

Chronicles of Brunonia

Out of the Closet and Into the Quad: The Origins of Brown Gay Liberation

Sarah Yahm, PhD candidate in American Studies, 2017

In the Fall of 1971 Brown student Tom Littler, with the support of a small group of fellow activists, started the first Gay Liberation organization on campus. This story chronicles the history of homosexuality at Brown from the years of the closet to the tentative early years of gay activism.

<http://dl.lib.brown.edu/cob>

Copyright © 2012 Sarah Yahm

Written in partial fulfillment of requirements for E. Taylor's EL18 or 118:

"Tales of the Real World" in the Nonfiction Writing Program, Department of English, Brown University.

Out of the Closet and Into the Quad: The Origins of Brown Gay Liberation

by Sarah Yahm, PhD candidate in American Studies, 2017

Abstract: In the Fall of 1971 Brown student Tom Littler, with the support of a small group of fellow activists, started the first Gay Liberation organization on campus. This story chronicles the history of homosexuality at Brown from the years of the closet to the tentative early years of gay activism.

In May of 1972, Lorraine Hopkins of the *Providence Journal* reported that gay liberation had “come out” at Brown University. This was big news at the time. The shockwaves from Stonewall had not yet made it up the coast to the sleepier city of Providence, Rhode Island. And the Ivy League in general seemed very far away from the angry homosexuals who briefly took over the streets in downtown Manhattan. It would take years for Brown to become a comfortable place for gay students, but Hopkins was right, something very important had begun. For the first time gay students had the tacit approval of the administration, and even if they risked bashing from their fellow students, they were safe from the institution itself.

Most stories of the gay 20th century begin with the infamous trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895; skim over the murky decades of dark bars, police entrapment, and McCarthyism; and land happily on the streets of the West Village in June of 1969, right outside of the Stonewall Inn. It’s only recently that historians and scholars are beginning to fill in those vague spaces in the middle, wander into the navy towns and bars of the blurrier decades. In 1919, Rhode Island played a crucial role in the construction of the modern day closet, when the navy prosecuted a number of shameless sodomizers in Newport. Those navy boys had no idea they were doing anything wrong, and so they willingly admitted in court to all sorts of sexual acts, their bewilderment rising off the transcripts even 100 years later. This is the moment, queer historians argue, when homosexuality as we know it entered the legal record. From this point on it was no longer acceptable for strange men to share beds and grope each other in the middle of the boarding house night; for soldiers to climb in and out of each other’s cots during the down times; for navy men to pick up fairies in bars on shore leave. This was the moment when homosexuality stopped being

an act and became a type of person. It no longer mattered if you were a top or a bottom, a manly man or a fey queen - either way you were a homosexual. One single act marked you as a type of deviant *person*.¹

After the Newport scandal, there was no longer any ambiguity in the Ocean State or in the United States: sex between men was wrong, sick, and most importantly illegal. The court trials are a bizarre piece of theater – the sailors are bewildered, the military police are insistent, and Teddy Roosevelt back in Washington orchestrates it all on high as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. The working class sailors describe sex with a frank, unashamed, carnality; the upper class court officials are shocked and horrified; and a new system is officially codified. Through the tiny peepholes in these records we see a glimpse of an active gay working class underworld in Newport: a world of fairies, and queens, and trade. A world that after this court case became actively criminalized and therefore more hidden. The methods employed at Newport by the navy, entrapment and surveillance, were used as a template throughout the rest of the 20th century to root out homosexuals from the streets and public restrooms of America.

But those are working class homosexuals- sailors and grunts. What about the Ivy League, which was historically the bastion of the “Oscar Wilde type?”² Although Ivy League schools had their share of gay scandals throughout the 20th century, they mostly kept them out of the papers and their disciplinary records are zealously guarded. It’s only through the legwork of reporters for the *Harvard Crimson* that we’ve been able to get a sense of the contours of the gay underworld in Cambridge in the 1920’s. And through this data on Harvard that we can begin to get a parallel sense of homosexuality at Brown.

Just a year after Newport, a gay scandal exploded at Harvard that was, for the most part, kept out of the papers and recorded only in the documents of a secret trial. The scandal began when a young Harvard man killed himself, and after his death his brother discovered (in his personal effects) a variety of letters with clear homosexual content. The brother brought these to the attention of the Harvard administration, which began an extensive investigation and eventual purge of all students associated with this den of vice

¹ Chauncey, George. "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era."

² Shand-Tucci, *The Crimson Letter*.

on campus. Although these students' lives were in some cases ruined, and their connections to the world of privilege mostly sundered, they were at least kept out of the papers.

One of the expelled students applied to Brown, but Harvard intervened and prevented his admission. Brown's dean, Otis E. Randall wrote to Harvard's Dean Greenough and thanked him: "You have given me just the information which we needed, and it goes without saying that we shall inform Mr. Lumbard that we do not care to consider his application for admission to Brown...I feel that your action in the matter was wise and just, and that you deserve the support of the colleges to which young Lumbard may make application for admission. How frequently we uncover in the undergraduate life messes of this sort, and how disagreeable it is to deal with such matters!" This quote reveals a great deal – that homosexuality was common at Brown, that the administration knew about it, and that they had some sort of official (or unofficial) way of dealing with it. Because there was no scandal and no subsequent secret trial, we don't have access to the thick description of the gay underworld at Brown. We don't know if the boys on Waterman street were hosting "faggoty parties" in their dorm rooms like the boys at Harvard, or casually talking about being "sucked foolish" in chatty, adolescent letters³.

The only other clue about gay sex at Brown appears decades later in a coded newspaper report from the *Providence Journal* in 1968: "Two Brown students pleaded innocent in district court here yesterday to charges of indecent exposure...Police said the alleged incident took place outside the Marvel Gymnasium about 12:30 am yesterday. A jazz concert had just ended and the audience was leaving, police said." Of course we don't know what really happened in the bushes outside of the Marvel Gymnasium on March 10th, but we can make an educated guess that they were cruising, and that they were caught in a larger net of police surveillance. We can also guess that the Providence Police employed the same techniques established 40 years earlier and 30 miles down the coast, in Newport.

³<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2002/11/21/the-secret-court-of-1920-at/>

In Prospect Terrace, and on River Road and Kennedy Plaza, men drove in from the suburbs and picked up young men in their cars. Even in 1965 the police were enthusiastic, sending in their best and brightest as bait. On October 28th, the *Providence Journal* reported that “a strong drive is underway by Providence police to break up overt homosexual activities by men in the downtown business district, which has become a gathering place for such sex deviants from this state and Massachusetts.” Their technique was to instruct a young patrolman to “make himself available for approach by other homosexuals.” The majority of these homosexuals, we learn, were between the ages of 18 and 26 years of age. There must have been some Brown students among them, although in all likelihood their money and influence kept their names out of the papers.

These stories seem almost like quaint relics from the pre-Stonewall past. Popular legend would have it that all of this changed forever on June 28th 1969 in the West Village when the fed up queens and butches at the Stonewall Inn refused to submit to one more police raid; when they exploded in a fit of near biblical rage that lasted for 4 days and 4 nights; when Silvia Rivera (drag queen extraordinaire) picked up her catalytic pumps and defended herself with her spiked heels. Maybe gay liberation began that day on Christopher Street, but it took a while for the explosion of anger and revolutionary fervor to wend its way up I-95 onto the already depressed streets of downtown Providence. As George Heymont, one of the first organizers of Brown Gay Liberation, remembers, “Providence kind of existed on the basis that there’s Rhode Island and then there’s the rest of the world...It’s hard to organize,” he explains, “when you have to take your mother grocery shopping right after the gay alliance meeting.” He is referring to Rhode Islanders he met after moving to Providence from Brooklyn in the months right after Stonewall. “The first time I went to a gay bar in Providence I arrived armed with my Carol Channing impersonations,” he remarks, “and nobody knew who she was.”

Providence was so insular, so small, so tight-knit, that you just didn’t have the same type of extensive gay underworld. Besides, the demographics were different. “In New York it was the street people who had nothing to lose,” George explains from his house in San Francisco. “There’s the famous story about Stonewall which is that as soon as trouble started the people with money took cabs.” Downtown Providence wasn’t filled with disgruntled marginalized queers. It was almost entirely abandoned. The only

people downtown were suburbanites cruising in their cars and kids looking to get cruised – equal parts excited and terrified. And the bars weren't being raided all that often because it was a mafia town and they were paid nicely and well. And even up on the hill, where the barefoot students were supposedly fomenting revolution, homosexuality was still the love that dared not speak its name.

Kate Monteiro, a local queer activist and a historian, argues that Providence wasn't exactly behind the times, it was just *different* than New York. New York was filled with the queers who left, who moved to big cities to be gay. Providence was filled with the queers who stayed. And the queers who stayed lived within networks of pre-existing family relationships. They had to co-exist with their 3rd grade classmates and their aging Portuguese grandmothers, and so gay radicalism wasn't necessarily on their agenda. And neither, it seems, was Carol Channing. Although they by necessity functioned within the coded world of camp, they also valued and functioned within the mainstream world of Providence. And that isn't a tragedy of the closet, Monteiro insists, it's a testament to the value of those kinship networks. It's a testament to how much they loved those Portuguese grandmas, and to how much those Portuguese grandmas loved them. There was a baseline understanding and, to a certain degree, acceptance of gay family members. Monteiro's research has also uncovered a number of gay bars, not just in Providence, but all over Rhode Island – in Newport, in Johnston, in Woonsocket. They were frequented not just by gays, but also by straight, respectable members of the population. New York, she argues, just isn't the right framework for the Ocean State. For the queers who stayed, it wasn't half bad.

But for out-of-towners, moving to Providence for school, it was not a place to be gay. Campus wasn't safe and Providence didn't provide much of an outlet. As a Brown alumnus and former editor of *The Gay Times* puts it, "I had to leave Providence to come out."

The Sixties

When Jack Marcus moved to Providence for grad school in 1967, two years before Stonewall, he wasn't out yet, but he was paying attention. For instance he knew that there was a Mattachine society at his alma mater, the university of Pittsburgh. He

hadn't gone to any of their meetings, but he knew they fought for homosexual rights, although he wasn't exactly sure what that meant. He hadn't officially (or even unofficially) come out, but he thought maybe when he got to Providence, away from home, things might be different. But Providence was even worse than Pittsburgh. There were no gay organizations on campus and no gay bars on the East Side. So for two more years Jack was a good boy: he did his homework, taught his sections, read French and more French, and stayed in the closet.

Jack Marcus wasn't really the bar hopping type but he was lonely, and so on weekends he'd find himself wandering around the city looking for some sort of action. And it wasn't hard to find downtown in the seventies on the mostly deserted streets in the post-industrial city. Fred⁴, a local who came out during that same time period, remembers that, "In those days downtown there were two type of people there, gays and derelicts and that was it. People didn't shop there anymore. People just didn't go downtown. So you could go downtown and street cruise basically, just walk around and look at cars and if they looked back and stopped you had a hook up."

Jack would spend nights walking the streets trying to figure out his way into this underworld that was unfolding around him, functioning according to a logic he didn't yet understand. He felt like was supposed to know where to go, that it should be programmed genetically inside his body like the way birds navigate by stars. And so he was relieved and kind of unsurprised when he finally stumbled onto Kubla Khan, part Chinese restaurant part gay bar, and watched what were undeniably gay men spill out onto the sidewalk. He'd thought about going to a gay bar for so many years, agonized about it for so long that it was strange to him that the mechanics were the same as opening any other door. That you just walked inside like entering any other building.

He didn't really know what to expect when he crossed the threshold. He was hoping for a lover maybe, a kindred spirit certainly. But he certainly wasn't expecting his French professor right there sitting casually at the bar.

"It's nice to know that there's *family* in the department," he said simply, while Jack stood frozen and terrified. And then the professor turned away and went back to his beer. They never mentioned it again.

⁴ pseudonym

From that point on Jack was in it - the scene, the gay underworld, whatever you want to call it. And he started making friends, but probably not the best kind. The bars were rough places in the late sixties and early seventies. There were knife fights, and occasional raids, and (it was rumored) an angry drag queen with a razor blade in her cheeks. "That was a bad thing in my life. Was not a good thing. It would have been nice if there was something on campus, kindred spirits."

But he couldn't come out officially, not up on campus, even though everyone knew of course. ("Jack couldn't be in the closet if he *tried*," his old friend George Heymont remarks. And Jack's sweet reedy voice on the telephone, his undisguisable fey cadences, indicate as much decades later).

Jack was right not to come out on campus, because just 10 years before there had been another extensive Ivy League purge, and this one **had** made it into the papers. Shand-Tucci informs us in *The Crimson Letter* that in 1960 *The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times* uncovered "a wider ring of 'perverts' highly placed in academic circles." Three Smith professors (and former "Harvard men") were charged with possession and trafficking of homosexual pornography. Their ignominy extended outwards and included their associates at Harvard, and a reign of terror began in Cambridge. This anxiety rippled out through the Ivy League. The message was clear: "stay in the closet and most importantly, stay away from our children." Jack knew that as a French instructor who taught freshmen he had to be especially careful because he would have been an easy target.

It was a relief when Jack met George, another intellectual type, around '69. They met at a play up at Brown, not at a bar, and they became housemates. They were kindred spirits of sorts. And somehow (although nobody remembers how) they met Tom Littler and James Moser, two political Brown students. They formed a little clique determined to counter George's colleagues at the Providence YMCA, who told him: "Gay liberation will NEVER come to Rhode Island."

Brown Gay Lib

George remembers Tom Littler as an earnest, level-headed kid, straight out of the Midwest, although he was actually from West Falls, New York. He was kind of a long-

haired hippie type (or so his picture in the *Brown Daily Herald* would indicate) and he liked to smoke pot, Heymont remembers, a radical(ish) act at the time. He was a kind man - rational, slow to anger, a negotiator. His lover and co-conspirator, James Moser, was a little less fresh faced. He was a wiry, black French major who wore political buttons with slogans like “out of the closet” and “gay.” Heymont remembers them because it was so rare to actually see two gay men who were lovers at the time, not just “dates.”

“They were young and in love,” Heymont recalls. “They were very affectionate and within that group PDA [public displays of affection] was revolutionary at the time, to hold someone else’s hand or even to put their arm around him at a party. And so they were viewed as a very pleasant oddball kind of thing.”

The first Gay Liberation meetings started in their dorm rooms. Later they moved to the top floor of one of the bars downtown, but Tom wasn’t thrilled with this solution: “He’s one of the oppressors” Tom insisted, referring to the bar owner who charged them too much for drinks probably because he had to pay off the mob.

So in December of 1970, just a year and a half after Stonewall, Tom successfully petitioned the Cammarian Club, the committee in charge of student groups at Brown, to start a gay liberation organization on campus. A few days later he advertised the first meeting in the *Brown Daily Herald*: “the gay liberation movement of Brown University will meet at 8 o’clock in Wilson Hall room 302.”

We know very little about what happened in that first meeting. Everything we know is from Jack and George’s vague recollections, and from the scribbled notes of Dean Brown, who sent a spy cryptically named CB. We know that every seat in the room was filled but there were only a few Brown students. We know that there were women there, as well as men. We know (from the questionable gaydar of Dean Brown’s spy) that some of those women at least looked straight. Jack remembers that after the usual awkward chatter and milling about George got up (even though he wasn’t a Brown student) and called the meeting to order. “We’re all here for different reasons. Some of you are here just to cruise.” He raised his eyebrows. “You know who you are.” There was laughter. “But that’s not what this is about; this is a political meeting.” They quieted down. “The goal of this organization is to create support and educate the straight

community,” George informed them. And then they began to plan.

But George barely remembers the meeting at all, even though according to Jack he ran it. The Dean seems to think that Tom Littler was facilitating, but Jack barely remembers Tom, and George has no idea who called the meeting to order. And that’s all we know. There are no minutes or articles or journal entries. And Tom and James and George and Jack weren’t taking notes. “We were not into keeping written records,” George Heymont reminds me. “No one was looking for posterity; we were just trying to get as far as the weekend.” And the two who would remember the most, Tom and James, both died in the early nineties, in all likelihood from AIDS.

So the only records are Dean William Brown’s scribbled notes from his conversation with the mysterious CB. Brown is relieved that the group hasn’t asked for University money, but still anxious. The problem, he worries, is “the younger, confused guy who may get drawn into a practice he wouldn’t otherwise do.” And he’s concerned about the larger question of course. What, he wonders, is the university’s “moral position on the practice of homosexuality?”

The thing is, by ’72 the university had kind of given up on this business of regulating morality. They’d given it one last shot 4 years earlier in ’67 when a Brown political science professor launched the Magrath report, an attempt to revamp the University’s code of conduct.

When the Magrath report came out it was the sixties with a capital “S,” filled with all the requisite headbands and draft card burnings. There were be-ins in San Francisco, People’s Park was occupied in Berkeley, the Lower East Side was teeming with kids unmoored by convention or traditional ambition, and students were walking around Brown campus *barefoot*. But even so, the Ivy League colleges were still trying to, you know, keep some sort of lid on it.

And Brown was leading the way in establishing the new protocols. The Magrath report, issued in the Spring of ’67, was seen as a model for university administrators around the nation, and written up in the *New York Times*. The gist of it was quite simple, really, and is summed up by Dean “Bob” Schultze in a letter to a fellow university bureaucrat from Bowdoin. “Dear Spike” he begins, “You’ll be amused (or something) about Barney’s one sentence reaction to the Report, conveyed to a faculty member in

Washington: 'I see they're against f-----g in the dorms.'" They were against it, but they also acknowledged they could do very little to stop it. The report reiterated their commitment to "moral" behavior, while simultaneously relaxing parietal rules and letting seniors live off campus. In other words no fucking in the dorms. If you must fuck, fuck off campus.

You can hear the vague desperation underneath Bob and Spike's collegial, old boys repartee. "Your larger and most significant point I come to last," Bob Schultze continues, " – where does it all end?...It's hard to predict how things will be three or four generations from now, but I must confess I'm a little more worried about whether there'll be anyone around to break the rules than I am about what the rules will be." We can only guess what put Bob Schultze in such an apocalyptic mood: the rising body count on the nightly news? The Columbia University occupations? Cold war tensions? The recent assassinations? The disappearance of all of the old protocols? All of the above?

Now, four years later, in 1971, the war is still escalating and the deans have a new problem, a problem not even mentioned in the thousand some odd pages of the Magrath report. Homosexuality.

Suddenly there's an official Gay Liberation organization approved unanimously by the Cammarian Club and advertised in the radical gay paper *The Motive*. There's Tom Littler, looking shaggy and triumphant in the accompanying photo in the *Brown Daily Herald*. And then there's Dean Brown himself, the first Black administrator to grace the halls of Brown University. Maybe he was inclined to be sympathetic about marginalization, but even so there are those anxious notes, the metaphorical wringing of the hands: "what IS Brown's moral position on homosexuality?"

In the end President Hornig dodges the question - the University discourse has abandoned morality (perhaps for good). Brown has spent the past decade entangled in the politics of civil rights, and so Hornig's answer is clear - it has nothing to do with morality. He told the *Providence Journal* (on the record) that "he has 'no intention of setting myself above the United States constitution with regard to any individual's civil rights. Gay Lib has gone through the mechanism set up for recognizing student organizations, it has not violated any laws."

Although Tommy Littler came out of the radical anti-war movement and was part of the national Gay Liberation movement, Brown Gay Lib kept a pretty low profile that spring. Their big social event of the year was more sweet than revolutionary, a Spring Dance on May 22 1972, held at Churchill House on the Pembroke Campus. Although the dance itself (by all reports) went off without a hitch, the lead up to it was rather fraught.

Lorraine Hopkins, a *Providence Journal* reporter, covered the dance and the meetings preparing for it. She remembers, “It did seem daring to have the dance, and for me to cover it...Covering was just part of my inclination to get far out, favor underdogs, be contrary, and I suppose...I'm not certain I was aware of Stonewall.” Before the dance a few members of Brown Gay Lib flyered on Thayer Street and got the word out in the bars, and over 50 people showed up to the May 5th planning meeting in Bigelow. The meeting itself was mired in the early politics of Gay Liberation – namely tension between the bar owners and the new “radicals” who wanted to move out of the-mafia run institutions and into the streets.

Hopkins remembers one bar owner shouting at the students and then later telling her, “They're crazy...There's no need for gay lib in Rhode Island. Nobody's harassing us. They wanted to hold a dance on the campus green up there. Can you imagine what that would do? They don't live here – that's the problem.” This echoed the larger battles going on across the country. It was the educated middle class who could afford to join the movement. The married men and the teenagers in the most Catholic State in the Union couldn't risk it. They wanted to keep things as low profile as they possibly could. And their anxiety was not unjustified – just one year later Mayor Dooley announced that he would fire any homosexuals found working in city government.

Dean Brown was also not thrilled with the publicity. He was worried about security at the upcoming dance and so he and Tom Littler negotiated – no photographers inside, no more press, no more flyering on Thayer. And then they had their dance, a dance documented rather eloquently by Hopkins. She describes George outside on the steps informing the passersby “This is a gay liberation dance...You're welcome to join us.” She describes the 100 or some odd people who show up - a mixture of gay and straight and some men in drag from Amherst. They didn't fill up the large dance hall and she wasn't sure if they wanted her there or wanted simply to be left alone. “You can

sense,” she tells us, “how pleased they were by their own event, having finally the form and sound of the rest of the world – a Saturday night social. The faces were all excited and they kept marveling at being there together. ‘It’s great’ one of them said. ‘It’s a relief after bar life. It’s just kids having a good time.’” Years later, Hopkins remembers that even she (who’d known gay people her whole life) was a bit frightened by this collective gathering. “I did think they were courageous,” she remembers. “But in truth, still a little too odd, too other-world, to seem appealing that night as a mass, rather than the one by one I’d known for some years.”

This was late May. George moved away 3 days later. By the time of the party his bags were already packed for San Francisco. He was afraid if he stayed in Providence he’d go back in the closet or kill himself. Gay Lib in Providence was too late and too slow for him. Now he’s an opera reporter and commentator for the Huffington Post. Jack also moved away a few days later. He’d finally finished his PhD and so he went back to Pennsylvania where he teaches French in a small Catholic college. “The crazy thing,” he tells me. “Is that half the people in my department [at Brown] came out after we left graduate school. One of them even wrote a famous book about French homosexualities. But no one was out at the time.” This “normal Saturday night social” arrived too late for Jack, but not for the next generation of gay students who would, over the next few years, build a fairly visible gay community on campus.

The Seventies

Richard Bump came to Providence from Maine expecting to find a vibrant gay community and myriad opportunities for gay sex. But at first he didn’t find much of anything except the cruising area in the Faunce House basement bathrooms. Brown University Gay Liberation (BUGL) existed, but just barely. They were located in a nearly abandoned building on Benevolent Street. “Gay Lib was the last student group occupying that building at the time,” he remembers. “I was scared shitless!” After the current leaders graduated, Richard Bump became the de facto face of Gay Liberation on campus and the target of anti-gay violence. The baseball team chased him through Wriston Quad one night with their bats, and someone wrote a threatening message in blood on his dorm room door. After a pro gay rights action, a fraternity plastered campus

with a poster advocating “stomping out fags on campus.” But Richard Bump continued to organize. He convinced the administration to give BUGL a real office in Faunce with a telephone and a bulletin board. By the time Jim Hopkins matriculated in 1975, through Bump’s continual efforts, there was an active gay scene on campus.

Jim, reporter Lorraine Hopkins’ son, didn’t come out even to himself until after his sophomore year. Even though Brown had a relatively permissive and progressive culture, as a freshman living in an all-boys, testosterone-soaked dorm there were a lot of fag jokes. And the butt of those jokes was the infamous Richard Bump. So Jim waited and bided his time. “When I arrived in ’75 I think I had a kind of sense that I was somehow different and I think that as a teenager I wondered sometimes if I was gay but I wasn’t 100 percent sure of that so that was my kind of state of mind.” It wasn’t until the summer of ’77 when the gay community rallied to oppose Anita Bryant’s Save Our Children campaign, that Jim felt safe enough to finally come out to himself.

Anita Bryant was a former Miss Oklahoma and a publicist for the Florida Citrus Association who led a battle in Dade County against an anti-discrimination ordinance that included sexual orientation. Jerry Falwell joined her, and they began a national anti-gay campaign. Anita Bryant’s organized vitriol galvanized the newly liberated gay community to move out of the bars and bathhouses and into the streets.

Jim remembers that in the Summer of ’77 he saw a photograph of a gay rights march in the New York Times. “In the photo,” he recalls, “you saw a street full of people going as far as you could see and I thought ‘wow there are a lot of gay people.’” Although he’d heard rumors of other gay people on campus (the infamous Richard Bump for instance) this photograph made the concept of gay community suddenly very concrete. When he came back to school in the fall he noticed that the gay organization had flyers and posters outside of Faunce house. But he still wasn’t quite ready to get himself to a meeting, so instead he proposed writing an article for the *Brown Daily Herald* (BDH) on BUGL. He walked up the stairs to their office on the top of Faunce house as a reporter and he left as a gay student.

“It was the first time in my life I’d been around a group of gay people my age and I remember thinking how interesting it was that they all seemed ‘normal.’ And that was a huge deal for me because suddenly I felt like I wasn’t so unusual...” He never wrote the

article. Within a few weeks he was climbing the stairs to the top of Faunce House every day to eat his lunch with the other gay boys. They would watch the human traffic pass by below on Waterman street and, occasionally, when someone delicious walked by, they would poke their heads out the windows and say: “Hey you! I think you’re **cute!**”

By 1979, Jim Hopkins recalls, the Gay Alliance (as it was now called) had arrived. They had their spring party in the biggest hall on campus and, unlike that earlier dance at Churchill House, over 1000 people showed up. It was suddenly hip (at least on Brown campus) to be gay. Or to be a gay white man. Jim remembers there was only one man of color in the Gay Alliance and they had almost nothing to do with the feminist and lesbian organizations on campus. Although they were technically in solidarity with other marginalized groups at Brown, mostly they just went to the bars. It was a far cry from the early radical goals of Gay Liberation. It was glitter, glam rock, and David Bowie. But, as Richard Bump rightly reminds us, “dancing with another guy at a dorm party was pretty fuck the system in 1976! Sitting at a table in the dining hall with other fags was pretty fuck you. Embracing our own gay identities at the time was radical. Many of us had to come in first before they could come out.”

The character of the early years of Gay Liberation on campus reflected the larger revolutionary mood of the times. The early activists were anti-establishment in a way that’s hardly recognizable in our era of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and gay marriage. Many of their leaders had come of age in the anti-war movement and had a general Marxist orientation. Marriage and gender roles were patriarchal and oppressive and sexual pleasure was in and of itself an act of resistance. Although BUGL was relatively tame, they talked big – revolution was part of their conception of gay equality.

The Gay Alliance of the mid-seventies reflected the priorities of its generation as well. The BDH is filled with articles bemoaning the lack of activism among this generation of students. Even though there was a Third World Student’s strike of ’75, the overall mood on campus (and in the nation) was far less revolutionary than just a few years earlier. This trend would continue over the next few decades at Brown. Queer students would become more or less political according to the issues of the times. In the eighties they were ACT UP and Queer Nation; in the nineties they were identity politics and queer theory. Queer students would also continue to be hip and have the best parties.

Homophobic fraternity pranks would also continue. The administration, in turn, would continue to be relatively supportive. Homophobia would become less and less acceptable. By the mid-nineties a freshman, even in a testosterone soaked dorm, would probably not hear too many fag jokes. And now we have the Brown of gender-neutral bathrooms, trans-friendly health care, and the infamous party “SexPowerGod.”

But the still infamous Richard Bump argues that this narrative of progress is a little bit less neat than it seems. Indisputably, there have been enormous gains, but something has also, he argues, been lost.

Epilogue

The 3rd weekend of February 2012, a few hundred queer kids from around the Ivy League descended on Brown for the 3rd annual IvyQ conference. It’s a diverse crowd – queers of all stripes and colors and genders filling up every seat in Solomon Hall for the keynote address. It’s hard to find a seat - “I’m sorry, these seats are *saved*.” There’s a lot of shrieking and enthusiastic hugging while we wait for the keynote to begin. The students have been meeting each evening in “family” groups. Everyone is welcome and everyone is family as long as you’re a member of the Ivy League.

The keynote speaker is herself a graduate of Brown – Kate Bornstein, class of ’69. She was Danny Bornstein at the time, and by her own admission a total closet case: “I used to hitch midnight rides on Waterman Street. Professors would pick me up and I’d give ‘em blowjobs. Sometimes they paid me.” Kate is the well-known writer of *My Gender Workbook* and the public face of genderfuck. Today she’s wearing sexy leather boots that go up to her knees, tight jeans, layers of costume jewelry, and a dapper black vest that covers her zaftig breasts and reveals her tattooed, wrinkled arms. And it’s all topped off with a porkpie hat above surprisingly ordinary, sensible, shoulder-length grey hair.

She sits perched on a wooden stool on stage waiting for the two organizers to go through their laundry list of thank yous. The list goes on for over six minutes and includes JP Morgan, Credit Suisse, and Goldman Sachs, among others. They also advertise an activism fair (“it’s like a career fair but for social justice!”) and an upcoming Out for Undergraduate Business Conference. And then Kate talks about politics and the

categories that make life worth living. The two she focuses on are identity and desire. “Since this is a queer conference” she tells us, she’ll define desire this way: “who you want to fuck, who you want to fuck you, where you want to fuck, how you want to fuck, if you want to fuck at all.” It’s a far cry from Dean Bob Schultze, asking students to please, please, just not fuck in the dorms.

Kate Bornstein’s performative radicalism aside, it seems Brown is once again not in a particularly revolutionary mood. In the Ivy League and the rest of the United States, Gay Life has become a Big Business. Gay students at Brown no longer have to straddle two worlds – the seedy underbelly of the bars and the elite world of the Ivy League. They can be gay right here up on campus. This is indisputably a type of progress, but some, like Richard Bump, miss the days when queerness also meant a critique of the Ivy Tower. He misses the days when it was about dismantling the Old Boys Network, not just expanding it. “I’ve always embraced the notion that our strength lies in our outsider status,” he writes. “I’ve never wanted to be ‘just like everyone else.’”

Sources:

Brown University Archives

Gay Liberation Movement files in Brown archives (Dean's correspondence, Providence Journal Article, and letter from Dean Brown to President Hornig)

Documents re: Magrath report in Brown Archives (Dean Robert Schultze correspondence)

"How the Brown Gay and Lesbian Alumni/ae Came to be: Clippings from the Brown Alumni Monthly (and other places) summarizing the history of Brown GALA." Brown University Archives

Newspapers:

<http://www.rainbowhistory.org/gmotive5.pdf> (ad for Brown Gay Liberation in Gay newspaper "The Motive")

Faunce House Men's Rooms: Gay Solicitation. Brown Daily Herald. October 30, 1986. <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/pdfs/1236285846422880.pdf>

"Gay Liberation Comes of Age." Brown Daily Herald. October 30, 1973. http://dl.lib.brown.edu/dbdh/bdh_render.php?issue=1261009357638194&pid=2&div=0

YAF sues Caucus, Brown. Brown Daily Herald. November 18, 1971. http://dl.lib.brown.edu/dbdh/bdh_render.php?issue=1261009346354100&div=DIVL10&pid=0 (conservatives sue Cammarian Club for giving gay lib a charter)

http://dl.lib.brown.edu/dbdh/bdh_render.php?issue=1261009347172325&div=DIVL198&pid=0 (announcement of first meeting. Thursday Dec 16th 8pm Wilson hall)

"Gay Lib Protests Job Ruling." Brown Daily Herald. February 11, 1972. http://dl.lib.brown.edu/dbdh/bdh_render.php?issue=1261009347580281&pid=3&div=0 (gay lib statement about mayor)

"Homosexuality, does anyone care?" Brown Daily Herald. March 20, 1974. http://dl.lib.brown.edu/dbdh/bdh_render.php?issue=1261009363825647&div=DIVL8&pid=0 (1974)

"BUGL Blows its horn: Gay Lib Comes of Age." Brown Daily Herald. October 30, 1973. http://dl.lib.brown.edu/dbdh/bdh_render.php?issue=1261009357638194&div=DIVL35&pid=0 (Gay lib comes of age)

“Gay” – page from 1978 yearbook

Hopkins, Lorraine. “And Now, Gay Lib.” *Providence Journal*. May 22, 1972.

“Two Brown Students Enter Innocent Pleas.” *Providence Journal*. March 10, 1968.

Paley, Amit R. *The Secret Court of 1920*. *The Harvard Crimson*. November 21, 2002.
<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2002/11/21/the-secret-court-of-1920-at/>

Interviews:

George Heymont – San Francisco art critic, former Providence resident

Jack Marcus – former PhD student in French Literature at Brown

Richard Bump – former Brown University Student

Raymond Butti – Brown University Senior Library Specialist
Special Collections

Jim Hopkins - Brown University Alum and Providence queer activist

Kate Monteiro – Brown University Alum and local queer historian

Lorraine Hopkins – former Providence Journal reporter

Academic Books and Articles:

Chauncey, George. "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era." *Journal of social history*. 19(2): 189-211, Winter 1985.

Shand-Tucci, Douglas. *The Crimson Letter: Harvard, Homosexuality, and the Shaping of American Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003.

D'Emilio, John and Freedman, Estelle. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988; 2nd expanded edition, University of Chicago Press, 1997)

