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**DIFFERENT DAUGHTERS:
THE DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS AND
THE ROOTS OF LESBIAN AND WOMEN'S LIBERATION,
1955 – 1970**

by

MARCIA M. GALLO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2004

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

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Marcia M. Gallo

Advisor: Distinguished Professor Martin Duberman, Lehman College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York

Founded in San Francisco in 1955, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) was the first national women's organization in the U.S. to directly address issues of gender and homosexuality. The organization and its leaders helped develop one of the 20th century's most significant movements for social change: the gay and lesbian civil rights movement. They also helped to broaden the definition of social justice to include sexuality.

Through its leadership in the predominantly male homophile ("love of same") movement of the 1950s and 1960s, its publication *The Ladder*, and its network of local chapters, DOB played a crucial role in creating lesbian identity, visibility, institutions and political strategies from 1955 to 1970. Established within a Cold War context, the Daughters were always a small part of an "advance guard" -- a tiny network of women and men who in the post-World War II period began to publicly question their lack of basic civil rights because of their choice of sexual and romantic partners. Due in large part to their foundational efforts, later movements for gender and sexual equality, such as the women's and lesbian liberation movements, could grow and flourish in the 1970s and beyond.

Acknowledgements

My greatest thanks go to the women of the Daughters of Bilitis, for their courage then and now, their cantankerousness, and their candor. From my long-time civil liberties colleagues Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon to my newer friends Stella Rush, Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen, it has been a privilege to work with you. To all of the former Daughters with whom I talked over the last couple of years, thank you again. So many of you opened your homes, your files, and your hearts to me, and shared your stories; I hope I've done them justice.

Graduate school at age 45 is a hard choice to make and an even harder career path to follow. I have been blessed to be part of the Ph.D. program in History at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York since 1995, where I found superlative professors, supportive students, and helpful staff. I also found friends and associates who have greatly enriched my life.

My advisor Martin Duberman took me to lunch the week before I started the program and he is one of the reasons I continued in it when things got tough. In addition to his wealth of knowledge and political passion, Marty's friendship and guidance, as well as his support and confidence in me, are a large part of why I'm able to write Acknowledgements to a completed dissertation. I'm very grateful for all he's done and treasure all of who he is. Much more than a mentor, Marty has become family.

I owe many thanks to the other members of my Dissertation Committee as well. Bonnie Anderson has also become a friend in many ways over the last six years. She is an excellent teacher, a terrific editor, and a supportive colleague. I appreciate her generous spirit and sense of humor, and the fact that she simply makes learning fun.

One of the first classes I took at the Grad Center was taught by Blanche Wiesen Cook and Gerry Markowitz; I not only learned a lot about the historical suppression of political speech in the U.S. but was challenged and impressed by the way they, especially Cook, would engage the class in respectful but sometimes raucous political debate. I thank her for being unfailingly positive about this project, even when I wasn't, and for being part of my "gang."

Josh Freeman has been hearing about "DOB" for many years, in a number of classes, corrected many drafts of many papers, and helped me think through social change organizing models and tactics. I am delighted that he has continued to find time to help me "finish!" despite all that's now on his schedule.

In the last five years, I have also had the great good fortune of working with Alisa Solomon when she directed the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at CUNY, founded by Martin Duberman in 1991. Serving on the board of directors with her was mostly a lot of fun and always rewarding.

Luckily for me, I made three good friends in my first semester of grad school – Kelly Anderson, Harry Lirtzman, and Christolyn Williams. We all worked on the first lesbian and gay history conference held at a major institution, "Defining the Field," sponsored by CUNY in the fall of 1995, and had a great time getting to know gay history and one another. Each of them not only made the grad school experience more bearable but have become valued colleagues and dear friends. To Kelly Anderson, again, I say a special "thank you" for incredible generosity; early on, she graciously agreed that I pursue the Daughters of Bilitis as a dissertation topic despite her own knowledge and previous work on the organization's history.

Further, former History Department Executive Officer David Nasaw was always personally and professionally supportive of me. I thank him for his unwavering belief in my abilities and his encouragement to continue when I felt most overwhelmed. Early on in my grad school experience, Professor Barbara Welter encouraged me to think about material culture, family, and women's daily lives; toward the end, Professors Phillip Cannistraro and Thomas Kessner taught two very helpful dissertation seminars. I thank them all for helping me shape the story I wanted to tell and relieve them of responsibility for any errors herein. They tried their best. And Department Secretary Betty Einerman has been a godsend, helping me (and countless numbers of befuddled historians-in-training) through the thicket of deadlines and forms, rules and regulations. Because of all of them, my experience of graduate school was more like joining a guild than navigating a huge impersonal public institution in the midst of New York City.

I also want to thank Sandi Cooper, Clare Coss, Eli Zal, Diane Bernard and Joan Heller, and Joan E. Biren (JEB) for their helpful comments on dissertation drafts and their enthusiasm for this project. Pioneering gay historians Allan Berube, John D'Emilio, and Jonathan Ned Katz, as well as activist and author Amber Hollibaugh, have been supportive and helpful over the years as well.

As a researcher of lesbian lives, it has been at community archives that I have found the most helpful material, as well as "homes away from home," during the last decade. Paula Jabloner, William Walker, Kim Klausner, Daniel Bao, and Martin Meeker at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society in San Francisco all have been very helpful and encouraging over the years I've popped in for "visits." Deb Edel, Saskia, and all of the volunteers at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn have been

wonderfully supportive and accommodating to my weird schedules. It was great to work with Karen Sendziak at the Gerber/Hart Library in Chicago and with the women at the June Mazer Collection in West Hollywood. Steve Capsuto “hooked me up” with audiotapes of an important *Ladder* interview at the William Way GLBT Center in Philadelphia. They all do the vital, unglamorous work of preserving the everyday lives and untold stories of sexually nonconforming women and men, in communities around the country, who would otherwise remain unknown and invisible.

My bicoastal orientation the last decade means that there are a number of extended family members to thank, east and west. On this side, my Maggitti clan in Wilmington, Delaware -- from Mom and “the brothers and the sisters,” (Ed, Rose, Mike, and Shelley) to Matthew and The Twins (Mark and Melissa) -- have helped me “get back home” when necessary, to relax and remember. I wish that Dad could celebrate this achievement with me; I know he’s very proud. Dear Mary Klein still is very dear, after all these decades; I treasure our Beatles memories and Pisces birthday celebrations. Tara, Gary, and The Mighty Nate Guggolz have brought me much joy, and the Jones sisters – Adrian and Anita -- have kept me laughing. John Cammett shared Italian mementos and stories. “Back east” girlfriends Deborah Cox, Luna D’alva and Gerry Gomez Pearlberg have let me talk about the Daughters and the ‘50s ad nauseum. Thank you, all.

And out west, a big chunk of my heart still lives in San Francisco; working on this project has taken me there often in the last nine years. I owe many thanks to my SF family, especially Mila de Guzman and Leni Marin, Dorothy Ehrlich and Gary Sowards, Elaine Elinson and Rene Cruz, Lynn Fonfa and Blue Walcer, Dick and Dorothy Grosboll,

Donna Hitchens and Nancy Davis, Sandy Holmes, Happy Hyder, Terry Kay and Daisy Santos, Esta Soler and Chris Cleary.

And the last shall be first. About midway through “the DOB project” that has consumed almost all my free time since 1995, I fell madly in love with a handsome, talented, opinionated, sensual and sweet Legal Aid lawyer who has become my best friend as well as my partner. She – and the 17-year-old Brooklyn Butterfly who lights up our home – have put up with a lot of my *agita* with humor, grace, space, home-cooked meals and take-out Chinese. Thank you, Anni and Mena Cammett. I love you both very much.

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DOB Second Annual Picnic, Tilden Park, Berkeley CA, 1956

The Ladder – The First Issue, October, 1956. Front Cover and Back Cover

The Ladder – October, 1957, Front Cover

Mattachine Review – May, 1961, with Valerie Taylor

The Ladder – August, 1968, Front Cover

The Ladder – August/September, 1969, featuring DOB President Rita Laporte

The Ladder – June, 1966, Front Cover: Ernestine Eckstein was the first African-American woman to be featured on the cover of a national gay publication

The Ladder – June, 1966. Eckstein is pictured wearing sunglasses and picketing the White House, Washington, DC, 1965

Lesbian Tide – May-June, 1973, Front Cover

San Francisco demonstration (late 1970s). Del Martin is pictured with Nina Kaiser, DOB SF’s last president

All photographs are from the author’s personal collection.

The Ladder covers are reprinted by permission of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon.

Lesbian Tide cover is reprinted by permission of Beth Elliott.

Introduction:

“We were fighting the church, the couch, and the courts.”¹

What is a social movement? What is a women’s movement?
 ...Movements are not themselves actors; movements are
 something that people create to press for social change. They
 are spaces that are made by people to allow relationships
 between them that can challenge power.²

Benita Roth

Even though starting the group was Rose Bamberger’s idea, it was Noni Frey who suggested the name. She was inspired by *Songs of Bilitis*: erotic verses included in a collection by the 19th century French poet Pierre Louys. Louys had “translated” poems purportedly written by Bilitis, a mythical female contemporary and lover of the legendary Greek teacher and poet Sappho.³

¹ Del Martin, interview with author, June 1997. She is referring to the triad of institutions – religious, medical (especially psychiatric), and legal – that DOB and the other homophile groups saw as central to the persecution of lesbians and gay men in the 1950s and 1960s.

² Benita Roth, “What Are Social Movements and What Is Gendered About Women's Participation in Social Movements? A Sociological Perspective,” at Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Bender, co-directors, Women and Social Movements website: <http://womhist.binghamton.edu>

³ Pierre Louys, *The Collected Works of Pierre Louys*, was republished in paperback in 1955. (New York: Avon Publications, Inc., 1955).

“Del and I went to the library to look up ‘Bilitis,’” Phyllis Lyon remembers, “and of course found nothing. Noni said it would be a great name – no one would know.”⁴ As Sappho was one of the few historical references to lesbianism available in the 1950s, and the reference to Bilitis was even further removed from mainstream awareness, the group’s name, “Daughters of Bilitis” (DOB), shielded it from the general public while signaling that it was a gay group to those few women who were “in the know.”

Poet and writer Elsa Gidlow was one of them. She wrote in her 1991 autobiography that in the ‘60s “a rumor reached me of an organization surprisingly named The Daughters of Bilitis. Surprisingly, because it signaled the possibility of its being lesbian-identified. The name was drawn from a book by Pierre Louys, *Les Chansons de Bilitis*...I had an affection for the work dating from my earliest awareness of being lesbian. I sought out the group hoping there might actually exist a community of women whose primary energies were not serving men, but love and loyalty to themselves and one another.”⁵ In addition to joining the San Francisco chapter, Gidlow contributed her writing to DOB’s magazine *The Ladder* in the mid-1960s. She is one of the many women who hoped to find a community of lesbians giving “love and loyalty to themselves and one another” in DOB.

A generation later, the need for lesbian community was still strong. As a 27-year-old newcomer to San Francisco and its lesbian subcultures in 1978, I whirled through a frenetic period of love and sexual discovery driven by disco music, dyke bars, and psychedelic concoctions. I also went to work as a secretary for the

⁴ Phyllis Lyon, interview with author, San Francisco CA, June 4, 2003.

⁵ Elsa Gidlow, *Elsa: I Come With My Songs* (San Francisco: Booklegger Press, 1991), 35.

American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California and volunteered for the campaign against the anti-gay Briggs Initiative, co-chaired locally by Phyllis Lyon.

Authors of the 1974 book *Lesbian/Woman*, Lyon and her partner Del Martin were icons by 1978: older, established, important people with positions of leadership on the San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women and the Human Rights Commission. Martin had also written the groundbreaking book *Battered Wives* in 1976, one of the first works on domestic violence. They were both very involved in San Francisco's feminist and gay communities.⁶ Early in November, we enjoyed a heady victory at the polls when California voters decisively rejected the statewide Proposition 6 (known as the Briggs Initiative). Prop. 6 would have banned gay topics and teachers from California's public schools, but aggressive organizing among lesbian and gay communities up and down the state, as well as strong alliances with teachers at all levels and most liberal politicians and democratic clubs, kept Briggs and his right-wing backers from victory.⁷

⁶ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman* (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1972; New York: Bantam Books, 1983; Volcano CA: Volcano Press, 1991); Del Martin, *Battered Wives* (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1976; Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, 1981).

⁷ State Senator John Briggs drafted and circulated the measure bearing his name that appeared on California's November, 1978 ballot. In addition to helping promote his candidacy for Governor, the Briggs Initiative was part of the late 1970s' campaigns of anti-gay reaction. Fueled by and aiding the fundamentalist surge in right-wing organizing that produced the presidencies of Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and now George W. Bush, local campaigns (like Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" in Florida in 1977) mobilized religious and political reactionaries to stop the passage of modest civil rights legislation for lesbians and gay men. California's rejection of the initiative was one of the few victories during this period; cities like St. Paul, Minnesota; Wichita, Kansas; Eugene, Oregon; Dade County, Florida all saw successful repeals of gay rights measures. See *Daughters of Bilitis Newsletter*, San Francisco Chapter/May 1978, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon Papers, 1954-2000, 93-13, The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco CA; Paul Van De Carr, "Death of Dreams -- Harvey Milk & Jonestown: 25 Years Later," *The Advocate*, November 25, 2003, 34-36.

Our jubilation was cut short by the discovery a few weeks later of the mass suicide of People's Temple members in Jonestown, Guyana – many of Jim Jones' followers were San Franciscans.⁸ Then, within days, came the news that San Francisco Supervisor Dan White had murdered Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk at City Hall. We soon moved from stunned shock to fury. Local gay leaders quickly surfaced to organize protests. They included strong, articulate lesbians – from black activists Pat Norman and Gwenn Craig to white educators like Sally Gearhart. Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin were also very visible, and it was during this terrible time that their leadership first made an impression on me.

Lyon and Martin's messages to the gay and lesbian community were of restraint and moderation during the chaos of reaction to Milk and Moscone's murders. Like many others, I was torn: my heart screamed in sorrow and sought revenge, but my head argued for coolness and control. Lyon and Martin appealed to my head. But it was their organizing in support of Milk's lesbian aide, Anne Kronenberg, that really caught my attention. Within days after the double murders, they led a contingent of women in an unsuccessful lobbying campaign with then-Acting Mayor Dianne Feinstein to name Kronenberg to replace Milk on the Board of Supervisors, which would have made her the first openly lesbian Supervisor in San Francisco. Supposedly uncomfortable with Kronenberg's youth – she was 23 -- and relative inexperience, Feinstein named Rev. Harry Britt to the position instead.⁹ I delighted in Lyon and Martin's strong support of

⁸ Paul Van De Carr, "Death of Dreams: Harvey Milk & Jonestown: 25 Years Later," *The Advocate* (November 25, 2003): 32-36.

⁹ Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 176. Stories circulated among lesbians at the time that it was actually Kronenberg's penchant

the young, dashing Kronenberg, who was a brash new-breed lesbian as unlike them in appearance and style as possible. What mattered to them was that she was a feminist.

A few years later, in the mid-1980s, I had the chance to work with Lyon and Martin when I staffed the Bay Area Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force (BAFACT) as part of my field organizing work for the ACLU. We were creating BAFACT as a response to the political alignment of some feminists with right-wing politicians to ban pornography by equating it with violence against women.¹⁰ Lyon and Martin were among the initial organizers of the group.

“Hello Marcie? This is Del Martin.” The low, no-nonsense voice on the phone instantly made my heart pound. “I need you to get me an analysis of all the bills in Sacramento dealing with censorship – by the end of the week.” I gulped and lied, “Uh, okay, sure. No problem.” It was Wednesday. I was already swamped. But I couldn’t

for wearing black leather and riding her motorcycle to City Hall, girlfriends perched on the back, that were the real reasons for Feinstein’s reluctance to promote her. That made her even more of a hero for some of us.

¹⁰ In 1983 feminist author Andrea Dworkin and legal scholar Catherine MacKinnon drafted a model local ordinance aimed at giving women the right to take producers, distributors, sellers and/or exhibitors of pornography to court. The ordinances were adopted in Indianapolis, Cambridge, and Cincinnati, among other cities, and inspired similar legislation at the state level throughout the country, including California. The Dworkin/MacKinnon approach differed from other attempts to suppress pornography in that they focused on sex discrimination and equated pornography with the cultural and legal subordination of women. “Pro-sex” and anti-censorship women in New York organized the Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force in 1984 to fight the ordinances, and some local groups were also established. The FACT feminists argued that censorship harmed women’s sexual and political expression. After a two-year court battle, the U.S. Supreme Court declared the Dworkin-Mackinnon anti-pornography ordinance an unconstitutional violation of the First Amendment. For a good summary of the history of American “porn wars,” see Joanne Meyerowitz, “Women, Cheesecake, and Borderline Material: Responses to Girlie Pictures in the Mid-Twentieth Century U.S.,” *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1996.

say no – it was *Del Martin* calling. I begged help from my friend and coworker Donna Hitchens.¹¹ Because she knew Lyon and Martin well, she didn't hesitate. We got them the requested summaries of over a dozen bills; they brought the issue to their political networks. And, along with activists from other women's and civil rights organizations, we were able to defeat the various pro-censorship bills in Sacramento that year.

In 1990, Lyon and Martin received the ACLU of Northern California's highest award, for courageous advocacy on behalf of civil liberties. The night of the awards ceremony, they talked about their life-long membership in the ACLU, their essential commitment to the protection and expansion of constitutional rights for all people. Never ones to forget early friends in the gay rights struggle, they remembered the work undertaken by the ACLU-NC's first director, Ernest Besig, with the Daughters of Bilitis thirty-five years earlier. I began to learn more about them and the DOB, and realized that there was very little information readily available about the historic group they helped create in 1955.

Lyon has often described meeting Martin at work in 1950 in Seattle – “she was the first woman I'd ever seen carrying a briefcase!” -- and starting a relationship with her. They'd decided to move home to San Francisco in 1953 and begin their life together there, close to family and old friends.¹² Over the next two years, they were able to settle

¹¹ Donna Hitchens is the Presiding Judge of the San Francisco Superior Court. She founded the nation's first legal group for lesbians, the Lesbian Rights Project, in 1977; today, renamed the National Center for Lesbian Rights, it is one of the largest advocates for lesbians, gay men, and transgendered people fighting for basic employment and family rights. Hitchens was also DOB's lawyer in the 1970s.

¹² The story of Lyon and Martin's beginnings as a couple has been told and retold for at least twenty-five years, primarily in gay and feminist circles. This year, however, after their historic marriage in San Francisco's City Hall on February 12, 2004, they have

in to their new existence in the City but they had not befriended many lesbians. “We were too shy to approach women at the bars,” Lyon remembered. When a new friend invited them over to talk about creating a secret social club, they jumped at the chance.¹³

Out of their discussions grew the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), the first national lesbian organization in the U.S. Lyon and Martin are known for being indefatigable organizers and savvy political activists. Yet when I have asked them why they started a lesbian group at a time when calling attention to one’s homosexuality could mean loss of employment, family, and home, they insist that they had no grand schemes in mind. “We just wanted to have fun.”¹⁴

After working for nearly ten years to learn about the Daughters of Bilitis, I now understand their meaning: the one thing that DOB members and leaders agree on today is

received extensive press coverage. Their story has been widely reprinted in hundreds of U.S. newspapers alone, ranging from the *New York Times* (Feb. 13, 2004, A-24) to the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* (Feb. 13, 2004, 1A/3A); follow-up features included a two-page story in the *Washington Post* (Feb. 29, 2004, A-1/A-14) and three columns in the Wilmington, Delaware *News Journal* (March 8, 2004, E-2), to cite just a few clippings sent to me by friends. However, other than their own book, *Lesbian/Woman* (Volcano, CA: Volcano Press, updated 1991), there is only one work that fully documents their lives at this point, the full-length film *No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon* (2003) written, directed and produced by Joan E. Biren (JEB), Moonforce Media, Silver Springs, MD and co-produced by Dee Mosbacher, Woman Vision, San Francisco, CA. For other recent books that include substantial information about Lyon and Martin, see Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Vern Bullough, ed., *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context* (New York: Haworth Press, 2002); Paul Cain, *Leading the Parade: Conversations with America’s Most Influential Lesbians and Gay Men* (Lanham MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002); David Mixner and Dennis Bailey, *Brave Journeys: Profiles in Gay and Lesbian Courage* (New York: Bantam Books, 2000).

¹³ Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 221.

¹⁴ Phyllis Lyon, interview with author, April 25, 1997.

the centrality of socializing to the organization. Whether they believed in social services or social change as the essence of the group, whether they were educators or organizers, athletes or intellectuals, former Daughters describe DOB first and foremost as a meeting-place where lesbians could congregate and connect. They got women together by planning parties, picnics, discussion groups and conferences – even trips to petting zoos! – all of them non-threatening ways to reach out to any interested woman who might want to join.

In fact, in addition to our mutual regard for one another's commitment to social justice activism, I recognize that it is a shared love of laughter, camaraderie, good times, and a connection to a community of lesbians who were, in Elsa Gidlow's words, "giving love and loyalty to themselves and one another" that has motivated them to work with me on this project. There have been many interviews and conversations among us – formal and informal, in person and in writing, serious and hilarious, agreeable or contentious – over the last seven years. In addition, Lyon and Martin have urged me to contact as many other DOB activists as I could. "It wasn't just us," Lyon would say repeatedly. "You need to get as many perspectives as you can." She provided names, addresses, and telephone numbers for approximately 50 former Daughters. Lyon and Martin also co-signed an introductory cover letter that accompanied my request for interviews.¹⁵ They helped me gain unlimited access to their records at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Historical Society in San Francisco, and made sure I knew the women in

¹⁵ For a list of interviews conducted, see Appendix A.

New York who were videotaping former DOB activists as part of a special project of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn.¹⁶

They also introduced me to Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin Lahusen, two gay women who are widely regarded as key leaders of the East Coast homophile and gay rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Gittings founded DOB's New York chapter, edited *The Ladder*, then went on to devote her considerable energies to helping gay men and lesbians who were caught in the U.S. government's snare of anti-gay policies. She worked to change the definitions of homosexuality as illness promulgated by the leading psychological and psychiatric associations, and she found community and common cause with gay librarians. Her life partner, Kay Tobin Lahusen, is one of the gay rights movement's first photographers, and she chronicled the movement's evolution, especially its use of direct action tactics, throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Among her best-known photographs are those showing small groups of well-dressed men and women holding large hand-lettered signs that publicly proclaimed sexual orientation as a civil rights issue. Lahusen's prints of the first gay pickets at the White House and Independence Hall, among other sites, visually preserve the moments when activists inserted sexuality into the social change environment of the mid-1960s.¹⁷

¹⁶ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon Papers, 1954-2000, 93-13, The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco CA; Daughters of Bilitis Video Project, Manuela Soares, Sara Yaeger, Kelly Anderson and Trista Sordillo, 1987-1989; Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn NY.

¹⁷ There are numerous interviews (on tape and in print), articles and books that refer to Gittings's experiences in and contributions to the homophile, gay rights, and gay liberation movements, starting with one that Lahusen, as Kay Tobin, wrote. She and Randy Wicker edited *The Gay Crusaders* in 1972 (New York: Paperback Library) and included one of the first published profiles of Gittings, as well as Lyon, Martin and other early gay activists. Also included in the book are many of Lahusen's photographs of

In May, 1996, I was included in an uproarious dinner with Lyon, Martin, Gittings, and Lahusen in Gittings' (and my) hometown of Wilmington, Delaware. It was one of the few times that the former Daughters had gotten together in a decade and, accompanied by a good meal and a great deal of wine, they told stories and swapped memories. Since then, and especially over the last two years, Gittings and Lahusen have opened their home and office and shared their recollections, mountains of gay movement materials, personal correspondence, and photographs with me. Their generosity has enriched my research and added greatly to my understanding of the evolution of the homophile movement.

Further, because Lyon and Martin vouched for me initially, another Daughter, Stella Rush, has spent numerous hours in conversation with me from her home in southern California, reviewing her nearly twenty years of experience in the homophile and gay liberation movements. She has shared many anecdotes, details, and stories about Los Angeles in the 1950s and 1960s, helping to bring California's "southland" of the post-World War II period alive for me. As "Sten Russell," Rush was an early and articulate writer, for both DOB's newsletter *The Ladder* and for *ONE Magazine*. It is due

homophile activists and organizing efforts, such as the gay picketing actions. Recently, Lahusen updated her profile of Gittings for *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*, edited by Vern L. Bullough.

For other accounts, see Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History* (New York: Crowell Company, 1976); John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); and Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994). Paul Cain wrote about Gittings and Lahusen in *Leading the Parade: Conversations with America's Most Influential Lesbians and Gay Men* (prev. cit.) and Andrea Weiss, Greta Schiller and Robert Rosenberg's documentary film *Before Stonewall: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community* (The Cinema Guild, 1986) includes interviews with Gittings and uses Lahusen's photographs.

to her careful recordkeeping that we have reports on the talks and speeches (and the audience reactions they engendered) at the first public gatherings of homophile activists. Rush also helped organize one of DOB's first chapters, in Los Angeles, with her life-partner Helen "Sandy" Sandoz. In our talks, Rush made sure to include as many stories of Sandoz's experiences as possible. Ranging from the early days of gay rights organizing to current political issues to Rush's lifelong search for spiritual as well as intellectual and emotional connection, we have covered many topics over the last two years. Rush has a sharp wit and a terrific sense of history. Knowing her has deepened my appreciation of the women who joined the Daughters of Bilitis during a time when being a lesbian activist was a contradiction in terms.¹⁸

In the following chapters, I will explore the creation of the Daughters of Bilitis in 1955; the evolution of its newsletter *The Ladder* from in-house organ to nationally-recognized lesbian magazine; the development of the first national network of lesbian activists; the research projects DOB members created and facilitated from 1958 until 1970; the coalition efforts they engaged in; and their deliberations over the best ways to achieve the integration of lesbians into society. DOB members debated direct action tactics and research strategies, disagreed on the relevance of feminism to gay women, and engaged in regular discussions, in print and in person, about sex roles, gender conformity,

¹⁸ Both Rush and Sandoz are profiled in Vern Bullough, ed., *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*. See Judith M. Saunders, "Stella Rush a.k.a. Sten Russell (1925-), 135-144; Stella Rush, "Helen Sandoz a.k.a. Helen Sanders a.k.a. Ben Cat, (1927-1987)," 145-147. They were part of the DOB Video Project: DV-20, taped May 15, 1987, Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn NY. John D'Emilio also included them in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*.

gay marriage, and raising children, to name but a few of the still-relevant issues they took on nearly fifty years ago.¹⁹

Using their stated goals – as delineated in the organization’s Statement of Purpose and printed in almost every issue of *The Ladder* until 1970 -- we can assess their efforts to use education, research, and lobbying to influence personal attitudes, institutional policies and social practices regarding homosexuality in the 1950s, 1960s and beyond. We do so, however, from the vantage point of a vastly different world, a world made somewhat easier for today’s lesbians, gay men, and other sexually nonconforming people by the risky work done by the early homophile activists. The women who organized the Daughters of Bilitis in 1955 could not imagine the varieties of lesbian and queer communities that exist today, just as those born after the Stonewall riots of 1969 have a difficult time understanding the secretive, sexually-charged homosexual subcultures of a half-century ago. They and the other former DOBers I interviewed for this project provide a vital link between yesterday and today.²⁰

¹⁹ *The Ladder* magazine during 14 years of publication recorded regular discussions of these and many other topics through unsigned reports on talks given by speakers, guest essays and the “Readers Respond” (letters to the editor) columns. See, for example, “Relationship Not So ‘Deviant’ If Child Has Love and Security,” Vol. 1 No. 7 (April 1957): 8; “Homosexuality – A Way of Life,” Vol. 2 No. 5 (February 1958): 7-13; “Lesbian Marriage,” Vol. 2 No. 11 (August 1958): 12-13 [the first of many debates on the issue]; “To Be A Man: The Life of ‘Franklin Thompson’” [a biography of a ‘passing woman’] Vol. 8 No. 1 (October 1963): 7-9; “The Moral Decision About Homosexuality” (by Iris Murdoch), Vol. 9 No. 3 (October 1963): 19-24; “Apartheid for Women” (by Brigid Brophy), Vol. 10 No. 10 (July 1966): 9-13; “Gay Liberation” (by Leo Skir), Vol. 14 No. 5 and 6 (February/March 1970): 8.

²⁰ When the *Lawrence v. Texas* decision decriminalizing private consensual sexual conduct was announced by the U. S. Supreme Court in June, 2003, I called Phyllis Lyon for her reaction. She quietly said to me, “It’s incredible. We never thought we’d see this in our lifetime.”

Different Daughters highlights the voices of many DOB members, expanding the narrative from the usual handful of recognized DOB leaders and *Ladder* editors (Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin, Barbara Gittings, Kay Tobin Lahusen, Helen Sandoz, Stella Rush, and Barbara Grier). I agreed with Lyon and Martin that it was important to include the less celebrated as well, such as Ada Bello, Cleo “Glenn” Bonner, Jeannette Howard Foster, Florence “Conrad” Jaffy, Jeanne Cordova, Ernestine “Eckstein,” Natalie Lando, Barbara McLean, Venice Ostwald, “Del Shearer,” Billye Talmadge, Valerie Taylor, Pat “Dubby” Walker, and Shirley Willer.²¹ These Daughters’ stories – some of them fragments and others more substantial – are crucial to understanding DOB and the lesbians who helped create and guide it.²²

²¹ In most cases, I have received permission to utilize women’s real names; however, there are three women for whom only their DOB names are available: Ernestine Eckstein, Del Shearer, and Lisa Ben. I cannot locate either Eckstein or Shearer and have no current information on either woman. Although my research has revealed Eckstein’s familial surname, I will respect what I assume would be her wishes and use “Eckstein” as her surname. I do not know whether “Del Shearer” was a pseudonym but am treating it as such. Lisa Ben has refused recent requests for interviews because her confidentiality has been violated in the past, when some writers have used her real name despite her objections. In deference to her wishes, I will refer to her as Lisa Ben.

²² A note regarding terminology: in an attempt to reflect and respect the specific language which DOB activists used to describe themselves in the 1950s and 1960s, I use the terms “lesbian” and “gay woman” to describe women who love women. The Daughters’ earliest written records refer to “gay woman;” however, from the first issue of *The Ladder* on, their preferred term was lesbian (and it was usually capitalized). “Homophile” (love of same) began to be used by the 1950s’ gay and lesbian organizers mid-decade. “It was felt that the use of the word ‘homophile’ would produce a more favorable and constructive reaction from the general public; that as soon as ‘homosexual’ is used there is a marked reaction of a negative tone.” Its usage is attributed to Basil Vaerlen, San Francisco psychotherapist, who spoke on “Is a Homophile Marriage Possible?” to DOB in June 1957. [His answer: “Any marriage is possible between any two people if they want to grow up – and it is nobody’s business but their own.”] See *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 9 (June 1957) and Vol. 1 No. 10 (July 1957).

While its creation may not have been a consciously political act, the characterization of DOB as “strictly social” does not tell the whole story. Although it may not have started out that way, DOB soon functioned both as a women’s social group and a lesbian social change organization – the first of its kind.²³

²³ For a discussion of the tendency in LGBT history to dichotomize “fun” or social activities versus “serious” or “political” social change organizing, see Julie Abraham, “Tales of the City” *The Women’s Review of Books* Vol. XXI No. 3 (December 2003). In her review of Nan Alamilla Boyd’s *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965*, Abraham makes the point that “the achievement of queer San Francisco seems to have been that there was little need to choose between assimilation or outlaw status...To pose the bar goers against the politicians is to presuppose a scarce economy of political virtue, in which either the bar world or the homophile groups must come out ahead.”

Chapter One:

“A society for raising cats...”¹

The Beginnings of the Daughters of Bilitis

SONG OF BILITIS

Have we committed so strange an act?
Explain, if you can, my worry and fright
I tremble with fear when you call me
Your angel...and yet, I feel my
Mouth seeking yours in the night.²

Pierre Louys

Listen you dirty preverts [sic] – I found this in
my daughter’s coat pocket and if you don’t let her
alone I will call the FBI and I mean it. And you had
better know it. You just keep your dirty sex ideas to
yourself. You are sick and every one knows it.

Mrs. Mary Spallino to Daughters of Bilitis,
1961

P.S. My daughter has told me all about you so don’t go
trying to pull anything funny³

¹ Del Martin, interview with author, September 10, 1997. Martin quoted DOB attorney Kenneth Zwerin, who said that with a name like Daughters of Bilitis, the group “could be an American women’s club or a society for raising cats.”

² “Pierre Louyse [sic], ‘Song of Bilitis,’” from the cover of LADOB, March 1971 (newsletter of Los Angeles Daughters of Bilitis, Inc.), DOB/LA Chapter files, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon Papers, 1954-2000, 93-13, The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco CA [hereafter referred to as “Martin and Lyon Papers, GLBTHS, San Francisco”].

³ Undated letter received at the national office of DOB, 1961. DOB Box 2/16; Martin and Lyon Papers, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

The eight women who started the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) in September, 1955 were motivated primarily by the desire to meet other lesbians; they also wanted to expand the social space available to them at that time in San Francisco.⁴ Begun as a private club without an articulated agenda, much less a political perspective, DOB quickly found itself trying to accommodate the women's differing viewpoints on whether the group could balance socializing with broader educational and reform goals. Some of them were eager to do it all and felt like they could. The need for and possibility of social change was very much in the air in San Francisco in the 1950s.

Wide Open Town⁵

San Francisco's place in the iconography of mid-20th century American gay and lesbian culture, particularly as a critical site where the creation of modern lesbian and gay identities, institutions and communities took place, makes it more than simply the background for the story of the Daughters of Bilitis. The City is a leading character in the formation of the modern gay and lesbian civil rights movement and its only all-female homophile organization.

Full of drama topographically – sudden curves followed by heart-stopping drops; high peaks and lush valleys ringed by sparkling blue water; bright wooden houses

⁴ There are numerous “official” accounts of DOB's founding, including annual organizational histories published in *The Ladder*; presentations to homophile conferences throughout the 1950s and 1960s; and pamphlets published by DOB in the late 1960s and 1970s. See Martin and Papers, DOB Box 9/2, GLBTHS, San Francisco. See also Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, pp. 219- 255.

⁵ Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965*.

hugging green velvet hills – the city perches high above the Pacific. Poised between East and West, it is a place full of possibilities.⁶

Had you consulted a guidebook published by the Federal Writers Project in 1939, you would have read a loving account of the city written by an unnamed artist:

SAN FRANCISCO (6 to 956 alt., 634,394 pop.), born of the meeting of sea captains and gold seekers, spills over its many hills – three times Rome’s seven – at the tip of a peninsula that walls the narrow channel of the Golden Gate through which the tides of the Pacific pour into San Francisco Bay.

...San Francisco has always cherished its eccentrics; it has been inclined to regard graft with a tolerant eye; it has always prided itself on the international flavor of its food and drink, and its cosmopolitan tastes in feminine beauty; it has always been a “good” town for the actor and the musician.⁷

World War II was a “transformative event” that “not only changed the personal lives of countless thousands of individual men and women, it also shifted the role of sexuality in American public life and altered the social geography of urban centers like San Francisco.”⁸ For gay men and lesbians in the military, The City was often a familiar if forbidden paradise, serving as one of the main points of departure and return for troops sent to the Pacific.

⁶ Comment by Trevor Hailey, community historian and leader of the “Cruisin’ the Castro” Walking Tour, June 7, 2003, San Francisco: “Chicago is a masculine town, San Francisco is feminine, and Los Angeles and New York are bisexual.”

⁷ The Federal Writers’ Project Guide to 1930s California, “San Francisco.” *The WPA Guide to California* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984; orig. pub. Hastings House, 1939), 269.

⁸ Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), 29.

...returning GIs brought home with them a new interest in foreign cultures, and San Francisco, with an eye on potential markets abroad, stepped up its commercial contacts with Asia. In fact, the city then was receptive to many outside cultural influences and offered a receptive environment for radicals, anarchists, communists, populists, Wobblies, abstract expressionist painters, assemblage artists, and experimental theater troupes. Jazz and bebop began revolutionizing music and pulling in enthusiastic crossover audiences. And behind the rhetoric of consumerism and togetherness a current of dissent ran just below the surface.⁹

Postwar, the Bay Area became home to many of the armed services' demobilized gay men and lesbians, who found its cultural climate more comfortable than the one "back home." It also became a haven for a growing number of returning students capitalizing on new educational opportunities; workers eagerly recruited by industries in the Bay area which had started up or greatly expanded during wartime; and bohemians searching for artistic and intellectual space in an affordable, non-hostile environment. Migrants from many states and countries were drawn to the area, and they helped shape her destiny.¹⁰

⁹ Nancy J. Peters, "The Beat Generation and San Francisco's Culture of Dissent," in James Brook, Chris Carlsson, & Nancy J. Peters, eds., *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), 202-203.

¹⁰ Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay*; Martin Dennis Meeker, Jr. "Come Out West: Communication and the Gay and Lesbian Migration to San Francisco, 1940s-1960s (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 2000). See also Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: The Free Press, 1990); and John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*.

There were neighborhoods such as San Francisco's "Latin Quarter," or North Beach area, as well as the Tenderloin, where all sorts of night life and clubs could be found – including those featuring male impersonators and catering to lesbians and gay men. Wartime only served to increase the number of gay establishments.

...Military personnel searching for such establishments received an inadvertent boost from the armed services themselves – lists of off-limits bars were routinely posted on military bases. Gay soldiers and sailors needed only to check the list and slip into their civvies before heading out for an illicit night on the town.¹¹

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, gay and lesbian nightlife flourished, despite regular law enforcement crackdowns, usually timed to coincide with city elections. According to historian Nan Boyd, the years between 1951 and 1955 were a "heyday" for San Francisco's lesbian bar scene due to the numbers of women-owned, and lesbian-friendly, bars in the City.¹²

Nightclubs, restaurants, saloons and cafes managed and frequented by gay people were also somewhat protected from raids at that time due to a landmark 1951 legal decision, *Stoumen v. Reilly*. In *Stoumen*, the California Supreme Court ordered the reinstatement of the liquor license of one of San Francisco's most popular gay bars, the Black Cat, persuaded by the First Amendment arguments of San Francisco attorney Morris Lowenthal. The Black Cat's victory in *Stoumen* established the right to assemble in a public establishment for gay men and lesbians in California, as long as there was no

¹¹ Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay*, 30.

¹² Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 92, 131-133.

“illegal or immoral conduct on the premises.”¹³ For a time, local authorities and state Board of Equalization officials, charged with policing the provision of alcoholic beverages, stopped targeting gay and lesbian bars. However, the protection provided by *Stoumen* began to crumble when a 1955 state statute allowed revocation of liquor licenses on premises that were ‘resorts for sex perverts.’¹⁴

By the mid-1950s, the cultural and political tolerance for San Francisco’s lesbian clubs and homosexual hangouts began to be tested by some local luminaries. According to Boyd, “the seeds of change were planted in 1954 when William Randolph Hearst’s daily, the *San Francisco Examiner*, called upon then-mayor Robinson to clean up the city.” Hearst’s propaganda coincided with, and helped magnify, an increasingly shrill political rhetoric connecting homosexuality to violent crimes. Further, local police as well as the head of the F.B.I. were making links between homosexuality, juvenile delinquency, and corruption of minors, urging parents to police their own children carefully for any signs of “degeneracy,” such as possessing pornography, frequenting Lovers’ Lanes, or any other “unsavory” habits.¹⁵

After a series of articles appeared in the *Examiner* in the early summer of 1954 alleging a “marked influx recently of homosexuals,” an infamous bar raid took place on

¹³ Allan Berube, unpublished paper for slide show, “Resorts for Sex Perverts,” author’s copy; Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 137.

¹⁴ Elizabeth A. Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 35; Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay*, 30.

¹⁵ Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 93, 134-35. See also John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence: Men’s Lives and Gay Identities: A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 241-243; and Neil Miller, *Sex Crime Panic: A Journey to the Paranoid Heart of the 1950s* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2002).

September 8, 1954, insuring weeks of headlines in San Francisco's newspapers and instilling a renewed sense of fear among the City's gay men and lesbians. San Francisco police arrested the owners of the lesbian bar Tommy's Place after their five-month investigation supposedly revealed it as a favorite haunt of a handful of "sexually rebellious" teenaged girls. "The public trial of Tommy's Place sparked a citywide panic and intensified a police crackdown against homosexuals," Boyd asserts. It was followed in October by a U.S. Senate subcommittee hearing on juvenile delinquency, held in San Francisco as part of a nationwide tour, that emphasized the ties between teenaged misbehavior and sexual deviancy.

By May 1955, a new statewide alcohol enforcement agency – the Alcohol Beverage Control Board – had been created by the California legislature. Within its first few months in existence, San Franciscans were told that the ABC "Fights Bar Hangouts of Deviates."¹⁶ From then on, there was an official policy of regular surveillance of, and a pattern of frequent raids on, San Francisco's gay and lesbian nightspots that would continue through the end of the decade.

¹⁶ Ernest Lenn, "State Fights Bar Hangouts of Deviates," *San Francisco Examiner*, May 25, 1955. Clippings File, GLBTHS, San Francisco, CA.

Part I: "...must be Gay girl and of good moral character..."¹⁷

Given the hazards of a night on the town in 1955, private clubs were an attractive alternative to the bars. Although today the early leaders of DOB will insist that their only goal was to organize a social group for lesbians, the first Daughters kept careful records of their conversations. "Social" did not necessarily mean "casual."

The "Resume of First Meeting, September 21, 1955" is a one-page typed account of their concerns as noted by an unnamed secretary. To launch the new group, they discussed a number of "Names" (the listing included "Musketeers," "Plus Two," "Habeas Corpus," "Qui Vive," "Two Plus," "Amazon," "Vaisya," "Geminii" [sic], "Chamelon" [sic], and "Daughters of Bilitis.") They also came up with a way to visibly identify themselves to the other members. "It was decided the club should have colors and an insignia, both to be displayed in the form of a pin to be worn by all members." They agreed to elect a slate of officers, for six-month terms, and scheduled business meetings for the first Wednesday of the month at 8 p.m.¹⁸

Logistics taken care of, the founders' turned their attentions to constructing careful boundaries for their new group. For example, the minutes show that they wanted to have specific methods for dealing with difficult Daughters: the only duty of the Board of Directors that was spelled out at this time was that "It will function as the jury during trials for all offenses. All proceedings of this Board will be held in the deepest secrecy

¹⁷ "Rules for Membership," n.d., Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 2/2, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

¹⁸ "Resume of First Meeting," September 21, 1955, Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 2/2, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

when sitting as the jury.” Then, sections headed “Disciplinary Action” and “Punishment” set out due process provisions and the price to be exacted by future transgressors for unnamed offenses: “First – fine or warning. Second – fine and/or suspension.” It was as though they expected unruly lesbians to rapidly inundate their ranks!

The eight women then agreed on an Application Card, which including a “space for talent;” a probationary period of 3 months, and qualifications that any members had to be over 21 (“and prove it”), and that she “must be Gay girl and of good moral character.” New members would be admitted by vote of current members, using a secret ballot, with a 2/3rds majority necessary. According to at least one founder, the requirement of “good moral character” was never defined and remained unenforced.¹⁹

On October 5, 1955, the women reconvened at the home of Rose Bamberger and Rosemary Sliepen. “Daughters of Bilitis” was chosen unanimously for the new group, with no recorded debate over the hard-to-pronounce name. (“Daughters of Bill-EE-tis” is correct, according to all of the women I interviewed. “Bill-EYE-tis sounds like a disease,” Lyon has commented.) The members also adopted a motto (“the French phrase ‘Qui vive’, meaning on the alert or on guard”) and settled on the club’s colors (“sapphire blue and gold”). The Minutes direct that the colors be incorporated in a pin “in the shape of a triangle.”²⁰

¹⁹ Phyllis Lyon, correspondence with author, March 15, 2004.

²⁰ There is no explanation of why a triangle was chosen as the club’s insignia. The choice is striking because the inverted pink triangle became a popular symbol of gay liberation in the U.S. in the late 1960s and early 1970s. By that time, American activists had learned about its use by the Nazis as a way to mark and persecute homosexual men, and they reclaimed it as a symbol of resistance to repression. However, it is not known whether any of the original members of the Daughters of Bilitis were aware of the triangle’s significance to gay people when they made it their club pin. In 1958, they

The minutes of that meeting list the first officers of the Daughters of Bilitis:

President – Del Martin

Vice-President – Noni Frey

Secretary – Phyllis Lyon

Treasurer – Rosemary Sliepen

Trustee – Marcia Foster

They also approved a Constitution and by-laws after adding language that “specific social gatherings, decided upon by the members at business meetings, will be open to male guests. No male guests may be brought to social gatherings of the club without a prior approval by the members.” They ended by dutifully recording the food assignments for the next meeting, which in addition to providing essential information about the menu provides the first official listing of the four founding couples: “Rosemary and Rose (Fried Chicken),” “Mary and Noni (Baked Beans),” “June and Marcia (Potatoo [sic] Salad),” “Phyl and Del (Salad, hors d’oeuvres [sic] and miscellaneous items).”²¹

received a letter from “Miss B,” a German subscriber to *The Ladder* whose long letter was published in the June issue. She wrote, “I do not know if it is known to you that homosexuals have been in concentration camps. Their backs were marked with a pink triangle. Because of this I was amazed when I saw the triangle – you use it as a sign. (The boys here, too.)” There is no record of a response to Miss B, nor any discussion in the pages of *The Ladder* as to why a triangle was used to identify members of DOB to one another and the public. See Erwin J. Haeberle, “Swastika, Pink Triangle, and Yellow Star: The Destruction of Sexology and the Persecution of Homosexuals in Nazi Germany,” *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr., eds. (New York: New American Library, Penguin Books, 1989), 365-379; see also Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle* (New York: New Republic Books, Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1986).

²¹ “Minutes,” October 5, 1955. Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 2/2, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

The next meeting -- two weeks later on October 19, 1955 -- is recorded as “the first meeting of the Daughters of Bilitis,” and it was held at June and Marcia’s home. Guests included “Bobbie, Toni, and Gwen, sponsored by Del and Phyl; and Elizibeth [sic], sponsored by Noni and Mary.” They agreed to write to the two tiny homophile (“love of same”) groups then in existence, Mattachine Society and ONE, Inc.; to the National Association for Sexual Research in San Francisco; and to the Cory Book Service, created by the author of *The Homosexual in America*, Donald Webster Cory.

The letters will announce the formation of the Daughters of Bilitis, outline the club’s aims, say that we are interested in the work they are doing and would like to exchange ideas, etc. It was also decided that we would ask to be listed in the Directory of Organizations published each month in One. It was also voted that we subscribe to One and the Mattachine Review.²²

“the education of the variant...”²³

From the beginning, there were awkward situations and uncomfortable moments among DOB’s four founding couples. Creating a lesbian social group meant that organizers had to be open to welcoming strangers – those potentially unruly lesbians -- into their homes; any new recruits would be women with whom they might have little or nothing in common but their sexuality. There were already racial, ethnic, and class differences among the eight of them: Mary was a Filipina, Rose was a Chicana, and they were both involved in interracial relationships with white women. About half of the

²² Untitled minutes, October 19, 1955. Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 2/2, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

group had children and half worked in typically blue- or pink-collar jobs. Some of them wanted only to have a place to socialize with other lesbians; others wanted to mix socializing with social action. It often seemed as though none of them were quite ready to deal with the various and sundry styles of gay women that a lesbian organization would necessarily attract.

At one of the first DOB meetings, in the fall of 1955, four women arrived dressed in men's clothing. Lyon remembers that "Noni and the others busied themselves in the kitchen, making coffee, and taking a very long time to return. So Del and I were left to entertain them. And it wasn't easy." One of the women would later become the owner of "Peg's Place," a San Francisco lesbian bar popular in the 1960s and '70s. According to Lyon, she looked "rough and tumble" and didn't seem to have much to offer the new group. "She just sat there," Lyon says. "She didn't say much of anything all night long, except that she certainly wouldn't be willing to carry a DOB membership card. She thought that if she did, someone would find out she was a lesbian. As if it wasn't already obvious!" She and her friends never returned after their first visit.²⁴

Evidence of disputes also found their way into the minutes within two months of the group's inception. A "SPECIAL MEETING" was called for November 9, 1955 to "re-define the purpose of the Daughters of Bilitis," and to solidify the group's mission. They also decided to institute a rule that "If slacks are worn they must be women's slacks" and that no meetings would be held at nonmembers' homes. (The "women's

²⁴ Phyllis Lyon, interview with author, San Francisco CA, September 10, 1998. See also Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, *Lesbian/Woman*, 220-221.

slacks” requirement must have been a direct result of the visit from the four butches²⁵, noted above. Again, at least one early member of DOB found this part of the “official” dress code surprising; another remembered early meetings where “everyone” was in blue jeans, which would have had to be men’s “because those were the only jeans we wore in the 1950s.”²⁶)

Shortly thereafter, they issued membership guidelines. “RULES FOR CANDIDATES FOR MEMBERSHIP IN DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS” were promulgated November 16, 1955, allowed involvement to all women, not just “gay girls,” and now used the term “sex variant.”²⁷ The Rules stated:

1. Must be a woman interested in promoting an educational program on the subject of sex variation, and for sex variants.
2. Must be 21 years of age, and able to provide documents of proof.
3. Must be of good moral character.

Procedure for becoming a member –

1. Must be sponsored by a voting member.

²⁵ “butch: a lesbian with masculine characteristics, see dyke...” from Bruce Rodgers, *The Queens’ Vernacular* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1972), 38.

²⁶ “Sheesh! Was that ever enforced?” Stella Rush wrote upon reading this statement. Stella Rush, correspondence with author, March 13, 2004; Billye Talmadge, interview with author, Silver Springs MD, March 25, 2002.

²⁷ “At least it’s better than ‘pervert,’” Phyllis Lyon has commented; correspondence with author, March 15, 2004. Lesbian bibliographer Jeanette Howard Foster thought so, too, and used “Female Variant” in the title of her 1956 study of literary references to lesbianism. See Chapter Four for more discussion. According to Bruce Rodgers, author of the quirky *The Queens’ Vernacular*, the term dates from the 1930s; in the 1950s it was less “loaded” than “female homosexual.” He says that “Lesbian” in that time period was more of a “dirty word” (*The Queens’ Vernacular*, 125).

2. Must sign application for membership after attending two business meetings or withdraw.
3. Must undergo three months probationary period.
 - a. During this period candidate will be screened by club members.
 - b. Candidate will be required to attend business meetings. Missing two consecutive meetings without valid reason will be considered as a withdrawal of application.
4. Must be voted in by members.
 - a. Voting to take place at the first business meeting following end of probation period.
 - b. No candidates may attend this meeting.²⁸

A turning point came after Lyon and Martin attended a ONE, Inc. Midwinter Institute in Los Angeles in January 1956. There they met the small group of gay men and women organizing educational programs in Los Angeles and San Francisco on issues relating to homosexuality. They returned home full of enthusiasm and encouragement from their comrades to the south. As recorded in their Minutes, “it was voted to make it compulsory for all members, including new ones coming into the club, to write their legislators regarding changes in the law.” In addition they announced that new members “Toni and Gwenn” had taken on responsibilities for DOB.²⁹

²⁸ “Rules for Membership,” November 16, 1955. Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 2/2, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

²⁹ “Minutes,” January 4, 1956 and January 18, 1956. Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 2/2, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

DOB members also made contact during the winter of 1956 with some of the members of the mostly-male Mattachine Society in San Francisco, which had recently opened an office there and was now the national headquarters for the homophile organization. The Daughters were impressed by the careful approach to organizing favored by Mattachine's leaders. "Mattachine, in its 5 years of existence, has found it much better to grow gradually, to look for quality in members rather than quantity."³⁰

After just a few months, DOB had become much more than a secret lesbian social club. The founders and earliest members had begun to create a structure, complete with rules and regulations, to govern a lesbian organization. Although Phyllis Lyon remembers today that "we would take almost anybody who came in the door," and she and Martin often tell stories of the ways in which they coddled any lesbians who expressed interest in DOB, joining the organization in the early days was tantamount to making a personal and political commitment not only to the group but to the new homophile movement. Given their written insistence on admitting women of "good moral character" and "quality," however undefined those terms may have been, we can also see that the new group was in no way concerned with appealing to *all* lesbians. From the beginning, they were willing to stay small and selective in order to attract the kinds of women who they thought could challenge and normalize popular perceptions of lesbians. They wanted intelligent, articulate, responsible women – over 21, except in a few exceptional cases – who would be serious activists but also know how to have fun.³¹

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Phyllis Lyon, interview with author, San Francisco CA, May 15, 2002. San Francisco members Pat "Dubby" Walker and Patti Brown were both under 21 when they first got

By spring, 1956, the Daughters of Bilitis were off to a promising start. But the tensions among the charter members over the DOB's purpose and constituency still plagued the fledgling group. Among the four founding couples, there were recurring disagreements on whether DOB's priority should be organizing private social activities or public projects; they also argued about whether attendance at DOB business and membership meetings should be limited to lesbians. Finally, some members did not want men invited to attend any DOB events.

Lyon and Martin were of the opinion that creating a *women's* organization would encourage more lesbians to come forward, as the stigma of belonging to a specifically lesbian group would be removed. Also, potentially they could create allies among heterosexual women. They also believed that working collaboratively yet strategically with the other, mostly male, homophile activists made sense. But they couldn't convince Noni Frey and the others.

A few months later, half of the original founders decided they didn't want to stay involved with the Daughters. Two of the core activists ended up moving to Redding, hours north of San Francisco. Soon Frey would leave to organize first one, then a second, secret lesbian social club.³² The tiny group of Daughters was in danger of coming apart.

involved with DOB in the late 1950s and early 1960s; by the late 1960s, this "requirement," while still in place, was even more loosely enforced.

³² The first club Frey started after DOB was Quatrefoil. According to Martin and Lyon, when she tried to enforce the same strict rules she proposed for DOB and her leadership was challenged again, she established Hale Aikane; both "lesbian sororities" lasted for a few years. Frey stayed friendly with DOB members; at one point she and Hale Aikane shared office space with the Daughters. Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 222.

Convinced that too much organizational groundwork had been laid to just abandon their efforts, Lyon and Martin rallied those who wanted to continue. The Minutes for the DOB discussion meeting of June 14, 1956 “with 11 present,” record new members “Carla,” Brian (O’Brien), Pat (Hamilton) and Griff (P. D. Griffin), all of whom were taking on different responsibilities for DOB.³³ Sandy (Helen Sandoz), Billye (Talmadge), and Jaye (Bell, nicknamed “Shorty” because she was so tall) were among the handful of Bay Area lesbians who heeded the call that first year.

The Daughters decided to pull together both a series of discussions and a way to publicize them. “The president announced that the group is going to start an all-out publicity campaign including publication of a newsletter. An article will appear in M. Review and also One will give us space.” At the same meeting, in a reflection of the national climate in the mid-1950s, the minutes show that “it was decided it might be a good idea to add the statement that we are against communism to our printed material.” The strong civil liberties beliefs of at least two of DOB’s founders – Lyon and Martin – must have prevailed, for no such statement ever appeared in the organization’s materials. Instead, the first few issues of their new publication included a notice that the Daughters of Bilitis was not affiliated with any other organization.³⁴

Most importantly, DOB’s leaders finally came to consensus on their mission. They wrote up a Statement of Purpose in which they outlined the steps they would take to

³³ “Minutes,” June 14, 1956. Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 2/2, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

³⁴ Ibid.

advance social change for “the homosexual.” It appeared in nearly every issue of their newsletter for the next 14 years.

DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS -- PURPOSE

A women’s organization for the purpose of promoting the integration of the homosexual into society by:

- (1) Education of the variant, with particular emphasis on the psychological, physiological and sociological aspects, to enable her to understand herself and make her adjustment to society in all its social, civic, and economic implications – this to be accomplished by establishing and maintaining as complete a library as possible of both fiction and non-fiction literature on the sex deviant theme; by sponsoring public discussions on pertinent subjects to be conducted by leading members of the legal, psychiatric, religious and other professions; by advocating a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society.
- (2) Education of the public at large through acceptance first of the individual, leading to an eventual breakdown of erroneous taboos and prejudices; through public discussion meetings aforementioned; through dissemination of educational literature on the homosexual theme.
- (3) Participation in research projects by duly authorized and responsible psychologists, sociologists and other such experts directed towards further knowledge of the homosexual.
- (4) Investigation of the penal code as it pertains to the homosexual, proposal of changes to provide an equitable handling of cases involving this minority group, and promotion of these changes through due process of law in the state legislatures.

Each of DOB's goals – self-knowledge and self-acceptance; public education; involvement in research; and lobbying to change the laws – reflects the remaining founders' beliefs that a conscious, carefully-constructed program of information and outreach to sympathetic professionals would best advance the nascent movement for gay and lesbian rights. In this way, they mirrored the objectives of the two other homophile groups then in existence, both of whom had similar mission statements.³⁵ Where DOB differed was in their emphasis on reaching the individual lesbian – “the variant” – first and foremost. They recognized that many women felt shame about their sexual preferences and were afraid to admit them. Without support to develop the self-confidence necessary to advocate for one's rights, no social change would be possible for lesbians. It is this emphasis that distinguishes them from the largely-male Mattachine and ONE, Inc., and it is a difference they would continually reassert. The prescient “the personal is political” feminism of founders Lyon and Martin shaped the organization's priorities from its beginnings. And they articulated it well before the resurgence of the women's movement in the next decade.

³⁵ See “Marvin Cutler” (Dorr Legg), *Homosexuals Today 1956: A Handbook of Organizations and Publications* (Los Angeles: ONE Press, Inc. 1956) for a contemporary description of all of the homophile groups then in existence.

Part II: The Daughters of Bilitis and Lesbian Organizing, 1955-1970

The story of the Daughters of Bilitis and the women who were its members and leaders is striking for a number of reasons. First, despite the availability of lesbian and gay history today, there has been relatively little written about lesbians in general, and DOB in particular. What has been produced often downplays their contributions to the development of the movements for sexual and gender freedom in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s -- from the homophile and gay civil rights movements to women's liberation and the creation of lesbian-feminism. Gay scholars have characterized DOB and its leaders as "conservative" or "accommodationist" for the last twenty years, although a few activists and academics question the utility of these terms.³⁶

Some of DOB's leaders react strongly to such characterizations and others shrug as if to say, "so what?" As Lahusen put it, "I wonder what today's activists would do if they had to confront what we did back then?" Organizing women to question the limitations imposed by gender and sexuality in mid-20th century America was

³⁶ See Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Kelly Anderson, "Out in the Fifties: The Daughters of Bilitis and the Politics of Identity." Master's thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 1994; Phyllis Gorman, "The Daughters of Bilitis: A Description and Analysis of a Female Homophile Social Movement Organization, 1955-1963." Master's thesis, Ohio State University, 1985. See also Martin Meeker, "Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 10 No. 1, January 2001, for a useful revisionist assessment of gay male homophiles' strategies and tactics in this era.

challenging enough; to do so openly as an organization dealing with lesbianism in the repressive cultural climate of 1955 was unheard of.³⁷

For the women who found their way to a DOB gathering in Lyon and Martin's living room or the organization's San Francisco office in the early days, the Daughters of Bilitis was an unparalleled experience. Barbara Gittings remembers her first DOB meeting in San Francisco in 1956, when plans were being made to start publishing the organization's newsletter, *The Ladder*. "There were about a dozen women in the room and I thought – wow! All these lesbians together in one place! I had never seen anything like it." Most women hadn't. As discussed previously, outside of the few bars which welcomed gay men and women – and which could be raided by the police at any time -- there were very few places where a lesbian could go to relax and enjoy the company of other women like herself.³⁸

The Daughters of Bilitis was also unique in that, at a time of intense racial segregation in the U.S., it provided some opportunities for women of color and white women to meet, socialize and work together. "Unlike many other groups in the 1950s,"

³⁷ Kay Tobin Lahusen, interview with author, Wilmington DE, May 2002. For discussions about the state of feminist activism in the 1950s, see Estelle Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 257-261; Elaine Tyler May, "Pushing the Limits 1940-1961," *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States*, ed. Nancy F. Cott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 473-526; Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Vicki Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois, eds., *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 231-258,

³⁸ Barbara Gittings, interview with author, May 2002.

remembers Billye Talmadge, “there were no color bars in DOB.”³⁹ She goes on to note that “there were not just African-Americans, but Asians, Latinas...the driving force was that we were gay women.”⁴⁰ While the organization’s membership was overwhelmingly white, it was not exclusively so. There were two women of color among the initial eight organizers.⁴¹ From the late 1950s through the early 1970s, a few black and Latina lesbians assumed positions of leadership within the organization at both local and national levels, such as Pat Walker in San Francisco, Ernestine “Eckstein” in New York, Ada Bello in Philadelphia, and Jeanne Cordova in Los Angeles. Cleo “Glenn” Bonner was the first and only African-American national leader of DOB, serving as president from late 1963 through 1966. This was a singular achievement within the homophile movement. In fact, it would take another twenty-five years for a national gay or lesbian organization to be headed by a man or woman of color: it was not until 1989 that the

³⁹ DOB’s Articles of Incorporation, drafted in 1956, stated that they welcomed all women, “regardless of race, color, or creed.” This declaration did not just gather dust in organizational files. For example, in the early ‘60s the Chicago Chapter’s monthly newsletter printed a similar statement at the beginning of each issue. However, at least one long-time DOB activist remembers that there were varying degrees of implementation of the policy and difficulties in addressing racial differences among some chapter members, particularly those Daughters from the southern United States. (Stella Rush, correspondence with author, March 15, 2004.) But it wasn’t just white Southerners who could make potential black DOB members uncomfortable. As Martin Duberman recounted in *Stonewall*, “Once, in the early sixties, Yvonne (Maua Flowers) had gone with another black woman to a DOB meeting on Manhattan’s Lower East Side, and had been repelled by it. The white women reacted to the black women’s presence first with shock, then with a supercilious casualness that was at least as offensive. Yvonne never returned. ‘I can’t be here,’ she decided, ‘with all these white girls.’” (234).

⁴⁰ Billye Talmadge, interview with author, Hyattsville MD, March 2002.

⁴¹ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*.

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force named South Asian lesbian activist Urvashi Vaid to serve as its Executive Director.

Essentially, the Daughters of Bilitis is an example of pioneering women's organizing during a time in the U.S. that is often thought of as "fearful and suffocatingly conventional."⁴² Further, during a period when "the feminine mystique" exerted much more cultural power than feminism, DOB created and maintained first a local, then a national, organization that challenged homophobia and sexism.⁴³

"a women's organization..."⁴⁴

Part of the creation myth surrounding DOB -- repeated in many accounts of its founding -- is that there was no connection between them and the Mattachine Society or ONE, Inc. when DOB got started in 1955. For example, in *Lesbian/Woman*, Lyon and Martin wrote that "(A)t the outset, the founding Daughters had been completely unaware of the existence of Mattachine and ONE." They added, "(R)epresentatives and leaders of both organizations were extremely cooperative when we finally did meet them." However, according to DOB's earliest records, within one month they had not only learned about Mattachine and ONE but knew enough about their programs to agree that DOB should officially correspond with them and utilize their publications to announce the new women's group.

⁴² Martin Duberman, "The 'Father' of the Homophile Movement" in *Left Out: The Politics of Exclusion: Essays 1964-2002* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002), 69.

⁴³ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963).

⁴⁴ From "Statement of Purpose," Daughters of Bilitis, adopted 1956 and printed in *The Ladder* from November 1956 until September 1970.

One way to explain the discrepancy in creation myths is the importance of independence to DOB's founders – an importance that has only grown over the years. Perhaps it has been necessary to build in extra distance between DOB's founding and its connection to the other homophile groups so as to underscore that it was not started as a “women's auxiliary” of any men's or cosexual organization -- a label that has been applied to it repeatedly, both by “the men's groups” at the time and by researchers and writers since. A very recent example is that of Richard Goldstein, executive editor at the *Village Voice*. He refers to the Daughters of Bilitis as “a sororal organization to the Mattachine Society” in a 2003 article decrying gay people's lack of knowledge of gay history in general and gay/Left intersections in particular.⁴⁵

DOB was the brainchild of eight lesbians who wanted to start a social club and it was always a free-standing group fiercely protective of its own mission and purpose. At the same time, it seems plausible that in the small and overlapping gay and lesbian social worlds of the 1950s, the already-established groups may have had some influence, albeit indirectly, on the women involved in organizing the new lesbian club. For example, is it just coincidence that the founders of the first ongoing national gay group (the Mattachine Society) also selected an obscure reference to antiquity as their organizational name? “Absolutely,” Phyllis Lyon insists today. “We chose (the name) Daughters of Bilitis before we even knew they existed.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Richard Goldstein, “Liberation vs. ‘Progress’: A Challenge to Queer People & Their Allies,” in *Guild Practitioner*, a publication of the National Lawyers Guild, Vol. 60, No. 2, Spring 2003, 117.

⁴⁶ Phyllis Lyon, personal correspondence with author, March 10, 2004.

“The First” and “The Second” Mattachine Societies⁴⁷

Harry Hay and four other politically radical gay men – Rudi Gernreich, Bob Hull, Chuck Rowland, and Dale Jennings – founded the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles on November 11, 1950. The name they gave their new group was derived from Hay’s study of secret all-male fraternities, which dated back to the 15th century in France (the Matassins), Italy (the Mattaccini) and Spain (the Mattachinos).⁴⁸ They fashioned themselves in the image of a brotherhood of masked men who performed at medieval festivals.

Hay was one of the first to espouse the belief that homosexual men and women constituted a minority group. “Harry argued that homosexuals met the four Stalinist principles for definition of a minority in that they had a common language, a common territory, a common economy, and a common psychology and culture, although his definition of these terms was quite different from those Stalin had conceived,” wrote Vern L. Bullough in 2002.⁴⁹ An active member of the Communist Party until 1951, Hay gave up his affiliation due to his increasing inability to reconcile his sexual orientation with Party prohibitions on homosexuality. But he brought his training as an organizer to the new arena for activism.

Hay and the other founders carefully expanded Mattachine’s discussion groups and leadership circles for the next two years. In 1952, they supported fellow Mattachine

⁴⁷ John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*, 229.

⁴⁸ “Mattachine,” Steve Hogan and Lee Hudson, eds., *Completely Queer: the Gay and Lesbian Encyclopedia*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998, pp. 382-384

⁴⁹ Vern Bullough, “Harry Hay (1912 -),” *Before Stonewall*, 73-82.

founder Dale Jennings in his legal battle with the City of Los Angeles following a brutal and bogus arrest by L.A.P.D. undercover cops. Mattachine members organized the Citizens Committee to Outlaw Entrapment to support Jennings; the case was dismissed after the jury deadlocked and for once a gay victory of sorts could be claimed.

Mattachine's popularity rose as did attendance at its meetings. But in 1953, following a spike of negative publicity due to an "expose" in the Los Angeles papers about the "strength" of the homosexual voting bloc there, Hay agreed to remove himself from leadership, fearful that his past Communist connections would taint the homophile group. An anti-Communist faction of Mattachine members launched an ugly internal coup in 1953 and both he and Rowland left the organization permanently, as did a number of other leftist members.

The reorganized Mattachine Society -- "the Second Mattachine Society," according to Hay⁵⁰ -- moved its headquarters to San Francisco in 1954. They gave up the structure of small, secret study groups and instead organized public discussions on gay issues, favoring education over radical action. By 1955, the group had started a newsletter, *Mattachine Review*, published by Hal Call. It "informed the heterosexual as well as homosexual with questions posed on its cover such as 'How would you face the problem if a member of your family is found to be a homosexual?'" It also featured a book-selling service (which may have been the inspiration for DOB's creation of a

⁵⁰ John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*, 229.

similar enterprise) designed to provide members with books by and about gay people and gay issues by mail. The *Mattachine Review* was published monthly until 1967.⁵¹

Call was also co-owner, with Don Lucas, of Pan Graphic Press. Pan-Graphic became a crucial movement resource: it printed not only the *Mattachine Review* but wildly successful gay male pornography. Starting in 1957, after Mattachine's mimeograph machine broke down, they began printing DOB's newsletter *The Ladder*.⁵²

ONE, Inc.

The other homophile group already in existence when DOB was formed was ONE, Inc., also headquartered in Los Angeles. Organized by a small group of mostly male Mattachine activists who split off in October 1952 to publish a newspaper, its name was taken from a Thomas Carlyle passage, "a mystic band of brotherhood makes all men one."⁵³ ONE, Inc. was the first group to establish regularly-scheduled educational programs on gay issues, from monthly discussions to annual conferences. Designed to

⁵¹ For recent accounts of Mattachine's history, see John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*; Vern L. Bullough, "Harry Hay," *Before Stonewall*, 71-80. See also Martin Duberman, "The 'Father' of the Homophile Movement" (2001) and *Stonewall* (1994); Stuart Timmons, *The Trouble with Harry Hay* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1990). In 1983, John D'Emilio provided a detailed description of Mattachine's founding and subsequent development in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*.

⁵² James T. Sears, "Hal Call (1917-2000): Mr. Mattachine," *Before Stonewall*, 155. Sears contests Kepner and others' characterizations of *Mattachine Review* as conservative – "the magazine was hardly a bastion of reactionary political thought as alleged by some contemporary commentators..." – and says that it urged openness and inclusion. He also notes that both Jim Kepner and Dorr Legg, ONE's founder, were involved with the *Review* and the Mattachine Society.

⁵³ Jim Kepner, *Rough News – Daring Views: 1950s' Pioneer Gay Press Journalism* (New York: Haworth Press, 1998), 3.

provide a safe, structured, intellectually challenging environment for learning about homosexuality, ONE, Inc.'s annual Midwinter Institutes – and its quarterly publication of Institute papers and speeches -- became important training grounds for the homophile activists of the 1950s and 1960s.

ONE activists also created the first known publicly sold magazine produced by and for gay people. The first issue of *ONE Magazine*, edited by Dale Jennings, appeared in January, 1953. According to anthropologist C. Todd White,

...with Jennings at the helm, *ONE Magazine* launched against the winds of culture. Through its thought-provoking essays, daring social commentary, and sharp, consistent design, *ONE* tacked its way into history, serving as “as one of the unofficial voices of the homosexual rights movement” until 1972...⁵⁴

ONE Magazine attracted a number of talented gay men and a handful of women, including Ann Carll (Corky) Reid, “Eve Ellore” (Joan Corbin) and “Sten Russell” (Stella Rush). When the Daughters of Bilitis was formed in 1955, and launched its newsletter the next year, the women involved with *ONE* helped publicize its existence.

Congratulations on The Ladder. Find enclosed my \$1.00 to help the cause. Wish it could be more, but though I can't give more personal financial help I can and will do all in my power (thru ONE and personally) to further your endeavor.

We plan to tell all women writing to ONE of the Daughters and of The Ladder. I hope to have an editorial on it in the next issue.

Best wishes for your success.

Ann Carll Reid
Editor, *One Magazine*⁵⁵

⁵⁴ C. Todd White, “Dale Jennings (1917-2000): ONE's Outspoken Advocate.” *Before Stonewall*, 83-93. See also Salvatore J. Licata, “The Homosexual Rights Movement in the United States: A Traditionally Overlooked Area of American History,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 6 (Fall/Winter 1980/81): 161-189.

Without the support of “the women of *ONE*,”⁵⁶ the Daughters of Bilitis would have had a much more difficult time finding new recruits. For example, Stella Rush got involved with DOB through her connection to the tiny community of homophile activists in LA in the early 1950s. A former girlfriend took her to a *ONE* party in 1953; she then read a copy of their magazine. She was impressed by what she found in its pages and, encouraged by her friends, wrote something for them to include in the magazine. Rush’s first essay, “Letter to a Newcomer,” appeared in 1954 under the name “Sten Russell.”⁵⁷

“I made it to the ‘inside’ by 1955 and wrote letters and opinions from 1955 to 1957,” Rush remembers today. She became a leading DOB activist and writer within two years of her first meeting with Lyon, Martin and her future life partner, Helen Sandoz, at a January 1957 homophile conference in Los Angeles. She provided consistent leadership to DOB, in print as well as in less-than-glamorous administrative positions like chapter treasurer, until the early 1970s.⁵⁸

Rush has been involved in human rights issues for most of her 79 years and possesses a keen awareness of social justice that was forged in her youth. Born April 30,

⁵⁵ *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 1956): 13.

⁵⁶ Jim Kepner, “The Women of *ONE*,” *ONE/Gay & Lesbian Archives* online: <http://www-lib.use.edu/~retter>. In this brief article, Kepner detailed the connections between *ONE* and DOB through some of the lesbians who were key activists with both, such as Los Angeles activists Stella Rush, Helen Sandoz, and Venice Ostwald, as well as *Ladder* writer and editor Barbara Grier. Kepner admitted that after the LA DOB chapter was formed in 1958, “the local DOB chapter drew off recruits who might earlier have come to *ONE*. Turnover and a new awareness of male chauvinism reduced *ONE*’s feminine viewpoint.”

⁵⁷ Sten Russell (Stella Rush), “Letter to a Newcomer,” *ONE Magazine* 2 (October 1954): 10.

⁵⁸ Stella Rush, correspondence with author, March 1, 2004; interviews with author, May 21 and 22, 2002

1925, she was the only child of a troubled marriage, the dutiful daughter of a matrilineal white Kentucky family. Her father – a returning WWI soldier whom her mother met in southern California while he was recovering from tuberculosis at the Veteran’s Hospital – died when she was 18 months old. Afterward, Rush’s mother moved them back and forth between her family’s home in Richmond, Kentucky and Los Angeles, California throughout Rush’s childhood and adolescence. From an early age Rush was intellectually curious and extremely capable scholastically. She also says she understood very young that being a female meant that she was not allowed to participate in some of the most appealing aspects of life.

I remember being in a rage as a child because of a situation in Kentucky where my boy cousin could go off to a tobacco staving party and I couldn’t. They’d use a long wooden pole (a stave) that they would put tobacco leaves on, turn the plant upside down, hang it in the barn from the ceiling to dry. To a kid it was a party but to the men it was work...It seemed exciting. All the men there, drinking and cussing and telling stories. No girls allowed. And I wanted desperately to go along.⁵⁹

Rush was keenly aware of other basic differences – between her and her Japanese-American classmates, for example, who in 1942 were forced to leave school. Her close friend Jane Kubota and others were removed to the internment camp at Santa Anita in southern California, along with their families. The experience profoundly affected Rush and her view of the world. “It was the first time that I was really aware of the cost of being different, even in this great country of ours. I wondered, how could this be happening to natural-born citizens in the land of the free?” Rush worked with a

⁵⁹ Stella Rush, telephone interview with author, June 29, 2002.

sympathetic teacher to gather and bring school materials to her friend Jane and the others at the camp so that they wouldn't fall behind in their homework, but at the last minute the teacher cancelled the trip. "It turned out that the teacher feared the loss of her job," Rush explains today. The experience stayed with her for the rest of her life, fueling her quest for enlightenment and equality.

After graduating from high school in Los Angeles in 1943, Rush got a trainee job at North American Aviation and worked there for two years to save money for college.⁶⁰ She was able to attend two years of college at the University of California at Berkeley, and it was here that she first encountered Phyllis Lyon. "She was a wheel – a junior and an editor of the *Daily Californian*. I remember being at a meeting with her, sitting across the table from her. She didn't notice me at all."⁶¹ Rush also joined the off-campus Unitarian Church, which was known as a center for progressive political and spiritual people. She remembers that time of her life as a rich, rewarding one, and she felt that she had found a community of like-minded people.

By 1947, despite receiving two scholarships, Rush's savings ran out and she had to leave Berkeley. After she completed her third year of college at UCLA in 1948, she went to work for Firestone Tire and Rubber as an aircraft draftsman. She also continued her involvement in the church, becoming an active member of the First Unitarian Church

⁶⁰ Judith M. Saunders, "Stella Rush a.k.a. Sten Russell (1925-)," *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*, 136.

⁶¹ Stella Rush, interviews with author, May 21 and 22, 2002.

of Los Angeles. “Around the corner (from the church)...was the If Club, a gay bar where Stella and others went after choir practice to visit, talk, and have a beer.”⁶²

The lesbian subculture that existed postwar in southern California, and in other major metropolitan areas, was centered in a handful of gay bars and “explained” in a few books – paperback novels and a handful of scientific studies -- about homosexuality. The bars were sometimes unsavory, and often raided by the police; the books were hard to find and usually depressing. Rush’s story of her experience in a police raid on a Venice Beach bar in 1949 reiterates her sense of secrecy and futility:

...all of a sudden the police were there and made all of us go outside. The raid seemed to be aiming mainly at the guys, although if a woman gave them lip she could also go to jail. The police were very democratic about that.

I had been warned ahead of time, probably because I belonged to a church where we were in political hot water over the communist thing – loyalty oath thing. And so we had some counseling to give only name and address when asked, but don’t tell them where you work. Let them think you are unemployed or whatever. So you don’t end up on the front page.

For Rush, “the books I read convinced me that the lifestyle of gay men and women meant living a series of lies.”⁶³ Within a few years, she sought instead to imagine, and then write about, a time when loving a person of the same sex would not require such deception. Rush devoted herself to working toward that future, despite the chilly climate in the 1950s for such unconventional ideas.

⁶² Judith M. Saunders, “Stella Rush,” *Before Stonewall*, 137; personal correspondence with author, March 10, 2004.

⁶³ Stella Rush, interview with author, March 14, 2002.

Part III: The Cold War political palette – “The pinks, the lavenders, and the reds”

In 1956, the very subject matter at the heart of DOB’s Statement of Purpose – the “problem of the female variant” -- meant that their appeal would be limited: the responsible, professional women they hoped to attract would often be too fearful to participate. Those who had the most to gain from a supportive community of lesbians also potentially had the most to lose in rejecting the mask of conformity.

Billye Talmadge remembers the fear that was so prevalent among lesbians at that time. In the early 1950s in San Francisco, “I was a public school teacher and Jaye (“Shorty”) Bell was my partner. We had met in Seattle, when Shorty was working for the telephone company and I was working for Long’s Drugstore. She’d had a dishonorable discharge from the service -- she was accused of being “homosexual” and decided to find out what that was. We were together for 7 years.”⁶⁴

Talmadge and Bell met Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon in 1956 in San Francisco shortly after they arrived in the Bay area. “Del and Phyllis were frustrated – they threw a party to give it (DOB) one more try. You can’t imagine it now, but people were absolutely afraid then.” One concrete explanation for the fear, Talmadge recalls, was that “in California at this time, there were 27 reasons why you could lose your teacher’s license: first was if you were a card-carrying Communist and second was if you were a suspected homosexual.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Billye Talmadge, interview with author, March 26, 2002.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

As has been recounted by scholars, the victorious end of World War II -- achieved by unleashing an awesome and potentially uncontrollable American power -- also unleashed an emotional mix of pride and anxiety. While America -- “the good guys” -- had won The Good War, the image and reality of the A-bomb infused and distorted postwar stability and disrupted the “return” to a normalcy the U.S. had never known. A weapon so vast and destructive could boomerang, and the relatively swift Soviet replication of the atom bomb, as well as the “loss” of China to a Communist-led revolution in 1949, spoiled the postwar party for America’s leaders. It led to an official policy of containment, marked by the need to further delineate “us” and “them,” and U.S. opinion-makers began to create larger-than-life enemies, both internally and externally. Suspicion and paranoia ruled, and the overt and covert censorship of cultural, political, and ideological ideas and activities chilled expressions of, much less organizing for, social change.⁶⁶

One example of the personification of fear so prevalent in the early 1950s is what can be called the *Invasion of the Body-Snatchers* Syndrome: the fantastic imagery of a wave of seemingly innocuous people morphing into monsters poised to destroy “the American way.” The nation’s headlines, comics, movies and radio broadcasts trumpeted warnings about all manner of scary invaders-from-within -- aliens, mutants, juvenile delinquents, sex perverts, and above all else Communists -- on the move from Hollywood to Main Street. You couldn’t be too careful, and you couldn’t really trust anyone. The

⁶⁶ Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998); Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); David Halterstam, *The Fifties* (New York: Villard Books, 1993); John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

home, family and private life became the refuge from all of the uncertainty outside, further fueling a sense of isolation and seclusion. Many people retreated into what seemed safe and familiar to protect themselves, wearing the armor of conformity when venturing outside. Cold War era film scholar Thomas Corber noted that “(T)he discourses of national security tried to exploit fears that there was no way to tell homosexuals from heterosexuals.”⁶⁷

As historian John Howard has written, “Good Americans got married, raised children, went to church, and moved to the suburbs. In contrast, physicians and psychiatrists, enjoying the continued ascendancy of medical authority over matters of sex, love, and home life, commented on the perversions committed in the dark recesses of the city. As they promulgated a disease model of homosexuality that tied same-sex affections to mental illness, the Kinsey reports reminded Americans just how common such sexual practices could be.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*, 199-204; Robert Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America*, 10.

⁶⁸ John Howard, “The Library, the Park, and the Pervert: Public Space and Homosexual Encounter in Post-World War II Atlanta,” in John Howard, ed., *Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South*. New York: New York University Press, 1997; 121. “The Kinsey reports” – two thick surveys, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, published in 1948 and 1953, respectively -- were instant sensations. They popularized the radical idea that so-called deviant sexual practices, such as masturbation and homosexuality, were actually fairly common in the U.S. Even Cole Porter included a reference to the first “Kinsey report” in *Too Darn Hot*, his 1948 hit song (performed by Ella Fitzgerald).

The red scare compounded anxiety about America's moral strength. When investigations turned up "unsuitable" gays, the inquisitors expanded the scope of their outrage. "Sexual perverts. . . have infiltrated our government," wrote the Republican national chairman to his workers, and they are "perhaps as dangerous as the actual communists."

Senator Kenneth Wherry called for a full investigation. "You can't hardly separate homosexuals from subversives. A man of low morality is a menace in the government."

Wherry called for strong action to secure "seaports and major cities" against the "conspiracy of subversives and moral perverts." The *New York Daily News* warned about the "all-powerful, super-secret, inner circle of highly educated...sexual misfits in the State Department ...all highly susceptible to blandishments by homosexuals in foreign nations." Billy Graham praised the vigilant Americans who were busy "exposing the pinks, the lavenders, and the reds who have sought refuge beneath the wings of the American Eagle."⁶⁹

By 1955, the same year that DOB formed, the most infamous witch-hunter of the day, Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, was finally beginning to lose credibility. His five-year televised campaign to weed out Communists from the federal government had focused on the wrong target --- the U.S. Army -- and a Senate committee turned the tables, investigating him and the tactics he had employed. But for many people, the damage had been done.

Nora Sayre has written about the response two respected journalists, Joseph and Stewart Alsop, received in 1950 when they published a piece in the *Saturday Evening Post* criticizing Senator Wherry's equation of homosexuality with risks to national security. McCarthy himself replied in two threatening letters to the editors of the *Post*,

⁶⁹ James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 391-392.

hinting that Joseph Alsop, who was single, was himself homosexual. McCarthy also threatened that “anyone” who got in the way of “cleaning the Communists out of government” was in danger. The bullying strategy worked. Sayre notes that “During the four years that followed that warning, the Alsops wanted to write more pieces opposing McCarthy for the *Post*. But the magazine ran no subsequent articles about him by anyone.” If a respected national magazine could be intimidated into silence in this way, what chance did the average U.S. citizen have against the government and “the Committee?”⁷⁰

In David Johnson’s study of the federal government’s persecution of gay men and lesbians in the post World War II period, he details the quiet, pre-McCarthy purges of homosexuals from the State Department under the Truman Administration in the mid- to late 1940s, following the Alger Hiss-Whittaker Chambers spy scandal. McCarthy in fact was a relative latecomer to the witchhunt; Republican legislators like Senator Kenneth Wherry (see previous quotes) did far more to build the climate of accusation against Democratic, especially New Deal, bureaucrats. McCarthy was in many ways most useful in helping to popularize the conflation of “loyalty” with “security,” and “Commie” with “queer.” Johnson asserts that far more homosexuals were trapped by government regulations and dismissed from their jobs with the various agencies of the federal bureaucracy in the 1950s than were Communists.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Nora Sayre, *Previous Convictions: A Journey through the 1950s* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 274. “The Committee” is a reference to the House Committee on Un-American Activities, popularly known by the acronym HUAC.

⁷¹ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

To underscore the severity of “the Lavender Scare,” in 1953 the federal Civil Service Commission was given the power to deny employment to women and men in all U.S. government jobs on the grounds of “sexual perversion,” pursuant to President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s Executive Order 10450. Never before had so many Americans had to swear to their heterosexuality in order to get or keep their jobs.

Many towns and cities also cracked down, flourishing variations of the “perverts subvert our character” motif. The sexual subversives menaced family and country by neutering American males. The skulking Communist and the stealthy pervert ran together – both spread their contagions. One “prancing minion of the Moscow party line” – like a single rotten apple – could spoil a whole office. The image of the gay man stood as the antipode of the strong American male holding the line against foreign danger.⁷²

In May 1957, “B.D.H., Washington, DC” wrote to *The Ladder* that “so much adverse publicity has been given homosexuals by the newspapers and Congressmen” that he did not share the optimism of the speakers at a February 1957 forum on “Employment and the Homosexual” that DOB had organized in San Francisco. “I know of a homosexual who lost his Government position a year ago and who since then has been unable to obtain employment. He seems to have developed a ‘mental block’ and so great is the fear which grips him because of this misfortune that he cannot bring himself to make the final step in approaching a prospective employer for an interview.”⁷³ The writer provided two more examples of gay people whose lives had been ruined by loss of employment due to blackmail or arrest. He noted that most employees don’t want to hire

⁷² James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation*, 210-211.

⁷³ Letter signed “B.D.H., Washington DC,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 8 (May 1957): 22-24.

gay men and lesbians “on account of the prevailing mores and the stigma which attaches to the employer because of the presence of homosexuals.”

Franklin Kameny launched a second career, as a life-long activist for gay equality, because he refused to be cowed by “the stigma.” Born in Queens, New York in 1925, Kameny is a veteran of World War II who completed his graduate work in astronomy at Harvard in 1956. He moved to Washington DC to take a research and teaching position at Georgetown University but quickly transferred to the Army Map Service, “where Cold War pressures promised fast advancement.” Kameny toured observatories across the country to help the U.S. military accurately aim its new, and expanding, arsenal of nuclear weapons. “But along with the government’s scientific patronage came demands for political and sexual conformity,” David Johnson wrote in a recent profile of Kameny. He found himself under investigation because, he was told, “information has come to the attention of the U.S. Civil Service Commission that you are a homosexual.” Kameny answered that “his private life was none of the federal government’s concern,” and lost his job. After the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear his case in 1961, Kameny turned his energies to organizing other gay people. He and other DC gays founded Mattachine Society of Washington, DC that same year.⁷⁴

Urging much more militancy from gay groups and an end to what he saw as homophile apologetics, Kameny championed gay people as “homosexual citizens”

⁷⁴ David K. Johnson, “Franklin Kameny (1925 -),” *Before Stonewall*, 209-218.

deserving all the rights granted anyone else. He insisted that homosexuality was “a preference” and that medical and scientific studies showing otherwise were bunk.⁷⁵

Kameny’s decision in 1957 to fight back is but one example of the private acts of valor and public signposts pointing to change in this period. In 1982, black lesbian feminist poet and activist Audre Lorde remembered hearing incredible news in the small town in Mexico where she was living in 1954. “That spring, McCarthy was censured. The Supreme Court decision on the desegregation of schools was announced in the English newspaper, and for a while all of us seemed to go crazy with hope for another kind of America.”⁷⁶

Despite the dominant culture of conformity at the time, it is important to remember the foundational work that was done in the midst of the Cold War 1950s to define civil rights issues and build the base for future struggles. It was a time when people could not ignore the national debate about race and segregation that was underway, commanding headlines and challenging customary ways of doing things. One year after the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed supposedly separate-but-equal facilities and ended legal segregation in the nation’s schools, African Americans proudly walked

⁷⁵ Kameny fought for 18 years to have the “immoral conduct” disqualification for federal employment erased. Along the way, he influenced (or infuriated) all the then-current leaders of the homophile organizations as he agitated for bolder public action; New York DOBers Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin Lahusen became very close to and allied with Kameny and his positions. What is clear today is that his work led to a great victory for gay people. In 1975, Kameny was informed by the Civil Service Commission’s General Counsel that the Commission had expunged the term ‘immoral conduct’ and twenty years after that, in 1995, President Clinton signed an Executive Order banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the granting of government security clearances. “Frank Kameny,” *Completely Queer: The Gay and Lesbian Encyclopedia*, 321-323.

⁷⁶ Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (New York: Persephone Press, 1982); 172.

the streets of Montgomery, Alabama for months while empty city buses rattled by. The first year-long, large-scale boycott against state-sanctioned discrimination since World War II, Montgomery was one of many protests that took place in towns and cities, North and South, in the 1950s.⁷⁷

Further, grassroots organizing was taking place in a variety of places and on many issues. For example, in Washington, Oregon and California, Japanese and Japanese-American women and men began challenging laws that prohibited them from owning property and started reclaiming the resources and respectability stolen from them in the internment camps of World War II. Farmworker organizers fanned throughout the fields of the southwest to help Chicano, Filipino, Black and Anglo men, women and children form unions and cooperatives, launching their decades-long fight to improve their working and living conditions. Courageous activists led demonstrations against HUAC and mounted campaigns to support Paul Robeson and the Rosenbergs. “Ban the Bomb” slogans surfaced from coast to coast despite the dominance of Cold War rhetoric, and New York housewives started organizing a national network of women against war.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ See John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). In addition, a little-known U.S. Supreme Court decision decided two weeks before *Brown* has at least as much relevance as *Brown* for the pursuit of civil rights’ claims by minority groups. *Hernandez v. Texas* extended equal protection of the law to Mexican-Americans in a jury-selection case. In his decision, Chief Justice Earl Warren explicitly noted that a group of people deserved constitutional protections when “differences from the community norm may define other groups” as inferior and thus subject to discrimination, like racial or ethnic groups which are “easily identifiable.” (Ian Henry Lopez, “*Hernandez v. Brown*,” *New York Times*, May 22, 2004, A-17.)

⁷⁸ In addition to the above-cited new works, for examples of social change organizing in the 1950s and early 1960s, see also Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*:

The Daughters of Bilitis was formed when the notion of civil rights was just reaching widespread popular consciousness. They did groundbreaking personal and political work with their constituencies in the 1950s and early '60s, expanding the then-prevalent rights discourse to include sexual minorities. The Daughters and other homophile activists helped give gay and lesbian people the self-esteem and confidence necessary to see themselves as worthy of respect and basic rights.⁷⁹

For example, given the bar raids which could and did erupt at any time, within a year of DOB's founding they invited Ernest Besig, executive director of the San Francisco branch of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), to address their July 5, 1956 meeting. Besig was one of the first such "guest speakers" invited to a DOB gathering, and he emphasized that merely *being* homosexual was not in and of itself illegal. He also encouraged DOB women to educate themselves and their friends about their constitutional rights when dealing with the government, particularly the police.⁸⁰

This signaled a long and productive professional association between DOB members and local branches of the ACLU, an association that was cultivated by the activists of the Mattachine Society as well, in San Francisco, Denver, Washington DC,

American Families and the Nostalgia Trap (New York: Basic Books, 1992, rev. 2000); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: UC California Press, 1995); Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1993); Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987).

⁷⁹ Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession*, 356-357; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 75-78.

and other cities throughout the U.S. In addition to pro bono legal advice and representation at key moments throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, the connections between the homophile leaders and local ACLU directors helped turn the civil liberties organization around when it came to same-sex sexuality as a constitutional issue.

Founded in 1920 as an outgrowth of radical organizing against U.S. involvement in World War I, by 1955 the ACLU had had over three decades of increasing growth and success in defending and expanding the rights of individuals and minority groups. But their stance toward homosexuality was no different from most of American society in the 1950s: it was not seen as a civil rights or civil liberties issue. While local ACLU leaders in a number of offices around the country were supportive of homophile organizing and were regularly featured as speakers at national conferences and local meetings,⁸¹ the national ACLU took a very measured approach to the issue of gay rights until the 1960s. The official position of the ACLU in 1957 was that there was no constitutional basis on which to challenge felony arrests for homosexual acts but that “homosexuals, like

⁸⁰ “Minutes,” July 4, 1956; DOB Box 2/2, Martin and Lyon Papers, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

⁸¹ There were many connections between the civil liberties watchdog and the homophile groups. Many of the DOB members interviewed -- such as Barbara Gittings, Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin, and Stella Rush -- cite their long-time membership in the ACLU as important to them. Also, examples of interaction with local ACLU offices and officials abound in homophile newsletters and programs of the 1950s and 1960s. For example, in his essay in *Before Stonewall*, (2002), the heterosexual homophile activist and scholar Vern Bullough recounts that when he moved to Los Angeles in 1959, he immediately joined the ACLU there and began meeting with the director of the LA office, Eason Monroe, to change national ACLU policy regarding gay men and lesbians. Bullough is also the author of “Lesbianism, Homosexuality, and the American Civil Liberties Union” (*Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 13(1), Fall 1986, 23-33), which traces the Southern California ACLU affiliate’s efforts on behalf of gay men and women in the 1950s and 1960s. John D’Emilio’s *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* also highlights the importance of activists’ involvement with ACLU affiliates, as does John Loughery’s *The Other Side of Silence*.

members of other socially heretical or deviant groups, are more vulnerable than others to official persecution, denial of due process in prosecution, and entrapment.” Such matters were deemed to be “of proper concern to the Union.” Local laws requiring the registration of people convicted of homosexual acts were condemned as unconstitutional.

However, the ACLU affirmed its previous policy, and that of President Eisenhower’s Executive Order 10450, that the use of homosexuality as a factor in determining federal government security clearances was valid but “only when there is evidence of other acts which come within valid security criteria.”⁸² This rather tepid statement on the rights of homosexuals was met with thanks from many homophile activists, including the DOB, who saw an opening to work with the organization.⁸³

DOB’s strategic meeting with Besig within the first year of the group’s founding is also one concrete early example of what would become their organizing style. By inviting him to speak to their meeting, they established a connection with the leading civil liberties group in the city and helped start a dialogue with those who could advocate on their behalf. They educated themselves as well as informed the ACLU of the very real conditions faced by lesbians.

⁸² “Policy of the ACLU national governing board, January 17, 1957.” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 5 (February 1957): 5.

⁸³ By 1966, the ACLU formally endorsed the principle of gay rights and in 1973 formed the Sexual Privacy Project. In addition to litigation and lobbying, they began to address gay issues internally with education and policy debates. Today, the ACLU’s Gay and Lesbian Rights and AIDS Projects houses one of the largest LGBT advocacy and legal programs in the nation. ACLU 2003 Annual Report (New York: American Civil Liberties Union, 132 Broad Street, New York NY; 2003). For a general history of the ACLU, see Samuel Walker, *In Defense of American Liberties: A History of the ACLU* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Part IV: The Politics of Respectability

Within DOB, and society at large in the 1950s, the public's suspicion of secret societies and the rabid climate of Cold War accusation co-existed with a passionate belief in the right and power of the individual to succeed and to contribute to society. This belief in individualism motivated DOB's leaders even more than the fear of being branded as subversive. They seized upon it in their first printed appeals for members, redefined it in terms of an evolving 20th century feminism, and created a strong self-reliant "We Can DO It" credo within the organization. As Del Martin wrote in an early editorial in DOB's newsletter,

And what will be the lot of the future Lesbian? Fear? Scorn? This need not be – IF lethargy is supplanted by an energized constructive program, if cowardice gives way to the solidarity of a cooperative front, if the 'let Georgia do it' attitude is replaced by the realization of individual responsibility in thwarting the evils of ignorance, superstition, prejudice, and bigotry.⁸⁴

DOB's brand of "militantly respectable"⁸⁵ individualism was both a blessing and a curse to the organization throughout its life. A blessing, because it attracted many strong and self-directed women into leadership positions in the group; a curse, because there were constant struggles from the beginning between the opinions of a given

⁸⁴ Del Martin, "Message," *The Ladder* Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 1956): 7.

⁸⁵ Thanks to historian Marc Stein for coining this phrase. He used it in his work, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Love: Making Lesbian and Gay History in Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) to describe the DOB approach to social change: appear dignified and responsible, be articulate and well-informed, and insist on equality.

individual DOB member or chapter, and the perceived needs of the entire organization. This tension – between the individual and the group – is not peculiar to the Daughters of Bilitis; in fact we can find it in every organization.

Influenced by liberal reform organizations like the ACLU, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the DOB's early leaders modeled themselves on the advocates who were working for integration of minority groups into American society.⁸⁶

The Daughters charted a difficult course for themselves. Navigating the norms of acceptability in post-World War II America was not easy. "Integration" may have been the buzzword but segregation was the daily reality for blacks, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, Jews, leftists, intellectuals, immigrants, poor people, and homosexuals in most of America.

The women who were active in DOB wanted the paper promises of American equality to be made real, and they were willing to accommodate themselves to many if not most of the prevailing social mores. In return, they wanted recognition that they were just as "normal" as anyone else. They wanted acceptance as well as an end to harassment and discrimination.⁸⁷

In some ways, DOB's belief that lesbians needed to adapt to societal mores while trying to reform social policies and practices is reminiscent of the early years of the black

⁸⁶ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, interviews with author, April 25, 1997; March 6, 2002.

⁸⁷ Many speeches to DOB meetings and conventions, as well as essays and letters in *The Ladder*, address this issue, especially in the years 1956 through 1965. One of the earliest was "A Plea for Integration," written by Barbara Stephens for *The Ladder* in Vol. 1 No. 8 (May 1957): 17-18.

women's club movement at the end of the 19th century and first two decades of the 20th. In addition to their stated belief in appropriate representation of the lesbian, the very name DOB activists chose for their newsletter -- "The Ladder" -- shows a commitment to uplift ideology. The new publication -- like the organization it would promote -- was intended as a way for the individual lesbian to elevate herself, out of the depths of self-hatred and social strictures. By her actions, she would enable others to do the same.

As historian Paula Giddings has written, "Black women activists believed that their efforts were essential for reform and progress, and that their moral standing was a steady rock upon which the race could lean...(but) Society failed to see them as a distinct political and social force. At a time when their White peers were riding the wave of moral superiority that sanctioned their activism, Black women were seen as immoral scourges."⁸⁸

"Respectability was one of the primary bases upon which African Americans claimed equal status and citizenship during the Progressive era. Defined more expansively, it continued to be an influential basis for claiming rights through the civil rights era and beyond," Paisley Harris wrote in her review of three recent works of African American women's history.⁸⁹ Like the well-educated, intelligent white women

⁸⁸ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), 81-82. See also E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001) and Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

⁸⁹ Paisley Harris, "Gatekeeping and Remaking: The Politics of Respectability in African American Women's History and Black Feminism," *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 15 No. 1 (Spring 2003): 212-219.

who organized local, national, and international women's clubs and organizations in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the founders of the black women's club movement were mostly middle-class and Christian, married, and devoted to notions of reform, not revolution. "Both believed in the importance of the home and the woman's moral influence within it. Black and White women saw the family as a microcosm and cornerstone of society. In the broadest sense, this idea imbued all female reformers with anew self-awareness and a stronger sense of importance."⁹⁰

"The organization of the NACW (National Association of Colored Women) was a watershed in the history of black women. They were not participating in a women's auxiliary of a like-minded men's group, as had happened with the social-uplift and abolitionist associations of the past. 'Our woman's movement is a woman's movement in that it is led and directed by women,' announced Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin at the Boston national convention."⁹¹ From 1896 until it was supplanted by the National Council of Negro Women in 1935, the NACW brought tens of thousands of black women throughout the U.S. into local and regional clubs which worked to care for the poor, the aged, the sick and disabled, and the young in their communities, as well as to agitate for national anti-lynching legislation and for woman's suffrage. It provided real experience

⁹⁰ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 95. For examples of white women's organizing internationally and locally in the 19th century, see Bonnie Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement 1930-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁹¹ Ibid.

in organizing and management skills for the women involved and created an important platform for Progressive policies and campaigns.

While DOB never reached anywhere near the numbers of women that the NACW was able to involve, the instincts and organizational impulses and attitudes of many of the early organizers echo similar themes. Their efforts to counter the prevailing images of the gay woman as immoral, their commitment to being an organization by and for lesbians rather than an auxiliary of one of the predominantly male homophile groups, and their belief that true social change can only come about when stigmatized individuals can claim a sense of entitlement and self-esteem are similar if not identical to the tenets of the black women's clubs which predated DOB by a half-century.

The lessons learned by watching the painfully slow progress of the black struggle for civil rights in America were extremely important to the leaders of the homophile groups. As we have seen, Mattachine founder Harry Hay urged the assumption of the "minority" label as early as 1948. Donald Webster Cory (the pseudonym of Edward Sagarin) further popularized the idea in his first-person account of gay life, the groundbreaking 1951 book *The Homosexual in America*. As Martin Duberman has written of Cory/Sagarin, "(I)n the years Cory spent preparing *The Homosexual in America*, he (as he would put it in the book) 'became more and more struck' by the notion that homosexuals were, like more established ethnic, racial and subcultural groups, a distinct and legitimate minority."⁹²

⁹² Donald Webster Cory, *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* (New York: Greenberg, 1951); Martin Duberman, "The 'Father' of the Homophile Movement," *Left Out*, 67. The importance of Cory's book to gay men and lesbians in the 1950s cannot be overstated. It was the first widely-circulated, popularly available nonfiction work,

1950s' gay and lesbian organizers fashioned themselves after the most visible activists of their time. The early 1950s, in particular, saw an upsurge in black organizing, lobbying, and litigation strategies and some highly-publicized successes. As noted previously, the U. S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and the Montgomery Bus Boycott the year after buoyed the movement. There was also the explosion of outrage surrounding the murder of Chicago teenager Emmet Till in Mississippi, organized by his mother Mamie in 1955.⁹³

The role of black women in the long struggle for civil rights in the 20th century – from Ida B. Wells-Barnett to Mary McLeod Bethune, from Pauli Murray to Rosa Parks, Jo Anne Robinson and Ella Baker – was crucial, yet they were often overshadowed by the greater acclaim and celebrity accorded the men. For lesbians in the 1950s, as for black women throughout U.S. history, their gender brought with it particular challenges as well as opportunities. Questions as to their “morality” were answered in part by unimpeachable self-presentation and conduct; in the face of societal opprobrium, both groups made the development of self-esteem and self-confidence central to their activism. It was a necessary precondition: both lesbians and black women were demonized as highly-sexualized predators; both were typecast by popular culture as depraved or deficient.⁹⁴

written by an “insider,” to assert that homosexuals were entitled to the same rights as everyone else.

⁹³ John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*, 146-155; Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement*, 170.

⁹⁴ Paisley Harris, “Gatekeeping and Remaking: The Politics of Respectability in African American Women’s History,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 214-215; Jaye Zimet, *Strange Sisters* (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1999), 25; John D’Emilio and Estelle

For black women who loved women, the challenges were even greater. It is no wonder that female activists for racial and sexual equality often chose the “respectable” route. Navigating the shoals between the archetypes of mother and whore was especially difficult when race, and deviant sexuality, were joined.

One early, and oft-cited, concrete example of DOB’s adoption of “the politics of respectability” is the organizational advocacy of a “mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society.” Lorraine Hansberry was one of the first *Ladder* readers to take up this issue. In doing so, she articulated an understanding of the sorts of social strictures operating for lesbians as well as for black women and men. Hansberry, the award-winning author of *A Raisin in the Sun*, was the first African-American woman to have a drama performed on the Broadway stage. Born in Chicago to a middle-class family, Hansberry had moved to New York in 1950 and found work with Paul Robeson’s newspaper *Freedom*. Three years later, she married a white male friend, Robert Nemiroff, and began writing for the stage. Hansberry was an early subscriber to *The Ladder*, sent in two long letters which were printed in 1957 and 1958, and met with DOB leaders Lyon and Martin in New York in 1958, a year before her play opened. “We met her at a café in Greenwich Village,” Lyon remembers. “She was very encouraging and interested in what we were doing, but she said she just couldn’t get more involved. Her play was about to open on Broadway and she couldn’t take on one more thing.”⁹⁵

Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 295-297; Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Mind That Burns in Each Body,” *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell & Sharon Thompson, ed., (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983); 332-335.

⁹⁵ Phyllis Lyon, discussion with author, April 9, 2004; Michael Anderson, “‘Education of Another Kind’ – Lorraine Hansberry in the Fifties,” Toni Lester, ed., *Gender*

In the May 1957 issue of *The Ladder*, a long letter from her, signed “L.H.N., New York, N.Y.” is printed in which Hansberry gave strong support for the inclusion in their Statement of Purpose of the phrase “to advocate a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society.”

As one raised in a cultural experience (I am a Negro) where those within were and are forever lecturing to their fellows about how to appear acceptable to the dominant social group, I know something about the shallowness of such a view as an end in itself...

What ought to be clear is that one is oppressed or discriminated against because one is different, not ‘wrong’ or ‘bad’ somehow. This is perhaps the bitterest of the entire pill. HOWEVER, as a matter of facility, of expediency, one has to take a critical view of revolutionary attitudes which in spite of the BASIC truth I have mentioned above, may tend to aggravate the problems of the group.

Hansberry insisted that “I have long since passed that period when I felt personal discomfort at the sight of an ill-dressed or illiterate Negro. Social awareness has taught me where to lay the blame.” She went on to imagine a time in the future when “the ‘discreet’ Lesbian will not turn her head on the streets at the sight of the ‘butch’ strolling hand in hand with her friend in their trousers and definitive haircuts” and adds, “(B)ut for the moment, it still disturbs.” Hansberry’s concerns seemed to be mostly with the best way to change opinions and attitudes about homosexuality among “one’s most

Nonconformity, Race, and Sexuality: Charting the Connections (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 211; Lorraine Hansberry, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words*, adapted by Robert Nemiroff (New York: Vintage, 1995), 73-74; Neil Miller, “Lorraine Hansberry,” *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House; 1995), 328-332.

enlightened (to use a hopeful term) heterosexual friends.” Hers was a strong voice commending DOB for their adherence to the politics of respectability.⁹⁶

But the debate continued. Following up on the issue of socially appropriate appearance, an article on “Transvestism – A Cross-Cultural Survey” by “Barbara Stephens” was printed in the June 1957 *Ladder*. It drew responses that show the diversity of opinion about “acceptable dress” among DOB members and *Ladder* readers. One letter, signed by “A.C., New York, N.Y.,” offers congratulations and support to the new organization and its newsletter but then goes on to note “I consider myself (and my roommate also considers herself) a mild transvestite – that is, we wear slacks almost always on our off-work hours. We are comfortable in them and we have no problem adjusting to the stares of passersby. We consider dresses, high heels and stocking holders the most uncomfortable contraptions men have invented to restrict the movements of women so they cannot walk very far, lift many things, or sit with their legs apart in warm weather.” Another writer in the same issue states forcefully “Of all the intellectual rubbish in the history of mankind, none has been more voluminous than the conventions and taboos of dress...The cult of conformity itself remains to be questioned.”⁹⁷

These are just a few examples of the debates to be found in DOB’s files and in the memories of the organization’s activists and leaders. They help complicate present-day notions of homophile accommodationism. What one was willing to do or to be in order to gain acceptance by the larger society was a contested issue from the beginning.

⁹⁶ “L.H.N., New York, N.Y.” in Readers Respond, *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 8 (May 1957): 26-28.

⁹⁷ “B.S., San Leandro,” in Readers Respond, *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 10, (July 1957): 28-29.

Despite DOB's unabashed and clear reform goals and objectives, the group also provided spaces for discussion and divergent thinking on the ways in which the struggle for lesbian and gay rights should be waged. The development of their newsletter in 1956 provided yet another important means of communication and an unprecedented site for the construction of lesbian identity and visibility.

Chapter Two:

“From the city of many moods...”

The Ladder

Women, like other oppressed groups of one kind or another, have particularly had to pay a price for the intellectual impoverishment that the second class status imposed on us for centuries created and sustained. Thus, I feel that THE LADDER is a fine, elementary step in a rewarding direction.¹

Lorraine Hansberry

The Daughters began to educate and organize themselves at a paradoxical time in the U.S. For many lesbians and gay men in mid-20th century America, there was the very real sense of shame and fear of exposure that co-existed with the excitement of developing new and different lives and loves in a handful of major metropolitan areas. The discovery and acceptance of one's homosexual desires put gay men and lesbians in *de facto* positions of defiance -- of prevailing social norms, of religious teachings, of family values.

For many, the possibility of ostracism and punishment meant that they had no choice but to live in two worlds -- “normal” and “deviant” -- and become adept at negotiating both while maintaining strict segregation between them. For some, the negotiation continues to this day.

¹ Portion of a letter signed by “L.H.N., New York, N.Y.” in “Readers Respond,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 8 (May 1957): 26-28.

For example, the pseudonymous Lisa Ben (an anagram of “lesbian”) for more than 50 years has been a celebrated lesbian activist who insists on her anonymity. She found her way to the nascent gay and lesbian community in southern California when she left her family home in the San Francisco Bay area and relocated to Los Angeles in 1945.²

She was introduced to the homosexual bar scene in Los Angeles by a good girl friend who asked her if she was gay. According to a recent interview, Lisa Ben “thought she was being asked if she was happy.” Her “affirmative reply” led her friend to include her in an evening spent at a local club, “where Lisa noticed that the men and women were in separate areas. That evening it gradually dawned on her what being gay meant and that she was not the only woman who found other women attractive.”³

Ben also observed that since there were magazines available for every type of interest, it would be logical to have a magazine for gay women. While working as a typist for the Hollywood movie studio RKO, the 26-year-old woman had a great deal of free time on her hands and had been told by her boss that the important thing was to “look busy,” so she created her newsletter, *VICE VERSA* (subtitled “America’s Gayest Magazine”), on company time. She has said that she named it such because “her kind of life was considered a vice.” Her fears of being found out were so great that not only did she write and publish *VICE VERSA* anonymously, she typed originals – two sets at a

² Hogan and Hudson, *Completely Queer*, 79, 559; Florine Fleischman with Susan Bullough. “Lisa Ben (1921 -).” *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*. Vern L. Bullough, ed. (New York: Haworth Press, 2002), 63-65.

³ Florine Fleischman, “Lisa Ben,” *Before Stonewall*, 63.

time, with 5 carbon copies of each, making a total of 12 copies -- rather than using the still-laborious but much faster mimeographing process (which would leave behind evidence). Not trusting the mail, she handed out copies to friends and friends of friends.

In the inaugural issue, she announced that *VICE VERSA* was

a magazine dedicated, in all seriousness, to those of us who will never quite be able to adapt ourselves to the iron-bound rules of Convention. The circulation of this publication, under the circumstances, must be very limited, going only to those who, it is felt, will genuinely enjoy such a magazine. This little publication, at present free of charge, will be published whenever there is enough suitable material to warrant the appearance of another edition.

Lisa Ben produced *VICE VERSA* from June, 1947 to February, 1948, writing most of the copy herself or retyping material she found elsewhere. Each issue contained a variety of information, from show business news and reviews to political commentary. Despite a positive response from the women who received it, the Valentine's Day 1948 issue was the last. Most stories of Lisa Ben's life attribute the demise of *VICE VERSA* to the tediousness and isolation of the work. However, one recent account complicates that picture, quoting Lisa Ben as saying that the real reason she stopped producing the newsletter was that she had lost her job at RKO and the resources and privacy it provided her. She also reportedly was enjoying the lesbian lifestyle so much that "I wanted to live it rather than write about it."⁴

Ten years later, when the Daughters of Bilitis formed a chapter in Los Angeles, Lisa Ben was one of its original members. She served as a local officer, taking on the position of secretary for the next few years. Ben also contributed her poetry and fiction to

⁴ Paul Cain, "Lisa Ben," *Leading the Parade*, 15.

the DOB's newsletter *The Ladder* in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which is when she says she took on her pseudonym at the urging of editor Phyllis Lyon. Lisa Ben also became one of the earliest lesbian celebrities. As "the first gay folk singer," she reworked popular songs, giving them overtly same-sex meanings ("the girl that I marry will probably be / As butch as a hunk of machinery..."). In DOB, Ben not only found a home but an audience. Beginning in 1960, the Los Angeles Chapter of DOB sold recordings of Lisa Ben singing gay versions of "Frankie and Johnny" and "Cruisin' Down the Boulevard;" the records were included in DOB's Book Service and sent to subscribers around the country. She also performed at functions and parties, and had a regular show at a Los Angeles club, the Flamingo, which featured gay events on Sunday afternoons in the early 1960s.⁵

In erecting *The Ladder*, the Daughters recognized their debt to Lisa Ben, who had created the first known lesbian publication in the U.S. They acknowledged her work and included her verses as they constructed their own organizational newsletter eight years after *VICE VERSA*'s last issue appeared.⁶

⁵ Florence Fleischman, interview with author, Los Angeles CA, September 6, 2003.

⁶ In Del Martin's review of *The Homosexual in America* in the third issue of *The Ladder* [Vol. 1 No. 3 (December 1956): 5-6] she acknowledges *VICE VERSA*.

An Overview of U.S. Homophile Publications Before 1956

According to gay journalist and homophile pioneer Jim Kepner, at least half a dozen American homophile periodicals appeared before the Daughters of Bilitis began to publish *The Ladder* in 1956. “The first known U.S. Gay publication was Henry Gerber’s 1925 *Friendship and Freedom*, from Chicago, of which there were perhaps a hundred or so mimeographed copies of two or more issues...Copies not already distributed were seized by police and destroyed when members of Gerber’s Society for Human Rights were arrested (in 1925).”

Kepner also includes *Chanticleer* in his roster of early 20th century homophile publications. A short-lived, mimeographed publication that Gerber worked on in 1934, *Chanticleer* was one of the few sources of news from Germany about Nazi persecution of homosexuals in general and Magnus Hirschfeld’s Scientific Humanitarian Committee and Berlin-based research center in particular.

In addition, Gerber published a newsletter (“Contacts”) in 1939 as a way for gay members of his pen pal club to connect with one another; one of them, Frank Court, wrote and distributed *Equinox Errant* in the mid-1940s as a covert newsletter for the New York chapter of the U.S. Rocket Society. (Kepner noted, “in those closeted days, Gay messages were often hidden in a special way of telling apparently hetero jokes.” Of the Rocket Society he adds, “I knew several members then through sci-fi circles but didn’t know if they were Gay.”)⁷ There may have been many more such efforts, but too little evidence has as yet been uncovered. As discussed, *VICE VERSA* -- the only newsletter

⁷ Jim Kepner, *Rough New, Daring Views*, 8-10.

we know that was produced by a lesbian -- relied on the drive and talents of one woman. It was a milestone in gay publishing but lasted less than a year. The two other overtly homosexual publications of the early '50s -- *ONE Magazine*, and *Mattachine Review* -- became pillars of the homophile community. Starting in 1956, *The Ladder* would bring to three the number of popularly available, U.S. magazines created by and for lesbians and gay men. They became the clarions of a new movement for civil rights.⁸

⁸ Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* (Boston, Faber and Faber, 1995).

Part I: Erecting *The Ladder*

Although initially intended to be a recruitment tool and publicity vehicle for the Daughters of Bilitis, *The Ladder* became better known than the organization that created it. From 1956 to 1972, it was a regular monthly national magazine created by and for lesbians --the first of its kind and the only one in existence until 1970.⁹ It also helped launch a revolution in the publishing world by creating an audience for attractive, intelligent periodicals dealing directly with lesbianism, feminism, and social change. Yet there have been very few articles or monographs written specifically about *The Ladder* despite its significance.¹⁰

In the summer of 1956, starting a newsletter seemed like a logical next step for the new Daughters of Bilitis group in San Francisco. It was a natural outgrowth of their first year of organizing. Both Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin had backgrounds in journalism from their college years. Lyon had been an editor of *The Daily Californian*, the student paper at the University of California at Berkeley, during her undergraduate days in the 1940s, and Martin had worked on the same paper as well as *The Golden*

⁹ Each one of DOB's chapters published a newsletter, so there were many local publications in the 1960s and 1970s. *Lesbian Tide*, which succeeded *The Ladder* in 1971 as a national monthly lesbian magazine, started as the organization's newsletter and was expanded by Jeanne Cordova and other LA DOB chapter members. Cordova began to publish *Lesbian Tide* independently in 1974 and it continued until the early '80s.

¹⁰ See Manuela Soares, "The Purloined Ladder: Its Place in Lesbian History," *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 34 No. 3/4 (Winter 1998): 27-49; Phyllis Gorman, "The Daughters of Bilitis: A Description and Analysis of a Female Homophile Social Movement Organization 1955-1963" (Master's thesis, Ohio State University, 1985); Rose Weitz, "The Development of Tertiary Deviance in the Lesbian World" (Master's thesis, Arizona State University, 1982).

Gator, the student newspaper at San Francisco State University. The two women had met in Seattle when both worked for a trade publication there. It was clear to them that publishing a newsletter would provide a way to advertise their activities and help with outreach to San Francisco women

They presented the idea to the other members, and it was well-received. By the end of June, 1956, Lyon was named editor of the newsletter, with Noni Frey (“Tori Fry”) as assistant editor, Barbara Deming (“Bobbi Deering”) in charge of mailing, and “BOB” (a woman named Brian O’Brien) as art director. The first name proposed for the new publication was “Feminine footnotes;” by the end of July, “The Ladder,” suggested by Brian and presented along with a drawing for the first issue’s cover, was unanimously chosen.¹¹

It was at this meeting that DOB discussed what should be featured in the newsletter. A series of articles on “fear” was the group’s first priority, and they discussed its many manifestations, naming “Fear of a group, ridicule, what people will say, job, public opinion, the law, involvement with a possibly communistic or radical group, and ostracism.” Using a somewhat facetious shorthand to describe themselves and other gay people (“homos”), they urged pragmatic solutions to counter the fears they all believed robbed gay men and lesbians of self-esteem. They concluded:

¹¹ Minutes, July 24, 1956. DOB Box 2/2, Martin and Lyon Papers, GLBTHS, San Francisco. San Franciscan Barbara Deming (“Bobbi Deering”) was a very active, early member of the Daughters of Bilitis; she is not to be confused with the New York writer and peace activist also named Barbara Deming.

Consensus [sic] seemed to be that if homos were educated as to their civil rights and also as to why they should mingle with other people and not expect to be immediately recognized most of the fears would be dispersed. Suggestion was made that an article on how the homo, by his or her own self-consciousness, makes himself more miserable than need be, be printed in the newsletter.¹²

The women worked through the summer so as to be able to produce their first issue of the newsletter that year. *The Ladder* made its debut as a typed, mimeographed 12-page newsletter in October 1956. The first issues look homespun, in part because of O'Brien's hand-drawn cover. She portrayed two slender women dressed in tailored slacks and blouses at the foot of a ladder that reaches into the clouds above. The slogan "from the city of many moods..." decorates the back cover, along with DOB's organizational coat of arms and motto, "Qui Vive," or "On the Alert." They quickly ran out of the 180 copies they produced after mailing it to everyone in their address books.

The President's Message in the same issue charts the course of the nascent homophile movement and DOB's particular role in it: "While women may not have so much difficulty with law enforcement, their problems are none the less real – family, sometimes children, employment, social acceptance." Del Martin makes a passionate plea for involvement in the Daughters of Bilitis, and in the homophile movement generally, primarily on the basis of gender identification, not sexual orientation:

¹² Ibid.

Women have taken a beating through the centuries. It has been only in this 20th, through the courageous crusade of the Suffragettes and the influx of women into the business world, that woman has become an independent entity, an individual with the right to vote and the right to a job and economic security. But it took women with foresight and determination to attain this heritage which is now ours.

...Nothing was ever accomplished by hiding in a dark corner. Why not discard the hermitage for the heritage that awaits any red-blooded American woman who dares to claim it?¹³

It seems they hit the nail on the head with their emphasis on confronting fear. A letter from "J. M., Cleveland, Ohio" in the second issue expresses what the Daughters assumed many lesbians felt.

I cannot tell you what a source of both inspiration and pleasure The Ladder contained for me within its pages. I, as an invert, can only know of what momentous importance such a movement as yours can mean, for the ultimate good of all of us.

Like so many others . . . I am living a completely repressed existence, sublimating my nature, whenever possible, in my profession.

One of the insertions in The Ladder caught my attention and I could not help but muse over it with some irony. The part about 'Come out of hiding'. What a delicious invitation, but oh, so impractical. I should lose my job, a marvelous heterosexual roommate, and all chance of finding work . . .
I would be blackballed all over the city.

I am interested – very much interested in becoming a member of the Daughters of Bilitis. Although at present discretion prevents me from making any moves to help the cause . . . there is one very effective weapon we, who must fight from a hiding place, still have – the fountain pen and the typewriter.¹⁴

¹³ "President's Message," *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 1956): 7.

¹⁴ "J.M., Cleveland, Ohio," Readers Respond, *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (November 1956): 14.

Many of the women involved in the organization at that time protected their identities by using pseudonyms or “pen names” in the newsletter’s listing of officers and staff. However, in the January, 1957 issue, editor Phyllis Lyon dropped the protection of a pen name, both in the interest of assuring DOB members that their privacy would be respected by the organization and because she claimed that it was “too confusing” to maintain another identity. In a story headlined “Ann Ferguson Is Dead,” she wrote:

I confess. I killed Ann Ferguson. Premeditatedly and with malice aforethought.

We ran an article in the November issue of THE LADDER entitled ‘Your Name is Safe.’ Ann Ferguson wrote that article. Her words were true, her conclusions logical and documented – yet she was not practicing what she preached. Somehow it didn’t seem right... At the December public discussion meeting of the Daughters of Bilitis we got up – Ann Ferguson and I – and did away with Ann. Now there is only Phyllis Lyon...

...I’m sure that I am not placing myself in any jeopardy by using my own name – and I’m only simplifying matters and practicing what I preach.¹⁵

As “J. M.” from Cleveland described, being honest about one’s homosexuality at that time could expose a lesbian or gay man to possible dismissal from employment, loss of family and friends, or worse. From the first issue of *The Ladder* on, the leaders of DOB sought to reassure their readers that involvement in the organization would help, not harm, them. They also appealed to their readers to send in original artwork, fiction, poetry, and essays – and to give desperately-needed financial support.

¹⁵ “Ann Ferguson Is Dead,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (January 1957): 7.

Through the pages of *The Ladder* over the next fourteen years, the DOB helped develop lesbian identity, create lesbian culture, promote visibility and construct community in the 1950s. In the first issue, soon-to-be-eliminated editor “Ann Ferguson” wrote, “(W)ith this first issue, we enter a field already ably served by ‘ONE’ and ‘Mattachine Review.’ We offer, however, that so-called ‘feminine viewpoint’ which they have had so much difficulty obtaining. It is to be hoped that our venture will encourage the women to take an ever-increasing part in the steadily-growing fight for understanding of the homophile minority.”¹⁶

For the individual women who somehow found a copy, *The Ladder* was a means of expressing and sharing otherwise private thoughts and feelings, of connecting across miles and disparate daily lives, of breaking through isolation and fear. For those women in small towns and big cities in the mid-1950s, married or single, it was a radical break from what had been the available literature about female homosexuality – finally there was something more than sorrowful stories about elite misfits, paperback novels with tragic endings, or psychological treatises on illness and immorality.

For budding lesbian artists and intellectuals, it was an accessible workshop in which to try out creative efforts and new ways of analyzing personal and collective experiences of homosexuality. For political activists, it was a way of debating tactics and strategies and publicizing meetings and public gatherings.

The Ladder also became the heart and soul of a nascent lesbian network that stretched across the U.S. and around the world. It was what held the Daughters of Bilitis together as a national organization, a means of disseminating information about DOB

¹⁶ *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 1956): 3.

activities and meetings and those of the other homophile groups as well. It was a focus for chapter activity, especially in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York. Members of *The Ladder* volunteer staff (initially many of the same women who served as officers for DOB) wrote original essays; contributed book reviews, short stories and poetry; and reported on research findings and media coverage of homosexuality.

The Ladder provided a sense of connection in the 1950s and 1960s. Before gay bookstores, community centers, and chat rooms were available, or even imagined, it was a virtual meeting space for lesbians. Women found *The Ladder* through friends; it was surreptitiously handed around at work; and sometimes the very professionals whose opinions DOB was hoping to change would recommend it to their clients and colleagues. The magazine provided a way for women outside of DOB's chapter cities in major urban areas to be involved, and it attracted many lesbians – writers, editors, artists, intellectuals – who wished to express their ideas through its pages rather than through institutional or organizational work.

Ladder writer and editor Barbara Grier asserts that DOB and *The Ladder* interested different kinds of lesbians: “organizationally minded” women who lived in major urban areas gravitated to DOB chapters, and those living at a distance, as well as those who preferred a more solitary sort of involvement, were drawn to *The Ladder*.¹⁷ Grier herself is a good example of this: although she was actively involved with the magazine from 1957 on from her home in Kansas City, Kansas; served as its last editor; and felt a tremendous sense of ownership of *The Ladder*, she “never belonged to a DOB chapter and only attended two national conventions.”

¹⁷ Barbara Grier, interview with author, December 29, 2003.

From the beginning, *The Ladder* reported the speeches given by the legal, medical, and religious experts invited by the homophile groups to address their gatherings. Because of their careful chronicling and their consistent publishing, we can chart not only DOB's growth but the development of the tiny homosexual rights groups of the 1950s and 1960s through its pages.¹⁸

“It was the glue that held us together...”¹⁹

They were being typed on stencils – it was not ditto,
it was stencils – and it could have been a manual typewriter.
I would go there in the evenings after working all day, and
what I remember of the office is it was on Market Street.
You had to walk up these dark stairs...
...I can remember going up there when nobody was there...
walking down the corridor...I don't mean to make it sound
sinister, because it wasn't, really, but I was just very young
and very scared....²⁰

Natalie Lando

¹⁸ As “Sten Russell, Los Angeles Reporter,” Stella Rush wrote about many if not most of the earliest homophile meetings and programs for *The Ladder*. She got involved as a regular contributor beginning in April 1957; her first essay, a review of three television programs on homosexuality aired by station WRCA-TV in New York and presented at the annual Mattachine convention in San Francisco, appeared in Vol. 2 No. 2 (November 1957). By reviewing programs such as these, *The Ladder* served to amplify the impact of still-scarce media coverage on homosexuality.

¹⁹ Stella Rush, interview with author, September 16, 2003.

²⁰ Natalie Lando, interview with author, May 15, 2002.

For the women who received and read *The Ladder*, the magazine was a monthly link to a larger world. For those who helped create it, like Natalie Lando, it was a commitment that consumed hundreds of women-hours for every issue produced.

The women involved in DOB's chapters, particularly in San Francisco, did the unglamorous, unacknowledged nitty-gritty work on the magazine: they typed and corrected articles and address labels, prepared the lay-out, delivered the material to the printer and, when it returned, hand-assembled the magazine. They sorted and stapled and inserted each copy into plain manila envelopes and mailed it out to women and men around the country and to some abroad. And they did this every month.

In the October, 1959 issue, Phyllis Lyon wrote an editorial entitled "Growing Pains," which detailed the extensive typing, retyping, layout and mailing processes involved in each and every issue, all done by volunteers. "Many women work one night a week at the office – but just before LADDER deadline it usually is every night of the week," she wrote.²¹ This continued for 14 years.

As the years went on, chapter activists also delivered copies to the dozen or so newsstands and bookstores that carried *The Ladder*, primarily in San Francisco and New York – such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti's North Beach bookstore City Lights in San Francisco; two spots in Greenwich Village (Harry Tobman's newsstand at 405 Sixth Avenue and The Paperback Gallery at 399 Sixth Avenue) and a bookstore near Columbia University in New York.²² At different points, the magazine could also be found at

²¹ Phyllis Lyon, "Growing Pains," *The Ladder*, Vol. 4 No. 1 (October 1959): 4, 21.

²² Letter from Barbara Gittings to "Dear Cleo," August 21, 1964; copy given to the author by Barbara Gittings from the Gittings-Lahusen personal collection, Wilmington, DE; November 2002.

leftist/“alternative” or campus bookstores in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Detroit and Portland and it was carried by dealers in Cleveland, Dallas, Depew (!), and New York.²³

While the Daughters did not realize greatly increased sales from placing *The Ladder* at selected newsstands, what they did accomplish is in many ways much more significant, if unquantifiable. Given that *The Ladder* most often featured portraits, line drawings, and photographs of women on its cover -- under the byline “A Lesbian Review” in the mid-1960s -- it showcased “normal” lesbians to the world at a time when no such images existed.

When *The Ladder* began publishing, the most accessible portrayals of lesbians were found in fiction. There was very little about them in the scientific and medical journals or the psychological studies of homosexuality and deviance.²⁴ The library might yield archaic definitions and psychiatric jargon, but the drug store or bus station was the source for frankly titillating representations. The “pocket books” with the lurid covers that you could buy there were among the few easily available sources of images and information about lesbians and gay men from the late 1940s into the 1960s. However melodramatic or unrealistic most of the stories may have been, they were a huge commercial success for their publishers. Curvaceous young girls in tight bright skirts and sweaters or skimpy lingerie, seemingly just moments away from engaging in wanton sex

²³ Cleo Glenn, “Memo to All Chapters Re: Newsstand Distribution,” (undated but probably 1964); Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 12/7, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

²⁴ Even Kinsey et al.’s famous 1953 report on women only devoted one chapter to “Homosexual Responses and Contacts.” Alfred Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin, Paul H. Gebhard; *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1953),

acts, glanced suggestively at one another – or directly at the reader. They were available for thirty-five cents and consumed like candy.²⁵

On the one hand, the femmes²⁶ found in books like “Women’s Barracks” were pretty and perpetually half-dressed. Whatever else was going on in their characters’ lives – like serving in the military during World War II – they appeared on the covers in their “off” hours, lounging on beds, smoking cigarettes, often with a bottle of booze nearby. They were never cleaning, shopping for groceries, or feeding children. The cast of characters may have included college women, but there were as many girls’ reformatories and prisons as there were dorm rooms. The paperback dolls on the outside, selling the stories inside, looked like they were one step away from the working class neighborhoods you imagined them growing up in. Best of all, they were stylish and unapologetically sexy.²⁷

On the other hand, there was the elite mannish woman, typified in the portrait of a foppish Radclyffe Hall featured on the book flap of her infamous novel *The Well of Loneliness*, first published in 1928 amidst a firestorm of censorship and publicity. It was

²⁵ Michael Bronski, “The Shock of the Old,” *The Gay & Lesbian Review/Worldwide* March-April 2003, 32-33 and Michael Bronski, *Pulp Friction* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2003; Jaye Zimet, *Strange Sisters: The Art of Lesbian Pulp Fiction 1949-1969* (New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1999).

²⁶ “femme: passive homosexual or passive lesbian; any feminine woman; ‘She’s a super femme: she can clean a house, mend socks, bake cakes, and talk on the phone all at the same time.’” Bruce Rodgers, *The Queens’ Vernacular*, 80. Many self-identified femmes would take exception to Rodgers’ use of the term “passive.” See Joan Nestle, “The Femme Question,” *The Persistent Desire* (Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc., 1992), 138-145.

²⁷ Jaye Zimet, *Strange Sisters*, 20; reproductions of lesbian-themed paperback novels from the 1950s and 1960s can be found in Zimet’s *Strange Sisters* and Susan Stryker’s *Lesbian Pulp Address Book* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000).

reissued in paperback in 1949. Pictured in profile, dressed in a dark suit with her short hair slicked back and gleaming with oil, Hall was a high-class lesbian, a butch icon who did not betray her background or privilege despite her desire for women.²⁸

The Ladder provided radically different images of lesbians, expanding the range of possibilities. We'll never know how many lesbians, perhaps too timid to purchase the magazine, surreptitiously looked *The Ladder* over and identified with the woman pictured on the cover. Or whether the curious heterosexual man or woman, glancing at the magazine, thought, "so *she's* a Lesbian..." while purchasing their *Look* or *Life* or daily newspaper. DOB's promotion of attractive, young, neat, fit, almost always white women on *The Ladder's* covers provided an alternative, albeit not an unproblematic one, to the mass-produced images of girlishly lascivious or mannishly straight-laced lesbians which were dominant in the popular culture at the time.

Regular features in *The Ladder*

The first issue of *The Ladder* in October 1956 put forth DOB's Statement of Purpose, which was then printed on the inside front cover of almost every issue. It communicated the organization's commitment to education, self- and social acceptance, research and legislative reform; it also generated a great deal of correspondence and comment from its readers.

²⁸ Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1928; Paris: Pegasus Press, 1928; New York: Covici Friede, 1928; London: Falcon Press, 1949). See Martha Vicinus, "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong:' The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity," *Lesbian Subjects*, Martha Vicinus, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 233-252 for discussion of the creation of lesbian representations and the "privileging" of the "predictable figure of the mannish lesbian."

In addition to advertising DOB's goals, *The Ladder* also featured short stories, poetry, chapters from "works in progress" and letters from relatively unknown as well as already-established lesbian and feminist authors and artists. In the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, it was among the first popular publications to present work from female novelists and poets such as Ann Weldy (Ann Bannon), Elsa Gidlow, Iris Murdoch, Jane Rule, May Sarton, and Valerie Taylor. They regularly printed pieces by science fiction writer Marion Zimmer Bradley, who also submitted essays and fiction as "Lee Chapman" and "Miriam Gardner." In the late 1960s, activists Rita May Brown and Martha Shelley published provocative pieces in *The Ladder*, fueling the debates over lesbian-feminist ideology and organizing that were then igniting both homophile and women's rights groups.²⁹

The Ladder was the first publication to showcase early works by researchers such as Dr. Jeannette Howard Foster, the author of the groundbreaking lesbian bibliography *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, self-published in 1956 after decades of research and writing. From Sappho to "The Price of Salt,"³⁰ Foster painstakingly chronicled more than 300 fictional works that portrayed "variant women," which she defined as lesbians, bisexual women and cross-dressing females. (*Sex Variant Women in Literature* was one

²⁹ Barbara Grier and Colletta Reid published two anthologies of writings from *The Ladder: The Lesbian's Home Journal* (Oakland CA: Diana Press, 1976) and *The Lavender Herring: Lesbian Essays from The Ladder* (Baltimore MD: Naiad Press, 1976).

³⁰ Written by Patricia Highsmith (using the pseudonym Claire Morgan) and originally published in 1952, *The Price of Salt* was one of the few mid-'50s lesbian-themed paperback novels that featured two intelligent, complicated women who didn't wind up dead (or heterosexual) because of their passion for one another. Barbara Grier's Naiad Press republished it in 1984.

of the first five books offered through DOB's new Book Service when it was launched in May, 1960.) Foster also wrote numerous short stories published in *The Ladder* under the names "Jan Addison," "Hilary Farr," and "Abigail Sanford." She became very committed to DOB and to its magazine, joining an intense debate in 1960 when the lesbian paperback writer "Ann Aldrich" (a pseudonym of Marijane Meaker) wrote disparagingly about the organization.³¹

Ann Aldrich's works were the only books by a self-identified lesbian in the late 1950s and early 1960s to offer a "first-person narrative" of the female homosexual's world. To the women of DOB, her largely negative portraits of lesbian life were difficult to accept, as they ran counter to their mission of building lesbians' sense of self-esteem. In the April 1958 issue of *The Ladder*, an "Open Letter to Ann Aldrich" appeared, written by DOB President Del Martin. In it, Martin accused her of perpetuating stereotypes. "You have glossed over that segment of the Lesbian population which we consider to be the 'majority' of this minority group. We refer to those who have made an adjustment to self and society and who are leading constructive, useful lives in the community in which they live." DOB then gave Aldrich a free year's subscription to the magazine.

Perhaps in retaliation, her next book, *Carol in a Thousand Cities*, savagely attacked DOB and the content and appearance of *The Ladder*, dismissing it as amateurish

³¹ Dr. Jeannette Howard Foster (1898-1981) was inducted into the City of Chicago's Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame in October 1998. See Marie Kuda, "A personal reflection," <http://www.queertheory.com/histories>. See also Chapter Four for more information about Jeannette Howard Foster.

and taking the magazine apart, “Rung by Rung.” In her review of Aldrich’s book, Barbara Grier (as Gene Damon) wrote:

With her witty knife ever in hand, she slashes to ribbons every story without exception that appeared in *THE LADDER* during the year 1958 (including two written by this reviewer),... In sum total the book is about half for and half against Lesbianism, with the editor surprisingly on the against side. One wonders how Miss Aldrich feels way up there judging and defiling her people.³²

Jeannette Howard Foster went even further. She wryly noted in her withering *Ladder* article on Aldrich’s work, “Ann of 10,000 Words Plus,” “Miss Aldrich doesn’t admit to writing fiction herself. Even if her three volumes on gay life in NYC read a good deal like it, they are sufficiently literal reportage to have got her boycotted by several gay bars in that city – the patrons don’t care to be used as copy.” Taking aim at Aldrich’s popularity (she also wrote lesbian-themed paperback novels under the name Vin Packer), Foster dismissed her by noting that “(W)hat these reveal is superlative early training in Writing to Sell, and something like diarrhea of the pen.” Foster ended her dismissal of the book, after wondering whether Aldrich had undergone “self-analysis” and quit being “emotionally arrested,” (i.e., was cured of lesbianism), by saying “for my money someone’s not sure just who she is. People Who Live in Glass Houses Should Undress in the Dark.”³³

Ultimately, Aldrich’s negative notices actually helped DOB. She increased knowledge about the organization and its magazine to the very audience DOB was trying

³² Gene Damon, “An Evening’s Reading,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 4 No. 11 (August 1960): 7.

³³ Jeannette Howard Foster, “Ann of 10,000 Words Plus,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 4 No. 11 (August 1960): 8-9.

to reach: lesbian or questioning women who were buying books about gay people. By October, editor Martin printed a letter thanking Aldrich: “Your slap at THE LADDER has boomeranged! Aside from the mail you yourself have received and graciously forwarded, letters and subscriptions have been pouring into the DOB office. One letter addressed simply to “Daughters of Bilitis, San Francisco, California” reached us. Another queried the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce for our address.”³⁴

DOB members’ reactions to Aldrich’s work were due to the fact that there was very little information about lesbianism, created *by lesbians*, available to the general public in the late 1950s. The Daughters were pursuing a strategy of accentuating the positive in representing gay men and women to the world, and they felt that “kiss and tell” writers like Aldrich did more harm than good. They determined that *The Ladder* would be the one source where women (and men) could find portrayals of lesbians that showed them as normal human beings who had families, jobs, went to school, fell in love, suffered heartbreaks, and survived.

The magazine was also a source of information for professionals, and many issues carry letters from attorneys, doctors, psychologists, and psychiatrists thanking DOB for their work. Infrequently, parents (like the outraged Mrs. Mary Spallino, whose undated handwritten letter to the “preverts” is quoted on page 15) would also write in, as would salacious (and mostly male) pleasure-seekers. Anyone who wanted to learn more about women loving women in the post-Kinsey period seemed to find *The Ladder*.

³⁴ “Readers Respond,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 5 No. 1 (October 1960): 19.

“Lesbiana”

Starting in March 1957 and continuing in every issue from then on, “Lesbiana” was an ongoing compendium of lesbian and lesbian-themed literature. “As promised, THE LADDER begins with this issue its running bibliography of Lesbian literature (fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry),” editor Phyllis Lyon wrote.³⁵

The first column carried capsule summaries of *The Collected Works of Pierre Louys*; *The Well of Loneliness*; *Wind Woman* (by Carol Hales); and *Claudine at School* (by Colette). In August 1957, a letter from “G.D., Kansas City, Kansas” commended the editor for the “Lesbiana” feature and enclosed “a few additions.” Lyon responded, “Also would like to ask G.D. to send along a sentence or two about the book as well as title, author, publisher, year, etc. Sometimes we haven’t read the book nor have the volume available to us. For inclusion in ‘Lesbiana’ we will accept any volume which includes Lesbianism as either a major or minor theme.”³⁶

This correspondence began a fifteen-year tradition of presenting the highly subjective, and often controversial, personal opinions of “Gene Damon” (Barbara Grier). Each month, she reviewed between four to ten books dealing with lesbians and homosexuality, from pulp fiction to serious literature, by female and male authors. One of the first books she reviewed when she took over the column in September 1957 was Thomas Hardy’s *Desperate Remedies*; she also reviewed “The Dark Island” by Vita Sackville-West in the same issue. “Lesbiana” became a valuable resource for tracking

³⁵ Phyllis Lyon, *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 6 (March 1957): 12.

³⁶ “Readers Respond,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 11 (August 1957): 26.

the phenomenal growth of lesbian and gay publications – from research to romance novels -- from the late 1950s through the early 1970s.³⁷

“Readers Respond”

One of the most popular regular features in *The Ladder* was “Readers Respond.” From the heartfelt thanks of isolated women living in small towns to acerbic comments about the amateurish quality of the last issue from DOB activists, it brings us the voices and views of a myriad of lesbians, some bisexual, trans and questioning women, and a handful of men who read and reacted to the magazine’s contents. Almost always printed using only the first initials of a correspondent’s name, and their city or state of residence, over the years the trickle, then flood, of letters received at the DOB offices were read, reviewed and selected for printing in the monthly *Ladder*. Often the same women would write in repeatedly – again, some would use a variety of pseudonyms -- and they would engage other correspondents as well as DOB activists who either agreed or disagreed with their views.³⁸

For example, often in the same issue Barbara Grier would write a “Lesbiana” column signed by “Gene Damon,” a letter to the editor as “B.G., Missouri,” and another letter, story or biographical sketch using the names Lennox Strong or Vern Niven. “We

³⁷ Gene Damon, “Lesbiana,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 12 (September 1957): 15. Barbara Grier, *The Lesbian in Literature* (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1981). From the hundreds of books she reviewed each year for “Lesbiana,” Grier published three extensive bibliographies, in 1967, 1975 and 1981.

³⁸ A “letters to the editor” column appeared in *The Ladder*’s second issue, entitled “Readers Respond” or “Readers Response.” From then on, nearly every issue of the magazine included at least a half-dozen comments from readers.

tried to make it seem like we had a lot of people writing in when we didn't...and then sometimes we got more letters than we knew what to do with," Grier said recently.³⁹ In the early years, many letters expressed congratulations and joy that a magazine like *The Ladder* existed. Some shared doubts about the magazine's likelihood of success. Other writers sadly admitted their inability to be comfortable receiving a homophile magazine – even one mailed in a plain envelope with no incriminating return address.

...Though I was never one to take an ostrich view of things, still I must hesitate when such things as our way of life get down to a black and white state of things – in print yet! Though your little mag is one of a few on the subject, still doubts do present themselves – at least to this one..

At any rate, put me on the list just for what it's worth...and may the next rung of *The Ladder* be a large step in the progress of your undertaking.

T.F., Seattle, Wash.⁴⁰

I wish you to know that it is with no disapproval of your publication, your organization or its sincere work that I make this request that you discontinue sending me THE LADDER.

...I live in a house in which we do not have individual mailboxes. Some of the residents are curious and unsympathetic and not in the least averse to prying into others mail. I think your publication is handled with dignity and integrity but not material for vulgarians. I sincerely wish you well.

J.H., Chicago, Ill.⁴¹

³⁹ Barbara Grier, interview with author, December 29, 2003.

⁴⁰ *The Ladder*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (November 1956): 15.

⁴¹ "Readers Respond," *The Ladder*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (May 1957): 29.

News of THE LADDER is spreading like wildfire...our sincere congratulations on a job well done in handling a controversial subject with good taste and excellent material.

N.B., New Mexico⁴²

Once in a while, a letter writer would report a welcomed victory:

As a sidelight to the November issue featuring a cover drawing by me, a copy somehow turned up where I work and found its way into my superior's hot little hands – and I was immediately discharged when I admitted the art work was mine; however, I am an AFL-CIO union member and they worked in my behalf along with me and I was reinstated after a week of much wrangling. Verdict: it is not a crime to contribute art work to any publication. I had been fired for misconduct connected with my job, no less!

My co-workers, even after they learned the general theme of THE LADDER, immediately came forward and readily testified on my behalf. Since this was a rather unusual hullabaloo that did turn out well, I thought you might be interested in hearing of it.

Kerry, New Hampshire⁴³

Some women wrote to ask for guidance:

...I am married and the mother of four. The one person who can give my life any real meaning is a thousand miles away. If I am able to see my responsibilities carried through to a successful finish, I will owe a great deal to the inspiration and companionship which I have received through your publication.

I am sure there must be many in the same position as I am who detest the fact that circumstances force us to hide out. Del Martin in her fine editorial in January mentioned that we should 'stand up and be counted.' How do you suggest that this be done? How can I help with the goals that you are reaching for in '63? And what seems far more

⁴² "Readers Respond," *The Ladder*, Vol. 5 No. 10 (July 1961): 24.

⁴³ "Readers Respond," *The Ladder*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (April 1961): 23.

important than all else, how can I, a mother with so much responsibility for my children, still come out of hiding, so to speak, and be of some good to someone?

...Have wished to let you all know that your efforts have helped me shake off the bottle, face up to daily responsibilities and look forward hopefully for the first time in many, many years. May God bless you and reward you each one.

A Subscriber, West Coast⁴⁴

DOB members who volunteered in the office also attest to the quantities of mail they received from women (and a handful of men) eager to gain introduction and find new partners through DOB. Every editor of the magazine had to print reminders that DOB was not a dating service, but there were always subscribers who tried to figure out a way to meet women through DOB or *The Ladder*. Each editor's personal style (and most likely the other demands on her time at the moment) influenced her response.

I am a Hungarian emigrant. I am 26 years old and should like to correspond with a 40 or 50 year old woman. Please, help me and send me an address!

E.H., Zurich, Switzerland

We receive a great many letters of this nature from various parts of the world. However, we are not set up to help those who wish to find some one with whom to correspond. Because of the laws in this country and the stigma attached to homosexuality, most of our members – readers prefer to remain anonymous. They rely on us to use discretion and to keep such information in confidence. Therefore, much as we may be sympathetic to the problem, it is definitely against the policy of the DOB to give out names and addresses in any case. Sorry!

-ED.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ "Readers Respond," *The Ladder*, Vol. 7 No. 8 (May 1963): 26.

⁴⁵ Editor Phyllis Lyon, "Readers Respond," *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 12 (September 1957): 23.

Thank you a thousand times over for your publication! How elated I am to know that such a magazine exists. I can't begin to tell you how lonely it is walking alone...I have an intense longing to communicate with other persons like myself, who live on the outside.

My main purpose in writing this letter is to inquire if such a writing group exists? And if so, may I join it? I don't expect you to forward any addresses, but I would sincerely appreciate it if you advanced my letter to someone that would be interested in such a correspondence...

L.L., California

EDITOR'S NOTE: Sorry, there is no correspondence club, and for many reasons, it is not the policy of DOB to forward names and addresses. However, we note that you are not too far away from the Bay Area and suggest you attend some of the functions of the San Francisco Chapter and get acquainted with the group.⁴⁶

THE LADDER's new format is more congruous than the slick cover and typed pages. In fact the magazine has become wholly unobjectionable and hardly interesting anymore. I'm one who disliked the corny poetry and silly fiction but now regret that there is nothing left to laugh at.

The book reviews and lists of relative literature are the main reason I want to continue my subscription...as well as wanting to keep (in) touch, no matter how indirect, with the organization.

I wish you had some sort of facility for introducing people, but I understand you don't have any way of arranging contacts. (I'm not interested so much in the sport as in the casual acquaintance angle.)

MSF, Newport News, Va.

So far as we can see, the format has been a surprise to us every month since we took over. The only thing that seems to be hopeful is that the printing, binding, cutting, etc., does seem to be improving

⁴⁶ Editor Del Martin, "Readers Respond," *The Ladder*, (Vol. 7 No. 2 (November 1962): 26.

as we educate the printer. There will be poetry and fiction for you to chuckle over, or perhaps enjoy otherwise, who knows?
 As to introductions: we just had a Chapter meeting here and I'm not sure people should be introduced to each other. However, if you want a "casual acquaintance," stand at a local newsstand, watch who buys the magazine and strike up a conversation. Let us know how it works out and what the newsstand is...we can't seem to get a list from our distributor.⁴⁷

The desire for personal connection notwithstanding, it was the fact that *The Ladder* was the only reputable national source for information about lesbians in the late 1950s and 1960s that made it so vital for so many people. Its mix of fiction, poetry, art, political commentary and news from the various segments of the homophile movement was not enough to distinguish the publication, however; what gave it its uniqueness was the distinct personalities of the five women who served as *The Ladder's* editors.

⁴⁷ Editor Helen Sandoz, "Readers Respond," *The Ladder*, Vol. XI No. VI (April 1967): 26.

Part II: The Lesbians Who Created *The Ladder*

During its 16 years of existence, *The Ladder* drew on the editorial talents, visions, energy and resources of Phyllis Lyon, Del Martin, Barbara Gittings, Helen Sandoz, and Barbara Grier. Each woman put her particular mark on the magazine, enabling it – and DOB – to continue reaching new audiences of women and men. All of them, in different ways, expanded the magazine’s scope; each one also took the prerogative of the editor to make what she felt were necessary changes. Each *Ladder* editor was a passionately independent thinker, an influential leader in the organization as well as the broader gay and feminist movements. All of them therefore simultaneously promoted DOB’s organizational program while individually shaping the *Ladder*’s editorial stance and tone as she saw fit.

“And what will be the lot of the future lesbian?”⁴⁸

Although Phyllis Lyon was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma on November 10, 1924, she considers herself a San Franciscan. She and her family moved a good deal during her youth and she attended schools in three different parts of California, but by her teenaged years they had settled in the Bay area. Lyon went to UC Berkeley in 1943 and majored in journalism. In 1949, despite having had the opportunity to interview one of her idols, former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Lyon was frustrated with receiving mainly reporting assignments for “the women’s pages” in California papers. She took a position

⁴⁸ “President’s Message,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 1956): 7.

in Seattle, Washington as associate editor of *Pacific Builder and Engineer* magazine, and met Del Martin. They became lovers and decided to move home to San Francisco in 1953. As discussed previously, she and Martin were eager to expand their lesbian social circle and so helped start the Daughters of Bilitis two years later.⁴⁹

From 1956 to 1960, Lyon was the engine that drove the new *Ladder* enterprise and she worked relentlessly to make it informative and appealing to a variety of constituents, all on a shoestring budget. Lyon wrote articles, solicited original poetry and short stories, and established the practice of regular reportage on homophile gatherings. The quality of the typing, artwork and writing in the early issues is extremely uneven, and the stencils used to make copies did not always reproduce well, but the sheer fact of *The Ladder's* existence, and the substantive information it provided from the first issue on, were reason enough for early subscribers to support it.⁵⁰

Another reason was the organizational work underway. From announcing DOB's 1957 incorporation in California as "a full-fledged non-profit corporation" ("for those who doubted our legality or our permanency we can only say 'See, we're incorporated and we're here to stay,'" they wrote in 1957) to the establishment of their first office space (a desk in the Mattachine Society's offices at 693 Mission Street, Room 308,

⁴⁹ Del Martin, "Phyllis Lyon (1924 -)," *Before Stonewall*, 169-177.

⁵⁰ See, for example, letters to *The Ladder* in the November 1956 issue (Vol. 1 No. 2) from women in Cleveland, Connecticut, and Seattle; in January 1957 "H.G., New York, N.Y." wrote that "(R)aising children in a deviant relationship is an untouched subject...never heard of it and would like to know more about it..." (Vol. 1 No. 4), 12. DOB was breaking new ground in providing information about homosexuality to women at the same time that they expanded the scope of the information on homosexuality to include women's particular concerns. This is an early example of their application of "strategic separatism," discussed in Chapter Five.

downtown San Francisco's Tenderloin district), *The Ladder* charted the growth of the Daughters. It was consciously used to further DOB's mission to "educate the variant." Each issue featured articles about discussions organized by DOB or forums co-sponsored with Mattachine or One, as well as analyses of -- and challenges to -- the prevailing medical experts' opinions about homosexuality. And when DOB activists found a friendly voice -- one that helped them dispel the notion of lesbians and gay men as criminal, sick, and immoral -- they made sure to promulgate the message.

"The Lesbian differs from the so-called normal heterosexual woman only in the choice of her love object. The general public opinion is that homosexuals are mentally ill. This is far from the truth."

So stated Alice LaVere, San Francisco personal adjustment counselor, speaking before the January public discussion meeting held by the Daughters of Bilitis.⁵¹

Under Lyon's four-year editorship, *The Ladder* made its biggest leaps: in size (from 12 or so pages to more than double that length in just a year's time); in the range and quality of the literature offered; and in terms of breadth of coverage. Lyon covered everything she thought relevant to the homophile movement -- from thoughtful analysis of ONE, Inc.'s censorship battles to open letters to California Assembly members urging revision of the state's vagrancy laws. She printed columns on fashion and personal style, and even accepted ads for perfume samples. Her skills as a journalist, and her own wide-ranging interests, resulted in a lively, if casual, magazine.

⁵¹ "Psychotherapy vs. Public Opinion," *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 5 (February 1957): 8.

“Only the Beginning”⁵²

Born on May 5, 1921, Dorothy Corn Taliaferro – the future Del Martin -- grew up in San Francisco. She graduated from Galileo High School (in the same class as the shy young Judy – soon to be “Lana” – Turner) and attended UC Berkeley. After two years, she transferred to San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University) but did not complete her undergraduate work. In 1940, Dorothy – or Del as she is known -- married a college classmate, James Martin, and two years later gave birth to her daughter Kendra. After her husband discovered love letters revealing her crush on a female neighbor, she and James divorced and he took custody of Kendra for a few years. Martin worked at odd jobs in the San Francisco Bay area, including as a reporter for *Pacific Builder* in San Francisco, before accepting a job in Seattle as editor of the *Daily Construction Reports*, the sister publication to *Pacific Builder and Engineer*, where Lyon worked. They became close friends and colleagues as well as lovers.⁵³ Martin was DOB’s first President in 1955 and assumed the role again in 1957, overseeing the organization’s growth and development until 1960.

When Del Martin took over as *Ladder* editor from Lyon in July 1960, she expanded *The Ladder*’s political coverage while still using it primarily as the “house organ” for the Daughters of Bilitis. She often used the magazine for fiery broadsides, especially directed at those she thought presented the lesbian or gay man in a less-than-positive light, such as “Ann Aldrich.” She advocated relentlessly for more political

⁵² Del Martin, “Editorial: Only The Beginning,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 5 No. 1 (October 1960): 4.

⁵³ Phyllis Lyon, “Del Martin (1921 -),” *Before Stonewall*, 160-168; Del Martin, interviews with author, May 11, 1998 and March 6, 2002.

involvement, published pieces on the dangers of censorship; the importance of privacy rights; the need to urge revisions of California laws regarding private, consensual sexual conduct; and the importance of fighting restrictions on gay bars. Under her editorship, *The Ladder* was copyrighted “and will henceforth afford protection to contributors under the copyright laws of the United States.”⁵⁴

The Ladder was also used to promote a new national scholarship program for women. In 1962, Martin and other DOB leaders established the Blanche M. Baker Memorial Scholarships to commemorate the San Francisco psychologist and friend to the homophile movement who died in 1960. The annual scholarships – which were provided until 1968 -- gave awards in two categories: “for furtherance of higher education for a full time woman student attending a recognized college or university...” and “for furtherance of the education of the Lesbian enabling her to better her earning power (this would include any vocational or trade school).” The scholarships were intended to promote the organization in academic and scholastic circles as well as provide a way for DOB to make concrete contributions to the education of individual women.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See, for example, *The Ladder* Vol. 5 No. 1, 3 (October 1960), which includes a response from San Francisco Police Chief Thomas Cahill to Martin’s letter to Mayor George Christopher protesting harassment of gay bar patrons; an editorial the next month, “Perversion of Freedom,” condemning Charles H. Keating’s “Citizens’ Committee for Decent Literature” and their call for tougher obscenity laws aimed at works on homosexuality (Vol. 5 No. 2, 4-5); her March 1961 arguments against the “Homophile Bill of Rights,” promulgated by ONE, Inc. [“Among the goals of the homophile movement which should be mentioned is that of working to promote broader ‘rights’ for all consenting adults, homosexuals or otherwise...”] (Vol. 5 No. 6, 4); two editorials on “The Homosexual Vote” in the July 1960 (Vol. 4 No. 10, 4-5) and January 1962 (Vol. 6 No. 4, 4-5) issues; and the February 1962 editorial “Love is a Private Affair,” in which she called for liberalizing California’s sex laws (Vol. 6 No. 5, 4-5).

⁵⁵ “Another Year,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (October 1962): 4.

Each of the chapters handled its own publicity and screening for the awards; final selections of proposed recipients were approved by DOB's Governing Board. Award amounts ranged from \$75 to \$150 per chapter, and most years the chapters proposed one recipient per year. During the program's five-year span, approximately ten women -- both homosexual and heterosexual -- received awards, the majority of them from northern California. At least two awardees were from the New York area and three were from Chicago. Lesbian poet Judy Grahn was the scholarship recipient recommended by the Chicago Chapter of DOB in 1966; she had already had her work published in *The Ladder* when she won her award.⁵⁶

The Ladder also carried Martin's challenges to her fellow homophile activists in the mostly-male ONE and Mattachine Society. However, it was during Martin's editorship that *The Ladder* instituted a regular column, "Masculine Viewpoint," and invited guest editorials from male homophile activists. It lasted until November 1962.⁵⁷

After three years, Martin turned the magazine -- now in its seventh year -- over to the "temporary editor," Barbara Gittings.

⁵⁶ "Announcement of Blanche M. Baker Scholarship Winner," Chicago Chapter, DOB; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 8/5, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

⁵⁷ See for example *The Ladder* for January 1961 (Vol. 5 No. 4, 4-5) and May 1962 (Vol. 6 No. 8, 4-10). "Masculine Viewpoint" premiered in the May 1961 issue with a piece by Dorr Legg reprinted from *ONE* discussing the "Homophile Bill of Rights" controversy as "ye olde Battle of the Sexes" (Vol. 5 No. 8, 24-26); Henry Hay (Mattachine founder Harry Hay) was the third guest columnist (Vol. 5 No. 10, 16-23).

A Lesbian Review

Only a tiny handful of us could or would take the risk of being so publicly on view. What if my boss sees me on the 6 o'clock news and fires me? What if my picture appears in my parents hometown paper and causes shock waves? What if a bystander throws insults at us – or worse, bricks or stones? And what is the government going to DO with all those photographs and tape recordings they're making of us?⁵⁸

Barbara Gittings was born July 31, 1932 in Vienna, Austria. Her family traveled quite a bit in her youth due to her father's work in the U.S. diplomatic service. They finally settled in Wilmington, Delaware, where Gittings went to high school.

Gittings was an excellent student who especially enjoyed drama, music, and singing; she was also aware of her attraction to other girls and, evidently, didn't hide it too well. "There was a near-total taboo on mention of homosexuality. She (Gittings) first heard the word in her senior year when she qualified for the National Honor Society but was rejected on grounds of 'character' and a sympathetic teacher explained that was probably because of Barbara's 'homosexual inclinations,'" noted Kay Tobin Lahusen.⁵⁹

So Gittings started doing her research. Attending Northwestern College in Chicago for a year, she found psychological textbooks and studies that didn't seem to match who she felt herself to be; burrowing in libraries and bookstores, she found a bit

⁵⁸ Kay Tobin Lahusen, "Barbara Gittings (1932 -): Independent Spirit," *Before Stonewall*, 245.

⁵⁹ Lahusen, "Barbara Gittings...", *Before Stonewall*, 242. Barbara Gittings, interview with author, May 2002, Wilmington DE. See also Paul Cain, *Leading the Parade* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 60; Neil Miller, *Out of the Past* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 340; Kay Tobin and Randy Wicker, *The Gay Crusaders* (New York: Paperback Library, 1972), 208.

more comfort in gay and lesbian fiction. “She acquired her own copy of *The Well of Loneliness*, and when her father found it hidden in her room and told her to burn it, she hid it better.”⁶⁰ Gittings left Wilmington for Philadelphia in 1950, at age 18, and started her quest for “my people.” Another book brought her to them.

Gittings discovered Donald Webster Cory’s *The Homosexual in America* in 1955 and arranged to meet Cory in New York.⁶¹ He told her about One, Inc. in Los Angeles and Gittings made California her vacation destination in 1956. Her pilgrimage led her to One’s office, then to the headquarters of the Mattachine Society in San Francisco, and it was here that she learned about the Daughters of Bilitis. As luck or fate would have it, she got herself invited to the DOB meeting at which plans were being finalized to launch *The Ladder*.

In the May 1957 issue, a letter from “B.G., Philadelphia, Pa.” appears. In it, the writer (who was clearly an avid bibliophile) shows her knowledge of Lesbian literature, detailing four examples of a “humorous Lesbian novel” and ending with

...If I had pots of money I would certainly commission a promising writer to do a story on Lesbianism which is both humorous and unexaggerated – truthful nonsense, in effect! Why should every book and play and movie have a social or other meaning?”⁶²

By 1958, Gittings was organizing the first East Coast DOB group with “Meredith Grey” (Marion Glass); Lyon and Martin were there to lend support from DOB in San

⁶⁰ Lahusen, *Before Stonewall*, 243.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “Readers Respond,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (May 1957): 24-25.

Francisco at the first meeting. “Mattachine notified the handful of women on its mailing list, DOB in San Francisco notified its few *Ladder* subscribers on the East Coast, and with no more than ten women in attendance, DOB’s New York Chapter got started,” she has said. For the next three years, Gittings traveled from Philadelphia to New York, where there were enough DOB members to organize a chapter, twice a month for meetings and activities, which included writing and producing a mimeographed newsletter. One important, long-lasting benefit of Gittings’ DOB work is her partnership with Kay Tobin Lahusen.⁶³

Lahusen – “I picked the name ‘Tobin’ out of the phone book, Lahusen is too hard to pronounce!” – was raised in Ohio by her grandparents. As a teenager, in coming to terms with her love for another young woman, “I decided that I was right and the world was wrong and that there couldn’t be anything wrong with this kind of love.” After the devastating break-up of her college love affair, she headed to Boston and went to work for the *Christian Science Monitor* in the reference library. She began to do her own research: “The *Christian Science Monitor* filed homosexuality under *Vice*,” she remembered in her interview with Eric Marcus in the late 1980s. “I found a book called *Voyage to Lesbos: The Psychoanalysis of a Female Homosexual*, written by a psychiatrist named Richard Robertiello...in 1961, I made an appointment with him in New York.” It was Robertiello who told her about the Daughters of Bilitis, gave her a copy of *The Ladder*, and provided their New York phone number. “So I wrote to DOB in New York,

⁶³ Kay Tobin Lahusen, interview with author, November 8, 2003.

and who got my letter but Barbara.” They met that same year at a DOB picnic in Rhode Island and have been friends, lovers, and comrades in the gay struggle ever since.⁶⁴

In 1963, Gittings was asked by DOB leaders in San Francisco to take over the editorship of *The Ladder* from Del Martin “temporarily,” until someone could be found who was willing to do the work on a permanent basis. Gittings’ temporary assignment lasted for three years.

Under her guidance from 1963-1966, *The Ladder* grew up and reached out. The words “A Lesbian Review” were added to the cover, marking the first time the word “lesbian” was used as part of an ongoing magazine title.⁶⁵ There were other firsts achieved under Gittings’ direction, such as the use of high-quality photographic portraits of lesbians on the covers. As noted in the Introduction, Lahusen is one of the earliest published photographers of the homophile groups’ activities, and her creation of covers for *The Ladder* featuring black-and-white images of women was the first time photographs of “real” lesbians were featured on the front of a national gay publication.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Eric Marcus, “The Rabble Rousers,” *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 104-126.

⁶⁵ The subheading “A Lesbian Review” first appeared on the cover of *The Ladder* Vol. 8 No. 6 (March 1964).

⁶⁶ Although *The Ladder* had one cover photograph – a woman’s shadowed profile --in April 1958 (Vol. 2 No. 7), it wasn’t until six years later that Gittings and Lahusen began using black and white photographs of women for the magazine. The first two were photographs of sculptures of women; of these, the second was a somewhat risqué photograph (taken by Lahusen) of the sculpture “Rhythm of the Sea” by Boris Blai. It is a full-frontal shot of a naked woman perched on the nose of a dolphin. In the September 1964 issue, Lahusen’s first *Ladder* cover photo of “real” lesbians – “September Sea” – appeared. It showed two women dressed in shorts and windbreakers, their backs to the camera as they stood watching the ocean. (*The Ladder*, Vol. 8 No. 12.)

In an additional challenge to the popular perception of “the lesbian” in the mid-1960s, the first woman to be portrayed full-face was a South Asian woman, “Ger van Braam.” Van Braam was pictured on the November 1964 cover. An Indonesian lesbian, she reached out to Gittings and Lahusen after finding a copy of the *Ladder*, lamenting the availability of positive literature about homosexuality in her country. They began a brief but successful “Books for Ger” campaign, during which DOB members collected and mailed copies of lesbian literature to her. Londoner Esme Langley, founder of the DOB-inspired Minorities Research Group in England, was featured in January 1965, and a photograph of Lilli Vincenz leading the picket line at the Civil Service Commission in Washington, DC on June 26, 1965 graced the October issue.⁶⁷ Gittings herself was often the subject of Lahusen’s *Ladder* covers; photos of an athletic young white woman with short curly hair, taken in a variety of outdoor settings, are a staple of the magazine in 1964.⁶⁸

While she continued to publish fiction and poetry by leading lesbian artists, and in some issues greatly expanded the space devoted to literature, Gittings also introduced passionate pieces by a gay man, “Leo Ebreo” (Leo Skir), to the magazine’s readers. A contemporary of Allen Ginsburg who published a novel about the poet Elise Cowen, *Beat Alice*, in 1964, Skir wrote knowledgeably for *The Ladder* of the emerging geographic and psychic “gay ghettos” in big cities like New York. He made connections between

⁶⁷ For example, photographs of Gittings can be found on the covers of *The Ladder* in December 1964 (Vol. 9 No. 3), June 1965 (Vol. 9 No. 9), and September 1965 (Vol. 9 No. 12).

⁶⁸ See *The Ladder*, Vol. 9 No. 2; Vol. 9 No. 4; and Vol. 10 No. 1. See also Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Love: Making Lesbian and Gay History in Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 114-118, 175-77.

homophile activism and the social action work of other minority groups, particularly blacks and Jews, and promoted women's liberation. A fervent Zionist, he was also a cultural radical who wrote for gay newspapers like *New York Spy* and *Gay* in the early 1970s as well as for *The Ladder* again under Barbara Grier's editorship in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁶⁹

Gittings also saw to it that *The Ladder* printed debates over changing tactics and strategies within the homophile movement in its pages, insuring that the magazine would be a valuable asset to the homophile community as a whole, not just a magazine for lesbians. She included many more essays, articles, reviews, and speeches by members of other homophile groups and the newly formed coalitions like ECHO (East Coast Homophile Organizations), organized in 1964. For example, Franklin Kameny is regularly featured in the pages of *The Ladder*; one of the most interesting series of articles, published in 1965, is a debate between Kameny and DOB Research Director Florence "Conrad" Jaffy over whether involving themselves in research studies on homosexuality and homosexuals was a worthy effort for the homophile groups. As was noted in Chapter One, Kameny is an astronomer who was fired by the U.S. government in 1957 due to his refusal to disavow his homosexuality. He argued that the very premise of sickness on which most of the research undertaken in the early 1960s was incorrect, and that participation in studies as to cause or effect merely served to keep an erroneous assumption alive. Jaffy, on the other hand, believed that DOB had a duty to try to influence the opinion-makers, and that by working with friendly researchers they could

⁶⁹ Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen, interview with author, November 8, 2003. Gittings noted that "Leo Skir didn't think that homosexuality had a specific gender."

counter the “sickness” notion by providing subjects for study who were relatively stable, happy, prosperous people rather than the distressed patients who were the usual subjects of studies. Readers could also find debates over the “hot” homophile question of 1965 – to picket or not to picket? – in the pages of *The Ladder*.⁷⁰

Initially pleased with Gittings’ efforts – and her expansion of the magazine’s circulation and distribution – the governing board in San Francisco, and the chapter activists there who worked to put the magazine together every month, started to grumble after a couple of years.

It began to seem to some DOB leaders that the magazine was no longer mainly focused on women, despite its subtitle. This, coupled with the distance and the difficulties in getting copy assembled and to San Francisco on schedule for production and mailing every month, caused disputes. The last straw came in the months preceding the August 1966 DOB Convention in San Francisco, when some of the organization’s leaders felt she did not provide enough lead time to publicize their meetings and related activities. Gittings was “fired” as editor (or “relieved of her duties,” depending on who is telling the tale) immediately after the convention, which she did not attend.⁷¹

The August 1966 issue is Gittings’ last as editor. Soon after, she and Lahusen dropped out of DOB and put their energies into other homophile groups, such as the Philadelphia-based Homophile Action League and the North American Conference of

⁷⁰ See *The Ladder* Vol. 9 No. 8 (May 1965): 14-10; and Vol. 9 No. 10/11 (July/August 1965): 15-21. Gittings also included debates over picketing in the September 1965 issue (Vol. 9 No. 12), 4-8.

⁷¹ Correspondence between Del Martin and Barbara Gittings, Lyon & Martin Papers, GLBTHS; Barbara Gittings, interview with author, January 29, 2004.

Homophile Organizations. Gittings continued her work with Kameny to help gay men and lesbians who had been fired from federal employment due to their homosexuality. She was also instrumental in working with gay librarians to open up the American Library Association to gay people and issues.⁷² Lahusen worked with Craig Rodwell at his Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop in the Village, helped found Gay Activists Alliance in New York in 1969 and wrote for *Gay* newspaper, published by Jack Nichols, in the early 1970s.

“Pre-Posthumous Memoirs of Ben Cat”

With this issue THE LADDER begins its second decade of publishing. Certain changes in editorial policy are anticipated. To date emphasis has been on the Lesbian's role in the homophile movement. Her identity as a woman in our society has not yet been explored in depth. It is often stated in explaining “Who is a Lesbian?” that she is a human being first, a woman secondly and a Lesbian only thirdly. The third aspect has been expounded at length. Now it is time to step up THE LADDER to the second rung . . .⁷³

“Sandy was one of the only lesbians we knew in San Francisco when we moved here from Seattle in 1953,” remembers Phyllis Lyon. “Del knew Sandy beforehand, when

⁷² In 2003, after more than thirty years of activism, Gittings was named an Honorary Member of the American Library Association in recognition of her “lifelong commitment to developing positive images of gays and lesbians in the literature and on library shelves and to ensuring equal access to information for all people.” Press release, American Library Association, February 10, 2003 at <http://www.ala.org>.

⁷³ Del Martin, Acting Editor, *The Ladder*, Vol. 11 No. 1 (October 1966): 24.

she was with a woman called 'Bridge.' We visited them and Sandy's partner wanted nothing to do with DOB. When they broke up in 1956, we got Sandy."⁷⁴

Helen Sandoz (who used the last name Sanders in her DOB work and was known as "Sandy") was one of the first members of the Daughters of Bilitis, and she is one of a handful of activists and leaders whom everyone who'd been part of the organization in the 1950s and 1960s remembers today.

Sandoz was DOB's third president in 1957; she was also one of the five women who signed DOB's incorporation papers (along with Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, P. D. Griffin and Barbara Deming) that year. From being one of their first forum speakers, to founding the Los Angeles chapter in 1958 and leading it for nearly a dozen years thereafter, she worked behind the scenes yet was not afraid to go public when that was called for. Her work with *The Ladder* was as expansive. She contributed early cover art for *The Ladder* in the first few years of its existence; ten years later, she helped keep the magazine alive as its editor in the mid- to late 1960s. Sandoz was one of a handful of DOB stalwarts, serving the organization and the cause of lesbian liberation, equal opportunity for women, and human rights for nearly 15 years. She died in 1987.

Born November 2, 1920 near Eugene, Oregon, she was the only daughter of a Swedish immigrant mother who supported them by working as a maid for a well-to-do family. Sandoz's mother was ill and often hospitalized throughout Sandoz's youth. Her father played no significant role in her life other than giving her his name; she didn't meet him until she was 18 years old. Sandoz attended Reed College during the early

⁷⁴ Phyllis Lyon, interview with author, June 4, 2003; Stella Rush, interview with author, December 6, 2003.

years of the war, earning a degree in psychology. She left Oregon almost immediately afterward, moving to Alaska on a civil service assignment. She returned to the Northwest – first to Washington, and then back to Oregon – and worked in personnel management.

It was while she was running errands back home in Oregon that she had a serious traffic accident, which left her with a broken neck. Sandoz spent a year in a full-body cast; the injury left her unable to sit for long periods of time for the rest of her life. Looking for a new career that might utilize her interests in art and graphic design, she learned sign printing.⁷⁵

By the mid-1950s, Sandoz had found her way to San Francisco and was working at Macy's. She also found her way to the DOB. And when the Daughters decided to publish a newsletter that year, Sandoz proved to be a valuable asset to the cash-strapped group: she used her knowledge of printing – and her access to Macy's machines – to “donate” copies of the new periodical. It was the first of many donations she would make to *The Ladder* for the next 16 years, including assuming the editorship in November, 1966.

Sandoz returned *The Ladder* to its initial role as an organizational tool yet kept the focus on lesbian literature and reviews. Under her guidance, in January 1967 DOB's Statement of Purpose was revised to remove references to “the variant” and began using “the Lesbian” instead.⁷⁶ Sandoz also implemented the promised “changes in editorial policy” and focused on women and women's issues, within and beyond the homophile movement. She, too, agreed to take on the editorship “temporarily.”

⁷⁵ Stella Rush, interviews with author, May 21 and 22, 2002; Stella Rush, “Helen Sandoz,” *Before Stonewall*, 145-147.

The quality and timeliness of the magazine was initially uneven under Sandoz's editorship; like Lyon she appealed honestly and directly to her readership with wit and not a small amount of frustration, frequently pleading with them to be patient and understanding of the staffing and printing problems she was dealing with. The essential problem seems to be that she was largely a one-woman operation. Her partner, Stella Rush, helped out, as did a handful of women in San Francisco, but Sandoz did most of the publishing work herself.

In the December, 1966 issue she printed a letter which stated "THE LADDER's big trouble is its total absence of editorial direction. You dump the same stuff in there issue after issue and most of it is terribly dull," signed by "J. C., New York." Immediately following it is a letter from "Dave Clayton, Atty. At Law, San Francisco" noting that "I have just received the October issue of THE LADDER and felt an urge to sit down and write immediately to congratulate you on a superlative issue." Never without a sense of humor, Sandoz also printed the following in the same issue, on the page preceding the above letters:

LATIN PROVERB: He labors vainly, who endeavors to please every person.⁷⁷

Another one of Sandoz's innovations was a column "written" by her pet cat. In the February 1967 issue, she introduced a regular feature (often accompanied by a photograph or drawing) signed by a trenchant and sardonic feline observer, Ben Cat.

⁷⁶ *The Ladder*, Vol. XI No. IV (January 1967): 1.

⁷⁷ *The Ladder*, Vol. 11 No. 3 (December 1966): 25-27

Mr. Cat comments on the frenzy of his home and “my two women” when *The Ladder* is in production; assesses local and national issues; and covers controversies within DOB and the homophile movement as seen from his perch in Manhattan Beach. While some readers found the Ben Cat pieces cloying and saw the column as indicative of a backward step from the literary quality achieved in the mid-1960s, Sandoz used these columns to address her readers, respond to criticisms, plead for submissions, and disavow or disagree with pieces of writing or opinions expressed in the magazine.

By 1968, *The Ladder* had a paid subscription list of about 1,000. In addition to her other duties, Barbara Grier had been serving as Assistant Editor to Helen Sandoz since 1966 and, according to Stella Rush, maintained what seemed like daily communication about the magazine’s contents and style. Sandoz finally handed over the reins to Grier at DOB’s national convention in Denver that year. Almost immediately, Grier began to emphasize lesbian-feminist issues. This was fine with the organization’s national leadership, who wanted to continue the reorientation toward women’s issues begun when Sandoz was editor.

The Lesbian Behind “Lesbiana”

When I became editor in 1968 I determined,
in an excess of guilt, to turn *The Ladder* into,
at least, the *Atlantic Monthly* of Lesbian thought.⁷⁸

Born November 4, 1933 in Cleveland, Ohio, Barbara Grier spent most of her life as a Midwesterner before relocating to Florida in 1980. The daughter of a physician and a secretary, she realized she was “a superior being” and “a, quote, homo-sexual” at 12. She describes an Anglo-American family of “eccentric, theatrical” people that includes a Mormon iconoclast (James Jesse Strang) and the British actor David Niven. Her family moved around a good deal in the 1930s but settled in Kansas City, Kansas when she was in high school.⁷⁹

Grier made Kansas City her home for thirty years. A librarian for much of her working life, she had the good fortune of meeting and befriending women like Marion Zimmer Bradley and Dr. Jeannette Howard Foster. It was through Bradley that she learned about *The Ladder* and began her fifteen-year involvement with the magazine.⁸⁰

Almost immediately after reading her first issue of *The Ladder* early in 1957, Grier wrote to San Francisco to offer suggestions and assistance. She had an outlet for her energies and a focus for her activism. “I found my life’s work,” she says today.

⁷⁸ Barbara Grier, “Introduction,” *The Lavender Herring: Lesbian Essays from The Ladder*, Barbara Grier and Coletta Reid, eds. (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1976), 13.

⁷⁹ Barbara Grier, interview with author, December 29, 2003. Also see Victoria A. Brownworth, “Barbara Grier (1933 -): Climbing the Ladder,” *Before Stonewall*, 253-264.

⁸⁰ Barbara Grier, interview with author, December 29, 2003.

Grier contributed not only a monthly “Lesbiana” column but many other biographies, reviews, and stories under the pseudonyms Gene Damon, Vern Niven, Lennox Strang or Strong, “B.G.,” “H.B.,” and others.⁸¹

In the summer of 1968, after a dozen years of intense involvement with the magazine, Grier became editor of *The Ladder*. The August 1968 issue is radical in many respects. Its cover, by Elizabeth Chandler, announces the theme of the 1968 Convention, “The Changing Scene,” in the style of Janis Joplin or Jefferson Airplane concert posters then sprouting like daisies throughout San Francisco’s Haight Ashbury, New York’s Greenwich Village, and other counterculture communities. Reflecting the bright, fresh fashion of the moment, and the increasingly militant tone of the times, the change in editorial direction is also bold.

In addition to a powerful personal and political reflection on the Vietnam War by expatriate Jane Rule (“My Country Wrong”), the August 1968 issue marks the first appearance of New York activist and lesbian feminist leader Martha Shelley. Shelley wrote in her article “Homosexuality and Sexual Identity,” “(T)o suggest that homosexuality is a disease because it involves guilt feelings, confusion about one’s sexuality, and other psychological problems is again a sophistry. Going to bed with – and enjoying – one’s own sex is not a disease. Prejudice is.”⁸² Shelley is an example of the “new wave” of DOB activists who would lead the organization in the next few years.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Martha Shelley, “Homosexuality and Sexual Identity,” *The Ladder*, Vol. XII No. X (August 1968): 6-7.

With the September 1968 issue, Grier put her particular mark on the magazine, starting with a stark geometric cover donated by the artist Jane Kogan. She dropped the subtitle “A Lesbian Review” and expanded every section, adding more fiction and poetry, cartoons and artwork. The greatest changes were in the much larger coverage Grier gave to the development of DOB chapters and the burgeoning women’s liberation movement.

For example, in the October/November 1968 issue, contact information is given only for the DOB national office, and the San Francisco and New York chapters. One year later, in the October/November 1969 issue, “Gene Damon” wrote:

We are conducting a drive to create new chapters all over the United States, in every area large enough to support a working group...Chapters provide all manner of recreation, an opportunity to work with those who may be less fortunate, a place to learn about our heritage and history, a place, a group with which to fight for our civil rights, a limitless tool to widen our horizons.⁸³

“Damon”/Grier went on to list “growing groups” in Chicago, Boston, Miami, Cleveland, Denver, and Portland (OR), and noted that there were now two southern California chapters – a new one in San Diego and a reactivated one in Los Angeles. “If there is no group near enough,” she invited readers, “start one of your own.” The next month the first feature in the magazine was an article, again bylined Gene Damon, entitled “The Year of the Chapter.” She celebrated the growth in local organizing in

⁸³ Gene Damon, “Three Ways to Serve,” *The Ladder*, Vol. XIV No. I and II (October/November 1969): 4.

1969 and connected chapter organizing to the vitality of the Daughters. “A strong DOB is essential to us all if we are to ever achieve our civil liberties.”⁸⁴

Grier worked well with then-DOB president Rita Laporte, a former member of the San Francisco Chapter. She featured her and her one-woman DOB organizing roadshow in every issue. She even put a picture of Laporte on the magazine’s cover, the first time that a national president of the organization was pictured.⁸⁵

Through the regular column “Cross Currents” (inaugurated during Barbara Gittings’ editorship from 1963-66), Grier devoted at least 12 double-columned *Ladder* pages (out of a total of 46 pages) to news tidbits she clipped or had sent to her. Many of them featured segments from articles on women’s liberation, reprinted from the *New York Times* or NOW newsletters. There are also many longer pieces in *The Ladder* in 1969 and the first few months of 1970, like the one by Wilda Chase on “Lesbianism and Feminism;” reports on local and national women’s liberation meetings and conferences; “Confessions of a Pseudo-Male Chauvinist” by Martha Shelley (on internalized sexism, or “identifying with the male oppressor class”); and feminist poetry from Elsa Gidlow.⁸⁶ There is no hint of the problems to come.

But by 1970, increasingly fractious disagreements with “San Francisco” (i.e., DOB’s governing board) over decision-making and ideology had reached the boiling

⁸⁴ Gene Damon, “The Year of the Chapter,” *The Ladder*, Vol. XIV No. 3 and 4 (December/January 1969/70): 3-4.

⁸⁵ Cover photograph of Rita Laporte, *The Ladder*, Vol. XIII No. XI and XII (September/October 1969/70).

⁸⁶ See, for example, *The Ladder* issues in late 1969 and the early months of 1970: Vol. XIV No. 3 and 4, 13-16; Vol. 14 No. 7 and 8, 4-6; Vol. 14 No. 9 and 10, 23-25.

point. Some activists had already proposed severing *The Ladder* from the organization and turning it into a profit-making venture under a reorganization plan that would have radically restructured the DOB.⁸⁷ The organization's long-time leaders – Lyon and Martin in San Francisco, Gittings and Lahusen in Philadelphia, and Rush and Sandoz in Los Angeles – were all more involved in other activities and organizations, from NOW to the Homophile Action League, from the Gay Activists Alliance to the Prosperos Society, than they were with the Daughters.

“It seemed like DOB was a dying organization,” Grier remembers, “and *The Ladder* was an entity of its own. They thought it was the tail of the dog, but it was really the dog.”⁸⁸ The uncertainty of the organization's future – and a certain propriety of ownership -- led Grier and Laporte to take extreme action. That summer, one month before the scheduled DOB Convention, they abruptly severed the magazine's ties to the Daughters of Bilitis.

⁸⁷ A discussion of the Willer-Glass 1968 proposal for revision of the DOB constitution is covered in Chapter Three.

⁸⁸ Barbara Grier, interview with author, December 29, 2003.

Part III: “The Purloined *Ladder*”⁸⁹

In July, 1970, Rita Laporte took the DOB’s mailing list and other materials, as well as copies of every issue of *The Ladder*, and moved it all to the home of two DOB members in Reno, Nevada. “She took files, books...as well as lots of copies of *The Ladder*,” Lyon said very recently. “It was Barbara’s idea. Rita went to the place where the address plates were made and, as National President, convinced them to give her all of it.” According to some Daughters, Laporte also gave Grier valuable early letters to *The Ladder*, such as those written by Lorraine Hansberry, that she took from the DOB office.⁹⁰

The loss of the Daughters’ beloved and well-respected magazine meant the end of the national organization itself. As Rush put it, “without the glue that held us together, there was no reason to go on.” Many of the women involved with DOB for more than a decade – Lyon, Martin, Gittings, Lahusen, Rush, among others⁹¹ -- have always referred to the “theft” of *The Ladder* and it has been a sore spot between them and Grier ever since.

⁸⁹ Manuela Soares, “The Purloined *Ladder*: Its Place in Lesbian History,” *Journal of Homosexuality* (New York: Haworth Press, Inc., 1998), 27-49.

⁹⁰ Phyllis Lyon, telephone discussion with author, April 9, 2004; Stella Rush, interview with author, September 16, 2003.

⁹¹ All five women mentioned Grier and Laporte’s “theft” at least two or three times in our interviews. In the DOB Video Project tape of Shirley Willer, she also refers to Grier “stealing” *The Ladder* (DV 17, Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn NY). On the other hand, both Jeanne Cordova and Martha Shelley told me that they found Grier to be “very helpful” and kind to them as they were getting started in lesbian activism.

Yet Grier insists that it was the other way around. She explains that she and Laporte “divorced” *The Ladder* from DOB because the group’s institutional weakness by 1970 put the magazine in jeopardy. “DOB was falling apart – I wanted *The Ladder* to survive.” The “theft” being an inside job done by “sisters” was so incongruous to them in 1970 that at least one DOB member in San Francisco remembered instantly blaming the government – local or federal -- for it.⁹²

The August/September 1970 issue is no longer affiliated with the Daughters of Bilitis; instead, readers are directed to a post office box in Reno, Nevada. The only “explanation” is more a manifesto:

THE LADDER, published by Lesbians and directed to ALL women seeking full human dignity, had its beginning in 1956. It was then the only Lesbian publication in the U.S. It is now the only women’s magazine openly supporting Lesbians, a forceful minority with the women’s liberation movement.

Initially THE LADDER’s goal was limited to achieving the rights accorded heterosexual women, that is, full second-class citizenship. In the 1950’s women as a whole were as yet unaware of their oppression. The Lesbian knew. And she wondered silently when her sisters would realize that they too share many of the Lesbian’s handicaps, those that pertained to being a woman.

THE LADDER’s purpose today is to raise all women to full human status, with all of the rights and responsibilities this entails; to include ALL women, whether Lesbian or heterosexual.

OCCUPATIONS have no sex and must be opened to all qualified persons for the benefit of all.

⁹² Manuela Soares quoted DOB member Judith Schwarz: “...everybody thought it was the cops or the FBI. I mean, it was just so clear it had to be them. What lesbian would come and do a thing like this, you know, who would dare?” (“The Purloined *Ladder*,” 35.)

LIFE STYLES must be as numerous as human beings require for their personal happiness and fulfillment.

ABILITY, AMBITION TALENT –
THESE ARE HUMAN QUALITIES⁹³

Grier began to publish *The Ladder* on her own and it lasted for two more years as a lesbian-feminist magazine. She says she stopped publishing it in 1972, despite a mailing list of nearly 4,000, due to financial difficulties. As she explains it today, “we weren’t able to receive enough advertising revenue – except from sources that the women wouldn’t want, like sex services or porn publishers – to keep publishing and mailing a high-quality magazine to so many people.”⁹⁴

In the August/September 1972 issue of *The Ladder*, Grier wrote her final “Lesbiana” column. She noted that, among many other new books in 1972, there were new works by authors she had reviewed in her column many times before: a volume of poetry by May Sarton (*A Durable Fire*); John O’Hara’s *The Ewings*; and the novel *An Accidental Man* by Iris Murdoch. She failed to review Lyon and Martin’s recently-published *Lesbian/Woman* and admitted to difficulty in evaluating *The Gay Crusaders* by Kay Tobin and Randy Wicker published a few months earlier. Grier wrote “the disaffection between male homosexuals and Lesbians is soft-pedaled to such an extent that one might imagine the two groups worked together congenially, which isn’t and hasn’t been so in many years.” This passage clearly reflects Grier’s increasingly lesbian separatist philosophies. In 1972, as had been true for at least twenty years, some gay men

⁹³ *The Ladder*, Vol. 14 No. 11 and 12 (August/September 1970): 2.

⁹⁴ Barbara Grier, interview with author, December 29, 2003.

and lesbians were successfully “working together,” if not always “congenially,” but then neither were the all-female groups. Within some mixed-gender organizations, personal and political work was done in the early 1970s to advance gay and lesbian rights, and many activists – men and women -- struggled together, most often over issues of sexism but also racism and classism, to form organizations like the Gay Academic Union and the National Gay Task Force.⁹⁵

Shortly thereafter, using *The Ladder*’s mailing list to announce her new enterprise, Grier launched Naiad Press with three other women, including her partner Donna McBride, Anyda Marchant (who wrote lesbian love stories under the pen name Sarah Aldridge) and Muriel Crawford. For 30 years, Naiad successfully published lesbian literature, bringing back long out-of-print works and launching new lesbian writers, such as Marchant and Katherine V. Forrest, as well.⁹⁶

In 1975, three years after it ceased publication, Grier gave Arno Press, a subsidiary book publishing company of the *New York Times*, a complete set of *The Ladder*. Sixteen years’ worth of writing about lesbian, feminist, homophile, and human rights issues were bound into eight volumes as part of the series *Homosexuality: Lesbians and Gay Men in Society, History and Literature*.⁹⁷ The series editor was the pioneering gay historian Jonathan Ned Katz; Barbara Gittings served on the Editorial Board. The

⁹⁵ See Martin Duberman, *Cures: A Gay Man’s Odyssey* (New York: Dutton Books, 1991), 275-277; John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*, 344-345.

⁹⁶ Barbara Grier, interview with author, December 29, 2003.

⁹⁷ Manuela Soares, “The Purloined *Ladder*,” 27-29.

eight volumes containing *The Ladder* include an Introduction written by Barbara Grier (under her pseudonym, Gene Damon), “*The Ladder*, Rung by Rung.”

In it she recounts the magazine’s history, its role in the emerging gay and lesbian rights movement, and the “growing procession of well-known writers” who first appeared within its pages. She ended on a celebratory note that reflects both the heady optimism of the mid-1970s and her personal stake in the magazine.

...There is much more in these pages. There is a history of very oppressed people who did not wish to stay oppressed and who worked to do something about it. What they have accomplished is visible in today’s much less restrictive, much freer atmosphere. No one associated with *The Ladder* feels that the magazine was all by itself responsible for these changes, but we all feel we helped. We are glad and we hope that you will enjoy our history as you read these pages.⁹⁸

In December, 2003, Grier recounted a story which, for her, captured what *The Ladder* had meant to lesbians. While attending a convention of lesbian writers and publishers in Chicago in the mid-1980s, she was introduced as its last editor. “When *The Ladder* was mentioned, the entire room erupted in applause. Every woman there knew the magazine, and loved it. There was no doubt of its significance.”⁹⁹

There is also no doubt of the still-fresh pain her actions inflicted. The sense of betrayal on the part of many Daughters, as noted above, is very strong more than thirty

⁹⁸ Gene Damon (pseud.), “*The Ladder*, Rung by Rung,” forward to *THE LADDER October 1956-September 1958*, Volumes I – II (New York: Arno Press, 1975); Jonathan Katz, Gen. Ed., *HOMOSEXUALITY: Lesbians and Gay Men in Society, History and Literature*.

⁹⁹ Barbara Grier, interview with author, December 29, 2003.

years later. They reject Grier's characterization that she "divorced" *The Ladder* from DOB and insist that it was nothing less than thievery.¹⁰⁰

Again, the experiences of the male homophile groups were instructive. Many of the Daughters had witnessed the wrenching battle ONE, Inc. had gone through in 1965, when editor Don Slater took the magazine's mailing list and continued to publish it privately. (He and ONE founder Dorr Legg engaged in a paper duel for six months, each publishing a magazine using the name *ONE* until a court order gave Legg the rights to the name. Slater got the office equipment associated with the magazine.) The Daughters opted to let their prize publication go rather than risk years of expensive litigation and a similar "punishing" struggle.¹⁰¹

Ultimately, it seems that Grier and Laporte's act of severing *The Ladder* from the group that had created it and controlled its production for 14 years mortally wounded an already weakened, vulnerable organization. In the name of feminism, they literally seized the means of lesbian cultural production from their sisters.

¹⁰⁰ Phyllis Lyon, telephone discussion with author, April 9, 2004; Stella Rush, interview with author, September 16, 2003.

¹⁰¹ Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 160. For more information on the battle over ONE magazine, see Rodger Streitmatter, *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America*, 145; Wayne Dynes, "W. Dorr Legg (1904-1994)," *Before Stonewall*, 99-100.

Chapter Three:

“About that chapter in your area...”

A National Network of Lesbian Activists

Please send me information regarding the Daughters of Bilitis and THE LADDER. . . their aims and purposes come evidently from adjusted Lesbians. Is there a group of women in the Los Angeles area who are “adjusted Lesbians”?

Ladder reader from southern California¹

A local chapter is to the Daughters of Bilitis as a municipal government is to the United States government. Only so much can be accomplished by the printed word; there must also be the spoken word, the personal contact.²

Del Martin

The reach provided by *The Ladder*, as well as the support offered by the other homophile groups of the 1950s, enabled DOB to start local groups in cities other than San Francisco and connect its members to a national organization within the first few years of its existence. Throughout the 1960s, through chapter organizing and National

¹ Letter signed by “W.O., Glendale, Calif.,” “Readers Respond,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 8 (May 1957): 24.

² Del Martin, “Why A Chapter In Your Area?” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 5 (February 1957): 7.

Conventions, DOB focused on developing a network of lesbian activists that stretched across the country and beyond.

The creation of local chapters or groups of DOB members had been on the agenda since the organization began. As soon as *The Ladder* was underway, letters started coming in from interested women asking about a group forming in their area, but there were some nay-sayers as well.

If an L.A. chapter were to be formed in this area, what would be its main activities? I think your publication is a great thing, but I do wonder about these meetings you hold. It seems that those attending and listening to a discussion are the very ones who would least benefit from hearing what is said. Other than the social aspect of the group, I don't yet see the purpose.³

Del Martin responded in February, 1957. "Letters received by the Daughters from points far and wide certainly indicate a basic need for 'someone to talk to'. . . Perhaps some individuals are able to cope with the problem alone. We doubt that this holds true for very many."

Although a few early members expressed interest in creating groups in Rhode Island and New Jersey, the idea didn't take root. But by 1958, two chapters – in New York and Los Angeles – were established, due to the energy and commitment of two DOB leaders (Barbara Gittings in Philadelphia and Helen Sandoz in Los Angeles), a handful of DOB members in each area, and the support of the small homophile networks already in existence in both cities. That same year, DOB leaders created a San Francisco Chapter as well as a national office, headquartered in San Francisco, to oversee the

³ Letter signed by "D.B., Long Beach, Calif.," "Reader Response," *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 3 (December 1956): 13.

growing organization, which by now had about 200 members. By 1962, a Chicago group was chartered.

Meeting the “basic need” proved challenging. It required a committed cadre of activists to get a group going and keep it going; there had to be women who were strong enough to take leadership but also willing to follow organizational policies and procedures. Long-distance telephone communication was expensive so DOB activists relied on written correspondence, as well as biennial gatherings, for almost all important discussions and decisions. As was noted in Chapter One, even in its earliest days DOB was a very structured organization; as it grew, the national governing board issued many “directives” and established rules and regulations for its chapters and members.⁴ It required tact and patience, time and energy, in addition to excellent communication skills, to engage the organization’s leaders at all levels. Where would these skilled, strong, responsive organizers – who were not afraid to publicly acknowledge their lesbianism -- come from?

The two women who would become DOB’s key chapter organizers in the late 1950s – Gittings and Sandoz – arrived at separate DOB meetings in San Francisco within months of one another in 1956. As discussed in Chapter Two, both of them were to prove essential to the development of the organization’s main recruitment tool, *The Ladder*. They also provided crucial guidance to the growth of local and national organizing.

⁴ A four-page “Directive No. 1” was issued to chapters from the National Governing Board in advance of the 1960 Convention. At least four more directives, mercifully much shorter, followed within the next year; eight were issued overall. Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 6/1, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

In addition, over the years a few dozen lesbians – such as local activists Pat “Dubby” Walker and Lois Beeby (“Williams”) in San Francisco, “Del Shearer” and Barbara McLean in Chicago, Venice Ostwald and Jeanne Cordova in Los Angeles, Ernestine “Eckstein” and Martha Shelley in New York, Ada Bello in Philadelphia, and national DOB presidents Shirley Willer and Rita Laporte -- volunteered their time to organize and manage local DOB groups. Some of them are still active in LGBT organizing as well as in other social, political, and spiritual arenas; others have quietly retreated from the scene, with little or no footprints left behind.⁵ Pat Walker – or “Dubby” as she was known to many of her DOB friends – is remembered by nearly all of the West Coast women I interviewed. She is an example of an early DOB activist who defied physical and social barriers to find community.

Pat “Dubby” Walker was born on February 18, 1939 in Los Angeles, California. “When I was about 11 or 12, my mother told me about gayness, about “The Well of Loneliness,” she remembered in a 1988 interview. “My mother had gay friends, and my sister is also gay. At 14 I realized I liked girls – I never felt bad about myself because of it.” Walker, who died in 1999, was a short black woman with close-cropped hair – “the thing everybody always commented on was that I stood breast-high to the world.”

⁵ Correspondence, meeting minutes, and local newsletters of chapter activities in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco can be found in the Martin and Lyon Papers, GLBTHS; additional sources of information about local DOB organizing is contained in videotaped interviews with individual activists, part of the Lesbian Herstory Archives/DOB Project, Brooklyn NY. Regional archives such as the June Mazer Lesbian Collection in West Hollywood CA, and the Gerber/Hart Library and Archives in Chicago IL, also contain some information on local activists. In addition, chapter information was provided in interviews with DOB leaders such as Lois Beeby, Ada Bello, Clara Brock, Jeanne Cordova, Barbara McLean, Venice Ostwald, and Martha Shelley.

Walker was partially blind from birth, and completely lost her eyesight in her teens. “I went to the Oakland (California) Orientation Center for the Blind in 1958 – I was 19. Somebody came from a class at San Francisco State to observe people at the Center, which was made up of blind or newly-blinded people, and she picked me out as gay, started taking me to different things.” Walker’s new friendship with DOB activist Billye Talmadge introduced her to a circle of lesbians who became friends. “All the women were really nice – I was a new experience for them, and they were a new experience for me.”⁶

“It was the first place I felt warm and accepted,” she remembered. “There were parties, picnics, getting together to work on the magazine...everyone would help. But there were also disagreements, about politics – that was a stressful kind of thing, to disagree with people you really cared about. It was like a family in that way.”

Walker was active with DOB from 1958 until the mid-1960s. She became president of the San Francisco Chapter in 1960, when Jaye Bell was elected national president of DOB. “People suggested I run for office, and I didn’t have the courage to say no. I didn’t feel that I knew enough or had enough experience. It was a gesture.” She remembered chairing meetings and keeping things moving. In a recent biographical essay on her, Del Martin remembers Walker as “a strong leader who had no trouble delegating authority.”⁷

⁶ Pat Walker Videotape, #MV46, Lesbian Herstory Archives DOB Project, Brooklyn, NY; October 1988.

⁷ Del Martin (with assistance from Leslie Warren), “Pat Walker (1938-1999), *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context* (New York: Haworth Press, 2002), 191-192.

Especially at the local level, DOB groups usually included an assortment of women: working-class as well as professional, young as well as middle-aged and older, a mix of racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Walker recalled that there was at least one other black woman involved at the same time she was, Cleo “Glenn” Bonner, who became national president of DOB in 1963. “I think that (my) being blind was more of an issue,” Walker said in an interview videotaped in 1988. “I didn’t think about being black that much, until it was brought up. There were so few black women that if it had been an issue, it could be avoided.”

Walker’s life was busy and full. She had an active social life, loved listening to music, was very involved with her family of origin, and volunteered with San Francisco Suicide Prevention in addition to her DOB work. She was also running a small business, operating the concession stand at a Berkeley public office building during the week.

A turning point came in 1965. Walker was one of the DOB representatives at the historic 1964 retreat in Mill Valley, California that led to the creation of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH), the groundbreaking coalition of clergy and homophile activists started in San Francisco.⁸ “My high was when gay people got together with ministers and had this weekend retreat. People like (ministers) Bob Cromeey, Cecil Williams...if the church is going to accept gay people, then obviously this is a really wonderful thing and there is hope for the future.”⁹

But when many of her good friends in DOB started getting more involved in CRH and other new activist projects, Walker drifted away. “The political issue (of

⁸ See Chapter 4 for a more complete discussion of CRH.

⁹ Ibid.

homosexuality), god help me, wasn't it. It was the people and how I related to them and how they related to me. It was an emotional base which I have built my life on -- feeling okay about me and other gay women."¹⁰ Local leaders like Pat Walker anchored the national network of lesbians that the Daughters maintained from 1955 until 1970.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Part I: Local Organizing and the Creation of DOB's National Network

The best geographic locales for lesbian organizing under the DOB banner in the late 1950s and the 1960s were the U.S. cities that, due to World War II demobilizations and the existence of pre-War same-sex communities, had significant gay and lesbian populations.¹¹ To varying degrees, the DOB chapters in Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco and Chicago had the benefit of strong and fairly consistent lesbian leadership and reliable allies in the gay male and civil liberties communities throughout the 1960s. In addition to being centrally involved in local homophile organizing, including engaging in media and public relations efforts, the chapters also provided leadership to DOB's national Governing Board.

In the 1960s, especially after 1965, DOB groups in the U.S. were also organized and lasted for varying periods of time (one to three years generally) in cities like Philadelphia and Dallas, Detroit and New Orleans. Although short-lived, these DOB chapters were encouraged by the drive and energies of two DOB Presidents, Shirley Willer and Rita Laporte. Their primary commitments as leaders of DOB were to chapter organizing from 1966 through 1970, and both women spent a good deal of time traveling and meeting with local activists. In *The Ladder's* January 1970 issue, editor Gene Damon (Barbara Grier) reported, "DOB now has four fully active chapters and six groups in the process of becoming members." Overall DOB membership stood at about 300.¹²

¹¹ See Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 271-273; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, *Sexual Communities*, 23-37; John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*, 178-182.

¹² Manuela Soares et al., "Shirley Willer," DOB Video Project, DV15 (October 1989), Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn NY; Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, interviews with

Outside the U.S., in addition to a DOB-inspired group in London, the Minorities Research Group founded by Esme Langley and other British lesbians in 1963, a 1969 DOB chapter organized in Melbourne by Marion Paull and Claudia Pearce was the first “openly homosexual political organization” in Australia.¹³

Local Snapshots

Los Angeles

Sixteen people attended a get-acquainted brunch of the Daughters of Bilitis in The English Room of the New Clark Hotel in Los Angeles on Sunday, January 27. After a rundown of the organization’s activities to date and plans for the future, enough interest was expressed that immediate steps will be taken to start a provisional chapter in the Los Angeles area...¹⁴

In many ways, it was a natural progression for the Daughters of Bilitis to spread south to Los Angeles when the organization was still in its infancy. One major factor that aided its development was basic human connection: Helen Sandoz was moving there to deepen her relationship with Stella Rush, the woman she’d met at a One, Inc. meeting in

author, April 25, 1997 and May 11, 1998; Barbara Grier, interview with author, December 29, 2003; Gene Damon (Barbara Grier), “The Year of the Chapter,” *The Ladder* Vol. XIV No. 3 and 4 (December/January, 1969/1970): 3. Membership numbers have been difficult to quantify for DOB, due to incomplete records, but listings for 1960 show 35 New York members, 44 LA members, 61 SF members, and 26 National members. In 1966, listings of those members “eligible to vote” in the upcoming convention show 71 New York members, 79 SF members, and 14 LA members. (Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 4-10 – 4-13, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

¹³ Graham Willett, *Living Out Loud: A History of Gay and Lesbian Activism in Australia*. (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 36-37.

¹⁴ “DAUGHTERS HOLD BRUNCH IN L.A. – PLANS FOR CHAPTER UNDER WAY,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (February 1957): 10.

1957. “I was asked by Del and Phyllis to keep an eye on her,” Rush remembers. “Make sure she got to the sessions, didn’t just check out. She was very smart and got bored easily. And I found her at the bar in the hotel where the meeting was being held, we started talking, and that was that.”¹⁵

Sandoz moved to her new home with Rush in Los Angeles late in 1957. In 1958, they called a meeting of local DOB members and *Ladder* subscribers. Given DOB’s strong connections to ONE and the Mattachine Society, the LA chapter got going by co-sponsoring local homophile forums and meetings with the better-established groups. Sandoz and Rush were the mainstays of the group. Lisa Ben was an early member, as was Venice Ostwald.

“I got divorced after my husband came back from Korea in 1958,” Venice Ostwald explained. “I was living in Long Beach and wanted to find out what it meant – to be a lesbian. I met Del and Phyl at a ONE meeting; I also met my lover to be.” In January 1958, Ostwald (listed using her pseudonym, “Mrs. V. C. Vostwald,” and “graduate student, ONE Institute”) was one of the debaters at the ONE Mid-Winter Institute on the topic “That Heterosexual Living Is Better Than Homosexual.” Stella Rush reports in her *Ladder* review of the program that “Vostwald gave a brilliant counterattack...she said that it could be conceded that heterosexuality was better for heterosexuals, but certainly not for homosexuals. ‘Society doesn’t grow by listening to the majority on all questions,’ was one of Mrs. Vostwald’s many rapier thrusts.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Stella Rush, interview with author, May 21, 2002.

¹⁶ “ONE Symposium: Homosexuality – a way of life,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 2 No. 5 (February 1958): 7-8.

Ostwald was involved with the LA DOB chapter from its beginnings and for many years thereafter, and was president in the early 1960s. Hers is another voice that reminds us that, at a time when racial integration in the U.S. was more of an ideal than a reality, DOB was one small space where connections across color lines could be made. “There were about eight or nine women when Del and Phyl came down to do the ONE conference and met with us. It was already a broad-based group – there was a real cross-section of people, white and people of color, poor and professional – but it was always a very small group.” A white woman who taught in LA’s inner-city public schools, Ostwald remembers the repressive tactics of the Los Angeles Police Department in those days and was part of organizing police monitoring committees like San Francisco’s Citizens Alert in the mid-1960s.¹⁷

In 1963, Florence Fleischman formed a Manhattan Beach group, providing a meeting space for lesbians in the beach community southwest of Los Angeles. Fleischman was one of the first women ordained in the Metropolitan Community Church, the gay ecumenical religious group formed by Troy Perry in the late 1960s.¹⁸

By the late 1960s, the Manhattan Beach and Los Angeles chapters had become relatively inactive, but in 1970 Jeanne Cordova and other younger lesbian-feminist activists provided a new infusion of energy. Their interest in working in a specifically

¹⁷ Venice Ostwald, interviews with author, May 26, 2002 and September 5, 2002. Ostwald, as “Virginia Essene,” is also the author of many books on metaphysics and spirituality. As noted previously, at least one other member of the LA DOB chapter at this time remembers Ostwald being “uncomfortable” with the involvement of a black woman who worked as a prostitute in the mid-1960s. Ostwald reported no such problems. Stella Rush, interview with author, May 22, 2002.

¹⁸ Florence Fleischman, interview with author, September 2002.

lesbian group is what drew them to DOB rather than one of the gay liberation groups springing up across the country in the wake of the June 1969 Stonewall riots in New York. After the loss of *The Ladder*, Cordova also worked with other LA DOB activists to launch a new publication, *Lesbian Tide*.¹⁹

Mexican-Irish by birth, raised in a Catholic family in a southern California suburb in the 1950s and 1960s, Cordova entered the convent of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Los Angeles at the age of 17. Following Pope John XXIII's radical changes to Roman Catholic practice, the IHM nuns were among the first to abandon their traditional dress and behaviors. They were encouraged to engage in encounter groups, move freely in the world, and take the gospel to the people. Cordova quickly became disillusioned with the experimentation erupting within the order; "I went into the convent to get away from the world, not be in it," she remembered. She left the IHM order and enrolled at University of California at Los Angeles, studying for and receiving her MSW. She also started a quest for a female lover. "I was looking...I knew dykes were baseball players, so I looked for that (in the softball leagues) for awhile. But there was no one to talk to. I was going to UCLA, 'the college kid,' and I was really lonely."

"I saw a copy of *The Ladder* on my sister's coffee table. She said, 'oh that's a gay thing...' and I memorized the address and phone number!" Cordova remembered that the group met in a church or auditorium, in a small hall, and that there were 20 to 25 people there. "October 3, 1970 – that's my political birthday as an activist. That's the

¹⁹ DOB chapters were always free to create local newsletters, and almost all of them did so, at least intermittently. Cordova's *Lesbian Tide* graduated from being a local organizational newsletter to a respected national lesbian magazine in 1974.

day I went to my first DOB meeting. I was there for the end and the beginning of lesbian feminism.”²⁰

Cordova became president of the LA Chapter of DOB in 1970; her vice-president was Barbara McLean, who had been very active in the revitalization of the Chicago chapter a few years before. Together, Cordova and McLean, and other new activists, introduced the homophile-era lesbians in Los Angeles to lesbian-feminist issues. “The (DOB) members were more conservative – very into (stereotypical butch/femme) roles. I was comfortable with that. But we invited the group Women Against War to DOB – that caused a stir, but they listened.”

Cordova soon got the job of editor of LA DOB’s newsletter and created the groundbreaking 1971 magazine, *Lesbian Tide*, the “second important lesbian publication to come out of DOB.” “I felt that DOB should change with the times, and that feminism was the determining factor for lesbians,” Cordova said. She remembers that the LA DOB membership thought the newsletter was printing too many “radical” pieces about lesbian feminism but she, McLean, and a few other younger women pressed their agenda and published the newsletter they wanted to read.²¹

In 1973, Cordova and LA DOB activists joined with other lesbian-feminists to organize the first large-scale lesbian conference, held at a UCLA auditorium with 700 seats. “There were 2,000 people – it was the biggest lesbian conference in the world.”

²⁰ Jeanne Cordova, interview with author, September 10, 2003.

²¹ Ibid. See also Jill Johnston, *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1973): “Historically the lesbian had two choices: being criminal or going straight. The present revolutionary project is the creation of a legitimate state defined by women.” (277).

Cordova recounted the intensity and excitement of the time, including an explosive confrontation among conference attendees over the inclusion of a transgender woman performer. “That conference was like a birth – always messy, the contractions don’t proceed as expected, but it birthed Lesbian Nation.”²²

New York

After visiting San Francisco in 1957, Barbara Gittings worked with “Meredith Grey” (Marion Glass) to organize a new DOB group in New York City in 1958. Like DOB’s other chapters, the New York group published a local newsletter and organized public meetings, often co-sponsoring them with Mattachine. But by the mid-1960s, they broke ranks: Gittings, Lahusen, and a few other New York DOBers were among the first lesbians in the country to join the small groups of gay men and women who began picketing important national public sites.²³

For example, in October 1965, a small group of lesbians and gay men picketed the White House to protest government discrimination against homosexuals. Among them was Ernestine “Eckstein,” a 24-year-old African-American woman who had been active

²² Jeanne Cordova, interview with author, September 7, 2002. See also Jeanne Cordova, *Kicking the Habit – A Lesbian Nun Story* (Los Angeles: Multiple Dimensions, 1990); “My Immaculate Heart,” *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking Silence*, Nancy Manahan and Rosemary Curb, eds. (New York: Warner Books, 1985); Jeanne Cordova, “Butches, Lies & Feminism,” *Persistent Desire: A Femme Butch Reader*, Joan Nestle, ed. (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992).

²³ Correspondence between Barbara Gittings and Del Martin, August 1965; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 6/12, GLBTHS, San Francisco. See previous discussion, page 111 on Gittings’ and Lahusen’s interest in opening up debates over tactics and strategies in DOB. As editor of *The Ladder*, Gittings promoted the idea of picketing: Vol. 9 No. 12 (September 1965): 4-8.

in the civil rights movement since her college days. In a photo taken that day, she wore white-rimmed sunglasses and carried a sign reading “Denial of Equality of Opportunity Is Immoral.”²⁴

The 1965 demonstrations in Washington, DC – which took place on April 17, May 29, July 23, August 28, and October 23 -- are significant because they marked the first time that a group of gay men and lesbians openly took to the sidewalks of the nation’s capital to demand their rights. As noted, homophile activists had been influenced by the examples of countless civil rights protests, marches, pickets and demonstrations that steadily increased in the first half of the 1960s. The stark images of dignified young black women and men -- neatly dressed and nonthreatening, who faced hostile crowds of jeering, hateful white people at lunch counters and department stores where blacks could work but not shop -- were seared into the consciences of many.

“Gay activism took a different turn in the autumn of 1964 when (Randy) Wicker suggested to Craig Rodwell, the youngest member of New York Mattachine...that the time might be right to try a picket line,” historian John Loughery has written. Wicker, Rodwell and a handful of others “paraded in front of the Whitehall Induction Center in lower Manhattan with signs that protested the military’s policy of excluding homosexuals and, more important, of discharging them in a manner injurious to their future well-being.” Shortly thereafter, they organized another action, this time demanding time to rebut a homophobic psychoanalyst at New York’s Cooper Union; they got ten minutes.

²⁴ Photo by Kay Tobin, October 23, 1965; *The Ladder* Vol. 10 No. 9 (June 1966): back cover. See also “Standing Tall Before Stonewall: The First Gay Pickets,” curated by Kay Tobin Lahusen, William Way Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center, Philadelphia PA, June and July, 2000.

When news broke in the spring of 1965 that Cuban President Fidel Castro's government would begin placing homosexuals in camps, another homophile activist, Jack Nichols, suggested that, since there was no Cuban embassy, they picket the White House and the United Nations. A second White House protest in May was organized and it led to wire service reports and coverage in the *New York Times*.²⁵ Similar demonstrations took place at Independence Hall in Philadelphia starting that year, and they continued every July 4 throughout the rest of the decade.²⁶ Eckstein joined some of these protests as well.

While Eckstein allowed herself to be photographed on the picket line or profiled on the cover of *The Ladder* in the June 1966 issue, she never used her real surname. Like many lesbians and gay men who lived in fear of losing their livelihoods and their families if they were known to be homosexual, Eckstein opted for the protection of a pseudonym. In this way, she balanced her desire for political visibility with personal caution.²⁷

Born in 1941 and raised in South Bend, Indiana, Ernestine Eckstein arrived in New York City in 1963. She moved East after graduation from Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, where she had majored in journalism and also studied government and Russian. Yearbook pictures and captions show a smiling, slender young woman who

²⁵ John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*, 269-272.

²⁶ Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 81-82, 111-114.

²⁷ Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen, interviews with author; August 23 and November 8, 2003.

is often the only black person in a group picture. While at Bloomington, she was active in a variety of campus groups including the daily student-produced newspaper.²⁸

In New York, Eckstein found employment as a social worker; she also for the first time found herself attracted to her female roommate. After a brief period of soul-searching, she accepted herself as a lesbian and sought an organization to join. Her search for affiliation was in keeping with her college experiences: Eckstein had been actively involved with the Bloomington chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) while at Indiana University. Within two years of her arrival in New York, she joined not only the activist Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) but also the two homophile organizations – Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis – that existed at the time. By 1966, she was the vice-president of the New York Chapter of DOB.²⁹

Eckstein urged the homophile organizations to give more emphasis to public demonstrations and legal strategies. “My feeling is that there are certain broad, general problems that we all have as homosexuals, across the board so to speak, and we should concentrate on those – the discrimination by the government in employment and military service, the laws used against homosexuals, the rejection by the churches,” she said in an interview with Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin Lahusen which was printed in the June 1966 issue of *The Ladder*.

²⁸ *The Arbutus Yearbooks*, 1960-1963, Main Library, Bloomington campus, University of Indiana.

²⁹ Barbara Gittings, “Interview with Ernestine,” *The Ladder* Vol. 10 No. 9 (June 1966): 4-11; “Interview with Ernestine Eckstein,” audiotape recorded by Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin, William Way LGBT Center and Archives, Philadelphia PA.

She drew some parallels between the black civil rights and the homophile movements. “The homosexual has to call attention to the fact that he’s been unjustly acted upon. This is what the Negro did,” she said. “Demonstrations, as far as I’m concerned, are one of the very first steps toward changing society.”³⁰

But at that time within DOB, such opinions were not universally shared; in fact they were highly contested. According to DOB leaders who knew her well, Eckstein “got fed up” with the debates over direct action tactics within DOB and dropped out in 1967. She moved to the West Coast a few years later.³¹

In the late 1960s, New York DOB continued to meet, under the leadership of Ruth Simpson and, later, Martha Shelley, who were both active in the early days of the women’s and lesbian liberation movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It became the “New York/New Jersey” chapter for much of the 1970s, kept alive by Julie Lee and a few other activists.³²

Chicago

On February 17, [1961] shortly before midnight, the police arrested some 52 people, herded them off to a Chicago jail, and charged them with presence in a disorderly house...At the station those women wearing “fly fronts,” regardless of whether they wore lipstick, long hair, or earrings, were made partially to undress in order to determine whether they wore jockey shorts...

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen, interview with author, August 23, 2003; John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 172-73.

³² Julie Lee Papers, Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn NY.

...Though I do not wish to go into the details of their fifteen-hour detention period, I will say that the conditions of the lockup itself, as well as their treatment, violated more than a few Illinois laws.

...If we ever hope to win our battle, we must fight. First, we must unshackle ourselves from fear, for it alone is our omnipresent enemy...³³

“Del Shearer”

Despite the fact that Illinois was the first state in the U.S. to reform its penal code, removing old statutes on sex offenses in 1961, homophile activism was slow to take hold in the Windy City. A Mattachine group had been started in the mid-1950s, fell apart when its membership dropped off, and then was revived in the early 1960s.³⁴

DOB also suffered from fits and starts throughout its 10-year life span. First organized in late 1961, and chartered by the National Governing Board in 1962, the group was led by “Del Shearer”³⁵ in its first few years. Early members included noted lesbian poet and writer Valerie Taylor (“Velma Tate”), a frequent contributor to *The*

³³ Letter signed by “D.S., Illinois” (“Del Shearer”), Readers Respond, *The Ladder*, Vol. 5, No. 7 (April 1961): 23.

³⁴ John Poling, “Mattachine Midwest,” (Master’s thesis, University of Iowa, 2002); William Kelley, interview with author, October 16, 2002.

³⁵ “Del Shearer” has turned out to be the mystery woman of the DOB leadership. Despite her five years of involvement in the Chicago chapter, three years serving as vice-president on the national DOB governing board, media appearances, and regular correspondence with the national office and the other chapters, no one – including Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon, Barbara Gittings, Kay Lahusen, and Barbara Grier – remembers much about this articulate, opinionated, passionate woman. I know only that she had a realty company in Chicago in 1964, but beyond that have no information about her age, race, background, etc. Even Chicago activists who have maintained extensive personal archives and who experienced, as well as chronicled, Chicago’s homophile history -- such as William Kelley and Marie Kuda, both actively involved with Mattachine Midwest in the mid- to late 1960s – say they don’t remember her. It is not known whether “Del Shearer” is a pseudonym or not but I treat it as such.

Ladder.³⁶ Close cooperation with other local homophile activists – such as pioneering civil rights attorney Pearl Hart -- were a hallmark of the group, as was its conscious outreach to black communities and newspapers.³⁷

Shearer wrote to the DOB Governing Board in August 1964, detailing her meetings with Chicago black journalist Balm Leavell, the editor of *The New Crusader*. “While talking with him I learned of his rather close connection with Jimmy Hoffa, and for this reason Cleo and I thought it would be well that the board knew about this contact...If you have objections about our using *The New Crusader* for publicity, please let me know immediately...,” she wrote. “I do feel that we should make use of public sources where we can...It is true, however, that anyone trying to cut our throats as an organization might dig up facts like Leavell’s connection with Hoffa.”³⁸ It is not known whether she received the go-ahead to pursue closer connections to Leavell and his newspaper; *The New Crusader* had already printed two articles about DOB’s activities before Shearer’s letter to the Board.³⁹

The Chicago Daughters were also working to increase lesbian visibility in the electronic media. In 1964, “Miss Shearer” was the only woman of five participants in a “lively two-hour exchange” televised on Chicago’s WBKB in April and reported in the

³⁶ See Chapter 4 for more information on Valerie Taylor.

³⁷ Eric Marcus, “Shirley Willer: One Angry Nurse,” *Making History*, 128-131.

³⁸ Letter to Governing Board from Del Shearer, August 15, 1964. Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 15/12, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

³⁹ Ibid.

October issue of *The Ladder*.⁴⁰ Shearer was identified simply as “President of the Chicago Chapter of Daughters of Bilitis,” unlike Franklin Kameny (“physicist and astronomer in private industry, founder and President of the Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C.”), Randolfe Wicker (“free lance writer, member of the Mattachine Society, Inc. of New York), Father James Jones of Chicago’s Episcopal Charities, and Dr. Jordan Scher, Director of the Chicago Psychiatric Foundation, in one of the first televised discussions featuring “known” homosexuals. She articulates DOB’s integrationist perspective (and betrays her own unquestioning use of then-prevalent sexist language):

The notion that many homosexuals act and dress differently is a fallacy. Sometimes a homosexual has a difficult time relating to people who are heterosexual simply because he is confronted with their heterosexuality. It stops him! So much public life has this heterosexual overtone, so much heterosexuality surrounds homosexuals. If they are going to move in society and be a part of it, they have to be able to withstand the pressures of this heterosexual atmosphere. Legislation does not stop homosexuality but only serves to drive it underground. The view that homophile groups want to see homosexuals predominate in society is completely fallacious.

Organizations like Daughters of Bilitis want to see the homosexual move out of his cubbyhole and join the rest of society as a responsible person. Also, they want to get society to accept the homosexual as a person.⁴¹

Shearer continued to lead Chicago DOB for the next two years while serving as vice-president of the National Governing Board. However, in a 1965 letter to the Governing Board, she resigned. She took the opportunity to express her strong

⁴⁰ W. Mitchell, “Special Report – ‘Off The Cuff,’” *The Ladder* Vol. 9 No. 1 (October 1964): 9-12.

⁴¹ Ibid.

disagreement “at this time or in the very near future” with the issue of picketing by homophile groups which was then being organized by ECHO. She called it “ridiculous if not utter insanity,” expressing her concern that homophile activists had not yet adequately influenced “the reflection of custom and public policy.” She criticized Illinois’ adoption of the American Law Institute’s Model Penal Code as a “maneuver made at an opportune time,” unsupported by public education and opinion.

Shearer also took on the then-popular comparisons of the homophile cause to “the Negro Civil Rights issues.”

The homosexual is not the Negro. If you look to that time when the Negro Civil Rights issues gained their greatest momentum, you will find there many factors which are totally and very apparently missing from the momentum of the homophile movement. You will find a history of suffering behind both causes. You will not find a century of subtle attack in the history of both. You will find an endless mass of literature concerned with the atrocities committed against Negroes, literature which has undoubtedly affected the general public and made them reflect upon issues which are near and dear to them. What issues can be so near and dear to them as voting power, integration, open-occupancy, equal employment opportunity, and property rights. These are the issues that made the American public think, if not out of humanity then out of fear. Those tempered by a century of literature had to face their consciences. It is in those consciences that the Negro issue was and will be decided.

The homophile cause does not present the same issues.... The antipathy is of a different nature. In addition, the literature in behalf of the homosexual, his rights, and his personal freedom is all but missing. The literature directed at the general public which does exist is essentially antagonistic. While picketing has served the Negro cause, it has only done so because a large and significant population was already very much aware of the cause.⁴²

⁴² “Letter to The Governing Board from Del Shearer RE: Daughters of Bilitis, Inc. Participation in ECHO and Specifically Picketing, June 10, 1965;” Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 6/12, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

Shearer also urged that DOB withdraw from ECHO to protect DOB's "separate identity." She ended her letter with "I would much prefer to see D.O.B. small and sound than great and vulnerable." She quit the organization shortly thereafter.

The Chicago DOB chapter found new leadership in the summer of 1965 in the person of Barbara McLean; it struggled for the next couple of years to maintain itself as an active organization. Throughout the rest of the decade, most of its efforts were social and recreational, such as women's dances that, in stereotypical Chicago-gangland style, caught the negative attention of the local Mafia-connected bar owners. McLean tells a story today that her friendship then with a high-priced call girl – who was the good friend of a boss in "the family" -- is what saved her and DOB from being harassed (or worse). "A lot of women were coming to our dances and the guys didn't like us competing with their bars," she remembered in a recent interview. "They sent one of their goons to push me around, but I called my friend and she told them 'hands off,' that she liked what we were doing." The dances continued for another year or more.

Also in 1965, Mattachine Midwest was reorganized after a long hiatus and soon became the center of homophile activity for both men and women in Chicago. While McLean was still involved with DOB, the Chicago chapter co-sponsored public meetings and activities with Mattachine, but after McLean moved West, no one stepped forward to keep the chapter going.⁴³

⁴³ Barbara McLean, interview with author, September 21, 2003; William Kelley, interview with author, October 16, 2002.

San Francisco

As the home of DOB's founders and its national headquarters, San Francisco was the center of the organization. For the first ten years of DOB's life, the national leadership of the organization often came from San Francisco. Cleo "Glenn" Bonner, the first and only African-American national president of DOB, was an active member of the San Francisco Chapter. She led the Daughters of Bilitis from 1963 to 1966.

A strong, determined woman who took her responsibilities seriously, Bonner helped steer DOB through a tumultuous, exciting period in its history. She presided over a small organization that was expanding in many different directions at once, reaching thousands of women and men in the U.S. and around the world via *The Ladder*. The Daughters started to receive large quantities of mail and phone calls, media attention, and requests for information. Nascent internal tensions also surfaced over issues as diverse as the organization's Statement of Purpose, its collaboration with researchers, and the content and tone of the monthly magazine. The development of chapters also meant the creation of a national structure, and rules governing policy and practices.

In 1960, Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin were invited to speak to a small, select gathering of lesbians in the Bay area. Bonner was at the meeting, and she responded to their invitation to get involved. She worked at Pacific Bell, the local telephone company, and was raising a son. She was also in a committed lesbian relationship with a

white woman. Bonner chose to use the pseudonym “Glenn” in her work with the Daughters of Bilitis to protect herself and her family.⁴⁴

When Bonner joined DOB, she and her partner Helen Cushman took on the job of helping to implement DOB’s Book and Record Service, which provided copies of publications and albums to members and subscribers to *The Ladder*. It was a tedious job that demanded accuracy and commitment, and “Cleo and Cush” shared the responsibilities. When then-national President Jaye “Shorty” Bell abruptly resigned from the position in November, 1963, Cleo took on the task of Acting President. The next year, at DOB’s national convention in New York, she was elected President and delivered the welcoming address. She continued in that role until the 1966 national convention, held again in San Francisco.⁴⁵ In 1966, after the convention, Bonner left the Daughters of Bilitis. It is unclear why she dropped out, and it is not known what became of her in the intervening years. (Lyon and Martin remember getting a call from her lover some time ago to let them know that Bonner had died of cancer.)⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, “Cleo Glenn (Bonner) (Dates Unknown),” *Before Stonewall*, 189-190.

⁴⁵ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, interview with author, March 6, 2002. Bonner’s lover, Helen Cushman, died in June 1988; she was 65. The sister of former Marine Corps Commandant Robert E. Cushman, she worked as Librarian of the Contra Costa Community College for more than twenty years and also helped establish the women’s studies program at the college. “She wasn’t just a person, she was an event,” Mary Bodvarsson, “Retired Library Chairperson Dies in Her Prime,” *The Advocate*, Contra Costa Community College (August 26, 1988): 2.

⁴⁶ Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, “Cleo Glenn (Bonner) (Dates Unknown),” *Before Stonewall*, 189-190; Phyllis Lyon, correspondence with author, March 15, 2004; Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin Lahusen, interview with author, May 2003; Gittings and Lahusen, interview with Joan E. Biren (JEB), *No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon*, Moonforce Media, 2002.

By the late 1960s, many of DOB's local long-time leaders had moved on to other interests. The local homophile movement was slowly expanding; by the spring of 1969, there were at least ten gay or gay-friendly groups in the Bay area, and some founding DOB members like Lyon and Martin had helped organize them.⁴⁷ New opportunities for activism were available for women who wanted to explore feminism, from small all-female groups discussing personal and political issues (the so-called consciousness-raising groups, as the mass media dubbed them) to the local NOW chapter. Other early Daughters, like Barbara Deming, were devoting time to Citizens Alert and monitoring complaints of police brutality throughout the City; Billye Talmadge was "helping people of all kinds – gay, straight, man, woman, old, young – to strip away the conditioned roles that imprisoned them" through the metaphysical Prosperos Society.⁴⁸ But new leadership did emerge and DOB's San Francisco Chapter and the national office continued their organizing and socializing activities. During these years, under the direction of activists like Lois "Williams" (Beeby), DOB seemed to be everywhere, doing everything, from collaborating with civil rights groups to playing in softball tournaments.⁴⁹

Younger lesbians – many of whom identified as radical feminists – took the reins in the 1970s. San Francisco – and the U.S. – was a radically different place than it had

⁴⁷ In addition to DOB and Mattachine, the Tavern Guild, SIR (Society for Individual Rights), the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, Citizens Alert, the Imperial Court System, Guy Strait's *Citizen News*, Vanguard (for young gays), and the Committee for Homosexual Freedom were all organizing in the Bay area. Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay*, 44-53.

⁴⁸ Chude (Pam) Allen, interview with author, June 15, 2003; William Fennie, "Billye Talmadge," *Before Stonewall*, 186.

⁴⁹ Lois Beeby, interview with author, May 27, 2002.

been in the mid-1950s. Throughout two turbulent decades, the City by the Bay had been a center of change and experimentation. For example, some of the nation's first stirrings of student protest were organized at Berkeley in 1960, when a few hundred young people turned out to protest HUAC hearings held in San Francisco. "Police arrested many of the protestors or simply washed them down the steps of City Hall with fire hoses. The next day, thousands of demonstrators returned to chant 'Sieg Heil!'"⁵⁰

A few years later, in the fall of 1964, Berkeley graduate student Mario Savio -- forever changed by his summer spent teaching in a Mississippi freedom school -- joined other civil rights and some Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) activists in publicly questioning official University of California limits on student speech. They formed the Free Speech Movement and led thousands in months of protest, both on and off campus, resulting in the largest mass arrest in the history of California and a subsequent successful Student Strike, honored by most of the faculty. Just a few years later, in 1968 San Francisco State University would erupt as well, this time over demands for community relevance and accountability and the establishment of black and ethnic studies programs. The City's dilapidated Haight-Ashbury district, bordering Golden Gate Park, by the mid-'60s was already becoming the home-away-from-home for an ever-increasing number of free spirits, flower children, artists, musicians, and druggies from throughout the U.S. and around the world. In the midst of a climate of cultural, sexual, and political exploration, regular tussles -- and some pitched battles -- ensued as many "straight" San Franciscans

⁵⁰ David Burner, *Making Peace with the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 55-56. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon remember attending the anti-HUAC demonstration at San Francisco City Hall; interview with author, May 11, 1998. Martin editorialized against the use of fire hoses and arrests as means of crowd control "in the so-called student riots" in *The Ladder*, Vol. 5 No. 12 (September 1961): 14-15.

urged their police and politicians to safeguard the City's reputation and its increasing property values. In December 1969, four months after New York's Woodstock festival (and six months after the Stonewall riots), a Rolling Stones concert at Altamont Raceway in the wind-swept East Bay hills turned violent and ugly. Members of the Hell's Angels motorcycle club, hired to protect the musicians, killed a member of the audience right in front of the stage. Some say the peace-love-spare change '60s ended right then in the Bay area, but militant activism of all kinds continued.

"Psychedelic aesthetics, student unrest, the tactics of the civil rights struggle and black militancy, labor organizing, social critiques rooted in the anti-war movement, the second wave of feminism, and Marxist political analysis all contributed to the rise of the gay liberation movement," according to Bay area historians Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk. "This was especially true in the Bay Area, where the sheer density of urban social space compelled various subcultures to overlap, intersect, and cross-fertilize one another."⁵¹ Through it all, somehow, the Daughters survived. Despite the demise of the national organization in 1970, the San Francisco DOB chapter met until 1979, when, after four years of struggle to keep the group going, they disbanded.⁵²

⁵¹ Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay*, 53. David Burner, *Making Peace with the Sixties*, 75-77; Nancy J. Peters, *Reclaiming San Francisco*, 212-213.

⁵² "Daughters of Bilitis - News Brief," January 1978; "What Happened to D.O.B.?" memorandum dated July 1978; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 4/8, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

Part II: The First National Lesbian Conferences and the Last Days of DOB

The first was held in San Francisco in 1960 and hosted by the San Francisco Chapter. The second was held in Los Angeles and hosted by the Los Angeles Chapter. The third was held in New York City in 1964 and hosted by the New York Chapter. The Conventions got better each time as the organization got practice and strength at this form of communication. The fourth Convention was held back in San Francisco in 1966 and became known as the kick-off for what became known as "The 10 Days in August." Many homophile organizations and organizations helpful to the cause participated in the entire Ten Days Series.

The point I am getting to is that when a Chapter and its leaders put on a National Convention for the Daughters of Bilitis, it takes a year of hard work and planning.⁵³

"Sten Russell"

Starting in 1960, and continuing for the next decade, the Daughters of Bilitis organized the first national gatherings of lesbian activists and their allies in the U.S., an impressive feat for a tiny, all-volunteer group.

Drawing anywhere from 100 to 300 women and men at each gathering, the DOB Conventions, much like those organized by the other homophile groups at the time, featured keynote speeches, panels, awards, and at least one gala event. Each of the sponsoring chapters worked hard for at least the year preceding the meeting to create themes, plan sessions, contact and confirm speakers, and arrange for publicity and outreach to DOB members and potential recruits as well as the news media. The National Conventions also featured a DOB business meeting, during which delegates from the

⁵³ "Sten Russell," REPORT ON THE 1968 NATIONAL D.O.B. GENERAL ASSEMBLY, *The Ladder*, Vol. XII, No. XI and XII, 9-15.

chapters voted on national officers and policy changes. Voting lists of eligible members, proxies, and financial statements and reports were carefully created by the National Governing Board and the chapters for each gathering.⁵⁴

A highlight of the meetings over the years was the presentation of special awards. The “S.O.B.s” (for “Sons of Bilitis”) were given to men both in and outside of the homophile movement who had been helpful to the Daughters.⁵⁵ “The list has grown over the years to where one wonders if there aren’t about as many official S.O.B.’s as voting D.O.B.’s!!” wrote Stella Rush in 1968. That year, the last at which such awards were given, former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, then a California Assemblyman, received his S.O.B.; so too did Mattachine founder Harry Hay and his partner John Burnside, New York’s John Lasso, and 10 other men. Rush commented, “all the above listed are now official S.O.B.’s, no matter what anyone’s private opinion may have been before. Smile! That’s a joke, son.”⁵⁶

The strength of the Convention organizing was directly related to the individual personalities of the DOB chapter activists in the host city, and their ability to call on

⁵⁴ “Eligible Members, by chapter” 1960-1970, Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Boxes 7/3, 7/11, 7/13, 7/17, 7/20, 7/21; GLBTHS, San Francisco.

⁵⁵ Men receiving “S.O.B.” awards also include (1960) Kenneth Zwerin, DOB’s attorney; Jeff Wiener, San Francisco photographer; Hal Call, Don Lucas, and Steve Kellogg from Mattachine Society, San Francisco; Art Maule, Mattachine Society, New York; “Carl B. Harding,” Mattachine Society, Denver; Dorr Legg, Don Slater and Jim Kepner of ONE, Inc., and Jack Fox, “Compleat Carpenter,” Los Angeles; (1962) Thane Walker, Prosperos Society founder and leader; Henry Foster, Bob Burke, and Fred Bunyan; (1964) researchers Ralph H. Gundlach and Wardell B. Pomeroy, Rev. Robert Wood; and (1966) Dr. Clay Colwell, president of the San Francisco Council on Religion and the Homosexual.

⁵⁶ Sten Russell (Stella Rush), “Report of General Assembly,” *The Ladder* Vol. XII No. XI and XII (September 1968): 14.

friends and comrades from the other homophile groups as well as heterosexual allies to create programs which were interesting and challenging yet accessible to their members.

Socializing was another major activity, and the “Gay Line” tours organized for the out-of-towners were an important part of the experience. As always, DOB members loved to drink and party, and their attendance at the conventions was often timed to coincide with vacation time away from home. Sightseeing of all sorts, starting with the host city’s best nightspots for lesbians, was a high priority. The potent mix of lesbians coming together from all corners of the country, late nights, and all-day sessions on sexuality insured that there was no small amount of dyke drama.

As important as the socializing and educational aspects were, the National Conventions also provided unprecedented opportunities to put the Daughters’ faces before the public. As the 1960s progressed, and the national obsession with homosexuality only increased, DOB activists – and therefore lesbians in general – saw their visibility climb as they were “discovered” by first local, and then national, talk-show hosts hungry for provocative and popular topics.⁵⁷ The Daughters were honing their skills at working with newspaper reporters, radio hosts, and television personalities on the still-titillating topic of homo sex, particularly the female version, without allowing themselves to be trivialized or dismissed. Whenever any one of them appeared in print, over the airwaves, or on television, the response was significant. The Conventions provided an unmatched opening for successfully approaching the local print and media producers in the host cities, and each of the first four Conventions saw an increase in coverage from the one before.

⁵⁷ Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels*, 31-36, 43-45.

San Francisco, 1960: “A Look at the Lesbian”

Probably the casual on-looker would not have known just what sort of convention this was. We don't mind.

There was the usual pre-convention hysteria Friday night when over 100 people crowded into a small space to bid each other “hello” and “howdjado”...Saturday was a day to remember. We started out with the usual panel...the pat on the head...the understanding...the back-up by professionals...Then lunchtime came. An Episcopal minister served up our dessert with damnation. We managed to recover during a pleasant interlude with an ACLU speaker, only to be shocked again in the mid-afternoon session by an exchange between opposing ideologies that made headlines in the local press. It was “Gay Bar and the Law”. The speakers were admirable in their vehemence. The audience rumbled but had the good sense not to erupt. What could have been violent was constructive.

...Those of us who attended will never forget the excitement, the living proof of our worth. It was a timely shot in the arm when so much is adverse in so many areas. Thank you, DOB; ABC; Vice Squad, professional folk...thank you all for letting us see you and letting you see us.⁵⁸

Held May 27-30, 1960 at the Hotel Whitcomb, 1231 Market Street, in downtown San Francisco, DOB's National Convention drew 200 women (and included a few men) for a program headlined “A Look at the Lesbian.” For a registration fee of \$12.50 for the weekend's activities, attendees were treated to a Friday night cocktail party at Martin and Lyon's home (which was also “Convention HQ” for the evening) and panels, a luncheon,

⁵⁸ “II – Impressions by Helen Sanders,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 4, No. 9, June 1960; 6, 25. DOB members' sense of “being seen” by the authorities as well as the press – both the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *San Francisco Examiner* ran articles about the “Gay Bar” debate at the Convention – was exacerbated when, almost twenty years later, they learned that a CIA agent had also attended DOB's 1960 Convention. In testimony before Congress, Dr. David Rhodes admitted that he had attended DOB's Convention “to interview lesbians to test CIA theories about how different kinds of people react differently to the same situations.” Rhodes noted that he “didn't learn much.” “Ex-CIA Shrink Reveals Exotic Bay Area Tests,” *San Francisco Examiner*, September 20, 1977.

cocktail reception and banquet on Saturday. Sunday featured a DOB business meeting “for members only” during the day and a Dutch-treat dinner for members and guests (“women only”) held at Charlotte Coleman’s gay bar, The Front, in San Francisco.

DOB’s first efforts to organize a national lesbian conference drew on the framework utilized by ONE, Inc. and Mattachine during the previous decade. They purposely invited speakers who would assert the “official” (albeit negative) religious and legal views of homosexuality. In *Lesbian/Woman*, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon wrote about their choice of luncheon speaker Rev. Fordyce Eastburn, “(T)he church was at the core of all our problems, and there had to be some way, somehow to reach the church. In planning DOB’s first convention in 1960, we noted that both Mattachine and ONE had previously counted among their speakers clergymen who recognized the needs of homosexuals. But they spoke unofficially, out of personal conviction, and never revealed what church they belonged to. Change could only come about if we could develop a dialogue with the church itself, and we were determined to have an official representative from some particular denomination.”⁵⁹

They got the official representative of the California Episcopal Diocese, who gave gays who wanted to be accepted by the church two choices: change or be celibate. “We look at it this way: we’ve opened a door to communication with the church. And that’s

⁵⁹ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 237-238.

what we were looking for,” Martin remembered.⁶⁰ Four years later, it would pay off when local ministers organized the Council on Religion and the Homosexual.⁶¹

The planning committee also consciously included a debate on gay bars between two local heavyweights. Attorneys Morris Lowenthal, who represented gay bar owners in a number of cases, and Sidney Feinberg of the Alcoholic Beverage Commission, had faced each other in court over the exact same question not long before. DOB saw this issue as paramount. While the founders had organized the group to provide an alternative to the gay bars, they continued to patronize them and believed strongly that they had a basic right to socialize in the bars, restaurants and nightclubs which catered to lesbians and gay men.⁶²

“In the early days of DOB, a great deal of energy was expended in apprising Lesbians of their legal rights, advising them of what to do in case of arrest, and obtaining legal counsel for victims of raids. *The Ladder* had the distinction of having its September and October 1958 issues filed with the District Court of Appeals along with an *amicus curiae* brief by Lowenthal and Associates in the case of an Oakland Lesbian bar called Mary’s First and Last Chance,” Martin and Lyon noted in 1972.⁶³ While Lowenthal’s brief asserted a dichotomy between The Daughters and the lesbians who patronized bars, in fact DOB’s most active members and leaders were also regular customers of the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ For a fuller discussion of CRH, see Chapter Five.

⁶² Sten Russell (Stella Rush), “DOB Convention,” *The Ladder* Vol. 4 No. 10 (July 1960): 16-22; Del Martin, “Editorial: Officialdom’s Logic,” *The Ladder* Vol. 4 No. 11 (August 1960): 4-5.

⁶³ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 234.

numerous nightspots catering to gay men and lesbians in the Bay area. The program for their first National Convention included not just a debate on the “gay bar question” but a gay bar tour for out-of-town visitors, complete with map and annotated comments provided by local DOB members.⁶⁴

Los Angeles, 1962: “*POTENTIALS: The Lesbian in Society*”

Jean Nathan, president of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis, proudly welcomed some 100 persons who attended the second National Convention of the organization at the Hollywood Inn in Hollywood, California, on June 23.

“Why the constant fear of the homosexual?” was asked by Jaye Bell, National President of DOB, who felt that the percentage of crimes directly related to homosexuals was played up by the newspapers and that actually was not so. She pointed out that the Vice Squad and the homosexual details of the Police Departments in the big cities, even though they engage in “peephole and entrapment” activity, rarely came up with charges other than solicitation and vagrancy.

“The Bill of Rights in this country applies to the homosexual as well,” Miss Bell pointed out and cited this as one of the reasons for organizations such as DOB – for those individuals who cannot afford to fight for their rights.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ “Directive No. 2” and “Directive No. 3,” National Daughters of Bilitis Governing Board Correspondence, Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 6/1, GLBTHS, San Francisco. See also Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 234. For discussions of DOB members’ patronage of gay bars which challenges older notions of their disapproval of and estrangement from such places, see *No Secret Anymore: The Times of Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon*, documentary film by Joan E. Biren (JEB), Moonforce Media, 2003; *Last Call at Maud’s*, documentary film by Paris Poirier, The Maud’s Project, Venice CA, 1993; Kelly Anderson, “Out in the Fifties;” and Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town*.

⁶⁵ “A Report on DOB’s Second National Convention (Part I),” *The Ladder*, July 1962, Vol. 6, No. 10, 4; map of San Francisco gay bars in 1981 newsletter of West Coast Women’s Collection (renamed the June Mazer Archives, West Hollywood CA), author’s personal collection, copy provided by Lynn Fonfa, a founder of the West Coast Women’s Collection, Oakland CA.

In addition to a panel on “Religion and Mental Health” moderated by pioneering homophile psychiatrist and researcher Dr. Evelyn Hooker, DOB’s 1962 National Convention included two reports from sociologists who were researching lesbian life (including one by a woman -- on lesbian couples – who shortly thereafter fell in love with an LA DOB member and left her husband).⁶⁶ There was also a session on the American Law Institute’s Model Penal Code and a panel with writer Jess Stearn (author of *The Sixth Man*, on male homosexuals, and *The Grapevine*, about lesbians) on “Is the Lesbian Being Portrayed Realistically by the Mass Media?” (the answer was, predictably, “no!”). The LA Convention included an evening banquet presentation by Thane Walker, leader of the Prosperos Society.⁶⁷

Named after the magician in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, the Prosperos Society was founded in 1956 in Florida by Walker, who claimed to be a student of Gurdjieff and was by all accounts a handsome, charismatic man. He was based in Hawaii but taught classes in southern California in the mid- to late 1960s; Walker and his followers established a school in Culver City, still active today. The Prosperos Society is a metaphysical spiritual group that attracted some of the California women and men who were leaders in the homophile movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Using archetypes and drawing freely from many religious and spiritual teachings, Walker taught that the spiritual identity of

⁶⁶ Rush, interview with author, September 2003.

⁶⁷ Talmadge, Rush, and Martin and Lyon to some degree, have acknowledged and discussed their involvement in the Prosperos Society in interviews with the author in 2002 and 2003; Rush continues to be connected to the group today, although much less so. Also, three profiles in *Before Stonewall* mention homophile activists’ involvement in the Prosperos: for Lyon’s discussion of Martin’s involvement, see pp. 164-165; see also William Fennie, “Billye Talmadge,” 186-187; and James T. Sears, “Hal Call,” 154.

everyone (“beingness”) is both male and female, and that “God, as male and female beingness, was present in and as every person.” The Prosperos experience takes place in lectures, classes in “Translation” and “Releasing the Hidden Splendor,” and intensive sessions. “But it was Thane’s sex lecture that got us all to join,” Stella Rush remembered recently. DOB leaders such as Billye Talmadge, Rush and her lover Helen Sandoz, as well as Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, joined Prosperos in the early 1960s; other homophile leaders like Hal Call had joined even earlier. Walker’s luncheon keynote at the 1962 DOB convention introduced his philosophies to many of the Daughters who had not yet experienced them. (However, some of DOB’s East Coast sisters – like Gittings and Lahusen -- were not impressed. “We couldn’t get over all these lesbians flocking to listen to this man,” Lahusen said in a recent conversation. The involvement of DOB’s West Coast activists in Prosperos was perhaps an additional cause of later tension between the New Yorkers and the Californians.⁶⁸)

DOB’s 1962 National Convention in Los Angeles also provided an exceptional public relations opportunity: a DOB activist was featured in the first nationwide broadcast of a television show that included an “out” lesbian. “Terry,” president-elect of the LA Chapter in 1962, was on the panel broadcast by Paul Coates as part of his nationally-syndicated television series. As Steven Capsuto notes in *Alternate Channels*, “‘Terry’ said the organization chose her to appear on TV because, being self-employed, she was ‘less vulnerable.’ She gave background on the Daughters, their convention, and recent controversies over the legality of lesbian and gay bars. Such broadcasts’ impact

⁶⁸ Kay Tobin Lahusen, interview with author, Wilmington DE, June 15, 2003.

on individual listeners was astounding. Women who had never told anyone of their lesbianism wrote or phoned the DOB, some telling their life story.”⁶⁹

New York, 1964: “*Threshold of the Future*”

Dr. Wardell Pomeroy, co-author of the two Kinsey Institute reports, opened the 1964 DOB National Convention in New York City. Held June 20 at the Barbizon-Plaza, with a registration fee of \$17.00 (“for entire program including luncheon, banquet, and public forum”); there was also the offer of some special half-price tickets to the World’s Fair. The program was packed with “the experts,” from Pomeroy to Dr. Sylvia Fava, a sociologist and co-editor of an anthology of writings about the Kinsey reports, as well as a half-dozen other researchers and writers. Dr. Ralph Gundlach of New York’s Postgraduate Center for Mental Health discussed his current project, undertaken with DOB’s assistance, on “The Early Family Life and Sexual Patterns of Adult Women.” The title of Gundlach’s provocative talk was “More Lesbians Than Non-Lesbians Report Rape – Why?”

Rev. Robert Wood, author of *Christ and the Homosexual*, was the luncheon speaker; his book was one of the first publications by a member of the clergy to assert the church’s responsibility to open its doors to gay men and lesbians. Immediately following him was Donald Webster Cory (Edward Sagarin), “the father of the homophile movement.” As the decade progressed, Cory/Sagarin would increasingly advocate

⁶⁹ Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels*, 43-44.

“curing” homosexuality,⁷⁰ but in 1964 he was warmly received at DOB’s third National Convention. At this meeting, Cory predicted that he soon would be “displaced” by the next generation of gay activists and intellectuals.

Again, the DOB program was a mix of some serious lectures and a few “short and lively” talks; for example, they had Dr. Mildred Weiss, “former Captain of the Intelligence Corps of the U.S. Air Force” speaking on “Is Change Necessary? or How to Enjoy Living.” But an inadvertently comical session on “Femininity: What Is It?” sounds like the most unique feature of the day. It brought together Mrs. Lee Steiner, a psychologist and marriage counselor who moderated a local radio program “Psychologically Speaking;” Florence DeSantis, Fashion Editor for Bell Syndicated; and Adele Kenyon, an “authority on speedy ways to a trimmer figure.” Kenyon caused quite a stir when she led the Convention participants in a “jounce in their seats” exercise session designed to “achieve that nice, narrow look in the beam...” With tongue firmly in cheek, DOB’s *Ladder* reporter for this session, “NOLA,” recounted that

At the end of the exercise session, Miss Kenyon explained that ‘the exterior look of femininity is built on a narrow base’ and the look of masculinity was broad-based. This biologically revolutionary statement went unchallenged...

...This rather surrealistic session gave a lift to things toward the close of the long afternoon. Though the “essence of femininity” remained unestablished, anyone seeing the triumphantly hatted panelists sashaying off the platform would have had to agree “there’s nothing like a dame.”⁷¹

⁷⁰ “You are invited...,” *The Ladder*, May 1964, Vol. 8, No. 8, 8.

⁷¹ “Report Round-Up, Part One,” *The Ladder*, July 1964, Vol. 8, No. 10, 12-14. “NOLA” was the pen name of Elenore Lester, a New York writer whose work appeared in the 1960s in the *Village Voice* and the *New York Times*.

DOB's National President Cleo "Glenn" Bonner gave the welcoming address at the Convention. Lyon has said that "Cleo could only do it because she was thousands of miles from home," and in fact Bonner did not address the next DOB National Convention in San Francisco, although she was still president of the organization at the time it was held.⁷² Such careful balancing acts – weighing how visible to be, where, and when – were very much required by many of DOB's leaders, especially as the organization continued to prioritize publicity and seek out media coverage and public appearances.

And their work was paying off. By 1964, the organization's visibility was increasing: reporters from the *New York Times* and the *Herald Tribune* covered DOB's 1964 convention. As reported in *The Ladder*, "The Times report – appearing in the widely read Sunday edition, June 21 – played up the fact that some of our speakers disagreed with 'the prevailing medical view that homosexuality is a disease.' Thus, in a 5-inch, single column item tucked away on a back page, the Times made a rare departure from its usual touting of the disease and/or social menace theories..."

Ladder editor Barbara Gittings went on to note, "the strangest postscript to the DOB convention was the most inaccurate and oblique press notice, from Dorothy Kilgallen, who wrote in her widely syndicated column, 'there are conventions all over town, as the newspapers have duly reported, but nobody mentioned the one held over the weekend at a very proper East Side hotel. It was a conclave of ladies with crew cuts.' Gittings archly responds: "Her comment was obviously not based on first-hand

⁷² Phyllis Lyon, interview with author, May 15, 2002.

observation. But if Miss Kilgallen looked for us on the East Side, that must be why she never showed up. Better luck next time!”⁷³

San Francisco, 1966: “*SF Greets Daughters*”

As reported in the San Francisco Chronicle on August 17 under the above headline, “an unfortunate little spat between the Daughters of Bilitis and the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau has ended happily.”

DOB was slighted in the week’s listing of conventions in the Sunday edition of the paper. Phyllis Lyon, public relations director, followed this up with a letter charging “discrimination” and demanding “a public statement of apology for this oversight.” She sent copies to the two San Francisco newspapers and the major TV and radio networks.

She got her wish – and then some. On the hour news spots were broadcast on radio stations KEWB and KSFO. KDWB recorded two interviews with DOB members – one with Miss Lyon about the convention and one with Del Martin and Bobbi Deming about problems encountered by Lesbians in our society. Miss Lyon also appeared before the television cameras in a pre-convention news conference.

On August 20, the day of the public sessions of the convention program, a bevy of reporters were in the sound booth of the Jack Tar Hotel taping the speeches and discussion...⁷⁴

DOB’s fourth National Convention, hosted once again by the San Francisco Chapter, started on Friday with a cocktail reception and featured a full day of panel discussions on Saturday, plus a business meeting on Sunday. In relying once more on

⁷³ Barbara Gittings, *The Ladder* Vol. 9 No. 2 (November 1964): 23; “Homosexual Women Hear Psychologists,” *New York Times*, Sunday, June 21, 1964.

⁷⁴ “S.F. Greets Daughters,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (October 1966): 4. See also “S.F. Greets ‘Daughters,’” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 17, 1966; 4; Maitland Zane, “Life in a World of Sexual Hostility,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 20, 1966, 12. Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB General Clippings, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

this basic conference structure, DOB's planning committee continued the scheduling format of the three previous DOB Conventions.

But this year, something new was added. The National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations was also meeting in San Francisco, August 24 through 27. DOB joined with local homophile organizations -- the San Francisco Council on Religion and the Homosexual; Mattachine Society; San Francisco's association of gay bar owners, the Tavern Guild; the new homophile group Society for Individual Rights (SIR); and Strait and Associates, publishers of the Bay area gay newspaper *Citizen News* -- to organize activities that stretched like a string of pearls between the two meetings.

DOB publicized it as "Ten Days in August" and saw in it an opportunity to definitively put the homophile movement "on the map," and enter into direct dialogue with city officials, from San Francisco Mayor John Shelley on down. "For the first time, representatives from city hall and the police department will sit down at a conference table with members of the homophile community and allied civic organizations...The program will be focused on one city: San Francisco. It is expected that in this face-to-face confrontation, specific recommendations will be made to solve problems encountered by the homosexual minority in San Francisco."⁷⁵

From a Tavern Guild fishing trip to a special Consultation on Theology and the Homosexual, the Ten Days featured a variety of discussions, trainings, and, of course, parties. And the DOB's National Convention program kicked things off.

⁷⁵ "DOB Puts San Francisco On The Spot," *The Ladder*, Vol. 10, No. 11 (August 1966): 4; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 203;

Speaking to the array of civic officials and their representatives at DOB's opening session – Mayor Shelley had designated Dr. Ellis Sox, director of Public Health for the City and County of San Francisco, as his official liaison – William Beardemphl, President of SIR, stated the hopes of the homophile movement in simple terms that still resonate nearly forty years later, “we ask no special favor. We want only ordinary rights like every other citizen of these United States – jobs, homes, friends, social lives, safety and security.”⁷⁶

Drawing on allies from other San Francisco activist groups with whom they had forged relationships in the two years prior to the Convention, DOB presented an impressive program of speakers from the activist Glide Foundation, which focused on working in one of San Francisco's poorest communities, the Tenderloin; San Francisco Suicide Prevention; Citizens Alert, the police practices monitoring group headed by charismatic preacher Cecil Williams; and the Council on Religion and the Homosexual.

At the National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations meeting that opened on August 25, DOB National President Shirley Willer made a hard-hitting speech and offered four “constructive steps” the other homophile groups could take to insure greater participation by lesbians:

1. To affirm as a goal of such a conference: to be as concerned about women's civil rights as male homosexuals' civil liberties.
2. To suggest that homosexual men attempt to appreciate the value of women as PEOPLE in the movement, respect abilities as individuals, not seek them out as simple “show-pieces.”
3. That those philosophical factors of homosexuality which engage both sexes be basic to our concepts of reform.

⁷⁶ “A Challenge to San Francisco,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (October 1966): 15.

4. That the number of one sex not be a determinate factor in decisions of policy, but that a consideration of all arguments be heard and that CONSENSUS be the goal of the conference. Insofar as we do find trust and value in the male – oriented homophile organizations, we will find common ground upon which to work.⁷⁷

Willer's staunch feminism reflects an increased emphasis on women's rights among DOB leaders. While the organization had always addressed itself to the concerns of lesbians as women in a sexist society, by 1966 the greater militancy that was being embraced by the homophile groups in tactics was also being expressed by DOB in ideology. "The important difference between the male and female homosexual is that the Lesbian is discriminated against not only because she is a Lesbian, but because she is a woman. Although the Lesbian occupies a 'privileged' place among homosexuals, she occupies an under-privileged place in the world," Willer stated to the group as part of her challenge to them to "be open to new avenues of in-depth communication."⁷⁸

Because "Ten Days in August" brought together homophile activists from throughout the country, it was also the site of some of the earliest confrontations between the 1950s' veterans of homophile organizing and the younger, more militant '60s gay activists. The generation gap revealed both social and political differences. In a videotaped interview with Helen Sandoz and Stella Rush just weeks before Sandoz' death from cancer in 1987, Sandoz remembered that at many of the parties after meetings held

⁷⁷ Shirley Willer, "What Concrete Steps....," *The Ladder*, Vol. XI, No. II (November 1966): 17-18.

⁷⁸ Ibid. See Chapter Five for more discussion of DOB's feminist thinking in the mid-1960s, particularly in the context of working in coalition with the other homophile groups.

during the Ten Days, “the kids brought pot and I just couldn’t get into it.” She also disapproved of the erotic videos being shown at some of the gatherings: “there was no love involved – and that, to me, is obscenity.”⁷⁹

There were several more planning conferences – regional and national – before NACHO (North American Congress of Homophile Organizations) was officially launched in 1968. Willer was DOB’s main representative in these coalition efforts, and she continued to press for women’s rights in theory and practice and to guard the Daughters’ autonomy within the larger group of mostly male homophile activists.

Denver, Colorado, 1968: “The Changing Scene”

Toward the end of the decade, as the pace and pattern of gay and lesbian rights organizing accelerated and diversified, the growth of the movement led to disputes among both long-time leaders and newcomers over strategies and tactics. An emphasis on autonomous local activism was taking precedence over national organizing. By 1968 DOB was the only homophile organization with a strong and centralized national governing structure. During Shirley Willer’s presidency, DOB chapter organizing received a great deal more attention from the President than it had previously. In order to strengthen local authority, and in a big departure from what had been the practice, in the summer of 1968 Willer and her partner, former New York chapter leader Marion Glass, presented a reorganization plan at the August DOB Convention in Aurora, Colorado, a suburb of Denver. They felt that too much time and energy was spent getting approval

⁷⁹ Interview with Helen Sandoz and Stella Rush, May 15, 1987. LHA/DOB Video Project DV-20, Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn NY.

for action from the National Governing Board, and they wanted to continue chartering local groups who could enjoy more autonomy.⁸⁰

Denver was selected, according to Stella Rush, because “there was no Chapter in 1966 willing or able to take on this responsibility for 1968. The newly-elected National Governing Board proposed to put on the Convention and General Meeting at some city central to the entire United States.”⁸¹ Chicago as the logical choice was not practical because of its unsteady organizational status in 1966; Rush notes that the Chicago Chapter had “just dissolved prior to the 1966 Convention” when selection of the next host city was made.

It is true that the period of 1966 to 1968 was a fairly inactive one for Chicago DOB. However, there were a number of friendly DOB members in the area. Perhaps the avoidance of Chicago had more to do with the fact that the NACHO conference in 1968 was being held there August 14-18, which was immediately after DOB’s meeting dates. Willer had urged that the 1968 conference be held in Chicago for that reason. Given that there were growing tensions within DOB at that time about participating in the homophile coalitions,⁸² some national DOB leaders decided to maintain physical distance between the two gatherings and Willer was overruled. A handful of potential DOB activists had met with her in Colorado, trying to get a chapter going, and so Denver was selected for 1968.

⁸⁰ “Amended Articles of Incorporation – United Daughters of Bilitis, Incorporated,” Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 7/2, GLBTHS, San Francisco; Meredith Grey (Marion Glass), “Changing Times,” *The Ladder* Vol. XII No. X (August 1968): 19-22.

⁸¹ Sten Russell (Stella Rush), *The Ladder* Vol. XII No. XI (September 1968): 9-15.

⁸² For a fuller discussion of these debates, see Chapter Five.

In Ben Cat's April 1968 column in *The Ladder*, the first notice of the meeting is given, and it is obvious that things would not proceed as usual:

I understand that there is going to be a meeting of the GENERAL ASSEMBLY of the DOB in August. I think it is 9-10-11 and it is to be held in Denver, Colorado. There won't be any great big program, but it will be a very important meeting for all members of DOB and friends who may wish to come and help plan our course for the next two years. Sandy says we are going to have to get a new editor for THE LADDER. This does cut me up a bit. However, she knows what she is doing and if that has to be, I will cooperate with the new editor as best I can.

The next mention of the meeting was in the July 1968 issue. The agenda called for two-plus days of meetings with a banquet on Saturday night. No major speakers or topic panels, no gala event, were planned. In fact, what was noted was that "this is a jam-packed business meeting and it may well be that the future course of our organization may be decided at this time. What our aims and purposes will be, what we can do about THE LADDER, how can we increase our membership—all of these things will balance with whether or not we should continue at all. *Every member should come to this meeting.*"⁸³

For any long-time DOB member paying attention, this was a startling turn of events. In the months leading up to the Convention, Willer and Glass had been working to create a new constitution for the organization., and they had disseminated it to the chapter leaders first. At its heart was a decentralization plan that would have eliminated the National Governing Board (and national office) and replaced it with a representative

⁸³ "BI-ENNIAL ASSEMBLY AND CONVENTION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS," *The Ladder*, July 1968, Vol. XII, No. IX, 30.

body of chapter leaders. Under the rubric of the renamed “United Daughters of Bilitis, Inc.,” which would be limited to “corporations and groups which have been authorized to conduct business as the Daughters of Bilitis in their localities,” each chapter would be autonomous, locally-controlled and financed operations. Each chapter would decide whether and how to support *The Ladder*, which would be the only remaining national project of the new federation. Glass emphasized the “problem of reaching the appropriate balance between what should be saved to preserve continuity and what must be replaced to ensure vitality.” Her main point was that the governing body of DOB needed to be changed from “a few officers scattered across the continent who were neither elected by the Chapters exclusively, nor responsible to them” and that the chapters “immediately undertake to be the effective nucleus of the Daughters in their areas.” She also noted that “The revised structure establishes THE LADDER as a separate ‘profit-making’ corporation which will publish magazines when it has the funds to do so.”⁸⁴

Philadelphia activist Ada Bello’s experiences of what seemed like a burdensome and unnecessary bureaucracy for such a small organization is one concrete example of why some DOB leaders wanted such significant changes made. “I was born in Cuba – November 1933 -- and I lived there until I was 25,” she said in a recent interview. “I was going to the university in Havana when the struggle against Bautista was happening – in fact the university was closed because too many students were being killed by the police. In 1958 I decided I couldn’t wait anymore to finish my education, so I came here (to the

⁸⁴ Meredith Grey (“Marion Glass”), “Changing Times,” *The Ladder* Vol. XII No. X (August 1968): 19-22.

U.S.), to Louisiana State University and I got my degree in chemistry. And it was a big change in many ways -- from a large, exciting urban campus to a place with rules and regulations worse than any convent.” Bello remembered regularly journeying to New Orleans, which had an active gay and lesbian scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s. After graduation in 1961, she worked for a few years in Mississippi. “The tension was high – it was the time of the Freedom Riders. There was a lynching at nearby Poplarville,” she remembers. When a good friend moved north to Philadelphia in 1962, she did, too.

“It was Paradise,” Bello said. “We went to a gay bar that very first night!” She found a position at the University of Pennsylvania -- which was “a very open environment” – and she and her friend Lourdes began making the rounds of the local gay bars and making contacts among the gay and lesbian community. “Neither one of us were (U.S.) citizens,” she noted. “We joined the local DOB under assumed names.”⁸⁵

The Philadelphia chapter of DOB was started in 1967, the result of then-DOB President Shirley Willer’s organizing drive. Historian Marc Stein has noted that about 20 women were active in the chapter in its first few months. “Several months after DOB Philadelphia was established, *Philadelphia Magazine* featured Nancy Love’s ‘The Invisible Sorority,’ which brought unprecedented attention to the local lesbian community,” he wrote. DOB wrote to the magazine commending the article for helping to ‘keep before the public eye the image of those of us who must make ourselves

⁸⁵ Ada Bello, interview with author, September 17, 2003.

invisible.”⁸⁶ “It was the Rizzo years,” Bello remembered, referring to the “law-and-order” police chief and then Mayor, Frank Rizzo. “He went after coffee houses and bars” (in addition to hippies, students, blacks, and anyone challenging the established order). DOB, as usual, attracted people who thought it was an alternative social space and the local group struggled to also define their work as political. “On March 8, 1968, they raided Rusty’s, a really popular bar – we at DOB had to do something about it.” What they did was contact the local ACLU and hold a meeting with Philadelphia police – “it was an all-time first,” Bello remembers. “I drove the get-away car!” Barbara Gittings got involved with the Philadelphia DOB chapter around this time as well. As the pace quickened on the local scene, DOB’s bureaucracy was increasingly frustrating. “It was difficult to get authorization from the administration of DOB,” Bello said. “We couldn’t find the President – it was before cell phones and email – and we felt that it was hampering our ability to react. We were more interested in action at that point than social gatherings or parties. So we thought, ‘Why not start another organization – one whose middle name is Action!’” The Homophile Action League – or H.A.L. – was born August 7, 1968. H.A.L. was active through the end of the ‘60s and into the early ‘70s in Philadelphia. “I felt like DOB was the Catholic Church – the hierarchy always had to approve,” Bello commented recently.

But the furor within DOB over the substantial organizational restructuring proposed by Shirley Willer and Marion Glass in 1968 – and the dismal turnout of fewer than two dozen Daughters at the ‘68 Convention -- meant that no formal decision on the

⁸⁶ Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Love: Making Lesbian and Gay History in Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 229-235, 253.

new constitution and the decentralization plan could be reached at the Colorado meeting.⁸⁷ Instead, it was agreed that all pertinent materials would be disseminated to members via the Chapters, and a final decision reached at the next General Assembly and Convention to be held in New York in 1970.

New York, 1970: “A New Day Dawns”

As time approached for the 1970 DOB Convention in New York, Laporte and Damon apparently feared they would lose control of *The Ladder*. So Laporte “lifted” the mailing list and other DOB properties and moved the operation to Reno, Nevada. Although the June/July 1970 issue of *The Ladder* appeared to be under the aegis of DOB, it was in reality already an independent non-profit publication.

Attorneys advised DOB that the move across the border (of California) to Reno made a lawsuit a federal case that could take years to settle. At the New York Convention members decided not to file suit, dissolved the national board, whose chief function was to publish *The Ladder*, and freed chapters to put their money, time and energy into local endeavors. It was hoped that the chapters would still maintain a loose coalition of mutual concerns. It never happened.⁸⁸

At the organization’s last National Convention, which actually took the form of a business meeting similar to the 1968 Convention, the DOB members in attendance voted to adopt changes to its national governing board similar to those proposed two years

⁸⁷ See Rita Laporte, President of the San Francisco Chapter, “Arguments in Opposition to Corporate Reorganization,” Memorandum to All Members of DOB, n.d.; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 7/2, GLBTHS, San Francisco; see also comments from Jeannette Howard Foster on whether DOB should decentralize, Chapter Four.

⁸⁸ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, “Daughters of Bilitis and the Ladder that Teetered,” Nanette K. Gartrell and Esther D. Rothblum, eds., *Everyday Mutinies: Funding Lesbian Activism* (New York: Harrington Park Press/Haworth, 2001), 118.

before, with one big exception: *The Ladder* was already gone, operating as a separate entity under Grier's direction.

The dismantling of the national structure, while momentous, was not seen at the time as necessarily problematic. In fact, for many of DOB's active members, it was an exciting moment. The demise of DOB as a national organization fit perfectly within and reflected the spirit of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when traditional ways of organizing were rejected in favor of new modes of activism.⁸⁹

For example, the recently reinvigorated Los Angeles Chapter's newsletter of July 1970 is full of news about the Convention.

Big old New York will never be the same!! Bo Siewert and Carole Sheperd, Vice-President and President, respectively, of the L.A. Chapter of D O B, attended the biennial National Convention of the Daughters in New York City this last weekend. L.A. took the town by storm, to say the very least! Old National D O B got pulled out of the closet and had a thorough washing and shaking out!! Ancient by-laws were abolished, stuffy closet queens were dethroned and Bo and Carole paved the way to a new, young and thriving organization that will more adequately serve the needs of all female homosexuals. D O B chapters are now run on an independent, each city "do your thing" basis with all monies staying in the local chapter for the good of our own girls, rather than being poured down a national level rathole. Things are indeed looking up for D O B of today and tomorrow. Yesterday has been thoroughly buried.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Elizabeth A. Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identity: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994*, 59-61; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 170-172; Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 230-240.

⁹⁰ W.C.S., "D O B Convention," *LA DOB*, July 1970 from Lyon/Martin Collection, Box xx, Los Angeles Chapter File, GLBTHS.

The following page begins with the headline, “A New Day Dawns.” Writer Pat Rardin noted that “The delegates were from Los Angeles, naturally, San Francisco, New York, Boston and Melbourne, Australia. The other chapters either could not (probably because of money problems) send any delegates or just ignored the whole idea of a convention...Because of this convention, there are no longer any national officers. Each D O B chapter is now autonomous and the next convention or symposium will be here in Los Angels [sic] (Summer of 1972). A Governing Board now will run D O B and this Governing Board is made up of the various Chapter Presidents. All chapters who did not attend will be asked to join. However, right now and until we hear from the absentee chapters, those chapters who were represented at the convention are the only recognized chapters of D O B.”⁹¹

LA DOB offered explanations about the changes undertaken at the 1970 National Convention: “members felt that activities of DOB were most effective on a local level...National officers were thought unnecessary and from past experience, possibly harmful. Abolition of the many bylaws gave each chapter almost complete autonomy.” The “Sister Chapters” noted by the LA activists were San Francisco, Boston, New England, Australia, and Detroit. They also noted that “although the Ladder is no longer affiliated with DOB it is an excellent magazine for all women,” and they provided the Reno, Nevada mailing address.

Even some long-time DOB leaders were upbeat about the changes, at least initially. Kay Tobin Lahusen wrote about DOB, in her profile of Martin and Lyon in 1972’s *The Gay Crusaders*, “both Phyl and Del are now on the sidelines as it continues

⁹¹ Ibid.

under a dynamic young president.” Although reacting negatively to the “ancient activist” characterizations that were sometimes hurled by younger gay liberationists at those who had been working for many years in the homophile movement, Lahusen and Gittings welcomed the new militancy they saw emerging within the homophile movement. “We actually went out and bought stuffed animals – dinosaurs – and took them with us to Gay Liberation Front (GLF) meetings and demonstrations” Lahusen remembered recently.⁹²

Martin and Lyon, writing in 1972 about the demise of the national organization they had devoted many years of their lives to create, said “we are happy to report that DOB is doing well. The increase in membership and the number of chapters has been significant and, under the new structure, we envision chapters springing up in every large city in every state. It is indeed an ‘idea whose time has come.’”⁹³

But some other long-time members were saddened by the loss of *The Ladder* and the end of the national organization, and saw in these changes the end of an era. Stella Rush, while still involved in Los Angeles DOB, has said that she and Helen Sandoz were uncomfortable with the heated rhetoric of the younger activists, particularly among some

⁹² Kay Tobin Lahusen, conversation with author, March 12, 2004.

⁹³ Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 253-254. In an Update to *Lesbian/Woman* written in 1991, they amended their earlier optimistic statements: “because of the conflicts [with Radical Lesbians in New York and the rise of lesbian separatism in general] and because women’s centers began to provide space and resources for Lesbians, DOB chapters across the country gradually disappeared...San Francisco DOB, which had maintained the organization’s national headquarters for almost two decades, managed to hang on until the late 70s...To our knowledge, only Boston DOB remains.” Contact information for a Boston DOB chapter is listed in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 2004, although my calls to their published telephone number have not been answered.

of the more separatist lesbians.⁹⁴ “There was a lot of man-hating stuff, and Sandy and I just couldn’t go along with that,” Rush remembers. “I was more into human rights, and Sandy’s thing had always been economic equity. We were turned off by their tone. We never did follow Del and Phyllis into NOW.”

By 1970, DOB chapters were increasingly led by lesbian-feminist activists such as Martha Shelley in New York, Jeanne Cordova in Los Angeles, and Karen Ryer in San Francisco. Because it was then and had always been an all-female group, locally and nationally, DOB benefited in at least one way from the separatist currents gaining in strength among some feminists. The Daughters gained new recruits and new leadership from lesbians who wanted to work specifically and, in some cases, *only* with other women. Unfortunately, it would be years before the younger radicals would learn that their ability to seize the day was in part due to nearly two decades of careful homophile activism, including groundbreaking research into lesbians’ lives.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Judith M. Saunders, “Stella Rush,” *Before Stonewall*, 143; Stella Rush, interview with author, September 10, 2002.

⁹⁵ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 190-191; Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy & Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 138, 149-150. John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 240-243.

Chapter Four:

**“What at one time to most of us seemed a curse is perhaps
a blessing to all...”¹**

Different Daughters

I am a woman,
a lesbian,
a poet,
poor,
handicapped,
radical,
Indian,
over seventy –
an eight-time loser.

How shall I not be
a revolutionary?

How shall I not see
my sister in every woman,
my brother in any man,
my child to cherish in every child?

When they dragged Jane Kennedy into solitary
that was my arm the cops were twisting.

When they dropped napalm on the rice paddies
that was my skin on fire,
that was my blood running out hot and sticky.

Goddess
give me eight kinds of strength to fight back.²

Valerie Taylor

¹ “R.L., California,” Readers Respond, *The Ladder*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (November 1960): 21-22.

² Valerie Taylor, “The Sweet Little Old Gray-Haired Lady in Sneakers,” (1980), *Valerie Taylor: A Resource Book* (published by the estate of Valerie Taylor, Tee A. Corinne, executor, rev. 1999), Gerber/Hart Library, Valerie Taylor Papers, Chicago, IL.

There has been much bitter comment that all the published data on Lesbians comes either from badly maladjusted women who have sought psychiatric help or from women in prison. It is high time information was collected and published covering all Lesbians, not just a few. And apparently the only way to make sure this is done is to do it ourselves.³

Florence "Conrad" Jaffy

From the beginning, providing information about lesbians' lives was a high priority for the women involved with DOB and *The Ladder*. They made a commitment to uncovering and compiling material on gay women from disparate sources -- from popular fiction to literary bibliographies and scientific studies -- and saw it as a crucial way to help the individual lesbian take her rightful place in history and society. It was also a means of influencing those with power, whose opinions held sway in popular culture as well as in the canons of religion, medicine, and law.

When the Daughters of Bilitis published its Statement of Purpose in 1956, the first two goals listed ways of educating "the variant" as well as the public. For fifteen years, they had pursued self-help and educational projects as part of their strategy to integrate lesbians into society. All of their efforts were based on the need to challenge negative stereotypes, misinformation, and biased judgments.

³"Coming in June: A Lesbian Questionnaire," *The Ladder*, May 1958, Vol. 2, No. 8, 9.

The third goal listed in DOB's Statement of Purpose focused on research, which they viewed as an essential tool in expanding the public's knowledge of gay men and lesbians, a tool to advance social change:

(3) Participation in research projects by duly authorized and responsible psychologists, sociologists and other such experts directed towards further knowledge of the homosexual.

They had their work cut out for them. As noted previously, other than Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues in Indiana, in 1955 no researcher of national prominence treated homosexuality as anything other than a serious illness. No mainstream religious institution, no university, no government agency gave any credence to the idea that gay men and lesbians were productive, stable, happy people who contributed a great deal to society. No public library openly displayed books with homosexual themes or information – the available literature (if one knew it existed), medical treatises and psychological case studies had to be specifically requested or read surreptitiously in the racks. Popular films or books that featured homosexuals usually portrayed them as miserable, tormented human beings or showed their salvation at the hands of science, medicine or a heterosexual love affair.⁴

Culturally speaking, gay men and lesbians in the postwar period could be bright and beautiful but they were always fundamentally flawed. The media images that included them simply reproduced the dominant cultural stereotypes of the day. The Daughters were determined to find and present new, more accurate, sources of information.

⁴ Michael Bronski, *Pulp Fiction*, 25-30.

Part I: *Journey to Fulfillment*⁵

The popularity of inexpensive paperback novels with lesbian content and covers were one of the primary cultural arenas for the expression of a 1950s' "obsession" with sexuality in the U.S.⁶ Starting in the late 1930s with the publication of Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth*, government-issued Armed Forces Editions offered a broad range of literature and were designed to fit into uniform pockets. Their sales skyrocketed in the decade following the war, in part due to the popularity of fiction with lesbian content. Although the paperback novels presented images of lesbians that were usually contrived and almost comically inaccurate for most "real" lesbians, their value was in their display and discussion of female-to-female sexuality. For the first time, information about lesbianism was widely available to men and women of all orientations.⁷

The paperback novels also contained stories, albeit often trite and tragic, about lesbians' lives. A man looking for cheap thrills, or a young woman wondering about her "feelings" for a female friend, could find in "the pocket books" a world of forbidden romance, a subterranean world full of pleasure and danger. Those women and men

⁵ Valerie Taylor, *Journey to Fulfillment* (Chicago: Midwood Books, 1964). *The Ladder* reviewed this book in 1965 and noted that it was a "welcome and nicely written piece for the overall picture of an appealing fictional lesbian character." Gene Damon, "Lesbiana," *The Ladder*, Vol. 9, No. 9 (June 1965): 12.

⁶ Jaye Zimet, *Strange Sisters*; Michael Bronski, *Pulp Friction*.

⁷ Kate Adams, "Making the World Safe for the Missionary Position: Images of the Lesbian in post-World War II America," *Lesbian Texts and Contexts: Radical Revisions*, Karla Jay and Joanne Glasgow, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 255-274; Dorothy Allison, "A Personal History of Lesbian Porn," *New York Native* (May 24 – June 6, 1982): 22-23; Marion Zimmer Bradley, "Lesbian Stereotypes in the Commercial Novel," *The Ladder* Vol. 8 No. 12 (September 1964): 14-19.

seeking to enter gay life could find virtual maps and descriptions of the cities, and neighborhoods, where it could be found.

For some women, such as Ann Weldy (“Ann Bannon”), Marion Zimmer Bradley (“Miriam Gardner”), Patricia Highsmith (“Claire Morgan”), Maryjane Meaker (whom we met earlier as “Ann Aldrich” and who also published lesbian novels as “Vin Packer”), Artemis Smith, and Valerie Taylor, the lesbian novels were also their bread and butter. Starting with *The Ladder*’s first issues in 1956, all of the above writers’ works were avidly read, reviewed, and collected by the Daughters. Some were sold through DOB’s Book Service in the late 1950s and early 1960s as well, thus providing additional access to women too shy or threatened to purchase them in public.

Not all the paperback writers were women, even if they used female names. We know of a few who were lesbian or bisexual. Of these, even fewer used their creative power to craft lesbian characters that would complicate the picture most Americans had of women who loved women in the 1950s and 1960s. Valerie Taylor was one of the few lesbian writers who was also an early homophile activist and DOB member.⁸

Born Velma Nacella Young in Aurora, Illinois in 1913, Taylor developed scoliosis in her youth that left her with a lifelong disability; it also gave her a sense of herself as unattractive and an appreciation for the underdog. As a child growing up on a struggling farm in rural Illinois, reading and writing poetry came naturally to Taylor, and from her youth on it was a constant occupation. She kept writing while attending

⁸ Jaye Zimet, *Strange Sisters*, 19-22; “Daughters of Bilitis, Chicago Chapter, August 17, 1963, Special Meeting” minutes list “Velma Tate.” Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 15/11, GLBTHS, San Francisco. Taylor also discussed her DOB involvement in an undated interview for *Windy City Times*, Chicago’s gay newspaper; transcript at Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago IL. Thanks to Karen Sendziak for this reference.

Blackburn College in Illinois in the mid-1930s and during her marriage, in 1939, to William Tate. Her first poem – a prayer -- was published in 1935; in 1946, when her children were young, she resumed writing and publishing again using the name “Nacella Young.”

In the 1950s, Taylor published her poems in the *Ladies Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, and the *New York Herald Tribune*. The sale of her first novel, *Hired Girl*, for \$500 in 1952 enabled her to divorce her increasingly abusive husband. She also began writing for the pocketbook market. When Dr. Jeannette Howard Foster published her pioneering bibliography on lesbians in literature in 1956, Taylor contacted her and the two women started a life-long friendship. She learned about *The Ladder* from Foster and published poems, essays, and short stories in it from 1961 to 1965.⁹

As Velma Tate, Taylor was also involved with the Chicago Chapter of DOB in the early 1960s. She attended chapter meetings, helped organize activities, even took the minutes at meetings. But the chapter’s instability in the mid-1960s left a void in Chicago’s homophile community. In 1965, Taylor helped to start Mattachine Midwest. With her lover, Chicago civil rights lawyer Pearl Hart (a founder of the National Lawyers Guild) as the new group’s legal advisor, Taylor served on Mattachine Midwest’s board for eight years and wrote for its newsletter, working closely with Marie Kuda.

After Hart died in 1975, Taylor moved to Albany, New York, and a few years later to Tucson, Arizona. There, at the age of 66, she started a new lesbian relationship. She never stopped writing and publishing both poetry and fiction. Barbara Grier’s *Naiad*

⁹ Tee Corinne, *Valerie Taylor: A Resource Book* (published by the estate of Valerie Taylor, 1999) 3-7.

Press published *Prism*, *Love Image*, and Taylor's final novel, *Rice and Beans*, in 1989.

Taylor died in 1997.¹⁰

In a 1961 article, Taylor discussed "Five Minority Groups in Relation to Contemporary Fiction." She wrote candidly about the difficulties politically-conscious authors have in publishing stories dealing with age, incest, race, same-sex love, and bisexuality.

The fourth taboo is perhaps the most serious of all. It's almost impossible to deal with love between members of the same sex in a realistic manner...I've never found a book dealing with love between two men that offered any physical data, and stories dealing with Lesbian love have a little more latitude, but not much...

Unfavorable or even distorted as some books are, they usually come a little closer to the truth than the average person's understanding of what we may call the emotional minorities.¹¹

Between 1957 and 1964, Taylor published seven lesbian novels: *Whisper Their Love*, *The Girls in 3-B*, *Stranger on Lesbos*, *Return to Lesbos*, *Unlike Others*, *A World Without Men*, and *Journey to Fulfillment*. "Along with Ann Bannon, Taylor was one of the most popular authors writing about lesbian lives for mass market paperback publications," according to Tee Corinne, her literary executor. Taylor made a point of creating complicated lesbian characters; one example is Erika Frohmann, a Jewish survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, who in *Journey to Fulfillment* is relocated to an unnamed Midwestern town in the United States. Unexpectedly (not to mention

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Valerie Taylor, "Five Minority Groups in Relation to Contemporary Fiction," *Mattachine Review*, Vol. VII, No. 5 (May 1961): 13-22. Taylor is pictured on the cover of the May 1961 issue. This piece first appeared in *The Ladder* Vol. 5 No. 4 (January 1961): 6-13, 16-22.

improbably), she finds herself in the middle of a lusty, barely submerged teenaged Isle of Lesbos – almost all the perky young female co-eds in the middle-class suburb she now calls home are bedding each other. Readers explore postwar American society, as well as the passion Erika felt for her new friend Judy, right along with her as Erika discovered these strange new worlds. Taylor's talent for telling a scintillating lesbian love story made her a paperback success; it also provided a means of popularizing her expansive, and progressive, worldview.¹²

¹² Valerie Taylor, *Journey to Fulfillment*. New York: Midwood-Tower, 1964; republished Tallahassee FL: Naiad Press, 1982.

Part II: Kinsey's Librarians and *The Ladder*

As important as Taylor's work was in the 1950s and 1960s in portraying the myriad possibilities of lesbian experience, the popularity of her writings was in many ways made possible by a dense scientific study on sexuality that drew both widespread notice and a fierce reaction from the authorities.

As noted previously, Alfred Kinsey et al.'s 1948 report on male sexuality, funded by such a reputable source as the Rockefeller Foundation, meant that sex of all kinds -- including homosexuality -- was suddenly everywhere in mid-20th century America. No longer existing in the shadows, or the cheap book racks, "the Kinsey report" moved the discussion of same-sex desire to center stage. The publication in 1953 of the team's second study, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, just kept it in the spotlight; it also cost Kinsey his financial backing and brought him under HUAC's scrutiny.¹³

Drs. Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy, Clyde Martin and Paul Gebhard compiled data on 5,940 white American women in the 1940s and questioned them extensively about their sexual beliefs and practices, producing *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* in 1953. A zoologist by training, Kinsey led the team as they shifted the research focus from seeking causes of vice and abnormality to providing information about regular behavior among average white American women. In addition to questioning the then-prevalent belief in vaginal orgasm as the main source of women's sexual pleasure, their findings directly challenged the popular views of some sexual behaviors -- such as masturbation or homosexuality -- as "deviant." The pair of Kinsey Reports together

¹³ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 140; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 36-37.

showed that such practices were, in fact, relatively harmless and fairly common among thousands of otherwise normal women and men, and therefore should be treated as “natural” and not penalized. The reports received widespread popular notice and extensive commentary; the women’s report even provided the material for a major 1962 Hollywood film, *The Chapman Report*, based on a novel by Irving Wallace.

In his 1956 obituary in the *New York Times*, it is noted that “Dr. Kinsey complained that some religious groups were bringing pressure upon his sponsors to withdraw the support that had kept his Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University going since 1942. Two years ago (in 1954), the Rockefeller Foundation, major factor in his support, discontinued its aid of \$100,000 a year. Dr. Kinsey was unable to replace this with other backing, and actually feared, close friends said yesterday, that his institute and long-range projects would end.” At the time of his death, however, he was engaged in a study of the sex problems of U.S. prisoners.¹⁴

In all the hoopla, what was not publicized was that Kinsey’s research librarians were a lesbian couple, both of whom had contributed their own sexual histories to the doctors for inclusion in the report on women. One of them would become well-known in lesbian circles just a few years after Kinsey’s 1953 report. As noted in Chapter Two, Jeannette Howard Foster was the author of *Sex Variant Women in Literature*, published in 1956.

¹⁴ “Dr. Kinsey is Dead: Sex Researcher, 62” *New York Times*, August 26, 1956. His Institute not only survived but they celebrated the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* with a weekend conference, attended by more than 300 people, on “Women’s Sexualities: Historical, Interdisciplinary, and International Perspectives” November 13-15, 2003 at the University of Indiana, Bloomington, Indiana.

Born November 3, 1895 in Oak Park, Illinois, Foster (and her life partner Dr. Hazel Toliver¹⁵) worked for Kinsey from 1948 until 1952. Chicago activist and community historian Marie Kuda has written that, while working for Kinsey, Foster catalogued 50,000 items while Toliver translated classical Greek and Latin erotic writings. The couple moved to Kansas City, Kansas and, while there, Foster published her bibliography on what she termed “sex variant women,” meaning “differing from a chosen standard.” She was interested in references to women throughout recorded history who had an “emotional attraction” to other women, “which is passionate and sexual in nature, even if the sexual component is not conscious.”¹⁶ She credited an earlier researcher, George Henry and his 1930s Committee for the Study of Sex Variants, for the term “sex variant” which Foster felt was “neither rigid nor emotionally charged.”

Foster’s experiences as a college student at Rockford University in Illinois in 1917 motivated her landmark research project. She was called on as a member of the student council that year to discipline two other female students in a “morals case.” Foster began to research what a “morals case” was, and found scientific studies, beginning with Havelock Ellis’ *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, on same-sex attraction. Continuing to be fascinated by the topic, personally and professionally, she kept reading

¹⁵ Not much is known at this time about Dr. Hazel Toliver, Foster’s life partner. According to Marie Kuda, Toliver was a professor at Linwood College and a translator of Greek classics. After retirement in the 1960s, she, Foster, and a third woman, Dorothy Ross (the head of Linwood’s physical education department), shared a home together in Pocahontas, Arkansas. Marie Kuda, “Jeannette Howard Foster (1895-1981)” *glbtq: an encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer culture*, n.d. See www.glbtq.com/literature/foster.

¹⁶ Virginia Elwood-Akers, “Jeannette Howard Foster (1895-1981),” *Before Stonewall*, 48; Caryn E. Neumann, “Foster, Jeanette Howard (1895-1981),” <http://www.glbtq.com/literature>; Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession*, 455.

and found more; each new reference to sexual relationships between women led her to others, in poetry and literature, and she began compiling lists of information.

Foster's pursuit of her pet project coincided with her own pursuit of education and career options in the early decades of the 20th century. A strong, self-directed white woman, her travels took her to many parts of the country during a time when few women had such opportunities. After graduating from Rockford in 1918 she received her Master's degree in English and American literature at the University of Chicago in 1922. She worked as a writing teacher in Minnesota for nearly a decade before returning to school. Foster earned the M.A. in library science from Emory University in Atlanta in 1932 and her Ph.D. at the University of Chicago in 1935, then worked as a science librarian at Antioch College in Ohio. When she was offered a professorship at Drexel Institute in Philadelphia in 1937, she accepted readily. While at Drexel, Foster was able to devote a good deal of her time and energy to her own research and had access to more extensive collections, in Philadelphia and at other eastern sites.¹⁷

In 1955, at age 60, and "after years of indefatigable research," Foster completed her more than 400-page work, which exhaustively catalogued poetic and literary references to female "sex variance." It covers lesbians and bisexual women in literature (primarily written in English, German and French), with 324 titles. Foster created sections beginning with "the Ancient Record," "the Dark Ages to the Age of Reason," "Romantics to the Modern," "Later Nineteenth Century," "Conjectural Retrospect" (in which she discusses major lesbian writers of the past) and "Twentieth Century Poetry" and all fiction up until 1954. According to Barbara Grier, the final quarter of the book

¹⁷ Marie J. Kuda, "Kinsey: Sex by the Numbers," *Windy City Times*, August 27, 2003.

provides “the richest field of literary lesbian history possible in the bibliographies, including primary material, bibliographic, biographical, historical and critical material, and scientific and psychiatric material.” Grier also says today that “(T)he book remains the foundation bible of lesbian literature, the place to begin your personal research.”¹⁸

In 1956, promised publication by a university press failed to materialize because the editor in charge of the project died; his successor was afraid to take on so controversial a topic. Foster paid Vantage Press to issue the book.¹⁹ The public response at the time was minimal, and it received only one (negative) review. But Foster had written to *The Ladder* announcing the book’s publication, and *Sex Variant Women in Literature* was thoroughly reviewed in the May, 1957 issue by Marion Zimmer Bradley.

To the collector of Lesbian literature the work is invaluable, listing as it does every major work and many minor ones. She has given summaries of the less well-known novels – this in itself would make the book useful to a bibliophile – and in almost every case has made an effort to evaluate the book in three points; the validity of the “Lesbian” material included (i.e., does the writer treat the subject from knowledge or from mere sensational surmise), the attitude of society reflected in the book under discussion, and the intrinsic literary merit of the work itself...

...I confess myself somewhat exasperated by the chapter devoted to biographical conjecture about Emily Bronte. Granting that Miss Bronte may well have been a Lesbian – the lady has been dead for enough years that this posthumous identification is apt to soothe the vanity of many Lesbians and cast no aspersions on her family – her work certainly contains no reflection of this aspect of her character, and Miss Foster’s “proofs,” frankly, do not convince me at all. Even more eyebrow-lifting is

¹⁸ Barbara Grier, “In Fond Remembrance,” *Lambda Book Report* Vol. 12.05-12.06 (December 2003 – January 2004): 38.

¹⁹ Foster’s *Sex Variant Women in Literature* was reissued by Diana Press in 1975 and by Naiad Press in 1985. In 1974, it received the third Annual Gay Book Award by the Gay Task Force of the Social Responsibilities Round Table of the American Library Association.

the chapter which includes the Biblical BOOK OF RUTH in Lesbiana...she musters a few unconvincing indications, but they seem to me shaky; I am fairly sure that a scholar of Biblical history, or one of Jewish mores, however open-minded, would reject the theory, not as offensive but as absurd...All these minor faults aside, however, this book stands as a major milestone in the literature of homosexuality in general and female variance in particular.²⁰

Foster found a very receptive audience among DOB members and *Ladder* readers; almost immediately, her work, “distinguished both for its critical insights and for the quality of its research,” was applauded and applied. For nearly fifty years it “has had a major influence on studies of lesbian literature.”²¹

Foster’s years of involvement with *The Ladder* and DOB began in 1957 as well. In addition to the numerous essays, poems, and stories she published in its pages, *The Ladder* also led her to life-long friendships, albeit mostly on paper, among herself and sister Midwesterners Valerie Taylor and Barbara Grier, despite the twenty- and forty-year differences in age between them. In a 1988 interview, Taylor recounted a story of Foster attending a DOB meeting in Chicago:

²⁰ Marion Zimmer Bradley, “Variant Women in Literature,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 1 No. 8, (May 1957): 8-10.

²¹ Caryn E. Neumann, “Foster, Jeannette Howard,” www.glbtq.com

...I have a very delightful memory of Jeannette, that when I was living in Chicago, the head of Chicago DOB (which consisted of about eight people at that time) called and said, "Jeannette Foster is going to be in town and my lover and I would like to make a dinner for her but we're in the middle of moving. Will you contribute something in the way of food towards the dinner and we will ask the members of DOB to come."

So it was a very chaotic environment into which Jeannette walked the next night. As I remember there was a mattress leaned up against the wall in the hall of the new apartment and things were scattered all over. And Jeannette looked at the mattress – we were all very much in awe of her – and she looked at the mattress and said, "Oh I see we're going to have an orgy." Well that sort of broke the ice....²²

Barbara Grier first met Foster in 1956 in Kansas City. Grier, then a young lesbian bibliophile working on her first collection of gay literature, contacted Foster on the advice of Marion Zimmer Bradley after *Sex Variant Women in Literature* was released. "In those days, I wasn't afraid of anything, so I just found out where she was and got in touch with her," Grier remembered recently. "She was very kind to me."²³ Foster encouraged Grier to learn bibliographic skills and she reviewed Grier's *magnum opus*, *The Lesbian in Literature*, in the September 1967 issue of *The Ladder*.

"Writing a favorable review of a work in which one has been over-generously cited might be taken as reciprocal back-scratching...Happily I can affirm with clear conscience that I consider THE LESBIAN IN LITERATURE an excellent bibliography." Foster could not resist using at least a third of her review to swipe at the "Trash" titles (which Grier marked with a "T" in her alphabetized listing of authors) "put out today

²² Tee Corinne and Caroline Overman, "Valerie Taylor Interview," *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, #25 (Winter 1988): 61-72.

²³ Barbara Grier, interview with author, December 2003; Tee Corinne, "Valerie Taylor Interview;" Marie Kuda, interview with author, October 2002.

without exception by paperback original houses, on inferior paper and with suggestive bright-colored covers,” and she noted that “(T)his inferior material constitutes slightly over 52% of the whole (bibliography).” Foster wrote that most of the trash titles were probably written by men, for men, and asked sarcastically “(W)hat do men find in these ‘Lesbo’ volumes? Well – on the principle of the ancient joke: What makes more noise than a pig caught under a gate? Answer: Two pigs – apparently the crudely presented situation of two women so aroused that they will use each other is twice as stimulating to some men as a picture of one women in like predicament.”²⁴

While her main connection to the Daughters of Bilitis was via *The Ladder*, Foster paid attention to organizational issues as well. In 1968, when then-President Shirley Willer and her partner Marion Glass (“Meredith Grey”) circulated proposals to disband DOB’s national governing board, Foster weighed in on the importance of maintaining the then-current structure. “As a member of D.O.B. and subscriber to THE LADDER almost from their birth, I have watched with keen interest the changing colors and temperatures of opinion within the organization and its published voice...I have heard repercussions of debates on group policy and action (and) some echoes have seemed mere healthy differences of opinion. Some have sounded dangerously close to civil war and secession. Thank heaven the latter has been averted.”

Foster went on to advance her theory that “a considerable number of the sisterhood have a strong need to dominate – even though some may look delicately feminine.” “During my service at the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research, I learned that homosexuals are homogeneous in nothing except their preference for their own sex.

²⁴ Dr. Jeannette Howard Foster, “The Lesbian in Literature: A Bibliography,” *The Ladder*, Vol. XI No. XI (September 1967): 17.

When one considers the geographical, racial, economic, intellectual and social differences among the national members of D.O.B., what can be expected but sharp variations in interest and sympathy?" Despite differences, however, she urged DOB members to maintain its national structure, comparing it to the AAUW, AAUP, and the NAACP. "May D.O.B. struggle along undivided, even though granted it is sure to have a struggle. And may its voice continue to be THE LADDER, perhaps more varied than it has been by spells in its history, but nevertheless our national magazine."²⁵

²⁵ Jeannette Howard Foster, "Dominance," *The Ladder*, Vol. XIII No. I and II (October/November 1968): 17-18.

Part III: *DOB Questionnaire Reveals Some Facts About Lesbians...*²⁶

Florence Jaffy also believed passionately that one of the Daughters' most important contributions to "the cause" was its ability to provide "a voice" for "Lesbians who probably do not otherwise come to the attention of the public or of researchers."

A small, wiry white woman, Jaffy taught Economics for over a decade at the College of San Mateo, a few miles' south of San Francisco. She joined DOB in 1957 after moving to the Bay area from Chicago and, as Florence "Conrad," assumed the role of Research Director for the organization, the first and only woman to fill the position. Her involvement in the decade to follow helped shape an important part of the research efforts that DOB initiated or engaged in during this period, work which was also to become increasingly controversial within the homophile movement. "She was responsible for getting DOB members to participate as guinea pigs in research projects in the late 50s and early 60s," Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon wrote about Jaffy in 1986. "She carefully screened researchers who approached DOB to check their credentials, hypotheses and biases. She was determined that it was possible to refute negative psychological theories about Lesbians and homosexuality."²⁷ Jaffy was convinced that if "the experts" – researchers and "professionals" – had more information about homosexuals, they would learn that gay women and men were no more abnormal than

²⁶ Brochure: "DOB Questionnaire Reveals Some Facts About Lesbians and Some Comparisons Between Male & Female Homosexuals," published by *The Ladder*/Daughters of Bilitis, San Francisco, CA, 1961.

²⁷ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, "Workshop Words," *Gay and Lesbian Outreach to Elders Newsletter* (February 1986); Florence Jaffy Papers, #97-23, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, San Francisco CA.

anyone else – a radical concept in those days. She believed that it was vital to provide data showing that it was societal strictures and stigma that created homosexual neurosis. That information, in turn, could help change public opinion. She argued that valid scientific studies were necessary and important tools in dismantling prejudice and discrimination against homosexuals.

In the process of pursuing her goals, she herself paid a high price. As a teacher at a public community college, Jaffy kept a low profile about her lesbian activism and her involvement in DOB. After a disastrous break-up with a long-time woman lover, “Nan Ryan,” in the late 1960s, Jaffy’s sexuality was revealed by her ex-girlfriend to the Dean of the college where she taught. While her employment was not threatened by this revelation, the intensely private Jaffy was devastated by the betrayal of a former intimate and sister DOB member. However, she continued to work for gay causes; she was an early and active member of one of the first gay rights chapters of the ACLU, in San Francisco, and edited the chapter’s newsletter from 1982 to 1984.

The following year, however, faced with a debilitating death from throat cancer, Jaffy chose to commit suicide. Her passionate self-determination had made it impossible for her to be rendered helpless and she had been involved with the Euthanasia Society and the Hemlock Institute for over twenty years. At least one old friend from the DOB days, however, believes that she never shook the despair that engulfed her after her personal betrayal.²⁸

²⁸ “BI” (Bill Ingersoll), “In Memory of Florence Jaffy,” *Bulletin* of Gay Rights Chapter, ACLU of Northern California, Florence “Conrad” Jaffy Papers, #97-23, GLBTHS; Venice Ostwald, interview with author, September 6, 2002; Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, interview with author, September 13, 2002.

But in 1958, “in an effort to make a small beginning in the collection of descriptive data on Lesbians,” Jaffy led the DOB’s first forays into sociological and psychological research efforts.

The movement’s embrace of social science promoted two main points. First, it sought to argue that homosexuals were not, by definition, sick, stressing instead that homosexuals were average people, just like everyone else...

...Secondly, homophile activists’ interest in scientifically generated statistical surveys was related to their arguing that homosexuals represented a minority, but a substantial one, worthy of respect for its social and cultural contributions. Scientific surveys became a strategy for visibility.²⁹

Lyon, Martin and many other early DOB activists had enthusiastically read the Kinsey Report on women and discussed its importance for lesbians. However, they believed research by lesbians about their own life experiences would prove even more valuable. Within the first three years of their existence, DOB twice launched efforts to learn more about their members. Their first survey, printed on the back page of the premiere issue of their newsletter in 1956, resulted in only a handful of responses.

They then decided to conduct a “sociological survey” of their readership and Jaffy guided their efforts. This was a big undertaking for the tiny organization. The 1958 DOB Questionnaire not only marks the first time that a survey of lesbian life was done by lesbians themselves, it was one of a handful of data collection efforts focusing

²⁹ Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society*, 355-356.

specifically on lesbians, especially “normal” ones (i.e., those not in mental hospitals, prisons, or under intensive psychiatric care).³⁰

Their report was published in *The Ladder* in 1959 and again in 1960. In the Introduction, Jaffy noted that “THE LADDER in June of 1958 mailed out a four-page questionnaire to all subscribers, covering items of general information, family, and personal history. Of the more than 500 questionnaires sent out, 160 completed replies were received over the following 12 months, of which 157 were considered usable.” The results of the DOB Questionnaire, although “disappointingly small,” were nonetheless revealing, both in terms of the questions the DOB activists asked of their readers and the responses they received.³¹

In her analysis of the data, Jaffy insisted that “No particular hypothesis or theory was meant to be tested by the questionnaire, though obviously certain questions (such as: Number of brothers or sisters? By whom reared? Favorite parent? etc.) were suggested by generally held conceptions as to what are important factors in human development.” She went on to carefully qualify the results: “Even in the case of questions such as these, however, the smallness of the sample, and the absence of any ‘control’ group, would

³⁰ Vern Bullough, in his essay on Berry Berryman in *Before Stonewall*, noted that Berryman began interviewing her lesbian and gay friends in the 1920s and ‘30s in Salt Lake City, Utah. “Berryman began typing up her notes while working in an office” of the American Red Cross in early 1940 but never completed the project. Bullough and his wife Bonnie (whose mother, Ruth Uckerman, was Berryman’s life partner) published part of her work in *Signs*, 2 (summer 1977) as “Lesbianism in the 1920’s and 1930’s: A Newfound Study.” It is one of the few studies available of pre-World War II lesbian friendship circles, particularly those found in smaller U.S. cities far from the coasts.

³¹ *DOB Questionnaire Reveals Some Facts About Lesbians and Some Comparisons Between Male & Female Homosexuals* (published by *The Ladder*/Daughters of Bilitis, San Francisco CA, 1961), 1-14.

make it impossible to rigorously prove or disprove any particular proposition about Lesbians.”

The sample is not only small, but it is neither scientifically selected nor truly random. It is actually a selected group, partly self-selected, consisting of those women who (1) had contact with the DOB, and (2) were willing to supply the type of information requested. We believe that a description of this group, however imperfect it may be, is not without interest. It cannot be known, as already pointed out, how far it is or is not representative of Lesbians in general. As will be seen, it is a quite different type of group from that usually studied by doctors and criminologists.

A summary of some of the more salient results was printed in *The Ladder*, noting the higher levels of education, income, professional occupations, property and home ownership, and voter registration among respondents than in the general population of white women “according to the Census Bureau figures” for 1957. It also emphasized the relative stability of lesbian life and relationships.

The group is of course female (the few male entries received were discarded), almost entirely Caucasian, largely of U.S. citizenship, born or reared in varying (40) states of the Union or (10) foreign countries. The bulk – almost three-quarters of the group – come from urban rather than rural backgrounds. Ages vary from 19 to 62, with a median age of 32 years.

The educational level of the group is high: 82% completed four years of high school, 46% have had four years of college, 66% have had some college, 16% reported college work beyond the fourth year.³²

³² Throughout the final report, where relevant Jaffy included comparable figures as noted in the 1957 Census Bureau figures: “(F)or comparison with the educational level of the general population, Census Bureau figures on white females are most relevant (since only one of the present group reported being non-white). These indicate that in 1957 only 45% of white females over 25 for the U.S. as a whole had completed four years of high school, and only 6% four years of college.”

...The income level of the group is also above average: The median monthly wage of those reporting specific income figures (about 85% of the total sample did so) is \$350, or \$4200 annually. This compares with a 1957 median annual income for white income-earning females over 14, nation-wide, of only \$1310.

A variety of occupations is represented. The professional group³³ is more numerous than any other (38% of the total); while clerical workers are second with 33% of the total. ...Over 6% of the present group are students, and about 6% work at trades, skilled or unskilled.

While no member of the group is presently in the armed services, about 18% have at one time been a member.

Subjects reported being Protestant in only 50% of the cases, Catholic in 19%, Jewish in 2%, other in 6%, none or agnostic in 23%.

Under "General Impressions," Jaffy drew the outline of a group of Lesbians that complicated, but did not completely refute, many of the myths then prevalent about gay women.

There are of course some atypical replies: One individual has been a prostitute; two are reformed users of narcotics; four report themselves as reformed alcoholics and one as presently so. In addition 11 were at one time (mostly for brief periods) committed to a mental hospital; and 19 (12% of the total) have been arrested (most commonly for drunkenness and traffic violations).³⁴

³³ "Professional" is not defined; however, Martin and Lyon have noted that a majority of the respondents reported being employed as teachers. However, DOB was advised by Kinsey researcher Paul Gebhard not to specify this fact because of the witch-hunts against homosexual educators in the 1950s. Martin and Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 218; Transcript of talk given by Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, San Francisco State University, March 25, 1998; General Files, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

³⁴ Ibid. Of course, the survey was based on a small number of respondents, but it is striking that 4.5 percent of the group admitted using or abusing drugs and/or alcohol and 7 percent that they had been confined to mental hospitals.

Jaffy also highlighted the fact that “(i)n all, the family history material shows some, but surprisingly little, of the disturbance usually thought to be associated with deviant personality development.” She called for “further information and detail, for example, on the psychosexual identification of the child, on attitudes of the child toward each parent, on parents’ conformity or lack of conformity to cultural sex stereotypes.”

The Personal History summary is revealing of partnership patterns perhaps particular to women at this time.

It can be seen that of this group 91% consider themselves to be more homosexual than heterosexual – that is, place themselves more than halfway down the (Kinsey) scale. Yet as many as 43 persons, or 27%, are either now married or were once married. Along the same line, while 100 persons count themselves as exclusive homosexuals, as many as 98 reported some heterosexual relationships.* These 98 must, and do, include a number of persons rated as exclusive homosexuals.

Jaffy noted that the word “relationship” is “ambiguous” and she guessed that “the replies probably overstate the number of relationships involving actual sexual intercourse.” She specified that “we have used the Kinsey heterosexual-homosexual rating scale in this survey but have not ourselves attempted, as Kinsey did, to place each individual on the scale in accordance with objective information supplied by her...the figures in Table 3 (“Homosexual-Heterosexual Scale”), therefore, refer to subjects’ own evaluation as to where on the scale they feel they belong.” The majority – 64 percent – rated themselves as “Exclusively Homosexual.”

Confronting common assumptions about lesbians and gay men as clannish and alcoholic, the DOB Questionnaire also asked respondents about friends and fellow-workers (“the largest number – 50% -- have friends about evenly balanced between

homosexuals and heterosexuals”); frequency of drinking; and frequency of attending homosexual bars. The largest number of respondents reported drinking “socially” (1-2 times per month); in an interesting twist, Jaffy speculated that geographic locale might have more to do with heavy alcohol consumption than sexual orientation.

A geographical breakdown, not possible with our present data, might perhaps indicate that the heavy-drinking stereotype is more nearly approximated in some sections of the country. (It is even possible that drinking habits correlate more closely with geographic and social situation than with sexual preference as such. Where homosexuals drink heavily, do they do so for social rather than psychological reasons?)

With respect to gay bars, she also noted that “(e)ighty persons out of the 157 reported they did frequent such bars but that “the largest group of those who go at all attend once or twice a month...Here again a geographic breakdown would be interesting...”³⁵

Under “Sexual Life”, Jaffy notes “(t)he vast majority of the group has had homosexual experience – there are only four (possibly five) exceptions,” but does not go on to provide more detail. She does state that “(t)here is some ambiguity in the use of the word ‘experience,’ though probably less than there was in the word ‘relationship.’ ‘Experience’ may be broad enough to mean to some people emotional relations with no physical contact, or varying degrees of contact. In a few cases, subjects specified that

³⁵ *DOB Questionnaire Reveals Some Facts About Lesbians and Some Comparisons Between Male & Female Homosexuals*” (published by *The Ladder*/Daughters of Bilitis, San Francisco, CA, 1961), 15-23.

their experience was of a limited kind; it seems likely that where no such limitation was made, the 'experience' at least reached the point of intimate physical contact."

A number of tables were included under this section, breaking out information on age of first experience, age of first awareness of homosexual tendencies, length of present homosexual relationship, and length of longest homosexual relationship, with the last two further delineated by age bracket. The emphasis on relationships, and their relative permanence or impermanence, is obvious. "A large majority of the group (72%) is presently engaged in a homosexual relationship," and the majority of these relationships were from 1 to 3 years in duration, except for women over 35 (the majority of which reported "10 years or over"). Jaffy concluded this section by stating that "(t)he present statistics do appear to show, at any rate, that lasting homosexual relationships, though not universal in the group, are not only possible but by no means rare."³⁶

The DOB Questionnaire also tackled the butch and femme stereotypes. Under "Sex Role Varies" Jaffy wrote:

Of considerable interest was the question: "In your homosexual relationship(s) do you consider yourself predominantly feminine, masculine, or neither?" Replies indicated a close balance between those answering "neither" and those answering "masculine" – each answer accounting for more than 1/3 of the replies.

These replies lend some support to the common idea that there is considerable masculine identification among Lesbians. What is of special interest, though, is the fact that, while over 20% claimed a feminine identification, over a third refused either label.

"There were a number of comments on this question worthy of remark," Jaffy added. Foreshadowing the debates within DOB over the resilience of butch/femme

³⁶ Ibid.

identifications among lesbians, and the priority that would be given to androgyny by many lesbians, particularly lesbian-feminists, in the next decade, she emphasized that “(A) number of persons indicated specifically that they recognized both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ elements in themselves. It is probable that a large majority of persons, Lesbian and otherwise, have such a mixture of elements, but that awareness of this mixture, as well as the mixture itself, varies from person to person.”

Jaffy concluded the Questionnaire’s findings by noting that “family background appears fairly conventional....It is also of interest that 30% of respondents counted their adolescence as ‘average’ in happiness” – about the same as those who rated theirs “unhappy.” “The personal data shows a group with a high homosexual component, both on self-rating and on the basis of actual experience, but with more heterosexual experience than might have been guessed.” She also noted that “a large majority have not had, and do not want, psychotherapy...the group as a whole does not conform to the stereotype with respect to heavy drinking and continuous attendance at ‘gay’ bars...(the data) lends some, but not much, support to the stereotyped ‘butch’ picture...and (shows) that durable relationships, while not the rule in the group, are certainly not uncommon.”³⁷

Within the next year, Jaffy went on to work with members of Mattachine Society in San Francisco to compare the results of this survey with one undertaken with their male members. Approximately 100 Mattachine men participated; most of the findings were not surprising but Jaffy’s concluding statements were.

While uncritically accepting the then-prevalent belief that men were intrinsically and “constitutionally” more sexual than women, Jaffy explained the male homosexuals’

³⁷ Ibid.

lower economic and cultural status in society (and thus their greater “adjustment difficulties”) as due to “a reverse reflection of the high prestige of masculinity in our culture.” In other words, even without adopting “feminine” characteristics or labels, gay men’s rejection of traditional male values and roles (as husband, father) brought with it a lowered social status and loss of prestige. At the same time, she asserted that lesbians, when they rejected the traditional role of women in society (as wife, mother), were thus “harmonizing” their “inclinations” to the “dominant social value” of maleness, and in some ways gaining privilege:

The two groups are similar enough in general background and characteristics so that the differences which do emerge are of interest. They seem to suggest on the whole (1) greater sex activity on the men’s part, and (2) greater adjustment difficulties on the men’s part, both to society and to themselves. The two points may be related, since constitutional factors making for a stronger sex drive in men may be involved in both. But there is also a cultural factor involved in the second point, namely, the stronger social taboo against male homosexuality, which is a reverse reflection of the high prestige of masculinity in our culture.

This is well illustrated by the apparent unwillingness of the men to choose a “feminine” label for themselves, even in the limited area of the homosexual relationship, although the women had less reluctance in choosing a “masculine” label under the same circumstances. In a society that is male-oriented and where masculine values have higher prestige, the lot of any male who rejects these values in any way is difficult, and perhaps few homosexual males can do so completely, or with impunity, despite their sexual or other preferences. Lesbians, on the other hand, when they reject the traditional role of women, may be harmonizing their behavior not only with their own inclinations but also with the really dominant values of society.³⁸

³⁸ *DOB Questionnaire Reveals Some Facts About Lesbians and Some Comparisons Between Male & Female Homosexuals* (published by *The Ladder*/Daughters of Bilitis, San Francisco, CA, 1961), 24-45.

The research project's emphasis on proving lesbian "normalcy" drew some sharp retorts from DOB members. It added fuel to the debates over DOB's emphasis on integration, which some Daughters felt implied conformity and acceptance of the status quo, as exemplified by the following letter writer's eloquent protests:

Every cover-to-cover reading of *The Ladder* leaves me with a nagging in my brain that all is not right with the endeavors of the DOB. Now, to my satisfaction, I have put the finger on the cause of my disquiet. I object to the merely Lesbian approach. I prefer to see the problem of the Lesbian as an aspect of the larger problem of society today: Conformity – the neglect of the individualistic impulse that alone leads to creativity and the ultimate enrichment of culture...

...*The Ladder* makes much of the problem of integrating Lesbians into society at the same time that probing minds in the heterosexual world decry the present trend toward dehumanization...

What at one time to most of us seemed a curse is perhaps a blessing to all. We as Lesbians know in a very personal way something about retaining and developing our particular identities. Perhaps instead of pleading, "Please, world, accept us – we're really very nice and not a bit different" we should say, "Look, world, we understand the agony of losing what each of you finds best in yourself and we can help you to be unafraid of your uniqueness!"³⁹

An indirect response came from DOB President Jaye Bell on the occasion of DOB's sixth anniversary:

Perhaps some may feel we are advocating conformity. We are, when it comes to common courtesy to those who are yet so uneducated that homosexuals strike as much fear in them as do child molesters, dope addicts, the mentally ill, etc. This is outward conformity, the same outward conformity demanded of numerous groups of people who are in positions foreign to the public at large. For instance,

³⁹ "R.L., California," Readers Respond, *The Ladder*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (November 1960): 21-22.

the ex-convict, the alcoholic, or the conscientious objector. All these people, and many more, must refrain from talking to the majority of society of parts of their lives lest they put themselves under the heel of many social pressures. To do other than conform outwardly would hurt them personally and be of no avail until the public is better informed.⁴⁰

Jaffy had presented the findings of the DOB "Facts About Lesbians" Questionnaire and "Some Comparisons Between Male & Female Homosexuals" at DOB's first National Convention in San Francisco in June 1960. Soon, psychological and sociological researchers, as well as the popular media, began contacting DOB about their work and inviting their participation in future research efforts.

One such response resulted in a radio program featuring Jaffy. "How Normal Are Lesbians?" was the title of the program, taped in July 1961 in New York, for broadcast in September as part of the WEVD "University of the Air" series directed by "Mrs. Lee Steiner, psychologist and marriage counselor." Jaffy joined Steiner and "Mrs. Elsie Carlton, housewife," on the show.⁴¹

Bell proudly reported in *The Ladder* on the response to DOB's efforts from professional researchers:

We have received innumerable requests for copies of both studies. The most noteworthy here, because of their interest in further research on Lesbians, are: Dr. Gershwin of New York, heading a research committee of the Society of Medical Psychoanalysts; Dr. Alexander Rosen of the State of California Dept. of Mental Health; and Dr. Robert Stroller of the University of California Medical Center in Los Angeles...

⁴⁰ Jaye Bell, "DOB's Anniversary Message From the President," *The Ladder*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (October 1961): 4-9.

⁴¹ "DOB on New York Radio in September," *The Ladder*, Vol. 5, No. 11 (August 1961): 7.

Another is Dr. Ralph H. Gundlach, psychologist from New York, who has just completed a project with a committee of the Society of Medical Psychoanalysts on the male homosexual and heterosexual in therapy. Dr. Gundlach has met with us in San Francisco and stated that our comparison study on the male homosexual on a non-clinical basis was of help to them in their study and that the two studies added strength and validity to each other. Dr. Gundlach has asked for our co-operation on a study on the Lesbians not under therapy. We are now working with him on the questionnaire to be used.⁴²

In June, 1963 Jaffy announced "New Research on Lesbians to Begin This Fall!" and urged all *Ladder* readers to complete the questionnaire being prepared. "By collecting accurate information on the lives and backgrounds of Lesbians, and by analyzing and reporting this objectively, such a study can advance the cause of genuine understanding of the Lesbian." She promised anonymity and emphasized that Dr. Gundlach "is not a psychiatrist" but rather a social psychologist.⁴³

In September, 1963, the "Gundlach-Riess Study of Lesbians" was announced in *The Ladder* with a coupon inviting readers to participate. An article by Gundlach, "Why is a Lesbian?" accompanied the invitation. DOB's Research Committee had met with Gundlach the previous summer and was involved in formulating the study's procedures and the questionnaire to be used.

Gundlach and his colleague Bernard Riess were interested in examining the life experiences of lesbians. In "Why is a Lesbian?" he said that "one of my aims it to conduct experimental studies in human behavior....Our question is, why are some adult

⁴² Jaye Bell, "DOB's Anniversary Message From the President," *The Ladder*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (October 1961): 4-9.

⁴³ Florence Conrad, "New Research on Lesbians to Begin This Fall," *The Ladder*, Vol. 7 No. 9 (June 1963): 4-5.

persons a-sexual, some heterosexual, some homosexual, some bi-sexual, and some other-sexual? Essentially, WHY is a Lesbian?...What determined the basis for choosing?"

Gundlach asked "How can we get beyond just re-stating our own beliefs with vigor and emotion? How can we get beyond prejudice, superstition, gossip, convention, and doctrine, to some sub-strata of fact?"

His answer was exploration:

We are trying to discover from a number of unique persons, some things that are common to most or to some small groups and clusters, about their family relations in childhood; their feelings and remembrances about brothers and sisters, and school mates; their relations to teachers and other adults; their induction into maturity at puberty, and their struggles for adult status during adolescence; and finally, their feelings and experiences of a sexual nature, and their adult patterns of living.⁴⁴

The year before, in 1962, Gundlach had been part of a team headed by Dr. Irving Bieber in New York who compared family dynamics between small groups of male homosexuals and male heterosexuals who had been in therapy.⁴⁵ The Bieber study concluded that "1. male homosexuals are homosexual not because they like men but because they fear women (and) 2. homosexuality is a form of psychopathology." Needless to say, Bieber's research caused much dismay among homophile activists, and *Ladder* editor Barbara Gittings printed a lengthy critique of it by Dr. Fritz Fluckiger in

⁴⁴ Dr. Ralph H. Gundlach, New York City, "Why is a Lesbian?" *The Ladder*, Vol. 7, No. 12 (September 1963): 4.

⁴⁵ Irving Bieber, Harvey J. Dain, Paul R. Dince, Marvin G. Drellich, Henry G. Grand, Ralph H. Gundlach, Malvina W. Kremer, Alfred H. Rifkin, Cornelia B. Wilbur, Toby B. Bieber, *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study* (New York: Basic Books, 1962).

1965. In “An Evaluation of the Bieber Study on Homosexuality,” Fluckiger questioned Bieber’s basic assumption, that homosexuality was a form of mental illness, and stated:

Homosexual acts are, after all, deviations from prevalent social norms. But to define them as “sick” on the ground that they deviate from a biological norm shows a thoughtless acceptance of the quasi-biological concepts in which psychoanalysis had its origins. Such a definition is one more of those numerous moral judgments which are disguised as clinical observations; it is one more example of the frequently noted fact that what is really felt to be a moral or social wrong according to certain values is called a mental illness, a term which is supposedly free of value judgements.⁴⁶

Gundlach had become disillusioned with Bieber’s perspective as well and wanted to launch his own research project, focusing on women. He had convinced DOB members, primary among them Jaffy, that the efforts would be beneficial to them and that his intentions were to gather data to improve scientists’ understanding of lesbianism, not to strengthen arguments against it. His own experiences as a member of a despised minority in the late 1940s may have influenced his later interest in studying homosexual men and women. An associate professor of psychology at the University of Washington in Seattle in 1949, Gundlach was fired following hearings by the Washington Legislature’s Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities (the Canwell Committee) and the University of Washington Faculty Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom. “Gundlach was one of three tenured professors who were fired and who were never able to work in academia again. These three refused to answer any

⁴⁶ Fritz A. Fluckiger, Ph.D., “An Evaluation of the Bieber Study on Homosexuality,” Barbara Gittings/Kay Tobin Lahusen Archives, Wilmington DE; copy given to author September 2003; published in three parts as “Research Through a Glass, Darkly” in *The Ladder*, Vol. 10 No. 10 (July 1966): 16-26; Vol. 10 No. 11 (August 1966): 18-26; and Vol. 10 No. 12 (September 1966): 22-26.

questions from the committee, because they felt speaking to them added legitimacy to the witch-hunt,” according to a 1998 article. “The University of Washington (UW) in Seattle began a national trend by being the first school to fire tenured professors for their political affiliation with the Communist Party or for their refusal to cooperate with hearings.”⁴⁷

Gundlach, born in 1902 in Kansas City, Missouri and educated at the University of Washington and the University of Illinois, was a progressive political activist who studied “social problems.” Teaching at the UW campus in Seattle throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s,

Gundlach found himself at the center of controversy throughout his career at the University. In 1944 the U.S. government wanted him to evaluate servicemen, but the Civil Service Commission failed to give him a security clearance because they thought he might be a Communist sympathizer. At the U.W. Gundlach often became the center of negative attention because of his field of study and methods of teaching. Dean Edwin Guthrie, also a psychologist at the University, disagreed sharply with many of Gundlach’s practices and became his nemesis throughout the 1940s. Practices such as distributing questionnaires on race relations and anti-Semitism met with disapproval from Guthrie and other members of the faculty and administration.⁴⁸

Gundlach stated to the UW Tenure Committee in 1948, “...I declare that I have worked over many years with organizations whose aims and programs are democratic, humanitarian, charitable, peace-loving, friendly, forward-looking. I have taken those

⁴⁷ John Ruhland, “Un-Americanism in Seattle: The University of Washington, possibly the birthplace of McCarthyism, now shows some remorse,” *Washington Free Press*, Seattle History, #33, May/June 1998; Biography, University of Washington Libraries, Ralph H. Gundlach Papers, Accession No. 686-3; Ralph Gundlach’s Statement to the Tenure Committee (1948), Ralph H. University of Washington Libraries, Ralph H. Gundlach Papers, Accession #686-70-21, folder 1/11.

⁴⁸ “Biography,” Ralph H Gundlach Papers, University of Washington., Seattle WA.

aims to be my aims and have worked to put them into effect. I am an anti-Fascist. I am not a Russian-hater, nor an anti-Communist.” Although the Tenure Committee voted against dismissal, UW’s President Allen fired Gundlach; he was fined \$250 and imprisoned for thirty days in 1949.⁴⁹ (It is not known who, if any, among the Daughters knew of Gundlach’s background and past experiences; however, he and Jaffy maintained regular correspondence from the mid-1960s into the 1970s.)

The repeated articles and notices in *The Ladder* during the last half of 1963 about the Gundlach study, urging readers to cooperate, also generated some negative reactions.

“F.I.B., California” (who identified her/himself as a heterosexual) wrote in to say:

the very nature of the study indicates bias in favor of environment’s being the generally predisposing factor toward homosexuality, and a feeling that homosexuality is undesirable and if we can find out enough about its causes we can cut back on it or cure it.

Homosexuality is a normal manifestation of human nature, not something to be cured like a disease...What is wrong with homosexuality, what pushes the homosexual into unhealthy behavior and attitude patterns, is NOT homosexuality itself, but the way society feels about it and reacts to it.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ According to his published “Biography” at the University of Washington Libraries, after his dismissal from UW, “Gundlach continued to be a recognized leader in his field. Shortly after his firing from the University, he received scholarly endorsements from various professional organizations, including the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, the Consumers Union, and the American Psychological Association. He prospered as a private psychotherapist in New York City and worked as a consultant to the New York Medical College. Gundlach continued to publish extensively in psychology journals and, in his own words, continued working for ‘lost causes,’ such as Julius and Ethel Rosenberg’s appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.” It is interesting that none of Gundlach’s research work on lesbians and gay men in the 1960s is mentioned. He died in Great Britain in 1978.

⁵⁰ “F.I.B., California,” Readers Respond, *The Ladder*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (November 1963): 23-24.

Jaffy responded:

I do think that the study of causation does perhaps imply an interest in understanding the “why” in order to control or change – though this may not at all be the explicit reason for the study. And yet I favor the study, because I think that in coming to understand more about the “why” of homosexuality, scientists who are not steeped in pre-conceived notions will also come to understand more about the “what,” and thus may have a much better basis for concluding whether or not change or prevention is really desirable!

Gundlach and Riess’ study proceeded, with two short follow-up articles printed in *The Ladder* in 1964. They reported that “(A) total of 226 persons classified as lesbians and 233 non-lesbian women filled out questionnaires completely enough to be accepted for this project...There were 74 persons who said they were members of DOB and 176 who said that they were readers of the LADDER, several of these not being lesbians.”⁵¹ Gundlach presented provocative preliminary findings, saying he had found a relatively high incidence of reported rape among the lesbians who participated in the study, to the DOB’s National Convention in 1964. These findings would later be corrected to show *similarities*, rather than differences, between the lesbians and heterosexual women who reported rape. As published in the *Journal of Homosexuality* in 1977,⁵² Gundlach and Riess wrote that:

⁵¹ Ralph H. Gundlach, Ph.D. “Draft: The Gundlach-Riess Study of Lesbians.” Florence Jaffy Papers, #97-23, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

⁵² Ralph H. Gundlach, Ph.D. “Sexual Molestation and Rape Reported by Homosexual and Heterosexual Women,” *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 2(4) (1977): 367-384.

About the same proportion of lesbians and heterosexuals, age 16 or over, were the object of rape. The lesbians tended to reject all men as sexual partners or companions, while the heterosexuals tended to blame themselves for not being careful. Some of the heterosexual women, age 16 to 18, interpreted the rape as a compliment to their sexual attractiveness.

Girls under 16 whose assailant was a stranger are, as adults, as frequently homosexual as heterosexual. Sixteen of the 17 girls age 4 to 16, molested or seduced (6 for a long time) by a relative or close family friend are lesbians as adults. The subjects' attitudes about the incident were highly determined by parental reactions.

But in 1964, Gundlach's initial presentation of his "findings" regarding rape caused an uproar among some DOB members, who felt that, once again, their sexuality was being pathologized. By 1965, heated disputes were appearing in the pages of *The Ladder* over the importance of homophile participation in research activity.

"Research Has Had Its Day"⁵³

Florence "Conrad" Jaffy led off with a long piece in *The Ladder* in the September 1964 issue explaining DOB's interest in cooperating with research efforts, "any research into human behavior that is useful to society, in the likelihood that it will add to society's store of valid knowledge." She argued that "I think that what the public doesn't know about homosexuals is good, bad, and indifferent – but that the good the public doesn't know (and the indifferent) is greater in amount than the bad, which is already very well known." She suggested that DOB adopt guidelines in determining which projects to join, and noted that cooperation be limited to "persons with not only appropriate training but

⁵³ Dr. Franklin E. Kameny, "Emphasis on Research Has Had Its Day," Vol. 10, No. 1 (October 1965): 10.

also research experience, and who are affiliated with a recognized institution of learning or research.” She concluded that cooperation did not necessarily mean approval of methods or findings, and that the decision on whether to participate was an individual one, but she hoped that DOB members would agree that “research is a highly meaningful activity.”⁵⁴

In March, 1965, Mattachine Society of Washington became the first homophile organization to publicly state that “in the absence of valid evidence to the contrary, homosexuality is not a sickness, disturbance, or other pathology in any sense, but is merely a preference, orientation, or propensity, on par with, and not different in kind from, heterosexuality.” In *The Ladder’s* May 1965 issue is an article by Dr. Franklin E. Kameny on “Does Research Into Homosexuality Matter?”⁵⁵

Kameny’s arguments against research were that gay men and lesbians themselves were the authorities on homosexuality and did not need to waste time with research.

As a scientist by training and by profession, I feel fully and formally competent to judge good and poor scientific work when I see them – and fully qualified to express my conclusions. In looking over the literature alleging homosexuality as a sickness, one sees, first, abysmally poor samplings, which are then taken as representative of the entire homosexual community...To characterize ALL homosexuals as sick, on the basis of such a sampling – as Bieber, Bergler, and others have done – is clearly invalid, and is bad science.

...I have never heard of a single instance of a heterosexual, whatever problems he may have been facing, inquiring about the nature and

⁵⁴ F. Conrad, “How Much Research – and Why?” *The Ladder*, Vol. 8, No. 12 (September 1964): 20-24.

⁵⁵ Dr. Franklin E. Kameny, “Does Research Into Homosexuality Matter?” *The Ladder*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (May 1965): 14-20.

origins of heterosexuality, or asking why he was a heterosexual, or considering these matters important...

The Negro is not engrossed in questions about the origins of his skin color, nor the Jew in questions of the possibility of his conversion to Christianity.

Such questions are of academic, intellectual, scientific interest, but they are NOT – or ought not to be – burning ones for the homophile movement. Despite oft-made statements to the contrary, there is NO great need for research into homosexuality, and our movement is in no important way dependent upon such research or upon its findings.⁵⁶

This started a lengthy political ping-pong match in print between two articulate and opinionated homophile leaders. Jaffy responded to Kameny in “Research Is Here To Stay:”

As preliminary, I would ask where the Negro civil rights movement would be today, militant or not, if research into racial differences had not long ago supported the Negro’s claim to equality of treatment? And where would WE be today without Kinsey’s two classic volumes on sexual behavior? Ours is a science-oriented society, and scientists are God to most people. In the long run, I do not think it can be seriously doubted that what science says will be important for the success of the homophile movement.

...Basically, the differences between Kameny’s approach and mine is a question of what audience we think we are (or should be) addressing. Obviously you don’t discuss these matters in depth on a 15-minute TV show or in a 2-page leaflet. But you **MUST** discuss them with those who care about such things if you want to be taken seriously by the opinion-makers.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Florence Conrad, “Research Is Here To Stay,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 9, Nos. 10 and 11 (July/August 1965): 15-21.

Kameny replied with “Emphasis on Research Has Had Its Day,” indirectly complimenting those homophile activists – like Jaffy -- who had preceded him by noting the evolution of the movement from “the formative years...when it was an extraordinary achievement even to have such a movement” to more recent forays “into the fight for civil liberties.” “The differences between Miss Conrad and me on research (as they often are when people acting in good faith have a common goal) are basically ones of emphasis. But I do recommend that Miss Conrad do some re-thinking about a formal position on homosexuality as sickness. There we do differ strongly, on a question I consider of fundamental importance to our movement.”⁵⁸

The two of them – and the organizations they represented – would continue to agree to disagree, with Jaffy leading the DOB’s participation in a half-dozen more research projects throughout the end of the 1960s, including a new study by the Kinsey Institute which was published in 1978.⁵⁹

In 1966, she initiated a research project with a twist: she created a questionnaire to query psychiatrists, psychologists, and other mental health professionals on their opinions about their gay or lesbian clients. Working with Dr. Joel Fort of San Francisco’s National Sex and Drug Forum, Jaffy conceived and crafted the study – “Attitudes of Mental Health Professionals Toward Homosexuality and Its Treatment” – which was published by Fort, Claude M. Steiner of San Francisco Center for Special Problems, and “Florence Conrad” in 1971 in *Psychological Reports*. A questionnaire,

⁵⁸ Dr. Franklin E. Kameny, “Emphasis on Research Has Had Its Day,” Vol. 10, No. 1 (October 1965): 10-14, 23-26.

⁵⁹ It was published as Alan P. Bell, *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1978).

returned by 163 professional therapists in San Francisco, was used to investigate both techniques of treatment and opinions about homosexuality.

Jaffy and her team also used the study to assess mental health professionals' opinions about government service for gay men and lesbians – ironically, the area of homophile activism to which Kameny devoted much of his life, and which in the 1970s was among the most contested. “Nearly all respondents (98%) felt it was possible for homosexuals to function effectively. Likewise, practically all (99%) opposed laws treating private homosexual acts between consenting adults as criminal.” A majority of psychiatrists and social workers believed that homosexuality should not disqualify an individual from security-sensitive Federal employment nor the Armed Forces.⁶⁰ This was DOB's last official research project and, by the time it was published, the national organization had long since ceased to exist. Jaffy published it without noting an organizational affiliation.

Despite the fact that the Mattachine Society had also prioritized participation in research projects when the organization began, DOB's devotion to expanding the pool of knowledge about lesbians had a gendered quality to it. As female homosexuals, they were often “the invisible women,” ignored in popular culture yet, when noticed, routinely stereotyped as sick misfits or lost girls just needing a good man.

To some observers, like Jaffy, lesbians occupied a somewhat more privileged status in society than other women due to their rejection of the traditional female role and

⁶⁰ Joel Fort, Claude M. Steiner, and Florence Conrad, “Attitudes of Mental Health Professionals Toward Homosexuality and Its Treatment,” *Psychological Reports*, 29 (1971): 347-350.

adoption of more socially-valued “masculine” characteristics. But as women, lesbians were bound by strictures that severely limited all females’ lives. The ability to earn a living wage, provide shelter and security for themselves, and create family and community were of paramount importance to lesbians, and heterosexual marriage was out of the question for most as a means to attain these goals. Women’s lower economic and educational status in U.S. society in the 1950s and 1960s made independence an elusive goal, even when two women pooled their earnings.⁶¹

The Daughters’ dedication to providing accurate information about themselves and other “normal” lesbians was to remain an important tactic as the rise of the women’s liberation movement brought new opportunities for self-definition. As we will see in the next chapter, DOB activists continued to rely on “experts” to define lesbian existence. The difference was that, by the late 1960s, most agreed with Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon that they themselves were the “experts” they’d been waiting for.⁶²

⁶¹ For example, in 1955 women earned an average of 63 cents for every dollar earned by men. The number of women in the workforce had jumped from 8.5 million in 1947 to almost 13 million in 1956. *Feminist Chronicles* (published by the Feminist Majority Foundation, 2000), www.feminist.org

⁶² Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 282-283.

Chapter Five:

**“Lesbians are not satisfied to be auxiliary members
or second-class homosexuals!”¹**

Strategic Separatism

Helen Sanders, president of the Daughters of Bilitis, Inc. said she had been asked many times, “Why a separate organization for women?” The question appeared to need answering one more time.²

In ten years, from 1955 to 1965, the Daughters of Bilitis broadened from a small, secret social club to a national network of lesbian activists. They published a well-regarded monthly magazine; sponsored regular local meetings and national conferences; engaged in research projects; and appeared in print and on local radio and television programs.

Throughout, consciously or not, the women of DOB utilized what can be called “strategic separatism” to maintain their sometimes precarious balance as women in the mostly-male homophile movement and as lesbians in a largely-heterosexual world. “Strategic separatism” describes the Daughters’ insistence that they were a *women’s* organization that dealt with *female homosexuality*. From the organization’s beginnings, well before the emergence of the women’s liberation movement, their alliances with

¹ Del Martin, Speech to Mattachine Convention, Denver CO, August 1959; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 5/16, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

² Sten Russell (Stella Rush), “Panel Discussion, *The Ladder*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (December 1957): 19.

heterosexual women on the basis of gender, as well as their solidarity with gay men based on shared same-sex eroticism, meant that they were always negotiating the connections and fissures between gender and sexuality in fighting lesbian oppression. The founders' establishment of the Daughters as a membership organization to which only women could belong gave them the psychic and physical space to define themselves and their goals, organize social services and activities, and debate strategies and tactics for social change from their experiences and perspectives *as women*.

DOB activists were the only homophile activists consistently raising issues involving gender in the sexual minority movement, and virtually the only feminists inserting questions of same-sex sexuality into the newly-resurgent women's movement. They recognized the value in working with men on issues of importance for gay rights, but never lost sight of the need to name and defy sexism and male chauvinism both within the movement and beyond. As they had since 1955, they also consistently pointed out, and challenged, the social and cultural invisibility and marginalization of lesbians.³

In the mid- to late 1960s, two trends further distinguish DOB's organizing from its earlier days yet show the continuation of its pragmatic application of "strategic separatism:" internal disagreements wracked the organization as its leaders struggled to define the parameters of their work with homosexual and heterosexual allies; and many DOB leaders increasingly articulated their commitment to feminism, and lesbian-feminism, and their distrust of men both within and beyond the homophile movement. In addition, many of DOB's leading members were beginning to push the boundaries of what had been 'acceptable' activism for the organization. While it was not to be an easy

³ See Del Martin's editorial in the first issue of *The Ladder* Vol. 1 No. 1 (October 1956).

transition for some, other Daughters joined eagerly in the increasing numbers of pickets and protests that marked the beginnings of a new era: an era of increasing militancy, distrust of authority, and change.

One early organizing effort, to change the laws governing homosexuality, was the final goal listed in their Statement of Purpose. It provides a good example of their application of strategic separatism.

(4) Investigation of the penal code as it pertains to the homosexual, proposal of changes to provide an equitable handling of cases involving this minority group, and promotion of these changes through due process of law in the state legislatures.⁴

In 1956, when the Daughters first wrote up their goals and began publishing them in *The Ladder*, every one of the 48 states in the U.S. had laws on the books criminalizing “sodomy,” usually defined as any sexual act except male-female intercourse.⁵ Oral as well as anal sex, whether practiced by homosexuals or heterosexuals, brought punishments of up to fourteen years in prison in states like California, for example. And regardless of how the laws were written, they were almost always used to punish male homosexual acts. Such “perverse” sex acts were routinely viewed in the same light as bestiality and incest.

⁴ From “Purpose of the Daughters of Bilitis,” as published in *The Ladder*, November 1956 through August/September 1970.

⁵ “‘Crime’ and Punishment in America: State-by-State Breakdown of Sodomy Laws,” ACLU Lesbian and Gay Rights Project, 2001.

As a member of the nascent homophile movement, some early DOB activists knew that they would have to join with gay men to remove these legal weapons from the hands of the authorities, despite the fact that far fewer women than men were actually arrested and charged under such laws. It was not an automatic assumption, however, that all or even most of their tiny group would agree. In the mid-1950s, some lesbians had to be convinced that it was important to *all* gay people to challenge the laws that criminalized homosexuality.

“You see, not only did the lesbian not exist – psychologically or historically or whatever – in the minds of the general public, there was also a tremendous division between gay men and women...There was also a lot of animosity and resentment over the fact that it was the gay guys who were creating such havoc with the police – the raids, the indiscriminate sex, their bathroom habits, and everything else,” remembered Billye Talmadge, interviewed in the late 1980s for Eric Marcus’ *Making History*.⁶ Talmadge’s comments reflect the very real feelings on the part of some gay women that gay men’s sexual practices were just as much a problem as society’s condemnation of homosexuality. Some lesbians thought that many aspects of gay male sexuality, from tearooms to cross-generational relationships, helped fuel anti-homosexual sentiment that hurt all of them, women and men.⁷

⁶ Eric Marcus, “The Teacher – Billie Tallmij” [pseudo., Billye Talmadge], *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Rights 1945-1990* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 76-77.

⁷ See, for example, the exchange of letters in *The Ladder* Vol. 5 No. 10 (June 1961): 23-26. One writer stated “Somehow I find it a little difficult to take up the banner in a ‘crusade for cruising’ or do battle to make legal latrine lechery and passion in our public parks. If the Lesbian recognizes the bounds of good taste and common courtesy, so be it. If the male refuses to, then let him assume the responsibility for his actions.”

The fact that Lyon and Martin, among other early members of DOB, believed strongly in working with their gay brothers to challenge unjust criminal laws shows that their commitment was first and foremost to civil liberties. The organization never adopted an official “blame the victim” stance when it came to policies on homosexuals and homosexual behavior, even if some of the behaviors in question were not ones they, as lesbians, engaged in or even approved of. They would debate the issue of public sex, for example, and air dissenting views from members and *Ladder* readers, but they did not alter their commitment to changing the penal codes.⁸ Their solidarity with gay men on this issue was more important than their personal attitudes about “appropriate” sexual practices. “We wanted to change the sex laws that made people felons,” Lyon says. “We thought that there would come a time, hopefully, when there wouldn’t be any laws against our sexuality and we’d be accepted as people by the outside community.”⁹

As it turned out, the Daughters’ interest in liberalizing laws regulating sex, while not yielding any immediate legislative results in the 1960s, led to one of the most important institutional achievements of the group: common cause with liberal religious leaders through the Council on Religion and the Homosexual.¹⁰

⁸ See, for example, Del Martin’s editorial in the January 1962 *Ladder* insisting that reform of “our outmoded sex laws” was a high priority for homophile activists “and may draw homosexuals together...” (Vol. 6 No. 4), 4-5.

⁹ David Mixner and Dennis Bailey, *Brave Journeys*, 32.

¹⁰ In 1961, without visible homophile activism, Illinois was the first state to liberalize its sex laws when it adopted the Model Penal Code drafted by the American Law Institute. But the work of the San Francisco homophile groups, including DOB, supported state legislators Willie Brown and John Burton in their efforts to repeal California’s sex laws, beginning in 1968. They finally succeeded in 1976. By the end of the 1970s, twenty other states had repealed their sodomy laws. Of course, it wasn’t until June 2003 -- 40 years after DOB and Mattachine began work on this issue -- that all remaining state

Police harassment of gay men and lesbians increased dramatically in San Francisco (and throughout California and the rest of the nation) in the late 1950s. In 1961, the largest gay bar raid in San Francisco history resulted in nearly 100 people arrested, 14 of them women. “One municipal judge called the city a ‘Parisian pansy’s paradise’ and threatened stiff penalties for any homosexuals brought before him,” according to *Gay Chronicles* editor Len Evans.¹¹ Soon after, owners of the City’s gay bars formed the Tavern Guild to begin to fight back. They approached DOB and Mattachine activists to organize a lobbying campaign to change the laws and a representative group then met with Assemblymen Phillip Burton and John A. O’Connell in 1962. They were told bluntly that the two sympathetic legislators “didn’t have even a remote chance” of success at getting a bill passed at that time. Burton and O’Connell suggested instead that the homophile leaders get the church to support changing the laws.

“We thought, ‘That’ll be the day,’” Martin remembers. But when they met up with the Methodist minister Ted McIlvenna, who worked with young runaways and “street people” through the Tenderloin-based Glide Memorial Methodist Church, they were pleasantly surprised. McIlvenna was not only open to them, but interested in doing something to reach his colleagues. “Astonished to learn that there was no ‘meaningful counsel’ available to homosexuals, he helped organize a “live-in” at the White Memorial Retreat Center in Mill Valley, just north of San Francisco in Marin County” in 1964.¹²

criminal statutes regarding consensual sexual activity between adults, homosexual or heterosexual, were invalidated by the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*.

¹¹ Len Evans, *Gay Chronicles: California*, <http://www.geocities.com>

¹² David Mixner, *Brave Journeys*, 35; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 99-100.

The retreat brought together fifteen religious leaders from a number of Protestant denominations – including Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopalian, and United Church of Christ – with fifteen members of the homophile movement. DOB made sure that five of them were women. They also made sure that their delegation was not all white: the Daughters’ representatives at the retreat included two black DOB leaders, Cleo “Glenn” Bonner and Pat “Dubby” Walker, as well as Lyon, Martin, and Billye Talmadge¹³

It was a difficult but life-changing experience for many of those involved. For once, gay men and lesbians had their chance to preach equality and inclusion to church leaders, and to acquaint them with the realities of gay lives. The ministers listened; they had no choice. Until they were taken on a “Gay Line” tour of bars and nightspots by the gay men and lesbians on Saturday night (“we thought that would be a good way for them to see how the other half lives,” Lyon has said), the group was literally isolated from the rest of society for the entire weekend at a remote (and beautiful) retreat center high in the hills near the Golden Gate Bridge.¹⁴ The tactic worked. By December 1964, a new San Francisco coalition was formed, the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH). It maintained a mix of (all male) religious leaders and (male and female) homophile activists as its directors. From DOB, Bonner, Lyon and Martin agreed to continue their participation. Within a few months, the CRH had created an ambitious program of education and public relations activities, along with some plans for raising money to support them.

¹³ Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon, interview with author, March 1, 1999.

¹⁴ Ibid. See also Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 238-240.

**Part I: “If DOB does not move forward with the tide...
then DOB will go down the drain.”¹⁵**

“San Francisco’s ‘Stonewall’” started with a flash on January 1, 1965. The New Year’s Mardi Gras Ball – the first of its kind -- would have been historic enough, bringing together as it did such disparate folks, many wearing colorful masks: gay men (some in full stage make-up and drag); white-collared clergy and their resplendent evening-gowned wives; and a number of lesbians in their assorted mufti (ranging from cocktail dresses to men’s suits). The guests arrived as planned at downtown San Francisco’s California Hall the evening of January 1. But the party, organized by DOB and the other San Francisco homophile groups as a fundraiser for the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, was taking place amidst banks of bright spotlights and barricades, all erected courtesy of the San Francisco Police Department. Despite proper permits and a number of discussions with SFPD’s representatives well in advance of the evening, local homosexuals and their dates, as well as prominent Bay area ministers, faced a horde of cameras as they entered the Hall and then were stopped and questioned by police inside the doors.

Pat Lyon, a graduate student at UC Berkeley in anthropology in 1964, had heard from her older sister Phyllis about the formation of CRH and the New Years Day fundraiser. Although heterosexual, she had been involved with DOB since the early days and, having just returned home to San Francisco from doing field research, asked if she could help out. “They said yes, I could sell drink tickets. So there I was in a little booth,

¹⁵ Letter from Del Martin to Barbara Gittings, January 6, 1965; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 6/5, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

at California Hall, selling tickets,” she said, “Many of the people there – there were a few hundred -- didn’t have a clue as to the problems out front. The clergy were there, with their wives – they were the ‘straight but not narrow’ types. Publicity is what resulted from that Ball.”¹⁶

Publicity, and a new sense of pride. “We were taking the invitations at the door and watched our homosexual brothers and sisters file in, visibly shaken, silently, without protest,” Lyon and Martin wrote in *Lesbian/Woman*. “But somehow their backs seemed straighter, their heads held higher, and their eyes, though saddened, were determined.”¹⁷ Some 500 San Francisco lesbians, gay men, and their friends braved the show of force that night, many proudly posing in their finery for the photographers. When some partygoers protested the intimidating tactics, blocking further intrusions inside the Hall, the police went into action, arresting three attorneys, one housewife, and two gay men (who were charged with “disorderly conduct,” unlike the others who faced only charges of obstructing police officers).

ACLU of Northern California attorney Marshall Krause immediately agreed to defend those arrested and called a press conference to announce it. After four days at trial, the judge ordered a verdict of “not guilty” on a technicality. Even so, it was the first time in San Francisco that gay men and lesbians had won in a confrontation with the local police. More importantly, however, the resulting public outrage meant that the customary police harassment of gay men and lesbians would no longer be tolerated.¹⁸ The ministers

¹⁶ Patricia Lyon, interview with author, May 15, 2002.

¹⁷ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 240.

¹⁸ Del Martin, Correspondence to Barbara Gittings, January 4, 1965; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 6/10, GLBTHS, San Francisco. For other accounts of the New Year’s

called a press conference, which was covered extensively by the media, both locally and internationally, to protest the police misconduct. San Francisco officials responded by designating Officer Elliot Blackstone as the first liaison between SFPD and the gay community, an historic admission on the part of the city's administration that there was, in fact, a community they needed to work *with*, not work over. "That was our very first step into some kind of connectedness with the rest of the city," Lyon remembered.¹⁹

The CRH continued its high-profile activities. As a follow up to the Ball, in June 1965 the Council on Religion and the Homosexual published "A Brief of Injustices: An Indictment of Our Society in Its Treatment of the Homosexual" and distributed it widely within the religious and homophile communities, the press, and the general public. Written by a joint committee that included DOB's Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, the document was a clear and strong affirmation of lesbian and gay people, the first of its kind from a group of religious leaders. It listed ten areas in which gay people were denied their rights and their humanity, and ended with a call for self-definition, dignity and justice for homosexuals. (Unfortunately, the "Brief" used only male nouns and pronouns to designate "the homosexual," despite the involvement of many women in drafting it.)

Ball, see Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town*, 231-234; John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*, 286-287; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 99-100; Eric Marcus, "The Defenders: Herb Donaldson and Evander Smith, *Making History*, 147-165; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 202.

¹⁹ "A Brief of Injustices: An Indictment of Our Society in Its Treatment of the Homosexual," the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (published by Glide Memorial Methodist Church, 1965); Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 17/8, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

No one should be forced to suffer in silence or live in fear. The only sensible criteria for judging human relationships is the maturity, necessity, and justice inherent in each relationship. Social and legal justice is essential. The homosexual is forced to perpetrate the last great injustice upon himself, that of failing to realize the best in himself and his part in cultivating the best in his society. Fear is the greatest obstacle which man must overcome.²⁰

The New Years Day Ball also helped launch local Councils on Religion and the Homosexual in other cities, such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, DC and the Philadelphia area.

The following year, CRH reserved a booth at the California State Fair in Sacramento, which was cancelled at the last minute because the Fair's director thought their exhibit "too controversial." After unsuccessfully taking the Fair's administrators to court, the members of CRH, DOB, San Francisco's Society for Individual Rights (SIR) and the Tavern Guild handed out a pamphlet at the Fair's entrance gates, insuring that the crowds of people coming from all parts of California to show off their livestock and prize-winning produce would also have the chance to meet real live homosexuals. The pamphlet boldly proclaimed that *Every Tenth Person is a Homosexual*. "Twenty persons representing the Council on Religion and the Homosexual distributed about 8,000 pamphlets yesterday just outside the main entrance to the State Fair," the major newspaper in the state's capitol, the *Sacramento Bee*, reported. "The group included men and women from San Francisco, San Rafael, Sacramento, the San Francisco Peninsula

²⁰ Committee on Religion and the Homosexual, "A Brief of Injustice." *The Ladder*, Vol. 10 No. 2 (November 1965): 4-7; "Council Issues Brief on Homosexuals," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 25, 1965, 1.

and other areas...” No problems were reported. One can only imagine some of the conversations that must have taken place.²¹

The new surge of activism among some DOB members in San Francisco also led to their involvement in forming Citizens Alert in 1966, a police brutality response network. Organizing CA brought them into collaboration not only with other homophiles but with black civil rights groups and poor people’s organizations, whose members were also subject to violence and harassment from the police.

...we were aware of police brutality cases and where gay men, in particular, were being beat up by the cops and told to get out of town and all that sort of thing. And so we were going to start what we called the Homophile Alert System, where we’d have a 24-hour phone and we’d have attorneys and different people that could respond.

And then Watts happened down in southern California and we realized it was a bigger problem than just for us and that other people were affected. So we decided that we ought to change it to a Citizens’ Alert. And at that point it was lesbians and gays who were inviting all these civil rights groups and so on and we were getting up a list of everybody that we could think of. Then we wondered if that would scare them off if they knew we were the ones that were calling the meeting. So we went to Cecil Williams and asked him if he would convene it. And so he did... That was a really good coalition-builder, and it was the first time that we had done that in the city, too. We really had a common issue. And it all happened out of the Glide Foundation.²²

As Lyon and Martin have noted repeatedly over the years, “it’s the most unusual Methodist Church in the country.” Not only did they launch the Council on Religion and

²¹ “Court Backs Fair Board: No Booth on Homosexuals,” *The Sacramento Bee*, Friday, September 2, 1966, 12; “Homosexual Council Hands Out Pamphlets,” *The Sacramento Bee*, September 5, 1966, 8.

²² Transcript of talk given by Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, San Francisco State University, March 25, 1998; General Files, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

the Homosexual in 1964, but Glide Memorial Methodist Church, and its Glide Foundation, became centers for urban activism, racial and social justice organizing, and progressive politics in San Francisco in the 1960s and 1970s. "When I went to work for them in 1964, they had started what they called Glide Urban Center and it was a most amazing group of people," Lyon remembered in a 1998 speech to a group of students at San Francisco State University. "There were four ministers: Cecil (Williams) was one, Louis Durham was the Executive Director and Don Kuhn and Ted McIlvenna... One of the things that that organization did was to have training sessions for ministers from all over the country, usually Methodists, but not necessarily, to show them and teach them about the diversity of the city. Including the homosexual community." (Lyon was hired as an administrative aide but rarely did clerical work. "I remember hearing ministers coming down the hall, and I heard someone say, 'I hear you have homosexuals around, I'd like to see one.' I kept saying that I wanted it (a sign) on my desk, because I was their token lesbian. Mostly I was the gay and lesbian switchboard. That's not how it started out to be but that's just how it turned out."²³)

In 1965 CRH organized another historic event, a Candidates' Night during which local politicians were quizzed on issues like police misconduct and other questions of concern to gay and gay-friendly constituencies. It was the first time that "the gay vote" was courted in San Francisco, and it began a pattern of well-organized electoral activity among lesbians, gay men, and their allies that continues to this day. "It was remarkable,"

²³ Ibid.

remembered Barbara Gittings recently. “That was something that the (gay) people in San Francisco were way ahead of the rest of the country in doing.”²⁴

But not everyone involved in DOB was as excited about the Council on Religion and the Homosexual as Bonner, Lyon, and Martin were. For two years, from 1964 to 1966, the issue of DOB’s involvement was a source of contention within the organization.

As Martin wrote to New York DOB Chapter leaders Shirley Willer and Marion Glass in June, 1966, “DOB here offered little support to the CRH Candidates Nights or to the Protest Day. As a consequence, Phyllis and I find ourselves moving in a direction that no longer encompasses DOB, and we have become more involved with CRH and Citizens Alert. This is an era of change, and both of these organizations represent action and change. We wish to be helpful to you, but cannot see our way clear to continued involvement with the S.F. chapter. We would prefer to remain inactive members.”²⁵

For over a year before this letter was written, Lyon and Martin had been chafing at DOB’s reluctance to see the potential in the new Council. Immediately after the 1964 retreat, they dutifully reported to the national board on CRH’s development, but no formal vote to affiliate was taken. Along with Bonner, they continued their involvement. When the Council decided to incorporate and seek non-profit status in December, 1964, some of the DOB’s governing board balked, citing one of DOB’s original constitutional provisions – adopted at the height of the “Lavender Scare” in the mid-1950s -- that prohibited them from joining any other organization.

²⁴ Barbara Gittings, interview with author, January 31, 2004.

²⁵ Del Martin, Letter to “Shirley & Marion,” June 2, 1966; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 6/10, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

Some governing board members objected to the fact that DOB leaders had moved from being “representatives” of DOB to active involvement in organizing the activities of the new coalition; others noted that members were acting outside the bounds of DOB’s established procedures -- the same argument that had been raised regarding the New York chapter’s participation in ECHO (East Coast Homophile Organizations) the year before.

Even Barbara Gittings questioned the “major and official commitment” some DOB members were making on behalf of CRH without approval of the Governing Board. (For some time, Gittings and her partner Lahusen had been advocating that the homophile groups needed to change their agendas from education and research to legislation and lobbying.) “So the project got launched without formalities and has snowballed without formalities,” she wrote to Del Martin in January, 1965. “Where is your respect for proper procedure?” Gittings noted that “DOB leaders have either insisted on the rules or evaded them – as it suited their aims of the moment.” She went on to note all the internal DOB matters not receiving attention and urged Martin to “reveal the drama and glamour right in DOB’s own central activities.” Martin responded, “the irony of the situation is your own brief for legislative action. And yet you people are telling me that DOB cannot join in this community effort to accomplish what we have been working for for the past 10 years? Surely you must be kidding!”²⁶

“I have carefully considered my actions and my decisions in participating in the Council. The time is now – and I am committed. There is no time to wait for the

²⁶ Correspondence between Barbara Gittings and Del Martin, January 1965; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 6/5, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

machinery of DOB to gear itself into action,” Martin concluded in a January 1966 message to DOB leaders, appended to an article on CRH she had written for *Challenge*, a magazine published by the San Francisco Theological Seminary.²⁷ She and Lyon, who was serving in the role of DOB Public Relations Director, maintained their local involvement in DOB for the next few months but focused their energies on the program and publicity for the upcoming DOB National Convention, which was once again to be held in San Francisco. But after the 1966 “Ten Days in August” events, with another successful DOB Convention concluded and a new national organization -- the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations or NACHO -- launched, Lyon and Martin began to devote more of their energies to coalition work and less to DOB. They remained intermittently active as “ambassadors-at-large” until 1968. A similar shift in leadership, and debates over the national officers’ authority to curtail local initiatives, was taking place on the East Coast.

²⁷ Del Martin, “Report on Council on Religion and the Homosexual Activities in San Francisco: Opening of an Article to be submitted to *Challenge*, a magazine published by the San Francisco Theological Seminar,” January 14, 1965; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 18/6, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

“All Means ALL”²⁸

As women and men throughout the nation joined in ever-widening protests on a variety of issues during the 1960s and into the next decade, some DOB leaders and members took part in public homophile demonstrations even when the organization’s official policies did not sanction such activity.

At the June 5 meeting of the East Coast Homophile Organizations the delegates from the New York Chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis presented a motion that ECHO may not engage in any activity contrary to the policy or welfare of any participating organization. The motion was defeated. Since DOB’s participation in ECHO has been predicated on this assumption, it must necessarily follow then that the Daughters of Bilitis officially withdraw from the ECHO affiliation.²⁹

ECHO began as a “loosely-structured coalition” in 1963. It was started by four homophile groups – Mattachine Society of New York, Mattachine Society of Washington, DC, the Janus Society of Philadelphia, and DOB’s New York chapter -- to encourage discussion and cooperation among them. Their first gathering was held in Philadelphia in January of that year, followed by a fall conference “in close concert with the American Psychological Association, which is also convening at that time in Philadelphia.”³⁰ It was at the first ECHO conference that the famous public retort was

²⁸ Message on one of the signs carried by homophile pickets at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, July 4, 1965. See *The Ladder*, Vol. 10 No. 1 (October 1965).

²⁹ “Statement of DOB Policy,” June 7, 1965; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 6/12, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

³⁰ “Cross Currents,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 7, No. 7 (April 1963): 15.

made to the psychologist and author Albert Ellis, as he expounded his view of “the exclusive homosexual as psychopath” to the largely gay audience: “Any homosexual who would come to you for treatment, Dr. Ellis, would *have* to be a psychopath!”

By the time of its next conference, in the fall of 1964 in Washington, D.C., at the urging of Craig Rodwell and other younger activists, ECHO was dedicating itself to “immediate action.” “It was a gathering of men and women impatient to remedy the discrimination against the homosexual citizen in our society,” Lahusen and homophile activist Jack Nichols wrote in their coverage of the conference for *The Ladder*.³¹ “Now there seems to be a militancy about the new groups and new leaders. There’s a different mood.”³² Within the year, ECHO would be instrumental in recruiting gay men and women to join in the new form of homophile activism: picketing at symbolic public sites.

As noted in Chapter Three, there were nine different picketing actions in 1965, from the April 17 and 18 demonstrations against Fidel Castro at the White House and the United Nations to the October 23 protests at the White House over discrimination against gay people in federal employment.³³ Craig Rodwell, Randy Wicker, and other activists with the Mattachine Societies of New York and Washington, impatient for greater public

³¹ Warren D. Atkins (Jack Nichols) and Kay Tobin (Lahusen), “ECHO Report ’64, Part One: Sidelights of ECHO,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (January 1965): 4.

³² Ibid. According to Nichols and Lahusen, the mood wasn’t diminished by threats from the American Nazi Party to disrupt the conference (which the lone protestor on Sunday attempted but didn’t accomplish) nor the appearance of a Washington, DC undercover cop (who attended the entire conference despite being recognized the first night by one of the local Mattachine activists.) The cop was put to work arresting the Nazi.

³³ John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence*, 267-272; Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 81.

visibility, worked to mobilize gay people to picket in 1965, and they got ECHO to join in.³⁴

In 1965, a tradition also was begun of well-coordinated, visible gay activism, celebration and commemoration held each summer in the streets of cities and towns throughout the world to proclaim what became known as “gay pride.” It started with the annual “Reminder Day.” On July 4, 1965, gay activists carried signs and circled the pavement in front of the Liberty Bell at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. They wanted to call attention to the denial of basic rights to some of America’s citizens simply because of who they loved. For the remainder of the decade, the Reminder Day actions were a central feature of homophile organizing on the East Coast, drawing women and men in ever-increasing numbers as the years went on.³⁵

But as evidenced by DOB’s June 1965 policy statement, the use of direct action tactics by the homophile groups was not without its detractors. The ensuing debate within DOB was to continue throughout the summer and into the next year. As was true with the disagreements about involvement in the CRH, the dispute had at its heart concerns about maintaining DOB’s independence.

³⁴ From “Gay Picketing – Chronology,” part of the photo exhibit entitled “Standing Tall Before Stonewall,” curated by Kay Tobin Lahusen, William Way Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center, Philadelphia PA, June-July, 2000.

³⁵ Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, 111-114; Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen, interviews with author, June 25, 2002 and November 8, 2003. By 1970, the Reminder Day fell out of favor, replaced by marches in New York and Los Angeles to mark the June, 1969 riots at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village. By the 1980s and 1990s gay activists throughout the nation and, increasingly, the world had added million-dollar festivals and parties to annual “Gay Pride” parades.

At this particular point we do not have confidence in the leadership as demonstrated by the Eastern Mattachine groups, who, under present circumstances, would be able to override DOB in any and all cases. And what DOB's participation would amount to is tacit support of the Mattachine program. We would prefer to hold DOB's identity as a separate organization in tact and cooperate with the Eastern Mattachine groups in so far as we are able.³⁶

By the mid-1960s, DOB was struggling to achieve a balance between its governing board and its activists, institutional cohesion and local initiative, between the collective and the individual. It was not an easy balance to maintain. In both of the contested instances of DOB's involvement in "outside" coalitions, first CRH and then ECHO, the initial response was one of adherence to established procedures. Again, as a women's organization that had long fought for its singular space in the homophile movement, many DOB officers and activists were keenly aware of the tendency of the mostly-male Mattachine members to dominate discussions and decisions. DOB leaders were determined to safeguard their autonomy.

Further, at least three of DOB's national officers at this time – Bonner, Lyon and Martin – were very involved with the CRH. They were working closely with and were influenced by the ministers' perspectives, some of whom were civil rights movement veterans, on the use of direct action tactics. In their June 7, 1965 letter to sister DOB officers McCann, Shearer and Gittings, they quote the thinking of the Rev. Cecil Williams, a black minister at Glide and the chair of the Social Action Committee of CRH, that "we should not engage in direct action until we have considered our strategy

³⁶ Letter to Marge McCann, Del Shearer & Barbara Gittings signed by Cleo Glenn (Bonner), President; Phyllis Leon (Lyon), Public Relations Director; and Del Martin, Treasurer; June 7, 1965; Martin and Lyon Papers, DOB Box 6/10, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

carefully and until we as individuals are committed to going to jail if necessary. Timing and strategy are of the utmost importance in direct action projects – as is proper training in techniques of non violence.” DOB’s leadership had not yet had the necessary discussions about what adopting such tactics could mean for them individually or for their organization. They added that “it has been suggested that when we decide to adopt such a program we should be prepared to provide bail and attorneys fees.”³⁷

For some DOB leaders, like Lyon and Martin, it was not an outright rejection of more militant approaches to homophile organizing. Rather, their concern was over the lack of planning that they felt should precede actions such as picketing and public demonstrations. There were other Daughters, however, such as Del Shearer, who expressed severe discomfort with this form of activism for gay men and lesbians.³⁸

But the Daughters included many strong and self-directed women who did not easily take “no” for an answer. The San Francisco DOB activists did not let the national DOB’s reluctance to affiliate with CRH keep them from working with the new group, and some of DOB’s leaders in New York and Philadelphia would participate in the new direct action organizing on the East Coast regardless of the organization’s official position.

For example, despite the statement of policy against picketing issued in June, by mid-summer 1965, and into the fall of that year, Gittings, Lahusen, and Ernestine

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Only dirty, unwashed rabble do that...” is the comment one long-time DOB member and *Ladder* editor made in a private letter to Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin Lahusen (quoted in *The Gay Crusaders*) regarding picketing. Chicago activist and national DOB vice president “Del Shearer” wrote a long letter, quoted in Chapter Three, expressing her disagreement with this tactic.

Eckstein had all been part of the small circles of serious, silent homophile picketers. The following year, in May of 1966, and timed to coincide with Armed Forces Day, the East Coast picketers were joined by Lyon, Martin, long-time DOB activist Barbara Deming and a few others in San Francisco in the first national homophile protest over the exclusion of gay men and lesbians from the military. They were not the only ones. Even the soon-to-be-inaugurated President of DOB was joining the demonstrations. “This split between those who wanted to make noise and those who wanted to do things quietly affected me very directly,” Willer said in 1989. “During the second half of the 1960s, I was more and more at odds with the official position of DOB. What made this situation impossible was that, as president – first of the New York chapter and later of the national group – I had to represent the official conservative views of DOB.”³⁹

“Despite the objections of a lot of women in DOB, I supported public protests and went to them – in high heels! The picketing in Philadelphia at Independence Hall was my first time. It was July 4, 1965,” Shirley Willer remembered. “I wore a skirt. They decided we would all wear skirts and heels. Now, to me, high heels are two inches. Cuban heels they called them then. You see, I never wore heels because as a nurse you wore flat shoes. When I wasn’t working, I wore penny loafers or something like that. And here I had to put these damn heels on and carry a sign and walk around and around in a circle. We had a large selection of signs and we swapped them every now and then. Walking in those heels took all the flesh off my ankles.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Manuela Soares et al., Interview with Shirley Willer, LHA/DOB Video Project, #MV24, July 12, 1987, Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn NY.

⁴⁰ Eric Marcus, “Shirley Willer – One Angry Nurse,” *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990*, 134.

Born September 26, 1922, Shirley Willer was an active member of DOB for only six years, from 1962 to 1968, but she had a big impact. (Willer died in 1999 in Key West, Florida.) A large white woman from Chicago who dressed in men's clothes when she could ("they are cheap and fit better"), it was during nursing school that she became aware that her desires for other women meant she was a lesbian. "When I finished reading *The Well...*, I started looking up words in the dictionary and the encyclopedia. I didn't find very pleasant descriptions." After graduation, Willer moved to California during World War II but returned to Chicago when the post-War recession eliminated her job and made finding a new one too difficult. In Chicago, she met other gay women, among them civil rights attorney Pearl Hart. Willer and a few friends talked about starting an organization, but Hart's discouragement – "it's too dangerous" – dissuaded them. When she learned about DOB in the early 1960s, Willer headed to New York and wrote to the chapter there. Marion Glass answered her letter, and the two later became lovers, establishing a partnership which lasted over 30 years.⁴¹

Willer was New York chapter chair in 1963 and became President of DOB in 1966. At the national level, she prioritized organizing local DOB chapters and working in coalition with the other homophile groups, representing DOB first in ECHO and then in NACHO. "As National DOB chair, I traveled back and forth across the country about 40 times," she remembered in 1987. Willer helped establish DOB groups in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Phoenix and Texas.

⁴¹ Ibid.

She also found an “angel” to finance DOB’s operations and improve its public image. Over time, it is estimated that “Pennsylvania,” as she was nicknamed by Martin and Lyon, contributed approximately \$100,000 to the DOB.⁴² “Shirley had become a friend, confidante, and therapist to a wealthy, closeted lesbian who wished to contribute to DOB anonymously. The two devised a plan whereby Shirley, acting as a conduit, named individual members to receive checks for \$3,000,” Lyon and Martin remembered. The money, which was turned over to the organization by the individuals receiving the checks, helped improve the look and accessibility of *The Ladder*.⁴³ Fundamentally, for Willer, DOB’s main utility was its ability to provide social and political space for lesbians. “We were strictly a women’s organization, a lesbian organization – we needed a place where only women came,” she emphasized. “Even gay men were considered a threat by many of the women. There was a lot of fear involved.”⁴⁴

⁴² Manuela Soares et al., Interview with Shirley Willer, LHA/DOB Project, Videotage #MV24, July 12, 1987, Lesbian Herstory Archives, Brooklyn NY. Lyon and Martin have also referred to DOB’s anonymous funder as “Delaware.” They have said that she was from a very wealthy, well-established Republican family “back East” and also supported groups like Planned Parenthood and Zero Population Growth. Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, interview with author, June 2000; Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, “The Daughters of Bilitis and the Ladder That Teetered,” *Everyday Mutinies: Funding Lesbian Activism*, Nanette K. Gartrell and Esther D. Rothblum, eds., *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, Vol. 5 No. 3 (2001): 113-118.

⁴³ Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, “Shirley Willer (1922-1999),” *Before Stonewall*, 203-205.

⁴⁴ Shirley Willer, “What Concrete Steps Can Be Taken To Further The Homophile Movement?” *The Ladder*, Vol. XI, No. II (November 1966): 18.

Part II: Lesbian Feminism -- Breaking Down the Barriers

We are no longer willing to be token lesbians in the women's movement nor are we willing to be the token women in the Gay Liberation Front...⁴⁵

Rita Mae Brown

By the second half of the 1960s, the "threat" Willer referred to -- male domination -- had become a critical issue for many long-time DOB members. Feminist ideology as a means of analysis and resistance was growing both among seasoned activists and for a new generation of lesbians, who would reject the "homophile" label just as surely as some of their older gay sisters would turn away from the "feminist" one.

When some DOB members embraced women's liberation in the mid- to late 1960s, they stoked the sparks of difference that had always burned within DOB. Discussions about and disagreements over feminism, women's rights, and lesbianism within DOB were not new at all. They had been taking place for at least ten years before the advent of the second wave women's movement. Rather, from 1966 on there was a seismic resurgence of these conflicts, ignited by feminist forces erupting throughout society.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Rita Mae Brown, "Take A Lesbian To Lunch," *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, Karla Jay and Allen Young, eds. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972, 1977), 194.

⁴⁶ For recent summaries of the emergence of the women's liberation movement in the U.S. in the 1960s, see Estelle Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking

Accounts of gay activism that assume it all started in June 1969 at the Stonewall riots in New York, ignoring the foundational work of the earlier homophile groups, have been supplanted by more recent scholarship and new evidence.⁴⁷ Similarly, accurate descriptions of the resurgence of feminism in the latter part of the 20th century cannot ignore the importance of “the decade of domesticity” that supposedly defines the 1950s.

As historian Elaine Tyler May has written, “Signs of stirring were evident beneath the surface of postwar complacency. While most women experienced discontent in isolation, as exhausted housewives or underpaid and exploited workers, a few groups did begin to organize on their own behalf.” She also points out that the widely-trumpeted “domesticity” of the times was racialized as well as gendered: “in the postwar years, white women faced pressure to become full-time homemakers...black women faced no such stigma.” Due to racism and economic necessity, African-American women usually had to combine paid work with domestic responsibilities (as did Latinas, Native Americans, and many Asian women). But the black press, unlike its white counterparts, presented female workers, who were also wives and mothers, as heroines to be admired and emulated. It also celebrated some of the women who were organizing for civil rights, one of the very few political arenas at that time in which black women were the majority of activists.⁴⁸

As we saw in Chapter One, the National Council of Negro Women formed by Mary McLeod Bethune and other women in 1935 continued its service, education and

Press, 2000); Elaine Tyler May, “Pushing the Limits 1940-1961,” *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁷ See Historiographic Essay, 268.

⁴⁸ Elaine Tyler May, “Pushing the Limits,” *No Small Courage*, 504-505.

lobbying work in the 1950s. The organized, largely white women's groups were mostly apolitical (such as the League of Women Voters, Business and Professional Women, the American Association of University Women and various sororities and clubs.) Only a handful, like the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), explicitly stated a commitment to women's equality and enabled girls and women to work together and across racial and class lines. But feminism, although dormant as a mass movement, was certainly not dead as an ideology. Especially not for lesbians.

As Lillian Faderman argues in her 1999 work, *To Believe in Women*, devoted female same-sex couples, whether or not they referred to themselves as "lesbians," dedicated themselves to "expanding women's possibilities" in the early 20th century. They worked as educators, social reformers, attorneys and physicians, creating homes together and networks of female friends, in the interwar years. Blanche Wiesen Cook, Estelle Freedman, Barbara Smith and other feminist scholars have written about the prominent women who formed female partnerships and networks of love and friendship – from Eleanor Roosevelt to Miriam Van Waters to Mary McLeod Bethune – in the 1930s and 1940s while they were engaged in some of the most significant issues of their time.⁴⁹

Further, between the two decades from the end of World War II in 1945 and the beginning of the National Organization for Women in 1966, there were a number of

⁴⁹ Lillian Faderman, *To Believe in Women: What Lesbians Have Done for America – A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999); Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman," *A Heritage of Her Own* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1979); Estelle Freedman, "Separatism Revisited: Women's Institutions, Social Reform, and the Career of Miriam Van Waters," *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Barbara Smith, Gloria Steinem, Gwendolyn Mink, Marysa Navarro, and Wilma Mankiller, eds., *The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Publishing, 1998).

significant women's writings published, challenging the status quo and agitating for change. For example, Simone de Beauvoir's influential 1949 work, *The Second Sex*, articulated a strong feminist perspective. Rachel Carson wrote pioneering books on environmental issues, such as her 1951 *The Sea Around Us*. May Sarton's novels brilliantly captured the personal and political conflicts of the era, such as her still-gripping *Faithful Are the Wounds*, published in 1955. By 1958, Lorraine Hansberry had completed her powerful commentary on the black experience of the American dream in her play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. When Betty Friedan's 1962 blockbuster *The Feminine Mystique* was published, there had been a small but steady stream of women's poetry, novels, and essays that identified barriers to equality and human rights, and urged women's full participation in society.⁵⁰ In fact, *The Ladder* was one of the sources where such writings could be found. All of the above works, and hundreds more, were reviewed and applauded in the magazine every month.

Most if not all DOB activists had been talking, thinking, writing, and living feminist – or certainly woman-centered -- lives for years. From the organization's first discussions in 1955 on, many believed that discrimination against lesbians was always grounded in their social status *as women* as well as in their choice of romantic or sexual partner. In the mid-1960s, it was as though the rest of the country finally caught up with what some lesbians had been doing for decades: defining themselves as autonomous, resourceful people who did not need men to feel good about themselves.

⁵⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (trans. H.M. Parshley) (New York: Penguin, 1949, 1972); Rachel Carson, *The Sea Around Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951, 1991); May Sarton, *Faithful Are the Wounds* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1955, 1985); Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun* (New York: Signet Books, 1961; Vintage, 1991); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963).

As discussed in Chapter One, DOB's President Del Martin established the importance of feminism to the organization in the very first issue of *The Ladder*.⁵¹ However, the DOB was not monolithic. Ten years after Martin's original feminist manifesto in *The Ladder*, the dissonance between lesbianism and lesbian-feminism that always had been there for some DOB activists surfaced again, sharpened by the popularity and visibility of the newly energized women's movement. Leaders like Gittings and Lahusen, who felt that their primary commitment as activists was to the issue of gay rights, had already left DOB for involvement with mixed-gender groups like the Homophile Action League. Other DOB leaders, like Stella Rush and Helen Sandoz, believed in women's equality but were "turned off" by the anti-male rhetoric of the new breed of lesbian feminists.⁵² They felt increasingly uncomfortable in both movements but maintained their connections to the local DOB chapter.

While trying to come to terms with the rapid changes in organizing strategies and tactics in the homophile movement in the mid-1960s, DOB also was wrestling with deepening differences among its members and leaders on whether the group would expand its commitment to feminism by prioritizing alliances with women's liberation groups over coalitions with gay male activists. Within this context, three crucial actions were taken in 1968 that would have important repercussions over the next decade: DOB withdrew from NACHO to "protect" its autonomy; some DOB members, like Del Martin, publicly said "Goodbye to All That" to the men in the gay movement and turned most of

⁵¹ Del Martin, "President's Message," *The Ladder*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (October 1956): 7.

⁵² Stella Rush, interview with author, December 2003; Interview with Helen Sandoz and Stella Rush, May 15, 1987, Costa Mesa, CA; LHA/DOB Video Project DV-20.

their energies to women's movement work; and Barbara Grier took over editorship of *The Ladder*, determined to use it to advance women's liberation.

Once again, the application of "strategic separatism" came into play, this time as a wedge to open up lesbians' participation in the new feminist organizations. With DOB as a launching pad, some long-time leaders as well as new recruits could utilize the organization's resources – from local chapters to *The Ladder* – to agitate for the importance of including same-sex love in any definition of women's rights.

For Martha Shelley, it was crucial to join a women's organization in 1967. She was one of the women who gravitated to DOB specifically because, as a lesbian, she wanted to meet and work with women. "I'm Jewish and I look it," she told Eric Marcus in 1990. "At DOB I was able to meet people who would relate to me in terms of my personality rather than, 'Here is a cute thing standing by a bar.'"⁵³

"Sometimes we'd have political discussions about what we could do to influence legislation or something...and there was the annual Fourth of July picketing at Independence Hall in Philadelphia," she said. "I thought it was ridiculous to have to go there in a skirt. But I did it anyway because it was something that might possibly have an effect." Shelley remembered "walking around in my little white blouse and skirt and tourists standing there eating their ice cream cones and watching us like the zoo had opened."

The significance of her involvement in DOB in the late 1960s was that in addition to being a place where she could meet other lesbians, it also provided a launching pad for her activism in the homophile – soon to be gay liberation – movement.

⁵³ Eric Marcus, "The Radical Activist – Martha Shelley," *Making History*, 176.

It was very easy for me in the late 1960s, when the gay liberation movement came along...The night of the riot (at the Stonewall Inn) I was escorting two women from Boston around Greenwich Village, taking them on a tour of the bars. The women were going to start a DOB chapter in Boston. While we were walking around, we saw these people who looked younger than I was throwing things at cops. One of the women turned to me and said, "What's going on here?" I said, "Oh, it's a riot. These things happen in New York all the time..."⁵⁴

Shelley was one of the first people to jump in to the surge of protests that followed the Stonewall riots in New York in the summer of 1969. As a DOB member, she helped organize the new Gay Liberation Front. She maintained her personal connections with some of the women of DOB after she became a leader in gay lib groups, starting with GLF and then going on to several lesbian-feminist groups.

Despite some political difference, it was newer, and younger, local activists like Shelley in New York, Jeanne Cordova in Los Angeles, Karen Ryer in San Francisco and others who would team up with more traditionally-oriented DOB members to involve the organization in the marches and other mass actions, as well as the new groups, which exploded throughout the nation in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

"In Mattachine and DOB we couldn't openly state that we were against the Vietnam War because they believed that getting mixed up in other struggles was bad strategy," Shelley said. "They thought that fighting for gay rights was difficult enough without having to take on all these other struggles." Many of the younger activists – children of the 1950s who came to political consciousness in the glare of television news stories of civil rights protests, the assassinations of revered leaders, and increasing

⁵⁴ Ibid.

uprisings against U.S. imperialism, at home and around the world – felt that all struggles were one and should be united. Shelley catalogued them: “the black civil rights movement, the struggle against the Vietnam War, the women’s movement, feminist politics, socialist politics. Every ethnic group had its own civil rights cause. And, of course, the gay cause.”⁵⁵

But where the fit between old and new was most comfortable for some DOB members in the mid- to late 1960s was in the newly-emerging women’s rights and women’s liberation groups. Again, “strategic separatism” comes into play when looking at the experiences of two of DOB’s founders as they brought issues of sexuality (lesbianism) into a feminist reform organization modeled, as DOB had been, on other liberal groups.

As Lyon and Martin, who began to work with the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, described it, “Lesbians by and large flocked to the women’s movement. It was because we always knew that no matter if somebody said, ‘OK you’re homosexuals, no problem any more,’ that we still have the problem of being women.” A few months after hearing a radio broadcast featuring NOW organizer Inca O’Hanrahan in 1966, they contacted her. O’Hanrahan was forming a Northern California chapter. “After all that had been going on (in the homophile/gay rights movement), some of the leadership of DOB was saying we really need to start with the women’s organizations, and we didn’t know how to go about it. We didn’t know how to get connected.”⁵⁶ Lyon

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Transcript of talk given by Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, San Francisco State University, March 25, 1998; General Files, GLBTHS, San Francisco.

and Martin told O'Hanrahan that they wanted to join NOW – as a couple. “She said, ‘oh that’s wonderful’ and put it up to their executive committee.” While they were allowed to join as a couple initially, the “couples’ membership” was quickly eliminated as an option by NOW’s leadership. (Evidently it had never been imagined that two women would claim it as applicable to them.)

Lyon and Martin blame Betty Friedan, who was being challenged by lesbians within the organization at home in New York as well on her anti-gay stance. After a few years of simmering internal struggles over sexuality, including “purges” of self-identified or accused lesbians, the second Congress to Unite Women, held in New York City early in May, 1970, was the site of the historic confrontation over lesbianism in NOW. Carried out by women wearing t-shirts proclaiming themselves the “Lavender Menace,” the protest included DOB members and *Ladder* regulars Martha Shelley and Rita Mae Brown, as well as Karla Jay and others. It was reported extensively in *The Ladder*, September 1970: the first issue published independently of DOB.

...this was (either) a highly successful conference wherein a number of previously ignored but very present Lesbians in women’s liberation had their say in public to the cheers and huzzahs of their heterosexual sisters, or it was a fiasco in which all hell broke loose...

Since I attended the whole thing, please let me make clear that while not the most orderly meeting in women’s liberation that I’ve been honored to attend, it was certainly the most illuminating and did more to convince all women that cooperation is essential.⁵⁷

As Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon recounted in *Lesbian/Woman* in 1972, the 1970 Lavender Menace action helped break through NOW’s nervousness about lesbianism,

⁵⁷ “Cross Currents,” *The Ladder*, Vol. 14, No. 11 and 12 (August/September 1970): 33.

due in large part to new national leadership from a black woman who understood the importance of inclusion. “For the first time they had a conference down in LA in ’71. That was when Aileen Hernandez, who is an African-American woman, became the second national president of NOW. She lives here in the City and has been our mentor in the women’s movement.” Hernandez was a seasoned San Francisco labor and civil rights activist who had been named by President Lyndon Johnson in 1965 as the only woman member of the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. “She was president (of NOW) and she was stuck with all of this hassle going on about lesbians. So she asked us if we would convene a workshop at the LA conference.”⁵⁸

They agreed, and as the conference opened, they found in the official packets “a beautiful statement” from the host chapter about the importance of lesbians in NOW. There were many statements of support from NOW chapters all over the country, from Atlanta to Detroit to Los Angeles, testifying to the crucial role lesbians had played in the organization at the local level. “They said lesbianism was pro-feminism and it (NOW) couldn’t throw out lesbians and still have a movement.”

As had happened with the American Civil Liberties Union and gay rights, it was local efforts by chapter activists, including some who had gained organizing skills through their work with the Daughters, that changed the thinking of National NOW on lesbianism. Martin, and Lyon, were encouraged by the local activism in support of lesbians; they were also enjoying their involvement in a new political women’s world. The same could not be said of their connection to the gay movement.

⁵⁸ *Feminist Chronicles: 1965*, The Feminist Majority Foundation, 2000.
<http://www.feminist.org>

In the December 1970 – January 1971 issue of *The Ladder*, Grier printed Martin's infamous "goodbye" to the homophile and gay liberation movements, "If That's All There Is." Martin and other DOB activists had gone to the NACHO meeting the previous August – on National Women's Strike Day, August 26, 1970 – to confront the coalition on its irrelevance to women. The delegates had passed a resolution in support of women's liberation, but took no other actions on the women's complaints of exclusion and invisibility. "They would not address themselves to the underlying reason for the existence of separate women's organizations – that the female homosexual faces sex discrimination not only in the heterosexual world, but within the homophile community." Martin's rage at her gay male comrades was huge. "Fifteen years of masochism is enough," she wrote. "I will not be your 'nigger' any longer. Nor was I ever your mother. Those are stultifying roles you laid on me, and I shall no longer concern myself with your toilet training...as I bid you adieu, I leave each of you to your own device. Take care of it, stroke it gently, mouth it and fondle it. As the center of your consciousness, it's really all you have."⁵⁹

Not surprisingly, Martin's "goodbye speech" created quite a stir in the gay movement, not the least of which was among some of the former Daughters with whom she had worked most closely over the years. Gittings and Lahusen felt that her anger was misplaced and misdirected. "We didn't think the men were really sexist," Lahusen has commented. "And neither of us felt like we had been discriminated against because we

⁵⁹ Del Martin, "Is That All There is?" *The Ladder*, Vol. 15 No. 3 and 4 (December 1970 – January 1971): 4-6.

were women. We were fighting for our rights as gay people.”⁶⁰ Ironically, it was Barbara Grier who applauded – and prominently displayed -- Martin’s diatribe despite their personal and political rupture over Grier’s “theft” of *The Ladder* six months earlier.

There are other examples of DOB leadership in the women’s liberation movement and the many arenas of activism launched by 1970s’ feminists. As mentioned previously, Del Martin wrote the groundbreaking book *Battered Wives* in 1976, exposing the extent of family violence in the U.S. and helped found the first battered women’s shelter, La Casa de las Madres, in San Francisco. Other Daughters, like Irene Weiss in Los Angeles, helped create spaces like Califia Community, which organized anti-racism and classism workshops in the mid-1970s. As discussed in Chapter Three, it was due to some of DOB’s local activists that a second critically-important lesbian-feminist publication, *Lesbian Tide*, was started in 1971 by Jeanne Cordova and others in Los Angeles. Across the country, Daughters like Diane Sabin in Boston were part of the early efforts to create women-produced and women-centered music concerts and festivals in the 1970s. DOB leaders helped advance women’s organizing in the new decade and did so as out and proud lesbians.⁶¹

However, the 1970s would also bring many challenges to the women’s movement, especially from women of color who were increasingly offering critiques and resistance to the universalizing notions of second wave feminism (that is, that all women

⁶⁰ Kay Lahusen, interview with author, November 8, 2003.

⁶¹ Del Martin, *Battered Wives*; Yolanda Retter, “Lesbian (Feminist) Los Angeles, 1970-1990: An Exploratory Ethnohistory” www.usc.edu/isd/archives/queerfrontiers, 1995; see also Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, *Lesbian/Woman*, 270.

share an essential connection *as women* that is primary, minimizing differences of race, geography, class, age).

In 1974, Barbara Smith and other black feminists in Boston started the Combahee River Collective, named after Harriet Tubman's 1863 guerrilla action in the Port Royal region of South Carolina to free more than 750 slaves. "A combined anti-racist and anti-sexist position drew us together initially, and as we developed politically we addressed ourselves to heterosexism and economic oppression under capitalism," they wrote in 1977. "We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work." They and other feminist women of color pinpointed white feminism's unwillingness to confront head-on the continuing reality of U.S. racism and American colonialist legacies around the globe, and created new women's organizations centered on racial and ethnic identities, as well as gender and sexuality.⁶²

At least one former DOB leader, Ernestine Eckstein, worked with a black feminist group after leaving DOB. She dropped out of active involvement in the Daughters by 1968, moved to northern California from New York, and joined Black Women Organized for Action, based in Oakland.⁶³ She never worked with DOB again.

⁶² Combahee River Collective, "The Combahee River Collective Statement," Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*. New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983; 272-275. See also Cherie Moraga, "La Guera," Gloria Anzaldua and Cherie Moraga, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1981. 27-34.

⁶³ Phyllis Lyon, interview with author, San Francisco CA, May 2002. No additional information about Eckstein is known at this time. As Lyon tells it, a friend of Martin and Lyon's was part of Black Women Organized for Action in the 1970s and when she

Further, the issue of whether transgender people were welcome in DOB would split the San Francisco Chapter in 1973, foreshadowing similar debates within the women's and lesbian movements. Beth Elliott was a male-to-female transgender lesbian who joined DOB in 1971. She was honest about her transition and, after some controversy and disagreements among the members, was accepted, even becoming vice-president of the local chapter. As she tells the story, an ex-lover "outed" her at the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference in Los Angeles, when she was on stage performing on the opening night of the three-day event.

The resulting furor – "there's a man on stage!" -- threatened to tear the conference apart; Elliott describes it as "an emotional battering" that caused her great distress. She took a temporary break from activism, but returned to SF DOB the next year. She stayed involved until 1976. "Where else was I going to go?" she asked recently. "I'm a lesbian. DOB was my home, too."⁶⁴

learned of Eckstein's past involvement in DOB in New York, she urged her to get in touch with them. In Lyon's words, "she had our number but never called." Gittings and Lahusen have surmised that by the time she left DOB, Eckstein was "tired of all the personal issues – she wanted a more political organization." Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen, interview with author, June 25, 2002.

⁶⁴ Beth Elliott, interviews with author, Oakland CA, May 12 and 13, 2002. The first time that the issue of transgenderism is recorded in *The Ladder* is July 1958, when editor Phyllis Lyon published a letter to DOB from "Lady Kay, New York, N.Y." who suggested using the term "femmen" for "females in male bodies" (Vol. 2 No. 10): 26.

Conclusion:

“Everybody tried to hush that up...”

The year was 1955. Dwight D. Eisenhower was president. Disneyland just opened. Rose Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man. And Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin helped found the nation's first lesbian organization.

Nearly 50 years later, Lyon, 79, and Martin, 83, are still making history. On Feb. 12, two days shy of their 51st anniversary together, they became the first same-sex couple officially to get a marriage license in San Francisco, helping to launch a local gay marriage movement that has been both applauded and denounced.¹

From as nearby as the East Bay and as far away as Scandinavia, the flowers, calls, letters, emails and cards of congratulations poured in to the already-overflowing house perched high on one of San Francisco's hills, overlooking Eureka Valley and “the Castro.” “We can't believe all this,” Lyon said, days after she and her life-long partner had been convinced to break new ground and get married. As the *USA Today* story (quoted above) put it, “The pair never felt the need to get married, but they did it for the same reason they became domestic partners: to speak out.” The act instantly catapulted them into international celebrity; the photograph of them in pink and green pantsuits, gently embracing while behind them a small semi-circle of women and men smile, weep, and celebrate, went around the world almost instantly.

¹ Janet Kornblum, *USA Today* (printed in *The News Journal*, Wilmington, DE), Monday, March 8, 2004, E2.

Convinced that the action would advance the cause of lesbian and gay rights, they agreed to go to San Francisco City Hall and be part of the new mayor's efforts to challenge what he saw as an archaic, discriminatory law. It was completely in keeping with everything else Lyon and Martin had done in their lives, and it surprised no one who knew them. What was surprising was how little is still known about the organization they helped create nearly a half-century ago.

The Daughters of Bilitis was a unique example of women's organizing during oppressive times. Through its leadership in the predominantly male homophile movement of the 1950s and 1960s, its publication *The Ladder*, and its network of local chapters, DOB played a crucial role in creating lesbian identity, visibility, institutions and political strategies from 1955 to 1970. They helped develop one of the 20th century's most significant movements for social change: the gay and lesbian civil rights movement. They also helped to broaden the definition of social justice to include sexuality.

Fundamentally, my research into the Daughters of Bilitis has led me to the conclusion that the academic and popular characterizations of the homophile activists as "conservative," posited against the gay liberationist "radicals," is far too simple. It flattens the historical, political, social and cultural contexts within which these movements emerged and grew, and it privileges one style, one response, and one method of organizing against injustice over others that may be just as life-altering and effective but not as obvious or confrontational. When it comes to women's organizing, especially lesbian activism, the need to expand our understanding and definition of what constitutes progressive social change is even more acute.

For example, recently I attended a reception at the Astraea Lesbian Action Foundation in New York. Astraea is the oldest and largest funder of women's grassroots organizing on issues of sexuality and gender, and they make grants to lesbian groups around the globe. As part of their remarks at the party, two long-time staff members told of receiving an email from women in Mongolia who had recently been given a grant. They reported that the money was used to create a meeting space for lesbians. The women wrote, "We now have a place for the women – the lesbians – to socialize. When we started, we didn't know any, but now there are many who come here." For them, this was a definite break – a radical shift – from what had existed. It had never been done before.

Fifty years ago, eight lesbians in San Francisco faced the same basic need and answered it -- without any lesbian organization to turn to for support, in fact without any medical or religious or legal authority anywhere telling them that what they wanted was right and natural and legitimate. They intended first and foremost to build the self-confidence necessary for lesbians to claim their place in society, but they never saw that society as flawless. The very idea that they could form a group – and then incorporate it under both California and federal laws -- for women to explore the "problem" of "the female variant" was a radical one. The program of education, research and legislative reform they adopted for themselves had never before been attempted.

The repeated comparisons to the black civil rights struggle within DOB and among the homophile groups of the 1950s and 1960s tell us how much they saw themselves, as gay men and lesbians, as marginalized and despised people, a minority whose only weapons were the rights guaranteed to all Americans by the Bill of Rights

and later amendments. It was only in 1968, when some DOB leaders began to cast their lot more with feminist struggles than gay ones, did their rights discourse shift, from seeing themselves as being part of a “minority” of gay people to being part of the “majority” that was women. Then, the lesbian-feminists in DOB would claim their numerically-superior status as women, entitled to equal pay and equal treatment with men, while also challenging their marginalization as lesbians within feminist organizations.

While they did not employ revolutionary rhetoric, the Daughters wanted no less than massive changes in American attitudes and behaviors toward gender and sexuality. In order to facilitate these changes, DOB leaders created a well-regarded publication reaching thousands of subscribers and many tens of thousands more who “borrowed” copies or eyed its contents at newsstands. They also moved from eagerly recording every printed reference to homosexuality and making a few appearances on local radio shows to inclusion in nationally-syndicated television programs. In both ways, they helped create and shape an alternative vision of “the lesbian.” insuring that every month at least one American magazine showed her as young, attractive, and average. Other than the sexy cover girls of the paperback novels, and a handful of tragic theatrical characters, there was nowhere else to see lesbians in popular American culture in the 1950s and 1960s. The Daughters changed all that.

This project, then, has been an attempt to tell a fuller story of the Daughters of Bilitis than has been told previously. It has been driven by my desire to flesh out the names, backgrounds, and experiences of some of the women who were its members and leaders. In reflecting on their stories, I believe that we can begin to understand the ways

in which the lesbian organizers of the 1950s and 1960s began to *radically* alter lesbians' lives. Those alterations helped to bring us to where we are today, a place where "gays and lesbians are very much a part of the world," as an unmasked, widely visible, wildly divergent mass of people. At least one gay historian, John D'Emilio, sees these alterations as "irreversible."²

Yet for all the advances that have been made with popular acceptance of same-sex desire and relationships since the Daughters formed, it is also true that our sisters are still stalked and silenced. The murder of a young black butch lesbian, Sakia Gunn, took place at a bus stop in Newark, New Jersey in 2003, just one year ago; the assailant, a stranger to her, is now in jail, having been charged with a hate crime. Members of her family and the black lesbians and other young people who were her friends have demanded that both local law enforcement and the larger gay community pay attention. They are insisting on visibility for Gunn and the many women she represents. Their message is that we are still at risk, as women and as lesbians, especially if we are young, black, and butch. "The crisis of the city's LGBT youth came to the attention of adult activists...when thousands of young lesbians took to the streets of Newark and rallied in front of City Hall demanding increased police protection and tolerance for LGBT youth in the city's high schools," a recent report in *Gay City News* noted.³

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the infamous murder of another lesbian in the New York area. It was also a violent act by a hateful stranger who tormented her.

² John D'Emilio, *The World Turned: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and Culture*, xi.

³ Mick Meenan, "PFLAG Launches a Newark Chapter," *Gay City News*, New York City, Jan. 29 – Feb. 4, 2004, 3.

But Kitty Genovese's lover could not find release for her rage in public demonstrations and righteous demands that the City take steps to make changes. Her lover, Mary Ann Zielonko, still lives with the memory not only of Genovese's brutal murder but the fact that no one acknowledged their relationship. Typed by every press account as Genovese's "roommate," Zielonko has finally broken her silence. "She was actually my partner... We were lovers together. Everybody tried to hush that up."⁴

Perhaps it is the difference in the lesbian community's response to two equally horrifying murders – outspoken demands versus painful silence – that represents what we have gained in the last half-century. Acts of hate and violence directed at lesbians, particularly those transgressing cultural norms of race and sexuality, remind us viscerally that context is all-important to our understanding of our current conditions as well as our history. As Jean Rhys said in 1975:

Listen to me. All of writing is a huge lake. There are rivers that feed the lake, like Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. And there are mere trickles, like Jean Rhys. All that matters is feeding the lake. I don't matter. The lake matters.⁵

I hope that I have been able to provide a tiny trickle, to "feed the lake" of knowledge and understanding about what it meant to challenge U.S. gender and sexual mores in the mid-20th century and what it might teach us about activism in the 21st.

⁴ Jim Rasenberger, *The New York Times*, Sunday, February 8, 2004, Section 14, 1, 9. Kitty Genovese was chased and brutally murdered by a stranger on March 13, 1964 in Kew Gardens, Queens, New York. "Seldom has a crime in New York City galvanized public outrage so intensely," Rasenberger noted, in large part because the young woman's screams and pleas for help supposedly were ignored by her neighbors.

⁵ David Plante, "Jean Rhys: A Remembrance," *The Paris Review*, No. 76 (Fall 1979): 247. Thanks to Gerry Gomez Pearlberg for sharing this quote.

Historiographic Essay:

A Brief Overview of the History of Homophile Organizing

In an interview with the Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review in the summer of 1994, Martin Duberman acknowledged the courage it took for the 1950s' gay and lesbian activists to get involved. He noted that "those people who stood up, who joined the Mattachine Society or the Daughters of Bilitis, these were people who were in a real sense 'unsocialized.' People like me had been properly socialized. We had been taught that gay is bad, disturbed, second-rate. Somehow there were a few hundred people who didn't get that message. God bless them; we all owe them a great debt."¹

The explosion of activism for gender and sexual liberation in the 1970s fueled the search for a gay and lesbian past. Over the last three decades, groundbreaking scholars such as Jonathan Ned Katz² have sought to uncover and analyze the links between the post-World War II homophile organizations – mainly Mattachine Society, ONE, Inc. and the Daughters of Bilitis -- and the late 1960s' gay liberation groups. John D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* was the first full-length work to chart the development of the homophile movement in the 1950s and 1960s.³

¹ Martin Duberman, "The Unmaking of a Movement," *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide* Vol. XI, No. 1 (January-February 2004): 22-23.

² Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Crowell, 1976); *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983); *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York: Penguin Group, 1995).

³ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

At the same time, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Blanche Wiesen Cook, and Lillian Faderman began to explore the worlds of women-loving women.⁴ A few years later, they were joined by Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, and Esther Newton, whose pioneering and community-based work helped expand our knowledge of the connections between, and differences among, not only gay men and lesbians but within the small lesbian circles that existed in mid-20th century U.S. cities.⁵

I am indebted to all of them, as well as to other activists and scholars like Allan Berube, Lynn Fonfa⁶, Joan Nestle and Deborah Edel⁷, for insuring that the foundational gay organizing work done in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s would not be lost and

⁴ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America," *Signs* 1 (1975): 1-29; Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman." *A Heritage of Her Own*, Nancy Cott and Elizabeth Pleck, eds. (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1979) and "The Historical Denial of Lesbianism," *Radical History Review* 20 (1979): 60-65; Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1981)

⁵ Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men; Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) and *To Believe in Women: What Lesbians Have Done for America – A History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999); Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994).

⁶ Lynn Fonfa helped create one of the first lesbian archives in the country, the West Coast Women's Collection, in 1981. It is now the June Mazer Lesbian Archives in West Hollywood, CA.

⁷ Joan Nestle and Deborah Edel are among the founders of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Brooklyn, NY.

forgotten. They inspired me and many others to dig down deep into what had been “hidden from history.”⁸

But despite more than twenty-five years of writing and researching, the old labels that were first applied to the homophile organizations during the heat of the 1970s’ liberationist fervor – the same heat in which I first acknowledged my own same-sex desires -- have been continuously reapplied. Limited ways of describing the homophiles persist, rendering their complicated mix of survival tactics and uplift strategies as simple assimilationism, despite the growth of complicating evidence since the 1980s and a deepening understanding of the period in which the homophile groups organized.⁹

There are several recently-published (and otherwise excellent) histories which uncritically continue the characterization of DOB as generally “conservative,” or date DOB dissidents’ involvement in more “radical” forms of activism as the mid-1960s, such as Nan Alamilla Boyd’s *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965*; Steven Capsuto’s *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television, 1930s to the Present*; and Marc Stein in *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Love*.

While it is true that the homophiles worked for inclusion and integration into American society, the oft-repeated characterizations of them as less “radical” than later

⁸ Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, George Chauncey, eds., *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989).

⁹ Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Steven Capsuto, *Alternate Channels: The Uncensored Story of Gay and Lesbian Images on Radio and Television, 1930s to the Present* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2000); and Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

gay liberationists can overshadow the pioneering nature of their early organizing work, undertaken as it was in the chilliest part of the Cold War period. It also continues to perpetuate a false dichotomy between pre- and post-Stonewall gay activism, and incorrectly frames grassroots organizing as consisting of only polarized “radical” and “conservative” approaches, rather than seeing the possibilities of varying tactics and a spectrum of viable strategies.¹⁰

However, I am heartened to note the articles, interviews, theses, and other works that deepen our understanding of the oppressive times within which the 1950s homophile groups organized. They offer illuminating, alternative views of the tactics and strategies adopted and begin to draw attention to the particularities of women’s participation in challenging homophobia and sexism.

For example, Kelly Anderson’s 1994 M.A. thesis, *Out in the Fifties: The Daughters of Bilitis and the Politics of Identity*, argues persuasively that shifting definitions of economic and social class for working women in the 1950s framed the social and political contexts within which DOB organized. I am indebted to her for her insights, particularly regarding DOB as a site where nascent yet contested lesbian identities and ideologies interacted and, sometimes, clashed.¹¹ Ten years before Anderson, in 1983, Phyllis Gorman wrote about the numerous connections between DOB and the resurgent women’s movement of the 1960s. “The use of separatism as a strategy

¹⁰ The June 1969 riots against police harassment at the gay bar known as the Stonewall Inn in New York City are often used to mark the “beginnings” of the mass gay and lesbian movement in the U.S. See Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*.

¹¹ Kelly Anderson, “Out in the Fifties: The Daughters of Bilitis and the Politics of Identity.” Master’s thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 1994.

for defining a woman-only space was central to the organizational patterns that both DOB and the later women's movement utilized."¹²

Other scholars have focused on DOB's varied constituency and strategies, including their emphasis on working with researchers. Jennifer Terry, writing in 1999 in *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society*, noted of DOB and Mattachine that "their diverse members made informed strategic choices in efforts to counter homophobia and to gain public acceptance. Alongside public forums and conferences highlighting the affirmative opinions of experts, the groups used many other strategies to champion homosexual identity. They rightly identified that scientific authority would help them to turn popular opinion toward their favor."¹³ Terry recently commented to me about DOB that "the critiques were made before the full story had been told." The fact that no full-length work yet exists about the only all-female homophile organization speaks to the truth of her observation.

John Loughery's *The Other Side of Silence: Men's Lives and Gay Identities: A Twentieth-Century History*, doesn't presume to analyze lesbian organizing. His few comments on and insights into the Daughters of Bilitis are very valuable, however, and he captures the homophobic context of the times in chilling detail.¹⁴

¹² Phyllis Gorman, "The Daughters of Bilitis: A Description and Analysis of a Female Homophile Social Movement Organization, 1955-63." Master's thesis, Ohio State University, 1985.

¹³ Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in American Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 356.

¹⁴ John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence: Men's Lives and Gay Identities: A Twentieth Century History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998).

Some new scholarship has been published in the last few years that re-examines the homophile movement in general. In an article published in 2001, and in his doctoral dissertation, Martin Meeker urged us to look beyond public representations in assessing homophile activism. He sees both covert and overt strategies deployed by gay groups, particularly the Mattachine Society, in the 1950s, and states that they were able to organize and build community by consciously using “the mask” of acceptability.¹⁵

David K. Johnson’s new book, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*,¹⁶ illuminates the far-reaching impact of the assault on gay federal workers which began immediately after World War II and led to firings, forced resignations, suicide and despair for thousands of men and women for thirty years. In the book, Johnson includes only one passing reference to the Daughters of Bilitis (and does not even list them in the Index) as well as using a reproduction of a *Ladder* cover showing gay pickets in Washington, DC. (He describes *The Ladder* as “a 1960s lesbian magazine with a small national circulation.”) Despite these important omissions, *The Lavender Scare* helps to broaden our understanding of the very real and frightening powers of repression at work in the post-War period.

¹⁵ Martin Meeker, “Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 10, No. 1, January 2001; Martin Dennis Meeker, Jr., “Come Out West: Communication and the Gay and Lesbian Migration to San Francisco, 1940s-1960s,” Dissertation, University of Southern California, December, 2000.

¹⁶ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*. The one reference I found to DOB is on page 202: “When ECHO, a small east coast federation of gay organizations came out in support of picketing in the summer of 1965, the Daughters of Bilitis withdrew its membership.” The photo of gay pickets is included midway through the photo inserts; the pages are not numbered.

Further, Craig Lofton has written a recent piece on the distribution strategies employed by the homophile publications. He argues that the 1950s' gay and lesbian magazines' public visibility on newsstands around the country created "a growing nationwide challenge to the postwar edict that homosexual life and institutions had to be masked, camouflaged, or veiled in order to survive."¹⁷

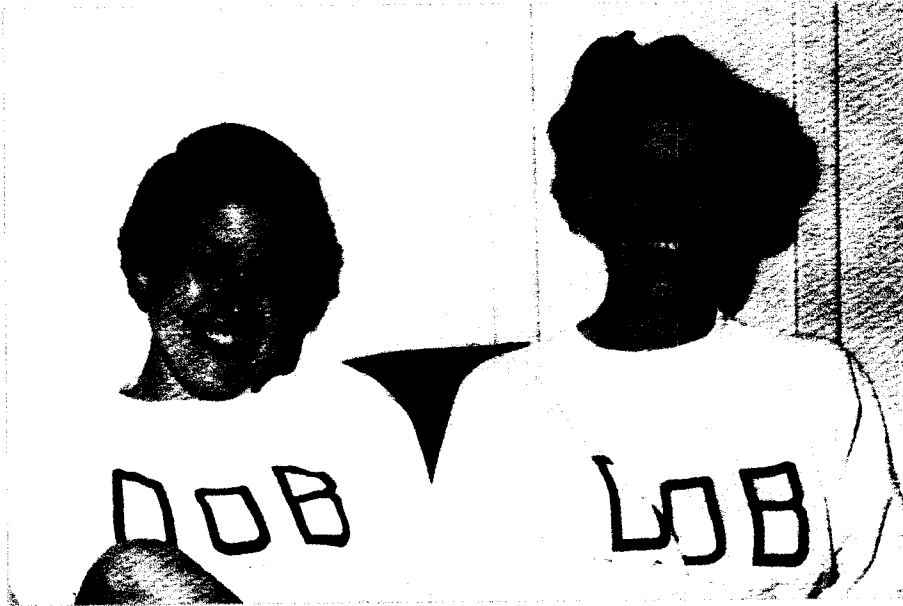
On a personal note, my own thinking – about DOB; about women's organizing in the 1950s; about the repressive cultural and political climate in terms of gender, sexuality, race and radicalism; about the interplay between time and place -- has been enriched by the work of all of the scholars mentioned, whether I completely agree with their assessments of DOB or not. I have further been challenged by conversations with other activists and scholars of women's history and sexuality, such as Bonnie Anderson, as well as the writings of Gloria Anzaldua, Lorraine Hansberry, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, and Barbara Smith, all of whom have been cited herein.

I have also learned a great deal about LGBTQ scholarship through my involvement with the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the City University of New York Graduate Center. Founded by Martin Duberman, CLAGS has also been directed by scholars Jill Dolan, Alisa Solomon and Paisley Currah, all of whom have helped broaden activist and academic perspectives on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered lives.¹⁸ In reviewing applications for CLAGS fellowships this spring, I was inspired by the numbers

¹⁷ Craig Lofton, Ph.D. cand., University of Southern California, "Newsstand Encounters: Gay Institutional Visibility in the Age of McCarthy," paper presented at the 2004 Meeting of the American Historical Association, Washington DC, January 6, 2004.

¹⁸ See Martin Duberman, "Foreword," and Alisa Solomon and Paisley Currah, "Introduction," in *Queer Ideas: The David R. Kessler Lectures in Lesbian and Gay Studies* (New York: The Feminist Press of the City University of New York, 2003).

of graduate students and junior faculty, from widely diverse backgrounds and disciplines, who are exploding the narrow confines of popular perceptions of the 1950s. From the standpoint of yet another repressive period in U.S. history, it seems that finally, today, we may be able to understand the complicated women who wore, decorated, and then discarded the mask of conformity a half-century ago.



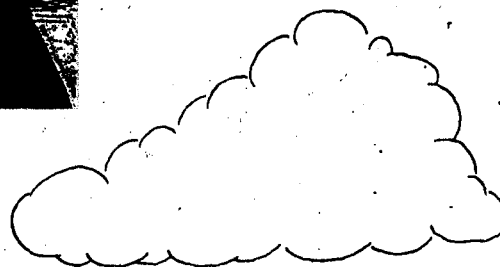
Left: "Kay" and
"Kelly" in the early
1960s.

Below: DOB
Second Annual
Picnic. Tilden Park,
Berkeley CA, 1956.





The Ladder
The First Issue
October, 1956
Front Cover



The Ladder
First Issue
October 1956
Back Cover

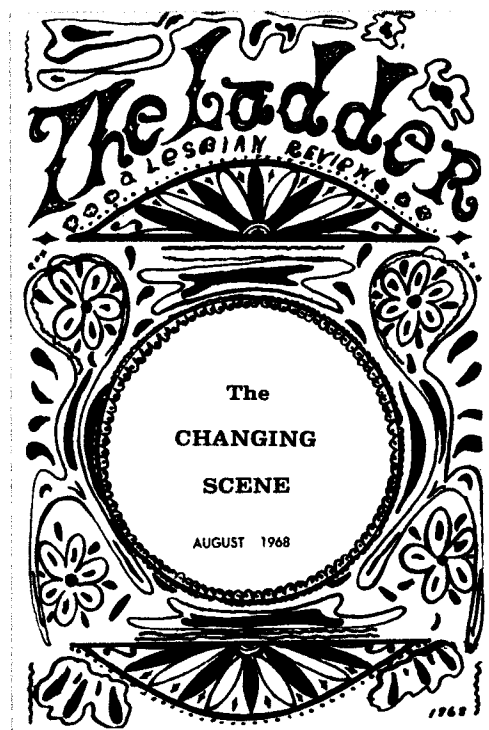




The Ladder, October, 1957, Front Cover



Mattachine Review, May, 1961,
with Valerie Taylor



The Ladder, August, 1968, Front Cover



The Ladder, August/September, 1969,
featuring DOB President Rita Laporte

THE LADDER

Adults Only .50
June 1966

A LESBIAN REVIEW



Left:

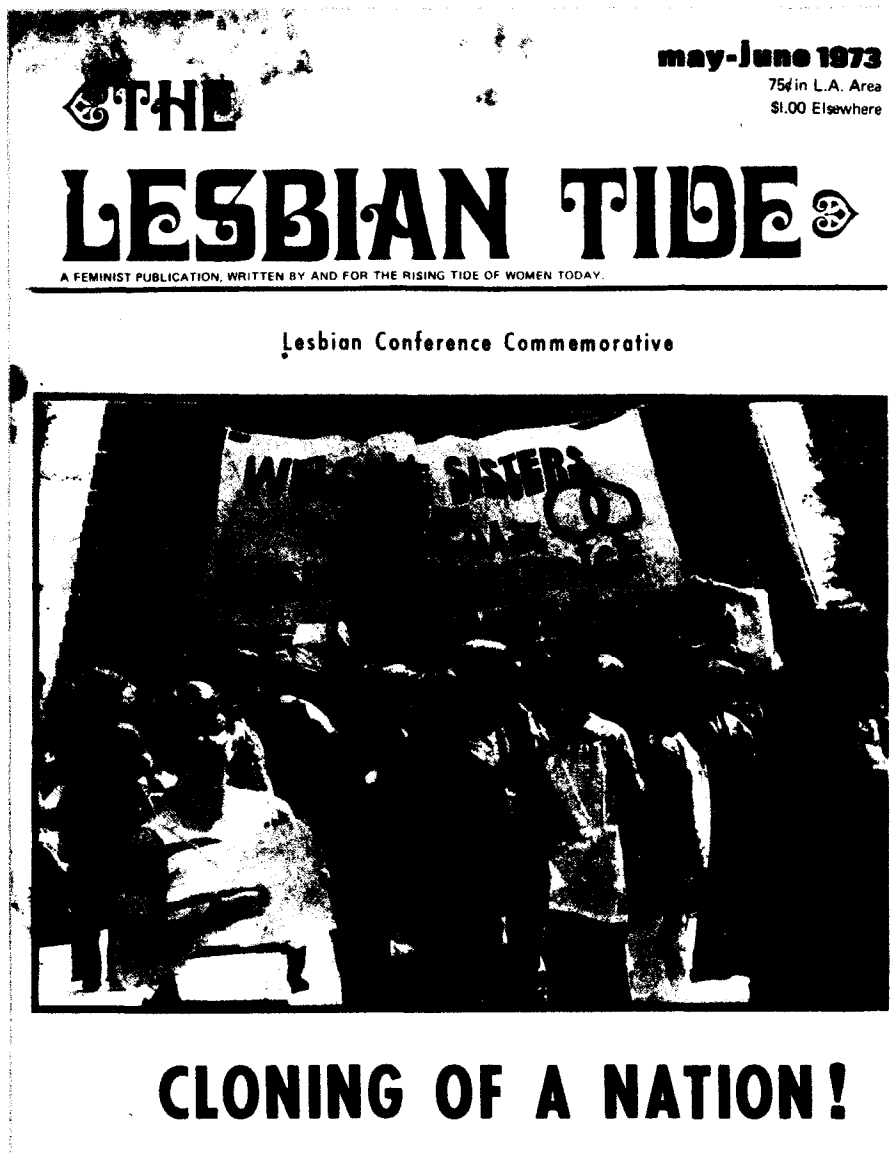
The Ladder

June, 1966, Front Cover.

Ernestine Eckstein was the first African-American woman to be featured on the cover of a national gay publication.

Below: Eckstein is pictured at left, wearing sunglasses and picketing the White House, Washington DC, 1965.





*Lesbian Tide,
May-June 1973
Front Cover*

San Francisco demonstration, late 1970s. Del Martin is pictured at far right with Nina Kaiser, DOB SF's last president.



APPENDIX A
LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

<u>Name</u>	<u>Place Interviewed</u>	<u>Date Interviewed</u>
Ada Bello	Philadelphia, PA	September 17, 2003
Lois (Williams) Beeby	Sunnyvale, CA	May 27, 2002
Clara Brock (Brock Harper)	San Jose, CA	May 17, 2002
Patti Brown	New York, NY	May 10, 1996 July 20, 2002 (email)
Jeanne Cordova	Los Angeles, CA	September 7, 2002
Beth Elliott	Oakland, CA	March 12 & 13, 2002
Florence Fleischman	Los Angeles, CA	September 6, 2002
Eva Freund	Washington, DC	March 21, 2002 (email)
Barbara Gittings and Kay (Tobin) Lahusen	Wilmington, DE	April 23, 2002 April 30, 2002 September 20, 2002 August 23, 2003 November 8, 2003 January 30, 2004
Barbara Grier	Panacea, FL	December 29, 2003
P. D. Griffin	Berkeley, CA	May 30, 2002
Beverly Hickok	Berkeley, CA	March 14, 2002 (telephone) May 13, 2002
Sue Handley	Willows, CA	May 14, 2002

<u>Name</u>	<u>Place Interviewed</u>	<u>Date Interviewed</u>
Nina Kaiser	San Francisco, CA	September 9, 2002
Shirley Kelly	Oakland, CA	May 15, 2002
William Kelley	Chicago, IL	October 16, 2002
Marie Kuda	Oak Park, IL	October 17, 2002 (telephone)
Natalie Lando	Oakland, CA	May 15, 2002
Patricia Lyon	Berkeley, CA	May 17, 2002
Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin	San Francisco, CA	February 18, 1997 April 25, 1997 May 11, 1998 March 1, 1999 March 6, 2002 May 15, 2002 June 10, 2003 February 13, 2004
Marjorie McCann	Philadelphia, PA	September 17, 2003
Barbara McLean	Portland, ME	August 21, 2003 (telephone)
Venice Ostwald (Vostwald),	Henderson, NV San Jose, CA	May 26, 2002 (telephone) September 5, 2002
Tracy Rappaport	San Francisco, CA	March 30, 2002
Audrey Rose	Sonoma, CA	March 26, 2002
Stella Rush (Sten Russell)	Westminster, CA	May 2, 2002 (telephone) May 21 and 22, 2002 May 27, 2002 (telephone) September 14, 2002 September 16, 2003 February 16, 2004

<u>Name</u>	<u>Place Interviewed</u>	<u>Date Interviewed</u>
Karen (Wells) Ryer	Guerneville, CA	May 30, 2002
Pat Sax	San Francisco, CA	February 23, 2000
Martha Shelley	Oakland, CA	February 16, 2004
Billye Talmadge (Billie Tallmij)	Chevy Chase, MD	March 30, 2002
Carol (Vovolakis) Wilson	Oakland, CA	May 15, 2002

APPENDIX B

NATIONAL OFFICERS, DAUGHTERS OF BILITIS: 1955 – 1970

October 1955

President:	Del Martin
Vice-President:	Noni Frey
Secretary:	Phyllis Lyon
Treasurer:	Rosemary Sliepen
Trustee:	Marcia Foster

October 1956

President:	Del Martin
Vice-President:	Tori Fry (Noni Frey)
Secretary:	Ann Ferguson (Phyllis Lyon)
Treasurer:	Pat Hamilton
Trustee:	D. Griffin (P. D. Griffin)

November 1956 – February 1957

President:	D. Griffin (P. D. Griffin)
Vice-President	Del Martin
Secretary:	Jean Peterson
Treasurer:	Pat Hamilton
Publications Director:	Ann Ferguson (Phyllis Lyon)

March 1957 – May 1957

President:	Helen Sanders (Helen Sandoz)
Vice-President:	Del Martin
Secretary:	Jean Peterson
Treasurer:	Toni Navarro
Publications Director:	Phyllis Lyon

June 1957 – July 1957

President:	Helen Sanders
Vice-President:	Del Martin
Secretary:	Marty Elliott
Treasurer:	Toni Navarro
Publications Director:	Phyllis Lyon

August 1957 – September 1957

President:	Helen Sanders
Vice-President:	Del Martin
Secretary:	Marty Elliott
Treasurer:	Audree Allen
Publications Director:	Phyllis Lyon

October 1957 – February 1958

President:	Del Martin
Vice-President:	Billie Tallmij (Billye Talmadge)
Secretary:	Marty Elliott
Treasurer:	Audree Allen
Publications Director:	Helen Sanders (Helen Sandoz)
Librarian:	Barbara Stephens

March 1958 – November 1958

President:	Del Martin
Vice-President:	Billie Tallmij (Billye Talmadge)
Recording Secretary:	Marty Elliott
Corresponding Secretary:	Cathy Pachico
Publications Director:	Helen Sanders (Helen Sandoz)
Treasurer:	Audree Allen
Librarian:	Barbara Stephens

December 1958 – August 1959

President:	Del Martin
Vice-President:	Marty Elliott
Recording Secretary:	Patti Brown
Corresponding Secretary:	Billie Tallmij (Billye Talmadge)
Treasurer:	Carol Wilson
Publications Director:	Sten Russell (Stella Rush)

September 1959 – June 1960

President:	Del Martin
Vice-President:	Marty Elliott
Recording Secretary:	Patti Brown
Corresponding Secretary:	Billie Tallmij (Billye Talmadge)
Publications Director:	Sten Russell (Stella Rush)
Treasurer:	Audree Allen

July 1960¹ - January 1961

President:	Jaye Bell
Vice-President:	Helen Sanders (Helen Sandoz)
Recording Secretary:	Dottie Dee
Corresponding Secretary:	Chris Hayden
Public Relations Director:	Jo Carson
Treasurer:	Ev Howe

February 1961- October 1962

President:	Jaye Bell
Vice-President:	Helen Sanders (Helen Sandoz)
Secretary:	Dottie Dee
Public Relations Director:	Jo Carson
Treasurer:	Ev Howe

November 1962 – October 1963

President:	Jaye Bell*
Vice President:	Marty Elliott
Recording Secretary:	Margaret Heinz
Corresponding Secretary	Barbara Gittings
Public Relations Director:	Meredith Grey (Marion Glass)
Treasurer:	Ev Howe

*resigned November 1963; all other offices remained.

January 1964 – July 1964

President:	Cleo Glenn (Cleo Bonner)
Recording Secretary:	Margaret Heinz
Corresponding Secretary:	Barbara Gittings
Public Relations Director:	Meredith Grey (Marion Glass)
Treasurer:	Ev Howe

¹ At the 1960 Daughters of Bilitis Convention in San Francisco, new officers were elected for the organization, beginning the tradition of electing the organization's leadership every two years.

August 1964 – February 1966

President:	Cleo Glenn (Cleo Bonner)
Vice-President:	Del Shearer
Recording Secretary:	Agatha Mathys
Corresponding Secretary:	Marjorie McCann
Public Relations Director:	Phyllis Leon (Phyllis Lyon)
Treasurer:	Del Martin

March 1966 – September 1966

President:	Cleo Glenn (Cleo Bonner)
Vice-President	Kris Leuthold
Recording Secretary	Meredith Grey (Marion Glass)
Corresponding Secretary:	Marjorie McCann
Public Relations Director:	Phyllis Lyon
Treasurer:	Del Martin

October 1966 – August 1968

President:	Shirley Willer
Vice President:	Lois Williams (Lois Beeby)
Recording Secretary:	Meredith Grey (Marion Glass)
Corresponding Secretary:	Sten Russell (Stella Rush)
Public Relations Director:	Phyllis Lyon
Treasurer:	Del Martin*

*resigned June 1968; all other officers remained.

September 1968 – June/July 1969

President:	Rita Laporte
Vice President, East:	Joan Kent
Vice President, West:	Rinalda Reagan
Secretary:	Lynd James
Treasurer:	Lois Williams (Lois Beeby)*

Chapter Presidents are also included on The Board

*resigned May 1969; all other officers remained.

August/September 1969 – December/January 1969/1970

President:	Rita Laporte
Vice President, East:	Joan Kent
Vice President, West	Rinalda Reagan*
Secretary:	Lynd James
Treasurer:	Leona Mac

Chapter Presidents are also included on The Board

*resigned November 1969; all other officers remained.

February/March 1970 – April/May 1970

President:	Rita Laporte
Vice President, East:	Joan Kent
Vice President, West	Jess K. Lane
Treasurer:	Leona Mac

Chapter Presidents are also included on The Board

June/July 1970²

President:	Rita Laporte
Vice President, West:	Jess K. Lane

Chapter Presidents are also included on The Board

² In August, 1970 the Daughters of Bilitis voted to disband the national organization and its governing board. In July that year, Rita Laporte and Barbara Grier had taken *The Ladder* from DOB and began to publish it privately.

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San Francisco, CA

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Don Lucas Papers
San Francisco Women's Building Records
Lesbian and Gay Advisory Committee to SF Human Rights Commission,
1990-1992
GLBTHS Periodical Collection
GLBTHS Vertical Files, including Clippings File
GLBTHS Ephemera Files – Organizations

Gerber/Hart Library
Chicago, IL

Valerie Taylor Papers
City of Chicago Lesbian and Gay Hall of Fame
Mattachine Midwest Collection

June Mazer Lesbian Archives
West Hollywood, CA

Daughters of Bilitis Papers
Marion Zimmer Bradley Papers
Vice Versa Collection
West Coast Women's Collection

Lesbian Herstory Archives
Brooklyn, NY

Daughters of Bilitis Videotape Project
Daughters of Bilitis Organizational Files
Julie Lee Papers
Alma Routsong Papers
Shirley Willer Papers

New York Public Library
New York, NY

“Becoming Visible: The Legacy of Stonewall,” An exhibition on the history of
New York’s lesbian and gay communities; June 18 – September 24, 1994

International Gay and Lesbian Collection: Daughters of Bilitis – New York
Chapter

ONE Institute and Archives
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA

Lesbian History Project: Lesbians of Color Collection (Yolanda Retter)

William Way Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center and Archives
Philadelphia, PA

Barbara Gittings and Kay Tobin Lahusen Collection

Private Collections

Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen, Wilmington DE
Beverly Hickok, Berkeley CA
Lois Johnson and Shari Barden, Boston MA
Nina Kaiser, Oakland CA
Shirley Kelley, Oakland CA
Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, San Francisco CA
Stella Rush, Westminster CA

Periodicals Consulted

Chrysalis
Gay City News
Gay Community News
Journal of Homosexuality
Journal of the History of Homosexuality
Journal of Women’s History
Lambda Literary Report
Lesbian Tide
Mattachine Review
Off Our Backs
On Our Backs
ONE

Periodicals Consulted, continued

OUT/Look
Radical History Review
Signs
Sisters
Socialist Review
The Advocate
The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review (now *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*)
The Ladder
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