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2016 KATH Thomas D. Clark Undergraduate Student Writing Award

A Rough Start: Gay and Lesbian Organizations in Lexington, Kentucky, 1969-1983

By Kody Ruark, University of Kentucky

A Rough Start: Gay and Lesbian Organizations in Lexington, Kentucky 1969-1983

In 1969 it was a crime in 49 states to commit homosexual acts. It was also legal, and even encouraged, to fire homosexuals from their jobs or bar them from employment.¹ In 2016 homosexuality is no longer criminalized and same-sex marriage is a reality across the United States. Many states and businesses also have laws and policies protecting homosexuals from discrimination, or termination, because of their sexual orientation. In 47 years a lot has changed, but how did this come to be? What happened locally that fueled the change nationwide?

Homosexuality has been a reality in every culture from all around the world throughout history.² However, if homosexuality is mentioned in history books, it has most always been as a side point. Not until the 21st century has there been any historical work focused solely on homosexuals or homosexuality. Recently, many new books have been published covering the Stonewall Riots of 1969 and major national gay and lesbian organizations such as the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society.³ Many more books have been completed documenting the fight for marriage equality. These books were mainly published after the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favor of same-sex marriage in June 2015. There has also been scholarly

¹ "Getting Rid of Sodomy Laws: History and Strategy That Led to the Lawrence Decision." American Civil Liberties Union. Accessed March 29, 2016. <https://www.aclu.org/getting-rid-sodomy-laws-history-and-strategy-led-lawrence-decision>.

² Jeffery Alan Jones, *Hidden Histories, Proud Communities: Multiple Narratives in the Queer Geographies of Lexington, KY 1930-1999*, 42. PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2001. Ann Arbor: Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company, 2002.

³ A sampling of some of these books include, but are not limited to: *Stonewall*, by David Carter, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights movement*, by Marcia M. Gallo, and *Behind the Mask of the Mattachine: The Hal Call Chronicles and the Early Movement for Homosexual Emancipation*, by James T. Sears.

work in the sociological and philosophical disciplines when it comes to the subject of homosexuality and gay communities. However, the historical work that has been completed has focused on much broader national issues and much less on local experiences. Many communities, large and small, all over the United States, have rich gay and lesbian histories, which not only contribute to the national movements, but make them possible. Studying these local histories will provide a much clearer picture of how movements were sustained after they were started.

In an attempt to begin stitching these histories together, this paper will cover a small window of gay and lesbian history in Lexington, Kentucky, from 1969-1983. This time period was chosen because it is widely agreed that, nationally, this period marked the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement. This movement, which was sparked by the 1969 stonewall riots in New York City, had far-reaching effects all over the United States. These effects included a rise in court cases concerning gay and lesbian rights, the formation of many new organizations, and the radicalization of new and old gay and lesbian organizations. Choosing this period of time enables the paper to examine what, if any, effects this national movement had on the local gay community in Lexington, Kentucky. This time period also allows unique insight into the development of gay and lesbian organizations after the Stonewall Riots.

This paper is based on a combination of oral history interviews, newsletters, and newspaper articles, as well as a plethora of other primary and secondary sources. The combination of these sources will illustrate the victories and struggles of the Lexington gay community during this time. This paper will answer the question of how and why gay and lesbian organizations formed in Lexington. It will also examine what, if any,

obstacles faced the formation of these organizations. Also, any public reaction to the gay community or the formation of any organizations will be documented. Finally, the information presented within this paper will illustrate the intrinsic connection between local gay and lesbian histories and the national story of gay and lesbian movements.

The examination of laws is a good place to start understanding the social and political atmosphere within which gays were living in the 1970's. Before 1962, every state in the country had some law that made sodomy a crime.⁴ Sodomy is most generally defined sexual intercourse involving anal or oral copulation. Laws such as these can trace their roots to religious practices and had been in effect in one version or another since the 17th century. These laws would in effect outlaw homosexual acts making it very difficult for gays and lesbians to live openly. In 1962, Illinois became the first state to decriminalize sodomy between consenting adults.⁵ However, the majority of other states, including Kentucky, held onto their sodomy laws for quite some time. It would not be until 1992 that the Kentucky Supreme Court would overturn the state's sodomy law as it pertained to consenting adults.⁶ This law read, "A person is guilty of sodomy in the fourth degree when he engages in deviate sexual intercourse with another person of the same sex."⁷ Laws such as these made gays and lesbians all over the country the targets of police. This resulted in a very hostile and oppressive

⁴ See "Getting Rid of Sodomy Laws" American Civil Liberties Union

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Nan D Hunter, "Sexual Orientation and the Paradox of Heightened Scrutiny." *Michigan Law Review*, 1530, 102, no. 7 (June 2004): 1528-554. Accessed March 29, 2016. Academic Search Complete.

⁷ "510.100 Sodomy in the Fourth Degree." Kentucky Legislature. March 28, 2016. Accessed March 29, 2016. <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/statutes/chapter.aspx?id=39376>.

atmosphere for gays and lesbians and was one of many issues that would ultimately lead to the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement in the 1970's.

The pressure felt by gays and lesbians from police during this era took several forms. One of the most popular tactics used by police were sting operations. Undercover police would go to known gay hangouts or bars and pose as gay men or women. When the police would find an interested party, they would leave the establishment with them and eventually would charge and arrest the man or woman with a variety of different charges.⁸ This tactic not only created an uneasy relationship with police, but it also caused a sense of distrust within the gay community. Other popular tactics included raiding gay bars and using surveillance to catch laws being broken.⁹ One example involved Peter Taylor, a University of Kentucky student during the early 1970's. During his interview Taylor told of one time he was arrested and spent nearly two weeks in jail. As Mr. Taylor explains, the arrest was made mainly because he was gay: "I was standing on a porch waiting for the rain to stop when a police car pulls up and asks me what I was doing. When I told them I had just been dropping off a present to a guy I had a crush on they arrested me." According to Taylor they put in parentheses "mental" as a reason for arrest.¹⁰ During this time it was still common for people to still associate homosexuality as a mental illness even though it had been removed from the list of mental illnesses years earlier. This evidence highlights that even in Lexington, these tactics and prejudices were enforced by the police. All the

⁸ Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 4-9. New York City: Simon & Schuster, 2015.

⁹ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 171-172.

¹⁰ Peter Jeffery Taylor, interview by author, March 09, 2016, interview in possession of author.

harassment by the police created the perfect tinder box to ignite the spark that would jumpstart the Gay Liberation Movement.

That spark occurred in June of 1969, in New York City, at a gay bar called the Stonewall Inn. This bar was located on Christopher Street, which was the heart of the gay neighborhood of New York. June 29, 1969, was like any other day at the Stonewall Inn: patrons arrived and were admitted, but about halfway through the evening the police showed up to conduct a raid. In the process of conducting the raid the patrons began to fight back against the police, this eventually began a widespread multiple day riot. This would become one of the most well-known and pivotal events of the beginning of the gay liberation movement.

What made this riot so different that it sparked the Gay Liberation movement was the fact the patrons fought back at all. The act of fighting against the police was a rare occurrence for the gay community, as much of the time gays would go quietly to avoid drawing attention to themselves. During this time it was perfectly legal to be fired from your job for being gay. Examples showcasing this can be found in many areas of the country during this time. One such example can be found in Florida throughout the 1960's. The Florida Legislative Investigation Committee, or FLIC, conducted frequent investigations of every state-funded agency and organization in Florida to purge homosexuals from their jobs.¹¹ This is just one example of many across the country so in an attempt to avoid possible termination, gays and lesbians at a bar during a raid would not put up a fight with police and go as quietly as possible.¹² There is still debate on exactly why the occupants fought back at the Stonewall Inn and not before. Some

¹¹ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 48.

¹² Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 43-44.

scholars attribute it to the radicalization of anti-war protests, others to the summer heat; but what is clear is that this time was different. News of this display of public disobedience quickly spread across the country. For many it was an evolution in the way people were to advocate for gay rights.

Soon the established national homophile organizations, like the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society, were cracking at the seams and new, more radicalized organizations formed. The older organizations had been filled by mostly anonymous people who were usually much older than the average age of college students and sought to work within the established systems to effect change. The new organizations, however, catered more to younger gay people who were usually out of the closet, and represented a shift to civil disobedience as a way to campaign against injustices.¹³ These new organizations borrowed heavily from tactics used in the Civil Rights Movement and the antiwar protests of the era.

One of the new organizations formed after the riots in New York City was the Gay Liberation Front. This organization originated in the fall of 1970 at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.¹⁴ This group was much more confrontational than the older homophile organizations such as the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society. This organization held sit-ins and actively demonstrated their outspoken views regarding gay rights. However, this group also held dances for gay and lesbian students and created a support structure that could exist outside the bars and off of the streets.

¹³Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 96-97.

¹⁴ Brett Beemyn, 2003. "The Silence Is Broken: A History of the First Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual College Student Groups", *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 218. Vol 12. (2). University of Texas Press: 205–23. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.uky.edu/stable/3704612>.

This support was altogether something new for gay and lesbian students, which explains the growth of the organization and the movement.

The growth of the Gay Liberation Movement had not quite reached Lexington by 1970. In fact, in the years 1969 and 1970 Lexington, Kentucky, had only one gay bar and no gay or lesbian organizations.¹⁵ The bar, which was called The Living Room, served as the only gay bar outside of larger neighboring cities such as Louisville or Cincinnati.¹⁶ Due to the constant threat of police raids or stings, bars did not serve as an effective anchor for the gay community. Bars, especially at this time, alienated two large groups of the gay community, youth under 21, and those wishing to stay in the closet. The frustration of the alienated groups was immense because there was little to no way for them express themselves or get support in dealing with how they felt. Peter Taylor asserts in his interview that, “Bars were toxic, there was a lot of substance abuse centered on them, and they just weren’t great, but it was all we had.”¹⁷ This created a large void in the cohesion of the community and also made the community ripe for change as the Gay Liberation Movement began to pick up steam.

The gay community in Lexington was indeed ripe for change by 1971. For reasons stated above there was a large void to fill when it came to creating a sense of community among gays. At the University of Kentucky, where a large portion of the youth alienated from the one gay bar would have been congregated, there was a move in the fall semester of 1971 to fill the void. It was in this semester that Bruce Kraus and

¹⁵ Jeffery Alan Jones, *Hidden Histories, Proud Communities: Multiple Narratives in the Queer Geographies of Lexington, KY 1930-1999*, 309. PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2001. Ann Arbor: Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company, 2002.

¹⁶ Jones, *Hidden Histories, Proud Communities: Multiple Narratives in the Queer Geographies of Lexington, KY 1930-1999*, 308.

¹⁷ See Taylor interview.

several other students started having meetings on campus organized under the Gay Liberation Front or GLF. This group, as stated in their constitution, sought to educate heterosexuals about homosexual issues and to provide support, both counseling and social, for gay students at the University of Kentucky.¹⁸

This group started meeting weekly in October of the fall semester and drew in students and non-students alike.¹⁹ Mr. Taylor states in his interview that there were many people who were not students who would come to the meetings. He would not speculate on why they took an interest in the GLF, but admits it could have something to do with it “being the only other game in town.”²⁰ Lexington had no formal organization at all to support the gay community at this time, so it is not surprising that people from the community were drawn to the group. However, this would present an issue for the group later on when filing for official recognition by the university.

Though meetings began in early October of the fall semester, it was not until November 30, 1971, that the group officially filed for recognition from the university. One of the reasons for the delay was finding faculty sponsors for the group. This could possibly be attributed to the group being a homosexual organization, but nonetheless two faculty members were eventually secured. Wayne Davis of the Zoology Department became the faculty advisor, and Alan Newman of the Political Science Department

¹⁸ “University of Kentucky Student Organizations Application for Registration”, November 30, 1972, President’s Office, Otis Singletary, 1979 ua 003 Box 102, folder 2, University of Kentucky Archives and Special Collections, M.I. King Library, Lexington, Kentucky.

¹⁹ “Gay Lib Asks Official Nod.” *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), December 03, 1971. 7, W.T. Young Library, University of Kentucky.

²⁰ See Taylor interview.

became the faculty sponsor.²¹ Once the faculty leaders were secured, the filing process could begin. As Peter Taylor states in his interview, applying for official recognition was done for a few reasons. "By becoming officially recognized," Taylor explains, "the GLF could gain access to office space and supplies, funding, the ability to hold events, and request meeting space from the university."²² To this point, this was the first time a gay organization had sought official recognition at the state or local level in state history.²³ However, as alluded to earlier, this was not going to be an easy process for the group, as there was significant institutional and public opposition to the group's formation and recognition.

According to Taylor, the entire group initially felt like they were "a shoe-in for approval."²⁴ They had the support of the campus newspaper and believed they had support from "...a good majority of students."²⁵ The gay community was definitely behind them, they had come up with a constitution, and had abided by all of the student handbook's requirements. The ball was now in the university's court. The *Kentucky Kernel* reported on December 3, 1971, that the dean of students, Jack Hall, gave an initial estimate of ten days to hear a decision on the application.²⁶ Overall, at this time the mood of the GLF members was fairly positive and eager.

²¹ See "University of Kentucky Student Organizations Application for Registration" University of Kentucky Archives and Special Collections.

²² See Taylor Interview.

²³ Jeffery Alan Jones, *Hidden Histories, Proud Communities: Multiple Narratives in the Queer Geographies of Lexington, KY 1930-1999*, 310. PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 2001. Ann Arbor: Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company, 2002.

²⁴ See Taylor Interview

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ "Gay Lib Asks Official Nod." *Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), December 03, 1971. 7, W.T. Young Library, University of Kentucky.

Ten days came and went, but there was still no word. Unknown to the GLF at the time, the dean of students, Jack Hall, had forwarded the request to the Kentucky Attorney General. Mr. Hall wanted to ascertain the Attorney General's opinion on whether he could lawfully deny the GLF's registration. Though student opinion seemed to tilt towards approval, administrators, including Jack Hall, were more conservative. To Hall it was never a question of whether he could approve the GLF legally, it was always whether he could deny the group without breaking the law. This is yet another testament to the overall public sentiment surrounding gay and lesbian people during this time. The simple approval or denial of a student group at a local university does not usually require the attorney general's opinion. However, when the opinion finally came back, five months later, Jack Hall, having received the attorney general's approval, denied the GLF's request for recognition at the University of Kentucky on May 5, 1972.²⁷ The opinion of the Kentucky Attorney General, which spans a length of eight pages, basically states that "...the University of Kentucky should reject the application... unless and until there is a clear-cut decision of a court of last resort directing otherwise."²⁸ Though it is not expressly stated in the opinion, it is likely that this decision to advise rejection was influenced, in part, by the thought that approving the GLF would somehow enable the violation of the state's sodomy law. This opinion would turn out to be just the beginning of the fight for the GLF at the university.

Denial by the dean of students was not the end of the process of application. In the event of denial, every student group had the right to appeal the decision with the

²⁷ "Hall Refuses Registration to Gay Liberation Front." *Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), May 05, 1972. 1. W.T. Young Library, University of Kentucky.

²⁸ Ed. W. Hancock, May 1, 1972, President's Office, Otis Singletary 1979 ua 003, Box 102, folder 2, University of Kentucky Archives and Special Collections, M.I. King Library, Lexington, Kentucky.

University Appeals Board. The board was made up of faculty and students and, according to Taylor, appealing the decision was thought of as an automatic process, rather than something that required much thought by the group.²⁹ However, the appeals board did not consider the recognition of the GLF until November 10, 1972, nearly a year after the initial application was filed.³⁰ While waiting for the process to be completed, the group continued to meet in space around campus as best they could without officially being allowed to request space.³¹

Another group on campus, called the University of Kentucky People's Party, even tried to help the GLF skirt the rules. The idea was to allow the GLF to meet and request space under People's Party name by forming separate caucus within their organization.³² This, too, was met with staunch resistance by the dean of students, Jack Hall. According to an article in the *Kentucky Kernel* on September 29, 1972, Jack Hall threatened to revoke the People's Party student organization status if they went through with this plan.³³ Not only does this type of resistance reflect the difficulties of starting a gay and lesbian organization, but it also reflects the overall public opinion of the time. There was such a resistance from the general public against the idea of gays and lesbians organizing that the dean of students was ready to revoke another group's recognition for trying to help the GLF.

²⁹ See Taylor Interview.

³⁰ Michael Carr, "Appeals Board Approves Gay Lib Request." *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), November 14, 1972. 1. W.T. Young Library, University of Kentucky.

³¹ See Taylor Interview.

³² Paul Curran, "Gay Lib Finds Possible Solution to Use of University Facilities." *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), September 18, 1972. W.T. Young Library, University of Kentucky.

³³ Michael Carr, "People's Party May Lose Status as Campus Group." *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), September 29, 1972. 6. W.T. Young Library, University of Kentucky.

The University of Kentucky's newspaper, the *Kentucky Kernel*, is a useful source to further explore the public resistance to formation of the GLF. As stated earlier the *Kentucky Kernel* editorial board was supportive of the GLF, but in the spirit of fair reporting allowed space for opponents too. Throughout the GLF battle with the University of Kentucky, there was a series of editorials published in the student newspaper. These included letters of both support and opposition to not only the GLF, but also homosexuality in general. Some titles of these editorials included "Gays don't need GLF,"³⁴ "GLF President Refutes Reader's Letter,"³⁵ and "God Speaks Out on Homosexuality."³⁶ Public opinion at the university level was split, but outside the university the resounding opinion was negative towards the GLF and homosexuality. This fact would become crystal clear when the University Appeals Board handed down their recommendation and the wider public became aware of the GLF's attempt.

On November 10, 1972, the University Appeals board recommended the approval of the GLF as an official student organization at the University of Kentucky.³⁷ This seemed like a long-awaited victory, but the final decision rested with the president of the university, Otis A. Singletary. It was at this moment that public opinion from outside the university would be felt the strongest. Hundreds of letters from all over the state were handwritten or typed, and mailed to Dr. Singletary in the weeks following. In nearly every single one people urged him to reject the GLF's application for mostly

³⁴ Tom Scholl, "Gays Don't Need GLF." *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), October 10, 1972.

³⁵ Peter Jeffery Taylor, "GLF President Refutes Reader's Letter." *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), November 20, 1972.

³⁶ Gerald Smith, "God Speaks Out on Homosexuality." *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), December 04, 1972.

³⁷ Michael Carr, "Appeals Board Approves Gay Lib Request." *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), November 14, 1972. 1. W.T. Young Library, University of Kentucky.

religious reasons. Letters would state things like, "The bible speaks very definitively in various places against homosexuality. We need more men with positions such as you have... to voice their convictions against this type of moral decay."³⁸ Among the throng of letters there were only two letters that were written in support of the GLF, and both were written anonymously.³⁹ This outpouring of opposition against the GLF, and even more widely, homosexuality, demonstrates the very reason that the GLF was needed. Gays and lesbians were under attack from all angles of society, and what better way to find some support to deal with this than in a student group?

Dr. Singletary made his decision known to the public on December 4, 1972.⁴⁰ However, before this he had a meeting with the GLF. Though the meeting was not referenced in his papers, both the *Kentucky Kernel* in 1972 and Mr. Taylor in his interview suggest the meeting happened.⁴¹ According to Mr. Taylor, during this meeting Dr. Singletary, in a roundabout way, said that while he understood the position of the group and would like to give them approval, his hands were tied.⁴² Though Singletary did not elaborate on why he could not give his approval, his intentions were clear. This led Mr. Taylor and others to conclude that the board of trustees or someone higher was making sure the GLF would not gain recognition. In fact, Singletary was president of Kentucky's largest institution of higher education which was, in part, publicly funded, it is most likely that he was bound by public opinion in his decision to not approve the GLF.

³⁸ "Gay Liberation Front." William W. Jones to Otis Singletary. January 06, 1973. Otis Singletary, Routine, 1979ua003:04, folder 7, University of Kentucky Archives and Special Collections, M.I. King Library, Lexington, Kentucky.

³⁹ Otis Singletary, Routine, 1979ua003:04, folder 7, University of Kentucky Archives and Special Collections, M.I. King Library, Lexington, Kentucky.

⁴⁰Michael Carr, "Singletary Refuses to Recognize GLF." *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), December 05, 1972.

⁴¹ See Carr, "Appeals Board"

⁴² See Taylor Interview.

After this meeting, Dr. Singletary made his decision public. The *Kentucky Kernel* as well as newspapers throughout the state reported that Singletary had refused recognition of the GLF on the University of Kentucky campus. Dr. Singletary composed a four-page letter that would thoroughly convey his opinion. In the letter, Dr. Singletary cites the opinion of the Kentucky Attorney General, inconsistent medical opinions on homosexuality, Kentucky law, and different court cases. Dr. Singletary also went as far as to cite public opinion when he wrote, "The registration of the Gay Liberation Front would... bring discredit, in the eyes of the general public on this institution."⁴³ It was through this quote that the real reason for rejection was highlighted.

Though Dr. Singletary lists a host of reasons for not approving the GLF, public opinion was the most convincing and probable reason. Public opinion would have mattered a great deal in retaining his job as the president of the state's land grant institution, as well as future funding for the university. This was certainly a blow to the group, but one that they had seen coming. Peter Taylor suggests in his interview that after the initial rejection by Jack Hall, the expectation of being approved had gone down considerably among those in the GLF.⁴⁴ However, this was not the last stop for the GLF. The Gay Liberation Movement had sparked fire nationwide, and with that came the will to fight for the rights of all gay people, including the right to organize on college campuses.

In the days following Dr. Singletary's rejection, Richard Rose, a local Lexington attorney, and the Kentucky Civil Liberties Union were preparing for a case in court. On

⁴³ Otis Singletary, "Text of the Letter Denying GLF Registration." *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), December 05, 1972.

⁴⁴ See Taylor interview.

December 11, 1972, the *Kentucky Kernel* released a front-page article entitled “Court Battle Looms for UK, Gay Lib.” The article states that Dr. Singletary had been notified via letter about the GLF’s intention and that they needed to settle the matter in court.⁴⁵ When asked how the group came to be involved with a court case, Mr. Taylor had this to say: “We felt our first amendment rights were being violated and were approached with free representation so it was a no brainer.”⁴⁶

The main crux of the GLF’s argument was that by denying the GLF’s recognition, the University of Kentucky had in effect infringed on the GLF’s right free assembly guaranteed by the first amendment. This really highlights the transition the Gay Liberation Movement had caused in the country. Prior to this movement, it would have been rare for a student group to end up in court. Dr. Singletary would have been aware during the composition of his rejection letter of at least one other court case in Kansas that denied the formation of a Gay Liberation Front in that state.⁴⁷ He was also aware of a multitude of other universities around the country dealing with their own requests for the formation of GLF’s on their campuses. Dr. Robert Zumwinkle, vice president of student affairs at the University of Kentucky, had gathered information from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln specific to GLF formations.⁴⁸ Previously gay and lesbian student organizations were sparse, but since the Stonewall Riots and the beginning of the Gay Liberation movement, student groups were on the rise as were

⁴⁵ Michael Carr, "Court Battle Looms for UK, Gay Lib." *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), December 11, 1972.

⁴⁶ See Taylor Interview.

⁴⁷ Ed. W. Hancock, May 1, 1972, President’s Office, Otis Singletary, 1979 ua 003 Box 102, folder 2, University of Kentucky Archives and Special Collections, M.I. King Library, Lexington, Kentucky.

⁴⁸ Robert Zumwinkle, October 22, 1971, President’s Office, Otis Singletary, 1979 ua 003 Box 102, folder 2, University of Kentucky Archives and Special Collections, M.I. King Library, Lexington, Kentucky.

court cases involving them. The court case involving the University of Kentucky's GLF would be no different from others around the country and it demonstrates the connections between local gay and lesbian history and the national movement.

The case would challenge the right of the University of Kentucky to refuse the group on the grounds that it was a homosexual group. Though the ruling would not come until summer of 1974, the GLF continued to meet wherever they could in an effort to continue providing a social alternative to the bar and streets, as well as support to all those who needed it. In Taylor's own words, "It never stopped."⁴⁹ The fact that they continued to meet in the face of severe opposition is yet another testament to the tie to the larger Gay Liberation Movement. The national Gay Liberation Movement was a source of inspiration, but the fact they did not give up continued to feed the national movement in a sort of positive feedback loop. This again shows that the national story affects the local history in ways that are intrinsically connected, but often hidden from view.

When the ruling finally came down in 1974, it was not in the GLF's favor. Judge Wade H. McCree Jr. ruled that, "The government cannot forbid someone having a group... but does the government have to charter the group?"⁵⁰ Basically, the case boiled down to the simple conclusion that the university was not actually preventing the group from meeting, and thus not infringing on the GLF's first amendment rights. This was true, the group was still meeting, but they were unable to officially use university money or space which ultimately limited the GLF's effectiveness.

⁴⁹ See Taylor interview.

⁵⁰ Mary Scheier, "Appeals Court Considers Gay Lib Recognition." *The Kentucky Kernel* (Lexington, KY), April 16, 1974.

This was certainly a blow to the GLF and to the gay community. Mr. Taylor states that the group held a small protest outside of the student center after the ruling, during which the GLF burned the United States Constitution and a Gideon's Bible in an act of frustration against the government and religion.⁵¹ Though no one other than GLF members attended the protest, it is a testament to the amount of dissatisfaction the group felt with the process and the ruling. As Taylor had eluded to earlier in his interview, he and the others in the GLF felt that the ruling and denial in every step of the process had been fixed against them.⁵² This feeling most likely stemmed from the massive negative views about homosexuality expressed by the general public, which resulted in a battle that could not be won. Starting with the lengthy period of time that elapsed between filing and the first rejection, then the attack on the University of Kentucky People's Party for offering to help the GLF, to the meeting with Dr. Singletary, a picture of systematic discrimination had formed. This was not uncommon during this time, but it stands as a testament to the resolve of the members of the GLF and perhaps the wider gay community in Lexington, as well as the change that had occurred since the Stonewall Riots of the summer of 1969.

The GLF on the University of Kentucky campus would not be the only unsuccessful attempt at establishing a gay and lesbian group on a university campus across the country in the 1970's. In a few other states such as Kansas, court cases had been brought against universities by gay and lesbian student groups who ultimately lost.⁵³ Many states still had various laws against homosexuality at the time that made it

⁵¹ Peter Taylor, email message to author, March 9, 2016.

⁵² See Taylor interview.

⁵³ See Zumwinkle Otis Singletary Papers, University of Kentucky Archives and Special Collections

difficult to win court cases. These states would cite these laws as a basis to deny groups on the ground that they could be in violation, or promote the violation of laws against homosexuality. However, an important point can be drawn from challenges, such as the ones in Kansas and Kentucky. Prior to 1969 there were no cases in the court system in which a gay and lesbian organization was attempting to form at a university. In fact, prior to 1969, gay student groups were virtually unheard of. This profound change occurred as a part of the Gay Liberation Movement. Local gay communities all over the country began to organize in a way they had never done before. The formation of gay and lesbian student groups and their court challenges were just the beginning.

Without the GLF at the University of Kentucky, Lexington was again without any gay or lesbian organization. Though Taylor asserts that the meetings continued, there was no way to officially organize or sponsor events.⁵⁴ However, the group was not finished. They may have not been able to organize on the university campus, but the greater Lexington area still needed what the GLF was trying to provide. In response to the defeat at the University of Kentucky, many members of the GLF began to organize what would later become the Lexington Gay Services Organization or the GSO. This would continue the legacy of change that had been seen locally which had been started by national events and national organizations.

In an interview with Marlon Austin, one of the co-founders of the GSO, the idea to form the GSO came from “the fact that they were pissed at the University of Kentucky

⁵⁴ See Taylor interview.

and the court.”⁵⁵ In 1975, the group started having regular meetings at different apartments of group members. The group not only consisted of gay and lesbian people, but of straight people as well. To garner attention, the president, Greg Butler, would speak with the local newspapers and talk about the group’s intentions.⁵⁶ The act of attracting attention to the group and its plans stands a hallmark of the Gay Liberation Movement. Previously where there were local groups of gays meeting it would have been imperative to attract as little attention as possible. The fear of being found out prior to the Stonewall Riots was paramount and usually kept groups from forming at all. However, afterwards the emboldened nature of the Gay Liberation Movement made this fear a thing of the past in most places.

It was not until April 28, 1977, that the group officially filed for incorporation as a non-profit organization from the state of Kentucky. Contrary to when the GLF tried to gain official recognition from the University of Kentucky, there were no court battles or really any major opposition from state or local leaders. The reason there was likely no major opposition was most likely due to the fact that no state funds would be used in the running of the GSO, whereas, the GLF would have used funds provided to the university by the state. The purpose for founding the GSO was the same as when the GLF tried to form at the University of Kentucky. The stated purpose of the GSO was to “...provide a variety of services as well as social outlets for gay Lexingtonians...”⁵⁷ By filing this paperwork and becoming recognized, the Lexington Gay Services Organization became the first officially recognized gay organization in the state of

⁵⁵ Marlon Austin, Interview by author, March 12, 2016, interview in possession of author.

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ "A Little Information on "Gayzette" and the Lexington Gay Services Organization." *Gayzette* (Lexington, KY), August 1979. 1. W.T. Young Library, Periodicals, University of Kentucky.

Kentucky. This was only possible because of the decision of the court to deny the registration of GLF at the University of Kentucky. Through this denial and the subsequent formation of the GSO, the Gay Liberation Movement continued to deeply affect the gay communities in the state of Kentucky.

There is not a lot of information on the GSO between the years of 1975 and 1979. Marlon Austin says the organization continued meeting and successfully raised money and put on different events such as picnics and trips.⁵⁸ In February 1979 the organization published its first newsletter entitled the *Gayzette*. This newsletter was a way to tie the community together and advertise organizational events and services as well as comment on local and national issues. The *Gayzette* gave people who were too afraid or too young to be directly involved with the community a way to still feel connected. Marlon Austin says that "... there were people whose only connection to other gay people was that newsletter that came once a month. ...I am very proud to have been a part of that."⁵⁹ In a time before the internet, the feeling of isolation was a really common occurrence for gay and lesbian people everywhere.

In a time when things were changing nationwide for gays and lesbians, the Lexington GSO was trying its hardest to fill a void in the community. It began planning and promoting fundraising events and social events throughout the year. Events would include dances and picnics, hiking and canoe trips, and even bridge nights for gays.

⁵⁸ See Austin interview.

⁵⁹ Ibid

The GSO also conducted educational outreach, substance abuse support, and opened the first ever gayline in 1979.⁶⁰

The gayline was unique resource for the Lexington gay community. This was a phone line that people could call anonymously and get information on local events, get emotional support, as well as information on community resources. All of these services contributed to a stronger and more cohesive community for the entire Lexington area. Many other organizations formed as a result of the success of the GSO. In 1969, there were zero gay and lesbian organizations in the state of Kentucky; by 1983 there were at least 5 in the Lexington area alone, but even more in other cities throughout the state. By June 27, 1982, the GSO, in concert with Gay and Lesbians United or GLU out of Louisville, Kentucky, hosted Kentucky's first gay pride celebration which has been held every year since.⁶¹ Today the GSO is now known as the Lexington Gay and Lesbian Services Organization and is the oldest continually operated gay services organization in the state.⁶²

All of these organizations and community services can trace their origin to the embattled GLF at the University of Kentucky. The GLF at the University of Kentucky can trace its origin from the national Gay Liberation Front started at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, as a type of response to the Stonewall Riots of 1969. At its very core the Lexington gay community was affected immensely by the Stonewall Riots and the

⁶⁰ "Vocal Support: GSO Phone Line & Rap Group." *Gayzette* (Lexington, KY), August 1979. 2. W.T. Young Library, Periodicals, University of Kentucky.

⁶¹ "Kentucky Observes Gay Pride." *GSO Newsletter* (Lexington, KY), June 1982.

⁶² See Jones, *Hidden Histories, Proud Communities: Multiple Narratives in the Queer Geographies of Lexington, KY 1930-1999*, 277.

resulting Gay Liberation Movement. However, it is only through the study of the gay and lesbian history of Lexington, that we are able to gauge just how much these events and movements directly affected the community. Though there were many trials for the Lexington gay community over the years, including the devastating AIDS epidemic in the 1980's, they were better able to cope with these trials because they had strong organizations to support them. The national Gay Liberation Movement triggered a strong local desire for support and change that coalesced into Kentucky's oldest still operating Gay and lesbian community organization. It is with studies of local histories that the true effect of national movements and events can be gauged and how those communities contributed to the overall national movement.

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