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## *PART I: PRE-1950*

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Probably the most influential force in changing attitudes toward homosexuality was the Kinsey report issued in 1948. As C. A. Tripp writes in his biography of Kinsey, homosexuality became front-page news, and much of the hostile criticism toward the report was due to its data on the same-sex experiences of American males. Although the report on women did not come out until five years later and faced even more hostile criticism, the revelation of same-sex activity among women did not raise the stir that the report on men did. Because, as Tripp indicates, Kinsey was determined to force Americans to face up to the existence of homosexuality, he must be regarded as a pioneer in the gay movement. This point should perhaps be emphasized, because changing public attitudes toward homosexuality was crucial and Kinsey played a large part in this. He made not only the public but also those who were gay and lesbian realize that a lot of people were homosexual.

Yet no matter how much research is done, the political battles necessary for gay men and women to be recognized have to come from the gay community. This section includes a discussion of a number of individuals from the then mostly secretive gay community. Henry Gerber, whom authors Jim Kepner and Stephen Murray call the grandfather of the American gay movement, emphasizes that the American gay movement did not appear from nowhere but was influenced by developments in Europe.

One who attempted to communicate some of these developments was Edward Irenaeus Prime-Stevenson, who wrote under the name Xavier Mayne. He was the first American to write extensively about homosexuality, first in a novel and then in a long scholarly monograph, both of which were published in Europe and eventually smuggled into the United States. He has rightly been called the father of American homophile literature. Somewhat more open about his homosexuality was the Boston Brahmin, Prescott Townsend, who traced his ancestry back to the Mayflower. He was a fixture in Boston who publicly advocated for homosexuals. During World War II,

while working in a shipbuilding yard, he was arrested and served time in jail for the “abominable and detestable crime against nature,” an event which he reported on in his Harvard class report for that year. He later went on to organize Mattachine Society in Boston. Somehow he managed to retain his leadership in the arts community of Boston. Few gays, however, had the *savoir faire* of Townsend, or the money and family connections that allowed him to be somewhat different.

Jeannette Howard Foster, a librarian, troubled by a lack of knowledge about what she called “female homosexuality” began investigating it and in the process compiled and published a comprehensive bibliography of sex variant women under her own name, which made it possible for a new generation of scholars, of which I was one, to build upon her research. If Harry Hay was the grandfather of the gay movement in the United States, then Jeannette Howard Foster is the grandmother of lesbian scholarship.

Not quite so open about her own lesbianism but very willing to fight for the cause of homosexuality was Pearl M. Hart. She had as one of her missions in life the representation of the underserved in court, and she defended literally thousands of male homosexuals as part of her practice. She was an early closeted member of the Daughters of Bilitis, lived openly with another woman, and was a major force in the Chicago gay community even though she was not public about her own sexual preference.

Lisa Ben is an interesting paradox. She published and distributed an early gay newsletter in the 1940s under her pseudonym. As of this writing, she is still alive and was very reluctant to use her real name in this book. Since, however, she is identified online as Edyth Eyde, it seems permissible to so identify her here. Her biography emphasizes that it takes a variety of people and attitudes to make a revolution, and sometimes a very small step can, in retrospect, seem to have been quite influential and daring.

Berry Berryman was more of a fighter than Lisa Ben but her pioneering study was not published until after she died. Scholarly journals simply did not accept studies such as hers and there was no gay press to publish it. She also lived in Utah, a state that might seem unlikely to have spawned a gay activist, but her case again emphasizes that a lot of gays and lesbians were doing their best to improve the conditions for their compatriots and whose contributions have not yet come to public attention.

## Alfred C. Kinsey (1894-1956)

C. A. Tripp



Photo by C. A. Tripp

For many, “pre-Stonewall” versus “post-Stonewall” defines the decisive turning point in the fight for gay liberation. At the time of the 1969 Greenwich Village riots, however, few anticipated that Stonewall would go down in history as the dividing line between radically different eras; in fact, the riots barely penetrated the consciousness of the public, gay and straight alike. This stands in sharp contrast to another major turning point that had seized widespread attention some twenty years earlier, in 1948. Almost overnight it created a divide between radically different eras of sexual understanding: pre-Kinsey versus post-Kinsey. It brought homosexuality out in the open, and Kinsey’s willing-

ness to do so marks a major step in gay liberation.

The publication of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, popularly known as the Kinsey Report, ignited a firestorm among scientists, psychiatrists, clergy, moralists of every stripe, and, not least, the general public. Indeed, the report raised a furor the likes of which had not been seen since the debut of Darwin’s theory of evolution. Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey, the senior author (and writer of the report’s every word), rocketed from obscurity to international prominence, the nature of which ranged, depending on point of view, from sublime distinction to what struck some as shameful notoriety. The report’s 804 pages of dense prose, replete with 335 graphs and tables charting the activities of 5,300 male subjects, put under the microscope a world of sexual experience that never before had received rigorous scientific scrutiny. In the process it demolished many myths about sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular.

Such a text demanded a great deal of the casual reader, of course. But then, many readers had no need to crack Kinsey’s tome for themselves. The

popular press, which knew a hot story when it saw one, trumpeted the central findings throughout the world.

The findings included astonishing statistics: 37 percent of adult males at least once had experienced sex with another male to the point of orgasm; fully 50 percent of adult males had acknowledged occasional sexual attraction to other males; and although “only” 4 percent were exclusively homosexual, 10 percent of married males in their twenties had made overt homosexual contacts *after* getting married. Kinsey expected this to be his biggest bombshell, and was much surprised when no reviewer or commentator even noticed it. Instead, all eyes focused on his next comment: “This [37 percent] is more than one male in three of the persons that one may meet as he passes along a city street” (p. 623). Later in the report, in a discussion of demands from some quarters that homosexuals be “institutionalized and isolated,” Kinsey noted that “there are about six and a third million males in the country who would need such isolation” (p. 665).

The figures rocked the boat of conventional wisdom, to put it mildly, for it had been widely assumed that homosexuality arises from rare diseases, or from impaired maleness, or from immaturities that thwart heterosexual development. But the report made it plain that male-male attractions were woven into the fabric of ordinary, everyday life. In that light, notions of rarity, illness, impaired maleness, and immaturity suddenly were subject to challenges which, pre-Kinsey, had lacked scientific substantiation. (A terminological note: “Gay” will be used sparingly because few of Kinsey’s homosexual subjects thought of themselves as gay in the identity-group sense of the term.)

The report presented several lines of evidence that showed that homosexual males, far from exhibiting “impaired maleness,” fully measure up to or even exceed the maleness of ordinary straights. One such indication emerged from some remarkable discoveries about the timing of puberty in boys. Although it is perhaps obvious that, regardless of sexual leanings, early puberty signals a certain hot-to-trot virility—a rush into sexual maturity—Kinsey’s examination of that reality uncovered a major difference between homosexual and heterosexual males.

Kinsey found that boys who reach puberty early (by age eleven) are much more sexually active than boys who reach puberty late (after age fifteen), not only during adolescence but, in fact, for the rest of their lives. This link between early puberty and high lifetime sexual activity was a discovery with far-reaching implications. It took on even more significance when coupled with another Kinsey finding: Boys who mature early are *much* more likely to engage in homosexual behavior than boys who mature late. By age sixteen, for example, 31.9 percent of the early-pubescent boys in his sample had had sex with another male, whereas only 12.3 percent of the late-

pubescent boys had experienced homosexual contact. One could suppose that this disparity might flow from the early-maturing boys having had more opportunities to experiment, simply by virtue of their head start. But the trend persists: By age twenty-seven, 42.2 percent of the early-pubescent males had had homosexual contact, versus 22.2 percent of the late maturers—a ratio of almost two to one.

In other words, homosexuality looms very large indeed among males whose sex drives kick in early and continues to stay strong. Early puberty, of course, by definition, is a fairly rare occurrence in the male population as a whole. But Kinsey's data made it clear that for homosexual males, early puberty very nearly approaches the norm. To put it plainly: Gays tend to want and get sex sooner and have more of it than straights, *from adolescence all the way through to old age*.

Furthermore, the data revealed that boys strongly inclined to homosexual activity tend to attain puberty at an especially early age. Indeed, to his amazement, Kinsey found that the greater the homosexual inclination, the earlier the puberty, and the greater the lifetime sexual experience—by a very large margin! A converse finding is equally striking: Boys who arrive at puberty late not only tend to be less sexually active throughout their lives, but also are highly prone to an exclusively heterosexual orientation.

Initially, the findings seemed compatible with conventional psychological or sociological explanations. The day these findings first poured from the Kinsey lab's IBM computer-card sorters, someone hypothesized that a boy who matured at ten or eleven was ready for sex long before he had sufficient heterosexual opportunities, and thus may get into pattern-setting homosexual experiences. It was tempting, that is, to dismiss the association between early puberty and homosexual behavior as an almost accidental by-product of timing combined with having all-male playmates. But another researcher present that day, Dr. Frank Beach, a distinguished experimental psychologist who chaired the psychology department at Yale, was more cautious and wanted to check it with experimental data in his animal lab. Months later, Beach established that the same basic trends prevail in rats: The first to mature are "champion mounters" strongly inclined to homosexual behavior. This confirmed that Kinsey had uncovered a deep, previously unsuspected connection in the biology of sex.

But that wasn't quite all. Previously, laypeople and sex researchers alike had assumed that homosexual males suffer from a deficiency of sex hormones. The report shattered that theory by pointing out that although injections of male sex hormones do amplify sex drive, they do not change the direction of sexual interest; they simply intensify preexisting attractions. Many researchers also assumed that "inversion," the capacity to switch back and forth between male and female sexual roles, stems from impaired viril-

ity. Building on Frank Beach's research, the report found quite the reverse: A propensity for inversion implies not a "weak" sexuality but an especially robust hormonal situation. The report quotes Beach's findings on lower mammals: "[M]ales who most often assume the female type of behavior are the ones who 'invariably prove to be the most vigorous copulators,' when they assume the more usual masculine role in coitus" (p. 615). Translation: Males who readily switch from being a top to a bottom are kings of the hormonal hill—and deliver performances to prove it!

Among the other myths the report exploded was the old chestnut propagated by Boy Scout manuals and the like that masturbation robs the young of their future ability to perform sexually. Kinsey's data indicated exactly the opposite: Sexually precocious boys, the ones most prone to "self-abuse," are destined to enjoy the lustiest adulthoods. Moreover, the folklore that masturbation brings on such calamities as blindness and hairy palms did not square with the report's finding; irksome in the extreme to guardians of purity, the report found that at least 95 percent of males engage in the practice.

Beyond showing that long-standing stereotypes of gays were ludicrously wrong, the report also presented surprisingly high figures on premarital and extramarital sex among heterosexuals in a context that suggested that the prohibition of such activities does far more harm than good. Many found this all the more alarming because of the prestige of Kinsey's backers: Indiana University, the National Research Council, the Rockefeller Foundation, and a roster of consultants that read like a cross-section of mainstream science.

Yet the substance and value of the Kinsey research lay elsewhere than in what seemed sensational. Then, as now, its great value flowed from the establishment, for the first time, of reliable baseline data on sexuality. Since the Kinsey data now are more than fifty years old, a question arises: Have the figures significantly changed in the intervening years as a result of the sexual revolution and other social forces?

Some certainly have changed. The average age at first intercourse is clearly down from age seventeen, where it once was, just as the amount of premarital intercourse is decidedly higher than it was in Kinsey's time. The proportion of homosexual individuals in the population, which Kinsey found to be stable for five generations, has probably remained so. At least, judging from several subsequent studies, nothing indicates it has either increased or decreased significantly.

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The marked originality of Kinsey's work frequently raises the double question of how he came to sex research, and how he was able to make such

a fresh start. The standard answer (true as far as it goes) is that when Indiana University instituted its first marriage course in 1938, Kinsey was elected to teach it. As his students began asking far-ranging questions about sex, he would try to answer them or look them up in the existing literature. What he found in the literature appalled him: a general lack of evidence and rigor.

Kinsey quietly decided to collect his own data. He began to interview people, to ask basic questions about their sex lives, and to polish and greatly expand his questions. Out of both generosity and a desire to learn more about “the reality,” as he liked to call it, he provided a good deal of private counseling to students in his course, most of whom were either married or planning to marry. During the spring semester of 1939 alone he conducted some 280 of these personal conferences.

One could not have predicted from Kinsey’s rigidly religious upbringing that he would follow this path. His straitlaced father, a devout Sunday school teacher who insisted that the family walk rather than ride to church, enforced a triple Sabbath: Sunday school, church, and evening prayer meeting. Part of this moralism stayed with young Kinsey until at least his first year in college, during which, he later recalled with amusement, a classmate once sought him out to confess to “excessive” masturbation. Kinsey took his friend back to their dormitory and knelt down beside him to pray for God’s help to make the youth stop.

Although Kinsey soon rejected religion, in other respects he continued to lead a conventional life. After receiving a PhD in zoology from Harvard, he secured an assistant professorship at Indiana University, got married, fathered four children, and pursued a career of teaching, writing, and fieldwork in entomology (the study of insects). The fieldwork presented physical and social challenges that Kinsey greatly enjoyed. In fact, a theme never to reverse itself was his lifelong fascination with nature and its effect on his interpersonal relations.

As a boy he was entranced by the outdoors. He loved to go alone on long hikes across the countryside, everywhere noticing the characteristics of plants and animals, particularly the differences and similarities between individuals of the same species. He was fascinated, too, by the sorts of people he found—farmers and country folk from generally less-educated backgrounds than his own, whose permission he often needed to cross land or camp out. He learned to meet strangers very different from himself, to tune into their views and attitudes, and to quickly establish rapport and gain cooperation.

For twenty years Kinsey put these abilities to extensive use while conducting field research on his first great academic passion, the gall wasp. “Bug hunting,” as he called his pursuit of the tiny insect, took him on treks for thousands of miles across the then forty-eight states, and into Guatemala

and Mexico, during which he met an even more diverse array of strangers. In Mexico, for example, he would hike for days into mountainous back regions that the government warned were inhabited by hostile Indians. At one point, officials required him to sign a document absolving them of any responsibility should he come into harm's way. Kinsey took the alleged perils in stride. His colleague, friend, and biographer Wardell Pomeroy gave this account of how he dealt with them:

On the first night [out in the wilderness] he set up his tent and went to sleep quickly, exhausted by a long day of collecting specimens. Next morning he emerged to find himself virtually surrounded by a circle of impassive Indians, who sat on the ground and studied him solemnly, with what purpose he did not know. Casually he set up his camp stove, then drew a chocolate bar from his pocket. He bit off a piece and ate it, to show that it was not poisoned, and offered a piece to the man nearest him. Then he divided the bar, giving a small piece to each man. When they had eaten it, he invited one of the Indians to examine his galls. The offer was accepted. After a few minutes of peering at them, the Indian called on the others to join him, and they took turns looking, equally interested. A few hours later, the hills were covered with natives searching for galls to bring to the American professor. (Pomeroy, 1972, p. 39)

From such experiences Kinsey developed “a system for discharging danger in strangers,” the cardinal principles of which proved extremely useful in his sex research: “Try never to move forward or back, especially in dangerous situations, be they dealing with the Mafia, interviewing prostitutes, or getting around the nervousness of ordinary people” (Pomeroy, 1977, p. 39). (“Moving forward” can seem intrusive, “moving back” can look defensive or rejecting.) “Be considerate and thoughtful, never selfish in your pursuit.” “Let people know what you want, then allow them to bring it to you” (Pomeroy, 1972, pp. 39-40). These are but a few examples; there were many others.

The boyhood hiking, the bug-hunting expeditions, and the sexual counseling thus laid the groundwork for Kinsey's development of one of his most consummate skills: making interview subjects comfortable. His kindly, nonjudgmental manner and simple language almost instantly put strangers at ease. He always reminded his college-bred interviewers to use the vocabulary of their subjects: “The lower-level individual is never ill or injured, though he may be sick or hurt. He does not wish to do something, though he wants to do it. He does not perceive, though he sees. He is not acquainted with a person, though he may know him” (Kinsey, 1948, p. 52). Everywhere

in Kinsey's approach it seemed that even plainness and politeness were powerful stuff, part of his respect for each person's makeup and the right to be himself or herself regardless of current position or predicament. Kinsey insisted that anyone generous enough to give a sexual history deserved to be treated as a friend or guest: "The tottering old man who is a victim of his first penal conviction appreciates an interviewer's solicitation about his health, appreciates being provided with tobacco, candy, and other things the institution allows. The inmate in a women's penal institution particularly appreciates the courtesies that a male would extend to a woman of his own social rank, in his own home" (Kinsey, 1948, p. 48).

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Kinsey early on recognized a need for broader knowledge of what sex is like in special and diverse contexts; he wanted to see behind the curtains of privacy that people use to disguise or to entirely hide what they do from others, and sometimes from themselves. By July, 1939, he had collected some 350 sex histories. The material persuaded him that he needed more information on homosexual behavior. A student whose history he had taken told him of someone in Chicago who could introduce him to homosexuals and show him how they live. Acting on this tip, he arranged for a trial visit to meet the contact and soon was making weekly trips. "He would leave Bloomington after his last class on Friday, drive the more than 200 miles to Chicago, work through the weekend, then drive back on Monday morning in time for his 8:30 a.m. class" (Christenson, 1971, p. 107).

Within two months he had collected scores of homosexual histories and was astounded by the variations among them. Although the subjects he met in Chicago did indeed constitute valuable urban samples, he later was amused by how naive he had been about "the homosexual." The kinds of histories he'd traveled great distances to gather could have been found in abundance, had he but known it, within walking distance of his Bloomington office.

On other occasions he traveled far and wide to study particular groups: prisoners, prostitutes, paragons of virtue in religious sects. Nothing he ever saw diverted or defeated him for, as a colleague put it, "He was always able to look through any ugliness to something lovely beyond" (Earle M. Marsh quoted in Pomeroy, 1972, p. 166). Whenever he ran into something unique, he immediately tried to investigate it. Once, when a sixty-three-year-old man claimed that he could come to orgasm in ten seconds from a flaccid start, Kinsey reacted with a skeptical glance, whereupon the man demonstrated this particular feat on the spot. Deep in rural Kansas, Kinsey searched out a community where, remarkably, all the women were easily

able to reach orgasm in ordinary intercourse—unusual the world over, both then and now. It turned out that the community’s prevailing style of pacifying babies involved a particular patting and stroking technique that soon induced sleep. Unbeknownst to the caregivers, the technique accidentally brought their baby girls to orgasm, thereby leaving traces in their sexual substrates that made them “easy responders” for life. Other special cases (tabulated separately to keep them from biasing the averages) involved such things as the sexual responses of people who had had brain surgery, others who for religious reasons had struggled all their lives against any sexual expression, members of nudist colonies, and paraplegics.

In addition to investigations of people plain and special, Kinsey and his co-workers made an extensive study of the differences between the sexes that so affect their psychology and compatibility. (A central finding revealed that males tend to be genitally focused, and females are more “peripheral,” i.e., tend to place more value on the moods and ambiance *around* sex than on genital stimulation.) Kinsey also pursued literally dozens of subprojects, including studies of fourteen mammalian species, and of human neurology and physiology. He launched cross-cultural surveys of ancient and modern societies, including a detailed investigation of sex practices in pre-Columbian civilizations and a study that traced shifts in Japanese sexual mores over 400 years. Legal experts were brought in to gauge the relationship between a man’s education and how well he fared in the legal system. A bevy of scholars worked to accurately translate into English important classical literature, previous translations of which distorted or outright omitted sexual passages, particularly ones dealing with homosexual themes. For example, Kinsey asked Dr. Hazel Toliver, an authority on ancient Latin and Greek, to check the prestigious Oxford-published Benjamin Jowett translation of Plato’s *Symposium*. She found, among many others, the following instances of censorship:

JOWETT: He who under the influence of true love rising upward begins to see that beauty is not far from the end.

WHAT PLATO REALLY WROTE: Through the nightly loving of boys a man, on arising, begins to see the true nature of beauty.

JOWETT: As Pausanias says, The good are to be accepted, and the bad are not to be accepted.

PLATO: As Pausanias says, It is honorable for a man to grant sexual favors to the good among men and shameful for him to grant them to the unbri-dled.

JOWETT: Now I thought he was seriously enamoured of my beauty and this appeared to be a grand opportunity of hearing him tell what he knew.

PLATO: Now I thought he was eager for my bloom of youth and I believed that it was a windfall and my marvelous piece of good luck that it should fall to me to sexually gratify Socrates in order to hear everything he knew.

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As noted at the outset of this chapter, the report generated enormous commotion. Its most controversial elements, by far, were those that explored homosexual issues. For although homosexuality was only one of the six basic forms of sex examined (the others were nocturnal emissions, masturbation, heterosexual petting, heterosexual intercourse, and sex with animals), and although it represented only a fraction of the research effort, nothing disturbed critics more or brought them to such a fever pitch of hate and rage than did the findings on homosexual behavior. A. H. Hobbs, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, issued a typical denunciation: “There must be something wrong with Kinsey’s statistics, which [coupled with] the prestige of the Rockefeller Foundation, give unwarranted weight to implications that homosexuality is normal, and that premarital relations might be a good thing” (Jones, 1997, p. 734). Others insisted that homosexuality just can’t be that prevalent—and, anyway, by talking about it you encourage it. The president of Princeton University, Dr. Harold Dodds, actually likened the report to “toilet-wall inscriptions” (Pomeroy, 1972, p. 287). Clare Boothe Luce, author of the racy play *The Women*, felt obliged to proclaim at a lecture for the National Council of Catholic Women in 1984 that, “The Kinsey Report, like all cheap thrillers, would fall into obscurity if so much attention was not paid to it.”

Similar sentiments came from congressmen, from a handful of anthropologists and psychoanalysts, and more stridently from Union Theological Seminary’s Henry Van Dusen (who, dangerously, sat on the board of the Rockefeller Foundation). A respected scientist had poked a stick in the eye of American prudery, and the leading prudes, aghast at the sudden airing of heretofore forbidden topics, ferociously lashed back. The hue and cry raised such doubts about Kinsey’s data that the National Research Council asked the American Statistical Association (ASA) to examine the work in detail. Kinsey was well prepared for this challenge, but not for the delay it entailed, during which his financial backing began to evaporate. Originally he had envisioned publishing nine further volumes on human sexuality; of these, only *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) saw print.

When the ASA finally weighed in, it rated Kinsey’s research as the best ever done in the field. The last three words of its summation characterized the report as “a monumental endeavor.” (Strangely enough, even here, ho-

mosexual behavior was the central issue; it was the only one of the six kinds of sex that Kinsey studied to appear in the index of the ASA's 338-page report.) But by then, the battle with reaction had been lost.

Heartsick at losing support for his "right to do sex research," as he always put it, and exhausted by efforts to seek new backing, Kinsey's health began to fail. He died on August 25, 1956. Shortly before, he memorably commented: "There isn't a day that I do not regret that we do not have a raft more of our material in print for people to use" (Christenson, 1971, p. 169).

In fact, one of the more haunting aspects of Kinsey's legacy is that perhaps as much as 90 percent of the data that he and his staff gathered has yet to be published or even prepared for publication. Furthermore, changing political winds, budgetary constraints, and mismanagement have severely restricted scholars' access to the treasure trove of information still held by the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University. It is both shocking and sad that many decades after Kinsey started gathering the information, those who control it still consider it too hot to handle.

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A few comments are in order about a pair of recent Kinsey biographies, *Alfred C. Kinsey: A Public/Private Life* by James Jones (1997), and *Sex the Measure of All Things: A Life of Alfred C. Kinsey* by Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy (1998). The Jones book, although a tour de force of meticulous detail distributed over nearly 1,000 pages, makes serious misjudgments throughout that cumulatively destroy the uninitiated reader's ability to grasp Kinsey's character, either his size as a man or his stature as a scientist of great merit. With regard to the nature of Kinsey's homosexuality, his alleged lifelong masochism, and, above all, his "sense of shame," Jones' mistakes are simply too coarse and careless to warrant rebuttal. More serious by far are other misperceptions, such as Jones' notion of "Kinsey the reformer," of a "compulsive" obsessed with revolutionizing sexual mores. This is absolute nonsense. For although the report made a landmark contribution to the intellectual underpinnings of the sexual revolution, Kinsey always maintained that the whole matrix of our mores is stubborn, ancient in origin, glacial in pace, and quite often indifferent to scientific facts. His vision, focused on the individual's striving to understand his or her particular sexuality, was almost exactly the opposite of what Jones portrays. To sum up the vision: If you as a person, whoever you are and wherever you live, can "get ahold of the facts" (a favorite phrase of his), *you can work out your own solutions*. This was not the credo of a man who would impose a new sexual order.

Fortunately, no such complaints can be leveled against the Gathorne-Hardy biography. Every time it comes to hand, I'm amazed anew at how

good it is—rich, important, lively, greatly detailed in its own way, and occasionally hilarious in a fashion that only a polished writer can manage to bring off. For instance, while evaluating how studies subsequent to Kinsey have tried to measure some of the same variables he explored, Gathorne-Hardy takes us behind the scenes to meet the “Blue Rinse Brigade,” a group of elderly ladies hired by a Chicago research organization to gather sexual histories. The “extensive training” that these women were said to have received turned out to consist of only a single page of guidelines and three days of actual practice—a woefully inadequate level of preparation that has plagued many other post-Kinsey studies as well. Kinsey, who wrote extensively on interviewing techniques, in contrast demanded that his history takers receive training for a *full year* and set extremely rigorous standards to maximize their “people skills.” He would have laughed out loud at the very notion of the Blue Rinse Brigade. For as one of its potential subjects asked with plaintive bewilderment, “Do they think I’m going to tell some old woman who reminds me of my mother that I’m a cocksucker?” (Gathorne-Hardy, 1998, p. 286).

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Numerous researchers have stepped in since Kinsey’s death to continue his work, with some achieving success in a few areas. But no one has matched his cutting edge or has come close to the quality and detail of the *Male* and *Female* volumes (both of which have recently been republished). They endure as the standard reference works on what people did and mostly still do in sex. They also endure as the first, and to this day the most comprehensive, refutation of myths associated with homophobia.

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# Henry Gerber (1895-1972): Grandfather of the American Gay Movement

Jim Kepner  
Stephen O. Murray

If everyone keeps aloof, nothing will be done. As Goethe said:  
“Against human stupidity even the gods fight in vain.”

Henry Gerber, October 23, 1945, letter to Manuel Boyfrank

Henry Gerber (1895-1972), the crotchety Bavarian-born forefather of a gay movement in the United States, arrived in the United States in 1913. In



Chicago Historical Society

1917 he was briefly institutionalized in a mental institution for being homosexual. After the United States declared war on Germany, Gerber was given a choice between joining the U.S. Army or being interned for the duration of the war as an enemy alien. He chose to join the army, working as a printer and proofreader in Coblenz (in the Rhineland) as part of the American Army of occupation during the early 1920s. Gerber contacted the then-thriving Bund für Menschenrecht (Society for Human Rights, founded in 1919 by Hans Kahnert) and worked either on *Blätter für Menschenrechten* (*Journal for human rights*, a gay periodical published in

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Shortly before his death, Kepner drafted a two-and-a-half-page biographical sketch for a precursor of this book. Murray edited this sketch and added material from Gerber's letters—letters that Kepner had collected and that are now in the ONE/IGLA collection at the University of Southern California—and from the material Kepner supplied Katz (1978). Dates following quotations are those of letters to Manuel Boyfrank. Page numbers that are not part of a fuller reference are from Katz (1978). Kepner did not supply citations for the direct quotations in his sketch.

Berlin for which Gerber wrote two bylined articles from the United States that appeared in 1928 and 1929) or, more likely, on an army post newspaper. His 1962 article in *ONE Magazine* recalled subscribing to a German homosexual magazine and traveling several times to Berlin.

After the war, his citizenship status still uncertain because of the psychiatric hospitalization, he worked for the U.S. Postal Service in Chicago. With some help from his supervisor there, he founded a Society for Human Rights (SHR) in Chicago. The SHR's December 1924 charter from the state of Illinois as a nonprofit corporation had the stated objective

to promote and protect the interests of people who by reasons of mental and physical abnormalities are abused and hindered in the legal pursuit of happiness which is guaranteed them by the Declaration of Independence and to combat the public prejudices against them by dissemination of factors according to modern science among intellectuals of mature age. The Society stands only for law and order; it is in harmony with any and all general laws insofar as they protect the rights of others, and does in no manner recommend any acts in violation of present laws nor advocate any matter inimical to the public welfare. (Katz, 1978, pp. 386-387)

Gerber signed the application as secretary. The Reverend John T. Graves, an African-American preacher, who was the only clergyman Gerber seems to have found congenial, signed it as president, and the document lists seven directors, including Gerber and Graves.

Gerber was deeply disappointed by his inability to gain support for SHR from any physicians or advocates of sex education and sexual freedom: "The most difficult task was to get men of good reputation to back up the Society." He tried to get medical authorities to endorse the new organization, but as he said "they usually refused to endanger their reputations." He was dismayed that "the only support I got was from poor people"; the only men willing to join were "illiterate and penniless." Gerber did all the work and bore all the costs. He recalled that he had been "willing to slave and suffer and risk losing my job and savings and even my liberty for the ideal" (Katz, 1978, pp. 388-393). Years after SHR collapsed, Gerber reported that he had come to realize that "most people only join clubs which already have members" (June 22, 1946).

Very few individuals were even willing to receive the Society's publication, *Friendship and Freedom* (of which there were two issues), by mail, regarding it as akin to thieves publicly subscribing to a thieves' journal, making it easy to find criminals (as those engaging in any same-sex sexual contact were then considered). Postal censors eagerly cooperated with local

law enforcement agencies to identify “sex deviants.” A picture of *Friendship and Freedom* appeared in a German magazine (it is reproduced in Katz 1978, p. 587), and a brief review of the first issue appeared in the French journal *L’Amitié* in April of 1925 (originally titled *Inversions*).

In his 1962 retrospect, Gerber wrote that upon his return to the United States,

I realized that homosexuals themselves needed nearly as much attention as the laws pertaining to their acts. . . . The first difficulty was in rounding up enough members and contributors so the work could go forward. The average homosexual, I found, was ignorant concerning himself. Others were fearful. Still others were frantic or depraved. Some were blasé.

Many homosexuals told me that their search for forbidden fruit was the real spice of life. With this argument they rejected our aims. We wondered how we could accomplish anything with such resistance from our own people. (Katz, 1978, p. 388)

Gerber never said where he tried to recruit, other than through pen pals. There were speakeasies where homosexual men gathered, but Gerber neither drank nor smoked and did not like to associate with queeny or with older homosexual men. Surreptitious homosexual activity in parks, restrooms, and theaters limited, if not precluded, conversation, at least any discussion about joining a legal reform organization. The few pen pals who admitted they were homosexual were interested in direct sex contacts, in trading erotic photos, or in ethereal romanticism.

Nevertheless, Gerber and his original group had a plan for gradual expansion with two cautious principles, both of which prefigured 1950s’ homophile organizations:

(1) We would engage in a series of lectures pointing out the attitude of society in relation to their own behavior and especially urging against the seduction of adolescents.

(2) Through a publication named *Friendship and Freedom* we would keep the homophile world in touch with the progress of our efforts. The publication was to refrain from advocating sexual acts and would serve merely as a forum of discussion.

The final part of the plan aimed to convince authorities of the need for change:

(3) Through self-discipline, homophiles would win the confidence and assistance of legal authorities and legislators in understanding the problem: that these authorities should be educated on the futility and folly of long prison terms for those committing homosexual acts, etc. (Katz, 1978, pp. 386-387)

Gerber and Graves had decided to exclude bisexuals from SHR. Unbeknownst to them, SHR's vice president, Al Weininger, called by Gerber an "indigent laundry queen," had a wife and two young children. The members of SHR were jailed when Weininger's wife told a social worker about an organization of "degenerates," and the social worker passed on the information to the police. The police brought along a newspaper reporter when they came calling on Gerber. As Gerber recalled:

One Sunday morning about 2 a.m., I returned from a visit downtown. After I had gone to my room, someone knocked at the door. Thinking it might be the landlady, I opened up. Two men entered the room. They identified themselves as a city detective and a newspaper reporter from [the Hearst newspaper] the *Examiner*. The detective asked me where the boy was. What boy? He told me he had orders from his precinct captain to bring me to the police station. He took my typewriter, my notary public diploma, and all the literature of the Society and also personal diaries as well as my bookkeeping accounts. At no time did he show a warrant for my arrest. At the police station I was locked up in a cell but no charges were made against me. (Katz, 1978, p. 390)

The next morning he was taken to the Chicago Avenue Police Court, where he found John, Al, and George, a young man who had been in Al's room at the time of arrest. The *Examiner* reported the story under the headline, "Strange Sex Cult Exposed." The reporter claimed that Al had "brought his male friends home and had, in full view of his wife and children, practiced 'strange sex acts' with them." He also wrote that a pamphlet of this "cult" was found that "urged men to leave their wives and children," a statement totally antithetical to the SHR policy of including only exclusive homosexuals.

On Monday the detective produced a powder puff in court that he claimed to have found in Gerber's room. This was understood by everyone as evidence of effeminacy, although Gerber heartily denied that it was his or that he ever used powder or owned a powder puff. The judge wondered aloud about whether *Friendship and Freedom* violated federal laws about sending obscene materials through the U.S. mail—the obscenity being discussion of

homosexuality or the persecution of homosexuals, rather than anything particularly prurient.

The case was dismissed and the prosecution reprimanded (by a different judge), but his legal defense cost Gerber his life savings of \$600 and resulted in dismissal from his job for “conduct unbecoming a postal worker.” Al pled guilty to disorderly conduct and was fined \$10. Most undistributed copies of *Friendship and Freedom* were confiscated by the police, along with Gerber’s private papers and typewriter. Despite a judge’s order, they were never returned to him. No action on obscenity was taken although two postal inspectors were present in the court. The case left Gerber very bitter that none of the more affluent Chicago homosexuals helped him in a fight which he regarded as one for the collective good. Gerber was left without a job or savings, and his dream of a Society for Human Rights was ended.

It is not clear what Gerber did to earn a living during the next few years. On a 1927 visit to New York City, a friend from his newspaper days in Coblenz introduced him to a colonel (who had been a brevet major general during World War I) who told Gerber he would be glad to have him in his unit if he reenlisted. Gerber did so; in 1945, he received an honorable discharge and a \$100 a month military pension. Making New York City his home, Gerber made some further efforts to organize homosexuals, although he increasingly believed that “most bitches are only interested in sex contacts,” not challenging legal and social stigmas of homosexuality. “I have absolutely no confidence in the dorian crowd, mostly a bunch of selfish, uncultured, ignorant egoists who have nothing for the ideal side of life,” Gerber wrote Boyfrank (April 9, 1944). “Since it gets me nothing and prevents me from enjoying my liberty in private, why bother to help others?” was the bitter view of the one-time idealist reformer. “Why waste your time and run risks of jail over a few stupid homos who are bound to get in dutch and spill everything? I have gone through all this and swore to do it no more” (January 4, 1945).

Gerber also ran the pen-pal club *Contacts* from 1930 until 1939. It had about 150 to 200 members when he began. Although most members were heterosexual, it was possible for Gerber and a few other homosexuals to blend in, thereby avoiding attention and interference from the postal authorities. Members were not informed who was running the club. He produced a monthly newsletter, generally a single mimeographed sheet for “Contacters.” He also worked on a 1934 freethinking publication, *Chanticleer*, writing many articles in defense of homosexuality, including an early report on the persecution of homosexuals in Germany. He missed the fact that a similar witch-hunt against homosexuals had begun in the Soviet Union months earlier: Russia was still thought to be the only Western country that had been

freed from legal oppression. So convinced was Gerber that religion was the source of antihomosexual bias that he hardly saw atheism and what we might now label gay pride as separable.

In the final (1939) issue of *Contacts*, #10, Gerber provided a lengthy self-description of a vaguely (pop-)Nietzschean misanthrope whose misogyny is dwarfed by his anticlericalism:

NYC Male, 44, proofreader, single. Favored by nature with immunity to female “charms,” but do[es] not “hate” women; consider[s] them necessary in the scheme of nature. Amused by screwy antics of Homo Sapiens. Introvert, enjoying a quiet evening with classical music or non-fiction book. Looking at life, I understand why monkeys protested Darwin’s thesis.

Of Bavarian descent. Brought up Catholic, now an avowed atheist. (God loves atheists because they do not molest him with silly prayers.) Believe[s] in brotherhood of man, but sees no hope for mankind to free itself from exploitation of the entrenched money changers. Religions is a racket and one who believes in supernatural powers is ready to swallow anything, including Jonas’ whale.

Believe[s] in French sex morality: that it’s not the state’s business to interfere in the sexual enjoyment of adults so long as rights of others are not violated. If I had designed this world, I would have designed a less messy and filthy modus operandi of procreation than “sex” and birth. . . . Nature is plain, although there is no meaning beyond multiplication of existing forms. Like cats, men and women create children, which in the case of cats are drowned every time a litter appears. It is still against the law to drown unwanted children. Nature will always favor procreation and is distinctly on the side of women in trapping man and drafting him for his natural duties. Birth control makes slow headway, but is considered legal, although natural forms of birth control which do not depend on artificial goods sold in drugstores [homosexual contacts] are still considered grave moral misdemeanors. . . . Religious racketeers realize that man’s emotions, if freely expressed by sex activity, would leave nothing for religion. But sex repress [repressed] and inhibited leads to religious hysteria, and priests get rich thereby. Thus sex must be suprest [suppressed]. No intelligent man will find certain anatomical parts of man’s body more moral than others and would naturally reject the word “obscene.” But it is part and parcel of a scheme to deprive man of sex pleasure for the ultimate profit of others. Man must not enjoy himself too much or God will weep and punish him! Absurd theology, accepted by millions of Christians and Jews.

Life itself is not a great gift, but those who have a good income without having to work too hard manage to find life tolerably interesting and enjoy the pleasures of mind and body. . . . A genuine introvert, consider[s] solitude the greatest blessing of man. Can get along without friends and prefer[s] to be alone rather than waste my time with morons who have only learned phrases such as You said it, You are damn[e]d right, Search me. It is impossible for a person conducting his business in a big city to be alone most of the time, and contacts in the line of business prevent a solitary introvert from becoming lopsided. Books, the radio, the newspaper bring the world into his home, without forcing him to endure painful contact with nitwits. Brainless people fear being alone with their empty selves and run from party to party and from the many amusements offered such unthinking people. I am fond of reading non-fiction books and have quite a library of selected volumes. Very fond of classical music. Have about 1000 gramophone records (all classical) and a radio-combination, also play the piano. Fond of outdoors in summer. Like foreign, especially French, films, and the few worthwhile Hollywood pictures, but am disgusted with the hypocrisy and “goody-goody” filmware which shows all men honest and all women “pure.” Firmly for realism even if it shakes a few pious spinsters out of their “Alice-in-Wonderland” reverie. Rather particular about correspondents. Not interested in smut or “obscenity,” not because it is a “sin” but believe my private affairs personal and sacred, not to be divulged to gossip. Not interested in the gossip-mongering of the average Contacts female nor inclined to waste time on brainless male “old wives” who are too lazy or cowardly to solve their own problems. Consider myself civilized and self-sufficient, but always welcome people of like minds who can discuss life intelligently, and can share the simple pleasures of discussion, music, and travel.

This diatribe drew at least one response, the beginning of correspondence with Manuel Boyfrank. In a January 27, 1940, letter Gerber wrote Boyfrank, “I was surprised to find you a homosexual, too, but let me tell you from experience [that] it does not pay to do anything for them. I once lost a good job trying to bring them together. Most men of that type are too scared to join any association trying to help them; the other half are only interested in physical contacts and have no interest in helping their cause, as I found to my sorrow.” Gerber continued, immediately, with specification of his own sexual conduct, circa 1940:

Personally I am only interested in young boys around 20 who are willing to do all the “dirty” work for say a dollar. . . . Fortunately there are many of that type who deliver the goods for a price, and I am more or less consorting to this business. How should I worry how others get theirs? As they say in the South, I get mine; why worry how he gets hisn?

In a letter to Boyfrank (March 23, 1944), however, he said that mutual masturbation in movie theaters was the extent of his “love affairs.”

He might have been not quite honest, since in another letter to Boyfrank (July 5, 1945), he wrote, “I prefer prostitutes who have their price and do a good job. . . . Thousands are willing to make a couple dollars and get pleasure on top of it.” In addition to their abundant supply, he stated that another advantage in this choice of sexual partners was that “prostitutes would no more call the police than a bootlegger would ask a revenuer for protection of his illegal business.”

Generally unsociable, Gerber longed for that “ideal friend,” but by his midforties he had settled for quick anonymous sex, primarily masturbating military men in theaters. Intellectual companionship for him was at a geographic distance, maintained cautiously (given his experiences with the U.S. Postal Service) by mail. From 1939 to 1957 he engaged in extensive correspondence with Manuel Boyfrank, Frank McCourt, and several others about how to organize homosexuals, and how to answer the prejudice and misinformation in the press.

Gerber and his friends suffered periodic beatings, theft, and blackmail by the “dirt trade.” They were further harassed by postal snoops who opened “suspicious or obscene” mail and reported homosexuals to the police. In February 1942 Gerber’s quarters were searched by G-2, the U.S. Army investigative unit. Although they found no damaging evidence, Gerber spent weeks in the guardhouse. Gerber recalled that “they put me before a Section VIII (undesirable) board and tried to get me out of the army on that. When I told the president of the board I only practiced mutual masturbation with men over 21, the psychiatrist told me ‘You are not a homosexual.’ I nearly fell out of my chair! Imagine me fighting all my life for our cause and then be told I was not a homosexual!”

Although he recurrently discussed the need for a homosexual advocacy group, Gerber felt that it was virtually impossible to find enough reliable people to start one. On Governor’s Island in 1948, Fred Frisbie, a nineteen-year-old soldier who had gone home with a friend of Gerber’s, enthusiastically joined such a discussion over breakfast, but Gerber argued that most homosexuals would never support any organization designed to improve the

general social position of homosexuals. Frisbie was later a participant in Mattachine and ONE, Inc.

Some of Gerber's long-winded letters in defense of homosexuality (also attacking corrupt politicians, conservative moralists, and religion) appeared in *The Modern Thinker*, *The Freethinker*, *American Mercury*, and District of Columbia newspapers, signed by "Doctor Gerber," since only a doctor was presumed to know anything about such abnormality.

Gerber, Boyfrank, and McCourt were masculine in appearance and demeanor and felt they had little in common with effeminate queens or lesbians. In particular, Gerber regarded women as nest builders, allies of priests, and as natural enemies of homosexuals. "Women are good psychologists and [it] did not take long to find out that homosexuals are their deadly enemies in the capture of the male" (January 4, 1945) was a leitmotif of Gerber's letters to Boyfrank. Although knowing little of the gay bar scene, they knew the park and movie theater cruising scenes well. Each had been rolled a few times. They argued among themselves about what homosexuality was and what to do about the problems homosexuals faced. Gerber initially viewed homosexuality as innate, then as a preference, and, after a Freudian conversion, as potential in all men ("There are no homosexuals. There is only sex pleasure and various forms of acquiring it"—July 5, 1945, letter to Boyfrank; reiterated October 23, 1945). However, he continued to vacillate about the existence of a homosexual kind of person as indicated by his rhetorical question, "What homosexual in his right mind wants to marry or to be 'cured'?" (August 9, 1947).

After a few relatively early partnerships with young queens, Gerber rarely had sex with friends or with anyone much over twenty-five years of age. Although publicly opposing racism, he often expressed his own. He viewed psychoanalysis as liberating and angrily cut off any friends, such as Jan Kingma (who was involved in or founded Philadelphia's Foundation for Social Development in 1948) simply because he espoused mysticism or religion or sought to work with sympathetic clergy. Except for the Reverend Graves, Gerber regarded any seemingly supportive clergy as a hypocrite, ignoring Christianity's implacable and essential opposition to homosexuality.

He worked some, though at a distance with Mattachine—New York and *ONE Magazine* during the 1950s. He wrote an account of the Society for Human Rights that appeared in the September 1962 issue of *ONE Magazine*, and translated part of Magnus Hirschfeld's (1914) *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes* for the *ONE Institute Quarterly*. Although Gerber pressed Boyfrank to join ONE, he continued to doubt that these organizations could win support from most gays or substantially change public prejudices. In a June 18, 1957, letter to Boyfrank he commented that "ONE and Mattachine have lots of financial trouble because the average ho-

mosexual is mainly interested in contacts with other homosexuals. When neither of these publications help in this matter but beg for contributions all the time . . . people are discouraged. . . . So the average homosexual, unless he is unselfish, can see nothing in it for him and he returns to the solitary hunt for trade.”

During the 1950s he began to explore the gay bar scene and was astonished to discover that more men than he had previously supposed did engage in anal intercourse. Except for brief trips to Mexico and Europe during 1951 and 1952, he spent his final years at the U.S. Soldiers’ Home in Washington, DC. He worked on an autobiography “admitting my homosexuality but not going into details,” a critique of religion, a book on ethics, and a book on sex laws. The last he titled *Moral Delusions* (January 4, 1945). He also worked on rewriting translations he had done years earlier of two German gay novels he collectively titled *Angels in Sodom* (December 7, 1946). He mailed some manuscripts to Boyfrank. Either they all were lost—perhaps seized by postal inspectors—or they disappeared into Boyfrank’s never-finished cut-and-paste manuscript. Boyfrank told Kepner he did not recall receiving them, although they are discussed in their correspondence around that time (e.g., in an October 23, 1945, letter). Gerber also produced a recreational bulletin at the soldiers’ home and wrote letters and prepared tax forms for other veterans, most of whom he despised as idiots.

Although his fledgling organization was crushed by a cabal of social control agents, Gerber sowed the seed of gay pride and the idea of fighting for gay rights in scores of correspondents, directly and indirectly influencing Harry Hay, Jim Kepner, Tony Segura, Donna Smith, Fred Frisbie, Manuel Boyfrank, and others who worked to establish the homophile movement of the 1950s. Gerber is also a clear link between the German movement to remove Paragraph 175 of the German penal code and the 1950s’ law reform movement that still remained extremely high-risk activism for people who were not just stigmatized but whose relations—even nonsexual associations—were criminalized. He was keenly aware of the centrality of postal inspectors interfering with association at a distance by those seeking to organize around homosexuality and its repression, an obstacle to nonlocal mobilization that ONE finally succeeded in removing in 1958.

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# Edward Irenaeus Prime-Stevenson (Xavier Mayne) (1868-1942)

John Lauritsen



Novelist, journalist, independent scholar, and music critic, Stevenson was the first American to deal openly with homosexuality, both in a fictional setting and as a transmitter of the ideas about homosexuality as put forth by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing.

Edward Stevenson was born on July 23, 1868, in Madison, New Jersey, the youngest son of Paul E. Stevenson, a Presbyterian minister who became principal of a classical school in Bridgewater, New Jersey, and then in Madison. Stevenson's mother, Cornelia

Prime, came from a family of distinguished literary and academic figures; she was fifty-two at the time of Edward's birth.

Although admitted to the New Jersey Bar, Edward Stevenson never practiced law but instead pursued a career as a writer, which he had begun while still in school. His first novel, *White Cockades* (1887), is a boy's book about Bonnie Prince Charlie. Twenty years later Stevenson, writing under the pseudonym of Xavier Mayne, commented on this work: ". . . passionate devotion from a rustic youth towards the Prince and its recognition are half hinted as homosexual in essence" (1908, p. 367). Many novels and short stories followed, of which several were based on the theme of passionate male friendships.

Stevenson developed an international reputation as a man of letters, specializing in musical, dramatic, and literary criticism. He was at various times on the staff of the *Independent*, *Harper's Weekly*, and other publications. In the 1890s, he began dividing his time between Europe and the United States, and his life and outlook became increasingly cosmopolitan. Eventually he claimed mastery of nine languages, Asian as well as European. After the turn of the century he became an expatriate, residing mostly in Italy. His reasons are clearly expressed in his writings: the United States

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(as well as England) had an atmosphere that was oppressive and laws that were dangerous to a man such as himself, who was a lover of other males.

Stevenson's place in homophile literature is assured through two works: *Imre: A Memorandum*, the first American novel to deal openly and sympathetically with male homosexuality, and *The Intersexes*, the first book in the English language to discuss all aspects of homosexuality.

*Imre: A Memorandum* was self-published in Naples in 1906. It is best appreciated as a didactic work, an apologia for "The Friendship which is Love—the Love which is Friendship" (these words appear on the book's title page). We may presume it is also an expression of Stevenson's own tastes and opinions.

The novel's plot is meager enough. In a small Hungarian town, Oswald, an Englishman who is "past thirty" meets and falls in love with Imre, a twenty-five-year-old Hungarian officer who is from an old and proud but impoverished Transylvanian family. Imre "was of no ordinary beauty of physique and elegance of bearing, even in a land where such matters are normal details of personality." He possessed "a pair of peculiarly brilliant but not shadowless hazel eyes." Though his features were delicate, they were "without womanishness," for "Imre was not a pretty man; but a beautiful man." His body is described thus: "Of middle height, he possessed a slender figure, faultless in proportions, a wonder of muscular development, of strength, lightness and elegance." Imre was a star athlete in sports ranging from gymnastics to swimming, fencing, target shooting, and horse riding:

Yet all this force, this muscular address, was concealed by the symmetry of his graceful, elastic frame. Not till he was nude, and one could trace the ripple of muscle and sinew under the fine, hairless skin, did one realize the machinery of such strength. (Mayne, 1908, p. 367)

Oswald and Imre spend much time together, mostly in conversation. About halfway through the book, following an intense discussion of friendship, Oswald begins a confession, which goes on for almost fifty pages. He tells the story of his life; reviews the work of Krafft-Ebing and others on uranianism; discusses the love-friendship of Ancient Greece; cites many famous men who were lovers of their own kind; and finally, using the familiar form of address, declares his love for Imre.

Imre appears to rebuff Oswald. In an anguished speech he pledges undying friendship, but implores Oswald never again to speak of what he had told him—"Never, unless I break the silence." Circumstances separate the two friends for awhile. Imre's communications become increasingly affectionate, and at last they are reunited. In a hotel room, Oswald is sexually aroused when Imre puts his arm around Oswald's shoulder, and struggles

“in shame and despair to keep down the hateful physical passion which was making nothing of all my psychic loyalty” (Mayne, 1908, pp. 367-368). Apparently with a visible erection as a sign of his “sensual weakness,” Oswald falls away from Imre, certain that his friendship would be lost forever.

However, Imre, voluntarily breaking the agreed-upon silence, delivers a confession of his own. Declaring his love for Oswald, he recounts his own experiences and love inclinations, which parallel those of Oswald. The dramatic high point of the novel is reached in Imre’s resounding declaration: “Look into thyself, Oswald! It is all *there*. I am a Uranian, as thou art. From my birth I have been one. Wholly, wholly homosexual, Oswald!”

After more talk, they take a walk in the moonlight. Finally, back in the hotel room, Imre puts his arm around Oswald and delivers the final speech, which concludes: “Come then, O friend! O brother, to our rest! Thy heart on mine, thy soul with mine! For us two it is surely is . . . Rest!” (Mayne, 1908, pp. 368-369). It is by no means described, but we may dare to imagine that they then take off their clothes and get in bed.

Stevenson’s magnum opus, *The Intersexes: A History of Similisexuality As a Problem in Social Life*, was also privately printed, apparently in Rome in 1908, in a limited edition of 125 copies. It is dedicated to the memory of Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902), the author of the best-seller *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886).

An astonishing range of topics is covered in the 646 pages of Stevenson’s book, including animal studies, similisexual love in the ancient world and among primitive peoples, gay geniuses, literature with homoerotic themes, ancient and modern legislation, male prostitution, blackmail, and violence.

Stevenson begins by addressing the book to the “individual layman,” paying tribute to “medical psychologists,” and explaining the basic concepts and terminology that he uses. Throughout *The Intersexes* Stevenson employs the terminology of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895), as popularized by Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) and Krafft-Ebing. The term “intersexes” is a translation of the German *sexuelle zwischenstufen* (intermediate sexual types or sexual intergrades), the notion being that homosexuals are psychologically, and sometimes also physically, in between real (i.e., heterosexual) men and women.

In Ulrichs’ sexual taxonomy, males are divided into three main categories: (1) the *Dioning* or normal male (called *Urianaster* when he acquires Urning tendencies!); (2) the *Urning* or homosexual male; and (3) the *Urano-dioning*, a male who is *born* with a capacity for love in both directions. Stevenson uses the English form, uranian, with its female counterpart uraniad for lesbians. (In Plato’s *Symposium*, Pausanias postulates *two* gods of love: the Uranian [Heavenly] Eros governs principled male love, whereas

the Pandemian [Vulgar] Eros governs heterosexual or purely licentious relations.)

The reliance upon Ulrichs, Hirschfeld, and Krafft-Ebing is unfortunate, as it dates the book and creates a conceptual muddle. Elsewhere in *The Intersexes*, Stevenson shows that gay men can be every bit as masculine as straight men and sometimes more so. One of the longest chapters in the book covers the uranian and uraniad in the military and athletics. We are assured that “In the army and the marine we find the Uranian in enormous proportion,” and that these uranians are characterized by “bodily vigour” and “virile courage.” A dozen pages are enthusiastically devoted to the phenomenon of soldiers who sell their bodies to other males.

Ulrichs and Hirschfeld notwithstanding, Stevenson is fascinated by the concept that man-to-man love is “a supremely virile love”: “Is there really now, as ages ago, a sexual aristocracy of the male? a mystic and hellenic brotherhood, a sort of super-virile male?” (Quotation in *Imre*, p. 1, attributed to “Magyarbol”, another of Stevenson’s pseudonyms).

Stevenson places great emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of male love, especially for the more masculine type of uranian who possesses a “super-seding sense of the beauty of the male physique and male character.” He praises the Ancient Greeks for having: “a temperament at once rugged and yet aesthetically sensitive as in no other race.”

Stevenson eloquently describes the high esteem with which male love was held in the ancient world, especially Greece. He puts forward the “startling but irresistible conclusion” that the condemnation of similisexual love is entirely a product of Christian morality which, going against our classical heritage, is “simply a relic of ancient Jewish semi-civilized dispensations.” Throughout the book he characterizes the source of oppression in such terms as the “narrow Jewish-Christian ethics of today.”

Stevenson drew upon almost everything that had been written on similisexualism in the early homosexual rights movement and in psychiatric literature. In addition, he recorded his own extensive observations of the Uranian scene in the cities of Europe and the United States. There are hundreds of case studies, newspaper accounts, and stories from the grapevine.

In his final chapter, “Is the Uranian a Higher or a Lower Sex and Type in the Scale of Humanity?,” Stevenson grapples with a paradox that tormented him. On one hand, uranian types included vigorous and masculine men of the highest character. On the other, there could also be “countless ignoble, trivial, loathesome, feeble-souled and feeble-bodied creatures.” He was horrified that the ranks of man-loving men included:

Those patently depraved, noxious, flaccid, gross, womanish beings! Perverted and imperfect in moral nature and even their bodily tissues! Those homosexual legions that are the straw-chaff of society; good for nothing except the fire that purges the world of garbage and rubbish! (a passage from *Imre*, p. 116, cited in *The Intersexes*, p. 588)

Nevertheless, Stevenson is convinced that the “uranian passion . . . is largely salutary,” and he holds up the ideal:

Happiest of all, surely, are those Uranians, ever numerous, who have no wish nor need to fly society—or themselves. Knowing what they are, understanding the natural, the moral strength of their position as homosexuals; sure of right on their side, even if it be never accorded to them in the lands where they must live; fortunate in either due self-control or private freedom—day by day, they go on through their lives, self-respecting and respected, in relative peace. (Mayne, 1908, p. 515)

Considering their scarcity, it is difficult to gauge the influence of Stevenson’s books on the homophile movement. *The Intersexes* is cited in Magnus Hirschfeld’s 1914 magnum opus, *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*. Some members of the homophile intelligentsia read them. Both *Imre* and *The Intersexes* were reprinted in 1975 as part of the Arno Press series on homosexuality. Unfortunately, they were so poorly reproduced that many pages are almost illegible.

At any rate, both books are precious repositories of information, and should be studied by every aspiring gay scholar.

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# Prescott Townsend (1894-1973): Bohemian Blueblood— A Different Kind of Pioneer

Charles Shively



Courtesy Boston Atheneum

Born in the Mauve Decade of Oscar Wilde's ascendancy, Prescott Townsend came of age in the roaring 1920s and lived to embrace hippies in the 1960s and Boston's Gay Liberation Front with its newspaper *Fag Rag* in the 1970s. During his nearly eighty years, Townsend participated in a multitude of progressive movements in the United States. He fostered an early counterculture in Boston and Provincetown, worked with the Kinsey Institute, produced his own "snowflake" theory of sexuality, established a Mattachine chapter, and later his own "demophile" group in Boston. After World War I and until his death, he called for the repeal of the Massachusetts antisodomy laws enacted by seventeenth-century Puritans. As of this

writing, Chapter 272, Section 34 of the General Laws of Massachusetts still prohibits "the abominable and detestable crime against nature, either with mankind or with a beast" and provides as punishment "imprisonment in the state prison for not more than twenty years."

Prescott maintained a deep self-regard for his biological bloodline. His family claimed direct descent from twenty-three passengers on the *Mayflower*. One of his revolutionary heroes was an ancestor, Roger Sherman, the only person to sign three significant American documents, the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution. Sherman, similar to Townsend, may not be much remembered today, but the grouchy second U.S. President John Adams described Sherman as "an old Puritan, as honest as an angel and as firm in the cause of American Inde-

pendence as Mount Atlas” (Cathcart manuscript). Like Townsend, Sherman also demonstrated a “personal awkwardness and rusticity of manner.” Townsend himself claimed that Sherman was the only Founding Father “to be so inconsistent” as to sign all three foundation documents. Sherman, however, probably did not share his descendant’s later sexual interest in his fellow males.

Born in Roxbury, Massachusetts, June 24, 1894, into a comfortable and conventional Yankee family, Prescott Townsend was the third son and fourth child of Kate (Wendell) and Edward Britton Townsend. He prepared at the Volkman School, entered Harvard College (as did his brothers), graduated with the class of 1918, and attended the Harvard Law School for one year. His third class report listed his membership in the Harvard Club of Boston and New York as well as the Masonic Order. Prescott regularly attended his class reunions and marched in Harvard’s annual procession for graduating students and alumni; at his fiftieth reunion he carried the class stanchion. His family attended the very high Anglican Church of the Advent, at the foot of Boston’s Beacon Hill, where Ralph Adams Cram, the fashionable Yankee architect, designed much of the interior, including a retablo for Prescott’s mother. His own funeral, however, took place in the Unitarian Arlington Street Church, which hosted gay youth groups, antiwar rallies, and other causes dear to Prescott’s heart.

Townsend early embraced “paths untrodden.” He came through Harvard when manliness was the norm and when Bull Moose Theodore Roosevelt was a hero. If TR’s Rough Riders inspired him, Prescott certainly deviated from TR’s ideal of what that might constitute. Like Roosevelt he went west for adventure, and in the summer of 1914 worked in the logging and mining camps of Idaho and Montana. Here he came in contact with the free-wheeling Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, also popularly known as “Wobblies”), who were organizing unskilled and itinerant workers. Their anarchist politics left a strong imprint on the impressionable youth; he probably witnessed camp dances, where the men got along without women and lived outside the norms of traditional society. At the very least, the lumber camps and the IWW gave Townsend a view of the world far beyond Harvard in Yankee Boston. He himself reported in his papers that he always loved street boys and drifters and said that wherever he went he took them in and provided them with “love.”

Another quite different summer trip into Mexico’s backwaters opened him to other unconventional experiences. In the Rio Blanco Canyon, he was codiscoverer of some Toltec stone heads and had a new species of salamander named after him: *Salamandra oedipustownsendensis*. Townsend himself early on developed an interest in Freud and his theories; the naming of the salamander reflects this, and is not an incidental reference to his fa-

ther who had built a fortune in the coal business. Although his father died relatively young, he left the family in comfortable circumstances. Townsend's relationship with his father at best was "distant," but it was surely less tragic than that of Oedipus. He always remained on good terms with his mother. Her only advice to him when he announced his homosexuality was that he should be careful because not everyone would be as generous as she was in accepting his life choices.

The United States' entry into World War I in 1917 offered another interruption from the traditional Ivy League life, and Prescott's stint in the U.S. Navy helped wean him further from his Puritan past. In April 1917 he enrolled as chief boatswain's mate U.S. Naval Reserve Force, was appointed ensign September 18, and was assigned to the U.S.S. *Illinois* in the Atlantic fleet. After a short time at sea, he transferred to New Orleans and then attended the Texas A & M Naval Unit to learn the secret military codes. He was released from active duty January 25, 1919, shortly after the end of the war.

After desultorily pursuing law school for a year, he dropped out and later left for an eight-month stay in Paris. Although he may not have known Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Robert McAlmon, André Gide, T. E. Lawrence, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), or Ernest Hemingway as well as he later implied, he did absorb the postwar culture and values of Bohemian Paris and he carried these ideals back to Boston.

As a member of the Harvard Travelers Club, Prescott made several memorable trips, one into North Africa and another into Communist Russia. The free life of the Bedouins attracted him as it has so many gay men. One of Prescott's prized possession was a *djellabah* which he claimed Lawrence of Arabia had given to André Gide, who in turn gave it to him. Since the garment, along with many other prized manuscripts and mementos, was lost in one of his several disastrous fires, DNA tests can never be run to see whether either Gide or Lawrence once wore it. Nonetheless, the existence of the garment and Townsend's attachment to it (similar to that of Christians to their relics) demonstrates how highly he regarded the homosexuality of the Bedouins, his connection with Gide, and fantasies of Lawrence in the Arabian sands.

Prescott himself was unconventional, but far from revolutionary in sentiments. His travels in Algeria seem to have left him with little understanding of the problems of colonialism. He did undertake to have *The Perfumed Garden* retranslated into English, but that gesture would hardly shield him from today's antiorientalism critics. Likewise, his trip to Russia in 1962 with a "people to people" program "working for world peace" had its conventional touches. He proudly reported: "I traveled on the farms and in the cities, giving out my forty pounds of *Life*, *Look*, and Sears Catalogs"

(Harvard University *Class Reports*, 1962). Unlike many gay pioneers of his day, he never flirted with communism. Rather like W. Dorr Legg, whom he had met in 1953, Prescott almost always voted Republican. His personal friendship with Adlai Stevenson, who had a purported lavender streak, may have led him to break ranks and vote Democrat in 1952, but if so he returned in 1956 to Eisenhower and Nixon.

Although a political conservative on most issues, he was an intellectual and cultural radical. Townsend was a moving force in the bohemian underground both on Beacon Hill and in Cape Cod's Provincetown. He backed theater productions, experimented with new architecture, encouraged authors, and played an active part in the city's gay life. He had met expatriate novelist Eliot Paul in Paris, and they brought together an intellectual, artistic, and often sexual avant garde caliber of women and men in Boston. The back of Beacon Hill, where Prescott lived most of his adult life, approximated New York's Greenwich Village and in some ways even the Left Bank in Paris. Before, during, and after Prohibition, the bars on the back of the Hill catered to a miscellaneous crowd of sailors, transvestites, poets, prostitutes, and gay men. For a time during the 1920s, Townsend participated in a speakeasy, eatery, and theatrical establishment on Joy Street in what was formerly a stable, one of several buildings he owned on Beacon Hill. In November 1922, with his backing and collaboration, the Barn Theater opened, offering experimental theater with links to Paris, Provincetown, and Greenwich Village.

Lucius Beebe, in his book, *Boston and the Boston Legend* (1935), described Townsend in this period as wearing "a raccoon skin overcoat that was the envy of Cedar Street"; and that the "rangy" youth could easily "talk informatively on any given subject for the space it required his auditor to consume precisely a quart of gin." A great talker, Prescott spoke to classes at Harvard, gave talks on the radio, and expounded his theories at length in the local restaurants, meetings, bars, his own special soirees, and underground films. Other than interviews, however, he left little extended work, and the publications or organizations he founded did not outlast his life.

Townsend's "snowflake theory" of homosexuality provided an interesting mix of Freud, Kinsey, and other sexologists. He intended it to be simple and illuminating for those confused or uncertain about their sexuality; in his words, it was "Freud pared to the bone . . . designed to provide enlightenment and save thousands of dollars" in psychotherapy. He held that certain conditions of early life are nonreversible: "left-handedness, homophile libido, sexuality, fetishes, inherited super-ego, and main vocational drives." The individuals who had these conditions were each different as were snowflakes and the question was what to do about it. His answer, somewhat oversimplified, was, "Hit, Miss, Submit," and "Work, Love, Play." In short, be

yourself; and although he recognized that his work had some basis in academic research, he wanted others to follow through on such research and left money to the Harvard psychology department to be “used in connection with research and study of the homophile and also the study of sexual variants.”

Townsend’s greatest work (beyond his extraordinary personality and public agitation for gay causes) was in his architectural experiments, both on Beacon Hill and in Provincetown. He built five A-frame houses in Provincetown; had he patented his A-frame, he might have become better known. He also built his own absolutely unique house, the “Gangway” assembled from driftwood, plastic castoffs, and other detritus. Because of his open welcome to the homeless (and young gays) some believe that his house was torched deliberately. This was because shortly before the fire three of the selectmen of Provincetown had issued “An Appeal to All Decent People,” complaining that “We are not getting the support we should in our effort to rid our town of these degenerates.” The appeal concluded with a call: “Let us not permit our town to become a Sodom or Gomorrah” (Cathcart manuscript). Undaunted by the fire, Townsend soon rebuilt on the site with a more conventional and very expensive guest house.

He was ever conscious of being gay even in the 1920s; he had examined ways of repealing the state’s “crime against nature” law. During World War II, he worked two years at the Fall River shipbuilding yard and while there had charges brought against him for an “abominable and detestable crime against nature.” He did not hide his arrest and wrote in his Harvard class report: “I was thrown into jail for refusing to pay \$15.00 graft for an act that is not against the law in England nor in Illinois.” According to legend, when the judge asked what he had to say for himself, he replied, “So what’s wrong with a little cocksucking on the Hill?” Consequently, he served over a year’s sentence in the Deer Island House of Correction before being released on the day that Germany surrendered in 1945.

Because of the dangers of arrest, blackmail, and imprisonment, detailed accounts of Prescott’s sexual life are relatively sparse. During his time in the U.S. Navy he recalled never having had any sexual relations, although later he made up for lost time by inviting many sailors into his Beacon Hill quarters. Street boys and runaways likewise always received a warm welcome from him, both in Boston and in Provincetown. Fellatio seems to have been one of his favorite activities, and he was always generous to a degree with those who needed food, shelter, and money.

During the 1950s, he convened meetings every Sunday at his house at 75 Philips Street (also then operating as the Paul Revere Bookstore), which he called “the first social discussion of homosexuality in Boston.” The circle

soon moved into a meeting room of the Parker House Hotel, more fashionably located next to King's Chapel and the old City Hall. One more formal member of the group (called "The Professor") did not like the informal atmosphere. "The purpose of the groups was for public education," he complained, "not for assignations, which is what they were trying to make it. Prescott was defending his creamy-meamy, bubble-headed, faggy types" (Mitzel, 1973).

The division between what in Boston has often been called the "Good Gays" and the "Bad Faggots" carried over into the Mattachine Society in 1957. Prescott organized the first chapter in Boston and he also attended meetings of ECHO, the East Coast Homophile Organization. As the Boston group grew with larger meetings, newsletters, and prominent speakers, the "Good Gays" soon voted Prescott out of leadership. Pushed aside, he then left to organize his own Boston Demophile Society. Although the Boston Mattachine Society soon collapsed, the Demophile Society managed to publish several newsletters, hold meetings, invite speakers, and organize outings for demonstrations and trips. The society continued more or less until Prescott's death, but one of his secretaries unfortunately used copies of the Boston Mattachine and the later Demophile newsletters for firewood. Later, Townsend's house caught fire, engulfing a vast treasure trove of early gay liberation records.

From the beginning, Townsend had always been something of a hippy and he went on to become a flower child in the 1960s. When groups of young teenagers began camping out in the Boston Common, Prescott himself joined them, gearing up his mimeograph machine to turn out flyers announcing "The Boston Common Be-In" for the Summer of 1967. This set the example for the Boston Gay Liberation Front "Be-In" in 1970 in which Townsend was involved. Townsend also became a star in underground filmmaker Andrew Meyer's 1966 *An Early Clue to the New Direction*. In it, Townsend propounds his snowflake theory of sexuality to "Joy Bang," a young star described as "a half Lolita-half Jane Fonda type." In the films Townsend explains that everyone is unique, like a snowflake, but that all sexual relations fit into hit, miss, or submit patterns. John Waters also captured some of Townsend's ideas in his works. His work inspired a number of young people to come out and be themselves. One of them, John Murray, after being in a Boston gay male liberation consciousness-raising group, went to live with Prescott at his final residence on Beacon's Hill's Garden Street until the elderly Yankee stopped eating and then stopped breathing on May 18, 1973. A large group showed up for his memorial to honor him and watched a screening of Meyer's *An Early Clue to the New Direction*.

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The Boston Atheneum contains letters from Prescott Townsend in Montana and Idaho to his mother and also letters from his World War I service. Each year he provided details of his life for his class reports at Harvard.

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# Jeannette Howard Foster (1895-1981)

Virginia Elwood-Akers



Photo by Tee A. Corinne

In the early years of the twentieth century, a young and very innocent college junior named Jeannette Foster was on the student council at Rockford University in Illinois, when a meeting was called to discuss two young women who were to be judged in a “morals case.” No details of the offense were given, beyond the fact that the two young women had locked themselves in their dormitory room together at every opportunity. Bewildered, Foster realized that the other students all seemed to know the nature of this serious offense and she was mortified by her ignorance. As soon as the meeting ended, Foster went to the library to search for answers. Having reached the conclusion that the embarrassment of

her fellow council members, and the use of the term “morals case,” seemed to indicate that the offense had been sexual, she looked in Henry Havelock Ellis’s *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, which she later said she had passed many times “without once having the impulse to look inside.” There, in a chapter titled “Sexual Inversion in Women,” in which Ellis discussed sexual relationships between women, Foster found her answer.

Perhaps Foster recognized herself in Ellis’s study. She would later say that she had been attracted to women since she was a child. Perhaps, as a serious scholar, she was merely troubled by what was later described as “her lack of knowledge regarding female homosexuality.” Whatever her reason, she began to compile a bibliography on the subject of what she called “sex variant” women. Foster selected the term “sex variant” because, as she said in her book, *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, it was neither rigid nor emotionally charged, and because its meaning was “no more than differing from a chosen standard” (Foster, 1985, “Introduction”). She defined the term to mean an *emotional* attraction between women, which is passionate and sex-

ual in nature, even if the sexual component is not conscious. At first concentrating on scientific and factual studies, she gradually added literary titles to the bibliography. Ultimately, she decided to limit the scope of her bibliography to literature, or what she called “imaginative writing.” The bibliography grew into a narrative and was published more than forty years after it was begun. Foster’s pioneering effort has been influential on virtually every subsequent scholar in the field of lesbian literature, and has led Karla Jay to acknowledge her as the “unchallenged foremother in this field” (1976, p. 34).

Jeannette Howard Foster was born November 3, 1895, in Oak Park, Illinois. Little is known of her youth or of her family. She was bookish and precocious, entering the University of Chicago when she was only seventeen, and going from there to Rockford College in Rockford, Illinois, from which she received an AB in chemistry and engineering in 1918. She returned to the University of Chicago and changed her studies completely, receiving an MA in English and American literature in 1922. For nearly ten years she taught literature and creative writing at Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota, before deciding upon a career as a librarian. Graduating with a degree in library science in 1932, she found a position as science librarian at Antioch College in Ohio. Although she had continued to work on her bibliography, it was taking a position as a professor of library science at Drexel Institute in Philadelphia in 1937 that gave her access to library collections in the eastern United States and allowed her to begin her work.

Blessed with the ability to see herself and her scholarly efforts with a sense of humor, Foster told interviewer Karla Jay that “lots of funny things happened” to her during her years of research (1976, pp. 34-35). As an example, she told the story of her search for a book called *Mephistophela* by Catulle Mendes, published in France in 1890. Mendes’ book was wildly popular at the time of its publication, when it had half a dozen printings in both French and English. By the time Foster was looking for it in Philadelphia, however, there were only four known copies in the United States. One was in Philadelphia but was in the library of the exclusive Rittenhouse Club, which allowed no women to enter its doors. Foster pleaded that she wanted only to use the library, which was in the front of the building, and none of the members of the club would even have to see her. She was archly told that women would not be admitted for *any* reason. Fortunately, Foster was acquainted with a member of the club, then an assistant librarian at the University of Pennsylvania. Amused, he agreed to check the book out for her to read, if she would read it in his office. Foster readily agreed, and read the more than 350 pages of *Mephistophela*, in French, sitting in a corner of the librarian’s office. Foster found the ridiculous situation to be funny. She also saw the humor in an occasion when she dropped out of a library school field trip—reasoning that the graduate students were adults and didn’t really

need her for a chaperone—in order to visit the Yale University Library, which held a rare copy of *Mary, a Fiction* by Mary Wollstonecroft. She had one day to read the entire book in order to include it into the bibliography; an important inclusion, since she described Wollstonecroft's book as "the first novel on female variance to be written by a woman" (Foster, 1956/1985, p. 55).

In 1948 Foster accepted a position as librarian at the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research in Bloomington, Indiana, which gave her access to a large collection on the subject of sexuality and allowed her to complete her research. It would be another ten years, however, before her own book would be published. Foster decided that it would be a good idea to start the title of her book off with the word *sex*, as "I had learned from searching bibliographies," she said, "a title beginning with the word *sex* couldn't be ignored." Still, Foster realized that it would not be easy to find a publisher for her book in the United States in the 1950s. Trade publishers were out of the question, and a dozen university presses also turned the book down. Rutgers University Press held the manuscript for over seven months before finally deciding they were unwilling to take a chance with publication. Finally Foster self-published the book with Vantage Press, investing \$2,000 of her own money. The experience with Vantage was an unhappy one. Editors changed Foster's prose, which infuriated the former professor of creative writing. She sent the manuscript back with edited parts reinstated, declaring, "That *stands*, or else." The editors capitulated, but charged her extra for "author's alterations" in order to return the manuscript to its original wording. Vantage published *Sex Variant Women in Literature* in 1956, but when the publishers asked for more money and Foster refused, she was told her royalties would be kept against what she owed them. Vantage then sold the rights to the British publisher Frederick Muller, Ltd., which published the book in 1958. Foster, who learned of the sale by reading an article in the periodical *Publishers Weekly*, did not receive any money from the sale or publication. The only monetary reward she received from her forty years of work was a check for \$240 when a secondhand dealer bought the 2,400 remaining copies of the book, from an original printing of 3,500, at ten cents a copy.

By the time the book was published, Foster was working as a reference librarian at the University of Kansas in Kansas City, Missouri. *Sex Variant Women in Literature* received only one review, and that a negative one, in a psychology publication. It was also briefly mentioned in a newspaper article. Foster's book seemed to be destined for oblivion. But fate, in the form of a young lesbian working in the catalog department of the Kansas City Public Library, intervened. Barbara Grier had seen the title mentioned in a library publication. The twenty-three-year-old Grier had been working on a bibliography of lesbian literature for seven years and had collected nearly

one hundred titles. Since she had been planning to write a book on what she thought was an original subject, she was both delighted and chagrined to learn that Foster had already done so. When she discovered that the author of *Sex Variant Women in Literature* was living in the same city, Grier immediately called her, and began a lifelong friendship with Foster.

Grier also became Foster's successor as bibliographer of lesbian literature. In 1956 the Daughters of Bilitis, a recently founded lesbian organization, began publication of a periodical called *The Ladder* which "soon instituted a careful recording of lesbian literature" (Grier, 1985, p. 355). Foster taught Grier review checking techniques and the younger woman began compiling records of new titles and also of old titles that may have been missed in prior years. Often Grier had to rely on intuition to recognize a title that might contain lesbians or lesbian literature, since mainstream reviewers rarely mentioned the subject. Many of the titles Grier selected were reviewed in *The Ladder*, which in 1967 published a bibliography of 2,000 titles, *The Lesbian in Literature*, co-authored by Gene Damon and Lee Stuart. Gene Damon is the pseudonym of Barbara Grier. Not surprisingly, *The Lesbian in Literature* was reviewed in *The Ladder* by Jeannette Foster, who had begun to contribute occasionally to the periodical.

"Writing a favorable review of a work in which one has been overgenerously cited might be taken as reciprocal back-scratching," Foster wrote (Foster, 1967, p. 17). But she went on to say that she considered Damon and Stuart's work "an excellent bibliography." Foster defended the inclusion in Damon and Stuart's book of the semipornographic original paperbacks that had proliferated at the time and that the bibliography identifies with a "T" for "trash." She pointed out that the paperbacks, although probably written by men as pornography, did include lesbians as subjects, and that inclusion was therefore justified.

During the late 1960s Jeannette Foster contributed both fiction and non-fiction articles to *The Ladder*. Besides reviewing *The Lesbian in Literature*, she wrote reviews of books such as Maurice Collis's *Somerville and Ross: A Biography*, which recounts the lives of writers Edith Somerville and Violet Martin, Frederick Brown's *An Impersonation of Angels: A Biography of Jean Cocteau*, and C. P. Snow's *The Sleep of Reason*. She also contributed fiction, using the pseudonyms Hilary Farr, Jan Addison, and Abigail Sanford. "Temple of Athene" by Hilary Farr, for instance, appeared in three parts in late 1967. It is the somewhat melodramatic story of poor Theodora's crush on the improbably named Lenox VanTuyl, and of lesbian tensions in a campus setting. Foster's contributions to *The Ladder* were not the first time she had contributed fiction to a periodical. In October 1927 her short story "Lucky Star" had appeared in the mainstream publication *Harper's Maga-*

zine. “Lucky Star” is also about an unrequited crush, but in this story the erstwhile lover is male, a visitor to a small town who has completely misinterpreted the lighthearted flirting of a married woman. Since the married woman does not seem to particularly care for her husband, it is possible that this story might also have been about two women if the circumstances of publication had been different.

Between the years 1914 and 1938 Jeannette Foster wrote passionate love poetry. In 1976 Foster’s poems were published, along with poetry by Valerie Taylor, by Womanpress in a volume called *Two Women*. In the same year Naiad Press published *A Woman Appeared to Me*, Foster’s translation of *Une Femme M’Apparut* by Renée Vivien. Since Diana Press had reprinted *Sex Variant Women in Literature* in 1975, Foster was delighted to have three of her creative endeavors in print at the same time, all of them published by lesbian-oriented presses. She was especially pleased with *A Woman Appeared to Me*, which was the first translation of the work based on the poet Vivien’s affair with Violet Shilleto and her relationship with Natalie Barney; with the exception of a few poems, this was the first major Vivien work to be published. Vivien was one of the writers discussed in *Sex Variant Women in Literature* who was essentially “discovered” by Foster, although her work was known to a select few. Foster called Vivien a poet whose poetry “has been pronounced most perfect in form of any French verse written in the first quarter of the [20th] century” (Foster, 1985, p. 158). Foster is also credited with the “discovery” of Natalie Barney, a woman known as much for her salon in Paris, and for her open and daring lesbianism, as she was for her writing.

Little is known of Foster’s private life. In interviews given at various times in her life she disclosed few details. She was quoted as saying that her circumspection was due to a wish to respect the privacy of her friends. It is known that she knew writer Janet Flanner when the two writers were both at the University of Chicago, and that she formed a friendship with poet May Sarton when Sarton was poet in residence at Lindenwood College, now Lindenwood University, in St. Charles, Missouri, where Foster had begun work as the assistant librarian in 1963. She was close to Barbara Grier and to writer Valerie Taylor. The poems in *Two Women* are clearly written to more than one woman, but the women are not named. In a recent article in Zimmerman’s (2000) *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia*, Andrea Peterson disclosed that Foster had a long relationship with Hazel Toliver, a professor she had met at Lindenwood College. Foster was a member of the Daughters of Bilitis and did not disguise her identity as a lesbian, although she said that she was a member of a generation that, as she put it,

“concealed our gayness as if it were syphilis” (Hogan and Hudson, 1998, p. 218).

Foster was not a political person, but she did weigh in on the issue of whether lesbians should have a strong national organization. In 1968 she wrote a letter to the editor of *The Ladder* on that subject. The editor decided that Foster’s comments on dominance within lesbian relationships were of sufficient interest to print the letter as a short article, and invited further comments from readers. In the article, “Dominance,” Foster described herself as a member of the Daughters of Bilitis who had listened over the years to debates, discussions, and arguments among the members and who had found herself curious as to why a group of people “as closely homogeneous as any except a racial group” (Foster, 1968, p. 17) would have such dissensions. Foster’s conclusion was that some members of “the sisterhood” had a strong need to dominate the others. Oddly, she identified these women as those who refused to marry men, insisted on taking a job whether or not they needed money, dressed as they pleased rather than in fashion, and openly proclaimed themselves as lesbians. Even in 1968 Foster’s conclusions must have seemed strange to some readers of *The Ladder*. Foster went on to make the point, however, that even within homogeneous groups dissension will occur, and that forming a national organization such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), American Association of University Women (AAUW), or American Association of University Professors (AAUP) would be advantageous for the Daughters of Bilitis, because there is “quite literally safety in numbers.”

Foster’s comments indicate that she must have been circumspect in her personal life, and she never reported that her life had been difficult because of her lesbianism. The library environment in which she spent her life is not a hostile one for homosexuals, and it is unlikely that Foster would have encountered a great deal of open discrimination, especially because she was discreet in her personal life. In fact, librarians acclaimed her accomplishment in writing *Sex Variant Women in Literature*; in 1974, she was honored by the American Library Association with its third annual Gay Book Award. She was delighted. “My long respected ALA is willing to admit the existence . . . and even honor it . . . of Gaiety!” she is quoted as saying in Steven Hogan and Lee Hudson’s (1998) *Completely Queer*. The publication of three of her works, and being honored by her peers, made the mid-1970s a happy time for Foster. Upon her retirement, she moved to Pocahontas, Arkansas, where she shared a home with Toliver and with a third friend, Dorothy Ross, who had been head of the physical education department at

Lindenwood College. But Foster was growing old and ill, and by the end of the decade she was partially paralyzed and living in a nursing home.

Lesbian scholars and others who admired her work made pilgrimages to Pochantas, Arkansas, to meet Foster, now more than eighty years old. When it became apparent that Foster's financial resources were depleted, Valerie Taylor and photographer Tee Corinne placed an appeal in gay and lesbian publications for funds to assist her. Benefits and fundraisers were held to raise money for Foster's expenses. On July 26, 1981, Foster died at the age of eighty-six.

Jeannette Foster would be an important figure in the field of literature even if she had never written a word other than her massive literary study. At the time of its publication, little had been written on the subject of lesbian literature and in fact it was a subject rarely discussed in "polite" company. Foster boldly stated in her book that "feminine variance has persisted in human experience since the beginning of literary records." She went on to say that such variance had "repeatedly aroused sufficient interest to be the subject of literature, some of it good enough to have survived through many centuries against all odds." She carefully explained that she selected the term *sex variant* because it was neither rigid nor emotionally charged and reminded her readers that the word *variant* simply means different. She reserved the word *lesbian* for instances of overt sexual expression, and used the word *homosexual* as a synonym for *sex variant*. "It will be employed here," she wrote in her book, "only when needed to relieve verbal monotony" (Foster, 1985, p. 13).

Foster began her study with Sappho, the Greek poet from the sixth century B.C., and made her way briskly through the centuries to 1951, ending with a discussion of (Patricia Highsmith) Claire Morgan's *The Price of Salt*. In the book's nearly 400 pages Foster discussed both the literary efforts and the personal lives of well-known figures such as George Eliot, George Sand, Emily Dickinson, and Emily Brontë. More important, she wrote also of little-known writers such as sixteenth-century poet Louise Labé, twentieth-century novelist Gale Wilhelm, and the French poets and literary figures Renée Vivien and Natalie Barney. *Sex Variant Women in Literature* also devotes many pages to lesbian and variant characters in literature, many of them created by male authors. *Sex Variant Women in Literature* is often cited as one of the most important works in the field of lesbian literature. According to the online service Literature Resource Center, Foster's courageous early work, "contributed significantly to the development of a lesbian culture in the twentieth century."

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# Pearl M. Hart (1890-1975)

Karen C. Sendziak



Gerber/Hart Library

Pearl M. Hart practiced law in Chicago from 1914 to 1975 as an advocate for children, women, immigrants, and gay men and lesbians. One of the first female attorneys in the city to specialize in criminal law, she was remarkable for her commanding physical and intellectual presence. The size of her five-feet, eleven-and-a-half-inch and 200-pound frame was surpassed only by her generosity of spirit. Journalist I. F. Stone describe her affectionately as a “big benevolent Brunnhilde of a woman, six feet tall with gray hair, grandmotherly expression, and one of those round unmistakable Russian Jewish faces” who was “famous throughout the Midwest for a life-

time of devotion to the least lucrative and most oppressed kind of clients” (Stone, 1953, p. 31). Hart’s direct involvement with one of these groups, gay and lesbians, did not emerge until the final two decades of her life, although she early on had defended gay men.

Pearl Hart was born in Traverse City, Michigan, on April 7, 1890, as Pearly Minne Harchovsky, but she was known as Hart for most of her life. Both her father, David, an Orthodox rabbi, and her mother, Rebecca, had emigrated from Russia. She was the youngest of the couple’s five daughters, and the only one born in the United States. By her own account, her childhood was happy: “. . . I was particularly fortunate in that everyone loved me a lot, and spoiled me” (Weiner, 1975).

The family moved from Traverse City to Chicago when Hart was a preschooler and settled in the bustling neighborhoods of the near west side among fellow Jewish emigrés from Eastern Europe. She was educated in the Chicago public school system, and according to the poet and author Valerie Taylor, labored in a garment factory as a teenager. Evidence of her leader-

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ship qualities emerged early when she was elected president of her predominately male local union.

Hart entered the night-school program at Chicago's John Marshall Law School in 1911, earning her tuition by working during the day as a law clerk and stenographer. Graduating in 1914, she was admitted to the Illinois Bar on October 7 of that same year and began to build her criminal law practice. From 1915 to 1917 she held a position as one of the first female adult probation officers in Chicago. Her early legal career focused on the needs of children, and in the mid-1920s, she began working with prominent social reformers such as Sophonisba Breckenridge of the University of Chicago to rehabilitate the juvenile court system. Regarded as an expert on juvenile justice, she drafted legislation, served on committees, and spoke before a variety of civic groups, all in an effort to protect Chicago's most vulnerable citizens. Hart remained dedicated to this cause throughout her life and her expertise in the field was recognized nationally.

Another of her major concerns was the welfare of women passing through the legal system. In 1933, she volunteered to serve as the first public defender in morals court to stem the tide of women being arrested for alleged prostitution. Women walking alone were particularly vulnerable to this charge. After four years serving in morals court, she had reversed the 90 percent conviction rate for these women to 10 percent.

In the 1950s, Hart devoted increased time to defending individuals accused of subversions against the U.S. government. The three major laws under which her clients were prosecuted were the Alien Registration Act of 1940 (popularly known as the Smith Act), the Internal Security Act of 1950, otherwise known as the McCarran Act, and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act.

The government brought charges against many of Hart's clients based on organizations they well might have joined decades earlier but had severed ties with or drifted away from long ago. Sadly, a good portion were elderly, already retired, and declining in health. Hart's most prominent case from this era was *U.S. v. Witkovich*. George Witkovich received an order of deportation on June 15, 1953. In a subsequent hearing before the Immigration and Naturalization Service, he was asked twenty-two questions about his activities and affiliations. On Hart's advice, he refused to answer the questions because they were not relevant to whether or not he should be deported. The United States filed a lawsuit compelling his answers, and Hart countered with an appeal that eventually made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court. She won the case in 1957 when the high court agreed with her contention that the attorney general's power to question aliens subject to deportation was limited by constitutional safeguards. Hart's victory was extraordinary, particu-

larly for a solo practitioner. Her creative legal analysis and compelling oral arguments are a testament to her commitment and skill.

Pearl Hart also carried a heavy caseload defending individuals subpoenaed to testify before the House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee. From the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, the committee held hearings in Chicago during which Hart was present with her clients.

Her activism is manifest in the large number of organizations in which she participated and/or helped found in her sixty-one-year career. The most prominent of these was the National Lawyers Guild, a bar association of liberal attorneys. She was a founding member of the group in late 1936 and early 1937. She also helped establish the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born in 1933. In 1947 she was a founder of the Midwest version of that committee. In 1960 she helped the Chicago Committee to Defend the Bill of Rights come into existence. She was a force in the Women's Bar Association of Illinois, of which she was president in 1925. In her presidential address to that group she stated that "years ago we were still regarded as a useless novelty" (Hart papers, March 16, 1925). In 1943 she joined with other women to found what eventually became the George and Anna Portes Cancer Prevention Center in Chicago.

Two other activities to which Hart devoted considerable interest throughout her life were politics and teaching. She ran for judgeships four times: 1928, 1932, 1947, and 1948. She also ran for a seat as Chicago alderman in 1947 and again in 1951. She lost all six elections; her campaigns as an Independent or Progressive Party candidate were completely overwhelmed by the Chicago Democratic machine. Her lack of success in electoral politics was balanced by her commitment to education. She taught criminal law at her alma mater, John Marshall Law School, for a quarter-century, from 1946 until 1971. She also taught at the Northwestern University School of Social Work. In addition, she was affiliated with the Abraham Lincoln School, an adult-education enterprise founded in 1943. The school was added to the Justice Department's list of subversive organizations in 1953.

By all accounts, Hart was an engaging public speaker. In the 1940s she addressed groups as diverse as a neighborhood Kiwanis Club, the Catholic Women's League, and the American Society for Russian Relief. After outlining the social and political ills of the days to attendees of the 1962 annual dinner of the Jewish Cultural Schools in Chicago, Hart urged those who grapple with the major problems of society not to be fearful of being called radical but rather to revel in the knowledge that they did not walk away from problems but rather were willing to stand up and fight for that which they knew was right.

It was only in the final two decades of her life that she became directly involved with the gay and lesbian community, although she had represented

many gays in court before that. She cofounded the Mattachine Midwest, which had its first public meeting on July 27, 1965, and served on its legal counsel until her death. In addressing one of the early meetings of the group, she urged the members to stop viewing themselves as members of a minority and assert the equal rights which are guaranteed to them by the Constitution. According to former president Jim Bradford, 75 percent of the Mattachines' job was "making the police behave." The pace of bar raids was unrelenting, and a defendant arrested in such a sweep could expect a difficult journey through a legal system infested with corruption. Pearl fought two major fronts in the battle to check police abuses in this area. First, she defended clients arrested for alleged criminal activity. Second, she communicated directly with the Mattachine membership through the articles in the organization's monthly newsletter. Covertly, notes Bradford, she passed along information gained from her clients about the names of officers that were causing trouble, which part of the parks were currently hot; she would pass along information, without revealing sources, that her clients would tell her—in her terms, where the "pinch bugs infest the bushes" (Bradford interview, p. 21).

Hart defended scores of gay men arrested for soliciting sex in a public place, those entrapped to do so, and those caught in the crossfire of a bar raid. In representing her clients, she defended each case on its own merit. She refused to be involved in the bribery so often involved in such cases, and usually demanded jury trials since juries were less likely to convict than judges. Her reputation was so immaculate that she was affectionately referred to as the "Guardian Angel of Chicago's Gay Community."

An occasional contributor to the *Mattachine Midwest Newsletter*, she usually focused on civil rights and police procedures. She and Bradford co-wrote an article that first appeared in the September 1968 issue on "Your Rights If Arrested," which was reprinted as a pamphlet, and distributed by the thousands.

In a May 1969 address to the Mattachine membership, she urged those in attendance and the Mattachine Society as well to be "more aggressive" in their public stance. Although her involvement in Chicago was, for the most part, with gay men, lesbian activists around the country knew her as well. Del Martin, editor of *The Ladder*, solicited her opinion on the 1961 repeal of Illinois' sodomy laws. In a March 1962 article in that magazine, Hart noted that new legislation would not guarantee social approval of same-sex activities. Instead, she emphasized that only through a protracted educational campaign could lesbians and gays achieve far-reaching results. Shirley Willer, the newsletter editor of the New York chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis, sent Hart a letter in 1966 thanking her for the financial contributions

to the chapter and expressing hope that she would become more directly involved in the organization.

Hart never openly identified herself as a lesbian. According to Valerie Taylor, any inquiry into her sexual orientation would be rebuffed with a cold stare and a reply, "That's none of your business. Why do you want to know that?" She did have two long-term relationships in her life. The first was with the actress and singer J. Blossom Churan. From 1918 until 1924, Hart had shared a law office with Churan's father, and sometime during this period she met Blossom, some six years her junior. Probably no relationship developed fully until the death of Hart's father in mid-1923. By 1926 when her mother died, Hart felt freer to express her own sexuality. In the early 1940s, however, Churan seemed to be bored with Hart and began an affair with a physician, Bertha Isaacs. Instead of relinquishing Churan to her new lover, Hart proposed that all three live together, which they did until Churan died in October 1973.

Hart's second major relationship was with the poet and author Valerie Taylor whom she had met in 1961 but did not become close with until 1963 when Taylor returned from living overseas. So secretive was their affair that many people known to both women did not realize their bond, and some old-time acquaintances even as of this writing claim that nothing happened between the two. Taylor, however, spoke fondly and affectionately of Hart as a profound influence on her life. She moved into an apartment around the corner from Hart's home, and for eleven years their intimacy was sustained by Hart's weekly Sunday visits. Taylor wrote at least a half-dozen poems for Hart, and dedicated her 1982 book, *Prism*, to P. M. H. Taylor's short story "Generation Gap," published in the anthology *Intricate Passion*, is based on her relationship with Hart. Taylor considered Hart the love of her life, but the feeling was not necessarily mutual; Hart's primary attachment was to Blossom Churan until Churan died.

Hart remained close to her family throughout her life. She was the favorite aunt of all her nieces and nephews, indulging them with outings and an occasional five-dollar bill. She formed a particularly strong relationship with the daughter of her sister Bessie, Tess Hart Weiner. Although separated by half a continent, the two remained in weekly contact for thirty-five years, and it was Weiner who cared for her beloved aunt during her final illness. For the most part, Hart's relationships with women were hidden from her family.

The highest honor that Hart received during her life was an honorary doctor of law degree from her alma mater, John Marshall Law School. The recognition came in 1964 as part of the ceremony marking the fiftieth anniversary of her graduation. The City of Chicago has since honored Hart twice, posthumously. In 1992 she was chosen to be inducted into the Chicago Gay

and Lesbian Hall of Fame. In 2001 Hart was the recipient of a Chicago Tribute Marker of Distinction. Under this program, the city recognizes outstanding deceased individuals by placing a large plaque on the sidewalk in front of their former homes or other pertinent location.

Hart died on March 22, 1975, of pancreatic cancer complicated by heart disease. In reflecting on her inevitable death in earlier healthier times, Hart bemoaned the fact that she had no sons or grandsons to say kaddish for her. The president of the Mattachine Midwest Society consoled her by saying that members of the organization were her sons and grandsons, and would gladly say kaddish if she felt the need.

She loved practicing law, and did so illuminated by her belief that the downtrodden—be they wayward juveniles, marginalized women, demoralized homosexuals, or browbeaten immigrants—deserved equal representation under the law. The Bill of Rights provided her moral compass, and she was fond of saying that the Constitution was a wonderful document that should protect everyone, if everyone would really obey it. Beloved by her clients and esteemed by her colleagues, Hart practiced law with compassion, integrity, and an unwavering passion for social justice. She devoted her life to protecting civil liberties and, in the words of the citation upon her honorary degree, was “a source of radiant confidence in the ultimate supremacy of the law and the goodness of man.”

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# Lisa Ben (1921- )

Florine Fleischman  
with Susan Bullough



Charles Faber Feature

The pseudonymous Lisa Ben broke the barrier of silence within the American gay community by publishing what some regard as the first lesbian newsletter/magazine, *Vice Versa*, beginning in June 1947. Ben said she started the newsletter to keep herself company; she called it *Vice Versa* because when she began publishing it, her kind of life was considered a vice. She distributed it free of charge.

Ben was an unlikely pioneer: although she had enough courage to publish a newsletter (for some twelve issues) and distribute it to friends and bar patrons, she did so anonymously. Later when she began writing for *The Ladder*, she adopted the name Lisa Ben (an anagram of lesbian). As of

this writing she still refuses permission to include her real name for fear of discovery by people who would “not understand,” even though her close family has long been deceased, as are most of her former employers and workmates. Since, however, Lisa Ben’s real name, Edythe Eyde, has been publicized online, it seems permissible to note it in this biography.

Lisa, an only child, was born in 1921 in San Francisco. Her father was an insurance agent, her mother a housewife; she was raised for the most part in Los Altos on a thirty-three-acre apricot ranch where she spent a lot of her time playing with animals as there were few children her age in the area. She went to college for two years, then her father insisted she quit and go to secretarial school even though she did not want to. She wanted to be a violinist in a symphony orchestra, but the obedient daughter, discouraged by her parents, did what they wanted as she was never allowed to argue with them. When she began working, she continued to live at home and her parents required her to pay a third of her salary to them as rent. Finally, shortly before

the outbreak of World War II, she got up enough courage to move to Palo Alto where she was then working. Ever mindful of finances, she paid for her rent by watching three children at night. Gathering up her courage, she moved to Los Angeles where she had a friend and she has lived there ever since.

Lisa was not interested in boys and did not date in high school. She knew nothing about homosexuality, although she had a crush on a girl in the high school band which included some hugging and kissing. When the girl broke off the relationship, a devastated Lisa confided to her mother about losing her girlfriend, and when her mother questioned her so intently about the matter, Lisa began to wonder if she had done something wrong. Lisa never brought up the subject again with her parents.

In Los Angeles she fell in with a group of women who did not talk about men all the time, as most of her other friends did. When one of the women asked her if she was gay, Lisa thought she was being asked if she was happy. Her affirmative reply led them to invite her to a club where Lisa noticed that the men and women were in separate areas. That evening it gradually dawned on her what gay meant and that she was not the only woman who found other women attractive. She gradually extended her lesbian contacts.

In 1947, she was working as a secretary in a Hollywood movie studio. She had been told by her boss that there were long periods when she might not have much to do in the office. He said he did not want her to knit or read a book during these periods, but she could do anything else she wanted providing she looked busy. She felt that since there were magazines and newsletters for every type of interest, it would be logical to have a magazine for gay women. She began typing a newsletter and decided to distribute ten copies. This meant she typed each letter twice, producing four carbon copies. Most of what was included in the magazine she wrote herself and distributed to other "gay girls" (her term). Originally she had intended to mail them, but a friend warned her that she could be prosecuted for using the mail to distribute obscene material and so she then depended upon personal contacts to pass them on. She could have cut a stencil and used a mimeograph to make more copies, but this would have exposed her activities to others. She quietly sought a printer to make more copies, but her initial experiences convinced her that this was not a viable alternative. She wrote movie and book reviews, poems, and news. She requested contributions from others, but never received any, although the magazine aroused much interest in the gay community. The publication ceased after nine months and twelve issues because her studio job ended. She went on to other things, among them writing gay parodies of popular songs and singing them at the Flamingo, a club that allowed gay shows and acts on Sunday afternoon.

She dated and went out with a number of other women and finally, at age thirty-six, entered into a special relationship with a woman she is unwilling to identify. The two lived together for three years, but their affair was ended by Ben after her partner went to Las Vegas and lost everything gambling, including the rent money. Although she continued to have casual relationships after that, Ben never again was interested in any long-term relationship. She keeps up correspondence with her friends and writes poetry in her spare time. In 1997 she was recognized as a founder of the Los Angeles gay community. She remains proud of what she has accomplished but reluctant to seek publicity. Still, her willingness to come out as she did in the 1940s makes her almost unique among the lesbians of the time.

## Berry Berryman (1901-1972)

Vern L. Bullough



Homosexual and lesbian friendships and social groups were long part of the American social scene, although most of these groups avoided public exposure. As historians try to trace down the histories of these groups, some serendipitously come to light and we find they left studies or autobiographies that are important to helping us to understand same-sex life in the past. One such “find” was a study by Berry Berryman who began interviewing her lesbian and gay friends perhaps as early as the 1920s and began writing them up in the early 1940s only to abandon the project, which was eventually completed by Bonnie and Vern Bullough in the 1970s. Her study

was significant even though flawed because it is one of the few studies we have of a rather loosely knit lesbian (and gay) community in an unlikely place, such as Salt Lake City was. She was a pioneer in her study and in her public lifestyle.

Born Mildred J. Berryman in Salt Lake City, Utah, she grew up there. Like many other young women conscious of her same-sex attraction, she had difficulty coming to terms with herself. She married twice, first an elopement at sixteen, which was annulled, and later in her early twenties in a more formal ceremony, which resulted in a quick divorce. After these efforts at conformity, she began to come to terms with her lesbianism and over the years lived with several different women for shorter or longer periods. It is not clear what caused her to begin her studies of the gay and lesbian community in Salt Lake City, but she was undoubtedly influenced by the writing of Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, whose books were in her library.

A short and somewhat overweight woman, she eventually settled down with Ruth Uckerman in 1942 and the two lived together running a small

business making jewelry from semiprecious stones, small carvings, various tourist items, and ribbons for state and county fairs. They later expanded their business to include various injectable plastic items. Similar to Lisa Ben, Berryman began typing up her notes while working in an office—not for a film studio office, but for the American Red Cross in early 1940. She left this job to become a machinist in the defense industry. There she met Ruth Uckerman and the two soon moved to rural Woods Cross in Utah. Berry never completed writing up her research, but fortunately it was preserved by her partner; it eventually came into the hands of the Bulloughs, who published part of it. Her actual interviews have not survived, only her summaries of the case studies.

She objected to much of the scholarship available about lesbianism and homosexuality at the time, but her studies nonetheless were much influenced by them anyway, indicating just how much societal attitudes affect the perspectives of people. Her highest compliment to a woman was that she had a “masculine mind.” The fact that her summaries did survive, however, was enough for interested Utah gays and lesbians to construct a real history of the underground lesbian and gay movement, centered in the Bohemian Club of that city (which dated back to the 1880s). The surviving membership lists have been combed to reconstruct the relevant history, and the study of Berryman’s life and that of her partner have become a small cottage industry. However, neither she nor her partner could be said to be closeted lesbians.

In fact, the home of Berry and Ruth served as a center for many lesbians in Salt Lake City and for many traveling through. They were accepted in their community as eccentrics, and apparently many of their neighbors never even surmised they were lesbians. In fact, one of the complaints that Berry often made was that after Radclyffe Hall’s *Well of Loneliness* came out, it was more difficult for lesbians to hold hands while walking down the street because people were more suspicious of close women. Since Berry’s partner was the mother-in-law of the author of this brief biography, one of her main contributions was also encouraging and supporting my own research into gays and lesbians, and early introducing me into the life and culture of the gay community. Her life emphasizes how rich and varied were the lives of gays and lesbians in a time when it was not polite for many in society to inquire more deeply into unorthodox living relationships. She thought long and often about what it meant to be a lesbian, and one result of her activity as communicated to me was to open up the study of same-sex relationships in the intermountain west and in Mormon country in particular.

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