal concepts like love, faith, and equality, into stunning images. Her work gave voice to the silent and the invisible. I am proud to have witnessed her genius firsthand.”

Mary died December 8, 2018. Her life partner, Dr. Sharon Grant-Henry, a professor at San Diego State University, died February 3, 2004.

Recording Struggles and Beauty: The Photography of Mary Wickline

Denice Williams and Kelly Burke. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.

Belmont Park rollercoaster, 1992. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.
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Foundry, 1990. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.

Names Project, April 12, 1988. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.
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UCSD Library. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.
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Mexican Fiesta. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.
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Mary Wickline portrait, 1988. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.

St. James Hotel and skyline. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.
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Sue and Sharon, 1986. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.
Armand Smith, Welder, March 2, 1989. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.
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Sand Dunes, December 26, 1990. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.
Mary Wickline portrait in engine, 1989. ©SDHC, Mary Wickline Collection.
San Diego’s Gay Bar History: Reflections on Community History and the Documentary Film Process

Paul Detwiler

7:45 p.m., Lambda Archives, June 17, 2017

I’m hunched over a smoky glass table covered with a treasure trove of photographs, shivering from the chilly air conditioning as much as from the excitement of discovering photographic gold nuggets. I’m alone, but surrounded by faces smiling to me across the decades.

There’s a shirtless, mustachioed blond on roller skates in front of a 1965 red Plymouth Barracuda; the position of the Giant Dipper roller coaster and street signage in the background establishes the photo was taken in the vicinity of the Apartment, a women’s gay bar that opened in Mission Beach in 1974. Another photo presents a dance floor crowd, beaming faces glistening under a sheen of sweat, big 1980s hair and lip gloss in full effect on the women (and on some men, too). A third snapshot: a festive lineup of Halloween-costumed contestants—a drag version of Tippi Hedren (a stuffed crow entangled in her stylish platinum updo), a garish clown, and a butch female cowboy—all vying for prizes awarded long ago in an unidentified San Diego gay bar.

The images I’m marveling at offer candid glimpses of San Diego gay bar culture from different epochs in modern gay history. They are some of the many artifacts in the Lambda Archives, a repository for collecting, storing, and preserving the LGBTQ history of San Diego and northern Baja California. From 2017 to mid-2018, I sorted through a multitude of photographs, gay periodicals, and ephemera in the process of producing San

Paul Detwiler is a San Diego community college science instructor, textbook author, and filmmaker interested in new media, documentaries, and creative collaborations with scientists, artists, and deep thinkers. His short films reflect fluid, metaphorical spaces that explore the intersection of desire, lyricism, memory, and queer subcultures. San Diego’s Gay Bar History, his first feature-length documentary, was funded through the 2016 KPBS Explore program.
Diego’s Gay Bar History, a documentary that was initially broadcast in June 2018 on KPBS, San Diego’s public television station, and had its premiere at FilmOut 2018, San Diego’s LGBTQ Film Festival.

San Diego’s LGBTQ history, viewed through the lens of its postwar gay bars and nightclubs (and through the voices of witnesses who lived through this history) in many ways parallels the development of the modern LGBTQ community in other large cities throughout North America, and gives the documentary, while regional in its focus, a wider relevance. A main thesis of the documentary posits that gay bars have been a foundational part of the LGBTQ experience, not only as safe places for socializing and forming interpersonal relationships, but also as cultural institutions that have played important roles in the formation of community over generations.

The film frames San Diego gay bar history within three major epochs bound by a common theme. From the oppressive secrecy of the postwar era to Stonewall; the birth of the modern gay rights movement through the freewheeling 1970s; and from the horrific AIDS crisis in the 1980s, which decimated an entire generation, gay bars have been more than just social drinking spots. They have provided sanctuary amidst a persistently hostile society, places where friendships were nurtured and lives anchored even in the face of changing cultural landscapes. The scope of this topic became quite expansive as my research progressed. I found records for at least 135 gay bars that have operated in San Diego since the late 1940s. The film really just scratched the surface of a deep, multifaceted history—one of the many histories of this community that merits further exploration.

**Epoch 1: Post-Second World War to Stonewall**

By the end of World War II, tens of thousands of veterans who served in all branches of the Armed Forces were stationed and/or had disembarked at California’s major coastal cities: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Long Beach, and San Diego. San Diego, already a major military port city even before the war, became a new home for thousands of gay men and women who were then able to discover others of their own kind. Settling in San Diego provided them the opportunity to live a life that they never could have actualized had they returned to their hometowns.

The oldest continuously operating gay bar in San Diego, the Brass Rail, first opened in 1934 as a bar and restaurant inside the Orpheum Theater on the corner of 6th Avenue and B Street. At that time, however, it was not an exclusively gay
establishment. During the 1940s and ‘50s, the clientele at several downtown bars, including the Brass Rail, transitioned in the evenings from a straight crowd into a gay one. It was not until 1957 when the Brass Rail came under the ownership of Lou Arko, a straight man, that it converted to a predominantly gay customer base. The bar retained its gay patronage after Arko relocated it in 1964 to the corner of 5th and Robinson in Hillcrest. In 1973, it relocated across the street into its third, and present, location at 3796 5th Avenue.

8:00 a.m., The Rail, Feb. 8, 2017

We are inside the Rail (formerly the Brass Rail; the bar was renamed after an extensive remodel in 2016), preparing to film several interviews within the next hour. I chose this location as a backdrop because the bar itself acts as a metaphoric character in San Diego’s gay bar history, having served as both a beacon and a safe harbor for several generations of LGBTQ community members.

We will hear the personal recollections of bar patrons, bartenders, former and current bar owners, and community activists—ten in all—over the next two days. The production crew weaves around bar stools carrying tripods, heavy loops of extension cords, and C-stands. They hurriedly set up the key and fill lights and tape black plastic sheets over
the bar’s front windows to block out stray light. A noisy, chugging ice machine must be silenced before we start recording sound.

During the interviews, I am rewarded as a director whenever a telling remark or line of questioning sparks a visible reaction revealing insights into the interviewee’s character, values, subtexts, or implicit motivations. As they relate their lived experiences (some spanning a 40-year timeframe) they express joy, frustration, humor, anger, and above all, an earnest sincerity in the belief that this community’s history is valuable and important. The crew and I are captivated by the stories that unfold. I wish we had scheduled several more days to fully record these fascinating oral histories.
San Diego’s Gay Bar History

While the Hillcrest neighborhood is presently home to most of the gay bars and nightspots in San Diego, that was not always the case. From the Second World War to the 1960s, nearly all the gay bars were downtown. A few of the early nightspots (now defunct) were located at still-extant addresses, such as the Cinnabar (825 5th Ave.), the Circus Room (1039 4th Ave.), and the El Cortez Skyroom (702 Ash St.). However, no traces remain of the majority of historic downtown gay bars from locations that were demolished and rebuilt during redevelopment projects of the 1960s and beyond. Those include Bradley’s, at 303 Plaza (now present-day Horton Plaza), Blue Jackets (750 India St.), the Gold Rail (1028 3rd Ave.), the Copacabaña (12th and Broadway), the Skylark (620 West Broadway, behind the YMCA), the Bon Voyage, and the Buccaneer.3

Although the downtown bars provided a modicum of refuge for gays in the 1940s and ‘50s, they were still risky places to congregate, especially for military personnel, who could be dishonorably discharged just by being seen within them. Vice squad officers and military police regularly “hit” those establishments, harassing patrons and arresting service members.4 Vice squad officers wore suits and hats and usually appeared in groups of three, which was a tip-off for wary patrons who knew they could be questioned and taken outside for such infractions as causally embracing each other, or even sitting in a booth next to another patron of the same sex.5 While dancing between females was socially acceptable in San Diego bars during the immediate postwar years, until the late 1970s men could not dance together or have any other physical contact such as hugging or hand-holding without risking arrest for lewd conduct.6 Surprisingly, but perhaps to prevent run-ins with undercover vice officers, Zola Mae (“Babe”) Hills, then the owner of the Loft,7 continued to enforce a “no touch” policy among patrons even through the mid-1980s.8

The earliest recorded gay bar in Hillcrest was the Gizmo (3968 5th Ave.), a bar especially popular with lesbians in the armed forces in the late 1950s and early ‘60s. Beer was 15¢ and patrons sat on crates.9 In those days, women had to be especially discreet, because if they were publicly exposed as gay and were mothers, it was almost assured child welfare authorities would take their children away, as homosexuals were deemed morally unfit to be parents. Thus many women used pseudonyms (“bar names”) to preserve anonymity.10 Even after 1974, when homosexuality was no longer listed as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association, some lesbians in Los Angeles still lost custody of their children on those grounds.11 Furthermore, women were not immune from police harassment and could be targeted in raids that led to unjustified arrests on trumped-up charges of lewd conduct.12
One of the main challenges in visually documenting this early era of gay bar history was the dearth of images from inside the bars. This is unsurprising, since the closeted status of many patrons precluded nearly all photography within a bar’s interior. Many customers would turn away and leave the premises immediately if a camera was ever seen inside a bar.

However, one tavern in San Francisco presented a contrasting picture. I was able to obtain 8mm footage from the GLBT Historical Society of San Francisco of events filmed there during the late 1960s inside an unidentified gay bar. The footage showed a racially diverse crowd of everyday people socializing alongside drag queens and leather guys, everyone smiling and having a good time. I was struck by the joy and camaraderie that the people were obviously experiencing, and this left me thinking about how the atmosphere appeared to be so vital and important for people of that generation, who risked so much to meet and socialize with other non-heterosexuals, despite the life-altering consequences: the possibility of arrest or of losing your job, place of residence, and even custody of your children. Yet the bars still drew people in, which speaks to the powerful human need for connection that superseded the punishments that an intolerant society regularly imposed upon LGBT people.

In searching through the Lambda Archives, I found no visual evidence of bar environments during the 1960s here in San Diego, a much more conservative city. Did
anyone ever record footage of the early bar culture here? If so, where is it? It is saddening to think that footage of those times, if any had been recorded, might now be lost to history.

**Epoch 2: Post-Stonewall through the 1970s**

The 1960s ushered in the Civil Rights Movement, spurring the nascent LGBT community to ramp up its own struggle for equal rights. The Stonewall Inn uprising and the riots that began June 28, 1969 in New York’s Greenwich Village became a watershed moment for the community nationwide, signifying its refusal to be treated as second-class citizens and its determination to fight back against brutality and homophobic oppression. With this empowered outlook, the 1970s witnessed a burgeoning of celebratory gay bar culture, and San Diego saw the appearance of dance clubs such as the Ball Express, the Barbary Coast, the Lombard, Diablo’s, and the West Coast Production Company. Hillcrest grew in importance as a gay neighborhood with an increasing number of bars and gay-owned businesses contributing to the economic growth of the area. Early gay publications provided information about gay topics, social events and bar gossip, and these were distributed throughout the bar network. Thus the bars became clearinghouses where people could engage and build community before there was an established gay center or systems of support services. The Imperial Court system became a key aspect.

AdVERTISEMENTS of Imperial Court candidates endorsed by their sponsoring bars. Photos from the San Diego Son, Issue 26, March 28, 1975. Photo courtesy of Lambda Archives of San Diego.
of bar culture. Bars would sponsor candidates to compete for the city-wide titles of Emperor and Empress, who would be crowned at a festive gala and then lead fundraising efforts for charitable causes throughout their year-long reign.

In addition to new bars opening, old bars would turn over and soon reopen under a new name and ownership. For example, in the Kettner Boulevard/India Street area, the Club (a women’s bar since the mid-1960s) was purchased from Lou Arko in the early 1980s by Fred Atcheson and transformed into the BULC, a leathermen’s dance bar.18 Similarly, another Arko bar, the Swing (named for the suspended velvet seat in which go-go dancers and birthday celebrants swung to and fro over the bar) changed ownership to Ed Coleman in 1976 to become A Different Drum, a western-themed tavern. It later converted into Libido’s, a male strip club, then eventually morphed into the women’s bars Club Bombay and 6 Degrees in the 1980s. By the mid-1970s, nearly 30 gay bars were spread across San Diego in La Jolla, Pacific Beach, Mission Beach, North and South Park, Hillcrest, Downtown, and some extending eastward to La Mesa.19

The bars that epitomized San Diego in this heyday were the beach bars. Bar events in Mission Beach, like the Sunday beer busts at the Outrigger (844 W. Mission Bay Blvd.), the bikini contests at the Apartment (a women’s bar at 756 Ventura Place), and barbecues at the Matador (4633 Mission Blvd. in Pacific Beach—first a women’s bar, then in the 1980s attracting a mostly male clientele), all drew large crowds of locals and tourists, many clad only in bathing suits.20
San Diego’s Gay Bar History

Inside the Matador, early 1980s. Photo courtesy of Lambda Archives of San Diego.

Bikini contest winner at the Apartment, flanked by bar owners Sam (L) and Peaches (R). Photo courtesy of Lambda Archives of San Diego.
A lot of thought went into the post-production editing phase to decide which narratives to present and how to distill them into compelling segments for an hour-long broadcast. We couldn’t include the gay piano bars, or the bars’ role in sponsoring teams for the softball and pool leagues, or cover any of the North Park bars. With over sixty hours of footage to edit, we attempted to strike a balance between developing each segment as fully as possible and representing the variety of the gay bars of this high-water mark period.

Bar matchbooks served as a powerful unifying visual motif that carried through the film—in many cases these mementos were the only physical remnants of bars that have long vanished. Fortunately, a wonderful collection of historic gay bar matchbooks is housed within the Lambda Archives. Whenever possible, we filmed interviewees holding the matchbooks of the bars they were reminiscing about—each matchbook a kind of talisman, embodying a history of personal experiences
that could be slipped casually or furtively into a pocket, a token of the bar carried closely against the body.

It was especially interesting hearing about the colorful men and women’s bars in the beach areas and noticing the deep sense of place and community shared by interviewees. In particular, two women, who met on camera after having not seen each other for at least twenty-five years, described the centrality of the Apartment in their lives during the late 1970s, with fond recollections that seemed as fresh as if the events had happened recently. I felt this was one of the more touching segments in the documentary.

Epoch 3: The Plague Years

The 1970s was an era of increasing social liberalism on many fronts, yet many of the bars remained segregated by gender, and misogyny was not unknown. As one interviewee commented, “In the ’70s... the separation between men and women was pretty clear. But AIDS changed that.”22 The AIDS crisis that began in 1981 dealt a staggering blow to the LGBT community. By the year 2000 it had decimated an entire generation of gay men, causing 448,060 deaths throughout the United States23 and 5,802 deaths in San Diego alone.24 Leather bars such as the Loading Zone at 1702 India Street, the BULC on Kettner Boulevard, and Wolf’s at 30th and Upas were especially hard hit by the epidemic, as scores of men in the leather community perished.25

Due to the climate of fear and stigma against those with HIV/AIDS, gay bars and their patrons experienced increased homophobic harassment by city and state authorities. The West Coast Production Company was inspected nightly by Alcoholic Beverage Control and visited at least weekly by vice officers, who arrested thirteen people one night in 1984.26 Squad cars were parked nightly outside the venue, which effectively intimidated the clientele. Certain police officers regularly accosted bar patrons, and in some cases, physically brutalized them.27

In light of the total absence of any level of government support in the early days of the epidemic, the bars became organization centers, foci where community members galvanized to...
become politically engaged, fight for resources, and raise funds to help those with AIDS. In fact, in 1983 community organizers met on the patio at #1 Fifth Ave. (a Hillcrest bar at 3845 5th Ave.) to create the AIDS Foundation of San Diego, the first grassroots AIDS service organization in the city.28

The bars held ongoing ad hoc fundraising efforts. One especially poignant anecdote describes how donations were solicited for people with HIV/AIDS. A photograph of an afflicted person was taped to the outside of a metal coffee can, and placed in a row of cans that ran down the length of the bar. Patrons deposited money into a can to donate to that particular person, who could have been a friend or a stranger, to help pay for their food, medicines, rent, or other necessities.29 In the face of constant tragedy, bars did what they could to offer a place of comfort for their patrons, and supported more concerted fundraising events initiated throughout the bar network by the Imperial Court de San Diego. This continued into the 1990s, as newly formed nonprofits such as Ordinary Miracles (which asked LGBT bartenders to donate their tips for one day out of the year) brought in money to support critical social service organizations like Mama’s Kitchen, the San Diego Food Bank, and Special Delivery, among many others.30

2:25 p.m., Editing Bay, Dec. 10, 2017

During their interviews, each person related their experiences of this time with varying degrees of emotion, ranging from resigned composure to outright weeping. In listening to their stories, and reflecting on their grit, resilience, and dedication to help their community in spite of the unimaginable hardships of the period, I was truly inspired and humbled. I was a teenager in the 1980s, and my coming out journey began in the
San Francisco Bay Area at the very crux of the AIDS epidemic. Consequently, I felt a personal and intimate connection to the people and stories that comprised this section of the documentary, and this made editing challenging. I had to grapple with how much to include of the impact and magnitude of the tragedy without having an overwhelming sense of loss and grief dictate the direction of the film.

It was abundantly clear to me that the epidemic forged a stronger community, both locally in San Diego and on the national front. It was also evident that many of the San Diegans we interviewed, along with the many others who died, were true community heroes who fought many battles on different fronts in the war zone that was HIV/AIDS. The San Diego LGBTQ community’s response to the AIDS crisis was significant, and it is due its own documentary.

**Epilogue: New Directions, 2000s–forward**

One segment in the documentary presented the perspectives of younger LGBTQ people and how they see the roles of gay bars in current society. Their views, which differ among themselves, certainly contrast with those of older generations. Gay bars play less of a central social role for a new LGBTQ+ generation than they did for the earlier generations. Clearly, gay bars have held
different meanings to people that came of age within each major epoch, and their lessened importance to young people may be a contributing factor influencing the long-term viability of gay bars. This segment of the film segued into footage of the last night of Numbers, a popular Hillcrest nightclub that closed on September 8, 2017 after 25 years of operation. By mid-2018 San Diego had lost three more gay bars.32 This phenomenon has been occurring with increasing frequency in major urban centers throughout North America and Europe since 2010.33 Debates continue on the presumed reasons why in recent times more gay bars have been closing or transforming into mixed venues (catering to both straight and gay patrons).34

1:30 p.m., Delivering a rough cut of the film to KPBS Studios, May 13, 2018

When I first began this film project, I was drawn to documenting San Diego’s queer past. But as the project neared completion, my perspective turned to questions regarding the future of San Diego gay bars, especially since younger people are less reliant on them as spaces for socializing and forming community. What does this trend portend for maintaining LGBTQ+ social spaces and culture in San Diego, Southern California, and beyond? And the more urgent question: how can a cohesive collective memory of the San Diego LGBTQ+ community be maintained given that the public social spaces, physical landmarks, and composition of the community itself are changing as a result of gentrification and other socio-economic drivers?

I hope that the film will inspire a new generation to address these questions as they strive to value and preserve the collective memory of our community—one that exists not only in matchbooks, periodicals, and snapshots of patrons beckoning from the past, but also in histories that live in the present. These histories can be maintained through intergenerational connections forged between LGBTQ elders and youth. When we strengthen those social bonds, we keep alive the collective memory that originated in gay bars and nightspots, the first public places that fostered the development of our community’s many histories.
NOTES

1. “Gay” is used as a blanket term for non-heterosexual males and females, transgender individuals, and other gender minorities (sensu Lillian Faderman, *Harvey Milk: His Lives and Death* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018)).


5. McGuire, interview.


7. A Hillcrest neighborhood bar at 3610 5th Ave., which has functioned as a gay watering hole since 1978.


29. Shaw, interview.


31. Now more commonly referred to as “LGBTQ+” to include more identities that reflect the broadening of the community.


BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by Olga Gonzalez-Silen, Department of History, California State University San Marcos.

The Laguna Art Museum presented the exhibition *California Mexicana: Missions to Murals, 1820–1930* as part of *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA*, an ambitious collaboration among cultural venues in Southern California that took place from September 2017 to January 2018. The common goal was to explore the multifaceted connections between California and Latin America. The Laguna Art Museum drew inspiration from Fernando Deppe’s *San Gabriel Mission* (ca. 1832-35), an evocative oil painting from the museum’s own collection that challenges a stark divide between a Mexican California and a California that became part of the United States. The guest curator Katherine Manthorne, a prominent art historian, expanded on this intriguing vision in both the exhibition and the accompanying volume reviewed here. The book *California Mexicana* is not, however, merely a handsomely illustrated exhibition catalogue (although it certainly is that). This work is also an exciting, comprehensive, and accessible history that catalogs California’s visual representations from the advent of the Mexican Republic in 1821 to the United States conquest of California in 1848 to the heyday of muralism in the 1930s.

In the introduction, Manthorne asks: “How did Mexico become California?” This question animates both her own and the other authors’ contributions, as well as positions art in conversation with history and geography. Her answer envisions “California … as a site of complex and constantly changing cultural exchanges, [where] Mexico is a visible and enduring presence” (p. 17). To capture these exchanges, the authors chose to place the creators at the forefront. Where did the artists come from? How were they educated? What inspired them? How did their lives and times influence their renditions? The book introduces artists who came from all across the United States, Mexico, and Europe to claim a piece of California, whether mythic or real. It pays particular attention to female artists to recover their often-neglected contributions to the visual imagery. That said, there is one group of artists not represented in the book, as the editor acknowledges. Indigenous peoples of California appear only as subjects of art.
The editor explains that the hard decision to “put more emphasis on Mexico and less on American Indians” reflects the exhibit’s theme (p. 16). The omission of indigenous creators, nonetheless, obscures the extent to which California in the long nineteenth century was indeed “a site of complex... cultural exchanges” that challenged a stark separation among the United States, Mexico, and indigenous peoples of California, then and now.

The book contains two distinct portions—a collection of essays and a biographical dictionary—that complement each other while maintaining their autonomy. The collection of essays is organized as one introduction and nine chapters that cover the period from 1820 to 1930 in chronological order. In addition to paintings, photographs, lithographs, etchings, murals, films, and religious objects, the sources include contemporary letters, diaries, books, newspaper and magazine articles, and novels. The essays focus on well-known subjects in the history of California to explore the origins and development of its visual culture. Many of the authors testify to the artists’ fascination with the Franciscan Missions throughout the entire period. As Michael Komanecky explains, “the California missions have assumed an important and enduring role in a consciously self-constructed history of the state, providing over the course of more than a century appealing and popular subject matter for painters, photographers, novelists, poets, playwrights, songwriters, and filmmakers” (p. 173). Other relevant subjects are the region’s natural beauty, the peoples of Mexican and indigenous descent, the Mexican-American War, the Gold Rush, miners, the railroad, bountiful agriculture, tourism, world fairs, and murals in Mexico and the United States.

The biographical dictionary is composed of fifty-nine entries that combine biography, history, and art. The editor places the entries in groups of four to nine at the end of each chapter. While the titles include only the artists’ full names, each entry revolves around an in-depth analysis of the work of art reproduced on the page. This formula works remarkably well, with the entries offering standalone reading experiences. Together, the entries are a tremendous addition to the book. Consequently, the book would have benefited from outlining this biographical dictionary’s purpose and organization in the introduction and table of contents.

Overall, California Mexicana offers an embarrassment of riches to those interested in the arts and the art history of California in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This volume also sheds light on the history of migration, the development of San Francisco and Los Angeles, and the role that Mexican exiles played (and continue to play) in bridging California and Mexico. The authors, further, succeed in balancing rigorous scholarship and friendly prose when writing for a general audience. This book is great to have around and browse at leisure. As a bonus, it is an object of beauty in itself.

Reviewed by Doris Morgan Rueda, Graduate Student, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

In Hard-Boiled Hollywood, Jon Lewis explores the relationship between Hollywood and film noir to uncover the origins of the classic film genre. What he finds is a city in transition and an industry in the midst of growing pains. A city experiencing a rash of unexplained homicides and violent crime and blatant political corruption is the setting for a unique relationship between crime and the public during World War II. While Lewis opens with a vivid description of the sensational murder of Elizabeth Short (The Black Dahlia) on December 15th, 1947 and the media’s obsession with the homicide, he utilizes the well-documented case to pivot to its backdrop, a city just as dark and salacious as Short’s murder. Rather than a traditional film study, Lewis provides a history of Hollywood as the space that created film noir.

Lewis is as much interested in the figures inhabiting Hollywood as he is with the places and spaces where crime and punishment occurred. What sets Lewis apart is his inclusion of the studio lot and production studios in this analysis. While Lewis does use traditional sources such as newspapers and legal proceedings, in this monograph the studio and production offices are as much a part of crime and justice in Hollywood as City Hall. By demonstrating the connections between studio workers, as victims and perpetrators of violent crime, and the city, in addition to the open relationship between Hollywood and the Mob, Lewis reveals the necessity of understanding Hollywood as both a city and an industry. The city was unique among major American cities as both the creator and subject of national media. It is this tension between the drive to create headlines while also avoiding headlines that could hurt business that Lewis highlights so well.

Furthermore, Hard-Boiled Hollywood explores the politics of gender in the world of crime and media in Los Angeles. In the second chapter, titled “Mobster and Movie Stars,” Lewis examines how news reports during Mickey Cohen’s 1949 trial reveal the complicated relationship between the media and a mobster heavily entrenched in the film and media industries. Cohen became a media darling praised for his “charity.” His power and position in Hollywood, and most definitely his gender, altered the narrative of his crimes and trial. On the other hand, Lana Turner and her daughter Cheryl Crane were not treated as kindly as Cohen by the media. Following the killing of Turner’s boyfriend, gangster
Johnny Stompanato, by Crane (later ruled justifiable homicide in defense of her mother), Turner as a mother faced public criticism. In an era when gender roles had undergone significant change, and in a city where women could achieve independent wealth, Turner represented a form of femininity that could not go unpunished. While Crane was ultimately responsible for Stompanato’s death, it was Turner who faced trial by public opinion.

Lewis continues his analysis of Hollywood by including a chapter on the Red Scare and the various A-List actors who found themselves on both sides. While this part of the book is indeed fascinating, his section on Cecil B. DeMille is the highlight of a chapter filled with histories well documented elsewhere. In the final chapter Lewis compares the tragic lives of Marilyn Monroe and the lesser-known Barbara Payton. Payton, who like Monroe died before her fortieth birthday, lived a wild life filled with various lovers and heartbreak. Both Payton and Monroe were constantly in the media’s eye as their ascents and tragic falls became front page news. These women, Lewis argues, represented the complicated, wild, and often dangerous place that Hollywood had become. Their personal issues with alcohol, drugs, and sex, just like that of the city’s, destroyed them. Lewis notes that in their wake, Hollywood, fresh from an industry transition to a much more insular world, would reinvent itself and the Hollywood star. Gone were the scandalous Payton and Monroe, and in their place the wholesome and artificial Sandra Dee and Doris Day. Hollywood’s transition from 1940s sin-infested playground to a sanitized and stable machine was complete.

_Hard-Boiled Hollywood_ offers historians of postwar California and Los Angeles a new paradigm with which to think about crime and punishment. Lewis introduces the film industry as a space in which crime and justice took place and were then framed for the American public. This contribution alone makes Lewis’s work a worthy addition to the literature on Hollywood and crime and encourages scholars to examine carefully place and space when tackling legal or media history. While Lewis offers a gender and class analysis, he refrains from any serious discussion of race and ethnicity. This omission seems glaring in the coastal city that had a large and growing African American and Latino population in the period covered in the book. Despite this issue, Lewis has offered readers a new way to approach Hollywood inspired by the film noir it produced.
BOOK NOTES

Christianity, Social Justice, and the Japanese American Incarceration during World War II. By Anne M. Blankenship. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016. Photographs, notes, bibliography, and index. xi + 298 pp. $85 cloth. $29.95 paper. $19.99 e-book. This volume examines an often overlooked element of the internment of Japanese Americans during the Second World War. Examining the efforts of people from various denominations both inside and outside the camps, Anne Blankenship explores how Christians coped with a clear moral outrage while ministering to the immediate needs of internees. The book also contemplates the lasting significance of internment for Japanese American Christians as well as for Christian social justice activists.


Gendered Politics: Campaign Strategies of California Women Candidates, 1912–1970. By Linda Van Ingen. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. Appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. xxiv + 234 pp. $100 cloth. $95 e-book. After the advent of women’s suffrage in 1911, California women entered politics, and over 500 would run for state and national office in the following six decades. This book examines the range of strategies these women pursued to define their platforms, mobilize constituents, and challenge unspoken but powerful assumptions about male dominance.

The Modoc War: A Story of Genocide at the Dawn of America’s Gilded Age. By Robert Aquinas McNally. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. ix + 410 pp. $34.95 cloth. $34.95 e-book. While the popular memory of the post-Civil War Indian wars typically focuses on events on the Great Plains, California was home to one of the more dramatic episodes of military action against Native Americans. In this account, Robert McNally examines the Modoc War of 1872-73, a conflict that derived from white settlers’
encroachment and disruption of native economies and culminated in the U.S. Army’s siege of the Modocs’ makeshift stronghold in the desolate Lava Beds of northeastern California.

*The Other California: Land, Identity, and Politics on the Mexican Borderlands.* By Verónica Castillo-Muñoz. Oakland: University of California Press, 2016. Illustrations, table, maps, notes, bibliography, and index. xii + 171 pp. $70 cloth. Verónica Castillo-Muñoz of the University of California Santa Barbara has produced this monograph focused on working-class communities in Baja California from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. At the heart of the study is the emergence of a diverse, multicultural borderlands region where people from Mexico, the United States, Europe, and Asia have intermingled and intermarried, all the while crossing and re-crossing the international boundary.

*In Search of the Mexican Beverly Hills: Latino Suburbanization in Postwar Los Angeles.* By Jerry González. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017. Illustrations, maps, notes, and index. x + 206 pp. $99.95 cloth. $27.95 paper. $27.95 e-book. Jerry González’s *In Search of the Mexican Beverly Hills* adds to the ever-growing literature on American suburbanization by investigating the experiences of Latinos in the Los Angeles megalopolis. While suburban homeownership was an important component of European immigrant families’ ascension to “whiteness,” Mexican Americans in Los Angeles did not receive a similar benefit and instead found their racial identities reinforced by their movement outward from the urban core to the suburban periphery.
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