

# In A Queer Time and Place

LGBTQ Archivist **Andrew Shaffer** looks at the history of queer-specific spaces and businesses in Madison's past, now part of the collection at the LGBTQ Archives at U.W.-Madison.

There is no Castro in Madison; no Boystown, or West Hollywood, or Valencia Street. Particular streets or neighborhoods have been known as queer hotspots, but Madison's social and political life has never been confined to a single area. Instead, Madison's LGBTQ community has long been woven into the fabric of the city. The U.W.-Madison Archives is gathering pictures, stories, videos, and other ephemera from many of the spaces where LGBTQ people have gathered throughout the region. The buildings may be gone, but their memories live on and continue to inform the lives of the people that called them home.

In the late 1970s some women in Madison became increasingly frustrated with the lack of establishments they could enjoy together. They decided a more permanent venue was necessary and in 1977 created **Lysistrata**, a feminist restaurant and meeting space. Events

ranged from arts to politics, and often blended the two together. Most importantly, Lysistrata served as a central space for women to find each other and organize. DJ Wipperfurth, one of the founding members, said, "It was like when you first come to town people go to [A Room of One's Own] to sort of get hooked up, well people came to Lysistrata for the same reason." Lysistrata and four adjoining businesses burned down in 1982, in what was believed to be an intentionally set fire, although no suspect was ever arrested.

**Apple Island** was another women's performance and meeting space begun by Lois Stauber in 1989. Women from the community volunteered to renovate it, turning an old warehouse into a venue where they could be with their friends and lovers in a safe space that was created by women, for women. A volunteer production company was formed shortly after Apple Island opened, producing nearly one concert a month for over three years until it finally shuttered in the mid 1990s.

After managing a bar at the **Hotel Washington** from the early '70s, Rodney Scheel bought the property in 1975 and went about

reinventing it as a hub of queer life. According to Scott Seyforth, it became "a remarkable complex unlike anyplace in Madison, unlike anyplace almost anywhere." The Hotel Washington housed a number of bars and cafes, including Rod's, the Club de Wash, Café Palms, the Barber's Closet, the New Bar, and more. More than a neighborhood or even a local attraction, the complex brought in visitors from around the Midwest and across the country. Events included drag shows and live theater, the annual Mr. Rod's contest, and other competitions to reward particular talents. The hotel burned to the ground in 1996, a significant loss for many in the LGBTQ community.

In April, the U.W.-Madison Archives held a one-night exhibit that presented some of these stories. Portions of the exhibit remain on display at Steenbock Memorial Library, 550 Babcock Drive, throughout the month of May. To schedule a viewing of the archival collection so far, or to contribute your own materials, visit us online at [go.wisc.edu/LGBTQ60s](http://go.wisc.edu/LGBTQ60s).

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