

Gay West Virginia: Community Formation and the
Forging of a Gay Appalachian Identity, 1963-1979

Bradley Milam

Yale University
Department of History
George Chauncey, Professor of History
April 2010

Contents

I.	Introduction	3
II.	West Virginia	6
III.	Violence	10
IV.	Bars	15
V.	Church	42
VI.	Conclusion	49
	Bibliographical Essay	52
	Bibliography	56

Illustrations

I.	Map of West Virginia	6
----	----------------------	---

I. Introduction

Historians of sexuality have only recently paved the way for the study of the history of gay life, revealing over the past three decades and for the first time a vibrant urban subculture that through the course of the twentieth century coalesced with, lived alongside and contrary to its heterosexual superculture.¹ Yet while a significant amount of scholarship on the history of gay people in places like New York and Chicago now exists and can serve as a foundation for the study of rural gay life, few to no resources exist for the history of gay people who lived outside of these metropolises.² As a consequence, our knowledge of gay history lacks a geographically comprehensive scope.

This essay provides the first written account of the history of gay life in West Virginia.³ The project's larger purpose is twofold. It will expose a history of rural gay life in itself – with its own historical narrative and autonomous political and social movements – to prove that gay life and a distinct culture of gay people have existed in this relatively remote part of America for at least the past century. Second, the project will place the larger and rather urban historical narrative of gay life in the twentieth-

¹ Notable works – and the most cited in this essay – are George Chauncey, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940 (New York, New York: Basic Books, 1994), John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970 (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), and Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America (New York, New York: Touchstone, 1999). Chauncey's work focuses on New York City, D'Emilio mainly on New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., and Clendinen and Nagourney on various cities, including New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New Orleans, and Miami.

² The most study of rural gay life in the United States is John Howard, Men Like That: A Southern Queer History (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), a study of queer history in Mississippi, which will be cited often in this essay.

³ Carol Burch-Brown completed a documentary in 2003, titled, "It's Reigning Queens in Appalachia," which recounts the history of the Shamrock Bar in Bluefield, West Virginia, a gay bar in existence from 1964 to 2001. Transcribed interviews with many of the bar's patrons and photographs of the bar itself are now held in Carol Burch-Brown, "The Shamrock Bar: Photographs and Interviews by Carol Burch-Brown, 1997-2003," Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Box 857. Much of this essay's work draws from the interviews that she conducted, for which I am eternally grateful.

century United States into a hereunto-unforeseen context by altering the narrative to fit a more inclusive – and realistic – landscape of gay life. As a whole, this history implicitly and explicitly plays the role of a sustainable and interdependent microhistory of American gay life and of Appalachian and American culture.

Structurally speaking, the paper is divided into four parts: West Virginia, violence, bars, and church. The essay will argue that West Virginian and Appalachian culture greatly influenced the lives of gay people in these regions. Many of them struggled in juggling their two seemingly contradictory identities as West Virginians and gays and lesbians, a conflict escalated by the extreme violence that some experienced and others lived in fear of encountering. A pervasive religious-based hostility towards gay men and lesbians forced them to live quietly and in disorganization and delayed the emergence of a bar culture. Nonetheless, bars formed in retaliation to the violence they feared and the cultural ostracism they faced, and created for them a unique space of unity and cohesion where they formed family-like circles, further developed their sexual identities, and became a more connected group in West Virginia and with a larger national movement. Their acceptance in certain church circles – a development that emerged in tandem with the establishment of a bar culture – created the ultimate space for acceptance and embrace, instilled in them and in the face of the larger society a feeling of legitimacy, permitted them to peacefully exist as both Appalachians and gays in West Virginia, and led to the establishment of more explicit social and political movements and an overwhelming feeling of acceptance within the Charleston, West Virginia, community and outside of it.⁴

⁴ Most of the analysis will concentrate on the 1960s and 1970s, but material from before and after this period will be included. The essay focuses primarily on the experiences of gay men and lesbians living in

As other historians of gay life can attest, it is remarkably difficult to trace the pasts of people who made it a priority to cover their own tracks.⁵ Most all of this history has been retold to me in the form of oral interviews, the subjects for which I found in a veritable underground social and political chain that stretches throughout the state.⁶ My resources were limited, and this project is written in the hope that it will one day be enriched and challenged by a more massive and inclusive study of the same topic. Dealing with such an isolated and isolationist area so familiar with ridicule from larger (urban) America is tricky, in that the most assured way to get the most honest information is to be able to connect with these people more than just superficially, and the most assured way of connecting with them is by simply being one of them. As a native West Virginian, and as a gay man myself, I find my position in this project important, for it has uniquely allowed me to glide along from person to person and community to community with relative ease. I am capable of understanding and respecting their lives and neighborhoods, which my interviewees knew well. This work is in no small part a product of trust, and for that reason I am assured of its relative accuracy, in so much that history, as a field built on remnants, can provide an accurate account of the past.

the state at the time as told in oral histories but will naturally and implicitly bring into perspective the history of the state's heterosexual life as its opposite binary and as the majority culture that so inevitably shaped the lives and culture of its minority.

⁵ No written material beyond a scattering of court records and newspaper articles dealing with the state's gay life is known to exist; as a consequence, the history can reach only as far back as its survivors can remember.

⁶ Most of the interviewees are white, male, and college-educated, though interviews with women and working-class men and women are to be included. Many of these oral interviews will be donated to the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscripts Library at Yale University. I should say now that my own sources are limited, and may in themselves make a poignant statement about the existence and nonexistence, or at least the visibility and invisibility, of sections of the state's gay life.



(This map of West Virginia was prepared by the United States Department of the Interior and the United States Geological Survey. Accessed 03 April 2010. Source: http://nationalatlas.gov/printable/images/pdf/reference/pagegen_wv.pdf)

II. West Virginia

In order to best understand the gay community that lived in this area one must first understand the context in which they lived. West Virginia differs from New York City in many ways, and the difference is important when trying to understand the cultural distinctions between these areas' gay populations. While its boundaries do not completely isolate the state from all of its surrounding areas – and while residents of the northern and eastern panhandles often hold allegiances to inter-state neighborhoods and communities – an isolationist culture pervades the mindset of most of West Virginia's residents. Indeed, the region has historically been separated from much of the rest of the

nation by its mountainous boundaries and also remains distant economically and culturally. In 1970, as was the case in 1930 and is the case today, the economy depended largely on natural resources, particularly natural gas, timber, and coal. Many residents have worked in these industries. They live in small towns in low-lying valleys between mountains, creating small, isolated communities that connect with one another only to a limited degree and by winding roads. The capital and largest city, Charleston, is located near the center of the state and in 1970 had a population of about 70,000; Morgantown, the home of West Virginia University, about 30,000; Bluefield, about 15,000; and Fairmont, about 25,000.⁷ Demographically, they were a homogenous group: Over 90% of West Virginians were white in 1970,⁸ and most of them attended church and held similar working-class jobs.

West Virginians like to see their neighbors as family. They are close-knit, self-sustaining, professedly strong yet down-to-earth. Why wouldn't they be? Most of them have the same jobs and family structures, and share the same Christian faith. They largely ascribe to a certain set of values, as Loyal Jones so expertly describes in his essay, "Appalachian Values." They value their faith above most all else. According to Jones, "To understand mountaineers, one must understand our religion." In memory of their exploitation by the coal industry, in which they were "consigned to poverty," many pride independence and self-reliance. They respect their neighbors. As Jones puts it, "We may

⁷ See on map, prepared by the United States Department of the Interior and United States Geological Survey, accessed April 3, 2010. <http://nationalatlas.gov/printable/images/pdf/reference/pagegen_wv.pdf> Statistics can be found in Section 3, Chapter A – Number of Inhabitants, of "1970 Census of Population West Virginia," pp. 50-11 and 50-12, accessed 01 April 2010.

<<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/00496492v1p50ch2.pdf>>

⁸ "West Virginia – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990," United States Census Bureau, accessed 01 April 2010.

<<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab63.pdf>>

not always like or approve of other people, but we normally accept them as persons and treat them with respect.” When Appalachians leave their mountains, which they find difficult to do, they often want only to return.⁹ There are exceptions, and different regions of the state are drawn to different cultural anchors, such as the eastern panhandle’s affiliation with Washington, D.C.¹⁰ On the whole, however, the people of this state are remarkably inward looking and close, as they have been for most of the state’s history.

Such an environment profoundly affected the experiences of gay men and lesbians. Jones’ argument that most people – whether or not they found approval from the regulatory societal body – were respected and accepted¹¹ is not necessarily true. In such a homogenous environment, differences were rare and amplified, and created outward and inward tensions that defined much of the gay Appalachian experience. Likewise, Appalachian gay men and lesbians thought of themselves as pariahs in urban gay communities outside of West Virginia because of their dress and their more rural character, and were mocked most often because of a thick mountain accent. As a result, no matter where they lived gay men and lesbians constantly struggled with their torn identities as gays and Appalachians. In his memoir, Loving Mountains, Loving Men, Jeff Mann describes this tension and the inferior treatment gays received in Appalachia and Appalachian gays received in urban gay communities.

For gays and lesbians in Appalachia who want to live full lives, who want to embrace both their gay and their mountain identities, who refuse to dismember themselves in order to assimilate, it can be very difficult to find some compromise between love of the same sex and love of home. If

⁹ Loyal Jones, Appalachian Values (Ashland, Kentucky: The Jesse Stuart Foundation, 1994), pp. 13, 37, 39, 52, 58, 63, 75, 81, 82, 99.

¹⁰ Such regional differences are clear in my interview with Victor Marchand, in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, October 5, 2009. Marchand lives in the eastern panhandle and cites his proximity to Washington, D.C., as a cultural influence that does not exist for most of the state.

¹¹ Loyal Jones, Appalachian Values, pp. 13, 37, 39, 52, 58, 63, 75, 81, 82, 99.

a gay man flees to the city, he is often encouraged to drop "that funny accent" and "those country ways," to feel ashamed of his mountain culture. If a lesbian stays in the mountains, she might face bigotry and abuse, especially from intolerant fundamentalist Christians; she might feel obliged to stay in the closet; she might suffer from the relative lack of social and romantic opportunities.¹²

While this study focuses on the experiences of gay men and lesbians within West

Virginia, their encounters of other gay communities outside of the state serve as a key backdrop to explain at least in part why many felt most at home – or, at least, less isolated – while in the mountains, and why they so adamantly fought for their own ground within this region rather than move to a more accepting city with an already-established vibrant gay life. That is not to say they ever felt completely welcome in either location. As these men and women grew up, and after they decided to stay closer to home, they faced a culture of oppression of sometimes unbelievable proportions. As the next section will prove, a pervasive and systemic societal policing of homosexuality created and enforced this incompatibility of identities between “Appalachian” and “gay,” and gay men and lesbians often faced hostility and violence or at least perpetually feared encountering it.¹³

¹² Jeff Mann, Loving Mountains, Loving Men (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2005), pp. xi-xii. Mann continues to discuss his struggle between an Appalachian identity and a gay identity in poems, short stories and essays throughout this publication. Similar conflicts between competing cultural identities have been documented in gay communities of racial minorities. Eric Wat, The Making of a Gay Asian Community: An Oral History of Pre-AIDS Los Angeles (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002) describes such tension among the gay Asian community of Los Angeles in the 1970s, particularly in chapter 4, “The Call from Morris Kight,” pp. 93-114. On p. 93 Wat writes: “For many minorities, including gay men and lesbians, their home community is not only a safe, supportive space, but they also draw strength from it to survive and resist the prejudice and discrimination in the larger society. For Asian men...their gay brothers become accomplices...in the purveying of negative stereotypes.” Likewise, black gay men have faced a similar feeling of ostracism from black communities, as noted in Cathy Cohen, “Contested Membership: Black Gay Identities and the Politics of AIDS,” in Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader, ed. Robert Corber and Stephen Valocchi (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 46-60. Black gay men and lesbians had been marginalized to some degree and often silenced their own sexual feelings to be part of the black community. As Cohen writes on p. 49: “When faced with the devastation of racism, the cost of silence and invisibility seemed a willing payment from lesbian and gay community members for the support, caring, and protection of members of the black community and, more importantly, the support and acceptance of immediate family members.”

¹³ A sense of place also affected the lives of homosexuals in Mississippi, as seen in John Howard, Men Like That: A Southern Queer History (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 34-77. Other sites – such as church and college – are included in this section of Howard’s work, which will be discussed later in this essay.

III. Violence

It is undeniable that Appalachians' heterosexuality played a major role in their acceptance in this society; sexual minorities' status alone barred them from participating in activities at the core of the Appalachian experience. They were forbidden to openly discuss or express their sexual attractions as this society enforced and reinforced an aspersion to nonconformist acts. They encountered social and work environments in which they felt uncomfortable if not unsafe. Most found church doctrine to be fundamentally anti-homosexual. For these reasons, almost all of them consistently struggled with ostracism, loneliness, and depression. While few were physically assaulted, almost all had heard stories of gay men who had been abducted or murdered. Such pervasive violence, hostility and oppression towards known or suspected gays and lesbians delayed the formal movement for greater social and political respect, and for decades and as a result of their fear it prevented them from establishing any public spaces or groups in which to gather and socialize.¹⁴ The stories that have been told enrich our understanding of the typical lives of gay men and lesbians of this era and go on to explain why they felt so alone, afraid, and oftentimes hopeless. It is apparent that one's sexuality would turn this familial atmosphere on its head.

Almost every gay West Virginian suffered from feelings of loneliness, and many from depression, in the 1960s and 1970s. Jim Lewis, a priest at St. John's Episcopal Church in Charleston, remembered so many who had been harmed by the church, which in his opinion constituted a severe theological oppression. Most churches either explicitly condemned homosexual behavior as sinful or implicitly rejected the possibility

¹⁴ Such silence and oppression, and a cultural hostility towards homosexuals, can also be seen in John Howard, Men Like That, pp. 3-33.

of gays being true Christians. The importance of religious life in such a deeply rooted Christian society only exacerbated the ostracism gay men and lesbians already felt. Many from more rural areas felt considerably more alone; after calling in to Lewis and sounding almost suicidal, Lewis tried to give them some form of comfort. “You are not alone out there.” One gay man who fled from his neighborhood was asked to return to his old evangelical church and be tried for his homosexuality.¹⁵ In the late 1970s Jeff Mann’s college friend Marian,¹⁶ a lesbian, became convinced by an evangelical church that she and Jeff could be talked out of homosexuality, a sentiment that both now look back on with regret.¹⁷

While for some their churches had never explicitly condemned homosexuality,¹⁸ for others and over time the church became a place for gay men and lesbians to internalize the moral outcry against homosexuality and homosexuals in their communities, even through silence. They were explicitly or implicitly taught that their sexuality was a choice and a conscious decision to turn away from their religion. According to Helen Compton, who in the 1960s was in her 40s, “Gay life is one of the loneliest lives you can live. We can’t do what other people does [*sic*]. We’ve never been able to. We never will be able to.”¹⁹ For Helen and others, homosexuality was a curse

¹⁵ Interview with Jim Lewis, in Charleston, West Virginia, I: December 8, 2009.

¹⁶ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁷ Interview with Jeff Mann, in Blacksburg, Virginia, October 6, 2009.

¹⁸ Interview with David Shumate, in Charleston, West Virginia, November 16, 2009. As in John Howard, Men Like That, pp. 3-33, 48-56, most had heard homosexuality being condemned in church or never heard it mentioned. Even some members of the clergy were involved in homosexual relationships but never confessed to what they did.

¹⁹ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02, Edited Selections: Helen Compton, Bill, Eva, Kathy, Pam, Ann Kilkelly, in Bluefield, West Virginia, 1998. This is also a sentiment somewhat echoed in Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 18AB: Helen Compton, Eva, in Bluefield, West Virginia, no date. In addition, Larry in Transcript 15 AB describes – rather emphatically – his own experience with closeted men in the area, who are married, with kids, and “all frustrated.”

and remained one until their deaths.²⁰ As the church was one of the only social outlets in small mountain towns, they had no choice but to listen and think of themselves and their sexual attractions as abominations against God.²¹

Gay men and lesbians underwent intense social marginalization at home, at school, and in the community at large. Some lost touch with family members, such as Mann's friend Karen,²² whose parents refused to talk to her for years.²³ Victor Marchand, who lived in the eastern panhandle near Washington, D.C., in the 1970s, remembered a pervasive oppression against homosexuality and recalled being socially derided in the form of name-calling and jeers.²⁴ Many whom Lewis met had come to Charleston for relief from anxiety and depression induced by similar experiences. They bought into the belief that they had to change, that no hope existed for them, that no one loved them, and that they could talk to no one. He had to tell them that they instead needed to be saved from the deep prejudices against them that they encountered on a daily basis, which – like black communities in the Jim Crow South – they had internalized.²⁵

Others were victims of terrible crimes. Helen remembered the murders of four gay men in Bluefield from the 1960s and before and believed the political community of Bluefield was behind at least one of the deaths.²⁶ While Bob R.²⁷ had never witnessed or

²⁰ Interview with Carol Burch-Brown, in Blacksburg, Virginia, January 17, 2010. Burch-Brown also said that, two weeks before her death, Helen was baptized in a Church of Christ, a move that points further to her own feeling of guilt about being homosexual and her consequential fear of dying.

²¹ Interview with Jim Lewis I, and repeated in Interview with Jim Lewis, in Charleston, West Virginia, II: March 10, 2010.

²² This is a pseudonym.

²³ Interview with Jeff Mann.

²⁴ Interview with Victor Marchand.

²⁵ Interview with Jim Lewis, II.

²⁶ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 12A (v.2): Helen Compton, Bill, in Bluefield, West Virginia, July 7, 1999.

experienced any violence himself, he knew a gay man who in the 1970s was kidnapped from the parking lot outside of the Tap Room, a Charleston gay bar, who may have been flirting with his kidnappers. They took him out of the state and beat him horribly.²⁸ Scott King moved back to McDowell County after graduating from West Virginia University in 1970. Days before he was to leave for graduate school, he was abducted and beaten. He knew the men and picked them up on the road to take them home. One drove the car as they told King they planned to kill him. “I’m going to show you what we do to queers around here.” He was saved only when they crashed a few miles from his family’s home. He lay next to the road, these men next to him, crawling up the hillside for help, sure he would die. He almost bled to death. King woke up in a hospital the next day, discovering he had suffered a compound fracture to his ankle and listening to his doctors discuss the possibility of a leg amputation. He walked with crutches for ten months, and for 25 years he told no one what really happened.²⁹ Such violence continued well into the 1990s, as Chuck Smith remembered two men murdered in Charleston who were targeted for being gay, and one murder in Huntington. All were outside gay bars before being taken away.³⁰

For some, the oppression was too much. While in college, Jeff Mann knew a lesbian who was secretly dating a married mother who hanged herself once her husband planned to expose her to the community.³¹ Lewis and his discussion group of gay men and lesbians began talking to a teenage boy from a nearby rural area. The son of a

²⁷ Bob preferred that I omit his last name.

²⁸ Interview with Bob R., in Charleston, West Virginia, March 11, 2010.

²⁹ Interview with Scott King, in Charleston, West Virginia, March 12, 2010.

³⁰ Interview with Chuck Smith, in Charleston, West Virginia, October 7, 2009. Such violence is echoed in John Howard, *Men Like That*, pp. 127-142.

³¹ Interview with Jeff Mann.

Baptist preacher, he had called them out of desperation, convinced he would be sent to hell for his sexuality. They tried to talk him out of his beliefs and comfort him. But with a pervasive moral and social sense of loneliness and hopelessness, and with the idea that hell was his inescapable destination, he committed suicide. While his death appeared in an area newspaper, the reasons behind it remained a secret to everyone but Lewis and the members of St. John's.³² While one must point out that suicide is definitionally self-induced, here the active regulatory mechanism of oppression fomented it; the internalized response overwhelmed them, and for this reason suicide, too, was created by a culture of hostility and fear of violence.

Of course, not everyone experienced unspeakable trauma. King does not remember others who had gone through similar experiences; if so, they never spoke about them. All he remembered were jokes about certain members of the community being gay, similar, he thought, to jokes about people of color.³³ Bob R. thought he had wonderful experiences with straight men, and most of his best friends were straight.³⁴ Bars like the Closet and the Tap Room appealed to an alternative straight crowd that tolerated, or perhaps even welcomed, an explicit gay culture;³⁵ some must have felt acceptance in other venues, as well. Yet pockets of acceptance do not erase the ugly history of shame and harm, and stories of violence spread quickly. As homosexuals faced condemnation at church and at home, they lived knowing that others like them had been assaulted and murdered for their sexual identities. As relatively isolated as these violent incidents were, word easily and quickly got round about harassment and assault.

³² Interview with Jim Lewis, I.

³³ Interview with Scott King.

³⁴ Interview with Bob R.

³⁵ Ibid.

As many began to identify among some circles as gay, so many others were propelled to never make it that far.³⁶ They felt forced to live in a closet and suppress their true identities as gay men. Some live in such denial even today.³⁷

By and large, gay men and lesbians faced enormous struggles in being accepted and accepting themselves, which for some was impossible. They lived in a culture where everyone looked alike and held similar jobs, and where everyone seemed to adhere to the same principles. By being different – as this culture saw it, by sinning – they broke the cultural codes that bound them to their neighbors. As a consequence, they felt forced to suppress their true identities and outwardly conform to the overwhelmingly larger, acceptable, heterosexual Appalachian one, and the moral force of evangelical Christianity regulated their behavior.³⁸ Unable to outwardly express themselves, many assimilated by marrying women, having children, and attempting to suppress their attractions.³⁹ Torn between their identities, they had no choice but to choose one over another, to conform in order to live.

IV. Bars

This hostility consequently delayed the birth of a more explicit gay culture. While bars existed in New York and San Francisco since at least the early twentieth century,⁴⁰ no bar that catered explicitly to the gay community existed in West Virginia until much later, in the 1960s. Yet this violence did not wholly preclude its emergence. Gay men and lesbians felt oppressed, and they retaliated in often silent but huge steps

³⁶ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 15 AB: Larry, in Bluefield, West Virginia, July 8, 1999.

³⁷ Interviews with David Shumate, Bob R., Scott King, Victor Marchand.

³⁸ This is made evident in the marriages of Shumate, King and others to women in the 1970s. Interviews with David Shumate, Scott King, Jim Lewis, I and II.

³⁹ Interviews with David Shumate, Scott King, Jim Lewis, I and II.

⁴⁰ George Chauncey, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940 (New York, New York: Basic Books, 1994), pp. 273-280.

toward establishing explicit pockets of acceptance. It is a testament to the bravery of gay men and lesbians in West Virginia that businesses that catered specifically to a gay or gay-affirming crowd emerged and were sustained over time in such an environment. These bars' display countered the exterior explicitness of new gay bars in 1960s and 1970s urban New York, which hosted an enormous social movement for acceptance.⁴¹ Yet similar to urban bars, these new houses of gay culture exposed the burgeoning community to their own generational differences in behavior, appearance, display of sexuality and gender itself, and their views on "coming out" and "being gay." This section will lay out the history of the emergence of bars in West Virginia and their importance in honing and strengthening a gay culture.

The year was 1964 when Helen Compton, born in McDowell County, West Virginia, in 1924, the daughter of a coal miner and a long-time resident of Bluefield, opened a hamburger and beer joint on the town's main street.⁴² Somewhat unsurprisingly, she named it the Shamrock and catered to railroad workers and businessmen, most of whom shared her own family's Irish ancestry. While it served the community as a diner by day, by night "Miss Helen" transformed the space into a bar that catered to the gay and lesbian community, the first establishment in the state to do so. "Why I started it was because of four guys that couldn't get in a gosh-durn bar," Helen declared in her interview with Carol Burch-Brown in 1998. One year earlier, in 1963, a group of boys attempted to drink at one of the town's many bars but was denied entry.

⁴¹ John D'Emilio outlines gay liberation's new outer strength and 1970s gay bar culture's strong resistance to raids in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 233-239.

⁴² This "main street" is Highway 19, the main and oldest throughway in the town and right on the edge of the town next to the railroad tracks. The bar was located in the town's oldest building, which was erected around 1895. This was confirmed in my interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

Nicely dressed and attractive, according to Helen, they stood on the sidewalk as she went inside and talked to the man who had refused to let them in. “They’re queers,” he said to an angry Helen; she went back outside to the boys, who confirmed the suspicion and regretted not having women with them, whose presence would have assured all of them access.⁴³ Helen was not aware of the fact that many in the town had for some time recognized what Burch-Brown calls a “gay presence” in the area; bar owners and others had perceived this presence to be a problem, which explains why these men began to be thrown out of bars.⁴⁴

It is clear through the testimony of Helen and Carol Burch-Brown, and the bar owner’s decision to bar entry to these men, that gay men had only recently become more visible.⁴⁵ To this bar owner and to others who owned or frequented bars, gay men and lesbians had for the first time begun to assert themselves in a more overt way by displaying signs of affection towards each other or taking a more lax stance on discussing their relationships with other people. Also important is the bar owner’s newfound discovery of homosexuals and his decision to target them and deny them entry. Not only did they lack any space of their own, gays were denied access to other spaces, as well, in these bar owners’ attempts to curb the problem – a different sexuality – that they caused. Based on their appearance and display described by Helen, it is clear that these men were accused of being gay for reasons other than outward gender nonconformity or an overtly

⁴³ According to Helen: “If a man wanted to get in a bar he had to have a woman with him. Woman wanted to get in a bar, she had to have a man with her.” Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, Bill, Eva, Kathy, Pam, Ann Kilkelly, in Bluefield, West Virginia, 1998.

⁴⁴ Carol Burch-Brown explains the area’s gay presence in my interview with her. This is also alluded to in Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al.

⁴⁵ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al. Also discussed in my interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

feminine performance.⁴⁶ Instead, they must have been categorized because of the bar owner's previous knowledge of their sexual object-choice, regardless of their expression of gender conformity or nonconformity.

At this point, some felt brave enough to address the problem of being denied access to public spaces. After witnessing these men's frustration, Helen decided to help them. She promised to establish a bar in Bluefield "and open it up to the gay people," and opened the Shamrock in 1964.⁴⁷ It became the first establishment in the state of West Virginia that catered specifically to the gay community. As bold as its birth was, its relatively radical existence was mitigated by its hybrid function as a conformist and assumedly straight diner and nonconformist bar. While a few gay people came in to grab breakfast or lunch, they did not identify as gay in this space and abstained from any display of sexual or gender nonconformity. At around 6:00, if the diner crowd still lingered, Helen would begin complaining about the young crowd about to come in – who, unbeknownst to older patrons, were gay – and the space would be cleared. A younger and explicitly gay crowd then took over the bar.⁴⁸ Under the guise of a typical town restaurant, the Shamrock became their first formal public space, created in direct reaction to their previous denial from access to other spaces.

In the decade to follow, other bars opened across the state. A bar in Morgantown opened in 1970 that catered to students at West Virginia University, and others in the town opened and closed throughout that decade.⁴⁹ The Closet, with a black keyhole as its

⁴⁶ Ibid. More on camp culture and other outward and flamboyant displays of sexuality can be seen in "Double Entendre and Camp Culture" in George Chauncey, *Gay New York*, pp. 286-291.

⁴⁷ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al.

⁴⁸ This information is presented in Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al.

⁴⁹ Interviews with Scott King, Bob R., Jeff Mann.

logo, opened on 9th Street in nearby Fairmont in the late 1960s, and another space in Fairmont, the Casablanca, tolerated gay crowds.⁵⁰ David Shumate, a resident of Charleston and later a pioneer of the gay rights movement in West Virginia, estimated that around six or seven gay bars existed throughout the state. A few bars came and went in Beckley. Bars in Huntington and Parkersburg have existed for decades,⁵¹ with Huntington's catering particularly to the students of Marshall University.⁵²

Yet, no matter the number of bars that emerged in other areas, in the 1970s the city of Charleston developed and maintained the most vibrant bar culture of any city. The Empire Lounge was a more laid-back space.⁵³ The Tap Room operated in the basement of the Quarrier Diner beginning in the early 1970s, owned by Charlie and Dreama Young, and was established after Charlie's father's World War II friends asked to use the downstairs as a bar space.⁵⁴ A third bar existed in the 1970s as the Great Downstairs Club, located in the basement of a family-owned grocery store and run by a gay son. It later became known as the Grand Palace,⁵⁵ which Chuck Smith remembers as the only "big one" among the bars in Charleston.⁵⁶ These isolated gay communities had established bars for themselves, thus catering to local and neighborly crowds.

Like the Shamrock, many of these other establishments began by catering to both the gay community and a larger community. Some actually served gay and straight patrons at the same time and in the same space in order to make a greater profit, which in

⁵⁰ Interview with Bob R..

⁵¹ Interview with Jeff Mann.

⁵² Interview with Chuck Smith.

⁵³ interview with Bob R.

⁵⁴ Interview with Scott King.

⁵⁵ Interview with Bob R. Jim Lewis also remembers the existence of these bars, as seen in Interview with Jim Lewis, I. In addition, Scott King remembers the Tap Room from the late 1960s, as seen in Interview with Scott King.

⁵⁶ Interview with Chuck Smith.

turn established a cover for the gay community. Such an observation attests to the presence of some circles of straights that accepted or at least tolerated homosexuality, particularly artist circles around universities or in downtown Charleston, and strayed from the active hostility described earlier. Gay men in particular used the possible disguise of straight couples to their advantage. In 1970, gay men who entered Morgantown's bar and were looking for a hookup sat at the counter, while others sat in seats in the rest of the bar, which included many straight patrons. Affection displayed between patrons at the counter did not solicit negative reactions from those at tables.⁵⁷ The Empire Lounge attracted straight patrons, but bartenders were gay. Gay men ventured into the back room opened in later years in order to have a greater degree of privacy.⁵⁸ Bob R. described the Tap Room in Charleston as "bohemian." It catered to theatre people who often traveled straight from performances to throw a cast party. Never exclusively gay, hookups were possible for those looking and who had "gaydar."⁵⁹ Nonetheless, other spaces became almost exclusive gay bars and were more open places for affection and hookups. While Scott King remembers that no one displayed any more visible and flamboyant displays of sexuality at the bar in Morgantown and does not remember ever having seen a drag queen at the bar,⁶⁰ physical contact at the Grand Palace in Charleston – which became a disco dance bar in the 1970s – was very common; according to Bob R., everything but actual kissing was game,⁶¹ and Jeff Mann remembers

⁵⁷ interview with Scott King.

⁵⁸ interview with Bob R.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Interview with Scott King.

⁶¹ Interview with Bob R.

the many drag queens at the Grand Palace after his own visit to Charleston as a college student.⁶²

Their exteriors also typically reflected their patrons' understanding of sexual identity and display and further prove the point that the surrounding environment remained unaccepting. Most bars remained hidden from the public eye. The Shamrock itself was never directly dubbed a gay bar, and it was unmarked. Burch-Brown noted the lack of an exterior sign when she visited decades later in the 1990s and believes the Shamrock may have had a sign for the diner but certainly not for the bar.⁶³ Reverend Jim Lewis, a priest at St. John's Episcopal Church in Charleston, remembers that nothing from the exterior indicated that these spaces were exclusively gay, though their reputation as "places where it spread" became well known.⁶⁴ The Tap Room had a marker above it so that patrons knew which door to enter in order to bypass the Quarrier Diner and go straight downstairs,⁶⁵ yet nothing in its name or on its sign pointed to its existence as a gay-friendly space. The Quarrier Diner itself remained an establishment that catered to numerous patrons both gay and straight, and never developed a reputation as a gay space.⁶⁶ Charleston's Downstairs Club remained more of a secret and fairly hidden. Once it became the Grand Palace, an awning that sported its name remained outside for everyone to see.⁶⁷ While its reputation as a gay bar spread, and while its exterior gave it away as the Grand Palace, nothing gave it away as a place for homosexuals to socialize.

⁶² Interview with Jeff Mann. There is a wealth on bar culture in less urban areas in John Howard, Men Like That, pp. 93-99.

⁶³ Interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

⁶⁴ Interview with Jim Lewis, II.

⁶⁵ interview with Bob R.

⁶⁶ Interview with Jim Lewis, II.

⁶⁷ interview with Bob R.

In order to better understand how significant a role these bars played in asserting a gay existence, it is necessary to understand the gay community's past and the ways it socialized and interacted in the bars' absence. Many in Helen's generation, including Helen herself, grew up in small coal towns in the mountains where homosexuality was not welcome or accepted. Helen herself was first exposed to homosexuality as a child of about ten or twelve. After seeing two men in her native town in McDowell County, West Virginia, kissing, she went home and told her father. Soon enough other residents of the town burned a cross in the yards of Smith and Wren⁶⁸ as a form of public humiliation for having sinned, a punishment also reserved for other sinners, particularly for adulterers.⁶⁹ Helen implied that the Ku Klux Klan, which at the time was a powerful community organization, was also at times involved in these punishments to some extent. She remembered a man who had abused his wife being picked up by the KKK, taken out of town, and tarred and feathered.⁷⁰ Knowing this, it is not implausible to imagine that the organization could also have been involved in policing the community's gay activity. Regardless of the organization's involvement, it is clear that this town and most likely many others vigorously policed and suppressed homosexual activity, which to them constituted a sin similar to adultery. Helen never completely abandoned her religious upbringing, and she described to Burch-Brown that while she could not affect her own sexuality, she considered it to be a curse to her and to gay people, who could live in denial of it and suffer or live freely and pay the price, most likely through punishment in

⁶⁸ The men's first names were not disclosed in the interview.

⁶⁹ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al.

⁷⁰ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al. The KKK performed similar acts of moral policing elsewhere, where they punished men and women who transgressed certain accepted codes of sexual conduct. For more information, see chapter 3, "Battling the Seductive Allurements," in Kathleen Blee, Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 70-100.

the afterlife. Either way, there was a cost that gay people had to pay that straight men and women did not.⁷¹

Gay people were also affected by the strong pressure to marry. When she was fifteen, Helen did just that, and stayed with her husband until 1958, when she was 34. Together they had a son. Yet this public display of heterosexuality – while many in the community may have seen it as a preventative or corrective measure against homosexuality – did not change her own sexuality. Not until three years after their wedding did Helen have sex with her husband, and they both maintained romantic affairs with women, his known to her but hers remaining a secret until after their divorce.⁷² Before and even after her divorce, Helen did not publicly come out; in fact, “coming out” as defined contemporarily did not constitute an important point in the lives of gay men and lesbians in 1950s West Virginia, and most all of them had no desire to do so. According to Burch-Brown, “Everybody knows you’re gay, but as long as you don’t say it, nobody can get you on it.” Unless you had actually slept with someone, that person’s sexuality, according to the gay community’s informal policy, remained, at least verbally and therefore publicly, a mystery. They used this mode of living to their advantage. Sometime in the 1950s Helen was involved in a court case in which the judge asked her if she knew the defendant to be a homosexual. Helen said in reply, “No, I have no idea,”⁷³ protecting her friend from a deeper questioning on moral grounds while not necessarily lying when under oath. Implicit in this silence is a belief in respectability, of not discussing in the public realm with anyone what should be reserved as private. Silence

⁷¹ Interview with Carol Burch-Brown, in which she described this to me, as well as Helen’s baptism, as described in previous footnote.

⁷² Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al.

⁷³ Interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

also served as a protective barrier. Even though gay men and lesbians were socially policed in everyday society, the gay community protected itself by going one step further and developing a common defense of silence within their community in southern West Virginia that they enacted with everyone. Not quite closeted, they were silenced from the outside but also silent even within the community, covering their own tracks when possible and necessary, and ensuring a relatively safe existence for each other for decades.

This silence helped the community to maintain a vibrant subculture for decades before the Shamrock's establishment. At least as early as the 1930s, gay people in and around Bluefield would cruise by walking the town's streets on Thursdays while wearing a hint of green, finding one another by looking for the color and eventually going home or to a more secluded public spot.⁷⁴ In the 1950s, Helen joined a sports car club run by lesbians, particularly Thelma Porterfield, Juanita Higgins and Betty-Jo Lambert. Thelma was married to Carl Porterfield, who owned a hearse in Bluefield, and Juanita to Jim Higgins at the Bluefield News Agency. They divorced, moved in together in the town of Mullens, West Virginia, owned and operated a jewelry store and remained together for thirty-five years, running the club on the side. Betty-Jo was a teacher in Charleston, West Virginia, and also owned a restaurant in the Bluefield area with Helen called the Wild Goose Drive-In. For fifteen years Betty-Jo lived with a woman named Clair – Helen's partner later in life – before Clair cheated on her with Helen. In the 1950s Betty-Jo, who according to Helen was “four hundred twenty-six pounds, and rode a damned Harley Davidson motorcycle,” took advantage of the “motorcycle hill climbs” just behind the

⁷⁴ Interviews with Carol Burch-Brown. This was a rumor that Scott King had heard when in high school, as evidenced in Interview with Scott King.

drive-in. These women, along with a handful of gay men, would hold a rally, “a bang,” as Helen called it, every third Sunday of the month, when they met at the Wild Goose before driving away.⁷⁵ With these interactions and the silent protection of one another, Bluefield’s gay community had successfully developed and maintained over time a subculture able to sustain itself through its own policing and covering as a dynamic resistance to the outward pressure of fear that society instilled and regulated.⁷⁶

This lifestyle had changed by the 1960s when gay men in particular began to be targeted by establishments within the community, revealing both a shift in identity and a new but relatively late recognition of an identifiable form of homosexuality in larger society. Gay bars formed in order to protect this gay community.⁷⁷ The establishment of these bars was a retaliation against the oppression gay men and lesbians had felt in their communities. Their emergence radically changed the social lives of gay men and lesbians in the state. Rather than accept the notion that what they did was impermissible, they formed their own separate spaces where what they did would be acceptable. They re-centered their focus from the oppressive atmosphere of the church to the accepting environment inside of these bars. As general meeting spaces that were meant to serve

⁷⁵ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 06B: Bill, Helen, Eva, Kathy, Pam, Ann Kilkelly, in Princeton, West Virginia, Saturday before Christmas, 1998. Such modes of silence and silent interactions are also evidenced in John Howard, Men Like That, pp. 3-33.

⁷⁶ Such dynamic resistance to a larger oppressive societal push against the display of sexuality further proves George Chauncey’s argument in “The Trouble with Shame,” in Gay Shame, edited by David Halperin and Valerie Traub (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 277-282, in which Chauncey argues on page 278 that “the truly remarkable thing about 1950s queers was their refusal to play the role assigned them by the hostility of their own time and the condescension of history.” Such sentiments are expressed by a gay New Yorker in the summer of 1954, who wrote in his diary – as outlined in Chauncey’s essay on page 277 – that “society does its best to cause us fear and humiliation (and, occasionally, . . . tragedy) but mostly, in this great city, it fails. And it is the degree of that failure which is the so remarkable thing to which I draw attention.”

⁷⁷ Gay people began to be targeted decades earlier in New York City, as argued in “The Exclusion of Homosexuality from the Public Sphere in the 1930s” in George Chauncey, Gay New York, pp. 331-354. Also see David K. Johnson, The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government. (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), which documents the government-led persecution of gay men and lesbians in the 1950s.

everyone in the community, these bars served many crowds and functions. They catered to young men and women at an early age and provided them with their first formal interaction with a larger network of people like themselves. Jeff Mann first attended a gay bar in the spring of 1977 as a high school student when he visited his best friends who were students at West Virginia University at the time and was scared but thrilled at the experience.⁷⁸ The age of patrons in Charleston's bars ranged from teenage high school students to middle-aged men and women, and sometimes others much older.⁷⁹ Some traveled for hours in order to attend these bars. During his sophomore year of college in 1978 or 1979, Jeff Mann traveled to Charleston and visited the Grand Palace with his roommate.⁸⁰ Gay bars catered to everyone able to travel to them, pay the price of a drink, and willing to risk being seen by others in the community. None of these spaces existed before the mid-1960s; by the end of the 1970s, they had transformed cities in West Virginia from places of secret, underground activity to places that included exclusively gay spaces that welcomed dancing, dating and drag queens.

The people that frequented them often served as a family network for those who – after being rejected by their biological families because of their sexuality – sought one. Helen described the dynamic as one of a family,⁸¹ having called it “a family bar” where she and other patrons always invited and welcomed strangers and where everyone was treated something like a sibling or cousin. As Helen said, “You come in there you’re not supposed to be harassed, you’re not supposed to have no trouble [*sic*], you come in there

⁷⁸ Interview with Jeff Mann. Jeff was raised in Hinton, West Virginia, and remembers hearing about the Shamrock in Bluefield when growing up.

⁷⁹ Interview with Scott King.

⁸⁰ Interview with Jeff Mann.

⁸¹ This is also seen in Sprout's comment of gay and lesbian publications as “family type” magazines, an understanding of the gay and lesbian community as a family that continues in the area's gay community today. Shamrock Bar Transcript 01A. Also in introduction to transcripts.

to enjoy yourself and let your hair down a little.”⁸² The relationships she formed with patrons as mentor, protector and a kind of mother⁸³ indicate that the bar itself was meant to imitate the familial relationships formed outside of it and for the bar’s community to serve as the surrogate family for those whose sexuality had damaged their relationships to their biological parents and siblings. The bar became a home to many of its patrons,⁸⁴ where they felt secure, secluded, supported, and free to finally be themselves.⁸⁵

From the Shamrock’s inception, Helen made sure patrons would be policed very differently than they were outside of it, and they realized that in this space they did not have to conform to the outside’s rules on gender display. In fact, Helen and presumably others of her generation welcomed the inversion of gender display in this protected space, a move that, at that place and time, must have seemed radical. By the 1970s, a group of gay men complained to her about the difficulty of sneaking their mothers’ and sisters’ clothes in and out of the house and dressing in drag without being caught, something they did socially and in private as their secret. Upon hearing their complaints, Helen decided to let them perform drag shows. The men took trips across the block to a flea market to buy secondhand dresses, purses, hats and shoes of their own; some had to buy bedroom shoes in lieu of heels because they found nothing in their size. Likewise, years later a group of women preparing for the Mr. Shamrock competition was spotted by the manager

⁸² Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al. This is also seen in Sprout’s comment of gay and lesbian publications as “family type” magazines in Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 01A: Eva, Helen, David, Pam, Kathy, Sprout, Cindy, Charlene, Ann Kilkelly, in Bluefield, West Virginia, Saturday morning, winter 1998.

⁸³ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al. This was also discussed in Interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

⁸⁴ This was mentioned or alluded to in Carol Burch Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al; Transcript 01A: Eva, et al; Transcript 15 AB: Larry.

⁸⁵ Similar to bars in John Howard, Men Like That, pp. 93-99.

of Deskins, a local grocer, buying cucumbers, which they cut to insert in their pants and position with duct tape.⁸⁶

Probably because of the presence of straight patrons, certain displays of homosexuality in some of these spaces were limited, such as flamboyant attitudes and the presence of drag queens, either because of a fear of crossing the line in the presence of straight patrons or a desire to not scare straight patrons off and keep them as a type of cover from the potential hostility generated against an explicitly gay establishment. While many in the larger community did not tolerate homosexuality, some degree of acceptance existed among certain social groups. The presence of straight customers at the Tap Room or the bar in Morgantown nonetheless proves that some were comfortable sharing a space together, indicating a degree of tolerance at least among a certain crowd, even if that crowd was atypical or bohemian. Other spaces emerged that permitted a different kind of sexual display than the Shamrock did. The overt hookup and cruising culture permitted at the Grand Palace pushed the boundaries of acceptance beyond those set by Helen at the Shamrock.⁸⁷ Yet for the most part, these bars covered themselves for safety but established their own spaces for strength. Likewise, Bluefield's straight community quickly caught on that the Shamrock was more than just a diner, its disguise. While most stayed away from the Shamrock bar, in disapproval or at least in apathy, others found it to be a threat to the community, and still others drove by the bar in hopes of finding someone to harass, some remained faithful to the diner. Helen continued to run it both as a diner and a bar throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and straight patrons

⁸⁶ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al.

⁸⁷ Interviews with Scott King, Bob R.

continued to frequent it,⁸⁸ indicating that they considered the space acceptable if and when it functioned as a heterosexual establishment. This, of course, is not to dilute the fact that others threatened the lives of homosexuals, and that relations between these smaller and larger communities remained tense if not hostile even in the 1970s.

While gay men and lesbians found unbelievable support through the network they found within the gay bars that they frequented, some even took it upon themselves to form a defense network against the possibility of attack. In the Shamrock's early years, men walking down the street to or from the bar were sometimes harassed by onlookers, and some were followed. Helen protected her family from harm: She kept a baseball bat behind the counter and used it actively and as a threat, warding off men on her own.⁸⁹

Helen did not have to bear the burden of protecting her patrons alone. In Bluefield, the police force vigorously protected the Shamrock since its inception.⁹⁰ Part of the reason was that the city and police department wanted gay people's unwelcome display off the streets.⁹¹ But the gay community also had political power. Indeed, secret connections between its patrons and some of the city's top officials affected the Shamrock's operation for the first thirty years or more of its existence. Betty-Jo Lambert's father was the sheriff of the county,⁹² assuring people and groups of which she approved better treatment. In the 1960s Helen developed strong connections with friends

⁸⁸ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al; Transcript 15AB: Larry. Helen closed the diner and ran the Shamrock only as a bar after 1981, as confirmed in Interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

⁸⁹ Interview with Carol Burch-Brown. Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection: Transcript 01A, Eva, et al.

⁹⁰ None of the interviewees could recall any raids or violence on the police's part, either in the 1960s or later in the 1970s; any actual violence from police, if it existed, was not reported or told. For more information on the national struggle for respect, see Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America (New York, New York: Touchstone, 1999), pp. 48-69.

⁹¹ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 15 AB: Larry.

⁹² Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 06B: Bill, et al.

– most of them closeted – who worked as city officials, and she herself regularly repeated her assertion that she was well connected in Bluefield. She often used this as a threat to dissuade people from tampering with her or her establishment. In the event of a fight or a threat she called the department, who dispatched a cruiser that arrived within minutes to her aid.⁹³

Numerous gay people held positions in city government. In the 1980s Larry Akers, a longtime patron of the Shamrock, had an affair with a closeted married man in a “very high position.” He claims to have been picked up by police cruisers and taken home from the Shamrock when drunk. He would “run interference with the city over that place,” and due in some part to his connections, he was hired at that time to draw up renovation plans for the downtown urban renewal project.⁹⁴ Thus, again, Bluefield’s gay community protected itself, this time by forming strong relationships with people of influence. These officials then felt indebted to Helen, Larry and others, who could use the possibility of uncovering these people’s sexuality as capital.⁹⁵ With these strong connections Helen and regular patrons of the bar secured the Shamrock’s prosperity – and their own safety – for years. She even managed to run the bar illegally for years. She had no license to serve liquor, and she faked inspections, often paying off the inspectors in order to keep the bar.⁹⁶ The Shamrock was not well-kept, and Helen had no legal right to serve anything in the space, but it served the function of keeping the gay

⁹³ Interview with Carol Burch-Brown. Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 01A: Eva, et al.; Transcript 15AB: Larry.

⁹⁴ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 15AB: Larry. Also mentioned in Interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

⁹⁵ Interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

⁹⁶ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 15 AB: Larry. Also, Interview with Carol Burch-Brown. Gay bars in other areas across the country also bribed police to stay in business. For more information, see Cristopher Agee, “Gayola: Police Professionalization and the Politics of San Francisco’s Gay Bars, 1950-1968,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15:3 (2006): 462-489, [University of Texas Press](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4629672), found in JSTOR, 28 February 2010. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4629672>>

community from the streets and other bars where the city did not want them to be, and it served as the center of a community of which many of the city's top officials were secretly a part. Bob R. recalls another gay bar in Fairmont running illegally for quite some time;⁹⁷ information surrounding its operation remains a mystery, but it is possible that a similar relationship existed in this town and in others throughout the state.

Gay bars encouraged and produced a new, stronger outward identification of sexuality and fostered a greater sense of strength in patrons of younger generations who had come of age while attending gay establishments. The emerging visibility of a distinct gay community with its own spaces was fairly new, yet even more new to Helen and her generation was how many of her younger patrons took bolder steps in identifying as homosexual. By interacting in the Shamrock, Helen's generation and this younger one revealed to each other their fundamental differences in identity and display, and their different understandings of the function of gay spaces. From their interactions we are able to see a different generational understanding of homosexuality and coming out.

While Helen welcomed drag shows and gender inversion, this display only went so far. Helen focused more on sexless gender display and approved of the 1950s drag queen persona that exuded from the Mr. Shamrock competitions, another "world" for the bar's younger crowd. By making the Shamrock a "family bar," Helen precluded the possibility of a hookup or pickup culture, an overt display of sexual attraction. While gay men and lesbians of the 1970s began to push the boundaries even further and proclaim their sexual identities to each other and trusted others, Helen and her generation reserved even the public display of affection for the completely private sphere.⁹⁸ For her, hooking

⁹⁷ Interview with Bob R.

⁹⁸ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 15AB: Larry.

up or cruising was not merely reserved for a protected sphere; even within that sphere, such an overt display violated her understanding of respectability. Larry Akers, a younger patron, described the Shamrock as its own “world” that took people back to the 1950s-era drag shows,⁹⁹ which apparently differed in intensity and display from shows of the 1970s and 1980s. He threw parties at his own home after the Shamrock had closed for the night, encouraging different rules of acceptable behavior for the Shamrock crowd that followed him back and welcoming that part of the gay community that did not frequent the Shamrock because of its distaste for the culture that Helen expected. While the bar and community continued to serve as a family, the intent of some members differed by trying to accommodate a more sexualized culture.¹⁰⁰ The differences in her generation’s and many of her patrons’ younger generation’s expression, identification, and definitions of acceptable and unacceptable behavior as real and grounded behavior inside and outside the Shamrock formed a primary source of division between them. As men and women of this younger generation became more comfortable with an open identification, Helen continued to operate the Shamrock in the 1970s as she did in the 1960s, as a respectable bar from the 1950s.¹⁰¹

This divide was caused at least in part by this younger generation’s increased and prolonged exposure to a gay community or “family” from an early age, which strengthened their own identities. They placed greater importance on coming out. “Coming out” as we know it – the confession of one’s sexuality to others, whether to everyone or to a specific group of people – varied quite extremely in its importance, even

⁹⁹ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 15 AB: Larry.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

¹⁰¹ This is evident in Larry’s description of Helen in Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 15 AB: Larry, and in Helen’s description of the younger gay community in Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 12A: Helen, et al.

among homosexuals in these same small towns and cities.¹⁰² A separation in these coming-out experiences existed specifically between those coming of age in the 1960s in the most rural of areas and those coming of age in other areas in the 1960s and in the 1970s. Jeff Mann realized he was gay in 1976 and in the 10th grade after his biology teacher, a lesbian, came out to him and lent him Patricia Warren's *Front Runner*, a novel with distinctly gay characters. He shortly thereafter came out to his sister, and his mother found out about his sexuality in 1979. He largely hid his sexuality from his fellow students in college but hung out with a group of gay friends, frequented Morgantown's gay bar, founded a gay student organization in 1978, and came out to his advisors in graduate school in the early 1980s.¹⁰³

Conversely, many older men continued to feel the need to cover their identities from larger society even in the 1970s.¹⁰⁴ Scott King first realized he had some kind of attraction to men in 1955 at the age of 7 after admiring his neighbors' shirtless teenage son. Not until after reading an early 1960s Life magazine story about homosexuality was he made aware of gay life outside of his native McDowell County. He had sexual relationships with other men when in college but only occasionally. During his time in Morgantown in the later 1960s, no gay student organizations existed. After marrying a woman – the expectation for every man – he continued having covert sexual relationships with men, and not until his retirement from the public school system and the end of his second marriage, in the 1990s, did he decide to formally come out.¹⁰⁵ Bob R. grew up in the considerably more populated town of Fairmont and graduated from high school in

¹⁰² Interview with Chuck Smith.

¹⁰³ Interview with Jeff Mann.

¹⁰⁴ Interviews with David Shumate, Chuck Smith, Scott King.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Scott King.

1964, and unlike the other interviewees of his age, he had already entered relationships with men and knew he lacked any attraction to women. He had a reputation in high school for being queer but never felt threatened. Nevertheless, he never publicly and formally came out until after announcing his engagement to another man in the 1990s.¹⁰⁶ David Shumate realized he was gay in the 1970s when in his 30s and after having married a woman. As a youth in southern West Virginia, he was revolted by the thought of gays. No one discussed homosexuality in any setting, and he knew of no one who was gay.¹⁰⁷ According to Chuck Smith, many gay men and lesbians in the 1970s in West Virginia – particularly in smaller regions, like Boone, Wyoming, Mingo, and Lincoln Counties – were similar to gay people in the 1950s in other parts of the United States. They remained hidden and terrified of being exposed; as a cover, and out of pressure from the community, many of them married and had children.¹⁰⁸ Chuck Smith himself remained closeted in the 1970s when living in rural Lincoln County.¹⁰⁹ Those of even older generations, who came of age in the 1950s and earlier, were wary of ever being detected; Helen never came out in the formal sense.¹¹⁰ Though she lived with Clair for years, she had never come out to explicitly call herself homosexual or a lesbian; after Helen opened the Shamrock, Clair moved out for fear of being discovered one.¹¹¹

Most all of the interviewees have had sexual relationships from the 1970s and later with men married to women who have rejected “coming out” and a “gay identity” as possible modes of existence. Many of those men have had sexual relationships with one

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Bob R.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with David Shumate.

¹⁰⁸ Interviews with David Shumate, Scott King, Jim Lewis I & II, Victor Marchand.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Chuck Smith.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Carol Burch-Brown. Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 06B: Bill, et al.

¹¹¹ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 02: Helen, et al. The fact that Helen never formally came out was explained in Interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

another in secret and often out of desperation.¹¹² When living in Lincoln County, Chuck Smith remembers few if any who were gay, or at least identified themselves that way. A few traveled to Charleston bars on weekends, and many knew of the Shamrock, but so many others – including himself – did not bother.¹¹³ Some were left completely alone to wonder if anyone else like them existed, and at least some, like Shumate, were never made aware of homosexuality as an alternative until after having moved away.¹¹⁴

So many migrated from rural to urban areas in West Virginia in the 1970s in order to simply escape the oppression and nonexistence of a gay group in rural towns and thought that such a move would suffice for them. Scott King lived in McDowell County for most of his life and felt lonely because of it. While there, he expected to have nothing more than a chance encounter with other men. He remembers it being no more than survival, that just very strong people persevered through the loneliness of living in a rural area and seemingly alone, something he no longer feels after having moved to Charleston.¹¹⁵ Bob R. moved to Charleston in 1973. Not considered a city person, he thought about living in Washington, D.C. for a while but has remained nonetheless in the urban area of Charleston. Gay men and lesbians in West Virginia have tended to migrate to Charleston more than any other city,¹¹⁶ often as an escape and an opportunity.¹¹⁷ Many came in order to develop a “gay identity,” as David Shumate did after coming out to and separating from his wife. It was there, too, where Chuck Smith lived, and where

¹¹² Interviews with David Shumate, Scott King, Bob R., Victor Marchand.

¹¹³ Interview with Chuck Smith. While some, like Smith, stayed away out of distaste, others still lived too far from any establishment and were left to form their own relationships often in complete secret.

¹¹⁴ Interviews with Scott King, David Shumate, Chuck Smith, Jim Lewis, I & II.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Scott King.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Bob R.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Jim Lewis, I & II.

he for the first time began interacting with gay men and lesbians in West Virginia.¹¹⁸

They were able to come to terms with both their gay and Appalachian identities there, and for most the established bar culture was key in their development.

These bars fostered a new generation of stronger gay men and lesbians, and they were not alone. Most of this essay has argued for the existence of a localized and self-sustained movement in these small mountain towns. In addition to a new bar culture, their awareness of a national gay liberation movement affected their own understanding of sexuality and gave them strength and courage to form these bars and come out.

Indeed, state newspapers published articles on homosexuality in the 1970s, proving that an external influence held some sway on both the gay community and larger society.¹¹⁹

Moreover, the gay community of West Virginia remained well connected, and from there, heard news and met people from gay communities outside of the state. These connections were fostered by urban migration of gay men and lesbians from West Virginia, but also by gay literature published outside of the state, and largely by the bar

¹¹⁸ Interview with Chuck Smith.

¹¹⁹ Most all of these newspaper articles were written by the Associated Press and included national news coverage of homosexuals and/or transsexuals, usually treating them as a distant group, but nonetheless keeping readers aware of the national gay rights movement and of homosexuality. All were found in the Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia. "Anita's New Crusade" (1978, January 23), Associated Press, *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 9A; "Baptists Shocked: Concern Over Sex Change Operations" (1977, September 21), Associated Press, *Charleston Daily Mail*; Patrick Buchanan, "Fundamentalists: 2, Gays: 0" (1978, May 3), *Charleston Daily Mail*; "Gay Mood At Gay Bar" (1978, May 10), Associated Press, *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 8B; "Gay Rights Fight: Voter Support Sought in St. Paul" (1978, April 19), Associated Press, *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 2A; "Gay Rights Ordinance Repealed By 5-To-1 Margin In Wichita" (1978, May 10), Associated Press, *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 8B; "Homosexual Suing Army" (1978, January 18), Associated Press, *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 9D; "Homosexuality Issue Termed Distracting" (1978, January 19), Associated Press, *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 12A; "'I'm Not Afraid': Anita Claims Gay Harassment" (1977, November 2), Associated Press, *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 4B; "Not Disabled: Transsexual Teacher Takes Pension Anyway" (1978, February 18), Associated Press, *Charleston Daily Mail*; "N.Y. Protects Gay Rights" (1978, January 24), Associated Press, *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 2A; "'Please Stay,' Gays Urged After Setback" (1978, April 26), *Charleston Daily Mail*; "Too Much Anita, Gays" (1978, April 25), *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 6A; Abigail Van Buren, "Homosexual Still His Son" (1977, September 22), Dear Abby, *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 12A; and "'Vigilantes' Police Perverts By Chopping Down Trees" (1969, July 1), Associated Press, *Charleston Daily Mail*.

culture that gay West Virginians participated in when traveling within or outside of the state.¹²⁰

The Shamrock became one important place in an expanding network of gay people that extended across the state and beyond. Some of its patrons traveled from miles away, sometimes even crossing state lines, in order to spend an evening with friends in an open environment.¹²¹ Crowds of well over one hundred were not rare in the 1960s and 70s.¹²² Some traveled to cities in Virginia or Charleston and visited bars like the Grand Palace and Tap Room. These communities were familiar with one another and groups visited each other fairly regularly; in fact, the Shamrock was something of a legend among many gay residents of Charleston.¹²³ The gay community in Bluefield remained connected with the student population at Concord College, a nearby institution with a large gay population,¹²⁴ as well as with the community in Charleston and in nearby Roanoke, Virginia.¹²⁵

The national movement was an extended part of the “family” and proved that these communities were interconnected, or at least more connected than what many would think. From West Virginia, the family branched out to include the gay communities of distant and urban areas. Helen and others were aware of Stonewall and other urban events in the national gay rights movement.¹²⁶ However distant its location, the power of Stonewall and the gay liberation movement as an inspiration for change

¹²⁰ This kind of movement and connection is seen in John Howard, *Men Like That*, pp. 78-93.

¹²¹ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 15AB: Larry. Interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

¹²² Interview with Carol Burch-Brown. She said crowds of 125 or 130 were typical on weekends. Larry Akers said in Carol Burch Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 15AB: Larry, that this number increased to 150 or 175 on Saturdays in the 1980s.

¹²³ Interview with David Shumate.

¹²⁴ This is evident in Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 10B: Delbert.

¹²⁵ Interview with Carol Burch-Brown.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

altered the mindsets of gay West Virginians by giving them hope in the possibility and feasibility of living more openly and proudly.¹²⁷ While the activities in Greenwich Village seemed to be a cultural and geographic world away, it was a family activity, one that affected them directly and instilled in them a source of pride and hope for their relatives in New York but also for themselves in Bluefield.¹²⁸ Some stayed connected through explicitly gay literature. As discussed above, Jeff Mann began reading gay novels when in high school,¹²⁹ and Eva, a patron at the Shamrock, was familiar with gay magazines.¹³⁰ Scott King first became aware of a larger gay community in high school in the early 1960s after getting his hands on the *Village Voice*. While he – and assumedly many others – had not become aware of Stonewall through area news, he found out about the event afterward through this Greenwich Village-based magazine.¹³¹

A migration of homosexuals to and from West Virginia reinforced this connection. Jeff Mann’s gay friends from college have since moved to Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio, Berkeley, California, and Washington, D.C. Mann himself, now a professor, moved to Washington, D.C. to teach before being offered a position at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia, and has lived most of his life in the more liberal college towns of Morgantown and Blacksburg.¹³² Victor Marchand lived in Washington, D.C., for years before moving to the eastern panhandle of West Virginia.¹³³ Such an encounter with distant networks of gay people seems to have been a universal experience for gay

¹²⁷ Interviews with Bob R., Scott King, Carol Burch-Brown.

¹²⁸ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 01A: Eva, et al; Transcript 02: Helen, et al. The concept of “family” is seen in Sprout’s comment of gay and lesbian publications as “family type” magazines, an understanding of the gay and lesbian community as a family.

¹²⁹ Interview with Jeff Mann.

¹³⁰ Carol Burch-Brown, Shamrock Bar Collection, Transcript 01A: Eva, et al.

¹³¹ Interview with Scott King.

¹³² Interview with Jeff Mann.

¹³³ Interview with Victor Marchand.

men and lesbians in West Virginia who felt torn between their competing identities and who needed help in establishing an identity, and oftentimes, a sense of worth as a homosexual.¹³⁴ Mann found a compromise between his identities in the Appalachian college town of Blacksburg, Virginia.¹³⁵ Others found it in Charleston and other cities with sizeable gay populations still located in the region they will always call home.¹³⁶

As the ways gay men and lesbians identified and came out changed, so did terms used to describe them. The vocabulary evolved from vagueness to greater clarity and directness within these two decades. Words like “homosexual,” “gay” and “lesbian” were known to many by the mid-1970s, but in the mid-1960s, they were much less known. Bob R.’s high school classmates knew what it meant to be homosexual in the 1960s, but words like “queer” were used in place of “gay” or “lesbian.”¹³⁷ When in high school in the 1960s, Scott King developed a relationship with another boy; he cannot remember the term that he used when asking the boy if that term defined them, but it certainly was not “homosexual,” and the boy denied being able to be identified in that way.¹³⁸ Jim Lewis remembers expletives being the most popular vocabulary used to describe homosexuals: “queers,” used then in a derogative sense, and “faggots,” were popular language.¹³⁹ With such negative connotations, who would want to identify as such? Still others had never even heard of this language. When David Shumate was in high school in Wyoming County, he had heard of “funny” people, but never “gay” people or “homosexuals.” He sensed at the time that he was different but never “gay;” he had no

¹³⁴ Interview with Jeff Mann. Interview with Jim Lewis, II, in which Lewis essentially says that this is a universal experience for the gay people he has met.

¹³⁵ Interview with Jeff Mann.

¹³⁶ Interviews with David Shumate, Bob R.

¹³⁷ Interview with Bob R.

¹³⁸ Interview with Scott King.

¹³⁹ Interview with Jim Lewis, II.

idea what it meant to be gay. Shumate later felt the need to develop a “gay identity” after coming out, something that he never knew existed when he was younger.¹⁴⁰ While some knew quite well what it meant to be a homosexual, others just across the mountain had never so much as heard the term before. Its linguistic identity was undeniably linked to the community’s understanding of it and to people’s understanding of themselves. For many like Shumate and King, homosexuality did not exist or was not made clear to them as an alternative sexuality until years after their high school days. “Coming out” was directly related to these terms, as was the larger community’s recognition of homosexuals and homosexuals’ development of their own sexual identities, all inevitably influenced by the development of gay bars and this fluid dialogue between West Virginia gay communities and communities outside of the state.

Their migration to a more urban area seems to have been an integral part of their development of a gay identity, of coming out, participating in bar life, escaping social and moral oppression, and finding friends with whom they can be honest. Their continued relationship with the gay community in West Virginia and with other members of larger gay communities exposed them to a national liberation movement and encouraged them to commit to this new bar culture that separated them from larger society.¹⁴¹ Bars were set up as a defense, but also to reassert the respect and identities of gay men and lesbians. In them, they fostered their understanding of themselves and became fierce advocates for acceptance and change. They saved one another from loneliness and oppression by coming together and facing the outside world as a unified

¹⁴⁰ Interview with David Shumate.

¹⁴¹ For information on bar culture in Mississippi, see John Howard, Men Like That, pp. 93-99.

whole and felt strengthened in their connection to similar, larger communities outside of the state.

The gay community in West Virginia witnessed the development of a bar culture within a decade, established to cater to its own community that had been denied access to other areas. Surely, their connections with gay people and communities outside of West Virginia strengthened their own understanding of identity. But these bars solidified it in making the culture immediate and unique to the region. They were able to establish their own protected bar culture that was built to cater to their needs, which strengthened the community in enormous strides by giving them a space where they could be themselves and an exponentially more visible network of people to do it with. The cyclical nature of this structure is clear: An elaborate foundation had been laid for a microcosm of acceptance, which in turn emboldened its members to be readier for greater visibility. While it inevitably lacked legitimacy among the greater society that continued to isolate gay men and lesbians into their own secluded spaces, it was their home, and while at home they comforted themselves and each other and cushioned the harsh reality of everyday life with the knowledge that their own private world that they created provided them with familial support that they lacked from rejection or silence with their biological families. As it developed its own community, it nonetheless remained formally secluded: The gay community in West Virginia lacked a political movement. In fact, the first gay rights organization was not founded until the early 1990s, and the first Pride parade took place in Charleston a few years later.¹⁴² This lack of a political movement differed significantly from the national movement for greater legal protections and social tolerance, which first began in 1950 by the Mattachine Society. It expanded drastically in

¹⁴² Interviews with Chuck Smith, David Shumate.

the 1970s to include gay liberation movements that called for greater freedom of sex and sexuality, and became more charged through the AIDS crisis of the 1980s.¹⁴³

Throughout all of this, the political scene in West Virginia remained quiet, largely the result of society's intolerance and the gay community's fear of such an overt act. But a burgeoning movement – and one that expanded over time to spearhead the political movement of the 1980s and 1990s – found itself at home in the 1970s in perhaps the most important place it could be, and the most surprising place it could be. Many gay West Virginians found themselves in the 1970s being welcomed in the one establishment most responsible for their depression and ostracism, and for providing the larger society a religious and moral impetus for the oppression of homosexuals: the church.

V. Church

This happened in tandem with the development of a bar culture and gave the gay community its greatest source of legitimacy. Having grown up in West Virginia, these gay men and women were raised in a deeply religious tradition. Having been condemned by their home churches, they often felt bereft of a religious life and desperate to regain one. In Charleston, a church began welcoming the gay community – and delivering sermons that called for the sanctification of gay relationships and the holiness of

¹⁴³ See John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970 (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1983). Part I, "Identity, Community, and Oppression: A Sexual Minority in the Making," pp. 9-53, discusses the initial difficulty in establishing any kinds of rights for homosexuals; Part II, "The 1950s: Radical Visions and Conformist Pressures," pp. 57-125, highlights the early struggles to establish a movement; Part III, "The 1960s: Civil Rights and the Pursuit of Equality," pp. 129-219, sets the ground for a study of the movement's major gains in this decade; Part IV: "The Liberation Impulse," discusses the importance of Stonewall and gay liberation. All of this occurred while gay men and lesbians in West Virginia remained hidden, and thereafter were beginning to establish cultural venues for themselves. Also see Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, Out for Good Part I, "Awakening," and Part II, "A Place at the Table," pp. 21-266.

sexuality – for the first time in 1974, and homosexuals found the hope and acceptance they wanted there.

The Reverend Jim Lewis moved to Charleston in 1974 with his wife to become minister of St. John's Episcopal Church. His involvement in a theatre guild in Charleston introduced him to another young man in the cast who worked as a speechwriter for the governor. The man came out to Lewis and asked him for a place to talk about issues of homosexuality in a safe and open way. Lewis knew that while the gay community remained largely invisible, a veritable underground network existed of men and women who knew of each other and who kept their lives secret. With the wellbeing of these people in mind Lewis began welcoming gay men and lesbians to his church, where they first started a discussion group in the basement, largely unbeknownst to the congregation. Originally attracting around thirty people, over time this group grew, and many were ready to take a bolder step. In 1977, a gay male couple and lesbian couple approached Lewis separately and asked him to bless their relationships. Lewis agreed. After approaching the Right Reverend Bob Atkinson, Bishop of the Diocese of West Virginia, to explain to him why he accepted the request, and with the couples' friends and families in the pews of St. John's, they were married.¹⁴⁴

This move created little tension until a few months later when the Charleston Daily Mail published an article on the gay community in Charleston. They asked Lewis for contacts; one of the couples talked to the reporter, and shortly thereafter the story was out. Many in the congregation were outraged. Some wanted Lewis to be tried by the bishop, though the bishop refused. A man in the congregation led an oppositional force against Lewis and set up a petition on the street outside of St. John's to have Lewis tried.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Jim Lewis, I.

They were unsuccessful.¹⁴⁵ Reverend Lewis also received responses to the Charleston Daily Mail article from another type of audience. Shortly after the newspaper article was published, around ten men and women, most from rural areas surrounding Charleston, called him feeling trapped and wanting desperately to be sent literature and to talk to someone about their sexuality. Some were suicidal. An evangelist holding a revival in Charleston at the time sent Lewis a note in the mail, written on a match cover with the name of a hotel and his room number on it; Lewis visited him and listened as he discussed his loneliness as a gay man, how he tried to preach the gospel but that “it’s impossible to tell people who [he is].” Lewis helped them in any way he could, and his congregation eventually helped, as well. He devoted the next year’s worth of sermons to the issue of homosexuality, and by doing so proved to his congregation that homosexuality was condemned not by the Bible but by a prejudiced society.¹⁴⁶

Lewis devoted his life to preaching the lesson of acceptance and embrace, and through his work the gay community in West Virginia was offered a ministry that openly welcomed them and their sexuality. Lewis encountered countless myths and stereotypes about homosexuals, and he tried to dispel them all. Many cited the pride parades they saw on television as typical displays of a gay lifestyle and argued that, because of this flamboyancy, gay people should not be welcomed in church. Many believed that men became gay after a negative experience with their mother, and could be fixed by a positive relationship with a woman. The argument became more common after the advent of Exodus International, an ex-gay ministry devoted to leading homosexuals away

¹⁴⁵ Lewis later discovered this man himself was gay after being tipped off by an adult bookstore employee; after being caught with a man on a trip to Atlanta, his wife gave him the option of trying to remove Lewis or be exposed. Many others in his congregation came out to him years later, a good number of them first reluctant to accept Lewis’s messages for fear of being exposed themselves.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Jim Lewis, I & II.

from sin and towards a more “Christian” lifestyle. A common argument, and one that the gay evangelist often encountered, was that gay men and lesbians could not be real Christians. In his own sermons, Lewis countered the message, “This is not biblical, not God’s intention,” with a message of his own: “Your human sexuality is a gift from God. Be grateful.”¹⁴⁷

Soon, due to official publicity in the press and its booming popularity by way of the grapevine, St. John’s became a spiritual hub for the gay men and lesbians of Charleston and the surrounding area. They initially were hesitant to display any sign of affection towards each other when in church, but this was unsurprising given the church’s initial social conservatism. As Lewis moved the church into a more physically welcome style of bonding and growing – encouraging, for example, hugging and embracing – couples became more open in their expression.¹⁴⁸ St. John’s, like many of the state’s gay bars, appealed to a large audience. The first group that began coming to worship at St. John’s was almost all men, but lesbians also began attending services and, all things considered, the gender ratio quickly became fairly even. Certainly he encountered black men – in fact, one of the two men married in 1977 was black – but the vast majority of the demographic was white and middle to upper class. The church became more socioeconomically diverse over time; Lewis remembers one lower-class man living in the Holly Hotel who came regularly to the soup kitchen, then to church services, who turned out to be the sister of another member and who, as a young boy, was sent to a mental institution for his “malady.” Lewis recognized that his work was relatively new; he had

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Lewis, I & II.

¹⁴⁸ Lewis says that today gay couples regularly hold hands and place arms around their partners.

no idea how many gay men and lesbians lived in Charleston, but he recognized their needs and struggles and adapted accordingly.¹⁴⁹

Indeed, the gay community in Charleston thrived due in no small part to St. John's. Members of the Charleston community, like Scott King and Bob R., felt delighted and relieved to be part of a church that so warmly welcomed gay men and lesbians. David Shumate remembered the excitement surrounding the welcoming of the gay and lesbian community at a religious institution for the first time.¹⁵⁰ Bob R., who in the 1990s married a man at the Unitarian Universalist church in Charleston, described himself as a "lifelong Episcopalian" and began attending St. John's shortly before Lewis's arrival. St. John's had a long history of starting, harboring and supporting social service programs, having started, among others, a women's health center and a soup kitchen. Lewis pushed the church further and started an INTEGRITY chapter for LGBT members at the church. His efforts led to an exodus of concerned – and usually comparatively wealthier – members of St. John's to Charleston's other Episcopal church, St. Matthew's, who were replaced by gay men and lesbians desperate for a message of hope and by heterosexuals who embraced this diversity.¹⁵¹

St. John's – and, later, other churches, such as Asbury United Methodist Church and the Metropolitan Community Church, both in Charleston¹⁵² – provided enormous support networks for gay men and lesbians struggling with acceptance in their communities and families. No longer were they alone. Lewis and his congregants

¹⁴⁹ Interviews with Jim Lewis, I and II. See John Howard, *Men Like That*, pp. 48-56, 240-255. Unlike St. John's, most churches in Mississippi at the time were segregated along the lines of race. A Metropolitan Community Church was set up by the 1980s in Mississippi but other churches remained explicitly anti-homosexual and outwardly disapproved of homosexuality.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with David Shumate.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Bob R.

¹⁵² Asbury United Methodist Church and the Metropolitan Community Church, both in Charleston, have since been established and specifically welcome members of the LGBT community.

regularly invited them to their discussion group and later invited them to church services. He even held a service on Sunday afternoons for those not wanting to be seen at the regular service for fear of being outed. For those who could not attend services, such as the callers from rural areas, Lewis sent literature and messages with the hope of encouraging them to live no longer in fear and without hope.¹⁵³ This message quickly spread to people in smaller communities. St. John's influenced a greater migration of homosexuals from other areas of the state to Charleston looking for their piece of religious and cultural acceptance.¹⁵⁴

The church also welcomed and blessed long-term relationships. Indeed, while they are defined by the larger community by their different sexual object-choice, the structure of their relationships and the development of their sexual lives – from experimentation and high sexual activity with multiple partners in youth to the celebration of a life partner in later years – mirrors the typical development and structure of the sexual lives of heterosexuals. Most remembered their days of youth and promiscuity. King, Bob R., and Marchand all found hookups in school, at bars, or at gay social clubs in the 1960s and early 1970s, such as at Marchand's group in the eastern panhandle, which was formed in the 1970s and included over 100 members who hosted dances at a train station in nearby Shepherdstown, pool parties, and dinners at members' homes.¹⁵⁵ Yet, after these stints of high sexual activity, most all of the interviewees described being in long-term relationships that they celebrated and cherished, that mirrored heterosexual relationships and were blessed and encouraged by St. John's and other churches. The stability of these unions proves that these men and women wanted to

¹⁵³ Interviews with Jim Lewis, I and II.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with David Shumate.

¹⁵⁵ Interviews with Scott King, Bob R., Chuck Smith, Victor Marchand.

be in committed, loving relationships just like their heterosexual counterparts. Vic and his partner John have been in a relationship for over 12 years.¹⁵⁶ Jeff Mann is now in a long-term relationship.¹⁵⁷ Bob R. married another man, and they were together for five years.¹⁵⁸ David Shumate and his partner, Andy, have been together for almost 20 years.¹⁵⁹ Jim Lewis married two couples in the 1970s and remembers numerous couples in long-term relationships that were celebrated and oftentimes formed at St. John's.¹⁶⁰ Perhaps as a display of their continued commitment to Appalachian values and their desire to conform, they have adopted a sexual and romantic practice that differentiates them from their heterosexual counterparts only in the sex of their partner, and one of which God approves.

This marked an unprecedented embrace from the church. The condemnation of homosexuality, whether explicit or implicit, went further to legitimate the harassment directed towards the gay men and lesbians. For the gay community of West Virginia, their sexualities – and, essentially, they themselves – were the church's enemy, and the church was their biggest source of rejection. Not only had gay men and lesbians built and strengthened a distinct bar culture of their own. They retaliated from this oppression by joining and solidifying the gay community at St. John's in Charleston. Its message of the divinity of sexual diversity reversed their previous understanding of the church and gave them hope in the place they had least expected it, and in the one that mattered to them and everyone else the most. For the first time, they felt embraced by the institution that had been responsible for condemning them to hell. They were given legitimacy

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Victor Marchand.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Jeff Mann.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Bob R.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with David Shumate.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Jim Lewis, I and II.

before the larger society and before God. Finally, they were able to reconcile their differences in identity by merging them: They found a church – and a niche – that embraced the message that gay men and lesbians could be Christians, and one that was led by a straight man. To most, identifying as a Christian was at the core of an Appalachian identity. Religious life has played one of the most important roles in the lives of all West Virginians, gay or straight, for decades, and it is an understatement to say that the church mattered to everyone. It served as the cultural anchor and guiding force for most every community.¹⁶¹ They, at last, could identify as both homosexuals and Appalachians, maintaining a bar culture while being encouraged to be themselves in a religious setting. While they became committed members, they felt liberated of their previous understanding of homosexuality as a burden and a sin. They were free to be themselves, and their sexuality was justified morally. Rather than being blocked from their own religion and culture, they created space for themselves and challenged a discriminatory God's word with an inclusive one, retaliating by asserting their normalcy and position as residents of this community and participants in the same culture. They used this inner strength to begin battling for their political rights and for broader social acceptance and change with new, unparalleled footing.

VI. Conclusion

What began as a social movement for tolerance and peace and a development of a social scene through the establishment of gay bars developed into an embrace from the church, one a move from gay men and lesbians from within, another a pull from an affirming straight minister. Gay men and lesbians were able to form strong relationships and mediate their two identities by doing just what they were raised to do – form a

¹⁶¹ Jones, Appalachian Values, pp. 39-50.

family, and attend church and worship God. They found their sexualities to be gifts, not curses, and through Reverend Lewis's messages they found internal peace and legitimacy that they could use in larger society for respect and acceptance. While other communities outside the state sought legitimacy through a political movement, gay West Virginians sought legitimacy first through a religious one, which directly spearheaded a self-sustained political emergence. Indeed, the members of St. John's and other churches were largely responsible for the emergence of the political movement in the 1990s and the establishment of gay social and political organizations, like the LGBT religious social group SAGA, the political group Rainbow Pride of West Virginia, and Covenant House, an organization and residence for HIV-positive citizens of Charleston and surrounding areas. They are largely responsible for the openness and acceptance that homosexuals see and feel in Charleston today.¹⁶² The church, above all, provided gay men and lesbians a forum to seek social justice and a place to solidify their own acceptance of themselves. Rather than encourage the oppression of homosexuals, and unlike the gay bars that responded to oppression by creating separate and enclosed social spaces, St. John's preempted this oppression by teaching homosexuals and heterosexuals alike to accept and embrace homosexuals, but also to accept sexuality as God's gift to man. In the face of religious condemnation, gay men and lesbians fought back with religious messages of their own. Finally and for once, they could be both gay and Appalachian. The movement continues in West Virginia – and the family grows – in this light.

Gay men and lesbians lived assertively in these decades by establishing a gay community that imitated the larger, national and more urban one, but also by moving that community forward in its own time and by asserting their normalcy as West Virginians

¹⁶² Interviews with David Shumate, Jim Lewis I & II, Bob R.

who abide by traditional – albeit somewhat redefined – Appalachian values. It was in these decades that they first spread awareness of a gay identity, then on that collective identity, established a distinct Appalachian gay community that existed both as an extension of a national community and as a sexually defined subculture within a geographically defined one. They built and maintained their own church group and bars from nothing, and they did it to form strong communities, eventually find long-term partners, build and maintain their Christian faith, and remain within the mountains of West Virginia. Through their work and strength, they succeeded.

Bibliographical Essay

I was a junior at Yale when I first conceived of this project. By day I tended to my duties as a student and by night I stamped envelopes addressed to my state legislators in West Virginia, the contents of which defended gay men and lesbians from employment and housing discrimination and a constitutional ban on marriage equality. From there, I wondered. How familiar were my recipients with these issues? Had they ever met openly gay people? Perhaps they had read literature on gay life in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles or San Francisco; certainly some were afraid that by passing protective orders for gay people they would be harboring the dreaded “gay lifestyle” in their own backyards. Where could I find a source that – in the rhetoric of the “us-them” isolationist Appalachian culture that influenced their decisions – swung gay people from “them” to “us” by proving that gay West Virginians had historically been some of the good old country boys and girls, their neighbors, whether they liked it or not?

I found almost nothing. I needed a source that documented the intricacies of gay life in Appalachia, with the assumption that such life existed. The source, no matter what it found or argued, would in itself prove that gay people have historically been a part of West Virginia’s cultural landscape, and that – as “real” West Virginians – they needed respect and support.

My project materialized after the first week of George Chauncey’s United States Lesbian and Gay History lecture in the fall of my senior year. I had excitedly surveyed the wealth of sources on the syllabus but disappointedly accepted the absence of material on rural gay life. I met with Professor Chauncey, my advisor, who recommended I read John Howard’s Men Like That; at last, I was given – besides inspiration – an example of

the gay landscape in rural America, and one that focused on the intricacies of queer life in Mississippi. Professor Chauncey encouraged me to test the waters in West Virginia and see what I could find. Nervous but hopeful, I approached with caution. Pandora's box sat before me and I didn't know how to open it.

Months of intellectual, logistical, and emotional intensity ensued. One by one I found the people I needed for the project and who were willing to participate. It was riveting. I laughed at their explicit tales of sexual exploits in disco bars. I cried – as evidenced in my recorded interviews – as I listened to the names they were called, the stories of their suicidal friends, to them recounting abductions and beatings, sure they would die. I remain shocked at some of my findings. Who knew that a gay sports car club existed in West Virginia in the 1950s, that gay people held tremendous but secret political power in some of the state's small coal towns, or that a church spearheaded a local movement for the social acceptance of sexuality and of gay men and lesbians in the 1970s? I reinforced at least a few stereotypes, if not about gay people, then about West Virginians. For example, it is practically a fact that everyone knows each other. I proved much of what I suspected I would, such as that most gay people were socially and politically marginalized from their communities and formed their own self-sustainable spaces and organizations. I was surprised by other findings, such as the acceptance of homosexuality among certain all-male social environments in mountain towns. Many of these findings overlap with or reinforce arguments already made about gay life in other parts of the United States, yet some were new. Professor Chauncey helped me find these similarities and differences. Most important and unique was the significance the church played in the lives of gay men and lesbians in this region, which I imagine

would be the case in other rural areas yet to be studied. I think about all of the avenues I could have taken in this paper, about focusing more on gender display and identity, or on illicit sex. Yet I chose to focus primarily on community formation because I think that it best proves how gay men and lesbians formed and felt about themselves and this community they were in. Perhaps another project sometime in the near future will reach more widely.

No doubt, these sources are flawed. Most of the interviewees are men, all are white, almost all are college-educated, and as I said earlier, all of them know each other. But it's a start. I got the most help from John Howard's Men Like That, but also plenty of assistance from George Chauncey's Gay New York for comparative purposes. Jeff Mann's Loving Mountains, Loving Men enhanced my own findings with literature that focuses on the topic of homosexuality in Appalachia. I am most grateful for the people who have helped support me and challenge my arguments along the way. First, the project was supported by a Bruce L. Cohen Fund Research Grant, with which I purchased a trusty recorder and traveled to Washington, DC, and Charleston, West Virginia, for research. Mary Caldera at Manuscripts and Archives at Sterling Memorial Library, Kelly Barrick at the Social Science Library, and Tim Young at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscripts Library were particularly helpful in guiding me through the databases and materials Yale has to offer. Carol Burch-Brown and her own project on the Shamrock Bar provided me with a springboard into the lives of another set of men and women whose stories I used. Stephen Skinner, president of Fairness West Virginia, is to thank for setting me up with my first few contacts. I thank Jim Lewis for all he has done for this project and for his involvement in this history. My dad and aunts fed and housed me,

and comforted me through the storms. Professor Chauncey opened the door of gay history for me, for which I will forever be grateful. And, of course, my interviewees gave me the evidence with which to write, and this project would have been impossible without their participation.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

As an oral history project, most of this essay's evidence comes from the accounts of men and women whom I interviewed. Most of the conversations were recorded, and copies of the interviews will be donated to the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscripts Library at Yale University. All of these interviews were conducted by phone while I was in New Haven, Connecticut. I have listed the locations of the interviewees as they were interviewed by phone. In addition, many of these interviews were conducted by Carol Burch-Brown, a professor in the School of Visual Arts at Virginia Tech. Her documentary, "It's Reigning Queens in Appalachia," completed in 2003, recounts the history of a gay bar in Bluefield, West Virginia, from its founding in 1964 to its closing in 2001. Recorded copies and transcripts of her interviews, as well as photographs of the bar and its patrons, are held at the Archives Center of the National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. The interviews she conducted – and the corresponding transcript numbers – will be listed under her project, and my own interviews will be listed below hers. In addition, relevant newspaper articles – which I found in the Newspapers on Microfilm Collection at the West Virginia State Archives in Charleston, West Virginia – are listed below the interviews.

Burch-Brown, Carol. "The Shamrock Bar: Photographs and Interviews by Carol Burch-Brown, 1997-2003." Archives Center, National Museum of American History. Gift of the artist. Box 857.

Transcript 01A: Eva, Helen, David, Pam, Kathy, Sprout, Cindy, Charlene, Ann Kilkelly. Bluefield, West Virginia, Saturday morning, winter 1998.

Transcript 02, Edited Selections: Helen Compton, Bill, Eva, Kathy, Pam, Ann Kilkelly. Bluefield, West Virginia, 1998.

Transcript 06B: Bill, Helen, Eva, Kathy, Pam, Ann Kilkelly. Princeton, West Virginia, Saturday before Christmas, 1998.

Transcript 10B: Delbert. Near the Virginia border, July 7, 1999.

Transcript 12A (v.2): Helen Compton, Bill. Bluefield, West Virginia, July 7, 1999.

Transcript 15AB: Larry Akers. Bluefield, West Virginia, July 8, 1999.

Transcript 18 AB: Helen Compton, Eva. Bluefield, West Virginia, no date.

Transcript 23A: Kathy. Blacksburg, Virginia, April 13, 2002.

Burch-Brown, Carol, in Blacksburg, Virginia, January 17, 2010.

King, Scott, in Charleston, West Virginia, March 12, 2010.

Lewis, Jim, in Charleston, West Virginia. I: December 8, 2009. II: March 10, 2010.

Mann, Jeff, in Blacksburg, Virginia, October 6, 2009.

Marchand, Victor, in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, October 5, 2009.

R., Bob, in Charleston, West Virginia, March 11, 2010.

Shumate, David, in Charleston, West Virginia, November 16, 2009.

Smith, Chuck, in Charleston, West Virginia, October 7, 2009.

“Anita’s New Crusade” (1978, January 23). Associated Press. *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 9A. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

“Baptists Shocked: Concern Over Sex Change Operations” (1977, September 21). Associated Press. *Charleston Daily Mail*. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

Buchanan, Patrick. “Fundamentalists: 2, Gays: 0” (1978, May 3). *Charleston Daily Mail*. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

“Gay Mood At Gay Bar” (1978, May 10). Associated Press. *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 8B. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

“Gay Rights Fight: Voter Support Sought in St. Paul” (1978, April 19). Associated Press. *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 2A. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

“Gay Rights Ordinance Repealed By 5-To-1 Margin In Wichita” (1978, May 10). Associated Press. *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 8B. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

“Homosexual Suing Army” (1978, January 18). Associated Press. *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 9D. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

“Homosexuality Issue Termed Distracting” (1978, January 19). Associated Press. *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 12A. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

“I’m Not Afraid’: Anita Claims Gay Harassment” (1977, November 2). Associated Press. *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 4B. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

“Not Disabled: Transsexual Teacher Takes Pension Anyway” (1978, February 18). Associated Press. *Charleston Daily Mail*. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

“N.Y. Protects Gay Rights” (1978, January 24). Associated Press. *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 2A. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

“‘Please Stay,’ Gays Urged After Setback” (1978, April 26). *Charleston Daily Mail*.

- Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.
- “Too Much Anita, Gays” (1978, April 25). *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 6A. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.
- Van Buren, Abigail. “Homosexual Still His Son” (1977, September 22). Dear Abby. *Charleston Daily Mail*, p. 12A. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.
- “Vigilantes’ Police Perverts By Chopping Down Trees” (1969, July 1). Associated Press. *Charleston Daily Mail*. Found in Newspapers on Microfilm Collection, West Virginia State Archives, Charleston, West Virginia.

Secondary Sources

- “1970 Census of Population West Virginia.” United States Census Bureau. Accessed 01 April 2010.
<<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/00496492v1p50ch2.pdf>>
- Agee, Christopher. “Gayola: Police Professionalization and the Politics of San Francisco’s Gay Bars, 1950-1968.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15:3 (2006): 462-489. University of Texas Press. JSTOR. Accessed 28 February 2010. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4629672>>
- Black, Kate, and Marc Rohrer. “Out in the Mountains: Exploring Lesbian and Gay Lives.” *Out in the South*. Ed. C. Dews and C. Law. Temple University Press: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2001. 16-25.
- Blee, Kathleen. Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s. University of California Press: Los Angeles, California, 1991.
- Chauncey, George. Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940. Basic Books: New York, New York, 1994.
- Chauncey, George. “The Trouble with Shame.” Gay Shame. Ed. David Halperin and Valerie Traub. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, Illinois, 2009.
- Cohen, Cathy. “Contested Membership: Black Gay Identities and the Politics of AIDS.” Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader. Ed. Robert Corber and Stephen Valocchi. Blackwell Publishing: Malden, Massachusetts, 2003. 46-60.

- Clendinen, Dudley and Adam Nagourney. Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America. Touchstone: New York, New York, 1999.
- D'Emilio, John. "Gay Politics and Community in San Francisco Since World War II." Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past. Ed. Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. New American Library: New York, New York, 1989. 456-473.
- D'Emilio, John. Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, Illinois, 1983.
- Duberman, Martin, and Andrew Kopkind. "The Night They Raided Stonewall." *Grand Street* 44 (1993): 120-147. Jean Stein. JSTOR. Accessed 31 March 2010. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25007620>>
- Erzen, Tanya. Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement. University of California Press: Los Angeles, California, 2006.
- Howard, John. Men Like That: A Southern Queer History. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, Illinois, 1999.
- Howard, John. "The Library, the Park, and the Pervert: Public Space and Homosexual Encounter in Post-World War II Atlanta." Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South. Ed. John Howard. New York University Press: New York, New York, 1997. 107-131.
- Johnson, David K. The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, Illinois, 2004.
- Jones, Loyal. Appalachian Values. The Jesse Stuart Foundation: Ashland, Kentucky, 1994.
- Kissack, Terence. "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York's Gay Liberation Front, 1969-1971." *Radical History Review* 62 (Spring 1995): 104-135.
- Mann, Jeff. Loving Mountains, Loving Men. Ohio University Press: Athens, Ohio, 2005.

Mann, Jeff. "Stonewall and Matewan: Some Thoughts on Gay Life in Appalachia."
Journal of Appalachian Studies 5, 2 (Fall 1999): 207-214.

Stein, Marc. "'Birthplace of the Nation': Imagining Lesbian and Gay Communities in Philadelphia, 1969-1970." Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories. Ed. Brett Beemyn. Routledge: New York, New York, 1997.

Wat, Eric. The Making of a Gay Asian Community: An Oral History of Pre-AIDS Los Angeles. Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham, Maryland, 2002.

"West Virginia – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1790 to 1990." United States Census Bureau. Accessed 01 April 2010.
<<http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0056/tab63.pdf>>