

# STONEWALL COLUMBUS

in partnership with

The Ohio Historical Society

The Gay Ohio History Initiative

Our Stories: A Developing Record of Gender Identity, Sexual  
Orientation and Alliance at The Ohio State University

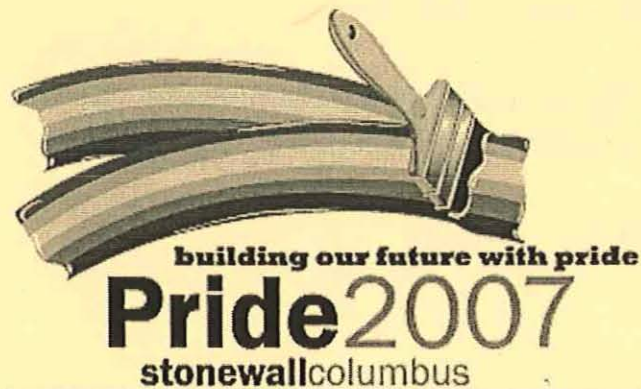
## PRESENTS

Three panel discussions and a video night

examining the history of

GLBT life in Central Ohio

June 6, 13, 20 and 27, 2007



### A NOTE ABOUT TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Because our community existed on the fringes of society for many years, most of our history is preserved only through oral storytelling. Since I moved to Columbus in the early 1980s, I have been privileged to hear some of the tragic and triumphant stories that make up our past. Two years ago, I began collecting recorded interviews so that these stories are not lost. Tonight you will hear some of these stories.

If you or someone you know has a story to tell about being GLBT in central Ohio, I would like to hear from you. I can be reached at [thurber1961@aol.com](mailto:thurber1961@aol.com).

Rob Berger

### SPECIAL THANKS TO

Lisa Kempton who has volunteered her services as videographer for these events for the past two years. For video services, Lisa can be reached at 614/488-1220.

Stonewall Columbus

The Gay Ohio History Initiative

Our Stories: A Developing Record of Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation and Alliance at The Ohio State University

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June 6, 2007

Show and Tell

Panel and audience members will share their own personal items to tell the story of the Central Ohio lesbian community.

Debra Modellmog, panel member and moderator  
Heather Mitchell, panel member  
Suzie Simpson, panel member  
Jan Brittan, panel member

June 13, 2007

In the Life: Black and Gay Back in the Day

A panel discussion on the African American GLBT experience in Ohio with a historical focus on coming out, meeting other GLBT people, relationships, religion and family.

Wanda Ellis, panel member and moderator  
Chynia Dickerson, panel member  
Sile Singleton, panel member  
Kevon Wilds, panel member



June 20, 2007

Cruising: Male Dating and Sex Before AIDS and the Internet

A panel discussion on the different ways gay men met, communicated, dated and engaged in relationships during more discreet, closeted and homophobic times.

Rob Berger, moderator

Russ Goodwin, panel member

Douglas Whaley, panel member

Jerry Gordon, panel member

June 27, 2007

GLBT History Video Night

This event will feature three videos: a movie underwritten by Stonewall Columbus that tells the story of when Columbus City Council agreed to adopt GLBT-friendly legislation in the early 1980's and then backed out after religious zealots protested, the first Pride Parade in 1982 and selections from the public access TV show that Stonewall Columbus hosted in the 1980's.

## PANEL MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

To introduce the audience to the panel members, a brief biography of each participant is provided below. Biographies are listed in alphabetical order by event date. Biographies are provided as written by the panel members or recounted to event organizer Rob Berger.

June 6, 2007

### Show and Tell

#### Jan Brittan, panel member

Jan Brittan arrived in Columbus in 1971, spending her first year in graduate school at The Ohio State University exploring classics, feminism, gay culture, and coming out. She became the first paid employee of the Women's Action Collective, a member of Gay Women's Peer Counseling and consciousness-raising group #1 and served as president and secretary for the Lesbian Business Association. She did speaking engagements for Columbus OSU Women's Liberation and Gay Activists Alliance and was a founding member of both the OSU Women's Studies program and Columbus' first women's professional football team. Jan has worked with Kaleidoscope and the Columbus AIDS Task Force, and fought for greater acceptance of gay men and lesbians within her Buddhist sect. In 2005 she received the Ruth Ellis Memorial Award from Lesbian Health News, and is "otherwise engaged" to her partner of nearly a decade.

#### Heather Mitchell, panel member

Heather Mitchell works as program coordinator in the office of Faculty & TA Development, a teaching and learning center at The Ohio State University. She also is the founding member and primary contact for *Our Stories: a developing record of gender identity, sexual orientation, and alliance at The Ohio State University*. *Our Stories* is a collective of faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students, and community members who seek to preserve the history of the gay community at Ohio State. Since autumn 2005, 50 people have subscribed to the *Our Stories* listserv, 36 people have attended *Our Stories* workshops, and 11 students have been active with the project via internships, service to the advisory board, and assistance with project management.



Heather moved to Columbus four years ago and has many great stories to share about the variety of communities through which she has grown as a student, a woman, and a lesbian. She stumbled out of the closet in her mid-twenties, some seven years ago, and considers herself quite lucky for it to have happened in the company of several gay men and women who were out and actively involved in both civic and religious organizations.

#### Debra Modellmog, panel member and moderator

Debra Modellmog is a Professor of English and Associate Dean of the College of Humanities at Ohio State University. She teaches and conducts research in the areas of twentieth-century American literature, feminist theory, and sexuality studies. Her most recent book is entitled *Reading Desire: In Pursuit of Ernest Hemingway*, and she has also published articles on various twentieth-century authors, multiculturalism, and coming-out in the classroom. She has been the principal organizer of an interdisciplinary undergraduate minor and graduate specialization in Sexuality Studies at OSU, and currently co-coordinates the program. Over 25 faculty members, 80 undergraduate students, and 10 graduate students have participated in the Sexuality Studies program since its inception in 2002, and approximately 10 classes are offered in the field each quarter. Debra is a 20-year resident of Columbus and has spent most—but not all—of that time as an out lesbian (there's a story here, of course).

#### Suzie Simpson, panel member

Suzie Simpson is currently employed as the Center Coordinator for Stonewall Columbus. She also handles booking and promotions for East Village and founded the Girlz Rhythm n' Rock Camp. Suzie has been involved with anti-war, women's and gay organizations since the 1970's. Suzie also helped form the Women's Music Union, a local volunteer production company for the lesbian entertainment circuit. During the 1970's, Suzie was involved in helping found or was a member of many political groups in Columbus. She has also produced concerts and events locally for many years aka suziemusic.



June 13, 2007

## In the Life: Black and Gay Back in the Day

### Chynia Dickerson, panel member

Chynia Dickerson is a native of Columbus, born and raised on the west side of town in the Hilltop area. Chynia comes from family of five and her family is very supportive of her sexual orientation and her role in the GLBT community. Chynia is employed at Maryhaven and assists clients in achieving their highest level of functioning in daily living skills. She has been with Maryhaven for over nine years and during that time has worked as a substance abuse individual and group counselor, anger management facilitator for women and coordinator for the homeless population. Chynia is a Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor II and serves on the GLBT cultural competence committee at Maryhaven.

Chynia was formerly employed with the Columbus AIDS Task Force for two years as a substance abuse counselor in the Positive Solutions program that targets African Americans who are HIV positive or at risk. Chynia is also a Culture Competence Trainer for United Way of Central Ohio.

Chynia's proudest moment is when her family saw her walk across the stage to receive her college degree. In the future, she would like to develop programs to help persons of the lower social economical status and travel the United States assisting agencies to improve their effectiveness in providing services to the African American community.

### Wanda Ellis, panel member and moderator

Wanda Ellis is the youngest of eight children born to an African Methodists Episcopal minister. Wanda grew up in a two-parent household and it felt like the home she lived in was made of glass. She is currently employed with Ohio Department of Job and Family Services.

Wanda moved to Columbus in November of 1996. She attended Franklin University and received an Associate's Degree in Business Administration in 2002 and a Bachelor's of Science in Human Resources and Business Administration in 2004.

Wanda began her work with Stonewall Columbus Board in 2004. She served as Board Secretary for almost two years and was elected Vice President in November 2006. Wanda's passion for this type of community



service has grown as she continues to see the work that needs to be completed within our community. On the Stonewall Board, Wanda works to do outreach to the community as a whole, but focuses on bridging the gap between Stonewall and people of color. Wanda also serves on the steering committee for the first GLBT census.

In the future, Wanda hopes to work with the center, board, community, and faith leaders to increase spiritual health among the LGBT community, especially youth, to realize God loves us, God created us in His image, and we are valuable, spiritual, giving, loving beings who are gifted to be LGBT.

### Sile Singleton, panel member

Sile (SHe-LAH) Singleton is a leading force in promoting the current, continuous and ever-changing development of the 'modern day' Drag King Cultural Explosion. Sile, a life student of gendered nuances and disruptions, has been publicly engaged in visual representations of gendered identities for just about 14 years. Sile originally broke onto the scene with the now 'famous drag queen character' LUSTER as Lustivious Dela Virgion (LUSTY). Sile's portrayal and insistence that "LUSTY" be situated smack dab in the drag king scene in Columbus, was and is critical to the current dialogue on bio-queen and femme narratives within drag king rhetoric.

Sile is a co-founder of Fast Friday Productions, a premier booking, management and production force in 'queered' entertainment, H.I.S. KINGS and globally known, first of its kind, big poppa to D.C.'s annual, The Great Big Drag King Show the premiere drag king networking event, The International Drag King Extravaganza, better known as I D K E or I - DKE. Sile is fascinated with the intersections of race, class, age and gender, specifically in terms of mass popular culture. Not willing to be pigeon-holed as a drag king, queen, activist, parent, performer, writer, poet, playwright, Christian, wife, visionary, Sile's main vibe, you ask? Love, as Passion, Baby - -- Shout it Loud and Act it Out --- however it goes --- Show Your Love, Baby, Love.

Sile has been involved in the Columbus GLBT community since 1976. She first arrived as a 15-year-old wide-eyed girl trying to be cool and hang out with a group of seniors running up to Columbus. Sile had no idea they were sneaking her into a lesbian bar (Jack's/Summit Station)--the rest as they say is history. Sile helped lick the envelopes that were sent out to inform folks of this entity called Stonewall coming to town. She painted and carried out trash and participated in the demands for the right to have a large gay dance bar formerly known as the Garage. Sile also marched in the first Pride March, terrified as helicopters flew overhead through scads of



angry Christians, who spewed their hate while police officers with guns did not hide their disgust.

Sile helped form and was a two term president for the first (as far as they knew) Black GLB (no T back then) organization -- Diversity of Ohio. They organized the first Black contingent to march in Columbus Pride under much scrutiny and resistance from the powers that were representing Stonewall. They also lead demonstrations outside the original Stonewall office, generated a letter writing campaign and were ultimately successful in garnering an apology and re-naming/imaging of a particular Pride logo and tagline they found to be a false representation of what Stonewall did and did not do for the GLB community. In her younger years, Sile was "a thorn in the side of the Stonewall board and administration, constantly calling them to the table for their bigoted practices." Sile was also the first person of color that held the GLB coordinator position at The Ohio State University, as well as the first queer person to hold the Ethnic Student Services Director position. Suffice it to say Sile have been involved at a variety of levels with the Columbus GLBT community for over twenty years.

#### Kevon Wilds, panel member

Kevon Wilds was born in Springfield and lived there until he was seven. Because his stepfather was in the military, he spent the rest of his childhood traveling around the country and the world. In 1979, Kevon moved back to Ohio to attend The Ohio State University. A short time later he transferred to the University of Cincinnati, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in communications in 1983.

Kevon has been involved with and volunteered for numerous organizations, including Stonewall Columbus, AIDS Walk, the Susan B. Komen Race for the Cure and the Franklin County Young Democrats. Kevon also served as a page in the Ohio House of Representatives. Kevon is currently employed at the OSU Medical Center as a medical secretary and attends Mount Olivet Baptist Church.

Kevon first realized he was gay as a teenager and came out at age 23. His two proudest moments are when he was able to come out and live his life as a gay man and when he found release and embraced forgiveness in his journey to heal from childhood abuse.



June 20, 2007

## Cruising: Male Dating and Sex Before AIDS and the Internet

### Rob Berger, moderator

Rob Berger grew up in Ohio and moved to Columbus in the early 1980s to attend The Ohio State University. Rob was raised in a small town where his being a gay youth regularly led to verbal threats and sometimes physical assaults. In high school, when Rob came to terms with being gay, he [secretly] dated several classmates and began going to gay bars. Rob graduated from OSU with a bachelor's degree in journalism and from Capital University Law School with a juris doctor. Rob is currently employed by the Supreme Court of Ohio.

Rob has been involved with various organizations including serving as president and vice president of Stonewall Columbus, helping found and then serving as secretary and endorsements chair for the Stonewall Democrats, chairing several committees for The OSU GLBT Alumni Society, serving on the Development Board for The Ohio Historical Society and helping lead the efforts of The Gay Ohio History Initiative. In 2006, Rob received the Leadership Award from Stonewall Columbus.

### Russ Goodwin, panel member

Russ Goodwin was born and raised in Columbus and "came out" at the tender age of 14. He began going to "GAY" bars and haunts at 16. He left Columbus to join the Navy in 1977, returning to his home town upon retiring from the Navy in 1997. Russ became politically active in Stonewall Democrats of Central Ohio upon his retirement and was elected President of Stonewall Democrats in January of 2006, a position he was reelected to in 2007.

Russ's political activism is fueled by personal experience of the inequality of being a Gay American. He is dedicated to see the repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell enacted. He is fighting to have domestic partners of bi-national couples respected and to see full equality for all LGBT Americans. Russ attended the Ohio State University and holds an Associate's Degree from City University in Seattle, Washington. He is currently a Sales Representative for Butler Animal Health Supply, LLC, the nation's largest supplier of veterinary products to veterinarians, universities and research facilities.



### Jerry Gordon, panel member

Jerry Gordon was born in southeastern Ohio in 1921 and graduated from Bridgeport High School in 1938. After graduation, Jerry attended the College of Commerce for one year and later attended Western Reserve University and The Ohio State University. Jerry served in the Army from 1942 through 1946 and was honorably discharged as a master sergeant.

Jerry comes from a musically talented family and has written hundreds of songs. He has appeared as the featured musical guest on the Ellen DeGeneres Show and received the Artist of the Year Award from the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department in 2004. Jerry has released one album and one CD and is working on a new CD entitled "It Is What It Is, What It Is!"

Jerry has held various jobs over the years including positions at Blaw-Knox Company, Chemical Abstracts and New Holland Machine Company. Probably Jerry's most well-known employment was from 1969 through 1988 when he operated Gordon's Candies and Ice Cream at the corner of Norwich and High Streets on the OSU campus.

Jerry says that he has "almost lived two lives since 1948 – my professional life and my gay adventures." These gay adventures include spending time at various places where gay people used to meet including the Oasis Bar at the Chittenden Hotel, the Kiri piano bar at Parsons and Oak, Eckles Lake on Olentangy River Road and bars at the Seneca Hotel and the Neil House.

### Douglas Whaley, panel member

Douglas Whaley retired from The Ohio State University after 35 years as a Professor of Law, in which capacity he published dozens of books, and won eight awards for outstanding teaching. He was involved in the start of Stonewall Columbus (originally called "Stonewall Union"), serving on its first Board of Directors and as President of the Board in 1984-85. From the beginning he was a frequent speaker on gay rights issues: at the annual Pride March (including the first one in 1982), on radio and TV, and at schools, churches, and meetings. His lecture (with slides and videos) of "The History of Gay Rights in Columbus" was given in 2003 at the request of Stonewall Columbus, and has been repeated four times in various venues around the city. In 2003, Stonewall presented him with the Rhonda R. Rivera Human Rights Award.





Panel members: Jan Brittan (date of arrival in Columbus: 1971), Heather Mitchell (2003), Suzie Simpkins (at least since 1970s)

An array of experiences, background, jobs, and community involvement represented by these three panelists. They have also brought some amazing artifacts and memorabilia that reflects their and others' history in the central Ohio lesbian community (indicate where these can be found in the room).

How we will proceed: as moderator, I will ask panelists some general as well as some specific questions related to their individual background and expertise as well as to the central Ohio lesbian experience since at least the 1970s. Want to make this an informal, interactive session, so if you have questions as we move along, please feel free to ask them. I will also leave time at the end of the session for additional questions and for audience show-and-tell. We will break around 8:30 so that you can ask individual questions of the panelists and look more closely at the objects on display.

Each panelist:

1. What is your favorite object/artifact that you've brought tonight and what is the history behind it?
2. Let's go back in time: tell us about the oldest artifact in your collection and how it reflects or represents lesbian life in central Ohio at that time?
3. Jan: tell us about
  - a. your involvement with the 1972 GLBT conference at OSU and the march to the Statehouse.
  - b. The early days of the Women's Studies program at OSU and Columbus-OSU Women's liberation
  - c. The protest at the Red Door restaurant
  - d. Women's Action Collective (Suzie too?)
  - e. Gay Activists Alliance

Suzie: tell us about

- a. your involvement with 1970's political groups in Columbus
- b. the Women's Music Union, a local volunteer production company for the lesbian entertainment circuit
- c. anti-war, women's, and gay groups since the 1970s
- d. the Women's Action Collective (Jan too)
- e. Sue Vasbinder
- f. Moonshine Coop
- g. Jack's a-go-go





Heather:

- a. what is Our Stories at OSU, and who are some of the early lesbian leaders on campus that you have learned about?
- b. What are some of your favorite stories that you have learned while working with Our Stories?
- c. What are some other favorite artifacts that you've obtained?
- d. What are some of the challenges you've faced in trying to collect and record GLBT history at OSU?
- e. What, if anything, has this work taught you about your own identity, history, and experience?

4. All panelists: what do you see as the, or at least one of the, most important moment/s in lesbian history in central Ohio? How does lesbian life today differ from that when you first moved here (or grew up here)? How has the lesbian community (or communities) changed (politically, racially, relationally, identification?).

