



Archives and Records

Finding Aid

COLLECTION NUMBER: Coll.11
TITLE: Boston Daughters of Bilitis Collection and *Focus/Maiden Voyage* Publication

COLLECTION SUMMARY

Creator: Boston Daughters of Bilitis
Title: Boston Daughters of Bilitis Collection and *Focus/Maiden Voyage* Publication
Extent: 3 archival boxes (1.5 linear feet)
Date Span: 1965-2005
Repository: The History Project, Archives and Records Department

Finding aid prepared for the History Project, Archives and Records Department by Deirdre Doran, a Simmons College intern, under the supervision of Andrew Elder, Spring 2009.

SUBJECT TERMS

Subject Names:

Boston Daughters of Bilitis
Daughters of Bilitis
Focus (Boston, Mass)
Laura McMurry

Subject Topics:

Lesbianism—United States
Lesbian Activists—United States
Gay Liberation Movement— Massachusetts— Boston
Gay Rights

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Terms of Use/Copyright: Unrestricted, though some items in the collection are copyrighted by individuals and/or organizations outside The History Project.

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HISTORICAL ABSTRACT

The Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) was a lesbian organization founded in 1955 in San Francisco by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon for the purpose of self-knowledge and self-acceptance, public education, involvement in research, and lobbying to change the laws criminalizing homosexuality. Starting primarily as a private social group for lesbians focused on the integration of the lesbian into mainstream society, the aims of the group shifted during the 1960s due to the changing political, social and economic conditions of the decade. The DOB took up political activism to lobby for the rights of lesbians, promoting individualism with a decreased emphasis on societal conformity. During the 1960s many regional chapters were chartered around the country and globally, continuing the organization even after the closing of the San Francisco national office in 1978.

The Boston chapter was founded in 1969 during a period when many homophile organizations were forming in Boston. Early leaders of the Boston DOB included Lois Johnson, Shari Barden, and Laura Robin/McMurry, who were prominent promoters of the group and its activities. Early on in the history of the Boston DOB, debate occurred over the group's overall purpose, with an outcome emphasizing the original DOB mission of personal and social support for lesbians, education of the public on lesbianism, and the lobbying for the reform of laws limiting the civil and human rights of lesbians. Many younger, politically active feminist lesbians thought of the organization as old-fashioned and left to create new groups or join other, more radically activist, homophile organizations. The Boston DOB became the longest running chapter of the DOB, maintaining an office in Cambridge until the early 2000s, with 30 years of documented history present in this archive.

Reference: Gallo, Marcia M., *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, (New York: Verso, 2006).

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Daughters of Bilitis collection consists of three archival boxes (1.5 linear feet). Box 1 contains a series of folders centered on the activities, organizational structure, and publications of the Boston chapter with some national publications, including the DOB journal, *The Ladder*. This collection also contains limited information about other activities of non-DOB homophile or feminist groups in the Boston area. The majority of the materials present date between 1965 and 1999, and include original documents as well as photocopies of newspaper and journal articles, event flyers, calendars, and correspondence. Boxes 2 and 3 contain the Boston DOB newsletter, originally entitled *Maiden Voyage* until 1971, when it was renamed *FOCUS*. The publication collection is arranged chronologically, beginning December 1969 and ending October 1983, with multiple issues filed together.

DESCRIPTION OF SERIES

Series I: DOB Activities

Present are a collection of informational pamphlets advertising the DOB's mission statement and a membership form, bulletins and calendars of DOB events, and event flyers and programs. The bulletins and calendars list DOB activities open to the public and range in date from September 1972 to November 1999, with complete month by month schedules included from January 1996 until February 1998. The majority of the event flyers for various DOB activities, including softball games, potlucks and dances, are undated, with sporadic dating between 1970 and 1999 and programs for the 20th and 25th anniversaries of the

Boston DOB chapter. Also included are calls for lobbying in support of a Massachusetts gay rights bill in 1973-74.

Series II: DOB Organization Records

The by-laws of the Boston DOB are organized into three folders: 1970 notes and revisions, 1972 notes and revisions including the by-laws of other organizations presumably used as models, and 1974 and 1987 by-laws. Handwritten notes are found on some revision copies of the by-laws. Various DOB election materials constitute another folder in this series, including election procedures, statements from candidates, and letters of resignation or withdrawal. Reports on the status of the Boston Chapter of the DOB are filed with directories of other gay groups in Boston from 1972 and 1973, due to verso printing. The Schlesinger Library HOLLIS entry for the Daughters of Bilitis, Boston Chapter is also included, as well as a report of ideas for rap sessions generated between 1984 and 1993.

Series III: Correspondence

Contains correspondence of the Boston DOB, including original letters, form letters, photocopied letters and email both written by, to, or about the DOB between the years 1970 and 1997. The bulk of the general correspondence is addressed to Laura Robin/McMurry, and dated between 1972 and 1974, during which time she acted as corresponding secretary for the DOB. Two thematic groups have been separated out, one dealing with the 1972 Boston Globe denial of an advertising space to the DOB, the majority of which are written by or to the then DOB president, Gail King. The other grouping concerns the indexing of the Boston DOB publication, *Focus*, by Clare Potter of the San Francisco based Circle of Lesbian Indexers. These letters are written to Laura Robin/McMurry, and include a guide to lesbian periodicals presumably created by the Circle of Lesbian Indexers.

Series IV: Articles and Publications

Includes articles written about the DOB, or individual DOB members, between 1965 and 1996 from a diverse selection of news sources. The bulk of the articles are specific to the Boston Chapter of the DOB, beginning with the 1965 announcement in the *Midtown Journal* for the intended formation of the Boston chapter. Original newspaper clippings are included as well as photocopied articles. This series also contains a copy of the DOB Boston 1994 release of *The Phantom Librarian*, a complete collection of all calendar supplements written by the Boston DOB "Librarian" between 1981 and 1987. Lastly, a limited collection of *The Ladder*, the national DOB journal, dated between December 1957 and September 1971 is included.

Series V: Photograph

This series consists of the one photographic image included in the collection, being of national DOB founders Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon with the former Boston, MA House Representative and Boston DOB member, Elaine Noble. The photo is from the Berkshire Conference on Women Historians held at Wellesley College in 1984.

Series VI: Miscellaneous GLBT Information

This series contains information in various formats, including flyers, programs and newsletters, concerning GLBT issues, events, and organizations in the Boston area not generated by the DOB.

Series VII: Maiden Voyage and Focus

Contains a collection of the Boston DOB's publication *Maiden Voyage*, which was renamed *Focus* in 1971. Beginning in December 1969 *Maiden Voyage* became the official publication of Boston DOB, and served as the chapter newsletter and a forum for announcements,

mission statements, essays, articles, reviews, poetry, letters, and cartoons for the DOB community. This series includes an incomplete run of the journal, up to the September/October 1983 issue with multiple copies of several issues, many donated by the Cambridge Women's Center. The attached spreadsheet lists all copies and shows which issues are missing from the collection.

BOX AND SERIES LIST

Box 1

Series I: DOB Activities

- Folder 1: Pamphlets
- Folder 2: Bulletins and Calendars
- Folder 3: Event Flyers
- Folder 4: Anniversary Programs
- Folder 5: Massachusetts Gay Rights Bill Lobbying 1973-74

Series II: DOB Organization Records

- Folder 6: By-Laws 1970
- Folder 7: By-Laws 1972
- Folder 8: By-Laws 1974, 1987
- Folder 9: Election Materials
- Folder 10: Reports and Directories

Series III: DOB Correspondence

- Folder 11: General Correspondence 1970-1997
- Folder 12: Boston Globe Ad Denial 1972
- Folder 13: Clare Potter, Indexing *Focus* 1981

Series IV: DOB Publications and Articles

- Folder 14: Articles 1965-1994
- Folder 15: *The Phantom Librarian* (Liane Curtis)
- Folder 16: *The Ladder*

Series V: DOB Photographs

- Folder 17: Photo of Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin and Elaine Noble; photo of Sherri Barden and Lois Johnson at Pride march.

Series VI: Miscellaneous GLBT Boston Information

- Folder 18: Boston GLBT Info

Box 2

Series VII: DOB Journals December 1969- March 1976

See attached spreadsheet for complete listing

Box 3

Series VII: DOB Journals April 1976- October 1983

See attached spreadsheet for complete listing