

STONEWALL UNION HISTORY

Origin of the Name

Stonewall Union was named after an event in gay history, the Stonewall riots.

The Stonewall riots started in New York City on Christopher Street at the Stonewall bar. The year was 1969, and it was the day of Judy Garland's funeral. As one historian put it, "the drag queen's were in no mood to play," meaning, the mood of the community was somber.

Until the day of the start of the riots the police had routinely physically and verbally harassed the men and women of the gay bars. The men and women did not resist or object. An example of such harassment would be the police entering the bar and running their night sticks over the buttocks of the patrons, making lewd suggestions, or asking lewd questions.

For whatever reason, one day the gays fought back, and three nights of riots began. For some reason, the fighting did not continue during the day but started at sundown each evening for the three nights. History has it that a Lesbian struck the first blow, and then the Drag Queens joined in. The Drag Queens gained a reputation for being fierce foes during the riots. Rather a paradox to what most persons assume a Drag Queen to be.

As a result of those riots, came the first awareness of the concept of and the need for gay civil rights.

Formation

Stonewall Union was formed in 1981 in reaction to the attempt of Jerry Falwell to organize a Moral Majority Headquarters in Columbus, Ohio. Falwell did not succeed. One could say that if not for the Moral Majority, Stonewall Union would have not come into existence.

The organizers of Stonewall Union were: Craig Covey, Steve Wilson, Rick Rommele, Craig Huffman, Dennis Valot, Val Thogmartin and Keith McKnight. The date was September 1981.

In October of 1981, a board of trustee's was nominated, and Stonewall Union received the first donation of \$100 from the owner of the bar Trends.

By November 1981, the board was formed. The people involved with Stonewall Union at that time decided to hold a press party and announce the formation of the gay rights organization. The board was especially pleased because a WOMAN was now on the board. That accomplishment in itself was rare. The woman's name was Rhonda Rivera.

The press party was held on November 20, 1981 at the home of Doug Whaley. Not one member of the press attended! Retrospective speculation has it that the press did not consider the event important. The press no longer has that attitude.

After that inauspicious beginning, Stonewall Union '81 achieved 3 major things. The organization was formed, the first president was elected, and the first gay voters' guide was

printed.

The voters' guide, which is still being printed for every election, names the candidates that support actively or sometimes passively gay civil rights. During the first years of Stonewall Union when 'Candidate Night', (an event where the candidates are invited to come and present) was held, few politicians came. That is no longer true. Every year Stonewall Union sends a survey to each local political candidate. Based upon the politician's answers to that survey, the voters' guide is formed. At first, few responded to the survey. Now many politicians answer the survey and return it to Stonewall.

Somewhere in this time the goals of Stonewall Union came to be. They are 1) Political Lobbying and Legislative Reform, 2) Community Building, and 3) Education.

Stonewall Union's history may be separated into years but in reality events do not happen in crisp increments of time. This observation is most clearly brought home by the Presidents of Stonewall Union. Not all presidents have served one full year. Each president came with the gift of ideas and a vision for what they wanted Stonewall Union to be. Not every idea that the presidents had came to fruition the year that president served. So the events you see in the various years may or may not have been a product of the president's term.

Presidents of Stonewall Union

1981 - Rick Rommele (deceased - 1988)
1982 - Susan Pyle
1983 - Rhonda Rivera
1984 - Doug Whaley
1985 - Dennis Cox
1986 - Vivian Schaeffer
1987 - Jerry Bunge
1988 - Chris Cozad

Stonewall Union '82

Stonewall Union '82 achieved a gay television show, a Gay Pride Parade, and an Annual Awards Dinner. No mean trick.

The first gay pride report was televised, and it was aired at 3:00 a.m. Many gay people in the city and counties found out through this show not only what was going on in the gay community but a very new idea was introduced: the idea that gay people are healthy functioning people. They saw gay people saying how they lived and what they were doing on a gay T.V. show!

When the first gay pride parade was held, the organizers were hoping that 400 people would show up. Much to the organizer's surprise, 1000+ (mostly local) people showed up to march. The gay pride parade has been held every year since 1982, and it has been expanded to an all Ohio parade. Stonewall Union organizes the

parade, and most years Stonewall Union has gone in the hole financially to sponsor the parade.

The first annual awards dinner was held by Stonewall Union to recognize outstanding service to the community.

This annual dinner has been held in public and private accommodations. When it has been held in local hotel banquet rooms, a major education of the staff occurs. Gay people are no longer "those people" (an unknown) but people.

The annual award dinner gives public recognition; it brings Gay Achievement out of the closet.

Stonewall Union '83

Stonewall Union '83 co-sponsored a gay information state fair booth and assisted in developing a Governor's Executive Order.

Ohio is the only state that has had an ongoing gay information booth at the state fair. Other states may have tried the concept but Ohio has consistently had the booth.

The booth was not started by Stonewall Union. It was started by O.G.R.C. and Stonewall Union co-sponsored it with O.G.R.C. (Ohio Gay Rights Coalition later The Ohio Gay/Lesbian Rights Coalition). O.G.R.C. dropped out, and Stonewall Union continued. Every year, the booth is staffed by volunteers who hand out information and talk to those who have questions. Many people pass by a few times and go on, only to come back the next year and talk or to tell how just seeing the booth affected their personal

coming out process.

Dealing with one's own sexual orientation is a task, but when others deal with one's sexual orientation, the result can be the loss of your job, your apartment, and other rights and freedoms assumed to be protected. Until 1983, a state employee could be fired for being gay. Stonewall Union assisted in the development of the Governor's Executive Order protecting the hiring and promoting of Gays and Lesbians in State Government. This order protects state government employees only. Ohio is one of the few states to have this protection.

Stonewall Union '84

Stonewall Union '84 took on City Hall and lost, published the first lavender yellow pages, and held the first gay conference which introduced the local gay community to gay national leaders and gay scholars.

Stonewall Union introduced the Job Protection Ordinance to the Columbus City Council. Stonewall Union coordinated the effort to have local citizens, gay and non-gay, speak in favor of the ordinance.

It was expected to be an orderly event. It was not.

Fundamentalists bused people in from out of town for the council meeting.

Tension mounted as the beliefs of fundamentalist religion clashed with the beliefs of gay civil rights. Ministers of both

sides spoke. Local experts from ACLU and the mental health profession spoke.

The Ordinance failed and failed badly. The politicians who sponsored or voted for the Ordinance suffered no political loss, but neither did the politicians who voted against the Ordinance.

Out of that defeat came the nationally recognized documentary, "YOU CAN FIGHT CITY HALL" by Vivan Schaeffer. The video won the top award at the International Gay film festival. The film became a 'lesson' to pass on.

But other ideas were taking form at the same time.

The first Lavender Listings was published. This booklet is a guide to local businesses and services that welcome gay clients and money. The idea came from Rhonda Rivera who had been putting out a list of businesses that contributed to Stonewall Union in the theory that one should patronize only the businesses that support gay causes. Now the Lavender Listing serves as a guide to newcomers to the Columbus community and to the old timers who need a particular good or service. The idea behind the Lavender Listings is "Keep it in the family."

The idea of 'family' or gay extended family and its history extended into the Stonewall Union Gay and Lesbian Conference.

Stonewall Union organized the first annual Gay and Lesbian Conference. This conference was to exchange information and to build community. National gay leaders and scholars have come to speak about history, about current happenings and to introduce ideas.

Stonewall Union '85

This year brought a new logo. The logo was a product of a logo design contest with a prize of \$500.

To go with this new logo was a real office. Prior to '85, the Stonewall office was a P. O. Box and a cardboard box or boxes in someone's home or apartment. This achievement was the first such office in Ohio, and Stonewall Union was the first non-social group organization in Columbus and perhaps Ohio to have an office all its own. The office says something. It states: "We are here to stay."

Stonewall Union '86

This year brought a campaign and a fund. Both address the community we live in. Both have a message. The fund, the Human Justice Fund, is a tax deductable fund that is for education purposes.

The Waging Peace Campaign was conceived. It was the idea of Vivian Schaeffer, who also created the video, "YOU CAN FIGHT CITY HALL". Waging Peace is an information campaign for the general public. Its purpose is to familiarize the public with the fact that gay people are not rare, weird 'others' with whom everyday people do not come in contact. It tells the community, "you do know someone gay, even if you do not know that the someone is gay."

Stonewall Union '87

1987 was the year of survey taking and a 'block that Judge' campaign. It also was a national march year.

Stonewall Union conducted a Waging Peace survey. The survey was sent to gay and non-gay people to find out how the gay population was perceived. The results of that survey revealed that much is yet to be done in the education area.

Stonewall Union coordinated with the "Block Bork" campaign. Lest we forget, Bork was the Supreme Court nominee who was very conservative and slightly to the left of Jerry Falwell, very slightly.

Stonewall Union lobbied Senators Glenn and Metzenbaum at the National March on Washington. Historical Note: over 700,000 gay people showed up in Washington, D.C. and marched as gay people for gay civil rights. This event was largely ignored by the press. Very little, if any, national and local press coverage was done. As Jesse Jackson said, during a debate on national television, "700,000 people marched and you ignored them". We held a national press conference and nobody came.

Stonewall Union '88

Thus far, 1988 has been a year of starts and finishes. Started were: 1) fulltime office manager. Until now, the "manager" was an answering machine, volunteers, and a part time

- manager. 2) Sponsoring of a National Coming Out Day. The date was October 11, 1988. Call in Gay and stay home for the day.
- 3) Sponsoring of a roundtable discussion and dinner in support of "taking the next step" (meaning coming out of the closet).
- 4) Establishment of the Task Force on Aging.

Stonewall Union participated in 2 major events. One was coordinating with lobbying efforts in support of SB 353, the Hobson AIDS Bill. This bill addresses three important areas in gay life: confidentially in HIV testing and partner notification, discrimination in housing, employment and public accommodations of the HIV positive persons, and regulation of the insurance industry in the use of HIV testing in group insurance (forbids) and the selective use of the HIV test in individual health and life insurance policies.

Second, Stonewall Union's effort resulted in the City of Columbus having a policy forbidding employment discrimination against gays.

At 11:45 a.m., December 28, 1988, Mayor Dana Rinehart signed a Statement of Policy which forbids discrimination against Lesbians and Gay men in city employment. The Policy took effect January 1, 1989. After that date, anyone who has a claim of discrimination in city hiring, employment, or termination has the right to proceed through the Equal Employment Office of the City. Expressly, Ms. Florence Warren will handle complaints and requests for information. Her office number is 645-8292.

This Statement of Policy is similar to the State Executive