



Archives and Records

Finding Aid

COLLECTION NUMBER: Coll.37
TITLE: *The History Project Bar Collection*

COLLECTION SUMMARY

Creator: Various (see HISTORICAL ABSTRACT)
Title: *The History Project Bar Collection*
Extent: 6 boxes and vertical file
Date Span: 1957-2009 (and ongoing)
Repository: The History Project, Archives and Records Department

Finding aid prepared by Eve Lambert, spring 2009, for The History Project.

SUBJECT TERMS

Subject Names:

Bill Conrad
Jim McGrath
Harry Fullerton
Toby Marsh
Vanessa Vale
Mary Faith
Sylvia Sydney [Sidney Sushman]
Tex Murray
Anthony Costa

Subject Topics:

Gay bars
Boston Pride parades
Drag performances
Stonewall anniversary
"Gay Boston"

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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NOTE

For additional, related materials, see:

Coll.34 – The History Project T-Shirt Collection
Coll.45 – The History Project Hat Collection

HISTORICAL ABSTRACT

Boston's gay subculture developed in tandem with Prohibition, where speakeasies became natural gathering places for gay individuals who were already leading a clandestine life. The History Project's *Improper Bostonians* notes, "Bars and other gathering places gave previously isolated individuals the opportunity to experience a modicum of freedom, which helped offset the constant threat of arrest, extortion, or loss of employment and the strain of leading double lives," (p. 162). At this time, bar exteriors were usually discreet, with unmarked doors and anonymous facades. When Prohibition was repealed, gay patrons continued to frequent many former speakeasies, along with hotel lounges, neighborhood bars, and nightclubs, drawn to places where sexual preference was openly acknowledged. Patrons, however, visited such establishments under constant threat of police raid and arrest, which served to foster the solidarity and sense of community that characterized the bar scene of the late 1940s and 50s. By the 1960s, gay and lesbian bars grew in number and patronage, reflecting a larger cultural shift of oppressed groups rising up and demanding recognition. By the 1970s, the disco scene served to bring gay lifestyles into the mainstream, as disco-owners recognized the buying-power of the gay community and sought to encourage gay patronage.

The material from the Bar Collection has been gathered by patrons and employees of local bars and has been donated to The History Project with the intention of providing a more comprehensive history of the social life of gay men (and, to a smaller extent, women) via the bars they frequented.

Bill Conrad: For thirty-five years, Bill Conrad worked in seven Boston bars: from 1975 – 1985, he worked as a waiter, doorman, and bartender at Sporters; from 1980 – 1981 he was the Assistant Director and Entertainment Manager of Buddies; from 1981 – 1983 he worked as a doorman and cashier at 1270; for one year in 1983 he worked in the coatroom of Pipeline; from 1990 – 1995 he was a cashier and coatroom attendant for Bobbies, and for six months in 1996 he was a cashier at Bolt. Conrad was also an anchorman for Gay Boston, a monthly cable-access series featuring gay and lesbian neighborhoods, local news recaps, community forums, and other special features. Gay Boston ran from 1985 - ?

Jim McGrath: Jim McGrath began working at Playland in 1951 and was there for thirty-eight years. While there, McGrath established a tradition of elaborate holiday decorations, as well as a Thanksgiving Day celebration for patrons and neighbors. The History Project has conducted an interview (partially transcribed) with McGrath about his time at Playland as part of the Oral History Collection.

Harry Fullerton: Harry Fullerton was a patron and employee of Bobby's. The History Project has an un-transcribed interview with Fullerton in their Oral History Collection.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Bar Collection is a unique assortment of material documenting the gay bar culture from the late 1950s to the present, and includes such items as matchbooks, glasses, clothing, buttons, flyers, invitations, membership cards, and posters. The bulk dates for the Bar Collection are the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s. The earliest material dates from the late 1950s, and, as this is an open and ongoing collection, material from the present is continually being accessioned. Bill Conrad's contributions make up the greater part of the collection. The Bar Collection contains material on a number of bars in the Boston and Cambridge area, but Sporters, Buddies, 1270, Playland Café, and Bobby's are most extensively covered. Material from other bars such as Napoleon Club, Jacques, and Paradise is also contained in the collection, but to a smaller extent. Other topics documented in the Bar Collection include Boston Pride, AIDS action groups, drag performances and performers, and the 25th anniversary of Stonewall. The collection focuses mainly on gay bars, but a small amount of information of lesbian bars is available in Series IV.

CONDITION

For the most part, the material is in good condition. A small amount of rusting staples and paper clips have been removed. Staples and matches have been removed from matchbooks and the matchbook covers have been flattened and stored in folders. Buttons have been stored in small plastic bags. Where possible, newspapers have been unfolded and flattened. Photographs have been housed in non-acidic sleeves in archival albums. There are a few photographs in Series II.A that have been torn, discolored, or have buckled due to inadequate storage, but re-housing will either halt or significantly slow further deterioration. Series III.F.ii contains a plastic cup that has cracked from either pressure or age; this has been addressed by re-housing in a stable enclosure to prevent further damage. Series I.B, the Scrapbook, is the most unstable element of the collection. It is currently bound with acidic paper and many pages have come apart from the binding. Additionally, many loose photographs have been added to the Scrapbook and need to be separated and inserted into sleeves. Digitization will address these preservation and arrangement issues.

DESCRIPTION OF SERIES

The arrangement of this collection divides guides into 4 different series, based on the creators and media:

Series I contains documents, photographs/scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, and other ephemera assembled by Bill Conrad. Series I is divided into 4 Subseries:

Subseries A consists of documents gathered by Bill Conrad relating to various Boston and Boston-area bars and related establishments. The series contains newspaper articles, photocopied newspaper clippings, magazine articles, membership cards, flyers, invitations, postcards, advertisements, brochures, and menus. The documents have been taken out of their original order and placed in folders, alphabetically, by bar/establishment name.

Subseries B contains Newspaper Clippings related to Boston and Boston-area bars and related-establishments, as well as bar listings from a variety of publications.

Subseries C contains Bill Conrad's employment resume.

Subseries D consists of Bill Conrad's bar scrapbook, an extensive collection of photographs and ephemera documenting Conrad's life. The Scrapbook is in the process of being digitized, and is identified as Oversized Item 1, although it is listed in the finding aid as part of Series I. Unidentified material is located at the end of the collection, but is not labeled as material will continually be added and removed as identified.

Series II contains photographs of bars taken by Jim McGrath, Harry Fullerton, and Bill Conrad. Series II has been divided into 3 Subseries according to creator:

Subseries A contains photographs of Playland Café by McGrath, and **Subseries B** contains photographs of Bobby's by Fullerton. Where possible, original order has been maintained.

Subseries C contains photographs from Bill Conrad that were housed in many different boxes and envelopes, therefore original order was not maintained; instead, using dates and information on the backs of photographs, the series was further subdivided by bar and individual photographs were arranged chronologically in as much as possible. II.C.8 (drag performers) and II.C.9 (personal photographs) have been placed at the end of the subseries, as Conrad originally stored them in separate envelopes.

Series III contains ephemera distributed by and collected from bars in the Boston and Cambridge area (unless otherwise noted). Bill Conrad and Harry Fullerton have donated the majority of items, but the nature of the material has not lent itself to maintaining original order. The material has thus been arranged according to media with specific bar names noted in the subseries descriptions.

Series IV contains The History Project's ongoing and open general bar file series, which compiles information on specific bars in the Boston and Cambridge area (as well as a few from the greater New England area). The Series is divided by bar and arranged alphabetically and has been divided into two Subseries: Subseries A contains folders on individual bars; Subseries B contains general subject files. The organization is subject to change with the addition of new information; for this reason, folders within the Subseries are not numbered. Instead, a provisional folder list has been made, which will allow for expansion and alterations over time. The folders contain flyers, newspaper articles, posters, invitations, advertisements, and a few photographs.

SERIES AND PUBLICATION LIST

Box 1

Series I: *Bill Conrad Material (1961 – 2009) and ongoing*

Subseries A: *Documents (1978 – 1999)*

Folder 1: 1270 – 1270 Boylston St., Boston, MA

Folder 2: Arena – 835 Beacon St., Boston, MA

Folder 3: The Athena Club – 112 Broad St., Boston, MA (Located at The Times – a monthly dance party for women)

Folder 4: Bobby's – 69 Canal St., Boston, MA

- Folder 5: Bolt – 174 Lincoln St., Boston, MA
- Folder 6: Buddies – 733 Boylston St., Boston, MA
- Folder 7: Café Jean Paul – at the Lewis Warf
- Folder 8: Chandler Inn Hotel – 26 Chandler St., Boston, MA (see also: Fritz)
- Folder 9: Chaps – 27-31 Huntington Ave., Boston, MA
- Folder 10: The Club – Ogunquit, ME
- Folder 11: The Eagle – San Diego, CA
- Folder 11.1: Esme – 3 Boylston Place, Boston, MA
- Folder 12: The Front Porch – Ogunquit, ME
- Folder 13: Jacques – 79 Broadway, Boston, MA
- Folder 14: Luxor – 69 Church St., Boston, MA
- Folder 15: Marco Marco – 212 Broad St., Boston, MA
- Folder 16: Maximum Security – 1270 Boylston St., Boston, MA
- Folder 17: Metropolis – 533 Washington St., Boston, MA (Georgi’s Underground – Women’s Night)
- Folder 17.1: Mirage – 1 Congress Ave., Boston, MA
- Folder 18: Narcissus – 533 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA
- Folder 19: Paradise – 180 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA
- Folder 19.1: Playland – 21 Essex St., Boston, MA
- Folder 20: Pipeline – 9 Lansdowne St., Boston, MA
- Folder 21: Quest – 1270 Boylston St., Boston, MA
- Folder 22: Randolph Country Club – Randolph, MA
- Folder 23: Ravens – 137 Kennebec St., Portland, ME
- Folder 24: The Shed – 272 Huntington Ave., Boston, MA
- Folder 25: Skippers – 252 Boylston St., Boston, MA
- Folder 26: The Sling – 228 Cambridge St., Boston, MA
- Folder 27: Somewhere: The Women’s Bar – 295 Franklin, Boston, MA
- Folder 28: Sporters – 228 Cambridge St., Boston, MA
- Folder 29: Tattoo – 1270 Boylston St., Boston, MA

Subseries D: *Bill Conrad Scrapbook*

Series II: Photographs (1957 – 2005)

Box 2

Subseries A: Jim McGrath Photographs (1957 – 1979)

Photographs spanning the late 1950s to the late 1970s at Playland Café, as well as photographs of drag performances, dinners, and holiday celebrations. Some ephemera (postcard, damaged photographs) are located at the end of the album.

Boxes 3 and 4

Subseries B: Harry Fullerton Photographs (1990 – 1991)

Photographs of employees and patrons of Bobby’s, as well as drag performances by Vanessa Vale. Photographs of Boston Pride (c. 1990) and Boat Cruise (c. 1990).

Box 5

Subseries C: Bill Conrad Photographs (c. 1970 – 2005)

- i. Bar Facades (1984)
Napoleon Club, Playland Café, Chaps, Buddies, Jacques, Haymarket, Atlantic House (Provincetown)
- ii. 1270 (c. 1970 – 1983)
 - a. Photographs of patrons and bar interior
 - b. Photographs of 1270 shirts
- iii. Buddies (1979 – 1983)
- iv. Paradise Café (late 1970s – early 1980s)
- v. Napoleon Club (1983)
- vi. Sporters (1972 – 1984)
- vii. Bobby's (1991 – 1995)
- viii. Drag photographs (1983 – 1996)
Includes photographs from Buddies and Sporters.
- ix. Bill Conrad personal photographs (1970 – 2005)

Series III: *Ephemera*

Box 6

Subseries A: Matchbooks (73 total)

- i. Napoleon Club (6 items)
- ii. Paradise (7 items)
- iii. 12 Carver (4 items)
- iv. Ramrod (4 items)
- v. 1270 (5 items) "Top of the Twelve"
- vi. Buddies (3 items)
- vii. Skipper's (3 items)
- viii. Metro (3 items)
- ix. Fritz (2 items)

- x. Sporters (4 items)
- xi. Sporters and 1270 (3 items)
- xii. Axis (1 item)
- xiii. Downtown Café (1 item)
- xiv. Club Café (2 items)
- xv. Café Mojo (1 item)
- xvi. Herbie's Ramrod Room (1 item)
- xvii. The Carnival Lounge (1 item)
- xviii. The Citi (1 item)
- xix. The Other Side Cosmic Café (1 item)
- xx. The Fan Club (1 item)
- xxi. Fifteen Lansdowne Street Discotheque (1 item)
- xxii. Luxor (1 item)
- xxiii. St. Botolph Restaurant (1 item)
- xxiv. Inns and hotels (7 items)
- xxv. Boston Symphony Hall (1 item)
- xxvi. The Moors (Provincetown) (2 items)
- xxvii. Bubala's by the Bay (Provincetown) (1 item)
- xxviii. The Other Side (Nashville) (1 item)
- xxix. Miscellaneous: no identifying information (4 items)

Subseries B: Buttons (40 total)

- i. Chaps (1 item)
- ii. Fritz (2 items)
- iii. 1270 (13 items)
- iv. Luxor (1 item)
- v. Entre Nous Equinox (4 items)
- vi. Sporters (3 items)

- vii. Ramrod (3 items)
- viii. Buddies (5 items)
- ix. The Sung (2 items)
- x. Mike's Men (2 items)
- xi. "1 Boston" (1 item)
- xii. "Mr. East Coast Leather" (1 item)
- xiii. "Jack Rubin for State Rep." (2 items)

Subseries C: Drink Stirrers (7 total)

- i. Paradise (2 items)
- ii. Jacques (1 item)
- iii. Café Jean Paul (1 item)
- iv. The Otherside (1 item)
- v. The Moors (Provincetown) (2 items)

Subseries D: Keychains (2 total)

- i. Bobby's (1 item)
- ii. Buddies (1 item)

Subseries E: Drink tokens (3 total)

- i. The Loft (1 item)
- ii. 1270 (2 items)

Subseries F: Miscellaneous

- i. Ballpoint pen "Sporters says don't blame the oranges, they're fruit too" (1 item)
- ii. Lighter "Bob White's 1270" (1 item)
- iii. Tag "434" (1 item)

Subseries G: Glasses (8 total)

- i. Glass (7 items)

ii. Plastic cup (1 item)

Subseries H: Denim jacket ("Saints") (**See oversize, Box 6**)

Series IV:

File Cabinet

Subseries A:

Arena – 835 Beacon St., Boston

Articles – Playland closing and Sporters profile

1999 Gay Bar History Tour

The Attic

Bobby's – 69 Canal St., Boston

Bolt – 174 Lincoln St., Boston

Boston Eagle – 88 Queensberry St., Boston

Buddies – 733 Boylston St., Boston

Campus – Brookline St., Cambridge

Chaps – 27-31 Huntington Ave. Copley Square, Boston

Citadel Lounge

Citi – Lansdowne St., Boston

Club Cabaret at the Club Café – 209 Columbus Ave., Boston

Coco's (women) – 965 Mass. Ave., Boston

College Inn

Diva/Venus (women) – Boston

Fantasy's – Ipswich, MA

Fantasy's Downtown – Boston

Fifteen Lansdowne Street – Boston

Fran's Place (women) – Lynn, MA

Fritz – 26 Chandler St., Boston

G Spot (women) – 1270 Boylston St., Boston

Girl Bar at Bobby's (women) – 69 Canal St., Boston
Graystone's
The Honey Spot at Fran's (women) – Lynn, MA
Hy Way Inn (women)
Jacques
JoJo Room at Checkmate Lounge – Peabody, MA
Joy Toy – 533 Washington St., Boston
Ken's
Land of Oz
Loft – 21 Stanhope St., Boston
Luxor – 69 Church St., Boston
The Marquee (women) – 512 Mass Ave., Cambridge, MA
Metro – Lansdowne St., Boston
Milky Way (women) – Jamaica Plain, Boston
Moody Gardens
119 Merrimac – Boston
Napoleon Club – 52 Piedmont St., Bay Village, MA
The Other Side
Paradise – 180 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, MA
Pegasus – The Premier – 1130 Washington St., South End, Boston
Pipeline – 9 Lansdowne St., Boston
Playland – 21 Essex St., Boston
Powderhorn 178 Milk St., Boston
Quest – 1270 Boylston, Boston
The Rage – Old Rte. 1 Ipswich, MA
Rainbow Discotheque – 15 Lansdowne St., Boston

Ramrod
Randolph Country Club
Raven's Bar – Portland, ME
The Saints Collective (women)
Skippers – 252 Boylston St., Boston
Skyline 300
Somewhere (women) – 295-297 Franklin St., Boston
Spit – 13 Lansdowne St., Boston
Sporters – 228 Cambridge St., Boston
Strand – Providence, RI
Together
1270
Uptown 965 – 965 Mass. Ave., Boston
XPosure – 280 Merrimack St., Methuen
Zon – Old Rte. 1, Ipswich, MA

Subseries B

Gay Bars
Lesbian
Bars – Lesbian
Bars – Boston
Provincetown Bars
Crossroads – Ogunquit, ME
Bars Subject File