

Madison LGBTQ Archives Update

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The Back Door: Madison's first gay bar

In December of 1972, Rodney Scheel opened The Back Door, the first exclusively gay bar in Madison's history and the first bar owned and operated by an openly queer-identified person. Located at 46 North Park St. at Spring St., patrons entered through the rear of the building, and followed the stairs to the bar in the basement. At the bottom of the stairs was a life-size mural of Dorothy and Toto from the Wizard of Oz with the quote, "Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

At the time, few bars in Madison were welcoming to the Madison lesbian community. In 1973 a group of lesbians approached Scheel about having a dedicated lesbian night at The Back Door. Scheel agreed, making Thursday Women's Night at The Back Door, which is seen in the pictures here. This tradition continued until the bar closed in 1978 and Scheel moved his full efforts to his new business, the Hotel Washington.

Photos from Judy Greenspan and Greg Scheel. Funding has been generously provided by the New Harvest Foundation, Inc. and the George L. Mosse Program in History. ■

