

“HOW COULD LOVE BE WRONG?”
GAY ACTIVISM AND AIDS IN CHARLOTTE, 1970-1992

by

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ABSTRACT

CHRISTINA ANNE WRIGHT. "How could love be wrong?" Gay activism and AIDS in Charlotte, 1970-1992. (Under the direction of DR. CHERYL HICKS)

Sustained gay activism in Charlotte, North Carolina, only emerged in response to the HIV AIDS epidemic. Community building among Charlotte's closeted gays and lesbians began in the 1970s with the emergence of safe spaces, particularly gay bars. However, before the mid 1980s, activism was intermittent, largely inward facing, and suffered from over-reliance on a few leaders. As the reality of AIDS gripped the community after 1985, two imperatives created by the epidemic gave rise to sustained gay and lesbian activism. First, the critical need to provide care for people suffering from AIDS galvanized the gay community into action and led to the creation of the Metrolina AIDS Project (MAP). MAP became the first outward looking and visible gay organization in Charlotte, and, critically, it enjoyed a degree of civic legitimacy. However, this civic legitimacy did not extend to the second imperative, the more contentious terrain of AIDS education. In this arena Charlotte's gay activists came into conflict with the Religious Right and the county government, which forced activists to become more politically organized. By the early 1990s, it became clear that further progress would require partnerships with straight allies, but because these allies were motivated largely by sympathy for AIDS there was limited progress on the broader gay rights agenda. The timing of gay activism and the necessity for straight alliances shows that Charlotte's experience as a mid-size Southern city differed from larger metropolitan

areas and progressive university/capital cities that have been the focus of previous historiography.

DEDICATION

To Betty and Laura, whose love of history inspired my own.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1996, Charlotte became embroiled in a spectacle that vaulted the city into the national news. The Charlotte Repertory Theatre had the distinction of being one of only six regional theatres selected by playwright Tony Kushner to perform his play, *Angels in America*, a two-part opus about the effects of AIDS on American society, politics, and religion, that had won a Pulitzer prize in 1993. Previous productions that included homosexual and AIDS themes had been well received among the city's theatre goers, and producer Keith Martin saw the play as "worthwhile theatre" that would "build future productions and audiences." However, Martin might have suspected that the performance would create controversy since Kushner had chosen Charlotte partly because of the conservative political and religious climate in the city.¹

Days before the play opened at the North Carolina Blumenthal Performing Arts Center, Rev. Joseph Chambers, leader of the right-wing group Concerned Charlotteans, called on the city government to stop the performance. He accused Kushner of being "a sick man with a homosexual agenda" and described the play as showing "complete disregard for the morals of the majority of the Charlotte community."² The production went ahead only with a last minute judicial injunction, and it ran to full houses amidst vocal street demonstrations both for and against. Chambers' protest, however, started a

¹ Andrea Cooper, "Angels in Our Town," *Charlotte Magazine*, Sept. 30, 1995. <http://www.charlottemagazine.com/Charlotte-Magazine/September-1995/Angels-in-Our-Town/> (accessed Nov. 10, 2016).

² Tony Brown and Jim Morrill, "Nude Scene Keeping Lawyers Busy," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 20, 1996, (accessed Nov. 10, 2016).

public debate about how taxpayer dollars should be spent.³ As liberal sensibilities and support for the arts rubbed up against socially and religiously conservative sensitivities there ensued a brouhaha that encompassed the city government, the gay and lesbian community, business and religious leaders, and perhaps most of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's citizens, at least as spectators.

A year later, the conflict over *Angels* resulted in a resolution by the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners to defund the county's Arts and Science Council in the name of "a wholesome family agenda."⁴ The charge was led by County Commissioner Hoyle Martin, who asserted that the *Angels* production represented an "aggressive homosexual agenda that seeks to undermine the values of a traditional American family" and that the gay community believes it has a "right to recruit children for experimenting sexually with anyone, including homosexual adults."⁵ Martin was not alone in his outlook on homosexuality. Commissioner Joel Carter defended the proposal to stop arts funding saying that "this body shall not be a party to this kind of deviant activity no matter how loud this minority community screams."⁶

On the evening of the final vote, after weeks of passionate letters to the press on both sides of the argument, hundreds of phone calls, faxes, and letters sent to County Commissioners, pleas from city leaders expressing concern for the city's image, and Charlotte Observer editorials asking for tolerance, the County Commissioners were

³ David Stout, "Angels Get Taken to Task in Charlotte," *Q-Notes*, Apr. 1996.

⁴ Resolution of the Mecklenburg County Commissioners in Support of Traditional Family Values, Box 4, folder, "Martin, Hoyle," Donaldson Wells King Papers, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (ALSC).

⁵ Editorial, "Mr. Martin's Perversion," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar., 23, 1997, Box 4, folder, "Martin, Hoyle," King Papers, ALSC.

⁶ Dan Van Mourik, "Charlotte and County Board of Commissioners Become a House Divided," *Q-Notes*, Apr. 19, 1997.

regaled with four hours of public comment. The City Government chamber was packed with 700 people representing a wide cross-section of Charlotte society, but most of the speeches supported arts funding—hardly a “minority community.” Among the speakers in favor of maintaining public arts funding were members of the city’s political and economic elite, including Ruth Shaw, senior vice president and chief administrative officer of Duke Power Company, who presented a “Resolution” signed by twenty-seven prominent county employers. Also speaking to continue arts funding was NationsBank CEO Hugh McColl Jr., undoubtedly the most influential person in Charlotte at the time. However, perhaps most impressive of all was what could have been a record in public “coming out” announcements as person after person openly and publicly declared their status as gay or lesbian. Despite this, commissioners had already made up their minds. Commissioner Bill James made his views clear, “how many people are going to come out? Fifty or a 100? Big deal. We have 500,000 people in this county.”⁷

Just before the vote was cast, board chair Parks Helms made a speech that would have resonated with many in the chamber and may have cost him the county commission chair some months later:

This is not about art. This is about power. This is about control. This is about who is going to tell you what you can do, how you can do it, and under what terms and conditions that you do it.... And what you have seen here tonight...will go on as long as we as a board take the position that we can determine what is acceptable, what is wholesome, what are community values. I’m afraid we have set ourselves

⁷ Van Mourik, “Charlotte and County Board of Commissioners Become a House Divided.” All the following articles were accessed in Box 4, folder, “Martin, Hoyle,” King Papers, ALSC: Pam Kelly, “Hundreds Enter Arts Debate,” *Charlotte Observer*, Mar., 30, 1997; Timothy Roberts, “Angry Gays May Go Public to Dispel Stereotypes,” *Charlotte Observer*, Apr., 5, 1997; Phuong Ly and Jim Morrill, “Arts Council Money Cut,” *Charlotte Observer*, Apr., 2, 1997; Editorial, “Misrepresenting the Public,” *Charlotte Observer* Apr. 1, 1997; Editorial, “The Absurd Arts Resolution: Why Should We Oppose It? Let Us Count the Ways,” *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 30, 1997.

on a course that will, in time, remove us as one of this nation's New South Cities, as one of those communities that cares, as one of those communities that is tolerant. And so, for all those reasons and many more... I tell you that this is a sad day in this community. And if you don't see it, if you can't see it, then you have missed the most terrible, terrible thing that has happened in this community in many many years.... Please forgive us for what we are about to do.⁸

Following this speech, the commission voted 5-4 to cut off public funding of the arts.

The *Angels* episode had a profound impact on Charlotte's gay men and lesbians. In addition to the sting of judgment, there were fears about further discrimination, especially in the art world, and concerns that funding would also be refused for agencies like the Metrolina AIDS Project that had been receiving a significant part of its budget from the county for some years. Yet on the positive side, the outpouring of support from Charlotte's mainstream community had been profound. Within a week of the vote Charlotte's business community started to take action, as three of the city's biggest corporations working with the Charlotte Urban League sought to find political means to combat what they saw as intolerance in local affairs.⁹ Contemporaries, gay and straight, also commented on how the decision energized Charlotte's gays and lesbians to fight back. David Stout, the editor of *Q-Notes*, Charlotte's gay newspaper, wrote about "groundbreaking discussions" and added that "the air is electric at gay gatherings these days; something important is happening in Charlotte and everyone can feel it."¹⁰ The *Charlotte Observer* ran an upbeat article: "Gays, Lesbians Spurred To Activism: Arts

⁸ Van Mourik, "Charlotte and County Board of Commissioners Become a House Divided."

⁹ First Union, Duke Power, and Nations Bank were the three corporations who joined Charlotte-Mecklenburg Urban League to seek solutions.

¹⁰ David Stout, "Hate Is Not a Charlotte Value," *Q-Notes*, Apr. 19, 1997. Stout also reported on discussions between gays and lesbians about "the necessity of outing, the importance of district politics and the formation of a new political action committee." By May a new group, Charlotte Pride Alliance presented itself to the next Commissioners' meeting.

Vote The Catalyst Behind Focus On Practical Politics.”¹¹ The event was hailed as something new: “for the first time they [the gay community] are actively building partnerships in the non-gay community.” They had been jolted “into what some believe will be a new unexplored level of activism.... There’s been a town meeting, and they have gathered at work, homes, and in bars to talk strategies. A committee is trying to identify leaders and find ways to increase their political influence.”¹²

* * *

Overview

Charlotte has often been accused of being a city that forgets its history, and in this case the accusation is true. As this thesis will show, gay and lesbian activism was not new in 1997. The outburst of noisy and visible protest against attacks from religious and social conservatives was not a first; the seminal role of AIDS as a catalyst for gay activism was not a first; the support from straight Charlotteans for gay and lesbian rights was not a first; and a losing showdown at the Charlotte Government chamber was not a first. Rather, what happened after *Angels* was, in many respects, a replay of the rise of gay activism, albeit on a much grander scale, that began in 1985, a decade earlier, when AIDS first gripped the city.

This thesis analyzes the first sustained period of gay activism in Charlotte that occurred in response to AIDS. The analysis begins by tracing the trajectory of gay

¹¹ Timothy Roberts and David Perlmutter, “Gays, Lesbians Spurred to Activism: Arts Vote the Catalyst Behind Focus on Practical Politics,” *Charlotte Observer*, Apr. 11, 1997, (accessed Nov. 10, 2016).

¹² *Ibid.* For detailed analysis of the cultural and political outcome of Charlotte’s *Angels* debacle, see LaShonda Mimms, “Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists: Lesbians, Identity, and the New South,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Georgia, 2012, pp. 142-151.

community building that occurred in the 1970s and early 1980s. At the beginning of this period, the vast majority of Charlotte's gays and lesbians lived a highly closeted existence in an often hostile or at best indifferent society. Charlotte's gay community in the 1970s had only tenuous connections to the emerging gay liberation movement that was gathering steam nationally in the years after Stonewall, but during the 1980s some important community spaces, particularly gay bars, emerged. In terms of activism, there were intermittent attempts to organize politically during the early and mid 1970s, and there was a period of more sustained effort between 1977 and 1983. However, activism in this period was largely inward facing, and organizing suffered from over-reliance on very few leaders who expressed a strong sense of dismay at the apathy and invisibility of most local gays and lesbians.

For Charlotte, a mid-sized socially conservative Southern city with strong business interests, sustained gay activism only started to gain traction *after* the reality of AIDS gripped the local community from 1985 onwards. AIDS created two imperatives – caring for AIDS sufferers and education and prevention – that played out quite differently. The clear failure to provide desperately needed care for people suffering from AIDS galvanized the gay community into volunteering time and providing critical financial support. AIDS provided a common cause and thus the epidemic built a sense of connection and a need to demonstrate worth. AIDS also identified gay men who were dying from the disease and prompted more willingness on the part of others to 'come out.' Charlotte's AIDS service organization, the Metrolina AIDS Project (MAP), was the first outward looking and visible gay organization in Charlotte, and it achieved a degree

of civic legitimacy for gays and lesbians that would have been unimaginable even two years earlier.

In contrast, education and prevention created contentious relations with the straight community. Issues surrounding education and prevention prompted direct attacks from the religious right and discomfort and distancing in local government. However, when MAP was threatened over the distribution of safe sex information leaflets tailored for gay men, gay and lesbian activists rallied to form a political advocacy group that printed and distributed its own leaflets, taking over responsibility for pushing an unabashed sex-positive message. The group, First Tuesday, became the openly identified gay political voice; it advocated for legal protection for homosexuals in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, canvassed local candidates, and encouraged political involvement of community members.

From around 1990, gay and lesbian activists began to develop strong alliances with more liberal elements within the heterosexual community. These alliances included: a strong parent support group, Charlotte PFLAG, that challenged evangelicals for ownership of the term “family values,” a new model of AIDS service organization, the Regional AIDS Interfaith Network (RAIN), that recruited members of congregations to provide care and change hearts and minds about the disease, and leading local charitable organizations, the United Way for Central Carolinas and the Foundation for the Carolinas, that interceded to re-shape the public conversation about AIDS. These straight alliances were critical to the success and impact of gay activism in Charlotte. However, these alliances necessitated compromises with the more progressive elements of the gay rights agenda, and those compromises caused tensions between activists who favored a

more accommodationist approach and those who were more radical. These tensions came to a head in a public and messy leadership change in MAP, Charlotte's most visible gay entity. In the political arena, Charlotte's gay and lesbian activists came close to passing an anti-discrimination ordinance in 1992. However, despite reassurances from straight allies who served on Charlotte's Community Relations Committee, the effort collapsed in a heated debate about moral values. In many respects, the debate over the 1992 ordinance was a dress rehearsal for the *Angels* conflagration four years later. While many in Charlotte's heterosexual community had sympathy for AIDS sufferers, they were not willing to fully endorse gay rights, since extending full civil rights was conflated with supporting illegal sexual acts and immorality.

* * *

Historiography

This history of gay activism in Charlotte makes important contributions to the historiography on gay rights activism in the post Stonewall period, particularly as regards to AIDS. To a large extent existing studies are based on metropolitan examples or in some cases smaller progressive cities, which were often university or government centers. This study highlights four important and interconnected ways in which the history of gay activism in a mid-sized New South city differs from the established narrative. First, gay and lesbian activism in Charlotte has a different timeframe. While the gay liberation movement elsewhere was under way by the early 1970s, Charlotte's gay and lesbian organizing got a late and intermittent start and was not fully expressed until the late 1980s and early 1990s. A second difference is the role played by AIDS as a catalyst for activism in Charlotte. Elsewhere AIDS activism built on preexisting

organizations of homophile and gay liberation movements. In Charlotte those foundations did not exist; it was AIDS that stimulated sustained activism among members of the gay and lesbian community and in particular that brought some in the community 'out.' A third difference is the role of straight allies in supporting gay activism. The existing historiography makes almost no mention of alliances between gay activists and the heterosexual community. This is not surprising given that many of the cities that have been studied heretofore had relatively large and politically influential gay communities and/or were cities in which the religious right was a distant menace rather than an immediate political threat. In Charlotte, the combination of a relatively small activist community and vehement local opposition meant that straight alliances were critical. The fourth difference, tensions within the gay activist movement, is more nuanced. While some historians have described how AIDS caused tension, both in terms of AIDS service versus AIDS activism but also between different strands of activism, others have downplayed such tension arguing that these movements were closely linked. In Charlotte, it is clear that the gay community's activism had to be restrained in order to maintain civic support for AIDS service work, an accommodation that some were reluctant to make.

Taken as a whole, the field of LGBTQ history is relatively small and relatively young. Much of the published work has come out only since the AIDS epidemic, and much of it is written by individuals who were closely connected to the movement. Historian John D'Emillio had been celebrated as a local hero in *Front Page* (one of North Carolina's first gay newspapers) for capturing the history that he was also shaping. His seminal work, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, challenged the myth that Stonewall

was the watershed in gay and lesbian activism by examining the emergence of gay consciousness in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the emergence of the homophile movement in the mid-twentieth century.¹³ D’Emillio’s synthetic history established a strong theoretical framework that influenced a generation of historians who have produced a rich array of case studies in different geographic and cultural areas of the US. However, almost all of these studies concentrate on the period before the era of gay liberation.¹⁴

As recently as 2014, Margot Canaday, summing up the state of the field of LGBTQ history, lamented that there was as yet no definitive study of activism or the gay liberation period.¹⁵ Her assessment may have been slightly premature because it came out just as Marc Stein published a comprehensive reassessment of the history of the gay and lesbian movement. In his examination of the gay and lesbian liberation period, Stein focuses on the half-decade following the Stonewall riots in 1969, when activists made

¹³ John D’Emillio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). It is interesting to note that D’Emillio’s scholarship had a direct impact on the Lawrence v. Texas Supreme Court decision that declared all anti-sodomy laws unconstitutional in 2003. Justice Anthony Kennedy’s majority opinion quoted from D’Emillio and co-author Estelle Friedman’s *Intimate Matters*: Daniel Hurewitz, "Sexuality Scholarship as a Foundation for Change: Lawrence v. Texas and the Impact of the Historians' Brief," *Health and Human Rights*, 7 (2004): 205-16.

¹⁴ Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America’s First Gay and Lesbian Town* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Michael David Franklin et al, eds., *Queer Twin Cities: Twin Cities GLBT Oral History Project* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Mark Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); C. Todd White, *Pre-Gay LA: A Social History of the Movement for Homosexual Rights* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Leila J. Rupp, *A Desired Past: A Short History Of Same-Sex Love In America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹⁵ Margot Canaday, "LGBT History," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies*, 25 (2014): 11-19.

major strides in challenging prejudice and discrimination against homosexuals and asserting the ‘healthiness’ of gay lives. Jim Downs’ 2016 monograph, *Stand by Me*, examines gay liberation in the decade of the 1970s as a whole. In contrast to Stein, Downs argues that the movement emerged from quieter more community-oriented pursuits such as churches, bookstores, history making, and print media.¹⁶

Another important strand in the historiography on the gay liberation period examines the way that gay activism was shaped in opposition to the conservative Christian backlash to the sexual revolution. Tina Fetner argues that the emergence of the powerful Christian conservative movement started with Anita Bryant’s campaign against a gay rights ordinance in Dade County, Florida and that continued attacks by the religious right on homosexuality elevated gay and lesbian rights into the national discourse. Fetner shows how this confrontational relationship shaped the trajectory of the gay rights movement. In *Gay Rights and Moral Panic*, Fred Fejes enriches this argument, focusing on gay rights struggles at the end of the 1970s. Fejes argues that the combined impact of these local struggles created a gay and lesbian “imagined community” at the national level. Although echoes of these struggles between gay rights activists and Christian conservatives that Fetner and Fejes describe can be heard in Charlotte in the 1970s and early 1980s, the contest was not manifest locally until after AIDS.¹⁷

¹⁶ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*. (New York: Rutledge, 2012); Jim Downs, *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

¹⁷ Tina Fetner, *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Fred Fejes, *Gay Rights and Moral Panic: The Origins of America’s Debate on Homosexuality*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008). Heather White offers important context for understanding the development of conservative Christian attitudes towards homosexuality in *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

It is important to note that Stein, Downs, Fetner, and Fejes as well as other historians who have written about the gay liberation movement in the 1970s focus attention on major metropolitan cities such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago, Washington DC, and Atlanta, or mid-sized cities with established liberal leaning universities like Madison, Wisconsin, or Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota.¹⁸ A North Carolina example of the latter is the Triangle (Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill), which, although similar in size to Charlotte and also in the South, had more in common with other progressive university/government centers.¹⁹ The absence of studies of gay and lesbian activism in the South, especially in mid-size New South cities like Charlotte, prevents a full understanding of the movement.

Like the broader historiography on LGBTQ history, the historiography on gay and lesbian activism during the period of AIDS is young, and much of the work is by journalists and activists who were involved directly in the crisis.²⁰ Most notable is the

¹⁸ Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out For Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999); Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle For Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945-1990, An Oral History*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1992); Downs, *Stand by Me*; Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*; Scott C. Seyforth and Nichole Barnes, "In People's Faces For Lesbian and Gay Rights: Stories of Activism in Madison, Wisconsin, 1970 to 1990," *The Oral History Review*, 43 (2016): 81-97.

¹⁹ James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001). Sears' monograph considers a wide swathe of Southern queer history in the 1970s, but it is clear that organizing in the Triangle area was much more rooted and sustained than in Charlotte. Stephen J. Inrig, *North Carolina and the Problem of AIDS: Advocacy, Politics, and Race in the South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), chapter 2. Although Inrig does not describe gay liberation activism of the 1970s in the Triangle area, he does reflect on ways that AIDS activists were able to build on existing community structure and social and political organizing to mobilize services for AIDS.

²⁰ For a recent memoir see Sean Strub, *Body Counts: A Memoir of Politics, Sex, AIDS, and Survival*, (New York: Scribner, 2014). There is also a vast literature on the medical history of AIDS, and a growing literature on AIDS as a global crisis that is not directly relevant for this study. For examples see Ronald Bayer and Gerald M. Oppenheimer, *AIDS Doctors: Voices from the Epidemic* (New York: Oxford Press, 2000), and John Engel, *The Epidemic: A Global History*

acclaimed and personally engaged history of the early years of the epidemic written by journalist Randy Shilts: *And the Band Played On*. Shilts focuses on activists' struggles against the homophobic intransigence of the Reagan Administration. He also stresses conflict in the early years of AIDS activism arguing that early AIDS activists who continued in the gay liberation tradition utterly failed to understand that AIDS required a critical change in direction, particularly the need to change gay sexual culture in order to stem the epidemic's rapid growth.²¹

Shilts' detailed documentation of the first five years of the epidemic established a powerful narrative that is challenged by Jennifer Brier in *Infectious Ideas*. Brier's revisionist history builds on the earlier work of feminist and AIDS activist Cindy Patton, whose extensive research on AIDS suggests that early responses to the disease revived rather than abandoned the "healthy communities" mantra in the gay and lesbian liberation era; activists, she argues, saw the community's health as a political problem and responded to AIDS by returning to a struggle for gay liberation. Brier thus reperiodizes the history of AIDS activism and gay liberation, suggesting that gay liberation continued into the 1980s, stimulated by the need to respond to the AIDS epidemic. She also downplays the distinction between AIDS service work and AIDS activism.²² Brier's central argument is that the struggle against AIDS was a critical, and often overlooked,

of AIDS (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2006). Stephen Inrig's medical history, *North Carolina and the Problem of AIDS: Advocacy, Politics, and Race in the South*, is relevant for this study because it covers the history of the epidemic in North Carolina.

²¹ Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987).

²² Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: US Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS* (New York: Rutledge, 1990); Susan Chambre, *Fighting for Our Lives: New York's AIDS Community and the Politics of Disease* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), the author also stresses the importance of early activists.

element in liberal political opposition to the dominant conservatism in US politics in the 1980s.²³ In her work, Tina Fetner extends the analysis of the political history of AIDS by exploring the closely entwined and confrontational relationship between the religious right and gay activism during the AIDS crisis. Fetner shows that as AIDS emerged as a focal point of Christian conservatives' moral crusade, gay activists were able to leverage sympathy for people suffering from AIDS to advance the gay rights agenda.²⁴

A final but critical point to make is that, as is true of studies on the gay liberation period, almost all of the historians working on AIDS activism have studied the large cosmopolitan cities – specifically San Francisco and New York – where AIDS first emerged and caused such devastation.

* * *

Notes on Usage and Sources

In this history, I freely use the word “community” as a label to describe the subjects under study. In particular, I use the terms, “gay community” and “gay and lesbian community,” sometimes interchangeably, to refer to homosexual people who saw themselves as part of a group set apart from heterosexual society. The term is problematic since it refers to a group whose membership is almost impossible to define, not least because so many homosexuals throughout this period remained closeted. Despite the imprecise nature of the term “community,” I have retained its use because it is a useful way to talk about the individuals who interacted with one another in a variety of spaces, from private homes and anonymous public places, to gay bars and various social, religious and political gatherings. Moreover, contemporaries, gay and straight, in both

²³ Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, p. 8.

²⁴ Fetner, *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism*, chapter 3.

public and private contexts, regularly used the terms “gay community” or “gay and lesbian community.” Also, in contemporary usage “community” can refer both to homosexuals in general and to individuals who are politically and socially active. I use the specific terms “gay activists” or “gay and lesbian activists” to refer to the latter. These were members of the community who sought to influence public policy and public opinion.

A second important point about usage concerns the terms ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian.’ In keeping with the nomenclature of the period and the sources I use the terms “gay” and “lesbian” in this study because these were the most common labels for homosexual men and women. (The term “bi” was starting to be used in this period, but it was not until the 1990s, at the end of the period under study, that the term LGBT, referring collectively to individuals who identified as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, or transgender, is seen in the sources.²⁵) However, it is important to note that while ‘gay and lesbian’ intentionally refers to mixed genders, the term ‘gay’ on its own was used at the time, and is used here, to refer to both mixed genders and males only. It is also important to note that since this study focuses on AIDS, it is often the case that the group under consideration was predominantly male. However, even though lesbians were personally at low risk for contracting AIDS, they were directly impacted by AIDS because it affected their friends or family members and because it shaped the social, political, legal, and religious environment. Lesbians also played a significant role as workers in care professions, as allies, and as AIDS activists.

²⁵ In fact, in Charlotte many women initially resisted the term lesbian, seeing it as too radical and for a period the term “gay women” can be seen in the sources. The term LGBT emerges in Charlotte’s gay and lesbian literature around the mid 1990s.

The use of the terms ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ as regards race and class is also complex. As the HIV/AIDS epidemic progressed, particularly in the South, it became clear that the virus disproportionately affected African Americans who were vulnerable both because of discrimination and disproportionate poverty. However, race is largely invisible in the sources for this study of gay and lesbian activism. There were certainly some African Americans involved in Charlotte’s AIDS activism, but the majority of activists seem to have been Caucasian. There are a few tantalizing hints about the different experiences of gay men and lesbians who were African American, but given what is currently available for Charlotte, it is not possible to do a systematic analysis on how racial minorities interacted with whites, how minorities experienced AIDS, nor their involvement in activism.²⁶ The same is true about class. Although there are suggestions that there were differences in the experiences of gay men and women based on class, there is insufficient evidence relating to Charlotte to allow a systematic analysis of those questions in this study. It is possible that as the archival record on the local gay and lesbian community grows, more insights into racial and class difference in the local history of AIDS and activism will be possible.

Finally, a comment on sources. This study relies heavily on three major sources of information: press accounts, oral histories, and manuscript collections. Newspaper and periodical sources include both the gay press – *The Free Press*, *Front Page*, and *Q-Notes* – and local mainstream newspapers – *The Charlotte Observer* and the *Charlotte News*. Newspapers provide a critical and largely comprehensive source of information about

²⁶ In *North Carolina and the Problem of AIDS*, Stephen Inrig explores the impact of AIDS on the African American community and in particular the ways in which African Americans were not well served by an AIDS service infrastructure that privileged white male homosexuals.

events, but almost by definition they are generic since they are written for the general public. However, having access to accounts from the point of view of the gay community as well as the mainstream Charlotte press offers the possibility of contrast and comparison and gives more insight into different perspectives. Oral histories and manuscript collections present different potentials and challenges. Clearly both provide an opportunity to enrich the basic framework provided by journalistic accounts, allowing greater insight and in some cases understanding of motives. However, both oral histories and manuscript collections tend to privilege the perspective of activists (more predominantly male, mostly middle class, and mostly white).

* * *

Thesis Structure

The structure of the thesis is as follows. Chapters 1 and 2 examine the history of Charlotte's gay community in the decade and a half before AIDS struck, circa 1970-1985. Chapter 1 documents the gay experience and straight attitudes towards gays and lesbians. Charlotte's gay community was highly closeted and therefore almost invisible. The 1970s saw the emergence of gay spaces, but it is clear that the straight community was largely intolerant, or at best indifferent. Chapter 2 examines early stirrings of gay and lesbian activism, but these were intermittent and had insufficient support to be sustained. Chapter 2 also describes the trajectory of the AIDS epidemic and the arrival of AIDS in Charlotte by the mid 1980s. The AIDS crisis hit Charlotte at a point when apathy in the local gay community was evident in the loss of major components of community structure.

Chapters 3 and 4 document the transformative effect of AIDS on gay activism in Charlotte by following two imperatives created by the epidemic. Chapter 3 considers the way that AIDS created a need for care, which galvanized the gay, and lesbian community into action, provided a sense of common cause, and highlighted a need to validate the community as healthy and worthy. The care of people with AIDS also gave the gay and lesbian activists civic legitimacy and a new level of acceptance as a cultural group in Charlotte. Chapter 4 focuses on the more controversial imperative for education and prevention that polarized popular opinion and pushed gay and lesbian activists into open conflict with conservative Christian elements of the city. This conflict prompted a direct political response on the part of gay activists to champion gay rights in the city.

Chapter 5 considers the way that the AIDS epidemic generated significant support from straight allies who saw common cause with activists in the gay and lesbian community. These included a Charlotte chapter of PFLAG, a new kind of AIDS service organization the Regional AIDS Interfaith Network that harnessed local churches in service to people with AIDS, and leading local charitable organizations, The United Way for Central Carolinas, and the Foundation for the Carolinas. While these groups legitimized the gay and lesbian community as community players, the straight alliances required compromises in the activist agenda that in turn led to tensions.

CHAPTER 1: THE GAY EXPERIENCE IN CHARLOTTE, 1970-1985

Tonda Taylor returned home to Charlotte in 1980 full of hope for starting life afresh in her hometown. As a lesbian she had left Charlotte in 1964 to escape isolation and the disapproval of her father. Almost twenty years in New York City had enabled her to make her life amid the diverse cultures of a metropolis – sometimes closeted, sometimes ‘out.’ But she had a yearning for the Southern city of her birth. She had been pleasantly surprised by some developments that had begun to take shape in Charlotte suggesting a sympathetic shift in attitudes towards gays and lesbians, and she wanted to get to work in her own home town where she felt could make a difference for the still deeply closeted gay population.¹

What she did not anticipate was the extreme reaction of her family. Halting Tonda on the stairs of their home in Myers Park, her father made it clear that she was not and never would be welcome to return to live in Charlotte. In reflection thirty-five years later Taylor could still feel the devastating sting of abandonment when she realized that her father was not only shunning her but “didn’t want (her) to live either.” Taylor returned to New York and grieved her lost family all over again.²

Taylor’s tragic narrative underlines three defining characteristics of gay experience in Charlotte at this moment in the city’s history. First, her father’s reaction reflects his belief, common in Charlotte at the time, that homosexuality was aberrant,

¹ Diane Suchetka, “Out On Her Own,” *Charlotte Observer* (Charlotte, NC), Feb. 19, 1995, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

² Tonda Taylor oral history interview 2, July 9, 2015, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (ALSC); Tonda Taylor oral history interview 3, Sept. 15, 2015, ALSC.

immoral, and shameful. Even Charlotteans who were more sympathetic tended to frame homosexuality in derogatory terms and treat it as an affliction. Second, Tonda Taylor's decision to go to New York in 1964 was a reaction to the isolation she experienced growing up in Charlotte. Evidence shows that despite changes in the more cosmopolitan cities, gay and lesbian Charlotteans of the 1970s continued to live isolated and closeted lives, hiding same-sex socialization from mainstream society. Finally, Taylor was motivated to return to Charlotte in 1980 partly because she had recognized hopeful signs of change in her socially conservative Bible Belt hometown. In her home, attitudes had not changed enough, but there is evidence of a sympathetic shift in public opinion about homosexuality by the early 1980s.³ These include the invitation that Myers Park Baptist church extended to Carter Heyward, a Charlotte native, open lesbian, and one of the first women ordained in the Episcopal Church, the formation of a gay student union at UNC Charlotte, and the successful effort to force WSOC TV to stop broadcasting an aggressively anti-gay religious show.⁴

This chapter's analysis of the gay experience in Charlotte during the period before the outbreak of the AIDS crisis fits into the tradition of local studies that have characterized the field of LGBTQ history for the last quarter century. These local studies have explored the particular regional variations of how LGBTQ social and political

³ Suchetka, "Out On Her Own."

⁴ Frye Gaillard, "A Priest's Struggle with her Sexuality," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 18, 1979, and "Controversy Abated as Episcopal Priest Spoke to Baptists," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 18, 1979; Harold Warren, "Student Government Charters Gay Group," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 11, 1979; Jim Maxwell, "Judge Snuffs Minister's 'Flames,'" *Charlotte News* (Charlotte, NC), Sept. 10, 1980. The evangelist whose show was dropped, Charles Sustar, sued the station for \$20 million, but the lawsuit was dismissed by U.S. District Judge James B. McMillan. WSOC also decided to drop the Rev. Jerry Falwell's "Old Time Gospel Hour" and a third religious program after this controversy.

movements emerged, how they were shaped, and what agents caused change over time.⁵ However, existing histories have tended to focus on larger metropolitan areas to which gays and lesbians gravitated, such as New York, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, and there are also a handful of studies of mid-sized cities in the North or the West of the United States; very little local history has been done on the South and almost nothing on Southern cities.⁶ The only substantive academic study of gay culture in the South that does focus on urban communities is LaShonda Mimms' dissertation comparing lesbian society and activism in Atlanta and Charlotte. Mimms' research is a rich source of information about the lesbian experience in 1960s and 1970s Charlotte. However, it does not analyze the gay male experience in any depth, nor does it trace changes in the relationship between the gay community and the straight community or

⁵ John D'Emillio established the framework for these studies in his groundbreaking monograph *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Notably, C. Todd White deepened and extended D'Emillio's history of the early Homophile movement in his ethnological and social history, *Pre-Gay LA: A Social History of the Movement for Homosexual Rights* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009). Other local studies include: Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island: Sixty Years in America's First Gay and Lesbian Town* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993); George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Michael David Franklin et al, eds., *Queer Twin Cities: Twin Cities GLBT Oral History Project* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Mark Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Rutledge, 1993); Peter Boag, *Same Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁶ The most extensive academic local study of Southern LGBTQ history to this point explores the culture of gay men in rural Mississippi: John Howard, *Men Like That*. James Sears has published numerous non-academic works on Southern gay culture. See in particular, James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001). However, Sears focuses on individuals across the region as a whole rather than providing in-depth analysis of one urban center.

the emergence of gay social and political consciousness.⁷ As will be explored in detail in Chapter 4, the lack of analysis of gay and lesbian history in the South prevents a full understanding of social and political change, especially during the period of conservative backlash to the social ferment of the 1960s, but it is also relevant for this chapter because the experience of gays in the Bible Belt South is more inflected by religion than those of Northern or Western regions.

This chapter will closely examine the social experience of homosexuals and the range of attitudes in the straight community a decade and a half before the AIDS epidemic shaped a new set of concerns. As Tonda Taylor's story suggests, gays and lesbians in Charlotte in the 1970s were shunned and closeted. However, the decade did see slow and halting change as gay spaces grew and strengthened offering opportunities for community building and a move away from clandestine assignation or isolation. For the straight community in Charlotte the 1970s continued to be an era of misconception about and discrimination against gay and lesbian society. Despite a range of attitudes, gays and lesbians continued to be ostracized, stereotyped, perceived as sick or perverted, and accused of being sinners by many in Charlotte's mainstream. Yet the decade also saw a shift in public opinion. While depictions of the gay community in the media in the early 1970s focused on what were perceived as the more negative aspects of gay society, there is evidence of tolerance and even acceptance by the early 1980s.

⁷ LaShonda Mimms, "Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists: Lesbians, Identity, and the New South," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Georgia, 2012.

* * *

The Gay and Lesbian Experience in Charlotte in the 1970s and early 1980s

There's a certain, and the best way I can call it would be, grace in the South. Smaller communities accept every kind of bizarre individual/personality as part of the family, so to speak. Now they may not associate with you, but they carve out a place for you, and you, you're just accepted, as long as you don't get out of your place, and that's the thing, as long as you don't get out of your place you're accepted. And the place might be pretty (intake of breath) tight, you know what I mean, that you have to stay in, you can't just, you know, be yourself, so to speak. And I think that's what a lot of people complain about, is they can't be themselves totally. They know their place and they have to stay in it.⁸

The population of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County in 1970 was 354,656.

According to the Williams Institute, which estimates that approximately 3.5% of the U.S. population has same sex orientation, it can be assumed that 12,413 of those people were gay.⁹ By and large they were invisible. The closet continued to be the most defining feature of gay society in Charlotte Mecklenburg throughout the decade. Local gay rights advocate, Darryl Logsdon emphasized the situation, "...you know I always say people weren't closeted back then; they were in a vault and it was locked." Logsdon noted that although this was also the situation across the country, religious indoctrination in the South in particular "drove so, so many of my generation, and still to this day, so deeply into the closet, and not just in the closet but deeply conflicted within themselves."¹⁰ The closet hid gay and lesbian Charlotteans from the wider community and also from history.

⁸ Gene Sloan and Bobby Schmiel oral history interview, Nov. 5, 2015, ALSC.

⁹ Garry J. Gates, "How Many People are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender?" *The Williams Institute*, Apr. 2011, <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/research/census-lgbt-demographics-studies/how-many-people-are-lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender/> (accessed Dec. 6, 2015). Estimates for percentages of LGBT people in populations across the world continue to be debated.

¹⁰ Darryl Logsdon oral history interview, Sept. 25, 2015, ALSC.

However, evidence has survived to give some insight into gay experience and community spaces in Charlotte during the decade before AIDS.

While there are numerous examples of the closeted life in 1970s Charlotte, the personal story of Don King is particularly well documented and instructive. Married in 1967 at twenty-five and separated from his wife four years later, King came out to himself for the first time in 1971 in Chapel Hill, when he visited Pegasus, a local gay bar, to confirm suspicions he had from adolescence that he might be gay. Like many of his generation he had fought his sexual orientation in an effort to conform to cultural norms; like many, his efforts failed.¹¹ Finding the Durham area too small for privacy King, a newspaperman by trade, applied for a job with the *Charlotte Observer* and started as a sports reporter there in 1972.¹² Once in Charlotte, he remained in the closet, keeping his gay identity hidden both at work and in the straight community but at the same time exploring Charlotte's gay counterculture.

King stressed the powerful effects of fear on the gay psyche and the resulting layered closets that gay Charlotteans resorted to:

Fear of course, is the reason so many gays keep their orientation partially secreted. Some are so fearful they never allow themselves a gay sexual contact, but this is the extreme. Some never try to cultivate gay friends and make sexual contact only in the most anonymous way, as in rest areas or other places where no questions are asked, and no names are exchanged.... Some come out to gay friends and actually have a gay extended family, but remain closeted to straight friends and to relatives. Some come out to everyone except employers.¹³

¹¹ Jim Baxter, "An Interview With Charlotte Activist & Entrepreneur Don King," *The Front Page* (Raleigh, NC), 26 Apr. – 9 May 1983.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Don King to Ken Friedlein, 29 Jan. 1981, box 1, folder 3, Donaldson Wells King Papers, ALSC.

King identified the source of what he termed these “constant pernicious” fears as social ostracism, job loss, harassment, physical harm, blackmail, and police surveillance.¹⁴ For gay men, the most fundamental source of fear probably stemmed from the reality that sex between men was literally against the law in North Carolina and carried heavy penalties. While a number of other states had repealed the ancient English sodomy laws starting with Illinois in 1962, North Carolina maintained its “crime against nature” statute until the Supreme Court struck down all remaining sodomy laws in the U.S. with *Lawrence et al. v. Texas* in 2003. Although prosecutions for sodomy were unusual by the 1970s, and in most cases individuals accused could get the charges dropped by admitting their guilt, the threat of a long prison sentence was still very real, and admitting guilt meant accepting the label of deviant, submitting to psychological or physical ‘treatment,’ likely job loss, and public humiliation.

Norfleet Jarrell, a respected instructor in the Geography Department at UNC Charlotte, was arrested on sodomy charges in 1973. Jarrell and nine other men who were engaged in consensual sexual activity were arrested by undercover police hiding out in Freedom Park over a couple of evenings. Two of the men were apparently not charged, because they “were too prominent in Charlotte,” one being the team doctor for the hockey team.”¹⁵ For the rest there were various fates. One of the accused, an executive with Celanese Corporation who had a wife and three children, committed suicide shortly after the arrest. Five others did a plea bargain, pleading guilty to forceful trespass and receiving \$500 fines and suspended jail sentences. Jarrell, however, decided to fight the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ King to George and Martha, 6 Jan. 1977 and King to Governor James B. Hunt, 24 May 1977, box 1, folder 2, King Papers.

charge. He was not successful, and Jarrell was ultimately sentenced to seven to ten years in prison. It seems likely that Jarrell's heavy sentence resulted from his challenge to the court.¹⁶

It was much the same in church. In 1977 actress and singer Anita Bryant led an anti-gay Christian movement in Dade County Florida that reverberated across the country. Bryant's appearance on Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's Praise the Lord network (headquartered on Park Road close to Southpark Mall in Charlotte) in early 1977 drew opposition from a national gay rights group, Council on Religion and the Homosexual Inc. PTL's response to the complaint was: "We're not discriminating against any minority group, but against all sinners." The Charlotte station that carried the show, WRET-TV, reported only one complaint about Anita Bryant's criticisms of homosexuals, suggesting tacit local approval.¹⁷ Other evidence suggests that Bryant's ideas resonated in Charlotte. In June 1978 six busloads of people from North Carolina, at least two of which left from First Baptist Church in uptown, went to Atlanta to hear Ms. Bryant speak.¹⁸ Earlier, in November 1977, the South Carolina Baptist Convention voted unanimously to oppose homosexuality as a "sin against God and mankind" and adopted a resolution calling homosexuality a "sickness,"¹⁹ and in April 1978 the Mecklenburg Presbytery

¹⁶ In a previous case, the judge noted that a severe sentence was probably the result of the defendant insisting on his right for trial by jury; George Painter, "The Sensibilities of Our Forefathers: The History of Sodomy Laws in the United States," *Sodomy Laws, 1991-2002*, http://www.glapn.org/sodomylaws/sensibilities/north_carolina.htm (accessed Dec. 6 2015).

¹⁷ Jane Lee Lisenby, "Homosexuals File Complaint Against PTL," *Charlotte News*, June 16, 1977.

¹⁸ Vanessa Gallman, "Bryant Fans Plan Welcome," *Charlotte Observer*, June 7, 1978.

¹⁹ "S.C. Baptists Vote to Oppose Homosexuality, Calling It a Sin," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 18, 1977.

condemned homosexual behavior as “transgression and sin.”²⁰ Keenly aware of the impact this had on gays and lesbians, Don King noted:

The effect of gay-as-sin message: be untrue to yourself...kill yourself if you can't fit in (the underlying message). There is a growing counter message, of course; yet the “it's sin” people still control the airwaves and so many of the pulpits. Actually knowing there is another interpretation of the infamous scriptural passages would help a ton of adults and kids.²¹

Given society's intolerance, the only option for homosexual men and women was to hide their sexual orientation. The closet forced gay Charlotteans to resort to one of three options: total self-denial and isolation, a concealed private existence, or socializing in one of the limited number of public spaces where homosexuals could meet. The first two of these are largely invisible in the historical record so the focus will be on the third.

All indications are that most gay spaces in Charlotte prior to the 1970s were well hidden. According to lesbian Tonda Taylor, who grew up within a prominent white family in Charlotte's well-heeled Myers Park neighborhood, there were no visible signs of any local gay venues during the 1950s or the early 1960s.²² Similarly, “Eddie,” a local high school teacher, described the social desert that he had known in Charlotte as a young gay man in the 1940s and 1950s. “Eddie,” whose real identity was withheld in an interview for the *Charlotte Observer*, had heard that “some gays would gather by invitation behind a locked door to a back room of El Morocco, an otherwise straight bar on Wilkinson Boulevard,” but it was all “very hush hush,” and he himself strictly avoided

²⁰ Bill Bancroft, “Mecklenburg Presbytery Condemns Gay Behavior,” *Charlotte Observer*, Apr. 16, 1978.

²¹ Don King to Stuart Dim, Oct. 3, 1980, box 1 folder 3, King Papers.

²² Taylor interview 2; Taylor interview 3.

any contact with gay men.²³ Other sources rumored that the Hornet's Nest bar in the basement of the once grand Barringer Hotel on North Tryon Street became a "discreet meeting place for gay men" in the 1940s to the 1960s.²⁴ No doubt there were others, now lost to the record. A *Charlotte Observer* article from 1959 noted that as many as thirty gay men were apprehended in a "downtown area" of Charlotte over the period of a month during that year, but there is no indication of exactly where or what drew the attention of the police. Apparently police chief Jesse James had "finger-printed and warned them," but there had been no arrests. James reflected that "...homosexuals flock to Charlotte due to the city's size," presumably meaning that Charlotte offered an element of anonymity impossible in smaller towns and rural areas.²⁵

From the early 1970s a more visible gay culture, accompanied by an increase in public interest due to increased national news coverage of gay liberation and lesbian feminist activism after the Stonewall riots, gives a clearer picture of some aspects of the gay experience in Charlotte. A 1973 article in the *Charlotte News* described Charlotte's downtown cruising attractions for gay men in some detail (albeit with both prurient and disparaging overtones). Guided by an anonymous gay man called "Glen," the author described the "territory where men in shiny cars and expensive clothes seek companionship." Glen claimed that, "almost any evening—after 8 o'clock—you can park

²³ Vanessa Gallman, "Gays Want Life with Dignity," *Charlotte Observer* Feb. 13, 1978. Note that Eddie's real name was withheld from the article. "Eddie" founded the local Charlotte chapter of Dignity in 1977.

²⁴ "Barringer Hotel," *Charlotte Eats*, Sept. 30, 2011, <http://charlotteeats.blogspot.com/2013/09/barringer-hotel.html> (accessed Nov. 28 2015); Lynnsy Logue, personal communication, Ms Logue worked in the Hornets Nest Bar as a bartender during the 1960s.

²⁵ "New Laws Needed for Homosexuals?" *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 18, 1959. James' comments suggest that Charlotte reflected a national pattern of gay migration from more parochial towns and rural areas to larger cities.

at the corner of Fifth and Poplar streets and watch the cars as they circle the block that surrounds First Presbyterian Church.” The article went on to claim that the cruisers included businessmen, doctors, lawyers, and as many as six ministers, one of whom frequented the area every night but Wednesday, it being “prayer meeting night.” While some cars circled the block to surveil the sidewalk traffic, those who were concerned with protecting their reputation parked in a side lot and communicated their interest by flashing their headlamps. Tuesday and Wednesday nights were the busiest, since these were the nights when most salesmen were in town. There was also gay sex for sale: “boys 15 to 18 years old—and they’re hustling the homosexuals, selling their bodies for \$10 to \$30 a shot.”²⁶

According to Glen, gay street cruising was just as segregated as many other aspects of Charlotte life at this time, with black gay men populating the downtown bus station at North Pine and West Trade Street and whites frequenting the nearby adult bookstores that had sprung up in the area.²⁷ However, other evidence shows that the gay community was not strictly segregated in this period and also that sexual encounters crossed the color line. For example, Charlottean Bobby Schmiel was first introduced to gay bars by his black roommate when he was a student at Charlotte Piedmont Community College in 1973, and Don King’s papers contain numerous references and letters to black partners. There were also numerous prominent black drag artists who performed regularly in Charlotte’s gay bars.²⁸

²⁶ Darrell Sifford, “A Tour of our Gay Nightlife,” *Charlotte News*, Dec. 15, 1973.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Sloan and Schmiel interview; various notes and letters, box 3, folder 19, King Papers; see the many advertisements for drag shows in *Charlotte Free Press*.

It is probable that downtown urban renewal, a civic desire to control the city streets, and the emergence of more venues for gay leisure drove gay cruising out of the center city over the course of the 1970s. By 1981, Charlotte's major geographic area for homosexual hustling had shifted to 36th Street and the Plaza on the edge of North Charlotte. Young male prostitutes operated near this intersection in much the same way as Glen's "young kids" had operated around First Presbyterian in downtown Charlotte. Their customers included not just gay singles, but often married men with families.²⁹ Don King frequently reminded people of the high cost of maintaining closeted double lives. Broken marriages were common when gay individuals tried to live conventional lives and failed, and children were often caught in the crossfire.

Information on other gay male cruising locations in Charlotte during the 1970s can be found in publications for the gay market that started to emerge in this decade. Charlotte's bar magazine, *Whatever*, promoted the city as a destination for cruising: "Freedom Park is still hot if you don't approach an undercover cop. 36th Street is the place to pick up hustlers. And the two monster malls—South Park and Eastland—are fine for eyeballing... just any old queen."³⁰ Oral histories confirm what was recorded at the time in print sources. Ricky Carter, one of Charlotte's celebrity drag performers, recollected that South Park Mall was a particularly popular location for meeting other gay men, many of whom were employed in the retail stores of the mall.³¹ Gene Sloan

²⁹ Ken Friedlein and Polly Paddock, "Hustling in Charlotte: The Plaza, Near 35th is a Well-Known Meeting Place," *Charlotte Observer*, Apr. 27, 1981.

³⁰ King promotional draft for *Whatever*, June, 1979, box 1, folder 3, King Papers. Both malls were built during the early 1970s.

³¹ Ricky Carter oral history interview, Nov. 6, 2015, ALSC. Carter found it difficult to visit the mall with his mother due to the attention he received there from other gay men.

remarked that as a young man he and his friends used a code word, “Rachael Anderson’s,” to refer to a local rest area where they often met up.³²

Adult bookstores and x-rated movie houses in Charlotte were also a part of the gay male scene and were advertised prominently in Charlotte’s *Free Press*, the first gay newsletter to be published in North Carolina. Regular ads were placed for the French Art Cinema at 3511 Wilkinson Boulevard and the Locker Room Upstairs Cinema at 2209 South Boulevard. The French Art Cinema was open until 2 AM on weekdays and 3.30 AM on Fridays and Saturdays, and it offered a full line of publications, including national gay news magazines and gay porn, in addition to the *Free Press* itself. The ads make clear that these locations were places where gay men could meet for sex: “Locker-Room-Rush-Inhalers, 16mm full length movies, 22 peep shows, complete line all-new novelties, and all locking doors.”³³ Many other such businesses existed without advertising, including a backroom bookstore called Joy Bookstore, at the “Bootery and Bloomery” on Pecan Avenue at Independence Boulevard, where anonymous sex could be solicited with no questions asked.³⁴

Similarly, two spa bathhouses catering to the gay market had regular full-page spreads in the *Free Press*. Club South, at 1708 South Boulevard close to the intersection with East, advertised itself as “by men, for men” with “Buddy Nights” every Monday and Wednesday. Club Charlotte at 1013 West Morehead St., part of the national Club Bath chain, advertised a steam bath and proclaimed itself, “a congenial meeting place for males, found in most major cities in the U.S. and Canada, often equipped with sauna and

³² Sloan and Schmiel interview.

³³ *Charlotte Free Press*, June 13th, 1977.

³⁴ Robert L. Barret oral history interview 2, Nov. 11, 2014, ALSC.

steam room.” Although having such a chain suggested that Charlotte was “on the map” as a gay male destination, the adverts for this establishment disappeared from the *Free Press* after February 1977, suggesting perhaps that one bathhouse was sufficient for the local clientele.³⁵

However, among all the spaces where gays could meet, undoubtedly the most important were bars. Echoing the national trend, gay bars emerged in Charlotte as a more visible part of the culture during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s.³⁶ A 1966 guide listed four gay bars in Charlotte, but it wasn’t until later in the 1960s that gay bars became more long-term business ventures in the Queen city.³⁷ King summed up their significance in his letter to Stuart Dim in 1980: “For years, the bars served as entertainment center and civic/social center for gays because there were no gay organizations.”³⁸

Gay bars provided a place for people to come out to themselves, to find community and to enjoy leisure in a safe environment. Ricky Carter, who went on to become Charlotte’s most well known drag queen, was immediately enthralled by Charlotte’s gay bars when he discovered them through friends in the late 1960s. Growing up in a tight knit Baptist family opposite Mulberry Baptist Church on the West side of town, Carter had known of his attraction for boys from an early age, but had no outlet to act on his inclinations as he matured.³⁹ His attendance at the Baptist Gardner Webb

³⁵ *Charlotte Free Press*, Feb. 7, 1977 and Feb. 21, 1977.

³⁶ Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*.

³⁷ Mimms, “Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists,” p. 52.

³⁸ King to Stuart Dim, Jan. 7, 1980, box 1, folder 3, King Papers.

³⁹ According to Ricky and Christy Carter, their family owned the first barbecue restaurant in Charlotte, The Hickory House. The restaurant was originally downtown, but it moved out to the west side of town. The Carters had co-owned the restaurant with Ricky’s uncle, but a family feud

College did not give him any opportunities for same sex romantic encounters either. However, his work as a designer at Belk's and Ivey's department stores in uptown Charlotte brought him into contact with other gay men who introduced him to the local bars. Carter was initially overwhelmed by the experience: "Oh lord, I sat back and watched things for two or three months before I ever talked to people at the bar."⁴⁰

For Carter gay bars also turned out to encompass his future profession. His life was changed profoundly when he took in his first drag show:

Me and another friend had gone to one of the first gay bars in Charlotte back in nineteen and sixty-nine. It was Halloween night. And he [his friend] snuck out of the house, and I had snuck out of the house and I had told them [his parents] I was going to a Christian function for Halloween, and we went to the bar. And it was the first drag show I had ever seen and I was just amazed and bewildered and talked to a few people, but I did not get up and dance and didn't run around through the bar talking to people and stuff. I just sat back and watched, took it all in.⁴¹

The bar was the Blue Note, out on North Tryon close to the intersection of highways 29 and 49 (not far from where his uncle's restaurant, The Old Hickory House would be built several years later). A year to the day after his Blue Note experience, Carter performed in his first drag show at Oleen's on South Boulevard at the corner of East Worthington Ave, where he soon became the house act and Charlotte's most celebrated female impersonator under the stage name of "Boom Boom LaTour."⁴²

It was often straight bar owners that saw the potential for profit in changing their clientele from straight to gay. In her dissertation, LaShonda Mims notes that gay bars in both Charlotte and Atlanta "existed because of white and often heterosexual owners who

resulted in a split in the business and Ricky's uncle built an alternative restaurant, The Old Hickory House on North Tryon Street: Carter interview.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Pink Trash*, (formerly *Free Press*,) Sept. 1977.

were willing to use their connections to maintain a queer social space, without undue harassment from police.”⁴³ Ricky Carter recalled fond memories of discovering a cocktail bar attached to Honey’s Restaurant at the corner of Morehead and Tryon St. on the edge of uptown:

Two sisters and this other friend of theirs ran the bar, and evidently the older queens started gathering there all the time in the afternoons when they got off work and stuff. So it was more like a sit down drink cocktail bar back then. They didn’t have dances and stuff.⁴⁴

Carter remembered that Oleen’s, on the edge of Dilworth, had started as “Xanadu,” a regular strip joint owned by Don Robinson. Business was slow, and Robinson’s girlfriend, Martha Oleen Love, saw good potential in the gay crowd she had come to know at the Brass Rail (the bar above Honey’s Restaurant) where she was a barmaid. Ed DePasquale, who had been a patron of The Brass Rail, recalled that the bar switched from a straight to a gay bar at 10:00pm sharp, “as though a switch was thrown.”⁴⁵ The crowd must have been lucrative, since Robinson agreed to the idea of converting Xanadu into a full time gay bar in 1970. The name was changed to “Oleen’s,” and Oleen took over the bar’s management. By the late 1970s Oleen’s was advertised in the *Free Press* as Charlotte’s “oldest show bar,” as well as “Charlotte’s First and Foremost Disco and Show Bar,” and even “The Show Bar of the South.”⁴⁶ It was also almost synonymous with Boom Boom LaTour’s performances. Ricky Carter remembered that his first few performances were unpaid and amateurish affairs, but as the crowds swelled beyond the comfortable capacity of the space, he would sometimes bring home “two or three

⁴³ Mimms, “Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists,” p. 57.

⁴⁴ Carter interview.

⁴⁵ Mimms, “Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists,” p. 66.

⁴⁶ *Charlotte Free Press*, multiple issues, 1977.

hundred dollars a night.” By 1977 Boom Boom and Company included Tina “Lady Champagne” Terrell, “Lady Day 2001,” and Linda “Miss Charlotte” Lock Lear, billed together as “The Dazzling Harlette’s Girls.” “Never the pretty one,” Ricky carved out a comedic role for Boom Boom from the start, modeling his style on English comedian, Benny Hill.⁴⁷ The concept was an immediate success, and it earned Carter a unique place among drag queens of the day. In addition to the house show, acts were brought in from Atlanta, Daytona, and Texas.⁴⁸ In 1977 Ms. Renaissance Drag Review was held in Charlotte’s National Guard Armory and drew a crowd of 3,000, causing it to move to the Country Coliseum at the Metrolina Fairgrounds north of Charlotte in 1978 where it was expected to draw 10,000 spectators.⁴⁹ By 1982 Charlotte’s drag culture extended to serving as the host for Miss Gay America, which was held at Oven’s Auditorium.⁵⁰

Although the impetus for the majority of Charlotte’s gay bar life came from the gay male community, some of Charlotte’s gay bars had mixed gender clientele. Mims stresses the significance of bar life for lesbians in Charlotte during the 1970s and 1980s but also the struggle to financially support a separate space of their own. Oleen’s show bar, for example, was a popular hang out for Charlotte lesbians, and in fact Oleen encouraged this crowd with performances tailored to them, including a Thursday night special for women in the mid 1980s.⁵¹ On her return to Charlotte in the mid 1980s Tonda Taylor noticed more camaraderie and less friction between gay men and lesbians in

⁴⁷ Carter interview.

⁴⁸ *Charlotte Free Press*, June 13, 1977.

⁴⁹ Wendy Fox, “A Beauty Pageant with A Twist,” *Charlotte Observer*, Aug. 17, 1978.

⁵⁰ Auditorium Coliseum Civic Center Authority 1980-1983, Eddie Knox Papers, box 1, ALSC.

⁵¹ Mimms, “Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists,” p. 67. In Nov. 1975 the bar hosted female folk singers “Jill and Marty” from Atlanta to entertain lesbian clientele. Several interviewees noted that it was common for brawls to break out at Oleen’s, usually between jealous lesbians.

Charlotte than she had experienced in New York City.⁵² Perhaps the small size of the gay population in Charlotte at this time encouraged cooperation and empathy rather than the conflict and distrust that grew in larger cities where different political agendas created rifts in the gay community.⁵³

Gay bars in Charlotte at this time were not all alike, and Oleen's showbar was certainly not to everyone's taste. Bobby Schmiel preferred disco to the drag queen atmosphere of Oleen's, even if the disco was provided by a juke box, as it was at the Scorpio in its early days. Typical of many gay bars, the Scorpio moved several times, from its first location at 2209 South Boulevard to 4316 Tryon St. in 1974 and eventually to its final location at 2301 Freedom Drive, where it is still operating as "Charlotte's Longest Running LGBTQ Dance Club Complex and Showbar."⁵⁴ In 1979 the Scorpio had become much more visible in Charlotte and was hailed as having the most mixed crowd with approximately "50-50 male and female, and 50-50 black and white" patrons. Manager David Wright also noted "We're beginning to pick up a sizeable number of straight people who like to come in here."⁵⁵

By the end of the decade a national directory published in San Francisco listed twenty-two gay meeting or cruising spots in Charlotte, including numerous bars, six adult

⁵² Taylor interview 3. This was corroborated by many interviewees of both genders.

⁵³ Many interviewees made this point when asked about relations between gays and lesbians in Charlotte. In addition to numbers, tight resources also made it difficult to establish separate spaces; LaShonda Mims has demonstrated how this problem led to the short existence of many lesbian-designated social spaces.

⁵⁴ *The Scorpio*, <http://www.thescorpio.com/> (accessed Nov. 20, 2015).

⁵⁵ Mona Gault, and Louise Hickman Lione, "The Last Waltz For Glitter Disco?" *Charlotte Observer*, June 15, 1979.

bookstores, a gay bath, and both the Southpark and Eastland malls.⁵⁶ In comparison to the 1960s at least, Charlotte had arrived on the gay and lesbian map.

Although Charlotte had an active cruising and bar scene, it is important to note that these were merely the most visible features of the gay experience. For lesbians and feminists, there was the Charlotte Women's Center on Lyndhurst Avenue in Dilworth, established in 1972 as an exclusively women's space.⁵⁷ But more importantly there was the home. A series of articles published in the *Charlotte Observer* in 1981 to expose gay lives to Charlotte's mainstream stressed above all else that the gay experience was much like any other human experience. "Gay Lives Guarded Living" included cameos of a lesbian couple playing Monopoly with their teenage sons at their rural home in western Mecklenburg, a gay couple doing their laundry together in their apartment off Central Ave. in east Charlotte who wished they could share their public lives also, and young lesbian lovers sharing a house in a blue collar neighborhood off Monroe Rd. who were living in a committed relationship despite their inability to marry. Staff reporters Ken Friedlein and Polly Paddock pointed out that, "in every area of Mecklenburg county—from winding country roads to blue-collar neighborhoods, to suburban apartments and condominiums—gay couples are setting up housekeeping, planting gardens and paying bills." They also stressed that gay men and women occupied all walks of life:

Charlotte's gays work in bookstores, printing companies, utility companies, restaurants, department stores, medical offices. They are clerks, chemists, landscapers, union members. Waiters, office managers, freight handlers, farmers.

⁵⁶ Ken Friedlein and Polly Paddock, "Gay Lives/Guarded Living," *Charlotte Observer*, Apr. 26, 1981. Note that Southpark Mall opened in 1970 and Eastland Mall in 1975.

⁵⁷ Mimms, "Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists," pp. 82-3.

Teachers, counselors, editors, funeral directors. They sell insurance and advertising and furniture and cosmetics and real estate.⁵⁸

As Paddock and Friedlein concluded, “the lives those gay men and women described are as varied and in many ways as ordinary as the lives of their heterosexual neighbors.”⁵⁹

* * *

Straight Attitudes

If there were 12,413 gay people in Mecklenburg County in 1970, then there were approximately 342,243 straight people. What their attitudes were towards the gay community and homosexuality is difficult to characterize with certainty. However, two contrasting series of articles about homosexuality that were published in the early 1970s in Charlotte’s two major newspapers illustrate a range of perspectives and public conversations on the topic. Taken together they provide a window into a broad range of viewpoints across Charlotte society, but close analysis shows that despite this range, common negative themes and stereotypes emerge. For most Charlotteans during the 1970s gay people were considered to be sick, psychologically disturbed people who were ostracized by society and led lonely and degraded lives. The range of opinions was more one between hostility and pity than hostility and acceptance.

Darrell Sifford, the executive editor of the *Charlotte News*, was the author of one of the two series; he wrote six provocative articles about “homosexuals” over a period of

⁵⁸ Ken Friedlein, and Polly Paddock, “Gay Life In Charlotte Is Open And Hidden, Varied And Ordinary,” *Charlotte Observer*, Apr. 26, 1981. This was a four-day series of articles about gay lives in Charlotte that ran in the Carolina Living section of the *Charlotte Observer* from Apr. 26 to Apr. 29, 1981.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

five years between 1969 and 1974.⁶⁰ These articles presented a mostly negative view of the gay community and were heavily informed by Christian morality.⁶¹ Sifford's position on homosexuality as a moral issue was particularly well illustrated in his second article published in November 1972. Headlined "Not A Creature of the Gutter," the article was based on a interview with Reverend Troy D. Perry, the founder of the gay-affirming Metropolitan Community Church of LA and author of *The Lord Is My Shepherd, and He Knows I'm Gay*. Perry had been a visiting speaker at Methodist Wofford College in Spartanburg, where Sifford interviewed him for his "Saturday Report." Offensive as the headline to Sifford's column was, his decision to begin the article with Bible quotations unequivocally established his rigid position on homosexuality. These passages would have been very familiar to both straight and gay audiences, and especially among evangelical Christians:

'And the men...turned with lust for each other, men doing shameful things with other men and, as a result, getting paid within their own souls with the penalty they so richly deserved.' Paul, writing in Romans 1:27.

'The penalty for homosexual acts is death to both parties'.
Moses speaking in Leviticus 20:13.⁶²

⁶⁰ It is a curious coincidence that Sifford's article describing gay nightlife in Charlotte was published on December 15th, 1973, the same day that the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.

⁶¹ At the time Sifford wrote the articles he was perfecting a style of journalism for which he became well known as a syndicated columnist and at the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Addressing his Charlotte audience in prominent front-page articles, Sifford tackled edgy topics of an intimate nature in a casual interview style. Perhaps because of this, he did not avoid his own prejudices in exploring Charlotte's gay community. A lack of criticism of his articles suggests that Sifford's viewpoint resonated with his readers. Daniel Rubin and Mark Duvoisin, "Darrell Sifford, 60, Drowns While Snorkling," *Philly.Com*, Mar. 8, 1992, http://articles.philly.com/1992-03-08/news/26019493_1_snorkeling-glass-bottom-boat-currents (accessed Nov. 10, 2015).

⁶² Darrell Sifford, "Not a Creature of the Gutter," *Charlotte News*, Nov. 25, 1972.

By quoting these passages Sifford emphasized homosexuality as a Christian moral issue. Sifford began his report of the interview by describing Perry rather demonically as “having a full head of dark hair, and sideburns that taper to a point low on his jawbone.” He followed with more reflections on Perry’s appearance, saying he was “tall, a lad over six feet—huskily built, rather handsome. On the zero-to-10 good looking scale I’d rate him about a seven.” After this demeaning and inappropriate start, Sifford did allow Perry to tell his story. However, he then undermined Perry’s legitimacy by following the story with a full report of an interview with a local Pentecostal minister, Reverend Hubert Morris of the Trinity Assembly of God. Sifford’s introduction of Morris contrasted with that of Perry: “Father of three daughters, a native of Vanceboro, NC, a graduate of Evangel College in Springfield MO.” Morris refuted Perry’s religious defense of homosexuality, summing up his verdict that after reading Perry’s book three times, “my reaction became one of pity. I asked mercy for him as a man while still condemning his homosexuality.”⁶³ In this article Sifford also included brief responses from other local clergy who did not agree with Morris. However, these were added as an afterthought titled “And Some Words Of Disagreement,” and no names were attributed to those interviewed, giving their voices much less weight. Sifford left it to the reader to decide who was right, but there was clearly little doubt in his mind.

Christian moralizing was common in Sifford’s articles. In “A Silent Language, A Closed Society,” a local doctor who remained anonymous asserted that “very little can be done medically [for homosexuals]. But the gospel of Jesus Christ can help. A

⁶³ Darrell Sifford, “Another Pastor Takes Issue With Mr. Perry,” *Charlotte News*, Nov. 25, 1972.

homosexual can be cured if he accepts the gospel and turns from his sin.”⁶⁴ In “He’s No Longer A Homosexual” a conflicted individual called “David,” described his “deliverance” after a transformative ritual encouraged by his Christian friends dramatically banished demons from his body.⁶⁵ Informant “Glen” in “A Tour Of Our Gay Night Life,” reflected pessimistically that “ministers and laymen don’t seem to want to play an active role in helping homosexuals. They seem like they don’t want to get their hands dirty, seem to regard us as slimy people who crawled from under a rock.”⁶⁶ Full of self-loathing, Glen hoped that he could change: “You don’t know how many nights I’ve lain in my bed and cried and wondered why God has put this curse on me. . . . I’m convinced God is the only way a homosexual can be cured.”⁶⁷

In addition to his moral tone, Sifford also used a variety of journalistic devices in his articles to indicate his disparaging view of gay lives. His authorial tone was serious, hushed, and furtive but at the same time revelatory, voyeuristic, and degrading; he used ‘experts’ to express professional opinions that were pessimistic and presented these as definitive; and he crafted headlines and selected artwork that echoed themes of deceit, shame, and negativity. (See Figure 1.)

⁶⁴ Darrell Sifford, “A Silent Language, A Closed Society,” *Charlotte News*, Feb. 22, 1969.

⁶⁵ Darrell Sifford, “He’s No Longer A Homosexual” *Charlotte News*, Jan. 30, 1973.

⁶⁶ Sifford, “A Tour of our Gay Nightlife.” Despite the hidden identities, Sifford gives sufficient geographic information for those who were interested to discover the places he described.

⁶⁷ Sifford, “A Tour Of Our Gay Nightlife.”

Homosexuality

Not A Creature Of The Gutter'

The Saturday Report

Wofford College, a Methodist-related school in Spartanburg, S.C., recently completed a two-week program that spotlighted "human sexuality" and explored such subjects as extramarital sex, prostitution, homosexuality, marriage and guilt.

This column recently carried an interview with one of these speakers brought to the campus for this program — Pauline Tabor, author of the big-selling "Pauline, Memoirs Of A Madam."

Today we're interviewing another of the speakers, the Rev. Troy D. Perry, pastor of Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles, an admitted homosexual, author of "The Lord Is My Shepherd And He Knows I Am Gay."

By DARRELL SIFFORD
Executive Editor, The News

The Rev. Troy D. Perry is 32, has a full head of dark hair, sideburns that taper to a point low on his jawbone.

an hour or so answering questions in an appearance for which he'll be paid \$1,000.

He's tall—a tad over six feet—huskily built, rather handsome. On the zero-to-10 good-looking scale I'd rate him about a seven.

He's wearing a dark gray suit, a green-gold shirt (without buttons on the collar), a paisley tie that is green, gold and gray. He wears two rings, one on the little finger of his right hand, the other on the third finger of his left hand. Both look like class rings.

BECAUSE OF a book he has written, "The Lord Is My Shepherd And He Knows I Am Gay," Mr. Perry is perhaps the most widely known homosexual.

'Being a homosexual is like being a member of any minority group. You have to fight the stereotype, the guilt by association.'

cause other young children can be very cruel. But I pu

And the... burned with lust for each other, men doing shameful things with other men and, as a result, getting paid within their own souls with the penalty they so richly deserved.

—Paul, writing in Romans 1:27

NOV 25 1972

"The penalty for homosexual acts is death to both parties."

—Moses, speaking in Leviticus 20:13

NEWS

SIFFORD Acknowledging that Mr. Perry's inclusion on the program

Dr. Donald J. Welch, dean of students,

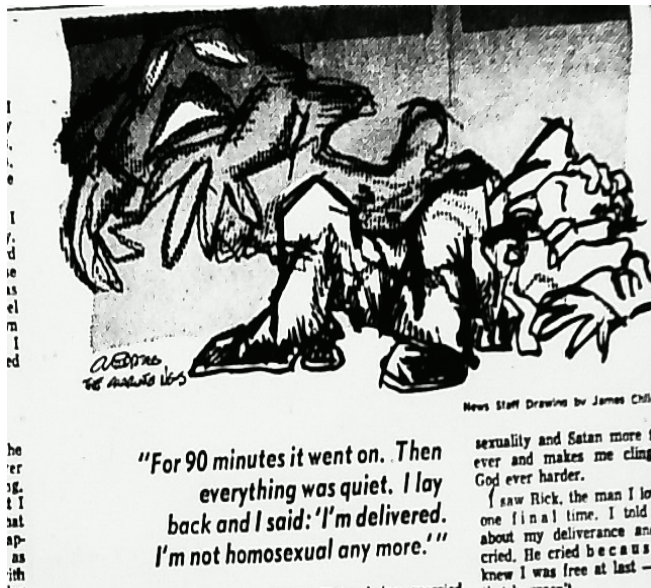
exual

'I saw Rick... one final time. I told him about my deliverance and he cried. He cried because he knew I was free at last—but that he wasn't.'

Sifford
The Christian News

News Staff Drawing by James Childress

Fig. 1 Darrell Sifford's use of imagery, headlines, and quotes emphasize a negative viewpoint on homosexuality and gay people.



sexuality and Satan more t
ever and makes me cling
God ever harder.
I saw Rick, the man I lo
one final time. I told
about my deliverance and
cried. He cried because
knew I was free at last —



Corinthians 6:9-10. It read:
"Don't you know that those doing such things have no share in the kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who live immoral lives, who are idol worshippers, adulterers or homosexuals — will have no share in His kingdom."



laymen and ministers need to get away from their television ministries and get out on the streets — where the homosexuals are — and minister to them. That's the only way these people ever will be helped. I'm convinced God is the only way a homosexual can be cured. And it is a sick-



Fig. 1 (cont.) Darrell Sifford's use of imagery, headlines, and quotes emphasize a negative viewpoint on homosexuality and gay people.

The second series of articles, published between March 22 and 28, 1970, were authored by *Charlotte Observer* columnist Pat Borden. There is no indication of what prompted Borden to take up this subject; perhaps national events unfolding after the Stonewall riots of September 1969 and a general increase in media coverage of gay issues piqued interest in the local gay community. In contrast to Sifford, the Borden articles did not carry negative religious overtones. Moreover, while Sifford's tone was clandestine and titillating, Borden's articles relied heavily on interviews with named local professionals and were written as an objective attempt to convey emerging shifts in attitudes about a social phenomenon. For example, Borden reported that her legal informants agreed that "Charlotteans' general attitude towards those (homosexuals) in their midst is becoming more lenient...where they used to have a fear, a repugnance of it." District Court Judge Willard L. Gatling described how he had changed his thinking from the "old school" by becoming familiar with new literature on homosexuality and now believed that "homosexuals should be better understood.... Homosexuals want to be accepted in society and I see no reason why they should not be...." Peter Foley, an assistant solicitor who was responsible for prosecuting homosexuals under the law, also noted that "the courts have been lenient toward consenting adults, and have some reluctance to prosecute them."⁶⁸ From the education sector, sex educator, Dr. Jonnie McLeod said that she included discussion of homosexuality in her sex education talks "in a positive way," and William G. Tucker, guidance counselor at Harding High School, described a sea change among students in regard to homosexuality, saying that: "The

⁶⁸ Pat Borden, "The Law Takes A Look At Homosexuality," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 22. 1970.

younger set feels that the penalties are much too strenuous toward overt homosexuals.”

Another Charlotte guidance counselor, Joe Champion, stressed that:

If a youngster is identified as one, (a homosexual), we feel you should accept him as an individual.... There seems to be a whole change of attitude about homosexuality.... I think I can safely speak for the rest of the counseling staff in saying that we're not shocked by it. The whole idea of sex is changing. Discussion is coming out into the open whereas before it was very hush hush.... Nobody cares too much now. We're not uptight about it in the schools. The more talk of homosexuality that comes out in the open the more it is accepted.⁶⁹

Despite these more positive views, however, Borden's sources indicated that while tolerated, gay people were still considered to be problematic outsiders in Charlotte society. Borden's descriptions of two gay bars illustrate that they had to be covert and shoddy to avoid negative public attention. One owner and manager referred to his bar as a "rat box," adding that this was the way the clientele wanted it to be in order to be assured that nobody will "bother them." It is also telling that affirmations were heavily qualified by negative remarks. The same bar owner asserted: "I'd 100 per cent rather have gay clientele than straight. Never have had to call the cops, though they're welcome to come in here any time." Yet at the same time he described his clientele as "weird, crazy, or sick," and stressed that "even though I like these people, I wouldn't want my kids to be gay.... You know if I saw my daughter in a gay bar I'd be out to kill someone."⁷⁰ In a plusher bar near the Square the owner noted: "They're neat, clean. Well mannered," and a straight customer chimed in "they make some of the best friends you could ever have."

⁶⁹ Pat Borden, "Counselors Sight [sic] Changes In Homosexuality," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar 24, 1970. Professional psychologists were beginning to question the classification of homosexuality as a disorder in the early 1970s and officially removed it from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* in 1973: "Facts about Homosexuality and Mental Health, Department of Psychology, UC Davis, http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/facts_mental_health.html (accessed, July 23, 2017).

⁷⁰ Pat Borden, "Never Had to Call the Police," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 28, 1970.

However, in an afterword the bar owner felt the need to stress that, “they’re outcasts, really...Nobody cares for them. If they think you care anything at all, there’s nothing they wouldn’t do for you.”⁷¹

The professionals Borden interviewed may have been somewhat accepting of homosexuality, but it is clear that they still assumed that being gay was an aberration. William G. Tucker described his treatment of homosexual students as paralleling his treatment of truants, “one who also displays non-socially acceptable behavior.” Though he suggested that he would be supportive of gay students, he also commented that by allowing them to “make up their own minds...you have to subscribe to the idea of ‘allowing a person to go to hell in his own fashion.’” Joe Champion, although outwardly the most accepting of the three interviewed, used terms that stressed abnormality: “sexual deviation,” “loner,” “this sort of activity.” Perhaps even more dramatically, Dr. Jonnie McLeod, who was noted in Charlotte for her groundbreaking work in introducing sex education in Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools during the 1960s, commented:

I do feel that society is too hard on them...but I can’t think that it [homosexuality] is normal. The only relationship to me that is totally complete is the man-woman relationship.... Homosexuals must lead essentially a very lonely life.⁷²

McLeod’s approach was to try and convince young people who thought they were homosexual that they were going through a developmental phase, but that it was abnormal to practice homosexual sex. McLeod also saw homosexuality as a learned behavior: “One doesn’t become homosexual overnight.... A basic unrest, an unhappiness with themselves in some way, contributes to a person’s turning to his or her own sex.”⁷³

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Borden, “Counselors Sight [sic] Changes In Homosexuality.”

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Borden's only interview with a homosexual was with a man whose views were very negative:

Homosexuality should be looked on as something like a crippling disease...something that happens to people without their having planned it.... People afflicted with it have to learn to live with it and learn to be as complete a person as possible...not one gay person I know wouldn't choose to change if he could.⁷⁴

Sifford and Borden's articles then offer evidence of widely different views of Charlotte's gay society in the 1970s. At one extreme there was significant hostility, contempt, and condemnation, but at the other there was also a growing awareness of and sympathy for gay people. However, underlying negatives that are shared across all the articles narrow the range. Despite differences in style and sympathy, both the Sifford and the Borden articles portrayed gay people as sick, psychologically disturbed people who were ostracized by society and led lonely and degraded lives.

Interestingly, there was also a strong tendency in these articles to address the situation of gay males rather than gay females, perhaps because gay women were seen as less of a threat to societal norms.⁷⁵ One of the (anonymous) doctors that Sifford interviewed noted that lesbians "seem to be more prevalent" than male homosexuals, and "they don't carry the relationship to the lengths of sexual contact as often as men do."⁷⁶ Sifford certainly seems to have been less hostile to female homosexuality since the last article in this series was a sympathetic story about a radical lesbian, Diana Travis. Sifford again introduced Travis as "a seven" on "the zero-to-ten beauty scale," but in general the

⁷⁴ Pat Borden, "Double Identity He Was Forced To Assume," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 27, 1970.

⁷⁵ The only interview that Borden conducted to represent the homosexual point of view in her articles was with a gay man, indicating either a bias towards the gay male perspective, the belief that gay males were more controversial for Charlotteans, or the unavailability of female informants.

⁷⁶ Sifford, "A Silent Language, A Closed Society."

interview was respectful, detailing Travis' accomplishments as a professional musician, lecturer, counselor, radio talk show host, and gay rights activist.⁷⁷ Sifford claimed that he wrote his final article to placate criticisms from lesbians about his negative stereotyping.⁷⁸ However, the truth was that Sifford's choice to interview Travis was forced on him by her irate mother, a detail that indicates another strand of shifting attitudes in Charlotte. Travis, originally from Charlotte, but now living in Boston, was the daughter of Gus Travis, a much-loved journalist on the *Observer's* staff. When Travis came out her mother was shocked, and although she eventually accepted her daughter's sexual orientation, she insisted that it be kept a secret in Charlotte. However, Mrs. Travis was so incensed by Sifford's articles that she insisted on an interview to straighten the record, thus "outing" her daughter to the whole of Charlotte.⁷⁹

By 1981 there is evidence that perceptions in Charlotte were shifting. A series of articles by Polly Paddock and Ken Friedlein published in the Carolina Living section of the *Observer* titled "Gay Lives / Guarded Living" presented a significantly different take on the lives of gay people in Charlotte.⁸⁰ In these articles the emphasis had shifted towards a view of gay individuals that was more insider than outsider. One comment in particular summed this up in a humorous way: "If everybody who's gay opened the door and said 'I'm gay!' there'd be a lot of people dropping dead on the floor." Although Pat

⁷⁷ Darrell Sifford, "A Lesbian: Don't Oppress Us," *Charlotte News*, Feb. 27, 1974. In an interview Diane Travis acknowledged that it was her mother who insisted that she have an interview with Sifford in order to correct what her mother saw as gross misinformation in Sifford's first stories: Diana Travis oral history interview 1, Feb, 27, 2017, ALSC.

⁷⁸ What Sifford also does not acknowledge was that an anonymous gay male (actually Don King) had directly offered to be the subject of an interview to provide "an example of a happy, well-adjusted homosexual." Sifford turned down King's offer "unconditionally in a very curt letter:" Anonymous, "Sifford Columns on Gays 'Slanderous,'" *Charlotte News*, Dec. 29, 1973, box 3, folder 19, King Papers.

⁷⁹ Travis interview 1.

⁸⁰ Paddock, and Friedlein, "Gay Lives/ Guarded Living."

Borden's portrayal of gay lives was sympathetic, her approach fully reflected the common public perception of the 1970s of gays as troubled outcasts. In contrast, Paddock and Friedlein's articles sought to challenge public opinion by revealing how ordinary gay lives were and how similar they were to those of the Charlotte's straight mainstream. Tonda Taylor's dismay at the reception she got on her return to Charlotte makes it clear that change was only just getting underway, but the prominent placing of these articles in the city's major daily newspaper indicates that by the beginning of the 1980s there was a new discourse around what it meant to be gay in Charlotte, and this reflects the signs of an emerging gay community in the city that will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: GAY CULTURE AND ACTIVISM IN CHARLOTTE, 1970-1985

In April 1977 the following letter appeared in the *Free Press*, a bi-weekly gay and lesbian news journal published in Charlotte and distributed widely across the Southeast.

Dear Mr. Freese [editor]:

I am writing to you to ask if there is at present any gay group in Charlotte working toward enhancing gay issues on the political scene in Mecklenburg, and I assume, if so, you would know of it. If there is not, let me know, and I'll run a few ads in the *Free Press* to sound out interest among the community. I'm thinking of a group that could do such things as hold voter registration drives, send out questionnaires to local political candidates for office, publish endorsements of candidates, etc.

I attended your media workshop at the recent Southeastern Gay Conference and enjoyed it, though gay media seemed to get only one third of the workshop's time. I welcome your opinions.

Sincerely,
D.E.

By publishing the letter rather than responding directly to D.E.'s enquiry, Freese tacitly acknowledged that there were no active gay groups interested in politics, but he added a note indicating that the *Free Press* would forward any replies to D.E.¹

The 1977 letter and the editor's response are interesting for a number of reasons. Given Charlotte's conservatism it is significant that North Carolina's first gay and lesbian newspaper was based in Charlotte, suggesting that there was enough of a gay and lesbian community to support the publication. The content of the *Free Press* also suggests that readers were interested in politics since it carried political articles and links to the wider movement in the state and the nation, including the unfolding story of Anita Bryant's Save Our Children organization in 1977 and its success in repealing the gay rights

¹ D.E., "Letter to the Editor," *Free Press*, Apr. 18, 1977, p.18.

ordinance in Dade County, Florida.² However, D.E.'s letter suggests that the presence of a gay and lesbian press had not stimulated activism and political organizing in Charlotte. There is no evidence of who D.E. was, or whether he or she heard from anyone else, but the fact that the *Free Press* stopped publishing by the end of 1977 suggests that the community's appetite for activism was limited.

For gays and lesbians across the U.S., however, the 1970's was a decade of significant community building and political organizing around issues of equality and human rights. In the wake of the Stonewall riots in New York City in 1969, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) emerged to champion gay rights in New York City, and similar groups formed in many cities across the country.³ At the national level several groups emerged in the 1970s that provided a theoretical and practical framework for local groups seeking to challenge legal and social barriers for gays and lesbians. In 1973 the National Gay Task Force (later the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force), was founded as a national political action group.⁴ These national groups helped to stimulate local activism and the cumulative effect made gay communities more visible and made gay rights a topic of national debate. There were also political victories across the country that promised a more inclusive future for gays and lesbians. Kathy Kozachenko won a seat on the Ann Arbor Michigan City Council in 1972, Elaine Nobel won a seat in the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1974,

² For a discussion of the importance of the Bryant campaign in shaping the gay liberation movement see Fred Frejes, *Gay Rights and Moral Panic: The Origins of America's Debate on Homosexuality* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

³ There has been significant coverage of the significance of the Stonewall Riots in LGBTQ history. For a discussion of these various histories see: Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Rutledge, 2012), pp. 79-81.

⁴ Leila J. Rupp, *A Desired Past: A Short History of Same-Sex Love in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 177-78.

Alan Spear won a seat in the Minnesota Senate in 1976, Jim Yeadon was elected to the Madison Wisconsin City Council in April 1977, and Harvey Milk was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in November of the same year.⁵

In his recent reassessment of the gay and lesbian movement, Marc Stein situates the Gay Liberation period between the Stonewall Riots in 1969 and the American Psychiatric Association's decision to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973. Stein distinguishes between two strands of the movement. On the more radical end of the spectrum were Gay Liberation Front (GLF) groups, typically made up of young, white men, who adopted a confrontational approach. Critical of accommodationist homophile politics, proud to be gay, and positive about the legitimacy of homosexual sex and culture, GLF groups emphasized "coming out" in all spheres of life to confront prejudice and gain public recognition and political equality. In contrast, Gay Activist Alliance groups (GAAs) were more conventional and more focused on advocating for gay rights through legislation and electoral politics rather than working towards revolution in society. Although still predominately white and male, there were more GAA groups that included women and people of color, and GAA groups were also more likely to promote community building through social, cultural, and religious activism.⁶

In his recent book, *Stand By Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation*, Jim Downs sees gay liberation as encompassing the whole decade of the 1970s. In contrast to Stein's focus on politics and social revolution, Downs describes developments that are similar to the activities of GAA groups, but he places even greater emphasis on quieter

⁵ Scott C. Seyforth and Nichole Barnes, "In People's Faces for Lesbian and Gay Rights: Stories of Activism in Madison, Wisconsin, 1970 to 1990," *The Oral History Review*, 43 (2016): 81-97.

⁶ Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, chapter 3.

gay spaces that were created outside the bars and other venues dedicated to sexual pursuit. In particular Downs highlights the importance of ‘forgotten’ gay organizations, spaces, or activities that emerged across the country in this period, including gay churches, bookstores, print media, and history making. Downs shows how these organizations and spaces provided transformative experiences that, in combination, created a gay community.⁷

However, the work of both Stein and Downs focuses on larger metropolitan centers, especially the gay meccas of New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, along with a handful of smaller progressive cities (often university towns). This chapter will show that while gay and lesbian activism in Charlotte emerged through many of the same kinds of activities and groups that were common in larger and more progressive cities, it did so five to ten years later and was not sustained. The first gay organizations outside of the bars, adult bookstores, cinemas, and baths emerged in Charlotte only towards the end of the 1970s, and it is not until the first years of the 1980s that they widened in scope. Moreover, progress was slow and halting, so that even by 1984 it could not be said that sustained gay activism existed in the city. By this point, of course, the AIDS epidemic was very much in the national news (although it was not yet seen as a matter of local urgency). The early history of gay activism in the mid-sized Southern city suggests a need to re-examine the accepted periodization of the gay liberation movement. The concepts, goals, and approaches of the national movement are visible in Charlotte but in a highly episodic and unfocused fashion. Indeed, there was no “movement” as Stein

⁷ Jim Downs, *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

defines it in Charlotte until after AIDS really took hold in the second half of the 1980s. This chapter shows that place is important.

The chapter takes a chronological approach, tracing evidence of gay and lesbian organizations and activities during the 1970s and first few years of the 1980s. While there was a trajectory of growth, from isolated, short-lived bursts towards more continuous and interconnected organizing after 1980, the numbers of individuals who were active was always small. Moreover, more in line with Downs than Stein, the gay liberation movement in Charlotte was largely inward looking; it was more focused on community building than in pushing a social change agenda. Ironically, just as the local gay movement seems to have been finding its feet in the early 1980s, the gay community nationally was beginning to deal with AIDS, and the chapter closes with a brief overview of the emergence of the epidemic.

* * *

Gay Activism

Charlotte's earliest recorded gay activism was a flurry of events starting in late 1971 when a group of racially diverse young people, many of them students, formed the Gay Liberation Front of Charlotte in an effort to raise consciousness about local gay issues. The short-lived group mostly patterned itself on the gay liberation movement in New York following the Stonewall riots and the counter culture movement of the late 1960s. The Charlotte group had at least one direct association with the wider national movement for gay rights, since one member, a twenty-two year old black Charlottean, had just returned from New York, where he had been a member of the Gay Activist

Alliance.⁸ However, the Charlotte GLF also had strong local associations. Three individuals, Charlottean Brad Keistler, Charles Shoe, and Shoe's partner Greg.⁹ Keistler had moved back to Charlotte in 1970, at age twenty-six, after spending time in Europe, and he opened a head shop called Asterisk on Sixth Street opposite the downtown library in Charlotte. The store was popular with "Charlotte's cultural malcontents, high school hippies, budding revolutionaries and closeted types," and this, plus the revolutionary literature Keistler discovered at an alternative local bookstore called Crazy Horse, encouraged his emerging activism. Keistler eventually came out to the "Red Worms" commune where he was living and was soon introduced to a gay couple, Charles and Greg, who lived nearby.¹⁰

The Charlotte GLF, a group of about twenty, met in the Red worms commune and saw its primary purpose as creating spaces for gay people to gather as alternatives to the gay bars where "heavy cruising" and "sexual urgency" could be too overt:

They have such an oppressive atmosphere, you're judged so much on physical appearance, and there's all this urgency to turn a trick, not to find a balanced

⁸ Polly Paddock, "Local Gay Liberation Front Prefers Rap Session to Bars," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 19, 1972. Brad Keistler oral history interview, Oct. 25, 2017, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, (ALSC).

⁹ James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp. 90-95.

¹⁰ In the mid 1970s the neighborhoods just south of uptown Charlotte and especially Dilworth, were becoming a hub for gay businesses. Honeys Restaurant and the original Brass Rail Bar was between uptown and Dilworth at Morehead and Tryon; Oleen's showbar was at South Blvd. and Worthington Ave.; Club South Baths was located close by on South Blvd. between Kingston Dr. and East Blvd.; Club Bath Chain, Club Charlotte was located on West Morehead St. close to what is now the I77 intersection; Nicky's Express was on East Morehead St. at Kings Dr.; Scorpio's original location was on South Blvd.; the business office of the *Charlotte Free Press* was on East Blvd close to Camden Rd., and Josh's restaurant, which was reputedly owned by the editors of *Charlotte Free Press* (personal conversation with Sandra Bailey) was on East Blvd. close to the intersection with South Blvd.

relationship. It's like being a piece of meat out on a rack.... The group is tired of living in a society that puts gay people out of sight and out of mind in the bars.¹¹

They also wanted "to set up a 'gay community center,' offer draft counseling for homosexuals, and establish a bail fund for those arrested under the state's 'crime against nature' laws."¹² However, the group's practical accomplishments were limited. In addition to consciousness raising sessions at their meetings, Charlotte's GLF sponsored at least two dances at a local church, held two panel discussions at UNC Charlotte, and undertook a handful of protest actions, including same sex dancing and shows of public affection. However, the Charlotte GLF group only lasted eighteen months and left nothing to build on. By the end of 1972 Keistler had moved permanently to Los Angeles and cofounders Charles and Greg had moved to San Francisco.¹³ (Where else?)

Just as the small GLF group was folding, Don King, who was to become the undisputed champion of the city's gay community during the late 1970s and early 1980s, arrived in Charlotte to work at the *Charlotte Observer*.¹⁴ His first act was to defend gays and lesbians against the disparaging caricatures that were being published by Darryl Sifford in the *Charlotte News*.¹⁵ King's first piece, "Homosexuality Not Always

¹¹ Paddock, "Local Gay Liberation Front Prefers Rap Session to Bars." In *Stand By Me*, Jim Downs particularly emphasizes the significance of creating gay and lesbian spaces outside the bars, adult bookstores and other institutions that connected people mostly through sex, as a necessary step towards liberation.

¹² Paddock, "Local Gay Liberation Front Prefers Rap Session to Bars;" Keistler interview.

¹³ Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, pp. 90-95.

¹⁴ Jim Baxter, "An Interview With Charlotte Activist & Entrepreneur Don King," *Front Page*, Apr. 26-May 9, 1983. The article characterized King as "the Gay Spokesperson...to the press and media," who answered "any and all criticism that has come our way."

¹⁵ It is very likely in fact that Sifford all but outed King when he made a point of mentioning that he had seen a "newspaper man" in a gay bar in his story "A Tour Of Our Gay Night Life." Sifford indicated that the man ignored him, even though he had recently been in Sifford's office interviewing for a job. The article was published in December of 1973, not long after King had changed his position with the *Observer* as a sports writer for a position in the promotions department at Knight Publishing Company, which owned both the *Observer* and the *News*.

Haunting Demon,” was published anonymously in the *Charlotte News*, but it can be found among King’s carefully carbon copied letters. His critique was a heated but logical attempt to educate people about what being gay really meant: “Homosexuality for me is a constraint only in that society makes it so. I do not feel the need to be delivered.”¹⁶ After Sifford’s fourth article was published on December 15 1973, King offered another stinging rebuke in a long editorial letter that was published in the *Charlotte News*. His comment drove home the message that Sifford’s reporting was dangerous and simple minded:

The most offensive thing in the series of articles is the purely idiotic definition, by apposite, in this most recent article. Of “homosexual, a man . . . who roams the streets and gay bars by night and who during the day shivers with fear that he’ll be discovered.” Are Charlotteans so dull-minded they cannot perceive that this is as blatant an offense against gay people as saying, “He is a Negro, a person who shines shoes or scrubs floors by day and tap-dances, squanders welfare money, or rides around in a brand-new Cadillac by night,” would be against blacks? This sort of calculated, demagogic “reporting” is an insult to any thinking person’s intelligence.¹⁷

It is impossible to know what spurred King to act, but there was an important spiritual dimension to his activism. King attributed his awakening sense of mission to his relationship with friend and mentor, “Father” Michael Bruce Wood, whom he met when Wood started holding religious services at Oleen’s bar in September 1973. Wood was quoted as saying that his purpose was to illustrate a need that was not being met by local churches and to “help people find peace through religion as I’ve done. I’ve seen no

¹⁶ “Homosexuality Not Always Haunting Demon,” *Charlotte News*, Aug. 3, 1973, box 3, folder 19, Donaldson Wells King Papers, ALSC.

¹⁷ “Sifford Columns On Gays ‘Slanderous,’” *Charlotte News*, Dec. 29, 1973, box 3, folder 19, King papers.

barriers in the Gospel, (to inclusion) whether it's race, nationalities, or sex.”¹⁸ King acknowledged Wood as his priest as early as June 1974. Wood had enabled King to see that his “sexuality (my homosexuality, even) is a special gift, not something that is evil or wrong or contrary to the concept of Christ.”¹⁹

After King and Wood became roommates in late 1974, the church meetings at Oleen's, which had been attracting as many as forty participants, became “The Church of the Good News” that met in their apartment.²⁰ Eventually King decided to join Our Lady of The Assumption Catholic Church where Wood was already affiliated. King's sense of mission continued to grow as a member of Assumption. In a letter he described discussions he had had with Father Ron McLaughlin about being gay and Christian and being helpful to other gay people: “I do have a mission of some kind that joins the two great themes in my life at present—Christianity and gayness, which, contrary to the feelings of too many ‘Christians’ are very compatible.” At the end of his letter King also notes: “Well, little Charlotte is still little Charlotte. Nothing radical is happening here....”²¹

King's dispirited comment reflects the difficulty of sustaining activism in Charlotte in an era when nationally the movement was making important strides. It is curious that this letter does not acknowledge some promising local episodes, but King is correct that at this point there was nothing lasting. For example, a gay student association formed at some point in 1974-1975 at UNC Charlotte. The group was planning a

¹⁸ “Gay People Attend Church In A Bar,” *The Charlotte News*, Nov. 9, 1973. Wood's legitimacy as a priest is disputed in the article.

¹⁹ King to Tim, June 27, 1974, box 1, folder 2, King papers.

²⁰ “First Report to the Parrish [sic],” Jan. 13 1974, box 3, folder 23, King papers.

²¹ King to Louis, May 21 1976; King to Roy Harris Feb. 1976, box 1, folder 1, King papers.

symposium that was to be called “Christopher Street Comes South” as early as July 1975. The organizer, Kenneth Foster, president of the “UNCC Special Activities Committee,” said the purpose of the symposium was “to enlighten people about homosexuality and gay liberation.” Foster noted that:

Gays today know very little about what’s happening on the national scene. For example, not one in twenty gays know the significance of June 29. The 29th is the official Gay Liberation Day, which commemorates the Stonewall riots in New York. The Stonewall bar on Christopher Street was the site of the first gay resistance to discrimination.²²

The four-day symposium was held the following November and featured an impressive array of significant national leaders of the gay liberation movement, but the UNC Charlotte group seems to have disbanded shortly thereafter.²³

Inspired by this student activism, a group of non-students at the university expressed interest “...in forming a gay alliance of some sort”²⁴ in early 1975. The first meeting was at the university, but it then moved to the home of a downtown businessman. Membership eventually reached as many as twenty-four people, “including

²² “Christopher Street Comes South,” *Charlotte Free Press*, July 28, 1975. It is notable that the *Charlotte Free Press* deliberately educated its readers about gay and lesbian history. This was also true for *Front Page* and *Q-Notes*.

²³ The symposium was sponsored by the University Program Board and included lectures by gay liberation leaders, Barbara Gittings, coordinator for the Task Force on Gay Liberation for the American Library Association, and Dr. Frank Kameny, member of the Human Rights Commission, president and founder of the Mattachine Society of Washington, board member of the national Gay Task Force, and legal committee chairman for the gay Activists Alliance of Washington, among others. The event was protested by several professors in the College of Business Administration who signed a petition questioning whether students would hear only one side of a controversial issue, but these protests were overruled. See “Homosexual Speakers at UNCC,” *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 10, 1975; “Homosexual Lectures Set For Campus,” *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 29, 1975.

²⁴ King to Roy, Jan. 27, 1975, box 1, folder 1, King papers.

a 32-year-old Northerner who said he was in on founding the GLF and the GAA in New York.”²⁵ The group’s agenda was similar to that of the earlier Charlotte GLF:

It seems that right now there are going to be no marches of any sort (after all, the police and political harassment here has not been overt.) Some of the things that we have talked about include an information center, a help line, a charitable effort to boost gay ‘public relations,’ consciousness raising, and a social alternative to the bar scene.²⁶

However, the group recognized the importance of the bars to the gay community and in a February 1975 letter made it clear that the “Alternative Sexual League” wanted to support established gay businesses rather than compete with them.²⁷ This overture established a pattern of collaboration between bars and activists that persisted in Charlotte. True to form, the “League” was short lived, and by the middle of 1976 the group was no longer active; its last act being a flyer distributed in March encouraging people to contact their congressmen to support a Congressional civil rights bill that included sexual preference as a protected class.²⁸ In an interview some years later King reflected that the group’s leadership had been strong on ideas but lacking in sensitivity: “you can’t be obnoxious and get things done.... You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.”²⁹

King’s remark that “nothing radical is happening here” also failed to acknowledge North Carolina’s first gay newspaper, the *Charlotte Free Press*, a publication that is,

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.* The only record of the group, with the exception of a flyer, which was distributed at the same time that the group was in existence, is in the papers of Don King, who was a member of the executive committee.

²⁷ King to Tom Hare et al, Feb. 4, 1975, box 3, folder 10, King papers. The letter was probably sent at King’s prompting. There continued to be support by gay bars in Charlotte for political organizing.

²⁸ Flyer from the Metrolina Gay Alliance, vertical file, “Homosexuality,” Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room.

²⁹ Baxter, “An Interview With Charlotte Activist & Entrepreneur Don King.”

surprisingly, never mentioned in his papers. John J. Freese, and Robert J. Freese Jr. founded R & J Publishing Company and started distributing the *Free Press* in Charlotte in April 1975. Interestingly, Ann Freese was the first copy editor and Emilie Freese was a regular contributor of articles focusing on lesbian interests. The office for the company was located at 103 East Boulevard in the Dilworth suburb of Charlotte. At a time when gay and lesbian news was not given print space in the national or local papers, gay newspapers were crucial avenues of communication.³⁰ By the end of its two and a half year run the *Free Press* had a circulation that reached as far as Asheville, Atlanta, Columbia, Durham, Fayetteville, Greensboro, Greenville N.C., Knoxville, Norfolk, Raleigh, Richmond, Spartanburg, Washington D.C., and Wilmington.³¹ The wide regional range of distribution and ads for gay businesses across the state is indicative of gay and lesbian networking that connected urban areas across the Southeast, and it also suggests that in this period Charlotte was a notable center of gay social life in the southeast.

Significantly, the *Free Press* devoted an increasing number of column inches to news about national gay events and political activism; indeed, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the *Free Press* functioned as a local mouthpiece for groups like the National Gay Task Force, and the Gay Coalition. For example, the March 7, 1977 issue

³⁰ In *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, Marc Stein discusses the significant emergence of gay and lesbian periodicals during the 1970s, noting that by 1980 there were more than 600 publications with a readership of more than 500,000 across the US. On a national level the most popular were *The Advocate*, based in California, Boston's *Gay Community News*, and Toronto's *The Body Politic*. Stein lists many local periodicals, including *Sinister Wisdom*, which got its start in Charlotte in 1975 before moving to Nebraska by the end of the decade. See p.118-19. La Shonda Mims discusses the history and importance of *Sinister Wisdom* in her dissertation, "Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists: Lesbians, Identity, and the New South."

³¹ In March 1977 distribution also included Augusta, Charleston, Macon, and Savannah but not Spartanburg.

included a call by the National Gay Task Force to lesbian women asking them to participate in the International Women's Year Conferences that would take place across the U.S. during 1977.³² The paper also encouraged political activism, with information about conferences, letter writing campaigns, or fundraising activities, such as a series of appeals to send money to support activists in Dade County Florida who were fighting Anita Bryant's attempt to repeal local ordinances protecting the jobs and homes of gays.³³ Other significant national news included the White House reception of the National Gay Task Force in 1977, with a detailed explanation of the rights issues that were presented to President Carter's public liaison assistant, Margaret Costanza.³⁴

On a regional level the *Free Press* was able to disseminate information about events and conferences aimed at building community, heightening awareness of gay issues, and advancing the cause of gay rights in the Southeast. The March 7th 1977 edition of the paper drew attention to the "2nd Annual Southeastern Gay Conference," which was to be held in April at UNC Chapel Hill. Intended as "an opportunity for gay men and women...to join together proudly in a festive atmosphere," the event featured keynote speeches by Jean O'Leary, of the National Gay Task Force, and prominent lesbian activist Barbara Gittings.³⁵ It was an encounter at this conference that prompted D.E. to write to Mr. Freese seeking information others in Charlotte who were pursuing

³² "Lesbians Urged to Participate in Women's Year Conferences," *Free Press*, Mar. 7, 1977, p. 12.

³³ *Free Press*, Feb. 7 - June 27, 1977, and *Pink Trash*, Sept. 1977. *Pink Trash* was the last edition of the *Free Press*.

³⁴ "National Gay Task Force Officers Meet at White House with Presidential Assistant," *Free Press*, Feb. 21, 1977, pp. 6-7; in particular the rights issues addressed were discrimination in such areas as the military, immigration and naturalization, treatment of federal prisoners, and IRS tax-deductible status.

³⁵ "O'Leary to Keynote 2nd Annual Southeastern Gay Conference," *Free Press*, Mar. 7, 1977, p. 5.

political action. As discussed in the introduction to the chapter, the appeal came to nothing, and the *Free Press* itself closed within a year, leaving Charlotte and the region with no local gay and lesbian print resource until 1979 when the Raleigh-based *Front Page* was launched.

As Don King recalled some years later, a real turning point in changing the gay scene in Charlotte came in 1977 with the founding of the Charlotte Chapter of Dignity, a national movement to create gay-affirming groups that was affiliated with the Catholic Church.³⁶ In King's opinion the Dignity group represented Charlotte's first real alternative organization beyond the bar scene that could act as a platform for other groups. King's outlook gives credence to Jim Down's argument that many in the gay liberation movement felt that it was important to build and sustain viable cultures outside the bars—redefining “homosexuality by showing the world that gay people had a culture and could not be defined simply by their sexual acts.”³⁷

The honor of founding the Dignity chapter of Charlotte belongs to a gay high school teacher in his late fifties identified as “Eddie;” Eddie had lived as a deeply closeted gay man in Charlotte until a chance encounter with literature about Dignity emboldened him to act.³⁸ Early meetings, which consisted of a small group of gay men and two lesbians, were held in private homes and restaurants, but by mid-November the chapter was meeting at Park Road Baptist Church, where minister Charlie Milford had

³⁶ King to George and Martha, Jan. 6, 1977; to Stu (Stuart Dim), May 11, 1977; to Mr. and Mrs. King, Jan. 19, 1978, box 1, folder 2, King papers; Vanessa Gallman, “Gays Want Life With Dignity,” *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 13, 1978. Charlotte's Catholic churches never supported the local Dignity chapter.

³⁷ Downs, *Stand by Me*, p. 192.

³⁸ Gallman, “Gays Want Life With Dignity.” See also box 1, folder ‘Dignity Charlotte 1977-79,’ Keith Bernard Papers, ALSC; and, Dignity notebook, box 3, folder 25 King papers.

welcomed them.³⁹ King took over the leadership of the Dignity chapter early in 1978, providing much needed structure and some beneficial publicity in the form of an article published in the *Charlotte Observer*: “Gays Want Life With Dignity.”⁴⁰ Dignity grew to as many as sixty-six dues paying members, with formal governance structures and regular programming, but the original religious focus of the group quickly shifted to accommodate wider needs.⁴¹ Writing for *Whatever*, in June 1979, King promoted Dignity as “much more than a religious group.... Mainly, what Dignity is now in Charlotte is the only gay civic organization in town.”⁴² While some of their activities involved religion, many, including film nights, workshops on aging, counseling services for members, and speaking engagements at UNC Charlotte, were distinctly secular in nature.⁴³

In 1979, Dignity’s transition to a purely social organization became official.⁴⁴ The group disaffiliated with the national Dignity organization and re-branded itself as Acceptance, a move that King described retrospectively as birthing an “explosion of gay

³⁹ King described Milford as someone who “sort of likes controversy. He marched with the blacks in the 60’s and he’s the kind of guy who’ll tell church members to take their asses elsewhere if they don’t like what he does. He is anti-Southern Baptist Convention and has most of his congregation behind him, apparently.” King to unknown addressee, Nov. 2 and Nov. 15, 1977, box 1, folder 2, King papers. See also box 1, folder, “Charlotte Events,” Bernard Papers for a significant sermon preached by Milford in 1978 titled “A Different Drummer, a sermon typed from the tape recording of the morning worship service July 16, 1978, Park Road Baptist Church.” In the sermon Milford notes that Park Road Baptist Church disagreed with the Southern Baptist Convention about “civil rights for homosexuals.” Milford points out that congregant Parks Helms had been a good spokesperson to express how the church was different from other Baptist churches in Charlotte in its support of gays and lesbians.

⁴⁰ Gallman, “Gays Want Life With Dignity.”

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Note that King wrestled with the tension between the religious, social, and political activities of Dignity: “Dignity Charlotte Newsletter,” Oct. 1978, box 3, folder 25, King papers.

⁴² Journalist copy for June issue of *Whatever*, 1979, box 1, folder 3, King papers. *Whatever* was a Charlotte gay bar zine published between 1977 and the summer of 1981. It mostly consisted of ads, announcements, and local gossip. King was a frequent contributor.

⁴³ King to Rev. Kenneth Boyd Thibodeau, Nov. 20 1978, box 1, folder 2 King papers.

⁴⁴ Acceptance Newsletter, Nov. 1979, box 1, folder ‘Dignity Charlotte 1977-1979,’ Bernard Papers.

groups” in Charlotte.⁴⁵ In the January 1980 *Acceptance* newsletter, a Statement of Purpose for the group listed the following goals:

1. Promote understanding and cooperation between homophile persons and the community at large.
2. Develop unity and self-esteem among homophile persons.
3. Eliminate current inequalities under the law toward homophile persons.
4. Offer the resources of the group in service to the community.⁴⁶

With the exception of the use of the dated term ‘homophile,’ these four objectives show that Charlotte’s gay activists were closely aligned with a national dialog going on in the gay liberation movement that had spawned similar groups seeking to affirm and support gays and lesbians, but that it was developing at least five years later.⁴⁷ As these goals turned into action, the “explosion of gay groups” to which King alluded, gay men and lesbians had more opportunities to come into contact with one another. In short, it created alternative community spaces in addition to the bars.

It is important to add, however, that Dignity was by no means inclusive. Evidence shows that while Dignity had both gays and lesbians when it started, the group became more heavily male as time went on. For example, by 1978 Dignity’s leadership was entirely male; even the “women’s committee” was chaired by Michael T. and Don Ellis.

⁴⁵ Dignity newsletters, box 1, folder ‘Dignity Charlotte 1977-1979’, Bernard Papers. King to the Newsletter Editor, Dignity/Greensboro, Jan. 1981, box 1, folder 3, King papers.

⁴⁶ Our Statement of Purpose, *Acceptance*, Jan. 1980, box 1, folder ‘Dignity Charlotte 1977-1979,’ Bernard Papers.

⁴⁷ These goals had been discussed in Dignity meetings during the previous two years: *Dignity Charlotte*, box 3, folder ‘Dignity/Charlotte/News Letters, 1978-1979,’ King papers; Downs, *Stand by Me*; Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagouny, *Out For Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

Acceptance newsletters indicate that there was a desire to be more inclusive, but the dominance of gay men continued to be a source of tension.⁴⁸

Dignity and Acceptance were also almost entirely Caucasian. Keith Bernard recalled that before an event being held at his apartment, one of the attendees asked whether it would be ok to bring his partner who was African American. Bernard was surprised at the question, but the episode illustrates how deep the racial divides in Charlotte were even in the post-civil rights era. Bernard noted Acceptance strongly supported diversity, but that as a minority themselves, gays had little power to change racial dynamics in the city. Both Bernard and Tom Warshauer note in their interviews that African American gays and lesbians faced such strong stigma within their own community that many were reluctant to get involved with gay activism.⁴⁹

The Gay/Lesbian Switchboard may have been the first of the gay entities that emerged out of Acceptance. The switchboard was founded in 1980 from a perceived need for an information and referral service and crisis hotline to serve the local gay and lesbian community and Charlotte visitors. Switchboard operators were trained in peer counseling to prepare them to man the phones from 7 PM to 11 PM every day, and by December

⁴⁸ Dignity and Acceptance newsletters, box 1, folder, 'Dignity Charlotte, 1977-1979,' Bernard Papers. In what was probably the first Acceptance newsletter in October 1979, a page dedicated to women suggested that there was an opportunity to "correct the past imbalance of men and women in traditional leadership patterns," and called for women to step up. Activist and community leader Billie Stickell was certainly involved in Acceptance, where she met her partner, Sami Rose (letter to "Deenie," Apr. 4, 1979, box 1, fol. 5, King papers). However, anecdotally it is clear that the group remained mainly male. It should be noted that the Charlotte Women's Center, which was a focus for feminist activism in the city during the 1970s, may have had more of a draw for lesbians since it was a female-only space: See Mims, "Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists."

⁴⁹ Keith Bernard oral history interview 1, June. 24, 2017, ALSC; Tom Warshauer oral history interview 2, Feb. 19, 2017, ALSC. Since both of these interview subjects are white, their comments cannot be taken to be conclusive.

1983 over 100 male and female volunteers had been trained.⁵⁰ The switchboard was initially operated out of Park Road Baptist Church.⁵¹

A second organization spawned by Acceptance was the Queen City Quordinators (QCQ), which was active by January 1981. Described as the “United Way” for gay activists by its founders Don King and Billie Stickell, QCQ coordinated fundraising to support the various organizations that were emerging after 1980.⁵² The genius of QCQ’s approach was to recognize that fundraising for activism might be seen as competition for the gay and lesbian dollars spent in gay businesses (particularly bars) that were so critical to the broader gay community. QCQ’s first and highly successful fundraiser established a trust between activists and the bars that ensured good relations for the next several years. The event was held on a Tuesday, since the bars were either closed or had low customer turn out, and it was on St. Patrick’s Day, since none of the bars had adopted this day to celebrate. QCQ’s arrangement with the owner of Odyssey, Charlotte’s most showy gay bar and disco, was that QCQ would keep a nominal door fee and Odyssey would get the bar profits. According to King the evening was a huge success with an extraordinary floorshow provided by competing female impersonators from the Scorpio and the Odyssey. Rival bar owners attended in good spirits. The event raised \$800, paving the way for a slate of five QCQ fundraisers a year by 1983.⁵³

⁵⁰ “Switchboard Helps Callers” *Q-Notes*, Dec. 1983.

⁵¹ This location was corroborated by John Quillin: John Quillin, oral history interview 1, Mar. 14, 2017, ALSC.

⁵² King to the Newsletter Editor, Dignity/Greensboro, box1, folder 5, King papers; Robert Sheets, “QCQ: Striving for Major Success” *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1986.

⁵³ Baxter, “An Interview with Charlotte Activist and Entrepreneur Don King.” In addition to bar-based fundraisers, QCQ organized an annual cabaret of gay and lesbian talent, initially hosted at the Unitarian Church of Charlotte, and later at Spirit Square. QCQ also co-sponsored theatre productions. A performance of the gay-themed play “PS, Your Cat Is Dead,” raised over \$850,

However the most important of QCQ's early accomplishments was to host the Carolina's first Gay/Lesbian Pride Week in Charlotte in June 1981. Events were divided a little awkwardly between the UNC Charlotte campus and the city's widely spaced gay bars. Ads in *Whatever*, the local gay 'zine published between 1977 and 1981, announced a slate of workshops tackling topics ranging from religion to wills, real estate to alcoholism, and of course gay rights activism. Highly respected national speakers, Boston's Brian McNaught and Philadelphia's Barbara Gittings, gave keynote addresses. Entertainment included a crafts market, a 'Sundance' outdoor disco, a live local band performing in the Lucas Room at UNC Charlotte, grand Saturday night balls at the Odyssey, Oleen's, and Scorpio, and the Pride Week Softball Tournament. The tournament was to be the highlight for Charlotte's gay bars:

It's rumored that the Scorpio, with a few men helping out a team made up mostly of women who play civic league softball, is the class of the field. But the toughies from the Brass Rail on Wilkinson, the determined team from Oleen's, the disco babies from The Odyssey and the laid back group from Tags will all have a say in things. And the cheerleaders...well! At last talk, the Brass Rail was going to field a crew of men dressed in cowboy drag with whips!⁵⁴

On the political front, members of Acceptance started a Gay/Lesbian Caucus in 1980, but it was re-branded as the Lambda Political Caucus in 1983.⁵⁵ Lambda Political Caucus was led by Billie Rose Stickell. The caucus was described in *Q-Notes* as an:

and was followed by a performance of the lesbian play "Last Summer at Bluefish Cove:" "Gay/Lesbian Performers to Go on Stage Nov 19," *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1983. Interviewee and UNC Charlotte professor, Joan Tillotson performed in this play.

⁵⁴ "Can the B.R. Boys *Really* Beat the Woman from the Scorpio? You'll Have to Attend the Gay/Lesbian Pride Rally to Find Out, *Whatever*, 1981 (circa June, exact date unknown).

⁵⁵ As President of Dignity King expressed his view that the group should focus on education, spirituality, social events, and charity and not assume a political role. Instead he envisaged that Dignity might birth "a new organization that has a political focus." Don King, "Goals and What To Do About Them," October 1978, box 3, folder, 'Dignity/Charlotte/News Letters, 1978-1979,' King papers. The new group, Gay/Lesbian Caucus, was announced by Don King in a press release in 1980. Don King, "For Release Before Saturday, Sept. 20," box 3, folder 29, 'Gay and Lesbian Caucus,' King papers.

“activist group initiating political and educational change through peaceful, systematic means, usually through behind-the-scenes work with political parties and candidates and through information about political news.”⁵⁶ The group’s new name reflected the pragmatic and non-confrontational approach of Charlotte’s gay and lesbian activists. Stickell had realized that “politicians would often open a letter from us [the Gay and Lesbian Caucus], see our letterhead and disregard the rest.... It was too much of a shock for some of them.” Significantly, Stickell also noted that the original name was “a little blatant for some people who wanted to join.”⁵⁷ This comment reflects the stigma that made many in the gay and lesbian community reluctant to be publically identified. Before 1980 it seemed that only Don King was fully willing to serve the role of public spokesperson for gay and lesbian Charlotteans; indeed, Billie Stickell herself had to remain closeted because her job made it impossible for her to come out.⁵⁸

Under its new name, Lambda Political Caucus was a political presence in Charlotte’s 1983 mayoral election, establishing a relationship with future mayor, Harvey Gantt. Their activities included sponsoring meetings between candidates and the gay and lesbian community, distributing position sheets to indicate which candidates were sympathetic to protecting gay and lesbian interests, and organizing a phone bank ahead of

⁵⁶ “Charlotte Organizations” *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1983.

⁵⁷ “Charlotte Political Group Uses ‘Lambda’ To Tone Down Name,” *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1983.

⁵⁸ Ken Friedlein and Polly Paddock, “Gay Life in Charlotte is Open and Hidden,” *Charlotte Observer*, Apr. 26, 1981. Others had actually offered to be identified in the media as early as 1978. See *Charlotte News* article, “Charlotte’s Gays No Longer Hiding,” Jan. 21, 1978. “Two gay men and two gay women...were willing to talk with their names used.... The News has decided to give fictitious names to all to protect their privacy.” The newspaper’s reticence may have been justified. Three years later the Charlotte Choir Boys accompanist, John George, was forced to resign after he appeared on a WPCQ TV (Channel 36) series, “Charlotte’s Closets: Charlotte Gays.” See Ken Friedlein, “Choir Official Forced to Quit,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 14, 1981.

the election to get out the vote. Perhaps the most significant meeting that the caucus sponsored was between Harvey Gantt and community members who gathered in June at Acceptance. During the meeting Gantt said he would agree to support a clause in city legislation prohibiting discrimination against gay men and lesbians in jobs and housing, and further that he would appoint at least one gay man or lesbian to the Charlotte Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee.⁵⁹ The latter was significant because the Community Relations Committee had played a pivotal role in the African American Civil Rights campaign in Charlotte. Gantt's meeting was followed by other meetings with candidates at Acceptance, and in October a forum was held where eight city council hopefuls gathered for a face to face with the gay and lesbian community. Fifty people turned up, and following the forum Lambda Political Caucus published and widely distributed a position sheet detailing the candidates' stands on passing an ordinance to make it illegal for the city to discriminate against gay men and lesbians in housing, hiring and promotions. In November, the caucus went into high gear to staff a phone bank to get out the gay and lesbian vote for Gantt and other favorable candidates. Unwilling to endorse political candidates directly, they utilized results from a questionnaire that had been distributed by the Charlotte Chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW) to encourage voters to vote for candidates who supported local antidiscrimination measures to include sexual orientation.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ This pre-election promise proved elusive and was held up as a betrayal in an article in the September 1986 edition of *Q-Notes*, "Town Meeting Called to Fight Charlotte Battle," which stated that the community was "angry about Mayor Harvey Gantt's failure to follow up on his campaign promise of two years ago."

⁶⁰ "Eight City Council Candidates Draw 50 To Lambda Caucus's Forum," *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1983.

The phone bank action was a first for the gay and lesbian activists and was hailed as a great success by Billie Stickell in an ebullient open letter to the community:

For the first time since my involvement began, I am excited and optimistic about our future.... During the Caucus/Acceptance Candidates Forum this fall, we heard very encouraging remarks from a number of candidates who were elected to city council.... We are very proud to report...that Mr. Gantt will be our new mayor and we are convinced that he will lead us in a progressive and fair manner.⁶¹

Stickell looked forward to future activism and challenged the community to step up:

“1984 could be a great year for us all. We have a chance for the first time in years to unseat Jesse Helms, and this time a candidate (Governor Jim Hunt) has stepped forward who could actually muster the votes to do it.”⁶² However, she was also painfully aware of the difficulties that activists faced in meeting this challenge:

Having been part of the initiative to begin the Gay/Lesbian Caucus (Lambda PC’s former name) three years ago, I have felt the frustration of too little help, and overabundance of apathy and helplessness in the face of a sometimes overpowering legal/political system that leans heavily against gays.⁶³

In addition to the groups that directly emerged out of Acceptance, there were some other important developments in Charlotte’s gay and lesbian community in the early 1980s that mirror national patterns. One was Charlotte’s Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), a gay affirming church that was chartered in Charlotte in 1981.⁶⁴ An initial meeting held at Spirit Square in January 1980 established that there was sufficient interest to start a chapter of the church in Charlotte, and a group of about 20 men and

⁶¹ Billie Stickell, “1984: Greater Year for LPC,” *Q-Notes*, Dec. 1983.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ MCC originated in 1968 when the Rev. Troy Perry, a former Baptist minister, founded the first church in Los Angeles to provide a congregation where gay people were welcome. By 1981 the denomination boasted 133 churches worldwide; Downs, *Stand by Me*, chapter 2.

women initiated a study group to undertake the necessary planning.⁶⁵ The Charlotte MCC was chartered in November 1981 under the leadership of Reverend Jamie McAlister, and Lynn Guerra took over as pastor in 1982.⁶⁶ Initially the church rented space in the Unitarian Church of Charlotte on Sharon Amity Road in South Charlotte, where they met for evening services, and by mid 1982 they had attracted ninety members.⁶⁷ Despite the relatively small congregation, the church had split by October 1984 as a result of divided loyalties.⁶⁸ The new church, New Life Metropolitan Community Church, led by Rev. Arthur L. Fleschner met for considerable time in the “Labor Building” at 2125 Commonwealth Ave. close to the intersection of Commonwealth and the Plaza. Both churches were supported by the QCQ, and the two ministers, Art Fleschner and Lynn Guerra, were important leaders in the gay community.⁶⁹

Another milestone common in the evolution of gay communities nationwide was achieved when Charlotte’s first gay bookstore, Friends of Dorothy, opened in November 1981.⁷⁰ Its owner, none other than Don King, announced his new venture with an ad in the mainstream *Charlotte Observer*: “Friends of Dorothy, a bookstore specializing in homosexual books, cards and records will open today 1-5 p.m., 331 E. Blvd. Apt. #3 in

⁶⁵ Judy Gaultney, “Church for gays organizing,” *Charlotte News*, Jan. 14, 1980; “Gay Church Closes,” *Charlotte News*, Feb. 4, 1980.

⁶⁶ Friedlein and Paddock, “Gay Life In Charlotte Is Open And Hidden;” Lynn Guerra, “Homosexuality: Another Perspective,” *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 25, 1982.

⁶⁷ Terry Mattingly, “Common Problems Face Unique Church,” *Charlotte News*, June 18, 1982; “QCQ-Affiliated Organizations: New Life MCC,” *Q-Notes*, Oct. 1984.

⁶⁸ Lynn Guerra, pastor MCC Charlotte, “An Open Letter to the Community,” *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1990; The front page information inset which lists organizations under the QCQ umbrella in *Q-Notes* for October 1984 includes the New Life MCC, which was at the study group stage in formation.

⁶⁹ The commitment of Guerra, Fleschner, and other religious leaders in Charlotte reflects the contribution by gay affirming churches towards a reorientation of self image and self-respect that Downs stresses as an important element of gay liberation in *Stand By Me*, see chapter 2.

⁷⁰ Downs, *Stand by Me*, chapter 3 details the importance of the gay press.

Dilworth. Don King is owner.” In a detailed article in *The Front Page* a year later, the store location was described as, “the front room of an upstairs apartment in the gayest of Charlotte’s neighborhoods—Dilworth—just southeast of the downtown area. It’s three blocks from Oleen’s and Club South (Charlotte’s baths).” It was King’s intention, the article continued, to give the Southeast “a shop like Glad Day in Boston, Oscar Wilde in New York and Lambda Rising in Washington D.C.”⁷¹ In addition to selling a wide range of books and periodicals related to gay and lesbian issues and interests, Friends of Dorothy was intended to serve a community purpose as an outlet for consignment art and crafts and as a space for sharing information.⁷²

Rounding out the developments in Charlotte’s gay and lesbian community was the revival of a gay press, which happened when QCQ birthed its own periodical, *Q-Notes*.⁷³ Although *Q-Notes* was initially more of a newsletter than a newspaper, it was a sophisticated publication that covered local news and events for affiliated organizations. The publication started in September 1983 and was edited by QCQ secretary Darryl Logsdon.⁷⁴ *Q-Notes* filled a gap in local reporting for the city’s gays and lesbians that had opened up when the *Free Press* went out of business in 1977. Although Raleigh’s bi-

⁷¹ “Friends of Dorothy,” *Front Page*, Nov. 23, 1982.

⁷² Periodicals sold at ‘Friends of Dorothy’ included *Front Page*, *Our South*, *RFD*, *The New York Native*, *The Advocate*, and *Christopher Street*, with the promise to carry major lesbian journals. King himself had taken an intense interest in gay and lesbian literature and had written to the Oscar Wilde Bookshop as early as 1979 looking for gay plays. His letters also frequently quoted from books addressing homosexuality from a variety of disciplines: predominantly psychology, history, and religion. At the end of the first year Friends of Dorothy carried an inventory of almost 200 book titles addressing topics including lesbian theory, parents of gays and lesbians, homosexuality and religion, volumes about psychological issues, gay and lesbian history and biography, self-help books, niche books for specific homosexual groups, and fiction.

⁷³ Downs, *Stand by Me*, chapter 5.

⁷⁴ Darryl Logsdon oral history interview, Sept. 25, 2015, ALSC. The initial *Q-Notes* newsletter was published from 1983 until the end of 1984. Following an 18-month gap in publication *Q-Notes* retooled itself as a full-fledged newspaper that started publication under the editorial supervision of Don King in June 1986.

monthly *Front Page* covered Charlotte news from its inception in 1979, and the local ‘zine, *Whatever*, had carried bar news and local events, the publication of *Q-Notes* restored an instrument of sophisticated communication, reflection, interrogation of local issues, consideration of wider state and national issues, and a sense of local pride. Unlike *Whatever*, *Q-Notes* was not affiliated directly with the gay bars, bathhouse and other gay businesses.⁷⁵ When *Q-Notes* began distributing their newsletter a particular effort was made to establish that it would not compete with other gay/lesbian newspapers. From the outset *Q-Notes* was intended to support its affiliated local organizations by primarily printing their news and community events.⁷⁶

By the end of 1983 Charlotte’s gays and lesbians had a range of opportunities that were much broader than those that had been available at the beginning of the 1970s. In addition to a vibrant bar scene, there were a number of community organizations and an emerging group of activists. The December issue of *Q-Notes* proudly announced:

For Charlotte’s gay/lesbian community, 1983 has been a very healthy year. New groups formed; old ones were stabilized; a sense of collective identity and purpose began to emerge.... At last, 14 years after the Stonewall Riots in New York birthed the latest era in gay/lesbian liberation, Charlotte’s gay men and lesbians starting (sic) acting like a community.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Michael Baxter, “Can This Paper Survive?” *Front Page*, Oct. 24-Nov. 13, 1980. In this article, editor of *Front Page*, Michael Baxter, describes a perceived rivalry between *Front Page* and *Whatever* that had prevented him from placing his publication in Charlotte gay businesses, and also cost him advertising dollars, threatening the continuation of *Front Page*. The issue appeared to revolve around a disagreement between The Capital Corral, a Raleigh gay nightclub, and *Whatever*, which had resulted in the night club not carrying the *Whatever* newsletter. *Front Page* was accused of being a mouthpiece for The Capital Corral, but Baxter denies this. Earlier letters to *Front Page* suggested that The Capital Corral had refused entry to cross dressers, which may have been the source of conflict with Charlotte bars that had strong associations with the drag Queen community.

⁷⁶ “Charlotte Gets Local Monthly Publication,” *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1983.

⁷⁷ “QCQ Helps Community Flex Muscles During ’83,” *Q-Notes*, Dec. 1983.

The phrasing of this announcement clearly privileges the perspective of the paper's activist editors, but it also suggests that the early mantra of the gay liberation movement – that gays and lesbians were part of a healthy community that could contribute to society in unique ways – was very much alive in Charlotte in the early 1980s.⁷⁸ Underlining this message, the same issue of *Q-Notes* included an advert that was unusual for a gay journal. A full page spread urged members of the community to “Teach Someone To Read,” drawing attention to the fact that over 50,000 adults in Mecklenburg County were illiterate and reminding readers of ways to make a positive contribution to mainstream society. The *Q-Notes* article also suggested that relations with mainstream Charlotte were showing promise: “The general public shows continued movement toward tolerance and understanding, though at a glacial pace.”⁷⁹ The growing visibility and coherence of the gay community was also acknowledged in the *Charlotte Observer* in January 1984, when Lew Powell wrote: “Five years ago Charlotte had one gay organization. Since then there have appeared a gay fundraising group, a gay political caucus, a gay newsletter, a gay bookstore, a gay church, a gay hot line, and a Gay Pride Week.”⁸⁰ The straight

⁷⁸ Both Jim Downs and Jennifer Brier focus on the significance of the gay community being perceived and embraced as healthy. Downs argues that there has been an over-focus on sexuality and political struggle as defining features of gay liberation, and that healthy community building in the face of public stigma was just as important if not more important than direct political action and protest. Brier sees the arrival of AIDS as an imperative that thrust gays and lesbians back to a gay liberation agenda of confirming their culture as a viable and vibrant alternative to traditional heterosexual culture. Downs, *Stand By Me*; Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: US Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

⁷⁹ “QCQ Helps Community Flex Muscles During ’83.”

⁸⁰ Lew Powell, “Growing Acceptance, But Many Fears Remain,” *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 22, 1984. Although Powell did not identify the one gay organization he referred to here, it was almost certainly Dignity, the quasi-Catholic spiritual and social group that had emerged in the late 1970s and transformed into the more purely social group Acceptance by 1980. It is also clear that despite its long history as a lesbian space Powell did not consider the Women’s Center as a gay organization, see Lashonda Mimms’ dissertation, “Drastic Dykes and Accidental Activists.”

community may not have embraced Charlotte's gays and lesbians, but at least, as Don King quipped, "Charlotte, in general, is just too busy to discriminate."⁸¹

However, even with the successes of the early 1980s there are indications that Charlotte's gay activism rested on fragile foundations. In the same article that trumpeted that Charlotte's gay men and lesbians were finally starting to act like a community, the author also acknowledged some underlying concerns:

Nongays are indeed aware that Charlotte has a gay/lesbian population and they tend to think of it as a united, self-supporting segment of the city. It is therefore highly ironic that so very many gay men and lesbians still think that a sense of community is something reserved only for activists or elite partiers.⁸²

What the author meant by 'activists' is fairly clear from the historical record since a number of key figures show up so often as leaders of these early organizations as to make one wonder if there was a 'community' behind them.⁸³ The reference to "elite partiers" is harder to contextualize. This could be a reference to the fact that some gays could, literally, afford to be out in gay social circles in a way that more marginalized gays could not. However, there is insufficient evidence to support an argument about a class divide in the gay community so this must remain a conjecture.

The *Q-Notes* author raised these concerns in the hopes of galvanizing people to join in QCQ's work, but the assessment that Charlotte's activism was the work of a handful of individuals rather than a community turned out to be accurate. Just six months later, a *Front Page* article, "Charlotte Minus Three" announced three major losses:

The week of June 2-9 took quite a chunk out of Charlotte's gay community. The Odyssey, one of Carolina's prettiest discos, announced to employees...on June 2

⁸¹ Powell, "Growing Acceptance, But Many Fears Remain."

⁸² "QCQ Helps Community Flex Muscles During '83."

⁸³ Notably, Don King, Billie Stickell, John Quillen, Keith Bernard, Daryl Logsdon, Lynn Guerra, and Art Fleschner among several others.

that it would not reopen as a gay bar. On June 3, Friends of Dorothy Bookshop sold its inventory to Lambda Rising Bookstore of Washington and closed. Then, at a meeting on Saturday, June 9, the Lambda Political Caucus decided to disband. . . . The closing of the Odyssey left the largest city in the Carolinas with one major disco and four other bars. With the demise of Friends of Dorothy, the Carolinas lost the only bookshop in the state carrying only gay/lesbian inventory. And the decision of the Lambda Caucus to go dormant, particularly after some impressive strides in the city's recent mayoral election, leaves a serious void in Charlotte's political life.⁸⁴

Contemporaries recognized that behind the impressive organizational structures and achievements reported by *Q-Notes*, political organizing was being accomplished by very few people who were increasingly stretched thin. The Lambda Political Caucus, for example, disbanded:

As a result of low membership, extreme apathy in the community and burnout of the active members. After appealing for new members for over a year, only one person joined, bringing the total of active members to five. . . . The Caucus has not been able to capture the interest and support of Charlotte's heavily closeted gay community. 'It is difficult to continue to help someone if they refuse to help themselves,' said Daryl Logsdon, Caucus representative.⁸⁵

To make matters worse, by the end of 1984 *Q-Notes* ceased printing, leaving Charlotte without its own gay and lesbian newspaper.

* * *

AIDS – The National Context

From the national perspective, the most striking fact about the June 1984 *Front Page* article bemoaning the loss of three of Charlotte's gay and lesbian institutions is the failure to mention the defining characteristic of the national gay experience at this time – AIDS. In 1984 Charlotte's gays and lesbians had not yet registered the reality of HIV / AIDS. For Charlotte gay men, AIDS was experienced, if at all, from afar, as a problem

⁸⁴ "Charlotte Minus Three," *Front Page*, June 26-July 9, 1984.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

for metropolitan coastal cities that had become the gay meccas of American culture. This argument can only be made from absence, but the absence is striking. In the initial run of *Q-Notes* in 1983 and 1984 there was very little panic or concern about the disease, despite the fact that it was devastating gay metropolises across the country and had captured the attention of mainstream media. In order to set up the analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 of how AIDS impacted Charlotte in the second half of the 1980s it is important to review the history of the outbreak and spread of the disease and particularly the close and early connection that emerged between this new disease and ‘morality.’ By the time AIDS hit Charlotte, both the epidemiology and cultural meanings of the disease were already well established.

The first reporting of the disease worldwide appeared in the gay newspaper, the *New York Native*, on May 18, 1981, a periodical that was available at Charlotte’s *Friends of Dorothy* bookstore.⁸⁶ However, it was the release of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report on June 5, and subsequent reporting in the national press, that marked the official beginning of reports on the disease that was to become known as AIDS.⁸⁷ While the medical community struggled with understanding the baffling epidemiology of AIDS, care for the sick and dying needed an immediate solution. During 1982 gay men, particularly in New York City and San Francisco, began organizing support services,

⁸⁶ Lawrence D. Mass, “Larry Mass Looks Back on 25 Years of AIDS Activism,” *Gay City News*, May 1-7, 2006, http://gaycitynews.nyc/gcn_522/larrymasslooksback.html (accessed June 4, 2017.)

⁸⁷ “*Pneumocystis* Pneumonia --- Los Angeles,” Centers for Disease Control, “Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports” (CDC, MMWR) June 5, 1981, 30 (21): 1-3, https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/june_5.htm (accessed Apr. 1, 2017). The article in the *New York Times* is often credited with being the first national report; Lawrence K. Altman, “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1981 <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/03/us/rare-cancer-seen-in-41-homosexuals.html> (accessed on Apr. 1, 2017).

which became known as AIDS service organizations (ASOs), to fill a vacuum in institutional response to the disease that was ravaging their communities at unprecedented speed.⁸⁸ These, and other groups in larger metropolitan cities, offered a model of community service to people with AIDS that was adopted across the country over the next decade. (Charlotte's ASO, the Metrolina AIDS Project, was founded in 1985.)

The CDC steadily tracked the disease and made increasingly alarming reports on the virulence and deadliness of AIDS.⁸⁹ As new cases came to light during 1982, reports also reflected a more nuanced picture of who was affected. While homosexual and bisexual men represented 75% of cases, other significant risk groups included intravenous drug users, Haitians, and persons with hemophilia.⁹⁰ By the end of 1982 the CDC reported the first cases of infection through blood transfusion and intrauterine exposure, and in January 1983 cases were reported in female partners of males with

⁸⁸ The most prominent were the Gay Men's Health Crisis in New York City, the Shanti Project in Berkeley, and The Kaposi's Sarcoma Research and Education Foundation (later the San Francisco AIDS Foundation) in San Francisco: "Gay Men's Health Crisis Records," *The New York Public Library Archives and Manuscripts*, <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/1126>, (accessed Apr. 1, 2017); Julia Bazar, "Guide to the Shanti Project Records," *Online Archive of California*, 2006, <http://archives.nypl.org/mss/1126>, (accessed Apr. 1, 2017); "Our history," *San Francisco AIDS Foundation*, <http://sfaf.org/about-us/our-history/?referrer=https://www.google.com/#> (accessed Apr. 1, 2017).

⁸⁹ The MMWR for 9 September 1983 reported that 2,229 cases of AIDS had been reported nationally to date. Of these, 58 cases had been diagnosed before 1981, 231 cases had been diagnosed in 1981, 883 cases had been diagnosed in 1982, and 1,087 cases had been diagnosed in 1983.

⁹⁰ "Current Trends Update on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) --United States," CDC, MMWR, Sept. 24, 1982, 31(37): 507-508, 513-514, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001163.htm> (accessed Apr. 1, 2017).

AIDS.⁹¹ Both discoveries raised the specter that the infection could spread into the heterosexual population.

By the end of 1983 AIDS cases had been reported in 41 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico – including the first case in Mecklenburg County; however the epidemic was most severe in major metropolitan cities. Cases had occurred in all racial/ethnic groups, although Caucasians continued to be the largest group at 57%, followed by 26% black, and 14% Hispanic. Women now represented 7% of cases, and almost all AIDS patients were aged between 20 and 49 years old.⁹² There were also important advances in medical knowledge, including confirmation that the disease was spread by bodily fluids, and especially through blood. This allowed the CDC to issue clear recommendations on prevention including self-regulation of “risky” sexual behavior, to restrict blood donations from people within risk groups, and to establish procedures to screen blood transfusions. (The FDA did not approve a test for HIV in donated blood until 1985, and a reliable, diagnostic, HIV test was not available until 1987.)⁹³ In an effort to calm fears and quell rumors the CDC reported in September that:

⁹¹ “Epidemiologic Notes and Reports Possible Transfusion-Associated Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) – California,” CDC, MMWR, Dec. 10, 1982, 31(48): 652-4, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001203.htm> (accessed Apr. 1, 2017). “Unexplained Immunodeficiency and Opportunistic Infections in Infants -- New York, New Jersey, California,” CDC, MMWR, Dec. 17, 1982, 31(49): 665-667, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001208.htm> (accessed Apr. 1, 2017); “Epidemiologic Notes and Reports Immunodeficiency among Female Sexual Partners of Males with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) -- New York,” CDC, MMWR, Jan. 7, 1983, 31(52): 697-8, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001221.htm> (accessed Apr. 1, 2017).

⁹² “Current Trends Update: Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) -- United States,” CDC, MMWR, Sept. 9, 1983, 32 (35): 465-7, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00000137.htm> (accessed Apr. 1, 2017).

⁹³ “Current Trends Prevention of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS): Report of Inter-Agency Recommendations,” CDC, MMWR, Mar. 4, 1983, 32 (8): 101-3 <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001257.htm> (accessed Apr. 1, 2017).

There has been no evidence that the disease was acquired through casual contact with AIDS patients or with persons in population groups with an increased incidence of AIDS. AIDS is not known to be transmitted through food, water, air, or environmental surfaces.⁹⁴

Yet despite these reassurances, fear, misinformation, and blaming were the inevitable public responses to a new as yet poorly understood disease of such devastating consequence for which there was no cure.

As the HIV/AIDS epidemic emerged and the epidemiology of the disease came better understood, it became quickly apparent that the social, moral, and political narrative built around the disease would be just as important as medical understanding. US Representative for West Hollywood, California, Henry Waxman, summed up the situation as he saw it as early as April, 1982, when he spoke at the first congressional hearing on AIDS which he convened at the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center in Hollywood. Waxman's grave warning was quoted in the *Washington Blade*, Washington DC's gay newspaper:

I want to be especially blunt about the political aspects of Kaposi's sarcoma. This horrible disease afflicts members of one of the nation's most stigmatized and discriminated against minorities. There is no doubt in my mind...that if the same disease had appeared among Americans of Norwegian descent, or among tennis players, rather than among Gay males, the responses of both the government and the medical community would have been different.⁹⁵

Waxman's message was reprinted in an article that was published in the May 1982 edition of *The Front Page* under the general heading of "Gay Health Issues," suggesting that it was most likely repeated in gay newspapers across the country.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ "Current Trends Update" MMWR, September 9, 1983.

⁹⁵ Lou Chibbaro Jr., "Gay cancer' focus of hearing," *The Washington Blade*, Apr. 16, 1982, DC Public Library Special Collections, <http://digdc.dclibrary.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16808coll24/id/8052> (accessed Apr. 4, 2017).

⁹⁶ "Other Voices With More Bad News, Los Angeles, CA (GCN)," *Front Page*, May 11, 1982.

The naming of AIDS may be the most concrete example of how certain public perspectives that shaped around the disease were fixed early and had implications for how the disease was dealt with at local and national levels. The presentation of the syndrome in the white gay communities of New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco initially led researchers to call the disease *GRID* (Gay Related Immune Deficiency), and it became firmly associated with white gay men in the public mind, and even among many medical professionals, in the early years. Despite CDC efforts to correct public misperceptions that AIDS was a “gay plague,” correlations proved tenacious and had long-term consequences for both white gay men (whether or not they developed the disease) and other demographics who contracted the virus.⁹⁷

Alarm particularly heightened when it became apparent that AIDS could – and many assumed would – spread to heterosexuals. This news began a period of major AIDS coverage in the media. On May 25 1983, for the very first time, the AIDS epidemic appeared on the front page of *The New York Times* (albeit below the fold) with the headline: “Health Chief Calls AIDS Battle ‘No. 1 Priority.’” After two years of virtual silence about a disease which was by far most keenly felt in New York City, twenty articles about AIDS were published in *The New York Times* that month alone.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ “A Timeline of HIV/AIDS.” See Stephen J. Inrig, *North Carolina and the Problem of AIDS: Advocacy, Politics, and Race in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011) for a discussion of AIDS among rural African American populations in North Carolina, and the adverse effects of public health structures built around case management for the virus that were originally tailored to gay men and in particular the gay white population. Other risk groups included black gay and bisexual men, men who had sex with men, women whose partners were HIV positive, children born to mothers who were HIV positive, heterosexual men, hemophiliacs, and people who injected drugs.

⁹⁸ David W. Dunlap, “1983: Having Claimed 558 Lives, AIDS Finally Made It to the Front Page,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 30, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/times-insider/2014/10/30/1983-having-claimed-558-lives-aids-finally-made-it-to-the-front-page/>

Randy Shilts has documented media coverage of AIDS in *And The Band Played On*, and his analysis shows that despite the initial lack of information, AIDS scare stories got particular attention from the media. For example, the Pro-Family Christian Coalition protested the National Gay Rodeo in Reno in the summer of 1983 with full-page ads in local newspapers. The ads claimed that if the rodeo went ahead it would lead to the spread of AIDS throughout Nevada. To support their arguments the Coalition cited Dr. Paul Cameron, a disbarred psychologist and ‘aids expert,’ who characterized the gay community as a

living breathing cesspool of pathogens.... Here is a subclass who as a function of their sexuality, are consuming prodigious amounts, from a medical standpoint, of fecal material. Any community that allows thousands of these people to congregate will run a considerable risk, not only from AIDS but other disease such as viral hepatitis.⁹⁹

For good measure, Reverend Walter Alexander of Reno’s First Baptist Church told reporters: “I think we should do what the Bible says and cut their [homosexuals] throats.”¹⁰⁰ Other examples include a brochure distributed by the Alert Citizens of Texas titled “The Gay Plague,” which detailed gay bathhouses, the practice of rimming, and golden showers, as typifying all of the gay community. Shilts also documented outbreaks of gay bashing such as the instance in Seattle when gangs of youth attacked gay men cruising in Volunteer Park “shouting invectives about ‘plague-carrying faggots’ and ‘diseased queers,’ and raping two men with a crowbar.” Shilts notes that one of the

(accessed Mar. 30, 2017). Randy Shilts, *And The Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York N.Y.: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), pp. 267-68.

⁹⁹ Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, p. 352.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

attackers told police, “If we don’t kill these fags, they’ll kill us with their fucking AIDS disease.”¹⁰¹

* * *

Conclusion

Read in the context of the national AIDS narrative, the travails of gay activism in Charlotte in the first half of 1984 take on another layer of meaning. While the leaders of Charlotte’s gay organizations, confident in their moral superiority, interpreted the setbacks in terms of apathy in the wider community, it is possible that at this particular moment in history, AIDS was also an issue. Consider, for example, the letter that Stan Hurlbut published in *Q-Notes* in January 1984. Describing himself a recent convert to activism he was writing to express concern about a personal ad he had seen in *The Front Page* in which the author bragged on “not being involved in the gay community.” It is impossible to know whether the advertiser’s reference to ‘community’ refers to involvement in activism or simply going to the bars, however Hurlbut clearly thought it was the former. He pointed out that out of “30,000 gay/lesbian persons in Mecklenburg County” only a couple of hundred were actively engaged in the movement. “This means,” he railed, “98.7% aren’t actively involved in any group!” Hurlbut had questioned friends who were reluctant to join gay and lesbian organizations in Charlotte and reported that they were afraid to be seen. He dismissed their fear as excessive caution not thinking, apparently, that given the new climate engendered by AIDS, it was an understandable choice.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, pp. 352-3.

¹⁰² “Getting Involved Can Be Road to Personal Growth,” *Q-Notes*, Jan. 1984.

CHAPTER 3: ACTIVISM AND AIDS: 1985-1990, CARE

In May 1985, as its lead story, *Front Page* published an essay by John Preston, a nationally recognized gay journalist, author, and photographer. Preston was living in Portland Maine, which, like Charlotte, had not yet experienced the true force of the AIDS epidemic. In the article, he expressed concern that gay communities in mid-sized cities like Charlotte were hiding from the real threat of AIDS behind the excuse of being “AIDSed-out.” He admonished his readers that avoiding the reality of AIDS was a luxury in the face of the inevitable toll that the disease would take:

AIDS appears to be descending into a distant circle of our consciousness. But the disease has been dealt with only as a *potential* threat, not as a reality.... AIDS is something that unnamed people have, just as being gay was something that unnamed people used to be.... The suffering is something that happens to others. The risks are things that others should consider.¹

Preston called on the gay community – both those infected and not – to mobilize to understand the disease and support those affected. More dramatically he argued that the epidemic compelled a new concept of the gay rights movement that would focus on a growing visible community; in his words, there was a “need for faces.”

We are stuck with outmoded concepts of gay rights and gay activism. We still assume that people have the unquestionable right to the closet. The closet, that shield of utter privacy, is a concept which came from the earliest chapters of the

¹ John Preston, “AIDS: Attention Must Be Paid,” *Front Page*, May 21, 1985. Preston’s message typified a reaction to the HIV/AIDS epidemic among intellectual leaders in the gay and lesbian community that Jennifer Brier highlights in “*Infectious Ideas: US Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis*.” Brier focuses on the writings of lesbian feminist, Cindy Patton, who in the light of the AIDS crisis urged lesbians and gay men to see their collective health as a political problem instead of laying blame on individuals. In reference to the feminist mantra “the personal is political,” Patton expressed that “what we are experiencing right now in the gay community is “It’s not political until it’s personal.” Both Patton and Preston saw AIDS as forcing the gay and lesbian community to return to the gay liberation movement, but in the light of AIDS, with a publically identified communal response and a sex-positive message that homosexual communities were healthy communities. Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: US Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), pp. 11-12.

gay movement. . . . That viewpoint is morally bankrupt today. It would be, in any event, in the new context where there is a growing community.²

Preston's article was prescient, as was the decision by *Front Page* editors to publish it for its North Carolina readers. Starting in 1985 the AIDS epidemic operated as a force for change, causing a rapid growth in cohesiveness, visibility, complexity, and capacity for action. At the most immediate level, the rapid rise in the number of AIDS cases in the second half of the decade forced the gay men to organize support services, provide care, raise funds, and create rituals of commemoration, all of which served to strengthen a sense of identity and purpose that focused on nurturing and valuing members of the community. Lesbians were obviously not affected directly by the disease, but they also mobilized to provide care. AIDS also spurred both gay men and lesbians to engage in visible resistance and political struggle, particularly on issues of education and prevention, and this activism signaled a willingness to push for gay (civil) rights that had not been sustained in Charlotte before this time. Finally, AIDS encouraged and even forced gay men to be more public about their sexual orientation and thus stimulated discussion around the need to come out, not just to other gays and lesbians, but to the wider Charlotte community—a phenomenon which was very foreign and which carried considerable risk in this Bible Belt city.

The impact of AIDS on gay activism in Charlotte in the second half of the 1980s was compounded by the ways in which the disease changed straight attitudes towards homosexuals, particularly gay men. Escalating fears that AIDS threatened heterosexuals re-energized a pathologized view gay male sexuality and led to increased public scrutiny of gay sexual cultures and practices. Also, AIDS revived concerns that gay men

² *Ibid.*

represented a predatory sexual danger to society highlighting deeply rooted associations that identified homosexual sex as deviant and sinful.

The relationship between AIDS and gay activism in Charlotte shares many elements in common with other US cities, but there were some important differences in timing and causation that suggest that Charlotte's history adds a layer of complexity to the national narrative. The iconic cases that have dominated the literature on gay responses to AIDS are those of New York, San Francisco, and to a lesser extent Los Angeles. In these cities, AIDS service mobilization and activism emerged amidst the escalating crisis in communities that were at the very epicenter of the disease.³ As Jennifer Brier emphasizes, AIDS activism in these metropolitan areas built on existing structures of the gay liberation era, adapting those to face the challenge of the epidemic. In part, then, Charlotte's history confirms her argument that AIDS was a critical agent of political change pushing the gay and lesbian community into activism and articulating a positive image of gay and lesbian culture. However, as shown in the previous chapter, Charlotte entered the era of AIDS without the benefit of a tradition of political engagement or of publicly celebrating gay identity and culture. By 1985 Charlotte had developed a range of community groups and spaces in addition to bars, baths, and adult bookstores similar to those that emerged in other cities during the 1970s gay liberation movement, but it lacked strong, sustained and visible activism. In this sense, Charlotte's

³ Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Susan M. Chambre, *Fighting For Our Lives: New York's AIDS Community and the Politics of Disease* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Jonathan Engel, *The Epidemic: A Global History of AIDS* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2006); Nancy E. Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned: Queers, Whores, and Junkies Respond to AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), chapter 5.

history complicates Brier's argument, because she has emphasized the continuity between AIDS activism and the earlier gay liberation movement.⁴

The analysis of the relationship between AIDS and activism in Charlotte is best understood in terms of two central imperatives to which the disease gave rise: providing care to those afflicted by AIDS and efforts to educate the community to help prevent the spread of the disease. These two themes are the subject of Chapters Three and Four respectively.⁵ Chapter Three focuses on care. It argues that the dramatic upturn in the incidence of the disease in Charlotte after 1985 created challenges that the established medical and public health structures were unable or unwilling to meet. The formation of the Metrolina AIDS Project (MAP) filled this gap. MAP had many features in common with the AIDS service organizations (ASOs) that sprang up across the country, but its late start highlights the transformative impact of AIDS in Charlotte. Within the space of two years, AIDS created a complex and substantial coalition of intersecting groups in Charlotte where little had existed before. The rapid development of MAP as an activist agency – engaging volunteers, raising funds, involving the community, and ultimately securing civic legitimacy in the form of an operating grant from the Mecklenburg County Commission – shows the capacity of the gay community to embrace activism in response to the disease. In addition, the nature of the disease and the service model of ASO's also

⁴ Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, chapter 1.

⁵ This division between care and prevention is evident in the literature; see for example, Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned*; David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). However, it has been recently challenged by Brier who sees no division between care and activism; Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, pp. 4, 11-77. Brier builds on Cindy Patton's earlier analysis of AIDS work: Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1990). As will be argued in chapter 5, Charlotte's history suggests a different interpretation, since MAP ultimately had to limit its activism in order to secure the resources needed to care for people with AIDS.

revealed the gay and lesbian community to the mainstream Charlotte community, a visibility they embraced.

Chapter Four focuses on the much more contentious issues of education and prevention. The argument will explore conflict between the gay community and the religious and political right and conflict with county government and public health officials that signaled a newfound spirit of activism within the gay community. Ultimately the struggle encouraged open political opposition to conservative attacks on gay sexual culture and the rights of “people with AIDS”, and a proactive stance in relation to serving the needs of the community.

* * *

The Incidence of AIDS in Charlotte:

Consistent with the uncertainty and rapidly changing understanding about HIV/AIDS nationally, the reporting of the first cases in North Carolina was confused and confusing. The first cases in North Carolina were reported in September 1982 when *Front Page* reprinted an article from *The Chapel Hill News* announcing that three or four local cases had been identified in the Triangle area.⁶ However, nine months later, in June 1983, a headline in *Front Page* boldly announced, “AIDS Comes to The Carolinas.” This article listed six North Carolinian residents who had either died of AIDS complications or were living with the disease and five others who came from other states, but who had died in North Carolina. Most cases were in the Triangle Area and the article remarked on the fact that no cases had been reported in Charlotte.⁷ Charlotte’s first case came four

⁶ Mike McLaughlin, “UNC-CH Researchers Study Baffling Illness,” *Front Page*, courtesy of *The Chapel Hill Newspaper*, Sept. 28, 1982.

⁷ Dan Leonard, “AIDS Comes To The Carolinas,” *Front Page*, June 28, 1983.

months later when WBTB broke the news that Nat Strickland of Indian Trail had been diagnosed with the disease. WBTB named Strickland on the air without his permission and against federal and state guidelines, indicating the level of insensitivity around people with AIDS in the early years of the disease.⁸

However, reporting of AIDS in the gay press was fairly limited in the first years of the epidemic. *Front Page* did a few stories in 1981-82, but it was actually the *Charlotte Observer* that published the first comprehensive treatment of the disease in the Carolinas in June 1983, following growing concerns about AIDS spreading into the heterosexual population. The series of articles included medical information on the “mystery killer” disease and its rapid spread, cursory information on safe sex practices, statistics on who was infected, and human interest stories and interviews with local gay men, most of whom indicated that they were not particularly concerned.⁹ The article was re-printed as a special supplement in the July 12 edition of *Front Page*, but there was no significant follow up reporting in Charlotte’s own newsletter, *Q-Notes*, whose initial run as a newsletter was from June 1983 until December 1984.¹⁰ Even in the latter part of 1983, as the transmission of the disease became better understood – and therefore how best to avoid infection – *Q-Notes* had no stories that shared this information with its readers. The Charlotte gay community had sympathy for those suffering from AIDS elsewhere. In June 1983 the Scorpio held the city’s first AIDS fundraising event to support the Gay Men’s Health Crisis in New York, and the Odyssey followed suit in July.

⁸ “First Charlotte AIDS Case Reported,” *Front Page*, Nov. 22, 1983. Strickland was being treated at Duke University Medical Center for Kaposi’s sarcoma.

⁹ Robert Conn et al, “AIDS, Tracking a Mystery Killer,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 5-8, 1983.

¹⁰ “The AIDS Crisis: What You Need To Know,” *Front Page*, July 12, 1983. *Q-Notes* reported the Strickland case but did not follow up other than to report on fundraising to help cover Strickland’s expenses: “AIDS Patient To Address Acceptance,” *Q-Notes*, Oct. 1983.

Yet it is clear that AIDS was perceived as a distant threat which only demanded locals to have a good time raising dollars for the cause. For example, a Scorpio ad for a second benefit, a Levis/Leather/Western night, was published under the banner “FEVER!” An event at the Odyssey included a “best bartender” competition for which the prize was a round-trip air ticket to New York City.¹¹

After news broke of Nat Strickland’s diagnosis in October 1983 the community did turn their attention to local needs for a short time. Almost overnight a support group called Charlotte AIDS Relief Fund (CARF) was founded to support people with AIDS in the local area. The group was immediately backed by the Scorpio, whose owner promised the group a third of the take at an upcoming AIDS benefit, and an auction in November at the Brass Rail raised \$800, but the last mention of the group was in the December issue of *Q-Notes*.¹²

This evidence shows that John Preston was right in chiding provincial gay communities like Charlotte’s for not preparing for the upcoming reality of an epidemic. As reported in the *Charlotte Observer*: “The concern, fear, and sometimes panic in gay communities seems proportional to the count of cases in a particular city. In Charlotte...many gay men say they feel insulated from the threat.” An anonymous gay businessman, “Dan,” admitted that he would be concerned if he were in a city like New York City or San Francisco, but that he was not living his life “worrying about whether I

¹¹ Deborah Gates, “Fear of AIDS prompts rumors, fund-raiser here,” *Charlotte News*, May 27, 1983; Leonard, “AIDS Comes To The Carolinas;” Scorpio ad, “FEVER,” *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1983.

¹² “AIDS Patient to Address Acceptance;” “Gagner, 2 Others Form Fund For AIDS Victims,” *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1983; Lee Mullis, “N.C. Fundraisers for AIDS-Related Causes,” *Front Page*, Dec. 6, 1983. Former TAGS bartender, Chris Lemmond, former TAGS manager, Hugh Gagner, and Kevin Jochems, who was a friend of Strickland, founded CARF. No oral history interviewees who were interviewed for this thesis recalled what happened to CARF.

have AIDS.” The reporter noted that with no steady lover Dan visited gay bars four to five nights a week and might have sexual relations once or twice a week for a total of perhaps 30-50 sexual partners a year. Patrons at TAGS, a gay bar on the corner of the Plaza and Matheson Ave. had a similar reaction. TAGS manager, Hugh Gagner, commented that: “I don’t think that there’s really a lot of concern in Charlotte. It’s more a thing to talk about. It’s one of those things where a person says, ‘yeah, but this can’t happen to me.’”¹³

This lack of concern changed dramatically in 1985. In its February issue *Front Page* reported that as of December 1984 there had been a total of twenty-four cases of AIDS in North Carolina and twelve people had died.¹⁴ In April 1985, the paper shared a report from the Communicable Disease Control Office in Raleigh announcing that there were thirty-two cases in the state, an increase of approximately 33% in just four months. *Front Page* noted that this count did not include people residing in North Carolina who had contracted the disease in another state, or people who “have a milder form of the illness known as AIDS-related complex or ARC.”¹⁵ In May of 1985, *Front Page* featured a table summarizing CDC AIDS statistics as of April 22—the national total number of cases was “9,760 and counting.” 49% of these people had died, and although North Carolina had only thirty eight cases, a footnote to the table explained that the numbers “reflect approximately only 10 percent of the actual number of AIDS cases.” In the same edition, a second AIDS article announced “disheartening news” from the International

¹³ Jody Jaffe, “As the Epidemic Spreads, So Do the Fears,” *The Charlotte Observer*, June 8, 1983.

¹⁴ “AIDS Cases Mandate Education,” *Front Page*, Feb. 19, 1985. Statistics are taken from the CDC.

¹⁵ “AIDS-What You Should Know,” *Front Page*, May 7, 1985. At this time HIV was not being diagnosed and enumerated as the precursor to AIDS disease.

AIDS Conference where researchers “reported that AIDS cases were expected to double in the next nine months.”¹⁶ An AIDS update in February 1986 indicated a new national trend. While new AIDS cases were slowing nationally, they were rising sharply across the South, including in the Carolinas. Further alarming news was that the death rate from AIDS was on the rise, with 51% mortality to date and 79% mortality for those who had been diagnosed before July 1984.¹⁷

The coverage of AIDS in the mainstream press showed similar patterns. Although the *Charlotte Observer* fell relatively silent on the AIDS epidemic following the news blitz of June 1983, the revelation in July 1985 that film star Rock Hudson was seriously sick and in particular that he was seeking treatment in Paris with specialists from the Pasteur Institute, set off a frenzy of speculation in the national news and revived public interest in the disease.¹⁸ The focus of articles in the *Observer* in late summer 1985 was mostly on the “worried well,” but reporting also aimed to cover a wide range of concerns from Charlotteans across the social and sexual spectrum. AIDS, it was reported had now spread from:

A few large cities to 46 states, to small towns, to women and children. . . . The six Carolinas cases in May 1983 have mushroomed to 85 today, with 37 more suspected. . . . Since Mecklenburg County saw its first case in March 1984, about 15 AIDS patients have been treated here, including 8 county residents. At least three local hospitals have seen some.¹⁹

¹⁶ “AIDS: Attention Must Be Paid,” *Front Page*, May 21, 1985; “AIDS Fundraisers,” *Front Page*, May 21, 1985.

¹⁷ “AIDS Cases in the Carolinas Up,” *Front Page*, Feb. 4, 1986.

¹⁸ Skip Hidlay, Pam Kelley and Nancy Webb, “What The Disease’s Spread Means To Everyone,” *Charlotte Observer*, Aug. 18, 1985, (accessed Aug. 15, 2015).

¹⁹ Pam Kelley, Skip Hidlay, and Nancy Webb, “AIDS Brings its Threat to Carolinas,” *Charlotte Observer*, Aug. 18, 1985, (accessed Aug. 15, 2015). Note that Nat Strickland was not counted as a Mecklenburg county case since he resided in Union County when he was diagnosed in 1983. Thus the first case for Mecklenburg County was recorded in 1984. However, the record is not clear on the month this occurred since news reports conflict and attending medical staff have no exact recollection of the date.

The reason for this sudden concern is evident in the significant increase in AIDS cases at the middle of the decade. The number of confirmed cases in the Charlotte metropolitan statistical area tripled between 1984 and 1985, from four to twelve, and the number of deaths increased at the same rate. Medical understanding of the long latency period for the HIV infection left no doubt that much worse was to come. Figure 2 provides a retrospective overview of what was being felt in Mecklenburg County and the Charlotte urban region with respect to HIV infection, AIDS disease, and morbidity during the 1980s. Although the number of cases was initially small, the general trend was clear, showing almost geometric growth. As shown in Figure 3, rapid growth in the incidence of AIDS continued through the early 1990s, with deaths tapering off by the mid 1990s as better treatments became available. As with all AIDS statistics, caveats apply. Despite the very specific figures that were trotted out in news articles, accuracy was impossible, since there were no absolutes that could be known.²⁰ Variables included the classification of the disease, the codes used by the CDC to determine whether someone had the disease or had died from the disease, the compliance of doctors and health departments in reporting

²⁰ Note that numbers in Figures 2 and 3 do not agree because of differences in regions represented. Figure 1 represents Mecklenburg County only, where Figure 2 extends to the Charlotte Urban Region. Also note that Figure 1 includes deaths of people resident in Mecklenburg County whose AIDS diagnosis might have been reported in a different location. The CDC only counted AIDS cases once and that was in the place of diagnosis.

HIV and AIDS CASES and DEATHS from AIDS*, 1983-1989: MECKLENBURG COUNTY:

Source: North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health:
personal communication

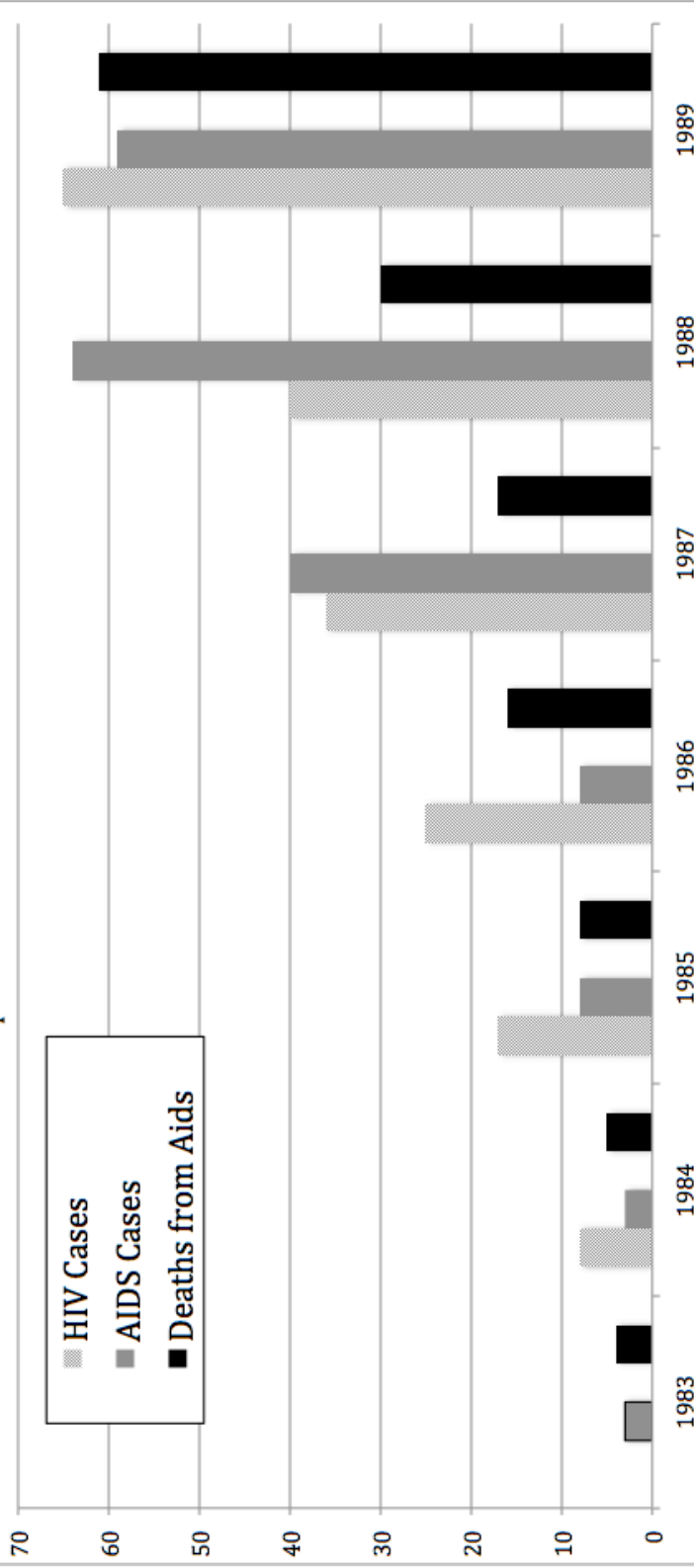


Figure 2: HIV and AIDS Cases and Deaths from AIDS, 1983-1989: Mecklenburg County:

* Deaths reported for residents of North Carolina at the time of death; may include individuals reported for onset of AIDS in other locations.

AIDS cases for 1983 and 1984 were reported as 'less than 5'.

AIDS CASES and DEATHS*, 1983-1996 CHARLOTTE URBAN REGION

Source: CDC Wonder Online Database, June 2017 www.wonder.cdc.gov/aids-v2002

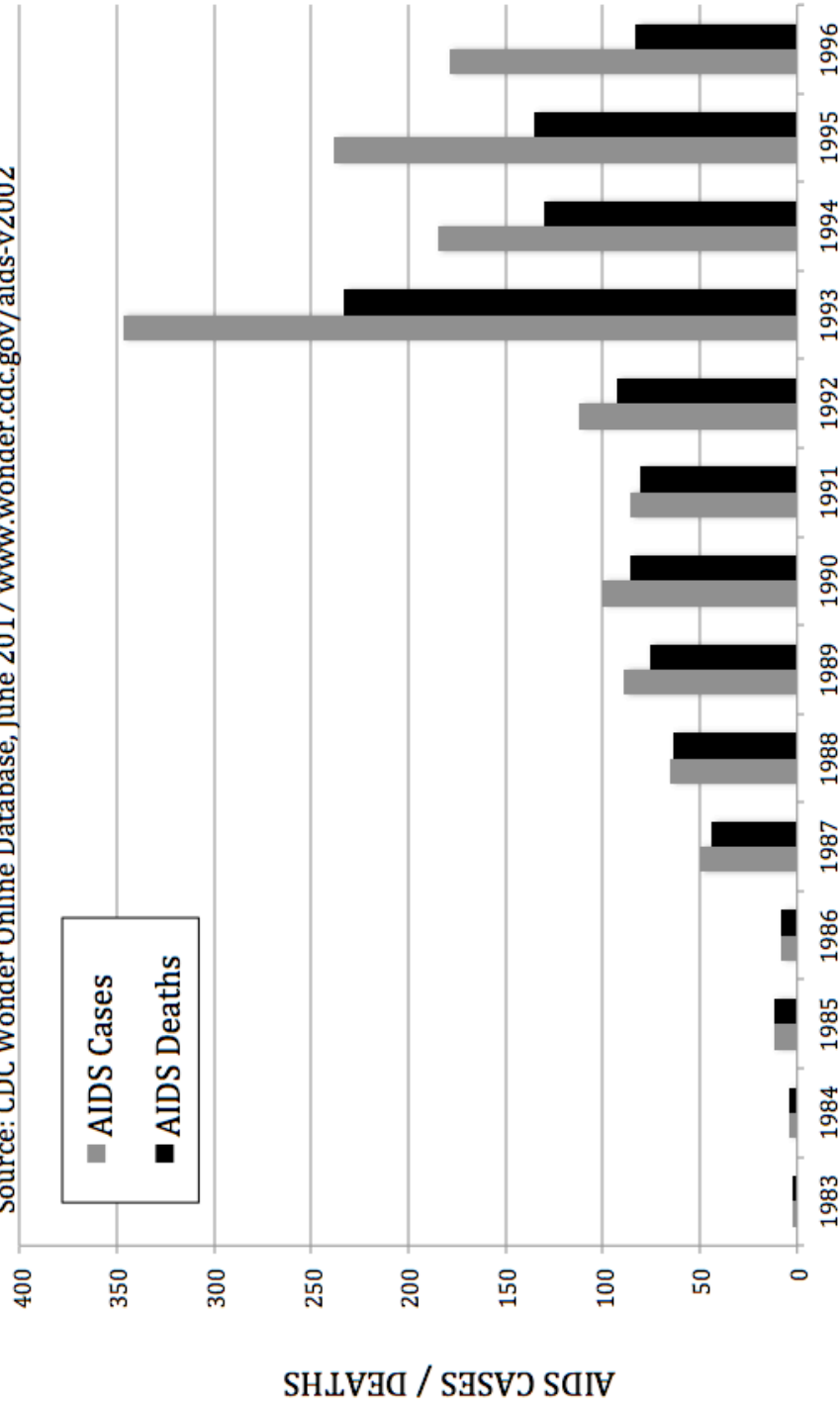


Figure 3: AIDS Cases and Deaths, 1983-1996: Charlotte Urban Region

* Deaths reported are for individuals presenting with AIDS in the year shown; year of death may be different.

the disease to the CDC, and most significantly the willingness of at-risk populations to seek medical care and, once a test was available, to be tested.

* * *

The Medical Community and AIDS in Charlotte

As AIDS cases emerged in Charlotte in larger numbers it became evident that the local medical community was not prepared, equipped, or in some cases even willing to meet the needs of patients. This was true despite the fact that Charlotte cases only emerged after other cities had experienced the full force of the disease's impact. In July of 1983, *Front Page* reported that "Charlotte, the state's largest city doesn't have any doctors who are recognized as experts on AIDS."²¹ At this early stage Charlotte did not need its own expertise because the Duke University Medical Center and the North Carolina Memorial Hospital at Chapel Hill had taken the lead in treating AIDS patients and pioneering AIDS research.²² Duke University announced in May 1983 that it had opened an "Adult Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) Clinic, in part to answer questions it is receiving about the disease."²³ When Nat Strickland was identified as Charlotte's "first" AIDS case in *Q-Notes*, it was reported that he was being treated at the Duke University Medical Center. Indeed, the first AIDS fundraising efforts in Charlotte raised money to pay for his lodgings during treatment, and early activists thought these

²¹ "Switchboard Flooded," *Front Page*, July 12, 1983. The *Charlotte Observer* supplement in this issue of *Front Page* listed resources associated with AIDS. It is surprising that the resources were locally slender and did not include any Charlotte hospitals. Resources listed included the Duke University Medical Center AIDS clinic; the Gay/Lesbian Switchboard of Charlotte which offered information and counseling; Mecklenburg County Health Department, which distributed a brochure and offered help at their venereal disease clinic; and a series of other crisis lines in different parts of the state and country.

²² Stephen J. Inrig, *North Carolina and the Problem of AIDS: Advocacy, Politics, and Race in the South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 28.

²³ "Duke Opens AIDS Clinic," *Front Page*, June 7, 1983.

travel expenses would be an ongoing need.²⁴ By 1985, however, it was clear that the number of cases turning up at Charlotte area hospitals was increasing, and Mecklenburg County quickly earned the unfortunate distinction of being a leader in AIDS cases in the state.

The initial response to AIDS patients within Charlotte hospitals was not well organized, and there was no clinic where AIDS concerns could be addressed.²⁵ Responses among medical staff to the onset of AIDS in Charlotte hospitals ran the gamut from fear, hostility, and indifference to a remarkable dedication beyond the usual scope of the medical professional / patient relationship. As a result, the treatment of AIDS patients fell mostly to individual doctors who were willing to step forward while others shied away.²⁶

Dr. Joseph Jemsek was one doctor who did step forward. He had started his professional career as an infectious disease specialist for the Nalle Clinic in Charlotte in 1979 and had become aware of the puzzling immunodeficiency disease that was affecting

²⁴ “AIDS Patient to Address Acceptance.” Note that from the gay community’s perspective Strickland, although he was from Indian Trail in Union County, was the first known AIDS case to emerge in Charlotte, but from the medical perspective place of diagnosis was the significant factor in recording statistics.

²⁵ It was not until August 1988 that there was a report of a new AIDS clinic at Charlotte Memorial Hospital where those who did not have health insurance could seek treatment. The clinic was run by Dr. William Porter, a Charlotte internist and full-time teacher at Memorial, with the help of other interns and volunteer infectious disease specialists from Charlotte. This was the only option that some people had to get access to testing and to be prescribed AZT, the only drug at the time that was approved for treating AIDS patients. The initiative emerged because one of Charlotte’s infectious disease doctors, who had treated as many as twenty AIDS patients, had come to recognize the serious lack of services for those without health insurance. Costs were covered for the clinic by the hospital, which received funding from the County Commission to cover healthcare for needy residents of Mecklenburg County. Karen Garloch, “Clinic Provides Free Care,” *Charlotte Observer*, Aug. 15, 1988, (accessed Aug. 15, 2015).

²⁶ The medical response in Charlotte closely resembles the responses documented in Bayer and Oppenheimer’s monograph based on interviews with seventy-six doctors from larger metropolitan cities mostly on the West and East coasts, with a smaller sampling of doctors from the metropolitan cities of Southern and interior states. For more detail of issues related to doctors treating AIDS patients in the first two decades of the disease see; Ronald Bayer, and Gerald M. Oppenheimer, *AIDS Doctors: Voices from the Epidemic* (New York: Oxford Press, 2000).

gay men as soon as the CDC reported on cases in 1981. Dr. Jemsek even looked forward to the challenge of working directly with the disease when it turned up in the local area, and he was probably the first doctor in Charlotte to knowingly treat an AIDS patient. Dr. Jemsek recalled that he was called to Mercy Hospital in early 1984 by a local general practice doctor to examine a man who was incapacitated by a severe lung infection. The GP had already suspected AIDS and had ordered a test for HTLV III (the name for HIV at the time), which had indicated a positive result, and the patient was diagnosed with immunodeficiency disease. Later the Mercy hospital pathologist confirmed that the patient suffered from pneumocystis pneumonia.²⁷

Dr. Jemsek's willingness to treat AIDS patients was by no means universal, but in general the medical community adapted fairly quickly to the challenge. Nurses at Mercy Hospital confessed their anxiety about caring for the first AIDS patient treated by Dr. Jemsek:

'At first we were all afraid,' Nurse Lola Krick told a reporter. 'One nurse volunteered to work with him at first, but eventually we all got involved with him. After we got to know him, we didn't even think about AIDS. We wore caps and gowns and gloves and masks. We were very careful with blood and body secretions.'²⁸

Dona Haney, one of the first graduates of the UNC Charlotte's School of Nursing, was the infectious disease nurse at Mercy Hospital who was responsible for training staff in procedures for handling infections. Haney reflected that although there was no directive from the hospital she "had conducted many an in-service to prepare the staff for what we anticipated would come." However, when she came across this first patient, "John...a

²⁷ Joseph G. Jemsek oral history interview, Jan. 25, 2017, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (ALSC); Dona Haney oral history interview, May 24, 2017, ALSC.

²⁸ "AIDS Cases Mandate Education."

pleasant gentleman who previously had no major problems,” she was struck by her own emotional reaction, and that of her staff:

This was a week of much stress and activity as I counseled with staff, coordinated isolation procedures, maintained contact with the patient and his family and tried to anticipate what to do next. Nurses who had taken care of the patient prior to the diagnosis had great fear that they had been exposed.... Tears were common as we discussed their specific concerns. I provided reassurance about how this disease was transmitted – but the newness and the severity of the disease diluted the reassurances.²⁹

John lived ten days in the hospital before his death. Reflecting on the experience, Haney recalled: “John was the first; my life would never be the same as I dealt with numerous facets of this disease and the impact it would have on patients, staff and the community.”³⁰

However, as Dr. Jemsek recalled, not all nurses adapted so willingly to the task of caring for AIDS patients. At Presbyterian hospital nursing staff refused to enter the room of the first AIDS patient admitted there. When Dr. Jemsek discovered that the patient had not been seen for several hours, he was incredulous: “Are you kidding me? That’s irresponsible, it’s unprofessional, are you kidding me?” Despite this rebuke, the next day, he discovered that his patient still had had no contact with nursing staff.³¹ On reflection he realized that procedures were not yet in place for handling this new situation: “I think it was a case of fear and confusion about the proper procedures for handling an AID patient. Initially there was a great feeling of dismay and fear in dealing with these patients.”³²

²⁹ Haney interview. This account was written as a reflection by Haney, and was generously shared during the interview. The written account is available with the archived interview.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Jemsek Interview.

³² “AIDS Cases Mandate Education.”

In addition to the fear of AIDS there was also disapproval of patients who were assumed to be homosexual and responsible for the disease themselves. Dr. Jemsek admitted to harboring his own homophobia:

There was a lot of stigmata associated with the illness.... In those days being gay was not for public consumption. It wasn't accepted to be gay. So most of the cases I saw were closet gays. At first I was very afraid to deal with this population, because I was from a semi-rural Midwest town. I was homophobic, and I'll freely admit that. But that all melted away in fairly short order as I got more acquainted with the population and more comfortable.³³

Dr. Jemsek went on to treat hundreds of AIDS patients at the Nalle clinic, and thousands more through his own practice, Jemsek Clinic in Huntersville North Carolina after the Nalle clinic closed in 2000.³⁴

The lack of administrative foresight and leadership was of greater concern to Dr. Jemsek than the initial reaction of nursing staff. After diagnosing a Charlotte Memorial hospital nurse with immunodeficiency disease Dr. Jemsek was obliged to notify the nurse's supervisors. To his surprise the nurse came to his office a few hours later, accusing Dr. Jemsek of getting him fired. This had certainly not been Dr. Jemsek's intention, and he took the issue up with the hospital administration. He was directed to a senior vice president, who astonished him by announcing: "Well, we don't want to be known as the AIDS hospital." Since Charlotte Memorial was popularly known as the county hospital, Dr. Jemsek could not comprehend how the administrator thought there was any choice on whether to turn away patients, nor, for that matter, that the hospital could consider ignoring an epidemic on its doorstep.³⁵

³³ Jemsek Interview.

³⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵ *Ibid*

In August 1986 Charlotte Memorial became the target of the US Department of Health and Human Services when the hospital was charged with illegally discriminating against a nurse with AIDS. The nurse in question had been diagnosed in 1984 with symptoms of AIDS and was placed on medical leave, although he had requested to continue working. The hospital stopped paying him within a month, and he died in February 1986 at age twenty-seven.³⁶ The hospital claimed that on the advice of their epidemiologist and other physicians, it had offered the nurse a non-nursing position, and that he had refused it. The case set a national precedent that people with AIDS might be able to protect their jobs. It also highlighted the difficult medical and ethical issues that faced medical professionals before AIDS was fully understood as a disease. Defending the hospital, its attorney explained the dilemma: “At the time this matter became known to us, and subsequently, there was unavailable to us any body of unquestioned, prevailing medical knowledge that unequivocally indicated that the disease was not contagious.”³⁷

As hospital staff got more familiar with HIV/AIDS and became more experienced with ministering to patients, it was still evident that people with AIDS had special social, psychological, and spiritual needs that were not being addressed. Dr. Jemsek relayed a story to reporters that came to typify many of the early experiences of AIDS patients in Charlotte. He had tended a young man who remained in the hospital well beyond the immediate medical need: “The man, a ballet dancer who moved to Charlotte this spring from New York, entered a hospital six weeks ago with nausea and a chronic liver infection. He could have been released within three weeks...but he doesn’t have any

³⁶ Dr. Jemsek did not believe that this was the same person as the nurse cited earlier.

³⁷ Valerie Reitman, “Charlotte Memorial Appeals U.S. Ruling of AIDS Bias,” *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 18, 1986, (accessed Aug. 15, 2015).

place to go.” Dr. Jemsek explained that the patient’s friends did not want to take him in with AIDS, and although he might have been eligible for Medicaid, Dr. Jemsek feared that, “the stigma of AIDS will make it difficult or impossible to find a nursing home to accept him.” The young man had also called his relatives out on the West Coast, and they did not want him.³⁸ Over the next decade many similar stories were reported by the *Observer* as the Charlotte community wrestled with the fears and stigmas of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Other local doctors faced similar challenges as they responded to HIV/AIDS. Infectious disease specialist Dr. James Horton joined the staff at the Nalle Clinic in 1984 and soon found himself deeply involved with the epidemic. Dr. Horton reflected that AIDS caused a revolution in the field of infectious disease:

There was a real hubris about infections in the 1970’s. There was a real feeling that the infections were all under control. The surgeon general said, I think it was in 1970, ‘the war against the microbes has been won.’ He didn’t say who’d won it, but he said it had been won.³⁹

Like many doctors, Dr. Horton was initially wary of getting involved with the new disease, fearing for his own safety and concerned about the impact his work with AIDS patients might have on the Nalle Clinic. He recalled deep concern on the part of senior partners at the Nalle Clinic that he (in addition to Dr. Jemsek) was taking a leading role in treating AIDS patients that would reflect on the clinic as a whole:

There was a lot of fear involved...I remember my senior partner here in Charlotte, Paul O’Bar saying he hoped that CDC had it right. Otherwise we were all going to be in trouble.... We were seeing so many young men with this mysterious illness and there were lots of doctors and nurses...who would not take care of these people with HIV.⁴⁰

³⁸ Kelly, Hidlay, and Webb, “AIDS Brings Its Threat to Carolinas.”

³⁹ James M. Horton oral history interview, Dec. 22, 2016, ALSC.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Dr. Horton remembered one case in particular where the admitting physician in the hospital refused to even see the patient and instead left a note outside his room saying that Dr. Horton was taking over his care. There was also significant concern that treating AIDS patients would drive off others and stigmatize the medical practice:

I was nervous because some of my partners were really nervous about the impact this would have on patients coming to the Nalle Clinic, to the practice. Would patients want to come to a clinic where they knew we were taking care of this new mysterious illness?⁴¹

And at a personal level Dr. Horton was concerned for his own health and more especially that he might take the disease home to his wife and young daughter. Nevertheless, he became deeply involved with not only treating the disease and working on clinical trials but also in direct support of people with AIDS as a board member of Charlotte's first AIDS service organization, the Metrolina AIDS Project (MAP.) In 1985 it was clear that Charlotte's medical establishment was not equipped and not willing to provide the kind of additional care and support that AIDS patients needed, and Dr. Horton could see that there was a need for a community service group that was willing and eager to work alongside medical professionals to provide that care.

* * *

The Gay Community and AIDS in Charlotte

The response of the gay community in Charlotte during the early days of AIDS was also far from coherent. Certain gay-serving businesses were negatively affected, such as Charlotte's gay baths. A "company spokesman" explained that "when the AIDS crisis first broke, there was something of a mass panic and the baths came close to dying." The

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

lull was not permanent and “when the panic began to subside a little bit and the bookstores harassment started, business began to pick up.” Still, he continued, “for the last four or five years, we’ve done nothing more than hang on.” In February a forlorn and final advertisement for the baths in *Q-Notes* simply read, “CL_B SO_TH - The Only Thing Missing Is You,” On July 26 1987 the only gay baths between Atlanta and Washington DC closed both because of financial difficulties and in anticipation of a future battle with local government to close for health reasons.⁴²

As might be expected, individual responses to the epidemic in Charlotte’s gay community also varied. Reminiscent of Preston’s accusation that AIDS was “descending into a distant circle of our consciousness,” many in Charlotte had little thought about AIDS and what it meant to the community at large. Gay men who were in committed relationships, or who were celibate, had little real concern that they were endangered, and they continued with their lives as normal. Darryl Logsdon, who had edited the early run of *Q-Notes* as a newsletter and was centrally involved as an activist in the gay community, remembered that he was busy renovating an old house with his partner

⁴² Don King, “Charlotte Now Bathless as Club South Closes,” *Q-Notes*, Aug. 1987. There are few references to Club South in available documents, apart from consistent advertisements in the various gay and lesbian newspapers. There is also very little discussion of the baths in interviews to date. Most interviewees claimed that they did not attend the baths, or had perhaps attended a very few times. Bobby Schmiel noted that the baths attracted closeted gays, many of who were married and who used the baths to find sex with men. Don King, who had a bridge-playing relationship with baths manager Harry Smith, referred to the baths in an article intended for *Whatever*, saying that he had visited a few times. The tone of the written piece suggested that he was not a regular there, but was rather trying to appeal to a section of the gay community that were supportive of the baths. See, copy for *Whatever*, June 1979, box 1, folder ‘Outgoing Correspondence 1975-1979,’ Donaldson Wells King Papers, ALSC. In a letter to the editor in November 1990, Trey B. describes his life’s trajectory as a gay man, noting that when he came to Charlotte in the 1970s as a young man from a small town he was amazed at the gay businesses where he could meet others, including the baths. Future interviews may reveal more detail about how the baths fit into gay culture in Charlotte: Trey B., “Gay Community,” Letters to the Editor, *Q-Notes*, Nov, 1990.

during the height of the AIDS crisis and was not very involved in the epidemic except through fundraisers.⁴³ Local educator and gallery owner, Robert Williams and his partner had already moved out to live in the country away from Charlotte's urban core by the time AIDS surfaced in Charlotte. They also spent as much time as possible in their second home on Gingercake Mountain in the Blue Ridge Mountains where a small enclave of gay men, lesbians, and straight friends engaged in philosophical discussions over shared meals. As Williams reflected: "I've never had much thought about AIDS.... It wasn't a major thing on our minds, in our lives. If we had been out more, if we had known more people, perhaps it might have been, but we kept to ourselves."⁴⁴ Other gay men were in denial of the risks of AIDS and continued to be sexually active with multiple partners without protection. Ken Schell reflected on his realization that he was taking significant risks with his sexual behavior: "It was after AIDS.... I picked this guy up and we had sex.... He was just passing through Charlotte from New York and...we had unsafe sex of course, and I thought, 'Oh my lord, what is wrong with me?'"⁴⁵

At the level of the community, the most important response to AIDS was a strengthening of community structures, which enabled the community to provide support for those with the disease. A palpable atmosphere of concern and focus on the epidemic is evident in *Q-Notes* articles from the beginning of the reincarnation of the newsletter as a newspaper in June 1986 through the early 1990's. *Q-Notes* editor Jim Yarborough commented on the challenges of living as gay men and lesbians in Charlotte, and the sense of urgency that the epidemic gave to taking affirmative action:

⁴³ Darryl Logsdon, oral history interview, Sept. 25, 2015, ALSC.

⁴⁴ Robert Williams, oral history interview 1, Jan. 24, 2017, ALSC.

⁴⁵ Ken Schell, oral history interview 1, Feb. 8, 2017, ALSC.

With its heavy influence of religion, PTL and others, it is not always easy to live the open lifestyle often seen as the norm in other large cities.... But... ‘there is strength in numbers,’ We are a strong and vital part of the city. There are also the ones who say, ‘Don’t rock the boat’ when it comes to the disease that has decimated our community in the larger cities, and the laws that make it not just a crime but a felony to love and seek happiness with other like persons, with some preachers who make us out to be the scum of the earth, though we know we are not. To those who say ‘Don’t rock the boat,’ I say, ‘If not now, when? If not here, where?’⁴⁶

Negotiating prejudice and misunderstanding in the health care system also helped gay activists to develop a strong sense of self-advocacy. Health advice in *Q-Notes* urged an honest forthright approach with doctors and a firm stand against homophobia:

Let treators [sic] know that you will not be ridiculed, harassed, or embarrassed. You will not let homophobia on the part of caregivers make you uncomfortable.... When you are ill you should not have to focus energy on homophobic behavior.⁴⁷

A broad view of the proliferation of gay and lesbian community groups in Charlotte in the late 1980s and early 1990s parallels the impact of the epidemic, suggesting a concern for building a healthy community at a time when gay men were most under threat. The change can be seen in a comparison of organizations listed by *Q-Notes* in late 1984 (just prior to going out of print) and early 1987. In late 1984 five organizations were listed under the Quordinators umbrella, with two additional independent social groups.⁴⁸ By 1987 the re-invented and strengthened *Q-Notes* listed

⁴⁶ Jim Yarborough, “Reflections on the March,” *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1987.

⁴⁷ Craig Nelms, “Gay Health...Not An Easy Issue,” *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1987. Nelms was also a hemophiliac and a board member of the North Carolina chapter of the National Hemophilia Foundation. He brought his experience in this realm to his AIDS service work: “Clotting Process Tested Hemophiliacs Try Virus-Free Factor,” *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 19, 1989.

⁴⁸ The November 1984 *Q-Notes* listed the following organizations: Acceptance; Gay/Lesbian Switchboard; MCC/Charlotte; New Life MCC; and Queen City Quordinators. In addition were two independent social groups represented in the newsletter, Gay Men Over 40 and New Vida, a lesbian social group.

eighteen associated organizations.⁴⁹ Many of these groups were newly minted in 1986, and many specifically addressed both gay and lesbian concerns even though AIDS was a particular threat only to gay men. Whereas the earlier organizations operated under the radar of Charlotte's mainstream society, looking inward to serve the gay and lesbian community, several of the new organizations were deliberately outward looking and more visible. Of particular note was Closet Buster Productions, a partnership between activists Don King and Diana Travis, that put on a local access cable program television show starting in December 1986 with the purpose of introducing local gay and lesbian issues to the Charlotte public and at the same time providing an information service for gays and lesbians.⁵⁰ By 1992 the Charlotte Gay/Lesbian Leadership Coalition, which was comprised of representatives of all community groups, listed thirty-seven organizations on their contact list.⁵¹

⁴⁹ The February 1987 *Q-Notes* newspaper listed eighteen organizations: Acceptance; Acceptance AA; Gay/Lesbian Switchboard; MCC/Charlotte; New Life MCC; Queen City Quordinators; Gay Men Over 40; AIDS Support Group; Metrolina AIDS Project; One Nation Indivisible—a political activist group; Queen City Friends—a lesbian social group; a support group for people ambivalent about sexual orientation; The Tradesmen—an organized group of Levi-leather men; PFLAG—Charlotte chapter of the national organization of parents and friends of lesbians and gay men; Gay Parents Coalition; Closet Buster Productions—a production group to provide television programming on gay and lesbian issues; Charlotte Lambda Choral; New Life Players—a gay and lesbian theatre group performing at Spirit Square.

⁵⁰ "Gay TV in Charlotte," *Q-Notes*, Dec. 1987.

⁵¹ Charlotte Gay/Lesbian Leadership Coalition member list, Mar. 9, 1992, box 2, folder 23, King papers. Organizations listed are: Acceptance AA/AL-Anon; Artist Alliance Against AIDS; Black and White Men Together; Brothers Foundation (a residential home for people with AIDS); Bryant Park Social Club; First Tuesday (a political action group); Business Coalition; Gay/Lesbian film series; Gay/Lesbian Teen Support—Time Out; GALA/UNCC; House of Mercy (a residential home for people with AIDS); Integrity, a religious group; Lesbian/Gay Education Bureau; Lambda Connections—a business coalition; Lutherans Concerned; Mature Gay Men; MCC Charlotte; MCC New Life; Mecklenburg County Royal Court; Metrolina AIDS Project (MAP); Metrolina Community Service Project (MCSP); Names Project; Newcomers Services; Gay/Lesbian Switchboard; One Voice Chorus; Older Wiser Lesbians (OWLS); P-Flag; *Q-Notes*; Queen City Friends; Support Works; Tradesmen; Rising Moon Books and Beyond; Charlotte Now, Curious Queers; ACT-UP Charlotte; and AIDS Coalition of Charlotte for Education,

However, undoubtedly the most important manifestation of gay activism in Charlotte was the Metrolina AIDS Project (MAP).⁵² MAP got its start, just as many other AIDS service organizations (ASO's) got theirs, among a small group of gay men concerned about the threat of AIDS to themselves and their community and in response to what they could see was a vacuum in services for people who were living and dying with AIDS. However, as noted in the introduction, MAP formed relatively late, even in relation to other mid-sized cities. Perhaps the most important comparison is between MAP and the AIDS work of the Lesbian and Gay Health Project (LGHP) that started in Durham in 1983. Like Charlotte, the Triangle (Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill) was a mid-sized urban community set in the socially conservative South. As Figure 4 shows, AIDS did not really impact either Charlotte or the Triangle on any scale until the middle of the decade, so it was possible for individuals in these places to borrow from the pioneering ASO's in New York City and San Francisco. In the Triangle, that happened. The LGHP started in 1982 when the organization formed to address the general health concerns of lesbians and gays that were not being met by conventional medicine due to prejudice and misunderstanding. However, in 1983, the group's leaders took on the task of providing support for people with AIDS as cases began to emerge in the area.

Service and Support (ACCESS)—an alternative ASO to MAP. Some of these organizations, such as ACT-UP Charlotte and ACCESS only lasted a short time.

⁵² It is important to note that an earlier nascent ASO, called the Charlotte AIDS Relief Fund (CARF) took shape immediately after Nat Strickland was diagnosed with AIDS in 1983, but it did not sustain.

AIDS CASES, 1983-1996

MAJOR NORTH CAROLINA URBAN REGIONS:

Source: CDC Wonder Online Database, June 2017 www.wonder.cdc.gov/aids-v2002

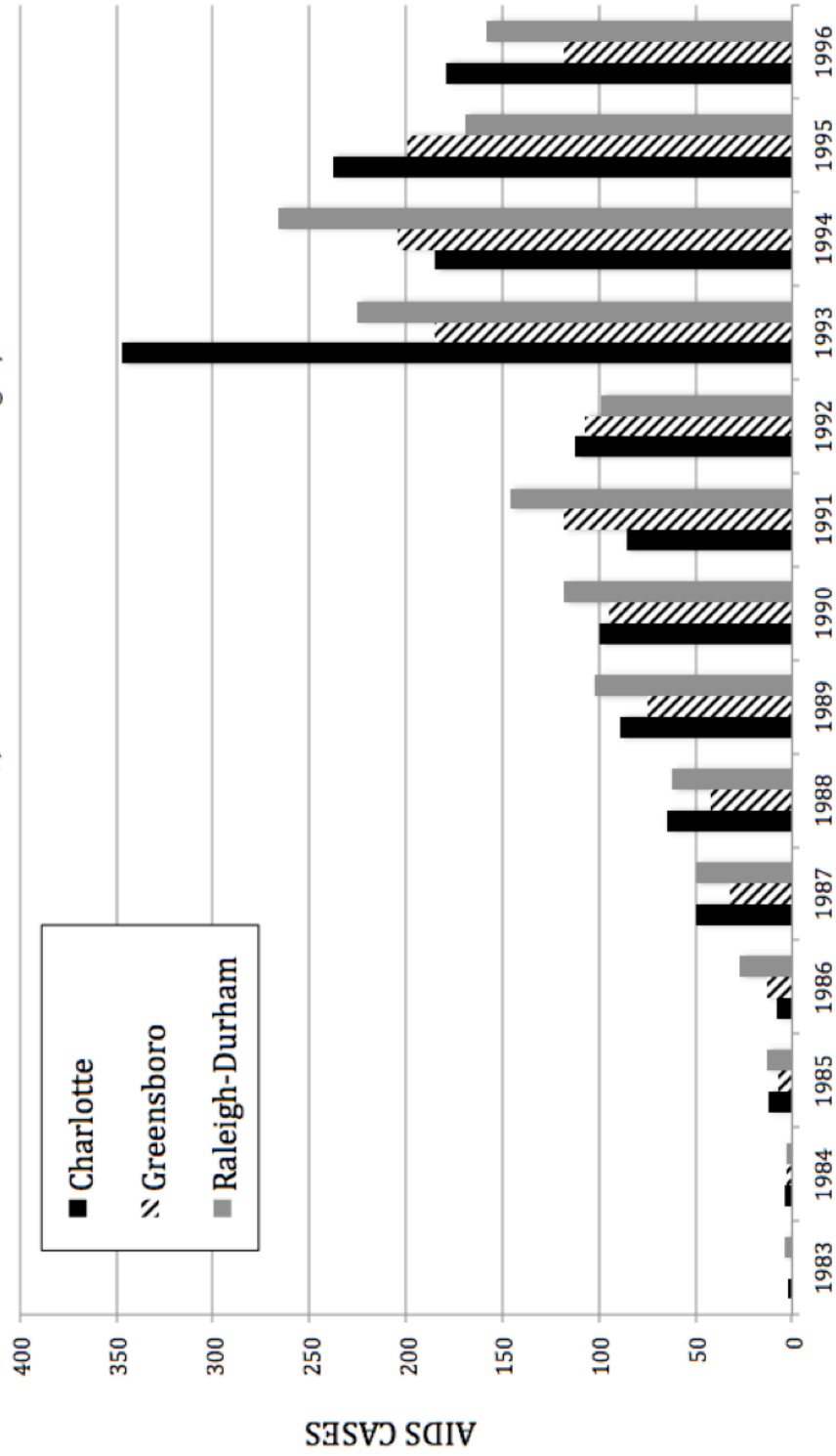


Figure 4: AIDS Cases, 1983-1996: Major North Carolina Urban Regions

Positioned at the center of university and political culture, at an epicenter for medical and pharmaceutical research, the LGHP allowed the Triangle gay and lesbian community to shape state health policy in regard to AIDS, something that was possible because the organization built upon gay community structures that pre-dated AIDS.⁵³

Charlotte was different. Although Charlotte was North Carolina's largest city, it was also very conventional and many members of its gay community maintained hidden identities. Indeed, it is interesting to speculate on the fact that MAP was founded not by one of the established leaders within the community but by a relatively new "outsider" who had not been involved previously in activism. Twenty-seven year old Les Kooyman had moved to Charlotte from San Francisco to be with his partner in 1981. Kooyman's experience and continuing connections with friends in San Francisco gave him an insight into the sobering reality of AIDS and the need for education, support, and advocacy for people with the disease, and he was concerned that there was as yet no preparation for the epidemic in Charlotte. Although he had not been very involved, and did not see himself as the activist "type," Kooyman had attended Acceptance meetings in an effort to seek out friendships, and there he had found others who were also worriedly anticipating the specter of AIDS. Kooyman began putting out his card asking people who were interested in starting a support group to contact him. The counterfactual argument cannot be proved, but one wonders whether or when another person would have stepped up to this role had Kooyman not been in Charlotte.⁵⁴

⁵³ Inrig, *North Carolina and the Problem of AIDS*, pp.17-42.

⁵⁴ Leslie Kooyman oral history interview, Sept. 19, 2015, ALSC; Drum, Mark, "Under Kooyman, MAP Flourishes," *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1986.

Kooyman recalled that there were eight gay men at the first meeting in his house in August 1985, and that six of these became the executive group that created MAP. He still marvels at the atmosphere of risk associated with such a gathering in the well-to-do Myers Park neighborhood. At first none of the early leaders of MAP were known to have the AIDS virus, although that changed over time. In initial meetings they discussed their own fears about the disease and the possible consequences if their sexual orientation should become public. Most members of the group were highly closeted, so Kooyman, who identified as a gay man within his upper middle class social group, and who also had the financial support of his partner, was the natural choice to be the director of the project. Kooyman recalled that their organization was very professional from the outset, benefitting from the skills of the group, which included business executives and a qualified nurse.⁵⁵ Kooyman himself had extensive experience with social organizing and counseling having worked as a campus minister at Sacramento State University.⁵⁶ However in the initial months, with no guaranteed income, and relying entirely on private donations and benefit fundraisers within the gay community, the group operated precariously as volunteers out of Kooyman's house.⁵⁷

The local media was hungry for news about AIDS, and Kooyman recalled that soon after the group formed it was contacted by a CBS affiliate for a story on AIDS in

⁵⁵ Kooyman saw himself as the visionary for MAP, and co-founder Ron Lowe, an executive at Duke Energy, proved to be an extraordinary strategic planner who also brought with him advanced computer skills. In preparation for the work ahead Kooyman recalled that the group paid attention to other ASO's around the country, and especially to organizations in the Bay Area (San Francisco AIDS Foundation and Shanti Project,) where he had contacts. Kooyman's ability to travel in search of effective models of care enabled MAP to get a rapid start in providing services to people with AIDS.

⁵⁶ Kooyman interview. Kooyman had explored the possibility of a similar pastoral support role in Charlotte, but the local Catholic church did not allow lay involvement.

⁵⁷ Kooyman interview.

conjunction with infectious disease specialist, Dr. Jim Horton and public health official, Dr. Stephen Keener. This event had two important consequences.⁵⁸ First, it introduced MAP to Dr. Horton and Dr. Keener, both of whom realized that the medical community needed allies if it was to manage the growing epidemic.⁵⁹ Second, the CBS broadcast abruptly pushed MAP into public service. Kooyman's role in the news program was to represent the community perspective, and in preparation for the show he was asked to provide a helpline number. That day he managed to expedite the installation of a second phone line into an upstairs bedroom of his house and secured the number 704-333-AIDS so that he could announce the hotline information during the program. From then on MAP manned the phone from 6 to 9 pm Monday through Friday. When *Q-Notes* resumed publication in June 1986 after an eighteen-month silence, the MAP hotline number flanked the masthead opposite the number for the Gay/Lesbian Switchboard. In April 1986 the MAP hotline was advertised in a *Charlotte Observer* article: "These Groups Are Our Quiet Resources." The hotline continued to be a lifeline, not just for gay men, but for anyone concerned about AIDS. Where the Gay and Lesbian Switchboard had specifically served gays and lesbians, MAP's hotline crossed into mainstream society.⁶⁰

By January 1986 MAP was ready to incorporate as a non-profit agency, and by April it was able to move out of Kooyman's house and into an office in the Elizabeth

⁵⁸ It has proved impossible to precisely date this CBS special; it must have occurred sometime between August 1985 and January 1986.

⁵⁹ Kooyman interview, ALSC; Horton interview, ALSC; Kathleen Curry, "These Groups Are Our Quiet Resources," *Charlotte Observer*, Apr. 30, 1986, (accessed Aug. 15, 2015). Dr. Horton remembered this media event as a turning point in his own involvement with AIDS and the gay community. Ultimately his work with AIDS would define his career, leading to the position of Chief of Infectious Disease at Carolinas Medical Center and involving him in drug trials that included the breakthrough in preventing babies from contracting AIDS from their infected mothers in utero.

⁶⁰ Kooyman interview.

neighborhood of Charlotte close to Presbyterian Hospital. The address was 1801 East 5th St., but this was kept very confidential, and there was something of a clandestine atmosphere about MAP's early office accommodation. The executive board feared hostility, although none materialized.⁶¹ Kooyman described the office as a second story space overlooking an interior courtyard in an old building called the Terry Building that had an assortment of offices, many of which were rented by psychological counseling and therapeutic professionals. The office was small, and with a dark wood interior it also lacked cheer, but having the space was crucial for the organization to grow and provide more services.⁶²

Around the time that MAP moved into the office on East 5th Street, Kooyman became a part time employee at 20 hours a week, and this enabled him to work on long-term planning and collaboration with doctors, social workers, and therapists. By September 1986 MAP was offering an extensive educational program, and support services that were provided by thirty trained volunteers. Education programs included a safe sex campaign to teach AIDS prevention through safe sex parties, workshops on AIDS in the workplace for corporate managers, an information hotline, outreach presentations for churches, health education for gay men, and general education presentations through forums, lectures and discussion groups. MAP also provided as much support as possible for people with AIDS (PWAs) through hospital visits and a "buddy program," which teamed up volunteers with PWAs to provide practical help and companionship in their home environment. In addition MAP organized support groups

⁶¹ John Vaughn, "Hello, AIDS Hotline, I'm Afraid," *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 4, 1987, (accessed Aug. 15, 2015).

⁶² Kooyman interview.

and social service advocacy for PWAs and their families and for people who tested positive to the HIV virus.⁶³ MAP continued to grow rapidly. In 1986 it served 50 clients with AIDS or ARC with one half time staff member, but by 1988 the number had grown to 208 and the full time staff had grown to four.⁶⁴

The hotline continued to be one of MAP's most significant services. In January 1987 an *Observer* article reported that volunteers in the office received an average of five or six calls a night:

Sometimes callers...are panic stricken. Sometimes they break down and weep in terror of the unknown. Always they're frightened, as they seek information about a disease Newsweek magazine recently labeled 'a national catastrophe that is already in the making.'⁶⁵

By this time calls were coming from heterosexual women and men as well as homosexual men, bisexual men, and a few intravenous drug users. Calls were heaviest after TV specials that covered the disease and most callers were the worried well, in need of information and afraid to call their doctor or the local health department for fear of losing their jobs, homes, and health insurance. Officially Charlotte had 18 diagnosed cases of AIDS when this article was published, although Kooyman believed this to be a low estimate due to underreporting. The hotline was getting two or three calls a month from gay men showing early symptoms of AIDS, and MAP was also seeing a lot of cases of ARC, or AIDS related complex, which represented the impact of the HIV virus on the

⁶³ Drum, "Under Kooyman, MAP Flourishes." The "buddy system" was adopted from New York's Gay Men's Health Crisis, which started its buddy program in 1982. See Susan M. Chambre, *Fighting for Our Lives: New York's AIDS Community and the Politics of Disease* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), pp. 20-24.

⁶⁴ Lesley Kooyman, "MAP Celebrates Third Anniversary," *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1988. Kooyman reported that of MAP's clients, 67% were gay or bisexual, 8% were IV drug users, 11% heterosexual, and 14% unknown transmission. 20% were African American, 10% were women.

⁶⁵ Vaughan, "Hello, AIDS Hot Line? I'm Afraid."

body in the early stages of the disease before the immune system was heavily compromised and breaking down. Kooyman noted that experts estimated there were about ten ARC cases for every one AIDS case, so MAP was well aware that there was a huge potential need for its services in the community. Many calls were also coming from “secretly bisexual married men who’ve had homosexual experiences with men they didn’t know,” and also from “men who’ve engaged in sex with a prostitute.” In addition, many single women were calling “concerned they may have been exposed to the virus by a boyfriend who later tested positive to the HIV test.”⁶⁶

Another important facet of MAP’s work was the Speakers Bureau, which sought to broaden public understanding about AIDS and give the disease a human face through presentations and discussions. While MAP had provided speakers from early on, it was MAP volunteer Dr. Robert Barret, a psychologist and a professor of counseling at UNC Charlotte, who developed the full potential of MAP’s Speakers Bureau. Dr. Barret got involved with MAP as a result of his personal interest as a psychologist in helping people who were dying of incurable disease. At the urging of his teacher, mentor, and eventually colleague at UNC Charlotte, Sister Mary Thomas Burke, Dr. Barret had been volunteering with terminal cancer patients. As media coverage of AIDS increased in 1985 he was drawn to serving the needs of PWA’s. At first Dr. Barret found this curiously difficult:

So there was no organization, like most other cities in the country that would deal with people with HIV. Try to provide support services, try to sort of do the social work behind HIV. And when I initially decided ‘I think I’ll volunteer some time’ there was nowhere to go. There was no place, and I thought a lot about, well how

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

do I find this population? So I went to hospital chapels, I went to ministers. None of them knew anything; they hadn't done any of this.⁶⁷

It was not until Les Kooyman contacted him that Dr. Barret was able to start helping AIDS patients through MAP. Recognizing that he had genuine interest in helping PWA's Kooyman invited Dr. Barret to join the MAP board of directors and put his skills as a counselor and psychologist to work for the organization by holding support groups for people with AIDS and their friends and family. Dr. Barret recalled that he felt under-qualified for the task, but he also realized that this was new territory and that there were no professional guidelines that he could follow. He decided that he would need to learn from the people with AIDS themselves about the psychological impact of the disease and the kind of support that was needed:

I don't know anything about this, but nobody else does either, and so somehow the people that I interact with are going to be my teachers, and I will approach them with that kind of respect, you can teach me about this experience, and I'm not coming with any supposition about what it's like.⁶⁸

Dr. Barret's first experience with support groups was very challenging. Since AIDS was so shrouded in silence and shame, his initial support group was a small and diverse assortment of individuals affected by the epidemic as persons with the disease and family members. Individuals in the group had widely different needs and were in heightened crisis. Although it was not an optimum mix, he could see that there needed to be a place for people to talk about their experiences. After his initial group lost most of its members, Dr. Barret decided to take a break from the support groups and focus on what was shaping up to be a more successful enterprise—a speakers bureau to communicate the humanity and needs of AIDS patients to the general community. In retrospect Dr.

⁶⁷ Robert L. Barret oral history interview 2, Nov. 11, 2014, ALSC.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Barret considered that these kinds of interactions, and the AIDS crisis, created an awareness and understanding of the gay community in Charlotte that had not existed previously. At the same time it also educated the gay community that “there is a community out here that would like to understand you. They may not know what to do with you but they would like to understand you.”⁶⁹

Dr. Barret pioneered the talks with a few individuals who were willing and effective in communicating their personal experience as AIDS sufferers to the wider public. He took the group to colleges, churches, and other public venues in the Metrolina area. As the practice became increasingly successful, he realized that the local media could magnify the benefit and deliver the stories to a wider audience. In April 1987, *Charlotte Observer* journalist Karen Garloch was assigned to cover health issues for the paper. Her first major challenge was the AIDS epidemic, and Dr. Barret could see that she wanted to make her reporting fair and accurate:

The paper played a key role I think ... and especially Karen Garloch I believe, because she really wanted to report this story without any bias. She wanted to represent it as it was...and during that time from 1986 really to the mid 90s I directed a few people to her for interviews and she wrote stories about them in the paper. They were not anonymous; they were willing to be public about having HIV.⁷⁰

One of these stories was about Jimmy Oehler, a key figure in the Speakers' Bureau team. Dr. Barret recalled the first time that Jimmy spoke of his life as a positive HIV gay man at a large gathering of students at Davidson College. Dr. Barret was nervous, but Jimmy turned out to be a consummate public speaker who won over the audience with humor, dignity, and candor. At a similar gathering at Pfeiffer College Dr.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Barret felt concerned that the audience would not be able to handle Jimmy's story. Again, he was proved wrong. Following the talk a woman stood up to say: "I do not know what to say. You have changed my life. I thought I understood this, but I don't understand it. It is something very different from what I thought and I can't thank you enough.' The whole room just applauded."⁷¹

Dr. Barret felt that the speakers' bureau was literally changing attitudes and creating an opportunity for dialog where there had been none: "It was just huge because here were these people living in the shadows with all this stigma of HIV. We went to churches, we went all over, any place anybody would have us. And that was about trying to educate people."⁷²

Oehler's story was particularly poignant and resonant to local sensibilities. Jimmy was very much a product of the Piedmont. His family had farmed an area along Mallard Creek in Northern Mecklenburg County for centuries and local roads were named for them. Fifty-two Oehlers were listed on the Mallard Creek Presbyterian Church roster. Although the Reverend Ken Craig suggested that many in his congregation struggled to reconcile their support for Jimmy and their outlook on homosexuality, they had not turned their backs on him, and Jimmy had caused Craig himself to "question his own beliefs." After Jimmy's funeral Rev. Craig spoke out against prejudice:

I realize the Bible speaks out against it, (homosexuality) but I'm also concerned that Christians (should be) concerned about anger, bitterness, hatred and prejudice, which seemed to be what worried Jesus the most. If someone is a homosexual, I think that does not give Christian people the right or the privilege to be nasty toward them.⁷³

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Karen Garloch, "Man's AIDS Taught Family Lessons Of Life and Death," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 7, 1989, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

Oehler's family was also eager to be open about his status as a gay man. Jimmy's mother, Maryhelen and sister Kathy Lewis nursed him through the last two years of his life at their home on Mallard Creek Road and wished to broadcast that they could live alongside AIDS and not contract the disease. After Jimmy's death his mother stated that she and her late husband had always accepted Jimmy from the moment he came out to them two years after high school. They also accepted his partner, Jim White of Thomasville, who Maryhelen treated as a son-in-law: "Not only do we accept him...but we accept his partner, his friend... He's just like family. They'd come to the Oehler reunion together (every June), as if he was Jimmy's wife or husband."⁷⁴ After Jimmy's death in March 1989, MAP memorialized him by creating the Jim Oehler Community Service Award, a prestigious accolade from the outset, whose first recipient was Presbyterian Hospital's pathologist, Dr. Jared Schwartz.⁷⁵

Another key figure in the Speakers Bureau was Sam Taylor, a heterosexual man who had contracted AIDS as the result of blood transfusions during treatment for leukemia. Sam was the brother of Tonda Taylor, who returned to Charlotte from New York City to help the family care for Sam after he was diagnosed with leukemia. Although Tonda's lesbianism was not part of Sam's story, the irony that Sam had AIDS was keenly felt by the Taylor family, whose tragedy became twofold as Sam and Tonda's father, Dr. Andrew Taylor, a prominent Charlotte allergist, was also diagnosed with AIDS and took his own life to save his family from nursing him. Dr. Taylor most likely contracted AIDS during the period that he assisted with Sam's treatment for leukemia, or

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Karen Garloch, "Tearful Moments, Joyful Songs Blend at AIDS Project Fundraiser," *Charlotte Observer*, June 4, 1989, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

as the result of a blood transfusion during his own surgery for heart disease, but the disclosure that father and son were both sick with AIDS was shocking to Myers Park sensibilities. Yet Tonda Taylor recalled that neighbors rallied in support, and Myers Park Methodist Church fully embraced the two family funerals. Although Tonda's mother made it clear that she should not be accompanied by her partner in the funeral, the tragedy of these two AIDS deaths drew the two women closer together and eventually Tonda found acceptance within her family.⁷⁶

In addition to the imperative to communicate the human stories and human needs that emerged with AIDS, the epidemic also created the need to raise funds, which had the effect of bringing the community together. An article by Don King in *Q-Notes* in July 1987 suggested that there was some early pushback from the gay and lesbian community over an increased burden of fundraising for the AIDS crisis. However, King pointed out that, "since AIDS came on the scene the need for services has intensified immensely," and he went on to congratulate the community for its ability to support these services, including the provision of an office for MAP, the AIDS hotline, AIDS education, and direct help for people with AIDS.⁷⁷

Fundraising for AIDS also strengthened the mutually beneficial relationship between activists and the bars, since the bars became an important venue for fundraising events. These events were clearly intended to be fun and were embraced for their creative opportunities. Olean's, for example, organized what became an annual benefit weekend

⁷⁶ Tonda Taylor oral history interview 3, Sept. 15, 2015 ALSC. Tonda did not return to New York where she had found a comforting measure of anonymity, but on recognizing a pressing need she committed herself to working for LGBT youth in Charlotte by founding Time Out Youth, a support and advocacy group, in 1991.

⁷⁷ Don King, "Benefits: Best Source of Funds," *Q-Notes*, July 1987.

called the “Carnival of Hope.” An advert for the event in the August 1987 humorously announced that:

Word on Charlotte Streets is that Gloria Hole, Linda Locklips, Dentelle Floss, Ruth-Anne Morehead and the ever-popular Lena Quisine will make yet another benefit performance. Collectively known as the “Cheap Trade” the girls will be dishing up their own brand of entertainment throughout Friday night’s show. Unencumbered by any semblance of talent or taste, the group remains true to its motto: ‘Anything for a buck.’⁷⁸

A more demure signature event, which came to be known as the “White Party” (so named because it was the last chance to wear white before summer officially ended) brought the community together at the elegant Van Landingham Inn on the Plaza.⁷⁹

Starting in 1987, the event became a major fundraiser, bringing out a wide cross section of the gay and lesbian community, with the purpose of garnering very generous

⁷⁸ Barry Bishop, “Early in August,” *Q-Notes*, Aug. 1987.

⁷⁹ The choice of the name is suggestive of insensitivity in gay and lesbian circles to racial issues. At the time discussions about race and prejudice in gay media suggests an awareness, but as yet little motivation to make significant efforts towards change in racial segregation. This has more recently been remarked on in the Advocate in a 2015 commentary about the annual Palm Springs White Party, and the lack of diversity of participants. DK, “Op-ed: The White Party and Gay Culture Need More Color,” *The Advocate*, Apr. 24, 2015, <https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2015/04/24/op-ed-white-party-and-gay-culture-need-more-color> , (accessed Aug. 6, 2017). In a 2014 article in the Huffington Post the annual Palm Springs White Party was nevertheless described as being “synonymous with mainstream gay culture,” and “reportedly the largest gay dance music festival in the world,” which “played an integral role in launching the careers of pop superstars such as Lady Gaga, Ke\$ha, and Icona Pop.” James Nichols, “White Party Palm Springs, Iconic Jeffrey Sanker Event, To Celebrate 25th Anniversary,” *The Huffington Post*, Feb. 2, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/06/white-party_n_4911960.html , (accessed Aug. 6, 2017). According to Wikipedia, “White parties” of various traditions, but united by the theme of wearing white clothing, began as early as 1974 in Chicago. In 1985 Miami held its first White Party as an AIDS fundraiser, which over time grew to become a weeklong event. White parties are also international in scope. Wikipedia contributors, “White Party,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=White_Party&oldid=791574592 (accessed Aug. 6, 2017). There are references to White Parties in Charlotte as early as 1977. The June issue of Free Press for that year advertises a “Grand Summer Celebration and Party,” called the White Party, to be held at Nicky’s Express Sunday July 10, 1977. *Free Press*, June 27, 1977, p.3. and also various other small ads throughout the publication.

contributions for MAP. It was a place to be seen, and it offered an oasis in a period of trauma:

Ever wonder what it's like in Heaven? If you attended this year's White Party you probably have a pretty good idea. Over 750 men and women, mostly gay and lesbian, dressed entirely in white strolled and chatted along the lovely grounds of the Van Landingham estate, looking like a host of angels in some Victorian Garden of Eden.... Perhaps the most remarkable visual treats though, were the outdoor neon sculptures. Pink triangles seemed to defy gravity as they floated in an upward pattern, declaring that we are indeed a community and that we will not be turned around. In another, two human figures were linked together by electric bolts at their heads and genitals – a friendly reminder to use our brains when we use our bodies.⁸⁰

The first White Party in 1987 raised \$14,000, but two years later this sum more than doubled, and by 1991 \$32,500 was recorded before all monies were even counted.⁸¹

The bars were also involved; in 1988 Marion Tyson, the owner of Scorpios, donated \$2.00 for everyone who went to the bar after the White Party was over.

A watershed moment in the willingness for many who had been closeted in Charlotte to come together publicly occurred at MAP's first openly advertised fundraiser, "Springtime, A Celebration of Life," on June 3, 1989. The event was a celebrity benefit of grand proportions that was held at Spirit Square in the heart of downtown Charlotte.⁸²

Q-Notes described the event in gushing language:

Is it possible to convey the significance of this even for MAP? Who in 1987 would have thought that stars the caliber of Louise Fletcher or Patty Duke would come to Charlotte to help raise money for MAP? Who then would have believed that people would pay \$100 or more to attend this sort of a fundraiser? Who would not have been astonished to learn that MAP had sponsored an event that included major celebrities to be held in such a mainstream location as Spirit Square?⁸³

⁸⁰ "MAP's White Party Nets \$14,000," *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1988.

⁸¹ *Ibid*; Dan Kirsch, "White Party Bids Fond Farewell to Summer," *Q-Notes*, Oct. 1991.

⁸² Garloch, "Tearful Moments, Joyful Songs Blend At AIDS Project Fundraiser."

⁸³ David Prybylo, "Benefit Signals Change For M.A.P.," *Q-Notes*, June 1989.

The event itself actually turned into a nightmare for the organizers, as plans unraveled with the realization that few of the major star turns had actually been secured for the show. Only ten out of nineteen advertised celebrities came through for the performance. Nevertheless, last minute efforts saved the day, and at least 600 of the 750 tickets were sold. Financially “Springtime” turned out to be a disaster with ramifications for MAP over the summer at a time when their budget was very tight.⁸⁴ Yet Dr. Barret recalled the evening as a tremendous psychological turning point:

It was tense, exciting, risky, dangerous...that it came off at all is a statement about the gay community’s willingness to step forward and give money to this and not be hung up on who’s going to be on the stage. It was a very courageous thing for the people who came, to come out and risk being visible.⁸⁵

However, MAP’s boldest move was the successful effort to claim civic legitimacy by appealing to the Board of County Commissioners for sustained funding. Given the experience of agencies like the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and Durham’s LGHP, it is not surprising that Kooyman sought public funding for MAP through federal grants and local government support. MAP needed a predictable income in order to employ a full-time director and support staff, to purchase supplies needed by volunteers and caregivers, to install a second hotline to assist with increasing queries, and to pay the rent and other bills to keep the office open. Kooyman worked with board president Ron Lowe to craft a request for funds from the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners in the winter of 1986-1987. The request was first presented to the Human Services Council that advised the commissioners about which agencies to fund. The Human Services Council endorsed MAP’s request.

⁸⁴ Don King, “MAP – A Look Inside,” *Q-Notes*, Jan. 1990.

⁸⁵ Barret Interview 2.

Although MAP's initial proposal was cut in half before it reached the county commissioners, the council recognized that MAP was undertaking work that no government agency was doing or was likely to take on. The commissioners heard MAP's proposal on May 28, 1987, and the response was encouraging. However, by early June severe budget cuts threatened to completely wipe out the request as county manager, in an attempt to balance the county budget, added it to a pile of rejections totaling \$7 million. Undeterred MAP went to work to initiate a campaign in support of their request and within a week and a half the commissioners received 600 letters. At the same time members of Charlotte Mecklenburg's health services and medical communities lobbied the commissioners. MAP even secured support from one of the commissioners, Peter Keber, a banker with a special interest in health and human services. Keber had been convinced of the need to fund MAP after discussing the matter with the health department's Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) specialist, Dr. Stephen Keener, who emphasized that MAP provided services that the county could not in the way of AIDS education and support for people with AIDS.⁸⁶

On June 16, 1987 the county commission voted to award MAP \$33,613. Reporting on the win for MAP, the *Charlotte Observer* noted: "For now, the Metrolina AIDS Project is the only place to go in Charlotte." Les Kooyman was quoted as saying: "It's not something that the Junior League or a regular established organization will do.... What we're asking to become is part of the established community network of services in Mecklenburg County." Peter Keber warned fellow commissioners: "AIDS is a scourge that we need to deal with in an extremely serious way.... It's the kind of thing where I'm

⁸⁶ Don King, "MAP Gets \$33,000 Grant," *Q-Notes*, July 1987.

afraid we're going to look back five years from now and say, 'Boy, how could we have misunderstood what's going on here?'" In response commissioner Rod Autrey added, "even though AIDS may have originated as principally and primarily a disease affecting the homosexual population, it has crossed the line to the heterosexual community. The whole society is at risk here."⁸⁷

The commissioners' belief that supporting MAP would help alleviate the risk of AIDS crossing the line from the homosexual to the heterosexual community was a recurring argument for action as Charlotte wrestled with the epidemic. There did not appear to be any sense that the community at large should be responsible for services to people with AIDS if those people were homosexuals, implying an underlying assumption that gay men were to be blamed for contracting AIDS themselves and guilty of transmitting it to the wider "innocent" community. Support services, information, and advocacy only became a public concern when the heterosexual community was implicated as a risk group. Kooyman and others in a position of leadership at MAP were well aware of this perception but did not explicitly discuss it. As a result, when MAP was challenged for being a "gay" organization the board took a conciliatory posture that was not always popular with the gay community.

In June 1987, however, there was little thought of future conflict, and Kooyman was very positive about the significance of the funding decision:

To my knowledge, it's the first time the county has ever done anything related to the gay community.... The effect could be far-ranging throughout the Southeast. It's really saying something that the county commissioners are addressing the gay community's needs for the first time.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Karen Garloch, "AIDS Project Keeps Step With Disease," *Charlotte Observer*, June 15, 1987, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

⁸⁸ *Ibid*; King, "MAP gets \$33,000 grant."

County funding gave MAP a new legitimacy in various ways. Initial funding meant that there was a strong likelihood that future support would follow and also that MAP was likely to have a better chance of securing grant funding. The support of the County Commission also gave MAP credibility within Charlotte's community services and promised greater co-operation from other county agencies. Kooyman was ecstatic at the outcome, and saw it as a reflection on the strength of the gay community:

Personally it's exciting to see a dream come true – from a small meeting in my living room with a bunch of guys basically from Acceptance to this. It's pretty incredible. And it says a lot for the gay community. The community has supported us for two years – long enough for us to become an established agency. It's a good sign of where our community is going.⁸⁹

Getting a spot on the county payroll, however, came with unanticipated political headaches, and within months MAP was the center of a conflict around the use of public monies for education, the implications of which will be explored in the next chapter.

⁸⁹ King, "MAP gets \$33,000 grant."

CHAPTER 4: ACTIVISM AND AIDS, 1985-1990, EDUCATION AND PREVENTION

On November 9th, 1987 more than 700 medical professionals, government officials, educators, first responders, NGO leaders, and care givers from across the state of North Carolina met in the largest medical conference in Charlotte up to that time. The event, titled “AIDS: Practical Strategies for Prevention and Compassionate Care” had been months in the planning. The conference was intended to raise awareness of the critical needs of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and stimulate urgency in filling the gaps in existing systems of care, prevention, and education. On the opening day, Larry Gostin, professor at the Harvard University School of Public Health and AIDS adviser to the U.S. Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee, warned that governmental policies aimed at stopping the AIDS epidemic were affected by a “deep sense of moral repugnance” at homosexuality and drug abuse. He also urged that “our judgment is clouded by morality and illegality,” noting that as many as 530 bills had been introduced in the last twelve months across state legislatures and that all were heading in different directions.¹ Although Gostin’s remarks addressed the national debates about the epidemic that were taking place as the death toll mounted in the second half of the 1980s, his assessment of the conflict around AIDS, particularly education and prevention, would have rung true for the Charlotte audience.

As we have seen in Chapter Three, the explosion of the AIDS epidemic in the South in the mid 1980s created an imperative for care that provided a focus around which gay and lesbian activism in Charlotte coalesced. Gay men were coming down with the

¹ Karen Garloch, “AIDS Expert: Morality Muddles Judgment,” *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 10, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015).

disease in increasing numbers and although lesbians were at very low risk, they aligned themselves with their gay male friends. In providing care and taking responsibility for the needs of people with AIDS, MAP encountered little public antipathy and even achieved a measure of civic legitimacy. However, AIDS also created a second imperative: the need to educate gay men and the public at large on how to avoid HIV/AIDS. While caring was largely uncontroversial, prevention and education were anything but. Issues around prevention and education put gay and lesbian activists into tension and direct conflict with various stakeholders, including the public at large and local and state government. The critical need to prevent further infection by HIV forced Charlotte's gay and lesbian activists, and the community as a whole, to confront these tensions and conflicts, and their response was proactive, political, and most importantly sustained. The critical turning point was MAP's receipt of public funding in late spring 1987. Stemming the spread of HIV/AIDS necessarily confronted the fact that the sexual acts that represented the greatest risk factors for infection were conflated with homosexual male sex in the public mind and were illegal in North Carolina; moreover, for those on the Christian Right AIDS was clearly a due payment for sin.

This chapter will show that contentious moral issues raised by AIDS brought activists into open conflict with conservative elements in the city. The conflict simultaneously revealed the power of the city's evangelical groups, and the willingness of gays and lesbians to publicly assert their rights as citizens and the value of their community.² The contentious issues around AIDS education and prevention also brought

² The term 'healthy community' acknowledges that the history of Charlotte's gay activism echoes in important ways the broader trajectory outlined by Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Response to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

the leaders of Charlotte's gay and lesbian community into conflict with the county government, whose responses were at once pragmatic and conflicted. Pragmatic because at times members of the Board of County Commission and other officials recognized the need for action, but conflicted because they were not personally invested in promoting gay rights and were subject to public opinion. Ultimately the chapter will show that while Charlotte's gay and lesbian community had clearly coalesced around the need to provide care to individuals suffering from AIDS, it was education and prevention that pushed the community into activism.

This chapter's argument intersects with two important strands in the historiography. First it provides a local case study of the emergence of the Religious Right and modern conservatism as a force in American politics. Known popularly as the "city of churches," and located in the South where deeply rooted Christian traditions had given rise to the moniker "Bible Belt," religion infused the culture of Charlotte, matching business as a defining feature of local society. Paul Boyer charts the emerging influence of the evangelical sub-culture that became a powerful force in mainstream politics and society in the 1970s. This movement, the Religious Right, was led by a group of energetic evangelical Christian leaders whose dramatic rise was demonstrated by the exponential growth in the number of their followers. Between 1970 and 1985 the Southern Baptist Convention grew by 23%, and in 1976 a Gallup Poll indicated that 34% of Americans described themselves as "born again."³ These new evangelical churches developed a new congregational culture, with modern megachurch complexes that

³ Paul Boyer, "The Evangelical Resurgence in 1970s American Protestantism," in Bruce Shulman and Julian Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 33.

accommodated thousands but were socially informal with a close-knit community feel.⁴ By the end of the 1970s national evangelical leaders associated with Charlotte, including Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, had fully exploited modern communications technology to reach millions of Americans.⁵ The success of the message was in large measure the result of how evangelical leaders appealed to religion as a way of addressing moral crises, mostly those concerning sexuality and gender. The rise to prominence of evangelical leaders contrasted with mainstream Protestant denominations, whose leaders were increasingly adopting liberal positions on social issues that were out of step with many of their congregants. The rise of evangelical Christianity is almost synonymous with the rise of modern conservatism, and for North Carolina history, and particularly the history of AIDS, Senator Jesse Helms embodied the two. Helms' role as a conservative leader is the subject of William Link's recent study, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism*.

Link shows how Helms took up a religious and moral crusade against homosexuality as

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 43. By 1980 there were fifty megachurches in the US that were theologically conservative.

⁵ Boyer, "Evangelical Resurgence," p. 39. Jerry Falwell's "Old Time Gospel Hour," founded in 1956, had 1.4 million viewers by 1980. Pat Robinson launched his Christian Broadcasting Network in 1959, showcasing the religious talk show, 700 Club. By 2000 CBN reached as many as 180 countries. The Bakkers got their start with CBN, but branched off to become perhaps the most exotic expression of evangelist ministry with the creation of Praise the Lord (PTL), which eventually had worldwide reach with 2,500 employees, revenues of \$129 million a year, and a theme park ministry campus that extended 2,300 acres called Heritage USA: see Jim Wigger, *PTL: The Rise and Fall of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's Evangelical Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). In a courageous show that was broadcast on the PTL network in November 1985, Tammy Faye Bakker interviewed a gay minister and psychologist who was HIV positive. The interview was candid, compassionate, and non-judgmental, foreshadowing the strong alliance that Tammy Faye Bakker developed with the gay community after the collapse of PTL and her separation from Jim Bakker. By the time MAP was awarded funding by the County Commission, the Bakkers were already fighting a highly publicized court case and had been thoroughly discredited. See "Steve Pieters Interview with Tammy Faye Bakker on PTL / Tammy's House Party," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjXXdQ6VceQ> (accessed July 28, 2017).

the AIDS epidemic emerged, using it to build political power and influence.⁶ In Charlotte, Helms' cause was taken up by Rev. Joseph Chambers, whose moral campaign to make Charlotte the "Clean" city directly targeted the gay and lesbian community and in particular MAP.

Second, with regard to the historiography on AIDS, this chapter confirms Tina Fetner's and Fred Fejes' argument that gay activism evolved in counterpoint to attacks from the Religious Right. This work, however, is largely based on either large metropolitan cities such as New York, Miami, San Francisco and Los Angeles or smaller, liberal, university cities where a strong gay activist culture was already well established. In Charlotte, gay activists emerged in the process of confronting prejudice that was deeply rooted in their own city, hence the strong moral claims that characterized both sides of this struggle.⁷

In tracing the complex interplay between gay activists and the Religious Right, this chapter will take a chronological approach. The chapter begins by tracing the emergence of Charlotte's Christian conservative movement under the leadership of Rev. Joseph Chambers, first with a crusade against pornography but focusing on homosexuality by 1986. It then shows how gay and lesbian activists responded to an incendiary speaker that Chambers had invited to Charlotte. The chapter then turns to

⁶ William A Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008). See also Bethany Moreton, "Why Is There So Much Sex in Christian Conservatism and Why Do So Few Historians Care Anything about It?" *Journal of Southern History*: 75 (2009): 717-38, and Matthew Lassiter, "Inventing Family Values," in Schulman and Zelizer, eds, *Rightward Bound*, pp. 13-28.

⁷ Tina Fetner, *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); and Fred Fejes, *Gay Rights and Moral Panic: The Origins of America's Debate on Homosexuality* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

explore the contentious struggle over AIDS education and prevention. It shows how MAP's success with the County Commission caused tensions with the Director of the Mecklenburg County Health Department. Even more dramatic was Chambers' intervention that led the County Commission to withdraw funding from MAP and limit the organization's autonomy. Unwilling to subordinate the critical issues of education and prevention to groups they did not feel were committed, Charlotte's gay and lesbian activists took matters into their own hands forming a political action group called First Tuesday.

* * *

Conservative Christian Opposition to Homosexuality

Before the full onset of AIDS in Charlotte there had been a handful of skirmishes between the Religious Right and the city's gay and lesbian community. The first was an isolated incident in 1979, when Anita Bryant visited Charlotte to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Northside Baptist Church, one of Charlotte's first evangelical megachurches. The event drew considerable attention, including an organized effort to protest Bryant's position on gay and lesbian rights. Four thousand gathered in the church to celebrate and hear Bryant's message, and at least seventy protesters lined the driveway to the church to challenge her "Save the Children" movement with placards and chants. The protesters, however, were a mixture of people who gathered for "one short-lived purpose." One of the organizers noted that the group was very diverse, and that "as individuals we have various reasons for picketing, but our common goal is to defend basic human rights." Apart from the arrest of a young teen who managed to smuggle a pie into the church, the protest was uneventful. Bryant was concerned about the

protesters, but cheered by a man who came forward to say he was a former homosexual who had seen the light.⁸

Three years later it was the turn of the Religious Right to mount a protest. The choice of Ovens Auditorium, a publicly supported facility, as the venue for the Miss Gay America pageant on September 25 1982 spawned a protest group called “Christians for Moral Decency.” Representing a coalition of evangelical churches, the group was led by the Rev. Joseph Chambers of Paw Creek Church of God. On the Thursday before the event, Chambers held a press conference to whip up support. Harkening back to Anita Bryant’s campaign, Chambers was concerned that impressionable young people would be swayed by the pageant’s presentation of homosexuality as an “art,” and he declared: “we are not trying to impose a moral standard upon anybody.... We’re trying to stop them from imposing their standard on our society.” His colleague, Reverend Gary Tate, thought the pageant was “a smear of Charlotte.... We’re going to make sure they don’t turn Charlotte into another San Francisco.” On the day of the pageant 250 people quietly gathered across the street from the auditorium, some holding placards with messages including “Gay is not good,” and “Christians For Moral Decency.” Chambers had hoped for at least a thousand and perhaps 5,000, but he acknowledged that many would be “afraid of this sort of thing.” The most hostile aspect of the protest was the threat to photograph people attending the pageant, with the implication that their identity might be revealed.⁹

⁸ Judy Gaultney, “Anita Bryant will draw pickets,” *Charlotte News*, Sept. (date unknown), 1979; Judy Gaultney, “Bryant’s Anti-Gay Message Heard By 4,000; 70 Protest,” *Charlotte News*, Sept. 10, 1979.

⁹ Catherine Chaplin, “Miss Gay America Pageant Draws Anger,” *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 23, 1982; Scott Flander and William Douglas, “New ‘Miss Gay America’ Chosen, Sept. 27, 1982;

Significantly, reports in the press suggested that opposition to the pageant was mostly limited to Christians For Moral Decency members. The promotions and publicity director at Ovens Auditorium, Maria Hudson, was “bombarded” with negative phone calls; she recalled that the calls were generally from “women, mostly housewives.... They are terribly irate. They quote Scripture and seem to be Christian, but they certainly are nasty.” Paul Buck, managing director of Ovens received most of the mail, which he characterized as being formulaic and sometimes identical.¹⁰ In addition to the complaints received by staff at the auditorium, sixteen individuals notified Mayor Eddie Knox directly to register their disapproval of civic property being used for a gay pageant event and urged him to use his influence to deny the organizers access. Knox’s response indicated his disapproval but noted that public facilities were forums entitled to the protection of free speech and beyond his control.¹¹

From the perspective of the gay community the event was a great success. 1,600 people attended, and from the glowing report in the *Charlotte Observer*, they clearly had a good time.¹² An article in *Front Page* noted that the *Charlotte Observer* editorial of September 25 characterized Chambers’ tactics as “indecent,” and it made a point of

250 Protest Pageant Outside Ovens,” *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 26, 1982; Ed Martin, “Churches Band Together To Protest ‘Miss Gay’ Pageant,” *Charlotte News*, Sept. 22, 1982; Cassandra Lawton, “At Contests, Beauty In The Eye Of Beholders,” *Charlotte News*, Sept. 27, 1982; “1982-83 Miss Gay America Pageant,” *Front Page*, Nov. 23, 1982. Ironically, there was no disapproval of the larger and rowdier event held the same evening in the adjoining Charlotte Coliseum, where the Budweiser Toughman Contest, which mixed professional heavyweight boxers with amateurs, was considered by some to be dangerous enough to cause injury to contestants. The coincidence of the two events drew humorous comments in the press.

¹⁰ Chaplin, “Miss Gay America Pageant Draws Anger.”

¹¹ Letters of complaint and phone message notation, box 1, folder 8, ‘Auditorium-Coliseum-Civic Center Authority-New Coliseum, 1980-1982,’ Eddie Knox papers, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (ALSC).

¹² Lawton, “At Contests, Beauty in The Eye of Beholders;” “1982-83 Miss Gay America Pageant.”

quoting the final sentence: “He is certainly damaging his Christian followers by leading them into the direction of spite, and he is assaulting the climate of freedom and tolerance that, along with a rich diversity of strong churches and preachers, makes this community so special.”¹³ However, the *Front Page’s* positive spin on the *Observer* editorial, suggesting the mainstream paper’s endorsement of gay rights, was somewhat misleading. While the editorial did state that “the worth of a democratic society is whether it protects the rights of a minority,” it qualified that declaration with the phrase: “no matter how distasteful that may be to the majority.” The *Observer* also gave credit to Chambers pointing out that:

His compassion generally exemplifies the best of Christianity. He runs an active ministry to people in prison. He hired an ex-convict to run the school at this church, His congregation is racially integrated—something more liberal Charlotte churches have been unable to accomplish.¹⁴

As it turned out, Christians for a Moral Society was just the first step in Chambers’ emergence as the local champion of Christian conservatism. Chambers’ life is a classic American success story. Growing up in a poor family on a North Carolina tobacco farm, he left school in ninth grade to work full time on the land alongside his five sisters and two brothers. His alcoholic father committed suicide when Chambers was seventeen but within the next three years the young Chambers turned his fortunes around. He “found Christ,” at a Church of God thirty miles outside of Durham, met his wife Juanita at a tent revival in Burlington, and began preaching at his first parish in Tabor City. As a minister, Chambers came to Charlotte via Rockwell and Black Mountain, taking up the leadership of Paw Creek Church of God in 1968. When he arrived, Paw

¹³ “1982-83 Miss Gay America Pageant;” Editorial, “Chambers Violates His Creed,” *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 25, 1982, (accessed June 3, 2017).

¹⁴ Editorial, “Chambers Violates His Creed.”

Creek Church of God was a small and beleaguered church of forty members in a dying mill village located on the Old Mt. Holly Rd. between two oil distribution centers. By 1984 Chambers' had moved the church to a twenty-acre campus and had founded the Paw Creek Christian Academy. The Paw Creek Church of God boasted 600 congregants and there were 485 students in the school. The whole campus was valued at \$3 million and employed fifty-five full time staff. Along the way Chambers also built up a significant prison ministry and fought to welcome minorities, who came to represent 20% of the congregation by the mid 1980s. In line with trends of the time he hosted two weekly religious broadcasts on a local Christian radio station, started two Sunday Schools, a boy's scouting program, and a singles ministry.¹⁵

By 1984 Chambers had turned his full attention to political activism and launched the group Concerned Charlotteans with a mission of restoring morality to Charlotte. His first target was pornography, and in this mission he found significant common ground with other entities across the state, including concerned fathers, a host of other conservative church groups, local government and law enforcement, and, an odd and uneasy match, feminist groups.¹⁶ By September the group claimed to represent as many

¹⁵ Jeri Fischer, "Pastoral Dynamo: Obscenity Battle Only Latest for Energetic Paw Creek Church Of God Minister," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 12, 1984; Joseph Chambers, "Who Am I?," *Paw Creek Ministries* website, Way Back Machine, captured Feb. 8, 2007 <https://web.archive.org/web/20070208105544/http://www.pawcreek.org/articles/misc/JRCVitalStats.htm> (accessed Dec. 4, 2016); Joseph Chambers, "The Open Heart," *Paw Creek Ministries* website, The Way Back Machine, captured Oct. 10, 2008, <https://web.archive.org/web/20081010191335/http://www.pawcreek.org/articles/saltysaints/TheOpenHeart.htm> , (accessed Dec. 4, 2016); WHVN website, "Pioneer Voice of Christian Broadcasting," <http://heavenradio.org/>, (accessed Dec. 4, 2016).

¹⁶ Bruce Henderson, "Diverse Views Converge In Fight Against Pornography," *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 27, 1985, (accessed June 3, 2017). Other ministers involved included Dennis Thurmon, pastor of Oak Grove Baptist Church, and Reverend Billy Sellers of Idlewild Baptist Church. In addition, University Hills Baptist, Southside Baptist, McQuay Presbyterian, Spencer

as 200 churches, and starting in October, members of the group picketed convenience stores, called for pornography awareness, and lobbied lawmakers for anti-obscenity legislation. In late 1984 Mecklenburg district attorney Peter Gilchrist sued six adult bookstores in Charlotte as public nuisances, and a Charlotte businessman was fined \$5,000 on federal pornography charges. By October 1985 Concerned Charlotteans had been a critical catalyst in getting North Carolina's obscenity laws re-written, and eighteen months later Mecklenburg prosecutors obtained guilty pleas that closed half the adult bookstores in Charlotte. Mayor Harvey Gantt called the closings "the most significant victory ever in North Carolina of Charlotte against the purveyors of obscenity," and Chambers enthusiastically echoed these sentiments. Only Theo Nixon, who had defended the Charlotte businessman against the pornography charges, expressed concern that "a small group of people [in Mecklenburg County] have decided what is obscene."¹⁷

The pornography campaign served to strengthen Concerned Charlotteans and garner public praise for their efforts. By 1986 the group had solidified its position as a

United Methodist, and First Baptist were all slated for future meetings of Concerned Charlotteans.

¹⁷ Fischer, "A Hard-Core Crusade Against Porn Preacher Now Tackling Other Issues;" Gary L. Wright, "Guilty Pleas Close 19 Porn Stores," *Charlotte Observer*, July 18, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015); Deborah Gates, "Group Plans Meetings To Raise Awareness About Pornography," *Charlotte Observer*, Aug. 21, 1984, (accessed June 3, 2017); Fischer, "Pastoral Dynamo." While pornography and the adult bookstores that carried pornographic publications were important to sections of the gay and lesbian community as spaces for seeking sexual outlets, this particular issue also fractured the community, and it was not possible to coalesce sufficient and convincing support to mount serious opposition to the closing of these businesses. In a nine-page letter written that Don King sent to Mayor Harvey Gantt, Judge Frank Snepp, District Attorney Peter Gilchrist, and Police Chief Mack Vines in January 1984, King set out an argument in support of maintaining adult bookstores. His reasoning was that adult bookstores were important outlets that were clearly set apart from mainstream spaces, for a marginalized group to find each other, and he challenged the idea of condemning pornography en masse. Despite King's well-honed skills in argument, it is self-evident that his position would never have convinced either the recipients, or the majority of Charlotteans, at the time: Don King to Mayor Harvey Gantt, Judge Frank Snepp, District Attorney Peter Gilchrist, and Police Chief Mac Vines, Jan. 7, 1984, box 4, folder, 'Politicians,' Donaldson Wells King Papers, ALSC.

citizen group to be reckoned with in Mecklenburg County. Concerned Charlotteans, and its leader Rev. Chambers, had become the dominant voice for the Religious Right in Charlotte despite the fact that many prominent national evangelical leaders were closely associated with the city, and despite the fact that Charlotte had several evangelical megachurches. In concert with other North Carolina decency groups, Concerned Charlotteans worked to support the conservative agenda touted by Senator Jesse Helms, and it increasingly turned its attention to homosexuality. By the mid 1980s the specter of AIDS had renewed a sense of urgency to the agenda of the Moral Majority and Religious Right. AIDS revived the stereotypes of gay men as predatory pedophiles whose threat to young people now extended beyond moral corruption to certain and excruciating death. This was proof of moral decay and a sure sign of God's punishment for sin. National evangelical leaders articulated the message and Chambers enthusiastically broadcast it locally.¹⁸

At the state and national level, Jesse Helms had leveraged socially conservative themes in his political campaigning since the outset of his career in Congress in 1973. William Link has shown how Helms shifted his focus on conservative social and political issues to align himself alongside the Moral Majority and the emerging Religious Right from the late 1970s onwards. While race-based threats remained a constant and rewarding theme for Helms, he increasingly turned to homosexuality as a means of appealing to his base and garnering more votes. The theme of homosexuality became particularly significant in Helms' race for Senate against popular North Carolina Governor, James Hunt in 1984. Link describes the race as a character assassination by

¹⁸ Anthony M. Petro, *After the Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, and American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 43-46.

Helms in which he smeared Hunt with suggestions of homosexuality and accusations of being beholden to homosexual groups for their financial support of his campaign. By the late 1980's Helms' position on homosexuality became more adamant in response to the AIDS epidemic. Helms interpreted AIDS activism as political expediency and accused the "homosexual rights crowd" of twisting "the AIDS issue into one of civil rights." Helms became "the Senate's most vocal enemy of the gay rights movement."¹⁹

Chamber's first explicit attack on homosexuality was to bring psychologist Paul Cameron to Charlotte to speak to Concerned Charlotteans in July 1986. By the mid 1980s Cameron had established himself as a highly controversial "expert" on homosexuality and AIDS. He had created his own "Institute for the Scientific Investigation of Sexuality," in Lincoln Nebraska and was widely known for his abhorrence of homosexuality and his advocacy for quarantining homosexuals with AIDS. Cameron's positions on homosexual psychology emphasized that sexual orientation was a choice, that homosexuals could be cured, and that homosexuality was aberrant and dangerous. Given that such positions had been formally renounced by the profession a decade earlier, Cameron had been effectively disbarred as a psychologist but he continued to be active.²⁰

¹⁹ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, pp. 273-295, 347. Note that Link also describes in detail the meticulous work of Helms assistant Mary Potter in opposition to gay rights. Potter was the daughter of Charlotte's judge Robert Potter who was presiding judge of the *Capacchione v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools* case in 1999. In his interview MAP director, Leslie Kooyman recalled long and fruitless conversations with Mary Potter while he waited unsuccessfully to address Senator Helms: Leslie Kooyman, interview Sept. 19, 2015, ALSC.

²⁰ Cameron had been expelled from the American Psychological Association in 1983 for a violation of the preamble to the ethical principles of psychologists. He was also reprimanded in 1984 by the Nebraska Psychological Association, which adopted a resolution formally disassociating itself from the representation and interpretation of scientific literature offered by Dr. Paul Cameron. Further, in 1985 the American Sociological Association adopted a resolution asserting that Cameron had "misinterpreted and misrepresented sociological research on sexuality, homosexuality, and lesbianism, and that he had campaigned for the abrogation of the civil rights of lesbians and gay men substantiating his call on the basis of his distorted

By the mid-1980s, the gay press had labeled Paul Cameron "the most dangerous antigay voice in the United States today."²¹ Chambers thought otherwise, and Cameron's message resonated for many, giving him a public platform in discussing AIDS despite his professional credentials. Characterizing Cameron as "probably the foremost AIDS expert in America," Chambers brought him to Charlotte "to educate people about pornography, homosexuality, and AIDS, because they are all interconnected."²²

Cameron's presentation in Charlotte does not seem to have done much for Chambers' message, since it only attracted about 100 people. However, ironically, Chambers' decision to bring Cameron to Charlotte galvanized the gay and lesbian community. On the day that Cameron spoke, a similarly sized group of activists held a protest they called "American Vigil for Truth and Decency." The event was organized by One Nation Indivisible (ONI), a new group called into being by Art Fleschner, the pastor of New Life MCC church. ONI represented a new level of boldness and cohesion in Charlotte's gay and lesbian community. It directly challenged Chambers' legitimacy, it advanced a strong positive message about homosexuality, albeit one couched in a plea for compassion for people with AIDS, but most importantly it was open and public. So striking was this fact that the article in Q-Notes reporting on the protest was published under the title "*Unrestricted Media Cover, Vigil for Truth and Decency*" [emphasis

interpretation of this research." Cameron was also discredited by U.S. District Court Judge Buchmeyer of Dallas, who accused him of making misrepresentations to the Court in his written opinion in *Baker v. Wade*, 1985: see Dr. Gregory M. Herek, "Paul Cameron Bio and Fact Sheet," Herek blog, U.C. Davis, http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/facts_cameron_sheet.html#notes2_4, (accessed June 3, 2017); "Paul Cameron," Southern Poverty Law Center website, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/paul-cameron>, (accessed June 3, 2017).

²¹ David Walter, "Paul Cameron," *The Advocate*, Oct. 29, 1985, pp. 28-32.

²² Kathleen McClain, "AIDS Quarantine Advocate to Speak To Anti-Porn Group," *Charlotte Observer*, July 10, 1986, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015).

mine].²³ Fleschner described how Cameron’s visit, and more generally Chambers’ attacks, led him to decide to act openly:

In the past I’ve wanted anonymity. I’ve wanted to lead a public life as Art Fleschner – not just Art Fleschner, a gay. You get tired of justifying yourself. But I just wasn’t willing to sit still while this happened. You can measure how much this means to me by the fact that I’ve gone public. I wouldn’t have come out for anything less.²⁴

As Don King explained a few months later: “Concerned Charlotteans has opened up a new front. They are trying to add scientific legitimacy to their religious antigay claims and we can’t let that go unanswered.”²⁵

After their splashy debut, ONI went to work to engage the gay and lesbian community in a way that had not been attempted before. The ONI steering committee that met on August 18 at the New Life MCC building on Commonwealth Avenue near the Plaza decided to establish a plan to directly oppose discrimination against gays and lesbians in Charlotte. Their strategy was explicitly political, focusing on getting engaged in the upcoming mayoral and council elections. However, unlike the Lambda Political Caucus that had remained out of public view in its work on behalf of Mayor Harvey Gantt in 1983, there was a conscious decision to be visible. ONI also sought to galvanize community support by means of something new—a town hall meeting, where members of the community could “decide how Charlotte’s gay men and lesbians should respond to

²³ *Ibid*; Barbara Barnett, “AIDS Speech Spawns Counter-Protest,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 26, 1986, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015); “Unrestricted Media Cover Vigil for Truth and Decency,” *Q-Notes*, Aug. 1986. Note that Fleschner was joined by other speakers, former NOW president Marjorie Storch, former District Court judge Larry Black, former president of Charlotte’s ACLU Jim Gronquist, activist Don King, and QCQ president Robert Sheets.

²⁴ Jeri Fischer, “Group to Counter AIDS Speaker Gay Minister Steps Forward,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 25, 1986, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015).

²⁵ “Unrestricted Media Cover Vigil for Truth and Decency.” Note that it was at this gathering that co-producer, Diana Travis also announced plans for the Lesbian and Gay Forum TV programming that began airing in December 1986. See also “Gay TV In Charlotte,” *Q-Notes*, Dec. 1987.

the increasing oppression evident here.”²⁶ The first town hall was held at Charades nightclub at Eastway Dr. and the Plaza, a location chosen to be inclusive since it was welcoming to both gays and lesbians and those not already engaged in activist groups.

The scene on the night of September 15 1986 must have seemed strange as ninety-one people filed into the fully lighted disco room at 8 pm with no intention of dancing, drinking, or turning on the strobe lights. On their way in, participants passed a table where signatures were taken for a petition recommending that the city and county include openly gay persons on public committees and commissions and an open microphone in the disco room allowed community members to share stories of discrimination. At one point, local drag queen celebrity Boom Boom La Tour took the stage, and, out of character, he urged bar patrons used to hearing him belt out bawdy lyrics to register to vote and become involved, warning that gay bars were not immune from the hit list of antigay activists. In the club’s piano bar ONI members used a tape recorder to document instances of harassment and discrimination, starting a process that would continue over the next several years. Thirty-one attendees registered to vote and eighteen joined ONI on the spot, with “dozens more” taking home membership applications. Charades manager Steve Freeman offered to pay for ten ONI memberships for anyone who could not afford the \$12 fee. One of the messages of the activists was to encourage people to be “out.” As *Q-Notes* reported: “people didn’t flinch as a *Q-Notes* photographer used a camera with flash to record the scene.”²⁷

²⁶ “Town Meeting Called to Fight Charlotte Battle,” *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1986.

²⁷ Don King, “Town Meeting Crowd Hits 91,” *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1986. The Charlotte town hall meetings are a clear example of the kind of unintended activism that Christian Conservatives encouraged in the gay and lesbian community; see Fetner, *How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism*.

* * *

AIDS Education and Prevention

While the response to Cameron's visit marks an important shift in the gay community's activism, the real struggle – over AIDS education and prevention – was still to come. From the beginning, education and prevention were crucial to how activists understood the imperatives created by AIDS. In Charlotte this is clear from the way that the region's gay newspaper, *The Front Page*, was using very direct language to describe risky behavior and encouraging others to do so as well. It is also clear from the fact that MAP, like many ASOs, embraced a sex-positive message in their efforts to effectively educate the gay community about preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. From its inception MAP used brochures created by other more established ASOs to relay information on risk that graphically described safe sex practices for gay men, and they distributed these along with condoms in bars and other venues where gay men gathered. MAP also designed and offered risk reduction workshops, advertised as "Safe-Sex Parties," which director Lesley Kooyman described as an effort "to teach ourselves how to enjoy healthy, hot sex without the fear of contracting the AIDS virus." Artfully modeled on the Tupperware party, hosts could hold an event, calling on one of MAP's two safe-sex trainers and their materials. Guests were then asked to serve as hosts of their own party.²⁸ John Quillin recalled that the parties were fun and effective. He noted that at the time the idea of safe sex, and especially condom use, was alien to gay men, that sex had become fear based, and that it was awkward to talk about safe sex. In the security of a small group

²⁸ "MAP Offers Safe-Sex Parties," *Q-Notes*, June 1986.

of friends, there was also an opportunity at the safe sex parties to talk about the loss of “free sex,” which many assumed was a thing of the past.²⁹

MAP’s efforts in the area of education and prevention were crucial in the gay community because North Carolina was remarkably slow to establish policies and materials for HIV/AIDS prevention education, particularly those tailored to gay men; the moral and political issues involved had proved to be too daunting and polarizing.³⁰ This sluggishness carried significant ramifications for the spread of the virus. By the time AIDS cases appeared in numbers in Charlotte and the Carolinas it was known which sexual practices were likely to spread the virus. It was also known by this time that AIDS could lay dormant for as long as seven years, and it was clear that the death rate was steeply climbing. For gay men, many of whom were at high risk for contracting HIV, safe sex offered the most effective tool for preventing continued spread of the infection and halting the epidemic.

In Charlotte, in 1986 and 1987, MAP was doing what it could as a fledgling ASO, and Leslie Kooyman was steadfast in his message that the only effective prevention policy was to provide those most at risk with the information they needed to avoid infection. When MAP received county funding in June 1987 it optimistically assumed that it could continue its risk reduction program targeted at gay and bisexual men as long as it did not pay for these materials using public money. In a *Q-Notes* article in July 1987

²⁹ John Quillin oral history interview 1, Mar. 14, 2017, ALSC. MAP was also offering educational programs to the wider community of a less intimate nature that addressed issues about AIDS in the workplace, AIDS in faith communities, and general AIDS educational presentations: Mark Drum, “Under Kooyman, MAP Flourishes,” *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1986.

³⁰ Garrison Kaufman, *Front Page*, Feb. 17, 1986. Kaufman, the Director of North Carolina Lesbian and Gay Health Project wrote: “In comparison with San Fran, or New York City, the Carolinas’ smaller and less affluent gay population has not been able to launch its own education program of sufficient scope and intensity to counter this government neglect.”

Kooyman noted that MAP was successful in winning funding because Stephen Keener of the health department explained to the County Commission: “MAP provided [services] that the county couldn’t.” To make sure its readers got the point, *Q-Notes* article spelled things out:

The funding filled a gap in the county health department’s own AIDS program. The department, because of North Carolina’s anti-sodomy law, cannot produce materials discussing the sexual activity pinpointed as one of the leading ways to transmit AIDS.... MAP, a private agency is not constrained by the law.³¹

As it turned out, the gay community’s reading of the situation was naïve. The report about the funding in the *Observer* suggested that details on MAP’s education program were never clearly articulated, probably because of the subject was so sensitive. For example, Commissioner Peter Keber justified his vote in favor of funding MAP in very vague language: “(Keener) has assured me it is money extremely well-spent if you’re interested in doing what this group [MAP] is doing. And I am.” No further clarifications were made about MAP services except to indicate their rapidly growing caseload and the increasing number of heterosexuals who were at risk.³²

The role of Dr. Stephen Keener – Assistant County Health Director for Disease Control and Epidemiology in the Mecklenburg County Department of Public Health – in convincing the County Commission to support MAP is significant, because from early on, Charlotte’s AIDS activists had important allies among the city’s medical leaders on issues relating to education and prevention. In addition to Dr. Keener, another highly significant figure was Dr. Jared Schwartz, the head pathologist at Presbyterian Hospital, chair of the Mecklenburg County Medical Society, and chairman of AIDS task forces for

³¹ Don King, “From County MAP gets \$33,000 Grant,” *Q-Notes*, July 1987.

³² Karen Garloch, “AIDS Project Keeps Step with Disease,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 16, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015).

North Carolina and the county. By the mid 1980s, Dr. Schwartz had established himself as the expert public medical voice on AIDS in Charlotte, speaking to as many as fifty clubs and civic groups annually, attempting to moderate public panic, advocating for frank education about AIDS prevention, and focusing attention on the real risk groups so that they could get the services they needed.³³ However, Schwartz and others in the medical community faced significant challenges. In North Carolina, with escalating fears of contracting the virus complicated by strong cultural and religious mores, frank discussion about sex and disease was highly political. By May 1987 ten bills were lined up in the North Carolina General Assembly calling for a wide range of measures in response to the epidemic—all controversial to different demographics. They included:

Mandatory testing of the blood of engaged couples, food handlers, prisoners and convicted prostitutes...educating school-age children about safe sex and AIDS prevention, and expanding the powers of state health officials to restrict the activities of AIDS victims.³⁴

In an effort to address these concerns locally and regionally and to create the opportunity for dialog and education among regional professionals, Dr. Schwartz started working with various local bodies in the spring of 1987 to plan a regional AIDS Conference; chief among them was MAP, by now the dominant voice for AIDS

³³ Robert Conn, "Panels Battle Ignorance of Sexually Transmitted Disease," *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 6, 1986, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015); Karen Garloch, "Fighting Darkest Fears Of AIDS, Doctor Enlightens," *Charlotte Observer*, June 3, 1989, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015); Ed Martin, "Authority on AIDS Says Battle Raging in Public Opinion," *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 26, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015); Karen Garloch, "Facts Are Way To Beat AIDS, Doctor Says," *Charlotte Observer*, June 6, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015); Karen Garloch, "Fighting On-The-Job AIDS Fears," *Charlotte Observer*, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015). Schwartz in many ways reflected the kind of medical pragmatism of U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop.

³⁴ Garloch, "N.C. Legislators Debating How to Attack AIDS." *Charlotte Observer*, May 11, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015).

education and service in the region.³⁵ The event, titled “AIDS: Practical Strategies For Prevention and Compassionate Care,” was one of the largest medical conferences ever held in Charlotte up to that time. Just before the conference Dr. Schwartz shared his frustration at the slow pace of preparation:

Public health officials are not doing anything. They’re back to where these people (in San Francisco and New York City) were in, what, 1983...? Here we are in 1988 [sic] and the major services and programming for an epidemic...isn’t coming from the public sector. It’s coming from private groups.³⁶

Schwartz had no time for the criticism that these private groups were taking on professional work:

People like Les Kooyman and Red Cross volunteers are not wandering around saying, ‘we are authorities, experts in the field.’ What we’re saying is ‘Hey, we’ve been trying to pay attention to what’s going on. We’ve been trying to educate ourselves. And we feel part of our job is to educate others.’³⁷

As its name suggests, the “AIDS: Practical Strategies” conference was an effort to break through the inertia and make progress on education through collaboration that would include groups like MAP as well as medical professionals. The event was coordinated with support from thirty-three state and local agencies and 125 speakers and panel members were engaged to address AIDS issues. Speakers included Dr. Rebecca Meriwether, chief epidemiologist for the N.C. Division of Health Services, and national experts from the CDC, the National Institute of Mental Health, the American Society of Law and Medicine, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, and the federal Health Resources and Services Administration. Over 700 doctors, nurses, public

³⁵ Although Dr. Schwartz was the leading force in organizing the conference, the event was formally coordinated by the Charlotte Area Health Education Center, led by Dr. David Citron, another important ally.

³⁶ Karen Garloch, “Charlotte Reaction – 2 Professionals Ask: How Can We Have Moved So Slowly?” *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 8, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015).

³⁷ *Ibid.*

health professionals, hospital administrators, police officers, firefighters, and educators registered for the conference, and 230 people were turned away for lack of space. The major emphasis of the event was on education; Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools alone sent 150 principals, counselors, science, and health teachers. Workshops focused on developing programs on effective AIDS education in schools and for hospitals, public safety officials, and AIDS victims and their families. Another major goal was to form groups of people who could act as a nucleus for responding to AIDS in their communities.³⁸

Despite the atmosphere of collaboration and mutual support, there was a significant absence at the conference. Charlotte Mecklenburg's Director of Public Health, Dr. Basil Delta, declared two days before the event that neither he nor any of his staff would attend the conference, setting off a brouhaha with the Board of County Commissioners to whom he reported and a frenzy of speculation in the press. Dr. Delta's fit of pique was unjustified. The Department of Health had in fact been invited to take a significant role in steering the conference at the outset, but it was Dr. Delta's junior partner, Dr. Stephen Keener, who had been approached for collaboration. When Dr. Delta was invited to take part himself as a panelist, he refused on the grounds that he had not been consulted earlier, and he forbade the continued participation of his staff. Dr. Delta's action met with sharp condemnation from the County Commission, and he was

³⁸ *Ibid*; Karen Garloch, "Charlotte To Be Site Of AIDS Conference," *Charlotte Observer*, June 10, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015); Karen Garloch, "Hundreds To Gather For Charlotte AIDS Conference," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 9, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015).

suspended without pay for ten days—a light punishment given that three of the seven commissioners had voted to force his resignation.³⁹

Delta's later behavior towards MAP suggested that he may have disapproved of the civic legitimacy that was invested in MAP to do AIDS work, either out of professional pride or out of a deeply seated personal jealousy. In 1988, when the Board of County Commissioners sought oversight for MAP's educational programs Delta pressed an agenda to prevent MAP from undertaking any kind of risk reduction or public education activities. In a 300-page report to the County Commission, Dr. Delta questioned MAP's credentials for disseminating psychological advice and medical information about AIDS and suggested that the organization should change its title to the Metrolina Gay Health Project.⁴⁰ Dr. Delta's management of issues relating to AIDS suggests his reluctance to fully address the challenges that the epidemic posed. For example, by August 1987 there was a waiting period of three to four weeks for AIDS testing at the Public Health facility on Beatties Ford Rd., and this was an improvement over the several months wait time that had existed before a decision was made to counsel people seeking the test in groups of up to twenty. When the state reprimanded Dr. Delta for this highly inappropriate solution, which jeopardized confidentiality, he responded

³⁹ Karen Garloch, "Mecklenburg County Health Chief To Boycott AIDS Conference," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 6, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015); Karen Garloch, "Health Director Won't Boycott AIDS Conference," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 7, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015); David Perlmutter, "Delta Stays An Hour At AIDS Conference," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 10, 1987, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); Lisa Pullen, "County Suspends Delta," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 24, 1987, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015);

⁴⁰ Karen Garloch, "AIDS Project Contends with Image As Gay Group," *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 16, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

that he did not have either money or staff to keep up with demand for the test.⁴¹ Yet in the same period Dr. Delta's annual report registered that he had been able to save the county \$3million of public funds.⁴²

In December 1987 MAP stood in a strong position in relation to both the County Commission and the local medical community. County funding had put the organization on a sound financial footing, supplementing the funds raised by the gay and lesbian community. Just as important, receiving county money gave MAP, and by extension the Charlotte's gay and lesbian community as a whole, a degree of civic legitimacy that would have been unimaginable even a year or two earlier. MAP's director, Lesley Kooyman, had become a well-respected figure among local and state level health professionals and officials, eclipsing Dr. Delta, the discredited Director of the county's Health Department. However, MAP's success put it in a position of public scrutiny for which it was not fully prepared and the fallout from this conflict ultimately forced MAP to compromise its position on sex-positive education messaging and agree to submit its education materials to county oversight. The conflict emerged on the issues of education and in particular safe-sex leaflets that MAP distributed. MAP's opponent in this conflict

⁴¹ Karen Garloch, "Lack of Confidentiality Tests AIDS Program," *Charlotte Observer*, Aug. 6, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015); Karen Garloch, "Proposed Rules on AIDS Threaten Mecklenburg Policy," *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 31, 1987, (accessed Aug. 22, 2015)

⁴² Mecklenburg County (N.C.). Health Department, "Mecklenburg County Health Department, The State of the Department Annual Report for Fiscal Year 1987-1988," Local Government Documents, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, (ALLGD). In his foreword Dr. Delta refers to "challenges that we face...of shrinking monetary resources" that force the health department to find ways to "do more with less." In this report there is also no reference to the AIDS conference that was held in November, and no reference to MAP, despite an emphasis on working with community partners. It is also clear throughout Dr. Delta's extensive reports during previous years that he was unhappy with the situation in Mecklenburg County, where there was no independent and professionally credentialed Board of Health, and where the Board of County Commissioners served this role.

was, once again, Rev. Joseph Chambers, who was speaking for the Religious Right, and, he claimed, public opinion. However as in the case of the Cameron visit, Chambers' attack ironically served to spur gay and lesbian activists to take a more overt position and to engage in direct political action to positively assert the legitimacy of their community.

The matter of MAP's safe sex literature might never have surfaced had it not been for Chambers. The grounds for Chambers' attack, however, followed national models. In February 1987 President Reagan had required that all materials funded with federal dollars should "emphasize local control and encourage sensible sexual behavior based on fidelity, commitment and maturity, placing sexuality within the context of marriage."⁴³ Later that year Jesse Helms capitalized on the President's lead by directly attacking New York City's leading ASO, the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), for their safe sex publication, *Safer Sex Comix*. Helms accused the GMHC of using public funds to produce their brochures, which he claimed supported "sodomy and the homosexual lifestyle," by depicting sexual encounters between two gay men. Despite an investigation by the Department of Health and Human Services that concluded that the comics were not funded by public money, Helms introduced a successful amendment in November that prohibited funding for anti-AIDS efforts that "promote or encourage, directly or indirectly, homosexual activities" and required federally supported educational efforts to emphasize sexual abstinence. Helms' cunning handling of the episode left little choice for senators but to support his amendment.⁴⁴

It is likely that Chambers was keenly aware of these national trends, and may have gone deliberately looking for offending publications locally. He discovered MAP's

⁴³ Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, p. 72.

⁴⁴ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, pp. 349-50.

safe sex pamphlets that were circulating in gay bars towards the end of 1987 and notified the county commissioners about it in December. In an echo of the Senate's sensibilities, members of the County Commission were shocked and offended by the content of the cards, which "went against all community standards and morals" because they encouraged, "promiscuous homosexual activity."⁴⁵ According to MAP, the cards in question had been donated two years earlier by AID Atlanta with no outlay of public money. However, MAP had no choice but to be conciliatory in its response to the challenge, and at a meeting on January 5 between commissioner Rod Autrey, Rev. Chambers, Lesley Kooyman, and chairman of the MAP board Marion McGinnis, MAP agreed to stop distributing the cards. MAP assumed that the matter was settled, but Chambers was not satisfied and pursued the opportunity. At a news conference on January 14, he accused MAP of being "nothing more than a homosexual club." He acknowledged that MAP's members had every right to meet and counsel one another, but the organization should not be supported by tax dollars.⁴⁶ The County Commission was caught between the pragmatic need to continue to support the only organization providing critically needed AIDS services in the county and the need to respond to the moral challenge that Chambers had raised. Working with the divided Commission, Chairwoman Carla DuPuy was able to prevent a hasty decision to stop funding MAP and after receiving seventy five letters in support of the agency, many from medical professionals, the Commission decided to continue county funding with the caveat that MAP should be overseen by the Department of Health. A further blow to MAP was delivered by

⁴⁵ Kathleen McClain and Karen Garloch, "Chambers Insists County Pull AIDS Support Group's Money," *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 15, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Chambers, who personally notified N.C. Secretary of Human Resources, David Flaherty, about the impropriety of the organization's safe sex materials. The immediate result was Kooyman's dismissal from the state's AIDS Task Force.⁴⁷

The County Commissions' decision to give control over AIDS education to the discredited Dr. Delta was keenly felt by Charlotte's gay and lesbian activists. Despite Kooyman's reassurances that educational outreach to the gay community would continue under the direction of the public health department, gay Charlotteans had little confidence.⁴⁸ Nor were they wrong. Over the next few months it became clear that Dr. Delta would not (and could not) provide educational materials that would meet their needs. Government-produced brochures for gay and bisexual men were such a political flashpoint that they continued to be elusive in North Carolina, despite the fact that U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop had, in a radical move within the restraints of the Reagan administration, sent one to all U.S. households in May of 1988. Even as late as January 1991, by which time the state had distributed AIDS prevention brochures specifically targeted to groups including people of color, women, and drug users, there was still no consensus on a brochure about AIDS prevention for gay and bisexual men. Moreover, like Koop's brochure, government educational material was relatively mild (at

⁴⁷ *Ibid*; Lisa Pullen, "Autrey: Pull AIDS Agency's County Money Support Group Criticized Over Obnoxious Cards," *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 19, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); Lisa Pullen, "Autrey Reveres Stance, Backs AIDS Group," *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 12, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); Dean Gaskey, "County Delays MAP Decision," *Q-Notes*, Feb. 1988; Karen Garloch, "Kooyman Rejected For Panel AIDS Project Director Not on Task Force," *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 25, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015). In fact, although Kooyman had been attending task force meetings and making substantial contributions as a member, he had never received an official letter to confirm his membership and Flaherty simply did not appoint him officially.

⁴⁸ Garloch, "AIDS Project Contends with Image As Gay Group;" Lisa Pullen, "United Way To Scrutinize AIDS Efforts," Feb. 16, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); Richard Epsom, "It's Not All Gloom And Doom," *Q-Notes*, Mar. 1988. Dean Gaskey, "United Way to Oversee MAP," *Q-Notes*, Mar. 1988. Note that the latter headline was corrected as an error in a later edition of *Q-Notes*.

least by the gay community's standards). According to David Jolly, supervisor of the state AIDS Control Program, the brochure that was under consideration in 1991 "would mention condom use as a way of protecting against the AIDS virus but would not describe or picture how to use one."⁴⁹ However, it was also clear that MAP, like many other ASO's, had an identity issue. Despite efforts to remain separate from the gay and lesbian community, MAP was seen by the public as a gay organization and a large majority of their clients at this time were gay men.⁵⁰ The issue of effective educational materials and public sensibilities would continue to shape relations between the gay community and their non-gay allies, and between groups within the gay and lesbian community itself for some time.

⁴⁹ "N.C. Lags on Data But Will Work On AIDS Brochure For Gay Men," *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 14, 1991, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); In February 1990, state health officials destroyed 15,000 Spanish language brochures that used graphics to show how to put on a condom, despite the fact that the same brochure printed in English had been approved two years earlier with a million copies distributed widely to health departments across the state. According to David Jolly the graphics were necessary to ensure that people knew how to use a condom properly, and Stanley Graham, health educator with the Mecklenburg County Health department noted that graphics were the only way to get the information across to non-readers. Karen Garloch, "N.C. Office Destroys AIDS Brochures," *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 23, 1990, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015). On a humorous note, Catawba County department of health commissioned a poster to promote safe sex among male teenagers and young adults that stirred up local sensibilities and gained national attention. Ministers, parents, and others thought the poster vulgar and said it encouraged free sex, despite the fact that it had been developed with the help of a nurse who won a N.C. Nurses Association research award for her work. The Board of County Commissioners decided that they could not use the posters in the light of public opinion, but they were reluctant to write off the expense. With the catchy phrase, "If You Can't Keep It Zipped – Keep It Covered," a visual of a pair of unzipped blue jeans, and information about free condoms at the local health department, the board of county commissioners felt they could try selling the copyright for the poster to recoup their costs. They approached thirty-six AIDS, adolescent pregnancy, and health related organizations from San Francisco to Atlanta to see if they had any interest in purchasing the copyright. Unfortunately, the only bidder was the Hickory advertising firm that designed and printed the 2,500 copies of the poster in the first place—and the bid was \$1,500 lower than the original cost. Everyone else who was approached thought the poster superfluous to their needs, or just too tame. Laura Zelenko, "Poster Rejected Nationally – Safe-Sex Sign Gets One Hickory Bid," *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 12, 1990, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

⁵⁰ Garloch, "AIDS Project Contends with Image as Gay Group"; Pullen, "United Way to Scrutinize AIDS Efforts."

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Gay Activism: First Tuesday

Chambers' attack on MAP's distribution of safe sex cards was relatively successful. MAP had to subordinate its education program to the County Health Department and could not promote a sex positive message on AIDS prevention. However, Chambers' attack also galvanized gays and lesbians to act decisively to positively assert their community's values. In January 1988 the Charlotte Leadership Coalition, which represented the city's gay and lesbian organizations, met for their bi-monthly meeting, and the conversation quickly turned to Chambers' attack on MAP and the County Commission's threat to stop funding the organization.⁵¹ The outcome of the discussion was the hasty creation of a new political advocacy group: First Tuesday. Although born out of a particular political moment, First Tuesday had a wider agenda that revised earlier gay liberation goals. The new political advocacy group derived its name from the national voting day, and its purpose was to spearhead gay and lesbian involvement in pushing for social and political change. The group's first co-chair, Rev. Lynn Guerra, who led Charlotte MCC and had been a visible figurehead for the gay community in Charlotte, stated:

First Tuesday started as a result of complaints about MAP's safe sex cards. We were frustrated with the fact that there were many people who did not agree with Joe Chambers, but there was no one to speak out. People were afraid. And unlike other groups, we didn't have to worry about losing county funding.⁵²

⁵¹ The Charlotte Leadership Coalition was a group of leaders from different organizations, and individuals in Charlotte's gay community that was started by the QCQ in 1986 to share information. By 1988 the group had come to act as a figurehead that represented the widest expression of the community. Jim Yarborough, "QCQ Fulfills Purpose, To Close on July 15," *Q-Notes*, June/July 1988.

⁵² Valca Valentine, "Lynn Guerra: Story of a Gay Minister," *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 26, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

From the outset First Tuesday was outward looking, publicly visible, and open to collaboration. Although the name initially masked the identity of the group, there was a decision to change this in October 1990 ahead of the election that pitted Harvey Gantt against Jesse Helms: the new name being ‘First Tuesday Association for Gay and Lesbian Equality.’⁵³ Robert Sheets, former chair of Queen City Quordinators described the intention of the group to work with political allies towards the protection of individual rights: “the group recognizes that politics is part of our lives and that Charlotte’s gay community would have to reach out to other organizations and individuals interested in defending individual freedoms and rights.”⁵⁴

First Tuesday took very organized structure from the outset, deliberately appointing male and female co-chairs: Keith B., a member of the statewide committee to repeal the Crimes Against Nature laws, and Rev. Lynne Guerra, who was already out and vocal in Charlotte. Committees focusing on media and electoral politics were formed, the latter of which interviewed political candidates about their positions on gay and lesbian issues and disseminated that information to the community. In addition, First Tuesday, echoing the work of ONI and the Lambda Political Caucus, collected documentation of discrimination, hate crimes, harassment, and abuse based on the sexual orientation of victims with the intent to prove the need for a local anti-discrimination ordinance for

⁵³ “First Tuesday Name Change,” *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1990. It is interesting to note that during the Gantt versus Helms campaign for Senate in 1990 1,500 gays and lesbians were registered to vote in Mecklenburg County in an initiative based in gay bars and restaurants including Liaisons, Manfred’s, Oleens, the Brass Rail, and the Scorpio. This nightly effort was, however, kept out of the public eye and the Helms’ campaign attempts to smear Gantt for his connections to the gay and lesbian community were focused on major metropolitan cities and not Charlotte. Gantt did attend a fundraiser held by gay individuals at Park Elevator, an alternative club that attracted both gay and straight patrons. “Charlotte Choose Separate Path,” *Front Page*, Nov. 27, 1990.

⁵⁴ Robert Sheets, “New Political Group Forms,” *Q-Notes*, Mar. 1988.

sexual orientation. First Tuesday also challenged derogatory public comments toward gay and lesbian people in the media while at the same time recognizing instances of responsible and positive treatment of gay and lesbian issues. As Jim Fulton, a First Tuesday board member, wrote in the organization's newsletter:

Who are we? We are the voice of Gays and Lesbians united to improve the quality of our lives, to work towards removing the perceived stigma of being Gay or Lesbian, to make it safe to "come out." Help make our voice so loud that we can be ignored no longer. Saying nothing to the face of prejudice, we are really saying "Yes, we certainly ARE vile and disgusting creatures, just like you say we are, and we deserve to be treated unfairly for it." Is that really what you want to say? First Tuesday says: HELL NO!!! Join us, and help to make that message loud and clear."⁵⁵

One of the first formal actions of First Tuesday, however, was to address the gap in AIDS prevention efforts caused by the struggle between MAP, the County Commission, and Rev. Chambers. Given the 'compromise' that required MAP's education materials to be approved by Dr. Delta's Health Department, First Tuesday facilitated a meeting between gay and lesbian leaders and the Health Department in early July 1988. At this meeting activists bluntly asked just what the health department was doing to help prevent AIDS in the gay community. Dr. Delta described the health department's HIV Testing Program and educational outreach, but it was apparent that the Health Department's programs were generic and not tailored to the needs of gay men. Dr. Delta also made it clear that he opposed "lewd descriptions in educational materials,"

⁵⁵ First Tuesday newsletters, box 1, folder 'First Tuesday/letters, 88-92,' Keith Bernard papers, ALSC; First Tuesday mailing, Aug. 28, 1990, box 1, folder 'First Tuesday/letters, 88-92,' Bernard papers. The reference to "disgusting creatures" refers to a comment made by Jesse Helms on the campaign trail in 1990; Steven Greenhouse, "Word for Word, Jesse Helms: The North Carolinian Has Enemies, But No One Calls Him Vague," *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 1994, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/11/27/weekinreview/word-for-word-jesse-helms-north-carolinian-has-enemies-but-no-one-calls-him.html> (accessed July 30, 2017).

although it is worth noting that some of his health educators expressed a more practical point of view.⁵⁶

While there does not seem to be any doubt that Dr. Delta's resistance to a more active education program was rooted in his own beliefs, the national and state context is again relevant here. The long delay in resuming educational efforts geared towards gay and bisexual men was due in part to a freeze on the release of CDC grant money within the state's Human Resources Department (NCHRD.) The controversy over the safe sex cards that was started by Chambers had caused David Flaherty, director of NCHRD to postpone distribution of \$170,000 in CDC grant money that was targeted at AIDS prevention education across the state. Flaherty claimed that the reason for the delay was insufficient coordination between ASO's and local health departments. Citing the scandalous cards that had come to light in Charlotte, he announced that a new round of grant proposals in 1988 had to be submitted by a health department or have the health department's endorsement to be valid. Dr. Delta had submitted his grant proposal, which included a significant sum for MAP, but MAP was not able to resume its program in risk reduction education for gay men until January 1989, almost a year after their program had been shut down.⁵⁷

Dismayed by the bureaucratic foot dragging, First Tuesday decided to step in and print its own safe sex cards in late July 1988 for distribution in bars and other places where gay men were likely to congregate. Partial funding for the cards was provided by a

⁵⁶ Craig Nelms, "Delta Meets with Community Reps," *Q-Notes*, Aug. 1988.

⁵⁷ David Prybylo, "M.A.P. To Conduct Risk-Reduction Workshops," *Q-Notes*, Jan. 1989; Craig Nelms, "Delta Meets with Community Reps," *Q-Notes*, Aug. 1988. Karen Garloch, "AIDS Agency, Others Still Wait for N.C. To Distribute U.S. Grants," *Charlotte Observer*, June 27, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015);

fundraiser at Oleens lounge. Unfettered by state or federal laws, First Tuesday was able to use the kind of graphic “street language” that the community deemed appropriate for getting the facts across to those most at risk. Given their graphic content, the First Tuesday safe sex cards garnered considerable publicity. Rev. Joseph Chambers denounced the cards as obscene and requested that Mecklenburg District Attorney Peter Gilchrist prosecute those who produced and distributed them. Gilchrist refused stating: “In my opinion it will not support a criminal prosecution. I think that there is legitimate argument that the thing has an educational value.” Coverage in the mainstream media occasioned by Chamber’s threat enabled Rev. Lynne Guerra to draw attention to First Tuesday’s effort “to meet people where they are and not expect them to understand the accepted terms.” Rev. Guerra also announced that the cards were available for straight bars, and any business or organization, including the police, that requested them. Charlotte lawyer Paul Whitfield, who handled anti-pornography cases for the Mecklenburg district attorney’s office said the cards violated community standards for obscenity and promoted homosexuality which was illegal. However, Dr. Jared Schwartz pronounced the cards to be appropriate for their intended audience, giving First Tuesday a nod of approval from the medical establishment. Don King quietly referred to these exchanges in a *Q-Notes* article hailing the accomplishments of First Tuesday’s first year: “After initial criticism from Chambers and from county officials put on the spot by the media, the cards have been quietly and extensively praised by persons working for educational and health-care agencies.”⁵⁸

⁵⁸ P. Scott Ferguson and Dean Gaskey, “Card Creates Controversy,” *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1988; Karen Garloch, “Gay Group Chairman Defends Safe Sex Cards,” *Charlotte Observer*, Aug. 10, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); “First Tuesday Holds Elections,” *Q-Notes*, Feb. 1989.

From the beginning First Tuesday intended to be visible and vocal. One of their first acts was to join Queen City Quordinators and other leaders in the gay and lesbian community in Charlotte's St. Patrick's Day Parade in March 1988, which marked the first time that a gay and lesbian group marched to represent themselves in downtown Charlotte.⁵⁹ Other activities included collecting information on anti-gay harassment, discrimination, and violence, and campaigns challenging anti-gay invectives in the local media. The most prominent example of the latter was a complaint about language used on the popular "John Boy and Billy" and the "Call Raeford" shows, both of which resulted in guest appearances for First Tuesday representatives.⁶⁰

First Tuesday encouraged, but did not require its members to be 'out,' recognizing that it was important not to make those who wished to remain closeted feel unwelcome or uncomfortable. Indeed, First Tuesday chairman 'Keith B.' did not come out in public in order to protect his job with Bahakel Communications in Charlotte.⁶¹ However in a 1991 policy statement the board clearly articulated a desire for public identification where possible:

First Tuesday Association for Gay and Lesbian Equality encourages pride and empowerment through visibility. Honesty about who we are is essential in creating a healthy environment for all individuals. First Tuesday acknowledges the personal nature of this decision and the various levels at which each person experiences this process.⁶²

⁵⁹ Robert Sheets, "Charlotte Comes Out for The Green," *Q-Notes*, Mar. 1988; Valentine, "Lynn Guerra: Story of a Gay Minister."

⁶⁰ David Perlmutter, "Queen City Dubbed Clean City: Citizens Group Notes Efforts At Banquet," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 22, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); First Tuesday News, Dec., 1989 – Jan. 1990, box 1, folder 'First Tuesday/letters, 88-92,' Bernard papers.

⁶¹ Keith Bernard oral history interview 1, June 24, 2017, ALSC.

⁶² First Tuesday News, Apr., 1991, box 1, folder 'First Tuesday/letters, 88-92,' Bernard papers.

The willingness of First Tuesday activists to appear in public is clear in two of the group's signature initiatives. The first was a series of pickets of a local Cracker Barrel franchise, where employee Jeffrey Sherrill had been fired for being homosexual. Protests started in March 1991 at the restaurant on I-85 at Billy Graham Parkway and were still continuing in October. The Charlotte protest was part of a national effort directed at the restaurant chain for imposing discriminatory practices. Protests were eventually featured on ABC's national television program 20/20 with Barbara Walters.⁶³

The second was to protest the annual banquet of Concerned Charlotteans. A First Tuesday board member, Chris Davis, found freedom in picketing the banquet. He had picketed for other political reasons, but never before as a gay man. The experience was exhilarating and self affirming:

It was loud, prominent, excessive, open. A very serious fun. As we marched in our long ovals up and down the sidewalk, chanting "1-2-3-FO", Jesse Helms has GOT to GO!".... "2-4-6-8, NO ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO HATE! I looked for signs of the effect we were having on those around us, on ourselves.... I thought of the ways one's higher innocence and personal freedom are destroyed in life unless one's will is strong... I think we can battle the forces of repression in the world first of all by respecting and valuing ourselves as gay people, and as sensitive people. "No one would ever choose to be gay." Haven't we all heard that? This act of suicide robs the impressionable world of the one thing we can give it, the living expression of our hard won free will, our anger and our laughter.⁶⁴

Davis' language expressed a powerful affirmation of being gay and of belonging to a community that offered a valuable and legitimate alternative to mainstream culture.

Describing an incident that took place during the picket, Davis recalled how a woman,

⁶³ First Tuesday News, Apr. – Dec. 1991, and Mar., 1992, box 1, folder 'First Tuesday/letters, 88-92,' Bernard papers; David Stout, "Activists Fight Rampant Discrimination," *Q-Notes*, Apr. 1991.

⁶⁴ Chris Davis, "Freedom is the Ideal we can give: thoughts after picketing the Concerned Charlotteans," First Tuesday Newsletter, May, 1990, box 1, folder 'First Tuesday/letters, 88-92,' Bernard papers.

trailing her husband into the Convention Center where the banquet was hosted, hesitated when offered a flyer, looking to her husband for guidance. Her husband pulled her along into the building, but Davis imagined an alternative world in which he might have said “you decide honey, I respect you.

CHAPTER 5—STRAIGHT ALLIES: COLLABORATIONS AND COMPROMISES, 1986- 1992

Nila and Stokely Bailey represented the epitome of family values. They had lavished love and attention on their only daughter, Sandra, throughout her childhood, into her adolescence, and then into her adulthood. This included giving her their full support when she came out as a lesbian in 1959 and proudly assuming the role of “mom and dad” of Charlotte’s gay and lesbian community after Sandra moved to live with them in the early 1970s. In fact it was Nila who told Sandra about the gay bars in Charlotte.¹ In 1986 they took this support one step further, helping to found Charlotte’s chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians And Gays (P-FLAG). P-FLAG had originated in New York in the 1970s and was launched as a national organization in Los Angeles in 1981. By 1991 it was an international organization with 200 chapters in six countries. As its name indicates, P-FLAG’s purpose was to actively and publicly support gays and lesbians with a particular focus on the parents of homosexual children. The organization had two principle areas of emphasis. One was acceptance: “It’s hard to believe parents would reject their own children, but they do. Our purpose is to get people to accept.”² The other was education, and particularly a concerted effort in both the social and political arenas to

¹ Gerry Hostetler, “When Nila Bailey Saw a Need, She Didn’t Wait,” *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 28, 1998, (accessed Sept. 5, 2015); Sandra Bailey oral history interview, Oct. 4, 2017, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, (ALSC).

² Allen Norwood, “For Parents Group Means Support, Help,” *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 28, 1990, (accessed Sept. 5, 2015).

promote an inclusive vision of ‘family values’ as an alternative to the bigoted and narrow claims made by those on the Religious Right.³

The decision by the Baileys and other members of Charlotte’s P-FLAG chapter to openly and publicly advocate in support of their homosexual children is an important example of another strand in the history of Charlotte’s gay and lesbian community that will be the focus of this chapter. As has been shown in Chapters 3 and 4, in the late 1980s and early 1990s a gay activist movement emerged in Charlotte in response to the AIDS epidemic. Much of this work was accomplished by members of the gay community, focusing on the effort to bring together and organize a range of gay and lesbian groups, spaces, and individuals, in order to build the capacity to advocate for gay and lesbian rights. However, beginning in the late 1980s, but not coming into its own until the early 1990s, was the emergence of active support for gays and lesbians in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County from sympathetic elements within the heterosexual community.

As this chapter will show, support from straight allies made important contributions to the continued development of gay activism in the 1990s. The straight allies’ contributions were evident in two broad areas. First, the growing number of non-gay organizations and individuals actively working in both the political and pastoral realms to support the efforts of the gay community offered tangible support – people and money – to Charlotte’s gay activists. This work – the political activism of P-FLAG, the visceral impact of the Charlotte Chapter of the Quilt Project, the care provided by the Regional AIDS Interfaith Network (RAIN), or the money generated by MAP’s ‘Guess

³ Diane Suchetka, “Growing Up and Coming Out, Parents of Gays and Lesbians Find Support Together,” *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 11, 1991, (accessed Sept. 5, 2015); Polly Paddock, “Helping Others Accept Truth,” *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 29 1986, (accessed Sept. 5, 2015).

who's coming to dinner' fundraising – made it possible for activists to accomplish, and imagine, more. Of equal importance, these straight alliances provided a moral counterpoint to the Religious Right's assertions that homosexuals were an isolated minority. Second, strong alliances with civic and political leaders significantly extended the reach and visibility of gay activism. The formation of the Regional HIV Consortium that was made possible by MAP's partnership with the United Way and the Foundation for the Carolinas, and it insulated the ASO from dependence on the fickle County Commission and opened the spigots on significant federal funding.

However, as this chapter will also show, alliances with the straight community were not without cost to gay activists. Straight allies often turned out to be motivated more by sympathy for the tragedy of AIDS than an embrace of gay liberation, so there were limits to how far they were willing to go. Moreover, particularly in the political realm, the compromises that gay activists made to maintain straight alliances caused tension within their ranks.

To a large extent the role that straight alliances played in gay activism has not received focused attention in the literature, but other studies broadly reflect findings in Charlotte. Susan M. Chambre has detailed straight support in her case study of New York's AIDS community, *Fighting for Our Lives*. Groups that came forward in New York City included members of the religious community, elite groups, individuals (especially elite women,) and local foundations.⁴ In *Victory Deferred*, John-Manuel Adroite notes the advocacy of a New York group of mothers, Mother's Voices, which was founded in 1991 by five mothers who had lost sons to AIDS. Their goal was to

⁴ Susan M. Chambre, *Fighting for Our Lives: New York's AIDS Community and the Politics of Disease* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), chapter 4.

challenge public attitudes and policies, and many mothers joined ACT UP, referring to themselves as “ACT UP in sheep’s clothing,” since they could appeal to politicians on the basis of shared “family values” and shift the conversation about morality.⁵ The power of parental advocacy on behalf of children, and especially mothers’ support, has also been discussed by Robert Hunt Ferguson in his article, “Mothers Against Jesse In Congress.” Ferguson illustrates the transformative nature of AIDS in forging strong relationships between parents and their dying homosexual sons, which in the case of Patsy Clarke and Eloise Vaughn turned into a political campaign in North Carolina with the formation of the political action committee known as Mothers Against Jesse Helms in Congress (MAGIC). Ferguson shows that although unsuccessful in its major goal, MAGIC contributed to a cultural shift in the 1990s by bolstering gay rights activism that pushed for respectability and inclusion.⁶ Another alternative to the Religious Right’s position is evident in the often-prominent role that Catholic nuns had in providing care. Thomas R. Rzeznik examines the complex response of the Roman Catholic Church to AIDS in New York City. Catholic hospitals in New York took the lead in recognizing the need to approach AIDS outreach as ministry. In particular the Sisters of Charity at St. Vincent’s hospital in Greenwich Village offered hospice that stressed compassion over moralizing; however, this compassionate support happened even as the Church upheld traditional teachings on human sexuality.⁷

⁵ John-Manuel Adroite, *Victory Deferred: How AIDS Changed Gay Life In America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 348-51.

⁶ Robert Hunt Ferguson, “Mothers Against Jesse in Congress: Grassroots Maternalism and the Cultural Politics of the AIDS Crisis in North Carolina,” *Journal Of Southern History* 83 (2017): pp. 107-140.

⁷ Thomas F. Rzeznik, “The Church and the AIDS Crisis in New York City” *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 34 (2016) pp. 143-165. Note that in Charlotte the Sisters of Mercy played a similar

Catholic nuns and mothers of sons offered respectability and sense of inclusion that aligned with an accommodationist stance in the gay liberation movement. In traditional narratives of AIDS this position has been attributed to those undertaking AIDS service work as opposed to those who championed AIDS activism. AIDS service organizations and efforts like the Quilt Project may have had their origins in community action, but as they grew into large formal institutions they were accused of ‘selling AIDS’ by more militant of groups like ACT UP.⁸ Jennifer Brier, however, has questioned the distinction between these two types of AIDS work, arguing that AIDS service work was often militant and revived tenets of the gay liberation movement.⁹ Susan Chambre also details how ACT UP borrowed imagery, ideas, and tactics from the early activism of New York’s ASOs.¹⁰ I have already shown how Charlotte’s history complicates Brier’s revisionist argument simply because in Charlotte there was no earlier gay liberation movement on which AIDS-inspired activism could build. However, the gay community’s partnerships with straight allies discussed in this chapter adds another dimension to this critique. Here again the contrast between Charlotte and the Triangle area is relevant. The Triangle chapter of ACT UP was very active in the late 1980s and early 1990s and was particularly important in securing political victories around the contentious debate over anonymous testing.¹¹ In Charlotte, however, two separate attempts to start an ACT UP

role at Mercy Hospital, and also opened a hospice house in Belmont for people with AIDS in 1991. Sisters of Mercy were involved closely with AIDS care in Charlotte, including MAP board chairman, Sister Mary Thomas Burke.

⁸ Nancy E. Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned: Queers, Whores, and Junkies Respond to AIDS* (New York: Rutledge, 1998).

⁹ Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: US Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 4.

¹⁰ Chambre, *Fighting for Our Lives*. p. 6.

¹¹ David Jones, “ACT UP Wins Anonymous Testing Case,” *Q-Notes*, Aug. 1992.

chapter “sparked so little interest that organizers gave up.”¹² Some individuals from Charlotte were involved in ACT UP efforts at the state level, but Charlotte’s gay and lesbian activists had little interest in taking on a more militant agenda in the city. This is not to suggest that dependence on straight allies limited the scope of what gay activists could accomplish, but it is an important part of the larger picture.

This chapter has three sections. The first examines examples of gay/straight alliances in the areas of community building and care, exploring both organizations and individual efforts. The second looks at gay/straight alliances in the area of government and administration with a focus on the continuing saga over MAP funding. The final section explores the tensions that these straight alliances caused between different elements in the city’s activist groups.

* * *

Straight Allies: Community and Care

Charlotte’s P-FLAG chapter was one of the first mixed gay and heterosexual groups to advocate for gays and lesbians in Charlotte. A primary focus of P-FLAG’s work was, naturally enough, on children. As parents, many P-FLAG members were acutely aware of the culture of bullying, harassment, and violence that gay children had to contend with and the high rates of suicide among gay and lesbian adolescents that resulted. In March 1989, the Charlotte chapter of P-FLAG won a grant of \$1,500 from the Fund for Southern Communities to print and mail information pamphlets about lesbians and gays to members of the clergy, psychologists, and counselors. The pamphlet

¹² Editorial “Struggling for Survival,” *Q-Notes*, Feb. 1994. An ACT UP advertisement was printed in the MAP newsletter for March/April 1991: *Metrolina AIDS Project Newsletter*, Mar./Apr. 1991, box 1, assorted materials, Pride Publishing and Typesetting, Inc., publications, ALSC.

sought to supply them with “accurate information to help families to become more supportive and to help overcome ugly stereotyping of homosexual people.”¹³ Towards the same ends, P-FLAG also worked with gay and lesbian activists “to start eradicating harassment of gay and lesbian adolescents” by documenting the problems they encountered. This evidence was then used to make a case to the city council for adding sexual orientation to the city’s anti-discrimination ordinance.¹⁴

P-FLAG members also took an active political role and in so doing helped to challenge the Religious Right’s claim to represent ‘morality’ in the debate over homosexuality and AIDS. In May 1989, P-FLAG members joined First Tuesday’s ongoing protest against Concerned Charlotteans. P-FLAG’s comfortable downhome image lent a new layer of legitimacy and urgency to the demonstration, calling into question just whose family values were being queried. Carrying signs announcing, “Gay And Good... That’s My Boy!!,” and “God Made Our Children Gay, He Did Not Give Them Or Us A Choice,” P-FLAG parents walked the picket line with representatives from First Tuesday and the National Organization of Women to protest Concerned Charlotteans’ fifth annual banquet at which Vice President Dan Quayle was to be the guest of honor.¹⁵ Joyce Rankin of Dallas N.C., and director of P-FLAG’s South Atlantic Region, wrote to Quayle ahead of the event to let him know what to expect:

Do you really want to associate your name and office with a group which espouses love, peace, and brotherhood but whose policies in practice have resulted in hatred and violence against our innocent gay and lesbian children? As you enter the banquet hall, there will be a group of us...silently standing outside with signs protesting the consequences of some of the actions of Concerned

¹³ Rod Thornton, “PFLAG Receives \$1500,” *Q-Notes*, Mar. 1989.

¹⁴ Don King, “Eradicating Second-Class Status,” *Q-Notes*, Apr. 1989.

¹⁵ Jesse Helms arranged Vice President Quayle’s attendance, no doubt looking ahead to building political capital for the 1990 senate race.

Charlotteans. We want you to look into our faces and know how much you will be hurting us and our children.¹⁶

The success of Charlotte's chapter of P-FLAG was such that in 1991 the city was selected as the first Southern chapter to host the Tenth International P-FLAG convention because it had "the most activist PFLAG chapter in the southeast." Seeking to combat "the anti-gay thrust of the conservative movement," the national leadership announced that it was choosing Charlotte in order to declare "guerilla warfare against Jesse Helms and others of his ilk, who seem bent on destroying our gay children.... We intend to strike a blow against homophobia by taking our mission directly into the heart of the Bible Belt."¹⁷ The result was a complete success, in large part because Rev. Chambers mean-spirited and ill thought through attacks served to undermine his cause and elicit public sympathy.

In a *Concerned Charlotteans Update Newsbrief* that was mailed to 10,000 citizens of Mecklenburg County, Rev. Chambers alerted his followers to the fact that P-FLAG was trying to "fool the public and hide their immoral deeds behind a façade of preservation of the family" in order to "squeeze dollars from tax money and corporations." Chambers wanted Charlotte to "strip this cheap cover off and show our state that our families and children are more important than an image that the liberals would call 'an international city.'" In a letter that came with the pamphlet, Chambers declared: "The AIDS VIRUS IS NOW IN EPIDEMIC PROPORTIONS! Militant

¹⁶ Richard Epton-Nelms, "Banquet Draws Protest," *Q-Notes*, May 1989. In 1990 the picket line at the Concerned Charlotteans banquet had doubled to sixty-five people and the protestors chanted and handed out flyers about First Tuesday and the reasons for picketing Concerned Charlotteans. "First Tuesday Pickets Banquet," *Q-Notes*, May 1990.

¹⁷ Douglas Randolph, "Charlotte Will Host The 1991 International P-FLAG Convention," *Q-Notes*, May 1990.

homosexuals are right now martialing a campaign to strike down existing restrictions against letting AIDS victims and HIV-carrying immigrants into our country.”

Characterizing the upcoming P-FLAG event as “anti-Christian, anti-family, and anti-common sense,” Chambers concluded: “with people dying by the thousands you would think the homosexual community would quit promoting sodomy sex.”¹⁸ More bizarrely, he accused the conference planners of designing badges that would indicate who was available for sexual encounters, and he suggested that the conference emblem, which was a crown with an inverted pink triangle at its apex, represented “the ‘unholy trinity’ of Satan, the Antichrist, and the false prophet.”¹⁹

Out of touch with the standards of Charlotte’s business community, the Concerned Charlotteans’ campaign had no impact whatsoever on the Omni Hotel’s decision to host the event. Chambers was also out of touch with the political climate, since Governor Jim Martin and Mayor Sue Myrick, both Republicans, signed letters of welcome that were included in the conference welcome packets.²⁰ Moreover Chambers’ outlandish attacks opened the door for considered counter-arguments in the press.

Opinion letters in the *Charlotte Observer* were overwhelmingly in favor of P-FLAG.²¹ In

¹⁸ Concerned Charlotteans Update Newsbrief and letter, August 1991, box 4, folder ‘Joseph Chambers,’ Donaldson Wells King Papers, ALSC.

¹⁹ *Ibid*; David Stout, “Chambers Launches New Attack on Gays,” *Q-Notes*, July 1991. The pink triangle, which had been used in Nazi concentration camps as a badge to identify homosexuals, had become popular as a symbol of both pride and liberation in the gay movement, and had been adopted by the militant AIDS activist group ACT UP in 1987.

²⁰ Letter from Nila Bailey to Mr. Joseph Chambers, Sept. 29, 1991, box 3, folder, ‘Community: P-FLAG Convention, 1990-1991,’ King Papers; Official letters from Governor Jim Martin and Mayor Sue Myrick inviting conference participants to the 10th Anniversary Conference of P-FLAG, box 3, folder, ‘Community: P-FLAG Convention, 1990-1991,’ King Papers.

²¹ “Today’s Focus: Convention For Parents Of Gays,” “Chambers hiding Behind God’s Word,” “Charlotte’s No Place for Discrimination,” “Chamber’s Way is Not American Way,” “Help Keep All Families Whole, Wholesome,” *Charlotte Observer*, July 6, 1991, box 3, folder, ‘Community: P-FLAG Convention, 1990-1991,’ King Papers.

an article, Bruce Henderson quoted Chambers' assertion that the conference's closing celebration at Queens College would be "lewd, vulgar, and downright degrading."²² In reality the event included a clogging group, a choreographed dance, skits from Charlotte actors, ballads, popular songs, and performances by singers with the Charlotte Opera and the Oratorio Singers, in addition to One Voice Chorus, Queen City Friends, and the Mecklenburg County Royal Court.²³ The proceeds from the event were used to pay for housing for people with AIDS, a food pantry for the needy, and a hot line to document violence and harassment for gays. It is possible, perhaps probable, that Chambers would have lumped all of these causes as "promot[ing] the sodomy lifestyle throughout Charlotte/Mecklenburg," but one wonders if the public would have agreed.²⁴ The *Observer's* senior editor Ed Williams published an editorial on July 3, 1991 announcing that he had accepted an invitation to present at the P-FLAG conference. While acknowledging his own complex feelings as someone raised Southern Baptist in a small rural town, he made his point clear: "Where do these presumptuous guardians of Charlotte get the idea that they are serving God by tormenting the parents of gays?"²⁵

In addition to organizations like P-FLAG there were many examples of individuals, often women, whose personal stories led them to step forward to meet the challenge of caring for, and publically advocating for, people suffering with AIDS. While

²² Bruce Henderson, "Charlottean Blasts Meeting of Gay Support Group," *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 1, 1991, (accessed Sept. 5, 2015).

²³ Don King, "Joe Chambers, No Research, No Substantiation, No Truth; Our Family Celebration," box 4, folder 'Joseph Chambers,' King Papers; "Our Family Celebration," *Front Page*, Sept. 24, 1991.

²⁴ Diane Suchetka, "Chambers Declines Invitation to Conference Of Gays' Relatives," *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 8, 1991, (accessed Sept. 5, 2015).

²⁵ Ed Williams, "What If Your Child Were Gay?" *Charlotte Observer*, July 3, 1991, (accessed Sept. 5, 2015).

the evidence is anecdotal, it is clear that lesbians came forward in significant numbers to support gay men suffering from AIDS, and many lesbians took significant jobs within the AIDS service sector.²⁶ John Quillin recalled that his friend and co-worker at the United Way for Central Carolinas, Donna Arrington, was deeply concerned over the loss of several of her male friends. Arrington's concern was evident in her approach to helping to establish and then to direct the Regional AIDS Consortium. Quillin recalled:

She was thoughtful, powerful, and determined. She knew a lot of men who had died from AIDS because she was a lesbian and knew a lot of men who were sick. And she saw a system foundering in its effort to be responsive, or to close its eyes altogether. ACT UP is not a Charlotte kind of phenomenon. It would never be successful here, because we are a hotbed of moderation. And it's way too extreme for here, but instead she was able to be in the right place at the right time to cause that [the creation of the Regional AIDS Consortium] to happen and it was a real passion of hers. Because she was a co-worker I got a lot of chance to talk to her about it. She felt very very strong about it.²⁷

Many straight individuals took similar journeys. One example is Marjorie Storch who was a member and past president of the Charlotte chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW). Storch played a prominent role in public demonstrations, including the 1986 "Vigil for Truth and Decency," and picketing the Concerned Charlotteans annual banquets.²⁸ However, for Storch her support for the gay community was also personal; her brother William Jeffrey Storch, was a gay man who died of AIDS in 1992 at the age of 35. Following his death Marjorie organized a project

²⁶ In addition to Donna Arrington, other lesbians taking leadership roles include the following. Rev. Debbie Warren founded and ran the Regional AIDS Interfaith Network, which opened in Charlotte in 1992: see Debbie Warren oral history interviews 1, 2, 3, ALSC. Courtney White was volunteer coordinator for MAP from 1991 to 1997: see Courtney White oral history interview, June 29, 2017, ALSC. Kimberly Melton was honored by the YWCA for her contributions to the lesbian and gay community in September 1991. Among her service was fund raising for MAP. See "Charlotte Lesbian Honored," *Front Page*, Sept. 10, 1991.

²⁷ John Quillin oral history interview 1, Mar. 14, 2017, ALSC. The Regional AIDS Consortium is discussed below.

²⁸ "First Tuesday Pickets Banquet."

she called PostAid to raise funds to support MAP and other local AIDS service groups. PostAid sold cards of the photographs her brother had taken as a hobby, which she modestly described as “one person’s view of the world.”²⁹ In 2003 Storch became the development director for the House of Mercy, a hospice house for people with AIDS that was founded by the Sisters Of Mercy in Belmont in 1991.³⁰

Among the countless personal stories that emerged during Charlotte’s AIDS crisis, one of the most extraordinary was that of Debbi Hood and Bobby “B.J.” Johnson. Hood attributed her decision to help people with AIDS to her Christian background, and she became a volunteer at MAP in 1987 and later was employed there. Through her experience as a buddy for three AIDS sufferers Hood realized that there was an “unconditional love I’m seeing from them that I wish I could see from the church.”³¹ Hood saw the buddy program as perhaps the most demanding, but also the most rewarding aspect of the work at MAP:

Many Buddies have spoken with me about how much the PWA’s teach them about personal dignity and courage and how valuable and precious the small moments in life are. Don’t misunderstand, though. The Buddies have perhaps the most difficult task of all of our volunteers: they also experience more of the unpleasant aspects of working with people who are terminally ill; dealing with misdirected anger, watching a person work through the stages of grief ... adjusting to the ‘roller-coaster ride’ of the PWA’s health, ...confronting their own personal issues involving death and dying.³²

Hood’s fourth and last buddy was a fellow MAP employee, Bob “BJ” Johnson.

Hood and Johnson became such close friends that when Johnson was diagnosed with

²⁹ “PostAid Available,” *Metrolina AIDS Project Newsletter*, box 1, folder 3, 1992, Sue Henry Papers, ALSC; “Mecklenburg County Deaths,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 4, 1992.

³⁰ “Career Almanac,” *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 20, 2003, (accessed Sept. 5, 2015).

³¹ “Development Corner,” *Metrolina AIDS Project Newsletter*, Nov. 1990, box 1, assorted materials, Pride Publishing and Typesetting, Inc., publications.

³² *Ibid.*

AIDS in April 1993 they decided to get married despite their sexual incompatibility. As expected, Johnson's death came within months of their wedding. Hood's wedding dress had been chosen with that inevitability in mind—a white bodice with a black floral lace skirt. Her ordeal, however, did not stop Hood from her mission to care about people with AIDS. A year after Johnson's death, Hood was still working for people with AIDS, this time using her skills to help launch a cutting edge on-line hotline offering information on AIDS.³³

A third gay/straight alliance story that carried significant potential for re-focusing public attention on the epidemic and building sympathy was the development of the local chapter of the AIDS Memorial Quilt Project (often known as the NAMES Project).³⁴ When Sheila Lockhart, manager of the Chaz salon in Southpark, realized that one of her stylists, Allen, appeared to have skin cancer, she felt that he might be hiding his real diagnosis. Sheila reached out to Rev. Glenn Boland of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church for advice since she knew he had frequently worked with AIDS patients. Lockhart's suspicions turned out to be right, and she was able to give Allen support as he faced his last months of life, dying at the age of twenty-nine on October 2, 1989. Following Allen's

³³ Bryan Alsop, "On-Line Hotline a New Computer Service Offering Information on AIDS May Be Even More Private Than the Phone," *Charlotte Observer*, June 20, 1994, (accessed Sept. 5, 2015).

³⁴ The national NAMES Project, was formally organized in 1987, when a group of gay men led by activist Cleve Jones started creating quilt panels in commemoration of friends who had died from AIDS. Jones conceived the idea in 1985 after a protest at the San Francisco Federal Building left names of friends pasted onto the side of the building. The patchwork of names resembled a huge quilt, the classic American symbol of family and memory and inspired Jones to start a project that would completely cover the National Mall with thousands of individual quilts within a few short years. The AIDS Memorial Quilt transformed the abstract iteration of numbers of people with HIV/AIDS into real people with rich and complex lives. The project strove to challenge governments with the enormity of the epidemic and urgency of need for compassionate response, built a powerful symbol of remembrance and hope that was international in scope and expressive of shared grief, pain and rage in response to the epidemic, and encouraged donations to support efforts to care for people with AIDS and seek solutions to the disease.

funeral, Lockhart joined with some of his friends to plan a Charlotte chapter of the NAMES Project in his honor. The pursuit ultimately cost Lockhart her job because her boss was uncomfortable with an association between his salon and the AIDS epidemic. Lockhart threw herself into organizing the quilt project, setting up workshops in the fellowship hall of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church on the Plaza.³⁵

Charlotte's chapter of the NAMES project grew extraordinarily quickly under Lockhart's direction; within a year of Allen's death 800 panels of the AIDS Quilt were assembled in Charlotte for a four-day display at the Convention Center. The success of the Charlotte Chapter illustrated the power of the AIDS epidemic to build a partnership between the gay and straight community. By the time the quilt arrived in Charlotte the local project had grown from three original organizers to 200 people volunteering their time and efforts. Panels were flown to Charlotte courtesy of USAIR and Flying Tigers transport airlines, a local truck driver volunteered to transport the quilt from the airport to the Convention Center, local people donated printed materials for the event, the Tower Club and several restaurants donated food for volunteers, the Van Landingham Estate threw a party for everyone involved after the event, and all media efforts for the showing were donated free of charge, including a public service announcement by Whoopi Goldberg.³⁶

³⁵ Don King, "Lockhart Gives All to NAMES Project," *Q-Notes*, May 1990. After Lockhart's experience with losing her job she remained anonymous to the Charlotte community as the founder of the project, although she was openly celebrated in the gay community.

³⁶ "Memorial Quilt Project Forms in Charlotte," *Q-Notes*, Feb. 1990 "Remember Their Names," *Q-Notes*, Mar. 1990 "Successful Benefit Leads to Quilt Display," *Q-Notes*, June 1990; Richard Epton-Nelms, "The Quilt Covers Metrolina With Compassion," *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1990.

The Charlotte NAMES Project continued to flourish beyond the first showing of the Memorial Quilt. In their spring 1993 newsletter, *A Stitch In Time*, project organizers stressed the importance of education and outreach:

The NAMES Project believes strongly in the educational value of the Quilt. It has influenced and enlightened many people.... The Outreach and Education Committee serves to educate civic organizations, schools, churches and businesses within the Charlotte Metrolina area about the NAMES Project, and the International AIDS Memorial Quilt and to promote and increase our community's awareness of AIDS.³⁷

Of all of the gay/straight alliances discussed in this chapter, the Regional AIDS Interfaith Network (RAIN) may be the most significant. The coalition of congregations and individuals that worked under the RAIN umbrella show that while AIDS mobilized those on the Christian Right to be more active in their attacks on gays and lesbians, AIDS also mobilized others who, as members of a faith community, took an active role in supporting gay men and lesbians. In addition, it is important to note that, as best I can tell, there have been no studies of RAIN or of its model of a congregationally based, nominally straight, AIDS service organization in the historical literature.

To be sure, the emergence of this support took some time to develop. While conservative, often evangelical, denominations were quick to seize on AIDS as a clear sign that “God [is] indicating his displeasure and his attitude toward that form of lifestyle,” most mainstream denominations saw significant, often heated debate in the 1980s and early 1990s on issues such as gay and lesbian priests, full acceptance of homosexual church members, and marriage unions of same sex couples.³⁸ To give two

³⁷ “Education and Outreach,” *A Stitch In Time*, NAMES Project/ Charlotte, box 1, folder 5, ‘1993,’ Henry Papers.

³⁸ “AIDS Shows God’s Anger at Gays, Baptist Chief Says,” *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 18, 1986, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015). Heather R. White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay*

North Carolina examples, Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh made national news in 1992 when it allowed the formal union of two homosexual men. At the same time, Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church in Chapel Hill was considering whether to license a homosexual minister. However, even in supposed liberal denominations, it was not always clear that the membership was quite as far along as the church leadership; Doug Reisner, the minister of the Unitarian Church of Charlotte, sent out a detailed and thought provoking questionnaire to his congregation to measure attitudes and encourage acceptance.³⁹

The increasing severity of the AIDS epidemic in the late 1980s and early 1990s, combined with the claims made by conservative Christians to speak in the name of religion, increased the pressure on more progressive congregations to take some action. Many churches in Charlotte offered space and therefore tacit support to gay organizations: P-FLAG meetings were held at Christ Episcopal in Myers Park, First Tuesday met at St Peter's Episcopal in downtown Charlotte, the NAMES Project sewed every Wednesday evening at Holy Trinity Lutheran in Plaza Midwood, the MCC Church got its start at the Unitarian Church of Charlotte in the Cotswold neighborhood. However, providing space was not the same as being actively involved. Dr. Robert Barret recalled his disappointment at discovering that none of the clergy he approached had engaged in providing material or spiritual support for AIDS sufferers and many were uncomfortable with the disease and issues of sexuality that it raised. Even in the hospitals chaplains did

Rights (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), see especially chapter 6; Rzeznik, "The Church and the AIDS Crisis in New York City," pp. 143-65. The *Observers'* religion reporter, Ken Garfield, gave an overview of these questions in "Seeking Common Ground in Homosexuality Debate," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 28, 1992, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

³⁹ Garfield, "Seeking Common Ground In Homosexuality Debate."

not initially embrace the particular needs that arose with the epidemic.⁴⁰ Indeed, although Leslie Kooyman had worked within the Catholic Church in California in pastoral education and counseling, he deliberately chose to establish MAP independently of any church even though he had been offered space.⁴¹

Thus it was not until the Charlotte chapter of RAIN formed in 1992 that the impasse around organized church involvement with AIDS ministry was finally broken in Charlotte. Nationally RAIN was the brainchild of Margaret Austin, who started an AIDS ministry through a chaplaincy internship at New Orleans Hospital in the early 1980s.⁴² The premise of RAIN was to involve faith communities in creating care teams to provide care to people with AIDS, starting with members in their own congregation. The emphasis was on being non-judgmental and processing the experience through group discussion and counseling.⁴³

Charlotte's RAIN chapter was founded by Rev. Debbie Warren. Rev. Warren came to AIDS work via a very personal path. She had grown up in Jackson Tennessee where she had experienced a nurturing Baptist church community and had developed a

⁴⁰ Robert L. Barret oral history interview 2, Nov. 11, 2014, ALSC. Note, however, that at Mercy Hospital the traditional approach of spiritual and psychological support for the dying by the Sisters of Mercy did heavily influence the hospital's culture of care: see Dona Haney interview, May 24, 2017, ALSC.

⁴¹ Leslie Kooyman oral history interview, Sept. 19, 2015, ALSC.

⁴² In New Orleans Austin had observed the same fearful response to AIDS by the medical community that occurred in Charlotte. Austin had stepped into the gap in care and realized that getting to know people with AIDS was a deeply rewarding experience: "every human life will teach you something if you can be open and break through ignorance." In response to the need, Austin had started a project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson foundation to establish RAIN, which had grown to become an organization in several states by 1991, including Arkansas, Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana: Henry Finch, "AIDS and the Church," *Pulpit Digest*, Nov./Dec. 1993, in unprocessed materials, RAIN (Regional AIDS Interfaith Network) records, ALSC.

⁴³ Deborah Warren oral history interview 1, June 21, 2016, ALSC; Hazard, "AIDS Crisis Needs Compassion Not Debate on Sexuality, Drugs;" "Implementing the Faithful Response to AIDS: A Training Event for Developing Congregation Based AIDS Ministry Care Teams," Apr. 19, 1991, unprocessed materials, RAIN records.

keen desire to be a spiritual leader. After earning her graduate degree at the Southern Baptist Seminary, Warren took a position as Minister of Youth Education at a progressive congregation close to Clemson University in Pendleton, South Carolina, where she was ordained. From there she went to the larger congregation of Oakland Baptist Church in Rock Hill. However, while it supported women in the ministry, the congregation was not going to embrace lesbianism. When Warren realized she needed to acknowledge her sexual orientation so that she could live a full and emotionally honest life she left Rock Hill and took an internship at the Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte where she became involved with AIDS work. Warren already had strong ties with Charlotte, where she had been attending Myers Park Baptist Church since 1986, forming a deep friendship with Henry Finch, a fellow congregant and former Baptist minister, who himself had left the ministry to come out several years earlier. Through his work as the director of the alcohol and drug treatment center in Charlotte, and out of compassion for friends dying of AIDS, Finch had started to volunteer with MAP.⁴⁴

Warren's work at the hospital and her close friendship with Finch made her realize that there was a significant gap in care for the increasingly diverse range of individuals who were contracting AIDS. She also realized that quite apart from MAP's internal conflicts (discussed below), the organization's buddy program, which was

⁴⁴ Warren interview 1. Henry Finch had come to Charlotte to seek a new life after coming out as a gay man when he was the minister of Charleston's oldest and most prestigious Baptist Church, First Baptist. His honesty cost both his family and his church, but it did not cost him the many friends he had made along the way in his career. Two of these friends, Gene Owens, the minister at Myers Park Baptist, and Bettie Dibrell, acting director of the Randolph Clinic (an alcohol and drug treatment center in Charlotte) helped Finch to get a job as the director of the clinic. It was through this work that he became directly involved in ministering to people with AIDS and joined the board of directors of MAP.

common in many ASOs, was reaching capacity and had serious problems with burn out.⁴⁵

Warren was also deeply aware of a disjuncture between vision and reality on the part of churches:

The national denominations in various faith traditions had issued these national policies about how folks ought to be caring and compassionate, engage in AIDS ministry or mitzvah or whatever. And that was it. Nobody was doing it. So you know, that was a clear indication that the people in the congregation felt that they were entirely different and separate from the people who were becoming infected. And that if you had become infected—well, you had done something wrong. So how do you begin to build relationships around all of that? And to tell you the truth, I wasn't quite sure.⁴⁶

In early 1991 Warren learned about the RAIN model for facilitating relationship-building between care team volunteers and people with AIDS, and, through Margaret Austin she connected with a RAIN chapter in Arkansas that provided her with materials and practical advice.⁴⁷ Returning to Charlotte Warren realized that she could combine the philosophical underpinnings of RAIN with a hands-on model of pastoral care called Clinical Pastor Education that she had experienced at Carolinas Medical Center under the leadership of Cathy Hasty. Warren's association with Cathy Hasty also gave her access to significant resources and expertise as she co-opted medical professionals in support of RAIN. Warren's association with Henry Finch, who was well connected within both Charlotte's gay and straight communities, also helped her to launch the first RAIN board that brought needed skills in business and finance. Finally, Warren seized the opportunity to team up with Myers Park Presbyterian Church that had begun its own nascent AIDS

⁴⁵ Deborah Warren oral history interview 2, July 13, 2016, ALSC.

⁴⁶ Memo to RAIN: NYU Leadership for a changing world, 2004 report, box 1, folder 2, RAIN records.

⁴⁷ Finch, "AIDS and the Church," Warren interview 1, "Implementing the Faithful Response to AIDS."

task force in response to the revelation that a highly respected member of the congregation was dying of AIDS.⁴⁸

Through the rest of the 1990s RAIN continued to develop, expanding both in terms of capacity and reach. Starting with just three care teams in 1992, two from Myers Park Presbyterian and one from Myers Park Baptist, RAIN had grown to 200 volunteers organized into 15 care teams in Charlotte, one in Gastonia, and two more in formation including one in Matthews by 1993.⁴⁹ By 2002, RAIN had 1000 volunteers from twenty different faith communities working in eleven counties. In addition to providing care to AIDS patients, RAIN actively sought to change hearts and minds through its work in communities. Care teams trained together to support each other as they supported their care team partner. The emphasis was on being non-judgmental and being open to what the care team partner could teach the care team. Following a death, the team would take time to grieve and counsel each other before deciding whether or not to take on the care of another partner.⁵⁰

Significantly RAIN provided AIDS care across the social and racial spectrum. The earliest congregations to get involved were white, ‘big steeple,’ progressive churches in Charlotte’s downtown and well to do suburbs. But over time, RAIN care groups formed in African American churches and in rural congregations in surrounding

⁴⁸ Well known Charlotte designer, Tony Putman and his wife, Gail Wilkins, shared his AIDS story with Myers Park Presbyterian Church in the late 1980s. Putman died in December 1990. Six months later Wilkins led the church in forming an AIDS ministry to provide educational programs and to serve people with AIDS, their families and friends: Rolfe Neill, “Facing AIDS with Compassion—Myers Park Presbyterian Seeks Ways to Help the Diseased and Educate the Rest of Us,” *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 12, 1992, (accessed Aug. 30, 2015); Warren interview.

⁴⁹ RAIN General Report, Dec. 1993, box 2, folder 1, RAIN records.

⁵⁰ Krissa Palmer, “Profile of An Angel,” *The Leader*, Apr. 12, 2002, box 5, RAIN records.

counties.⁵¹ With the organization's growth came increasing local recognition; in an interview, Debbie Warren made particular note of the fact that a significant number of civic leaders were personally involved in RAIN as members of care teams.⁵² There was also national recognition and access to critical funding.⁵³ RAIN's stature, and focus on providing care to all AIDS patients earned it grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Ford Foundation, a local illustration of Jennifer Brier's argument about how national granting bodies shifted the AIDS conversation in the 1990s towards minorities and, particularly, women.⁵⁴ RAIN also engaged in local fundraising, the most enduring example of which is the annual AIDS walk that continues to this day, and the most flamboyant of which was the annual 'Gay Bingo' evenings that started in 1999.⁵⁵

While both the AIDS walk and Gay Bingo started in the late 1990s, they are examples of another aspect to the gay/straight alliances that emerged in Charlotte in the early 1990s, fundraising. In the first years of the decade the best example of a fundraising event that engaged straight allies was MAP's annual "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" extravaganza. In the 1980s, most of MAP's fundraising efforts were focused within the gay community – ranging from charity events at gay bars to the annual Farewell to Summer Party. But starting in 1991 the organization reached out into Charlotte's mainstream with an event modeled on the 1967 film "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?"

⁵¹ Warren interview 2; "Implementing the Faithful Response To AIDS;" Palmer, "Profile of An Angel;" Neill, "Facing AIDS with Compassion;" Memo to RAIN: NYU Leadership for a changing world, RAIN records.

⁵² Warren interview 2.

⁵³ "RAIN Picked as Finalist for Leadership Award," *Q-Notes*, Aug. 4, 2001; "A Ministry of Caring: Rev. Stephanie Speller, Minority Program Director, R.A.I.N.," *Vision Focus Magazine*, Mar. 1998, p. 5. Both items located in box 2, RAIN records.

⁵⁴ Brier, *Infections Ideas*, chapter 4.

⁵⁵ Warren interview 2; Elizabeth Coleman, "Facing Up to AIDS in the Deep South: A New Partnership Overcomes Denial and Fear," *Ford Foundation Report*, Spring 1994, Box 3, folder 'Magazines and Special Publications,' RAIN records.

As with other gay and lesbian rights activities, the event explicitly borrowed from the African American civil rights tradition, in this case seeking to promote love and compassion and to overcome prejudice and misunderstanding. Each year themed dinner parties were hosted at private homes and guests contributed to MAP in return for a meal. The idea for a fundraiser on this model was copied from the Triad Health Project in Greensboro, but from the beginning the Charlotte event took on a flavor of its own. Instead of small elegant gatherings where a few people made large donations, Charlotte's dinners were designed to be eclectic, everything from casual backyard gatherings around the grill to 'full works' catered black tie affairs. Guests at one dinner party might number five, at another a hundred or more. To conclude the evening everyone was invited to gather downtown and mingle until midnight at the First Union Plaza for champagne, gourmet desserts and coffee. Non-diners could join the event downtown for a \$15 ticket.

Over time "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" grew almost exponentially in size and creativity and attracted a lot of media attention. With the introduction of themed parties imaginations ran wild and wacky with themes like "Dancing with the Enemy," "Eclectic Uses for Aluminum Foil," "Tango to the Center of the Earth," "Karaoke by the Creek," "Equatorial Island Wear," and "Think Opera, Think Oprah, Think Okra," just to name a few. In addition to raising significant amounts of money, the event allowed a natural mixing of gays and lesbians with the straight community and an opportunity to come out in a safe and celebratory environment.⁵⁶ Les Kooyman reflected on the event as a game changer:

⁵⁶ Keith Bulla, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" *Q-Notes*, Apr. 1991; Gigi Guyton, "At-Home Dinner Parties Help Metrolina AIDS Project," *Charlotte Observer*, May 2, 1992, (accessed Apr.

[Guess] started as a very gay sort of event. By the time I left it was very integrated, still heavily gay, but a lot of mix of people. So while the federal money was very helpful [for MAP], to me it was more important to have the local money. Because that really signaled people were supportive.... For many gay people that was THE thing that really signified we had arrived. We're out, we're visible we're downtown.... As opposed to having a dinner party in someone's home, and no one has to know if I'm coming or going almost, right? I'm showing up downtown, it's a fundraiser for an AIDS organization, so it's good cover if I ever were asked, but it really was about coming out, as a community.⁵⁷

The dollars raised and people involved indicated the level of success of this event. In 1992 (just the second year for the event) thirty-eight dinner parties raised \$23,000 and 1,800 people gathered at First Union for dessert. In 1993 fifty-eight dinner parties raised \$47,000 and 2,300 people gathered at First Union. In 1994 there were seventy-five dinner parties, reflecting a push out into the community to involve people who had never before been involved with MAP. By 1996 an estimated ninety-five dinner parties were expected to raise at least \$80,000 with 4,000 people crowded into First Union Plaza. In 1996, sixty Rosenthal China plates were decorated by artists and celebrities for auction at the event—of most note were plates decorated by actress Elizabeth Taylor and playwright Tony Kushner of “Angels in America” fame. Les Kooyman also remembered that for a couple of years a highlight of the evening was their celebrity guest, Tammy Faye Bakker, who “stood there and took pictures with person after person after person, for hours.”⁵⁸

14, 2017); Kathleen Purvis, “Think Charlotte Doesn’t Know How to Have Fun – For A Good Cause? – Guess Again,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 10, 1995, (accessed Apr. 14, 2017).

⁵⁷ Kooyman interview. For more detail about the planning and organization of “Guess Who’s Coming To Dinner” fundraisers see White interview, ALSC.

⁵⁸ Kooyman interview; Purvis, “Think Charlotte Doesn’t Know How To Have Fun;” Guyton, “At-Home Dinner Parties Help Metrolina AIDS Project;” Helen Schwab, “Benefit Saves The Sweetest Time For Last,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 17, 1996, (accessed Apr. 14, 2017); Helen Moore, “Wild, Wacky Motifs Will Be Coming To Dinner,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 4, 1994, (accessed Apr. 14, 2017); Helen Moore, “Benefit Dinners Fancy, Funky,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 5, 1993, (accessed Apr. 14, 2017); Allen Norwood, “Designer Dishing – Auction of Hand-

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Straight Allies: Government and Administration

By the late 1980s and early 1990s gay and lesbian activists in Charlotte were enjoying increasing visibility in various forums. They were active and vocal participants in the political arena, advocating for gay rights, they had created a reputation for high-society fundraisers that were marquee events on the Charlotte's social calendar, and they had established leadership in support services to people with AIDS which had official sanction of high level medical professionals and local government. However, in this latter role there were limits. When MAP was censured for distributing education materials that many in Charlotte considered immoral if not illegal, the organization was obliged to kowtow in order to maintain its status. Lesley Kooyman and MAP president Marion McGinnis gave no pushback when challenged by commissioner Rod Autrey over the safe sex cards, and MAP capitulated without objection to having its education materials subject to approval by the Director of the Health Department, Dr. Delta, despite strong evidence of his lack of respect for the work they had accomplished.⁵⁹ The response, the formation of First Tuesday, had been immediate. In retrospect *Q-Notes* editor Richard Epsom recalled that he was concerned that the Commission's response "would sever the ties between MAP and the community." MAP would be prevented from "meeting the

Painted Plates Highlights Tonight's Dessert Gala," *Charlotte Observer*, May 18, 1996, (accessed Apr. 14, 2017).

⁵⁹ Kathleen McClain, "Insists County Pull AIDS Support Group's Money," *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 15, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); Editorial, "Cooperation on AIDS Elusive Commissioners Get No Agreement Between Delta, MAP," *Charlotte Observer*, June 8, 1988, (accessed Aug. 31, 2015); Karen Garloch, "Commissioners Try To Settle Rift Between Health Chief, AIDS Agency," *Charlotte Observer*, June 7, 1988, (accessed Aug. 31), 2015; Karen Garloch, "Delta, AIDS Agency Divided Again," *Charlotte Observer*, May 5, 1988, (accessed Aug. 31, 2015).

need for open and honest dialogue in providing counseling, education, and support for those in the gay community with AIDS, as well as those who just needed information on AIDS.”⁶⁰ Kooyman’s message to the gay community about the new reporting structures had been one of cautious reassurance, but even he did not seem to be convinced.⁶¹ The Commission had resumed MAP funding in contradiction of Delta’s wishes by April 1988, but commissioner Rod Autrey suggested in the May budget hearing that county money should eventually be withdrawn.⁶² A year and a half later, in January 1990, Kooyman expressed concern about county funding stating that: “we’ve been notified our funding will be phased out over the next three years. While we don’t want to be dependent on county funds, we feel it’s the county’s responsibility to respond to this disease. While cases are increasing is no time for the county to pull out.”⁶³

Other forces in Charlotte also knew that AIDS was a critical health care that should not be held hostage to a politically conflicted County Commission. Dr. Jared Schwartz, president of the Mecklenburg County Medical Society, and a member of the North Carolina Medical Society AIDS Task Force, had long believed that in order to get ahead of the epidemic it would be best to have an independent AIDS task force to coordinate services. Dr. Schwartz was also aware that funding far in excess of what the county could afford would be needed to provide the necessary services for an epidemic that was going to strike the region’s most vulnerable citizens and that required an

⁶⁰ Richard Epton, “It’s Not All Doom and Gloom,” *Q-Notes*, Mar. 1988.

⁶¹ Dean Gaskey, “United Way to Oversee MAP,” *Q-Notes*, Mar. 1988.

⁶² Lisa Pullen, “70 Sign Up to Take Shots At 89 Budget,” *Charlotte Observer*, May 26, 1988, (accessed Aug. 31, 1015).

⁶³ Don King, “MAP – A Look Inside,” *Q-Notes*, Jan. 1990.

organization that was well placed to receive federal dollars.⁶⁴ At least some members of the County Commission agreed with Schwartz. The most obvious partner was the United Way of Central Carolinas. The United Way already had a focus on healthcare issues and had been asked to prepare reports of a more general kind to inform the Commission on health-related issues.⁶⁵ Moreover it had, on its own, been considering the formation of an AIDS taskforce to address the growing impact of the epidemic. In February 1988, following the MAP safe sex cards incident, the Commission reached out to the United Way asking it to “study the community’s AIDS related efforts, coordination of the services, and any possible deficiencies.”⁶⁶ During the next twelve months a study committee was assembled under the leadership of Dr. David Citron, formerly the head of the Charlotte Area Health Education Center. Citron had organized the 1987 Charlotte AIDS conference and was almost legendary for his skills in diplomacy and collaborative

⁶⁴ Lisa Pullen, “Autrey: Pull AIDS Agency’s County Money Support Group Criticized Over Obnoxious Cards,” *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 19, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); “Expert: Fear Hurts AIDS Education,” *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 26, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015). Dr. Schwartz had looked to the United Way as a likely body for oversight of AIDS services as early as 1987: see Karen Garloch, “Fighting Darkest Fears Of AIDS, Doctor Enlightens,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 3, 1989, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015). Schwartz also suggested at a state-wide AIDS study committee that AIDS education could cost North Carolina as much as \$2 billion a year. See “Expert: Fear Hurts AIDS Education.”

⁶⁵ Note that Mecklenburg County and the United Way of Central Carolinas commissioned their first Community Needs Survey in 1984 with the goal of identifying household and individual needs in the community that were not being met. These included nursing care, counseling needs, and health and physical needs among other factors. A second survey was conducted in 1989. It is interesting to note that the 1989 report does not mention AIDS. A third report in 1993 indicates a marked change in the Charlotte population and more sophistication in carrying out the research. Sexually transmitted diseases and specifically HIV are acknowledged for the first time in the 1993 report, but still these represent very low incidents in comparison with other health problems across the population. This may reflect low reporting, but also the specificity of HIV with respect to risk groups at this time. K.P.C. Research, “1989 Community Needs Survey,” and “1993 Community Needs Survey,” Local Government Documents, J. Murrey Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, (ALLGD).

⁶⁶ Lisa Pullen, United Way to Scrutinize AIDS Efforts,” *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 16, 1988, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

leadership. Dr. Citron chose Dr. Delta to head up an advisory panel of consultants, indicating his intentions to involve all parties.⁶⁷

Despite the wider regional interests of the United Way for Central Carolinas, the study committee on AIDS was to focus on Mecklenburg County. For several months the committee of twenty, described as “broadly representative of the community,” met with a variety of stakeholders, including “leaders of the healthcare community, educators, ethicists, and the major providers of services to PIWHIVs.”⁶⁸ These groups included individuals as diverse as Rev. Joseph Chambers, Henry Finch, (executive director of the Randolph Clinic and a member of the board of MAP), Rev. Clifford Jones (pastor of Baptist Friendship Church), Rev. Lynne Guerra (minister of MCC Church of Charlotte), and Rev. Gary Gloster (assistant minister at Christ Episcopal Church in Myers Park who had served on the board of MAP).

Mecklenburg County’s first comprehensive study of AIDS, “A Report from The Study Committee on AIDS to the Human Services Planning Board of the United Way of Central Carolinas’ Inc.,” was released on March 8, 1989. It had been eight years since the first national case of AIDS was acknowledged, six years since the reporting of the first case in Mecklenburg County, and four years since MAP had emerged to offer services for people with AIDS. The report called for a compassionate response to AIDS, and committee members were aware that the report’s recommendations would be likely to be controversial. Noting that 68% of Mecklenburg AIDS patients were homosexual, the

⁶⁷ Lisa Pullen, “United Way’s Committee on AIDS Pledges Suggestions by Year’s End,” *Charlotte Observer*, June 15, 1988, (accessed Aug. 31, 2015). Dr. Delta developed health problems in September 1988 and retired from his position as Director of Health. This largely removed issues between MAP and the Mecklenburg Health Department.

⁶⁸ “National Community AIDS Partnership Local Partner Application,” box 2, folder 4, AIDS Prevention Advisory Committee (APAC) Records, ALSC.

report made a particular appeal for compassion towards homosexual people and also for other known high-risk groups, including intravenous drug users. The report also noted that African Americans now represented 40% of cases in the county and drew attention to an increasing number of women who were contracting AIDS. Recommendations called for a permanent AIDS Community Coalition to coordinate AIDS efforts and suggested that the county distribute free condoms and clean needles as well as introducing AIDS education in schools in kindergarten. The report also recommended expanded services for people with AIDS in respect to housing and drug abuse treatment and encouraged the state legislature to prohibit discrimination against people with AIDS in housing, employment, and insurance. Following the presentation of the study in March, the study committee requested \$75,000 from the County Commission to establish a coalition to oversee AIDS services in Mecklenburg County.⁶⁹

Apart from Rev. Chambers, who commented that “the report sounds like it was either written by a homosexual or written by a person who was a pawn in the hands of a homosexual,” the response to the study was overwhelmingly positive. The committee had been unanimous in supporting the plan, and subsequently the plan was endorsed by the United Way Executive Committee, Mecklenburg County Medical Society, and the Health Committee of the Mecklenburg County Human Services Council. Although the County Commission had not weighed in officially, the Chair, Carla DuPuy, hailed the study as a “map” for future decisions, and there was a general show of appreciation for the

⁶⁹ Karen Garloch, “AIDS Report Focuses on Attitude, Education,” *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 8, 1989, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); Karen Garloch, “Committee Seeks Money to Start AIDS Coalition,” *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 9, 1989, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

collaborative genius of Dr. Citron.⁷⁰ However, despite these accolades there was no guarantee that the report's recommendations would be accepted by the County Commission. Donna Arrington, who had played a key role as United Way administrator for the AIDS committee cautioned that "we cannot assume that the Human Services Council will approve the report in toto," and even after clearing that hurdle, she pointed out that the County Commission could reject parts of the plan.⁷¹

When the plan came to a vote in September 1989 five county commissioners voted against it, with only commissioner Bob Walton supporting it (Carla DuPuy was absent). The sticking point was the creation of an independent coalition financed with public and private money to coordinate AIDS efforts in the county. The commission took the position that the health department was adequately handling AIDS education and that there was no need for further public funding. Furthermore, commissioners felt that they should retain responsibility for the county's health policies. Commissioner Peter Keber objected to the "non-judgmental" approach presented by the AIDS study, stating that he was "totally opposed to giving out clean needles and becoming a condom dispenser for the homosexual community." To those concerned with the epidemic's spread, the only possible conclusion was that the County Commission was too compromised to be effective in providing prevention services and education.⁷²

⁷⁰ Karen Garloch, "AIDS Study Draws Rebuke by Chambers," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 10, 1989, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); Karen Garloch, "AIDS Infighting Doctor's Diplomacy Brought Down the Battle Lines In Mecklenburg," *Charlotte Observer*, Mar. 13, 1989, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015).

⁷¹ Don King, "United Way Proposals Must Cross Hurdles," *Q-Notes*, Apr. 1989.

⁷² Pam Kelley, "County Board Rejects Plan for Permanent AIDS Coalition," *Charlotte Observer*, Sept. 29, 1989, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015); Editorial, "Rejecting The AIDS Report Can Prevention Efforts Survive Moralistic Objections?" *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 15, 1989, (accessed Aug. 23, 2015). Following the Commission's 'no' vote on the United Way report, acting Public Health

Although the United Way had hoped for a partnership with the county, the organization had already made plans for an alternative way to create, and fund, an independent AIDS consortium. With timing that suggests a lack of trust in the County Commission's willingness to share in responsibility for public health policy, the United Way along with the Foundation for the Carolinas announced, less than a month after the County Commission turned down the AIDS plan, that they had received a federal grant of \$147,000 from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The grant provided funding to "develop a regional plan for the comprehensive care of people infected with the AIDS virus" in the seven-county metropolitan statistical area (MSA) surrounding Charlotte. However, in essence the main tenets of the United Way's original plan for Mecklenburg County remained as a basis for what became the Regional AIDS Consortium.⁷³

The involvement of the Foundation for the Carolinas in this effort is important in two respects. First, it introduced a measure of financial security since the Foundation had resources needed to provide seed money until grant applications were successful. More importantly, the Foundation's involvement indicated, if indirectly, the support of Charlotte's corporate interests and city leaders, an involvement that was motivated by

Director, Betty Snow managed to pull together an alternative plan to strengthen the precarious position of AIDS education in Mecklenburg County. The proposal passed unanimously, and Ms. Snow, a registered nurse who was praised as a "consensus builder" by Dr. Citron, was appointed as Mecklenburg County Health Director: "Memorandum to Board of Commissioners/County Board of Health, and attached plan for HIV Infection/AIDS Prevention," from Betty Snow, Nov. 2, 1989, box 1, folder 5, APAC Records; Editorial, "Recovering The AIDS Fumble Acting Health Director's Proposal Wins County Support," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 6, 1989, (accessed Aug. 30, 2015); Ted Mellnik, "Nurse to Run County Health Department," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 7, 1989, (accessed Aug. 30, 2015).

⁷³ "National Community AIDS Partnership Local Partner Application," box 2, folder 4, APAC Records; Karen Garloch, "2 Agencies Get Grant for AIDS Care Plan," *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 13, 1989, (accessed Aug. 30, 2015). The only difference between the United Way plan and the Consortium is that the grant did not cover general AIDS education or AIDS education in schools.

their desire to avoid further tarnishing Charlotte's image as a backwater city embroiled in conflict. In the spring of 1989, Foundation president, William Spencer, had received a telephone call from Paula Van Ness, director of the National Community AIDS Partnership (NCAP) which had become the nation's largest private funder of AIDS prevention, education, and care (the NCAP was also supported by the Ford Foundation). Van Ness was searching for partnerships with organizations such as the Foundation and the United Way, and she wanted to inform Spencer of a new federal HRSA planning grant that was available to establish an AIDS consortium and avoid further political distractions to AIDS service delivery. Spencer wasted no time in partnering with the United Way to apply for the grant, which had a deadline of June 5—three months *before* the County Commission voted down the United Way recommendations.

Whether or not the United Way and the Foundation knew how the County Commission would vote, they were anxious to secure a way forward to create an independent consortium. In this effort they had some support on the Commission, for the chair, Carla DuPuy also knew about the United Way's intention to seek federal funding to establish an AIDS consortium. She had been copied on a letter alerting Charlotte's mayor, Sue Myrick, of the county's eligibility for the HRSA grant in March 1989 that included a copy of the Foundation and United Way's application to become a local partner in the NCAP which followed their successful HRSA grant application.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Coleman, "Facing Up to AIDS in the Deep South: A New Partnership Overcomes Denial and Fear," RAIN records; "National Community AIDS Partnership Local Partner Application;" "Letter to Charlotte Mayor from Charles L. Hostetter, Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Maternal and Child Health Resources Development," Mar. 24, 1989, box 2, folder 4, APAC Records. Jennifer Brier describes the importance of the work of philanthropic organizations, and in particular the Ford Foundation, which tackled AIDS in the 'global south' by emphasizing the need to support women and children: see Brier, *Infectious Ideas*, pp. 122-155.

The NCAP contributed \$300,000 towards establishing the Metrolina AIDS Consortium, and also offered technical assistance and access to a wider network of other similar bodies within their funding orbit. At a time when Charlotte was mired in dissension, the consortium was able to depolarize the debate and focus on care. Free from the oversight of local government, and working within a new paradigm of funding opportunities, the Regional AIDS Consortium was able to move forward with planning a “regional effort to address HIV infection and the health and health related needs of persons affected,” that encompassed seven counties around Charlotte.⁷⁵ Building on the planning already accomplished in the United Way AIDS report, a team representing people with AIDS, health and local service providers, the insurance industry, minority groups, the business community, city and county governments, churches and other groups, was pulled together under the leadership of Dr. Citron. United Way’s senior planner, Donna Arrington, a lesbian, became the full-time director of the Consortium. Planning goals were to identify present and future needs for a continuum of care, to identify services that could be shared or regionalized, to develop an education plan that would increase public awareness, support and advocacy, and to develop a fund-raising plan. Four task forces were created to divide the work and report results.⁷⁶

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Gay / Straight Alliance: Limits and Tensions

The emergence of the Regional AIDS Consortium and the alliance between gay activists and straight allies coincided with a strong period of gay and lesbian activism in

⁷⁵ “Regional HIV Consortium” draft report, Jan. 10, 1990, box 1, folder 10, APAC Records.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*; “AIDS Consortium Will Outline Comprehensive Regional Plan,” *Concord Tribune*, Jan. 19, 1990, box 1, folder 10, APAC Records.

Charlotte and across the state. The January 1991 edition of *Q-Notes* trumpeted a host of accomplishments for 1990. Highlights included sustained engagement to support Harvey Gantt in his bid for the senate seat held by Jesse Helms, gay pride marches held in cities across the Carolinas, the creation of the Charlotte chapter of the NAMES Project and subsequent display of the AIDS Memorial Quilt at the Convention Center in downtown Charlotte, the meteoric rise of One Voice Chorus, strong participation in the documentation project to catalog crimes against people because of race, religion or sexual orientation, and political action and engagement with elected officials and bodies across the state. However, these straight alliances had limits and costs. It became clear that straight allies, motivated largely by sympathy for AIDS sufferers, were only willing to go so far in their advocacy of the gay liberation and civil rights agenda. To make matters worse, maintaining alliance with straight partners required compromises that caused tension between different activist groups. These limits and tensions suggest that Jennifer Brier's revisionist argument that there was no division between care and activism in the gay community's response to AIDS is perhaps problematic, since in Charlotte it is clear that these two facets of AIDS activism could be at odds. These tensions and limits can be seen in two episodes that took place in the early 1990s. One was the failure to get a city ordinance passed to protect gay and lesbian people against discrimination, and the other was the firing of MAP's second director, John Conley.

Efforts to pass a city ordinance to protect homosexual people from discrimination in public accommodations had a history in Charlotte's gay and lesbian community. As early as 1983, lesbian activist Billie Stickell had worked towards this goal with the Lambda Political Caucus, securing mayoral candidate Harvey Gantt's promise to support

antidiscrimination legislation and “appoint...one or two people nominated by us to the Community Relations Council [sic].” As noted earlier, the Community Relations Committee (CRC) was a body that had played a historic role in the black civil rights struggles. After Gantt’s successful run Stickell asked *Q-Notes* readers to send her names of one man and one woman to represent the community on the CRC.⁷⁷ Gantt did not fulfill his promise, but in 1984, Gilbert Dale Cornelius presented a request to the CRC’s Human Resources Subcommittee chair, Dr. Sherman Burson, “regarding the protection of the rights of homosexuals.”⁷⁸ Cornelius’ asked for at least two representatives from the homosexual community to become members of the committee and urged the committee to investigate abuse and discrimination against homosexuals. The response from the CRC was to suggest that further study of the issue was needed, and there was clearly little hope of anything substantive emerging from the episode. However, the seeds had been sown for future consideration.⁷⁹

In subsequent years, Charlotte’s gay and lesbian activists continued to return to the goal of working towards representation on the CRC and inclusion of sexual orientation in the city’s antidiscrimination ordinance. In 1986 town halls held in the wake of Rev. Chambers’ decision to bring homophobe Paul Cameron to Charlotte as a guest speaker for Concerned Charlotteans included pleas to “start working seriously on an antidiscrimination ordinance in Charlotte.” Anger was expressed that Mayor Gantt had not followed through on his promise to appoint representatives from the gay and lesbian

⁷⁷ Billie Stickell, “1984: Greater Year For LPC?” *Q-Notes*, Dec. 1983. “8 City Council Candidates Draw 50 to Lambda Caucus’s Forum,” *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1983.

⁷⁸ “Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations Committee Agenda,” Aug. 29, 1984, box 3 folder ‘Community: Community Relations Committee,’ King papers, ALSC.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

community to the CRC.⁸⁰ When First Tuesday came into existence in February 1988, a major focus became the documentation of harassment, discrimination, or violence against gays and lesbians in the city in order to prove that an antidiscrimination ordinance was necessary. The initiative had a statewide scope. Once again town halls were held in Charlotte's gay bars and other meeting spaces to gather this information, and chairman Sandra Bailey announced that First Tuesday would "go before Charlotte's city council and Mecklenburg County's board of commissioners to begin a process expected to take years, to raise gay men and lesbians to full citizenship."⁸¹ To this end First Tuesday sent questionnaires to candidates running for city and county office in 1989-1990. Almost all questions addressed candidates' positions on the inclusion of sexual orientation as a protected category in the city's antidiscrimination ordinances as well as candidates' positions on discrimination against people with AIDS, gay and lesbian legal rights to adoption, spousal healthcare benefits, legal recognition of same sex couples, and hospital visitation rights.⁸² Foreshadowing events that would unfold three years later, there was a mixed response from candidates, but a show of positive support was evident—with the exception of Hoyle Martin, who saw the matter as a moral and religious issue that government should not meddle in. Bailey was optimistic, however, about the coming election:

This can be the most important election ever for Charlotte's Gay/Lesbian community. This can be the turning point in our quest for equal rights. This can be the beginning of the end of discrimination based on sexual orientation.... In speaking with many of the candidates, they just have not been aware that these situations exist and were appalled. They expressed the desire to make changes.⁸³

⁸⁰ "Town Hall Meeting Called to Fight Charlotte Battle," *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1986.

⁸¹ Don King, "Eradicating Second Class Status," *Q-Notes*, Apr. 1989.

⁸² Sandra Bailey, "First Tuesday Questions the Candidates," *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1989.

⁸³ Sandra Bailey, "Gay Rights Ordinance In Charlotte?" *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1989.

Invoking the ACT UP slogan, “SILENCE=DEATH” Bailey urged readers to “join together as a community for the good of the community” and vote.⁸⁴

The next two years saw a concerted effort to build a case that gays and lesbians needed special protections in Charlotte Mecklenburg. In January 1990 *Q-Notes* bemoaned that Charlotte was the only major North Carolina city without some proclamation or policy denouncing discrimination based on sexual orientation: Raleigh, Chapel Hill, Durham, and Greensboro had all spoken out against discrimination. Yet, there was a hope that the city council had sufficient sympathetic interest to pass an ordinance in Charlotte, an action that would put the city in the vanguard.⁸⁵ The hope was bolstered by the appointment of openly gay Charlotte activist, John Quillin, to the CRC Discrimination Subcommittee, and his reappointment in September 1991. Quillin, a fundraiser with the United Way of Central Carolinas, and a member of various local and state gay and lesbian groups, including political activist groups and One Voice Chorus, chaired a task force in late 1991 and early 1992 to review the existing antidiscrimination ordinance and spearhead an attempt to modify it. In December 1991 and February 1992 the Discrimination Subcommittee heard claims by gay men of entrapment and false arrest in cases of solicitation to commit crimes against nature that were presented by activist

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Although ACT UP did not gain a purchase in Charlotte, it is interesting to note that Charlotte native Oliver Johnston, a designer responsible for the commemorative program for Leonard Bernstein’s 45th Anniversary Concert in Carnegie Hall in 1989, was one of six gay men in New York who started the “Silence=Death” project and co-designed the logo that became the famous symbol of ACT UP. Johnston was also a founding member of ACT UP. He died of complications from AIDS in Sloan-Kettering Hospital in New York City in November 1990: “Charlotte Native Co-Creator of ‘Silence = Death’ campaign, dies,” *Front Page*, Jan. 8-21, 1991.

⁸⁵ “Discrimination Documented by Gay and Lesbian Switchboard,” *Q-Notes*, Jan. 1990.

Don King and attorneys Anita Hodgkiss and Lila Bellar.⁸⁶ On July 14, the Discrimination Subcommittee of the CRC adopted a resolution that “sexual orientation, familial status, age and disability status be added to the existing list of factors (national origin, race and gender) under which a person could not be discriminated against according to the city’s Human Relations Ordinance.”⁸⁷ The motion was then adopted by the CRC on September 15 and passed along to the Charlotte City Council for review in mid-October. At the time Quillin was amazed at how easy it had been to get the resolution approved and the support he had within the CRC. However, he was also aware that even if the council passed the resolution there might be a lot of push back from members of the public: “I don’t want [groups of people who are misinformed about gays and lesbians] to come along and object to the law and then have the Council say, “oops, we dint’ really mean to do that!”⁸⁸ Between summer and fall, Quillin and others in the subcommittee consulted closely with gay and lesbian-friendly Council members and Assistant City Attorney, Anthony Fox. If the resolution passed it would become the first public law in North Carolina to prevent discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, since other local protections were limited to policy and not law.⁸⁹

However, as it turned out, no one was prepared for the disheartening circus that ensued when the City Council first discussed the CRC’s recommendation on November 9, 1992. Council member Hoyle Martin had a visceral reaction to the CRC’s suggestion. While others among the Council remained silent, Martin blurted out his honest response,

⁸⁶ “CRC’s Discrimination Group Will Hear False Arrest Claims,” *Q-Notes*, Jan. 1992.

⁸⁷ Gordon Rankin, “Antigay Discrimination Resolution Passed by CRC Subcommittee,” *Q-Notes*, Aug. 1992

⁸⁸ Gordon Rankin, “CRC Endorses Anti-Gay Discrimination Resolution,” *Q-Notes*, Oct. 1992.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*; “Antigay Discrimination Resolution Passed by CRC Subcommittee.” John Quillin oral history interview 2, Mar. 28, 2017, ALSC.

Why didn't you include prostitutes? I'm appalled (this) would be a part of the proposal.... To think we in government would do anything to sanction homosexuality.... It's morally wrong. That's grossly wrong. I can't in any way sanction something in government that's morally wrong.⁹⁰

Martin's position became entrenched in the next two weeks as the press had a field day over the debacle and opinions were aired in the broader Charlotte community. For Martin there was no comparison between the black civil rights struggle and the gay and lesbian civil rights struggle, "I was born this color.... I have no control of that... Folks who are homosexual make a conscious choice to be that way."⁹¹ His remarks were echoed by others, as outrage on both sides spilled out and Charlotte "vaulted into the national debate over extending civil rights to gays and lesbians."⁹² Mayor Richard Vinroot reported that his office had received thirty calls, all but one of which urged the city to reject a gay rights ordinance. On the other side *Charlotte Observer* editorials drew attention to the inaccuracies and inconsistencies in Martin's statements and made a considered case for separating citizen rights from individuals' moral perspectives and opinions. A similar position was taken in a statement by Kelly Alexander, the president of the local NAACP chapter: "I think the moral high ground is on the side of people who wish to eliminate discrimination," but he qualified the NAACP's position by explicitly stating that they were not endorsing any particular "lifestyle."⁹³ Dr. Robert Barret, UNC Charlotte

⁹⁰ Jean Marie Brown, "Official Blasts Request Panel Wants Law to Protect Gays," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 10, 1992, (accessed Aug. 31, 2015).

⁹¹ Kathleen McClain, "Council Member's Comments Put City in Middle of Gay Rights Debate," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 11, 1992, (accessed Aug. 31, 2015).

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Elizabeth Leyland, "NAACP Chapter Backs Ordinance on Gay Rights," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 22, 1992, (accessed Aug. 31, 2015).

professor and psychologist who had come out as a gay man four years earlier, led a group called Citizens For Human Rights to protest Martin's position.⁹⁴

There was little hope, however, that the modifications to Charlotte's antidiscrimination ordinance would pass.⁹⁵ On November 23 the Council chamber was packed and 100 people stood outside in the lobby. Rev. Clifford Jones, pastor of Friendship Baptist Church spoke first for the CRC, finishing his description of the resolution by stressing that "this discussion is about discrimination. I want to make that clear, so let me say it again—discrimination." Mayor Vinroot had limited public comments to twenty minutes for each side (instead of three minutes per person) for and against the motion, starting with those who were in favor. Activist Diana Travis spoke first, boldly stating her status as a lesbian and illustrating her Charlotte credentials as *Observer* columnist Gus Travis' daughter, a board member of the United Way, a clarinetist with the Charlotte Symphony, and a local business owner. She also highlighted four others who had prominent positions in Charlotte, and whose fear had prevented them from speaking out publicly on the issue. Others followed, including UNC Charlotte professor Dr. Stan Patton, IBM manager David Ferebee, a representative of Charlotte P-FLAG, and Myers Park Baptist Church minister Gene Owens, who noted that as a new member of the CRC he was struck by the unity with which the committee had adopted the recommendation to amend the non-discrimination ordinance. Most notable was the speech of former mayor Harvey Gantt. Gantt's passionate speech stressed the gravitas of

⁹⁴ Jean Marie Brown, "Local Rights Group Gathers to Support Anti-Bias Ordinance," *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 20, 1992, (accessed Aug. 31, 2015).

⁹⁵ Note that Hoyle Martin had received 193 letters and 271 phone calls opposing the change to the ordinance and only 51 letters and 67 phone calls supporting it: Charlotte City Council Minutes, January –December 1992, ALLGD.

the decision to choose discrimination. He hoped that the council's decision would be "just one more step on the road to Charlotte's being a beacon city for human understanding," and he stated that the council's decision would send a signal about what Charlotte is about as a community.⁹⁶

In opposition, various area ministers, including Dr. Charles Page of First Baptist Church, Rev. James H. Logan, pastor of South Tryon Presbyterian Church, Paul Jarrett, minister of the Archdale Church of Christ, and Allen Blume, staff pastor of Hickory Grove Baptist Church, spoke out against the motion on moral and Biblical grounds, claiming that the CRC had already made a moral judgment to bring the extended protections for homosexuals to the City Council for endorsement. However, *Q-Notes* particularly drew attention to Linda Overfield's speech on behalf of Concerned Women of America. Overfield opened her remarks by stating that the council "would be voting on whether to give homosexuals and bisexuals privileges and protective rights status based on their behavior, namely oral and anal sex."⁹⁷ She then quoted from unidentified studies to state that 51% of gays and lesbians had sex in public, and that although they were only 2% of the population, gays and lesbians were responsible for 80% of all child molestations.⁹⁸

Although there was significant contention among council members, the ordinance was defeated by a 7-4 vote. Council member Lynn Wheeler did not believe in extending government controls and doubted that there really were any inequities to address, Pat McCrory thought the ordinance was wasting council's time when there were more

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ David Stout, "Council Votes to Discriminate," *Q-Notes*, Dec. 1992.

important matters to prioritize, and that the CRC was not sufficiently diverse as a committee, and Tom Mangum and Nasif Majeed felt that an ordinance was not needed since gays and lesbians were already protected as individuals. Supporting the ordinance, Ella Scarborough, Cyndee Patterson, Ann Hammond, and Don Clodfelter saw the issue as a matter of protecting vulnerable groups from discrimination and stressed the imperative of accepting people who are different. Ironically echoing his predecessor Harvey Gantt, Mayor Vinroot said that the ordinance would have been symbolic. In the opposite spirit to Gantt, however, Vinroot added that “Council made the right decision.”⁹⁹ John Quillin saw things differently: “What bothers me is this duality; either we are the fifth largest region or we are Hooterville. When it’s convenient we are large and progressive.”¹⁰⁰ In essence, what Quillin, and others in the gay community, recognized was that there were limits to how far straight allies were willing to support the gay agenda.¹⁰¹

The limitations imposed by straight alliances are also evident in the conflict over the firing of MAP’s second director, John Conley. In 1990, when the future of MAP seemed secure within the overarching structure of support provided by the Foundation for Central Carolinas and the United Way, it may have appeared that the organization had finally made it as a permanent and respected player in Charlotte’s administrative structure. From the earliest planning stages of the Regional AIDS Consortium MAP was

⁹⁹ Charlotte City Council Minutes; Jean Marie Brown, “Anti-Bias Proposal Up for Vote Sexual Orientation Section Expected to Be Defeated,” *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 23, 1992, (accessed Aug. 31, 2015); Jean Marie Brown, “Anti-Bias Amendment Rejected Mayor: Measure Just a Symbol,” *Charlotte Observer*, Nov. 24, 1992, (accessed Aug. 31, 2015).

¹⁰⁰ Brown, “Anti-Bias Proposal Up For Vote Sexual Orientation Section Expected To Be Defeated.”

¹⁰¹ Note the following informative documentary about the 1992 Charlotte non-discrimination ordinance proposal and outcome, Wesley Johnson, “Charlotte Sub-Culture: Gay Life in the Queen City,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1O7CyQNxcE> (accessed Aug. 2, 2017.)

seen as having provided impressive leadership in the region, and Lesley Kooyman took a significant role on the steering committee. MAP conducted the client portion of a needs survey for the Consortium to maintain the privacy of responders. Despite Kooyman's announcement that he was leaving the role of MAP's director in early 1990 to pursue a masters' degree at UNC Charlotte, he continued his position with the Consortium.¹⁰² When he stepped down from MAP in June, Kooyman was leaving an organization that he had done more than anyone else to shape. There had been tensions between the organization and the gay community, but by and large they had been resolved amicably and the community had fiercely stood up for MAP when the organization was under attack. Kooyman had worked harmoniously with the board of directors, who he had been involved in appointing. He had been a quiet activist within Charlotte, if a more ardent one at the state and national level, maintaining a level of decorum that fit Charlotte's corporate image. In discussing state ASO collaborations, Kooyman noted that the Charlotte contingent would always be turned out in business suits and armed with balance sheets and prospectuses.¹⁰³ When feisty ACT UP groups started to emerge to challenge governmental complacency with respect to AIDS in more cosmopolitan areas, including Atlanta, Georgia, the Triangle area, and even Columbia, South Carolina, Kooyman made a point of suggesting militant activists would not be successful in Charlotte, and that "sometimes their tactics are at odds with what's going on in the local community. Understanding the local political climate is critical."¹⁰⁴ His social position in

¹⁰² "Steering Committee Minutes," Regional HIV Consortium, Feb. 9, 1990, box 1, folder 10, APAC Records.

¹⁰³ Leslie Kooyman Interview.

¹⁰⁴ Melissa Wall, "ACT UP Brings Confrontational AIDS Tactics South," *Charlotte Observer*, Apr. 30, 1989, (accessed Aug. 31, 2015).

the higher echelons of Charlotte society had cushioned him to some extent from prejudice but also made him more acutely aware of the high stakes of being out and an activist among the well-heeled.

The extent to which the balance between gay and straight perspectives was managed by Kooyman and his style of leadership became apparent when his successor, John Conley, took over as director at MAP in the summer of 1990, only to be terminated a year later. To maintain the gay/straight alliance that enabled MAP to be successful, it was necessary to compromise. It was not possible for the director of MAP to endorse an activist gay agenda, especially given the recent history of struggle with forces of the Religious Right.

John Conley, described as a “veteran of the liberation days in San Francisco,” came to MAP in the summer of 1990 from Roanoke Virginia, where he had been director of the AIDS Council of Western Virginia and the Roanoke AIDS Project.¹⁰⁵ In the August 1990 MAP newsletter, President of the Board, Sister Mary Thomas Burke, welcomed Conley and described his suitability for the job in terms of his business experience, his public health background, his educational achievements, and his personable style. Several months into Conley’s tenure, *Q-Notes* painted a somewhat different kind of picture, which may help to explain why Conley was ultimately a poor match for the board of MAP and Charlotte sensibilities. According to *Q-Notes* Conley was “an active supporter of gay rights,” who had been arrested the previous year at a sit-in at the White House and detained in a cell with Cleve Jones, founder of the NAMES Project. The article stressed his pride as a gay man and his commitment to gay men in the

¹⁰⁵ Michael Meredith, “MAP’s New Director Settles In,” *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1990.

fight for AIDS services, where attention had increasingly been turning to other demographics affected by the disease. Conley was also perhaps a little too willing to share personal information with the interviewer when he announced that he had “met someone very special to me.... Love was an unexpected bonus of my move to Charlotte.”¹⁰⁶

Since no formal statements by board members survive there can only be speculation about exactly why Conley’s position as director of MAP was terminated on July 8, 1991 after barely a year on the job. The incident certainly came as a surprise to other MAP employees, MAP volunteers, *Q-Notes* editors and staff, members of First Tuesday, and even some on the MAP board. The firing was also not premeditated, since the board clearly had no plan for succession and had not thought through the implications for MAP’s employees or clients once Conley was gone. The first inkling that there was a problem was a week before the firing, when a MAP volunteer sent a letter to *Q-Notes* announcing that the MAP board was homophobic and AIDS-phobic. The letter claimed that board chairman, Sister Mary Thomas Burke, had censored the word “gay” or any discussions of gays or lesbians from the MAP newsletter. She was also reported to have prohibited discussion of condoms and the use of identifiable envelopes for thank you letters. None of these steps were recorded in board meeting minutes, so there is no way of corroborating the accusations. The volunteer called for Sister Mary Thomas Burke and two other members of the board to resign immediately.

To understand the situation, it is important to grasp the particular context for MAP at this time. Sister Mary Thomas Burke had become the board chair of MAP at a

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*; “MAP Newsletter,” Aug. 1990, box 1, unprocessed materials, Pride Publishing and Typesetting, Inc., publications.

time when her impeccable reputation as a community leader and collaborator were sorely needed to counteract the damage sustained by Rev. Joseph Chambers' attacks on the organization and the gay community. The MAP board, which represented a mixture of gay and straight people, was also in a delicate position, both within the broader Charlotte community that shrank from anything sexually explicit, and in relation to the wealthy and closeted gays and lesbians who were willing to support MAP discreetly. Sister Mary Thomas Burke and members of the board understood this in a way that MAP's staff and volunteers, who were working on the front lines with disease and death, could not. In fact, in the context of the state and national movement, which was becoming increasingly militant, there was a groundswell to endorse gay and lesbian sexuality and identity and an emphasis on being 'out,' being vocal, and being proud and aggressive. During this time the concept of 'outing' was also debated as a political tactic in the face of what was seen as hypocrisy by some gays and lesbians in positions of power who were obstructing the gay rights agenda. Given Charlotte's history of deeply closeted gay elites, open demonstrations of gay culture and especially the idea of 'outing' were highly sensitive issues. It was not, therefore surprising that the board was concerned about privacy and public image.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ An example of this tension at the state level is the resignation of activist Mike Nelson from the position as the first executive director on North Carolina Pride PAC for Lesbian and Gay Equality in June 1993. Nelson was forced to resign after he threatened to publicize information about a closeted gay member of the state legislature who had helped to defeat a sodomy bill which would have removed sodomy as a crime in North Carolina earlier in 1993. Nelson, who was successful in becoming the first openly gay mayor of Carrboro in 1995, felt that covering up the identity of the closeted legislator was to "perpetuate the tyranny of the closet...that...undermines our movement:" "Faxed letter to David Stout from Michael Nelson, NC Pride PAC," box 1, folder 'N.C. Pride PAC,' Tom Warshauer Papers, ALSC.

Sister Mary Thomas Burke answered the challenge that she and others on the board were homophobic by denying that she had ordered Conley to stop using the word gay and explaining that she had requested that the MAP newsletter be used for “responsible and informative” articles. The article she had objected to had been an amusing and lighthearted report of a volunteer’s experience as part of the “bar brigade,” where he called himself “condom man.” Although innocent, the article did not strike the right tone for Sister Mary Thomas Burke, who was considering the donor population that would receive the newsletter in addition to the earlier debacle over education materials. Explaining the plain envelopes, Sister Mary Thomas Burke reminded the community of an adopted board policy to use these instead of identifiable envelopes in order to protect the anonymity of clients and donors who had requested it.¹⁰⁸

There was clearly an issue between the board and Conley, however. Within a week of the letter being published Conley was fired, suggesting that the volunteer’s letter was just the last straw in a building crisis. The firing created a furor at MAP and within the gay and lesbian community. Anger surged in response to this apparently unprovoked attack by the board on someone who had been seen as a successful and charismatic leader. During the short time he had been with MAP Conley had built a strong minority support group, written a successful application to bring MAP under the direct auspices of the United Way, balanced the budget, and designed two new client programs which were about to be launched. Poor communications with the board had left MAP staff with little sympathy for the board’s point of view. Sister Mary Thomas Burke and those on the

¹⁰⁸ “Letters To The Editor: MAP Volunteer Calls For Board President To Resign; Response from Sister Mary Thomas Burke; Response from Ward Simmons; Response from Norman Brame,” *Q-Notes*, July, 1991.

board who supported her became pariahs and were accused of both homophobia and racism; the latter because of a claim that she had suppressed an article in the MAP newsletter that drew parallels between gay rights and the civil rights movement. Staff members were initially conflicted about whether to vote with their feet and leave, or stay to maintain services to clients. Although they decided to stay, many did in fact leave once a new director was appointed.¹⁰⁹

There may also have been a deep suspicion of Sister Mary Thomas Burke's motives as a Catholic nun getting involved with AIDS service work given the apparent contradiction with Catholic doctrine. As a Sister of Mercy, however, her role was very comprehensible as an act of compassionate service, and her counterparts who founded and ran the AIDS facility, the House of Mercy in Belmont North Carolina, experienced no apparent conflict arising from their religious credentials. In addition, the MAP board was steadfast in its support of Sister Mary Thomas Burke, and one member, Dr. David Moore, who had recently buried his partner of eighteen years, and who was suffering from AIDS himself, sent an open and emotional letter to *Q-Notes* and *Front Page* resigning his position on the board and making a point of thanking Sister Mary Thomas Burke:

She has withstood some of the most unfair and mean spirited treatment by the very community to which she is being a great steward.... She is an advocate for our community, strongly supports the use of condoms for the prevention of the spread of the virus and even supports the concept of clean works for prevention within the IV drug community.... All of these positions take great personal

¹⁰⁹ Francoise Pierre Nel, "MAP Director Forced Out: Critics Charge Board is Homophobic, Racist," *Q-Notes*, Aug. 1991. Volunteer coordinator Courtney White, who started her job after the Conley conflict described the scene facing her on her first day when staff and volunteers were protesting outside the MAP office. She had to completely build her volunteer organization from scratch: Courtney White oral history interview, June 29, 2017, ALSC.

courage from her. She genuinely cares about those of us living and dying with this curse. Her leadership as much as anyone's has been instrumental in MAP's growth.¹¹⁰

The controversial nature of AIDS education played a significant role in the emerging conflict. In her position as board chair, Sister Mary Thomas Burke had become a gatekeeper for educational materials and had also been appointed to the citizen review board mandated by CDC regulations to oversee the suitability of these publications. In perhaps an over-reaction following Rev. Chambers' challenges, or because of her own sensibilities, Sister Mary Thomas Burke had rejected as too explicit AIDS educational risk reduction material for gay men that many in the gay community deemed perfectly appropriate. Fellow review panel member and chair, Richard H. Epsom-Nelms, had unsuccessfully challenged her on this matter in a letter expressing his frustration in working with the panel. Epsom-Nelms, who was also a journalist for *Q-Notes* and a *Charlotte Observer* electronics technician, was one of the few African American gay activists whose identity is apparent in the record. When he wrote to Sister Mary Thomas Burke he was about to move to Greensboro, where he founded and directed the Eastern Triad HIV Consortium. His considered letter suggested that the review panel had unwittingly voted along sexual orientation lines, being unaware of the needs of the constituents for whom the materials were so crucial. Epsom-Nelms died just a few years later at the age of forty-two.¹¹¹ The controversy around educational materials was one

¹¹⁰ David H. Moore, "An Open Letter to The Charlotte Gay Community," *Front Page*, Sept. 10, 1991. The letter was also published in *Q-Notes*.

¹¹¹ Letter from Richard H. Epsom-Nelms to Sister Mary Thomas Burke, box 1, unprocessed materials, Pride Publishing and Typesetting, Inc., publications. For more information about Richard Epsom Nelms see, Valca Valentine, "Black Men Straight Talk," *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 18, 1990, (accessed Aug. 4, 2017); "Mecklenburg County Deaths," *Charlotte Observer*, May 11, 1993, (accessed Aug. 4, 2017). Richard's partner was Craig Epsom-Nelms, who also wrote for *Q-*

that was felt around the country. In fact, a court decision in 1992 found that restrictions placed on AIDS educational materials by the US Congress were unconstitutional, and the judge specifically cited Charlotte decisions as being subjective and imprecise.¹¹²

The evidence suggests that the MAP board's quarrel with Conley stemmed mainly from his public image as a gay man. At the AIDS Memorial Quilt display in downtown Charlotte, he had publically identified as a gay man and had made his presentation wearing a T-shirt with the ACT UP logo. As it was summed up in many press reports, the board seemed to have been concerned that Conley was "too gay" and not willing to compromise his position. In a letter that Conley wrote as director of MAP to the Regional HIV Consortium, he raised a set of concerns about the Consortium's unwillingness to frankly address the gay community's needs in the AIDS prevention program. He pointed out that gay men were still a high-risk group, and needed appropriate prevention materials. "I believe it is impossible to produce *effective* [emphasis in original] HIV educational materials for homosexual men which show 'care and respect for the prevailing norms of our society,'" and he concluded by saying that it might be worth offending some people to save lives. Conley also criticized the Consortium's preference for using the term, 'men who have sex with men.' This term had emerged in AIDS public health discussions in the early 1990s as way of reaching individuals, particularly men of color, who may not have identified as 'gay' but were at

Notes. Craig Epton-Nelms, a hemophiliac, died in 1995 from AIDS/hemophilia. A native of Charleston, he was a "nationally known AIDS educator and the Director of the North Carolina AIDS Training network. He was thirty years old: "Obituaries," *News and Record*, Dec. 28, 1995, http://www.greensboro.com/obituaries/article_0a1503d0-4143-55d7-8371-749f3d64c2e6.html , (accessed Aug. 4, 2017).

¹¹² David Prybylo, "Judge Finds CDC Grant Terms Unconstitutional," *Q-Notes*, July 1992; Nel, "MAP Director Forced Out."

risk of contracting the disease through sexual contact. Conley's concern was that "many homosexual men do identify themselves as gay and have pride in this identity. To label them 'men who have sex with men' reduces them to what they do sexually."¹¹³ This letter, read in the context of the extensive discussion of Conley's firing in *Q-Notes* makes it clear that both gay and straight members of the MAP board were reluctant to push an activist agenda because of the implications for continued funding and public support.

The circumstances of Conley's firing angered many in the gay community. On the one hand a group calling itself SAVE MAP was started by MAP volunteers, in particular the group that had coalesced around minority AIDS support. They called for Sister Mary Thomas Burke's resignation and "a reorganization of the policy-making body of MAP to reflect the interest of and accountability to the community it serves."¹¹⁴ Over thirty SAVE MAP members attended the board meeting in July, followed by thirty-five more in September. At the root of the concerns expressed in these meetings was the feeling that the gay community had been sold out. The tragic impact of AIDS made it a defining feature of gay identity and, ironically, an important part of the reason why the community had made such strides in Charlotte. For these individuals, Sister Mary Thomas Burke's comment that MAP was "not a gay organization. We have gay clients.... It's for everyone," was unacceptable (even though it was true). On the other hand, there were members of the community who recognized that the pragmatic leadership of figures like Sister Mary Thomas Burke was critical for maintaining a strong relationship with

¹¹³ "Letter from John Conley to Judy Coble," Sept. 19, 1990, box 1, folder 9, APAC Records.

¹¹⁴ Dan Kirsch, "MAP Controversy Continues: Board Agrees to Meet with Gay Leaders," *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1991.

Charlotte's philanthropic entities and shielding MAP from attacks from the Religious Right.¹¹⁵ With compromise came conflict.

The fallout from the Conley firing was mixed. Some cautiously worked towards reconciliation, recognizing that conflict within the community was ultimately unproductive and that heterosexual supporters were essential for the success of an AIDS service organization in Charlotte. In an August 1991 meeting at the United Way building in uptown Charlotte, members of the MAP board met with their counterparts from First Tuesday and leaders in the gay community, under the mediation of Unitarian Church minister Doug Reisner. Given that First Tuesday had first been organized as a complementary spin-off to support MAP in the struggle against Rev. Chambers' attacks, the very circumstances of this meeting indicate how things had changed. In a highly choreographed set of exchanges, representatives from each group read from statements that had been pre-approved by their respective boards. The gay and lesbian community representatives' statement was firm, charging "the Board of MAP to fulfill its mission statement without censorship of gay and lesbian issues and to be responsive to the concerns of the gay/lesbian community," but they also left room for discussion.¹¹⁶ For its part the MAP board adopted formal resolutions recognizing the critical contributions that "volunteers from the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community in the Charlotte area have, since inception, been a critical part of the agency's ability to provide services to persons affected by HIV" and emphasized the community's importance for future efforts.¹¹⁷ They

¹¹⁵ Dan Kirsch, "Conley Speaks About Forced Resignation," *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1991.

¹¹⁶ "First Tuesday Reps Meet with MAP Board," *First Tuesday News*, Oct. 1991, box 2, folder 21, Henry Papers.

¹¹⁷ Dan Kirsch, "MAP Controversy Continues," *Q-Notes*, Sept. 1991; Dan Kirsch, "MAP Board Begins Talks with Gay and Lesbian Community," *Q-Notes*, Oct. 1991.

also agreed to more frequent and effective discussions, that the MAP newsletter is an appropriate place to publish gay positive matter related to services of the agency, and that the appropriate way to evaluate individuals is on their actions. However, there was still clearly discontent between some activists and the board.

For members of SAVE MAP, however, the rift was too big to heal. The MAP board's efforts at their August meeting was undone by the publication of an extensive interview with Conley in the November issue of *Q-Notes*. In the interview Conley made it clear that he felt that his visible gay identity was the reason he was let go, and he identified some gay male members of the MAP board as being particularly hostile. He was also very critical that the MAP board would only approve very circumspect language in its educational materials: "That's just wrong... The decision will end up causing people to die."¹¹⁸

Shortly after the interview was published an initiative got underway to start an alternative AIDS service organization called AIDS Coalition of Charlotte for Education, Service and Support (ACCESS). ACCESS opened its doors in January 1992 as a not-for-profit corporation with membership who would elect the board of directors. They planned to offer many of the same services as MAP, but they also sought to "empower clients with an active voice in their own care." The ACCESS model was in line with gay liberation thinking and opposed to accommodation.¹¹⁹ While ACCESS was well intentioned, it was short-lived, for it folded within about a year. However distasteful to those who would have pushed a more strident agenda, it was clear that in a city like

¹¹⁸ Dan Kirsch, "Conley speaks about forced resignation," *Q-Notes*, Nov. 1991.

¹¹⁹ Frank Dalrymple, "Charlotte Gains ACCESS," *Q-Notes*, Dec. 1991; Dan Van Mourik, "New AIDS Group Opens Doors," *Q-Notes*, Jan. 1992.

Charlotte the straight alliances that MAP had forged were critical. Gay activism needed straight allies.

CONCLUSION

On Monday 22 February 2016, Charlotte's city council passed an ordinance providing new legal protections for gay, lesbian and transgender people in a 7-4 vote. The historic decision came twenty-four years after the same city council failed to pass a non-discrimination ordinance in 1992. The government chamber was again packed, and the city council was regaled for three hours with similar impassioned speeches both for and against the proposed regulations. Activists in the LGBT community had been working with allies on the council for two years to achieve this goal. Victory was short lived. In horror (and retribution), the North Carolina General Assembly called a special legislative session on March 23, and in less than twenty-four hours governor Pat McCrory (who voted against the 1992 ordinance) signed House Bill 2 into law and probably lost himself the 2016 gubernatorial election. HB2, the so called 'Bathroom Bill,' invalidated Charlotte's new protections for LGBT individuals by making it impossible for any local ordinances around the state to expand protections for the LGBT community, and it went further, requiring individuals to use the bathroom of the sex shown on their birth certificate. Almost overnight, HB2, catapulted North Carolina to top of the charts for political buffoonery. Over the next months, major corporations, headline entertainers, conventions, and major sporting events withdrew from the state to register disapproval, even the European Union got into the act.

The parallels between HB2 and Charlotte's failed 1992 gay and lesbian ordinance are clear. In both cases, gay activists had recently achieved significant successes in their efforts to earn a seat at the table. In 1990 MAP had achieved stature as a leading

Charlotte NGO with the formation of the Regional AIDS Consortium, and in 2015 the US Supreme court had paved the way for gay marriage nationwide (a milestone that activists in 1992 could hardly even have imagined). Both episodes represent efforts by gay activists, working with straight allies, to build on this success in order to get formal recognition of, and protection for, gay men and lesbians (and in 2016 bisexual and transgender individuals) recognized in the local ordinances. However, in both cases, the effort to extend protections, seemingly on course, ran into implacable opposition from conservatives and the Religious Right. I will leave it to the reader to decide whether this is a case of history repeating itself “first as tragedy, then as farce.”

This thesis offers a history of gay and lesbian activism in Charlotte, North Carolina, in the two decades leading up to the 1992 ordinance, with a particular focus on the impact of AIDS. It has shown that gay and lesbian activism in Charlotte operated in a very different kind of cultural, social, and political space. The timing and character of efforts by gay men and lesbians to earn acceptance in this New South city differs from the classic narratives of gay activism in three important respects. First, gay and lesbian activism in Charlotte developed later and in a more pragmatic fashion in response to the dramatic transformations that AIDS wrought. Where other urban areas saw the building of a gay liberation movement starting in the early 1970s and consolidating throughout the decade, Charlotte’s gay activism was sporadic, disjointed, and un-focused until the mid 1980s. It was only in response to the tragic imperatives created by the AIDS epidemic that local gay and lesbian activists were able to sustain a political and social agenda for change that was visible, outwardly engaged, and proud.

Second, the history of gay and lesbian activism in Charlotte was shaped by the weight of Christian moral condemnation the sin of homosexual sex, which was sanctioned in statute by North Carolina's crime against nature law. Although religion is important in the story of gay liberation nationally, particularly during the AIDS epidemic, there is a reason Charlotte has been called the 'buckle of the Bible Belt.' Religion, and particularly evangelistic Christianity, was important as an inescapable cultural and political reality against which gay activists in Charlotte had to struggle. More so than other places that have been studied by historians, politically active Christian conservatives posed an imminent, vocal, and powerful barrier to the changes activists sought. However, ironically the vitriol of the Religious Right helped to galvanize activists and engendered popular support for their cause.

Third, the history of gay and lesbian activism in Charlotte shows the crucial role of alliances with progressive elements in the straight community. Activists were able to achieve a level of success working within the gay community, but further advances relied on support from straight allies. Although genuine, the evidence shows that straight support was more often inspired by compassion than a full commitment to the gay rights agenda, and thus while there was a cultural shift in Charlotte in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this did not translate into political victories. Moreover, maintaining these straight alliances came at a cost to Charlotte's gay and lesbian activists because of the compromises that collaboration required.

In sum, what this thesis offers is the study of gay and lesbian activism as it related to the AIDS epidemic in an environment that has heretofore been absent from the literature. The vast majority of the work on the gay liberation movement and AIDS

activism has focused either on large metropolitan cities or progressive university cities, and state capitols. By decentering the narrative of AIDS this study offers important insights to the national story.

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