



The 1950's Exhibit Collection©

Tucson Gay LGBTQ Museum And Library

Copyrighted-Registered-All Rights Are Reserved

Text, Audio, And Photographic Format Exhibit

'Sure I got a girlfriend, but I got a boyfriend too ... Why read only one newspaper?'
1954 Bouncer at the Esquire Club In Tucson

The 1950's in Tucson Arizona dawned with a population of 45,454 inhabitants living within its 9.5 square mile city limits to a feeling of peace, new prosperity, and stability both there and across the nation as everyone left World War 2 behind.

By 1957 the nation had entered the Space Age (ironically largely due to the Nazi technology and rocketry scientists brought back by the military to the United States during and after WW2), and an unprecedented building explosion during the 1950's brought on by millions of returning veterans then in the child rearing stage of their lives who would bring on the Baby Boom Generation.

That event would spawn millions of boys and girls who would in future decades become the Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and Transgendered pushing for their sexual preference rights until the idea was finally right in the faces of everyone in the United States and far beyond.

However, at the same time the 1950's were also one of the most Socially Repressive Time Periods in the entire history of the United States.



1950's Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual Government Employees Protest Firings

Any group that was deemed the all-encompassing term 'subversive' by the U.S. Government and the U.S. military led to the United States Congress to require the registration of all members of subversive groups.

During that time during the 1950's those groups were all secretly infiltrated by U.S. Government agents including the Federal Bureau of Investigations, and state local and city law enforcement departments.

In 1950, the U.S. State Department identified all homosexuals working for the State Department as 'major security risks' with that permanently noted in their personal files.

What quickly followed was a very rapid expansion of constantly more and more repressive laws and federal government actions that included multiple firings of personnel working for all federal, state, city governments, private businesses, and educational institutions on all levels who were merely only suspected or secretly accused of being a homosexual.



1952 Senator McCarthy And Roy Cohn

In 1952, the **American Psychiatric Association** listed Homosexuality in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) as a **Sociopathic Personality Disturbance**, with a pathological hidden fear of the opposite sex that was caused by traumatic parent-child relationships.

This view was widely influential in the medical, legislative, judicial, educational, and legal professions.

In 1956, however, Evelyn Hooker performed a study that compared the happiness and well-adjusted nature of self-identified Homosexual Men with heterosexual men and found no difference. Her study both stunned the medical community and made her a hero of many *Homosexuals (Gay Men and Lesbians).

Politically and personal vindictive motivated police raids, recording people's names, occupations, places of work, parents names, home addresses, political party registration, taking the individuals 'mug' shots, and keeping secret files and photos on the patrons began occurring at *Homosexual (Gay and Lesbian) bars all across the United States and as far as up in Canada.

Throughout the United States, many laws were passed prohibiting cross-dressing by both men and women making that a felony subject to immediate arrest and mandatory jail time.



1959 Secret Prom In Tucson

In many communities across the United States even merely dancing with the same sex was a serious felony crime with both the dancers facing arrest and mandatory jail terms.

Then, clear across the globe in June of 1950 North Korea attacked South Korea and many of the former World War 2 military troops who had been discharged into the 'inactive military reserves' suddenly found themselves being recalled right back into active duty into the branches of service they had so cheerfully left after doing their part during World War 2 not so many years before.

The military draft and the local draft boards were started up again as both the recalled reserves as well as new *Homosexual (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexuals) were suddenly finding themselves in the military.

During this time many *Homosexuals (Gay's and Lesbian's) in the U.S. military were often routinely bullied, beaten, baited, found out, put in military psychiatric hospitals, medically experimented on, and discharged out of the service with bad discharge records that then followed them throughout their lives.



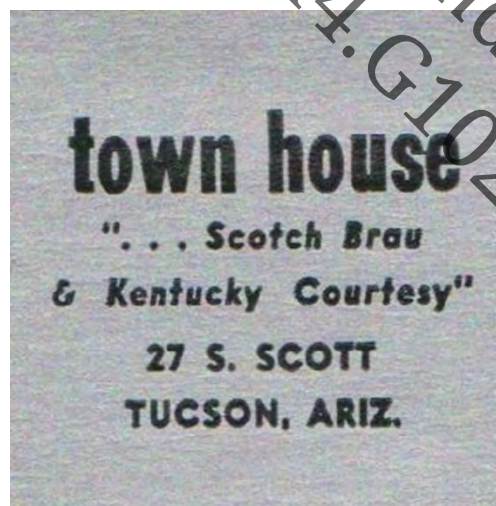
1955 Actors Sal Mineo
and James Dean - Both Bisexuals

Around Tucson by the mid 1950's the **Town House** – (bar-cocktail lounge-package liquor) with a mixed straight/*homosexual crowd and an ‘**anything goes atmosphere**’ had steadily gained popularity continuing to bring in increasingly larger numbers of *Homosexuals (by then mixes of Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals).

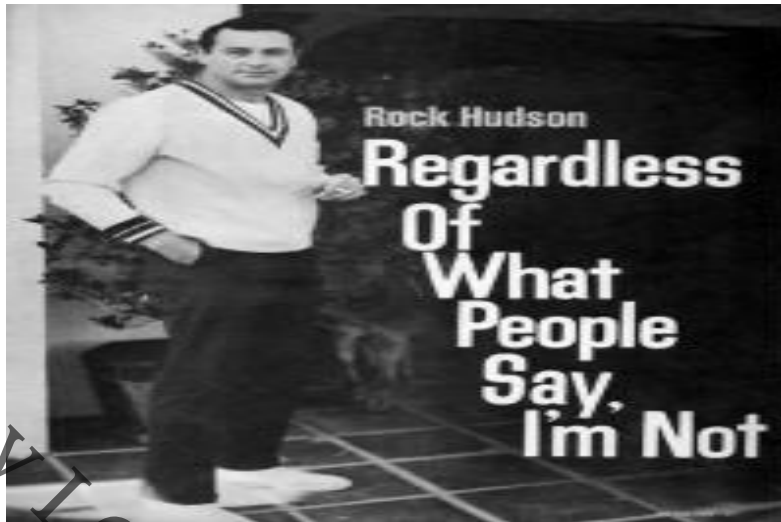


As that word of the **Town House** bar and lounge being *Homosexual ‘friendly’ spread wider and wider around Tucson in the swinging yet also still conservative time period of the mid 1950's and more city officials became aware of its patrons being *Homosexuals, it was on the Friday afternoon of June 3, 1955 that the Tucson Chief of Police contacted the bar's owner due to ‘supposed’ “**increasing complaints**” about the “**complexion of the clientele**” and that it “**needed to be corrected.**”

The next night at the **Town House** on its very busy Saturday, most *Homosexuals (Gays) that entered the door were then refused service and told to immediately leave.



‘The Word’ the **Town House** was “**no longer welcoming or friendly**” quickly spread across Tucson and almost immediately the **Tap Room bar** inside the **Hotel Congress** located at 311 E. Congress Street which was only licensed to serve beer at the time became the new center of Tucson's growing *Homosexual (Gay, Bisexual, and Lesbian) population (that scenario at the **Hotel Congress and Tap Room bar** had happened before and would again at later times be repeating itself in varying ways over and over again in the coming decades at the bars located inside the **Congress Hotel**).



1956 Hollywood Actor Rock Hudson

During other times in Tucson in the 1950's 'mixed bars' like the **Zebra Room** under ownership of Claytie Lokey located at 167 S. Meyer Avenue, an after-hours club located across from the main Tucson Police Station.

Also in operation as a 'mixed bar', was the **R&B bar** located inside the Greyhound Station at 2 S. th 4th Avenue.

Both establishments were for short times *Homosexual (Gay) rendezvous until Tucson Police and city officials applied "pressure" on both establishments owners and at times "targeted" their patrons when they 'entered or left.'



1955 Pioneer Hotel In Downtown Tucson

The **Hotel Congress Tap Room bar** continued its becoming more and more popular with Gays as the words ***Homosexual and Queer** began a steady mixing with the newest much shorter more fun simple three letter word **GAY**.

The word was also then used as somewhat of a code word at the time as many of that periods adult population merely understood the mention of the word "GAY" to simply mean some version of someone "Happy And Having Fun."

However, in the busy Tucson of the 1950's, it was the **Club Esquire** located at 32 S. 5th Avenue, a somewhat sleazy dive bar in downtown Tucson owned by the very open minded and friendly Hy Lavin it was a place where *'anyone could find just about anything they wanted to'* and *'where you always kept both hands on your wallet and your other hand on your drink.'*



The **Club Esquire** bar cocktail lounge quickly became Tucson's ultimate cruise and make-out place in town as it was becoming unbelievably both popular and at the same time very profitable.

At the **Club Esquire** with its constant flow of horny young military men, Bisexuals, Gays, at times Lesbians, missile plant workers, beatniks, alcoholics, transients, prostitutes, pool hustlers, bowling machine freaks (the ones who worked hand setting the pins in bowling alleys), straights, con artists, hustlers, along with various assorted others, it was the **Club Esquire** bar that really brought them all in sooner or later.



1955 Around Town

In June of 1956 the **Lil' Brown Jug** (called and known as 'LBJ' by Tucson locals) bar and steakhouse located at 431 E. Grant Road opened as a *Homosexual (Gay) bar and steakhouse with its owner Dennis (Denny) Smith who had ran a bar-lounge steak house operation at the location prior, and in time including Charles 'Chuck' Kohnke from Duluth Minnesota who later bought into a partial ownership position.



The Very 'Private' After Dark Off Street Entrance
Through The Unlit Rear Dirt Parking Lot Entrance
To The '**Lil' Brown Jug**'

(always normally dark, this side entrance was only artificially illuminated taking this historical photograph in 1956)

At that time utilizing the same liquor license and located at the time still just far enough away from the prying eyes of downtown do-gooder's and the 'Billy clubs, Handcuffs, and Backseats of a Police Patrol Car of the Tucson Police Department, the **Lil' Brown Jug** continued being packed every night providing local Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, and any others who **were allied or alternative, their safe place to go and be themselves as well as a venue for live and often 'over the top' performances.**

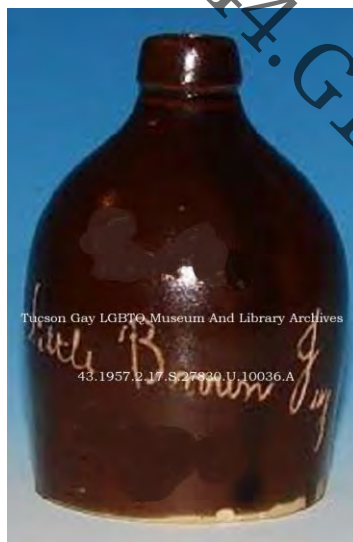


1956 Inside The Lil' Brown Jug bar

Like the **Hotel Congress Tap Bar** at that time, the **Lil' Brown Jug** with its provisional liquor license was also only "legally" allowed to serve beer but that was only due to its recent change in ownership adding the out of state partner Kohnke onto the Lil' brown Jug's liquor license causing a 'Probationary Provisional Liquor License' to be issued. The provisional liquor license allowed the state liquor board to monitor the bars activities before reinstating the bar's full liquor license.

The 'secret' in many bars and restaurants of the 1950's was to bring your own small bottle or hip flask of your favorite hard alcohol and then just ask the bartender or waiter for a Coke, 7up, Dr. Pepper, or Pepsi (and always be sure to leave him or her a 'very good tip').

The **Lil' Brown Jug** also quietly offered for sale to its trusted Gay patrons late at night, refillable "Lil' Brown Jugs" filled with their choice of Whiskey, Bourbon, Rum, Rye, Mexican Tequila, or Vodka to take home and later return back to be refilled.



Soon the **Lil Brown Jug** was attracting Gays from Phoenix, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York as the word of a **REAL GAY BAR** that was located in Tucson, Arizona spread quickly by both word of mouth and through paid 'underground advertising' across the United States.

The **Lil Brown Jug** bar's after closing (a.k.a. after hours) parties were known to be even wilder than when it was open with those after hours events attracting a both very intensely loyal and profitable following.



With it's out of downtown & out of mind location the highly successful bar avoided being harassed, told to shut down, or bothered by police, state or city authorities.



1958 Actors And "Roommates" Tab Hunter & Roddy McDowell

As more Gays in the Old Pueblo were able to connect in larger numbers, the spring of 1958 saw the formation of Tucson's first acknowledged **Gay Men's Social Club** which they then named the **Gay Ladies of the Southwest**.



1958 Back Home In Tucson On Leave

By the Fall of 1958 the **Gay Ladies of the Southwest** group had renamed itself **Gay Ladies of the Arizona Desert** (G.L.A.D.) and used the initials GLAD as their own private code word in very cleverly disguised designed sentences such as, “I’m *GLAD* when it rains,” and “I’m *GLAD* we have saguaros” which if correctly answered back then acknowledged and identified both me as being Gay or at the least very very interested and knowing the ‘secret’ local code.



1959 Movie ‘Some Like It Hot’

Two Gay/Lesbian national level first's occurred in the early 1950's when the Mattachine Society was founded in Los Angeles in 1950 and quickly spread chapters on college campuses including the University of Arizona in Tucson. The second called The Daughters of Bilitis (also called the DOB), a Lesbian social and political club founded in San Francisco originally as an alternative to Lesbian bars in 1955. Membership in both groups was usually not large, but even with the constant harassment, infiltration, and gathering of thousands and thousands of hours of evidence by Police, FBI and CIA both groups still managed to survive well into later decades.



1956 Gay Student Police Beating

Ironically, at the same time in the 1950's the FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover , who was a known heavy gambler betting on the horses, was directing his agents to conduct the wiretapping of phones, making sound recordings by secret microphones of their meetings, Hoover himself went home every night and put on a dress and high heels while wrapping his arms around his boyfriend Clyde Tolson who was also the assistant director of the FBI, the heir to his entire estate, his live-in roommate, and constant companion for many years.



1951 FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover With Lover Clyde Tolson

(Note the wedding ring on Tolson's left ring finger – Neither Tolson or Hoover were ever 'Married')

In Tucson of the 1950's many of the national undercurrents had their effects on the city, yet at other times and in other ways they would not. Some mixed in with local styles and became unrecognizable as one traveled very far from Tucson.

The Gays & Lesbians of the Old Pueblo for the most part at times just did what they had learned to do many years before, and ignored the fads and what was going on nationally and in other states.



1954 Around Tucson

That was to keep their lifestyles and sexual preferences behind closed doors in private homes, on one side of friendly bars and restaurants, and visit their private clubs & after hour clubs that were secretly scattered around the city until the opening of the Lil Brown Jug bar as a Gay Establishment on June 12, 1956 provided them more safety and stability.



1959 Actor Clint Eastwood (left)

(A 1959 Gay Marriage Supporter)

At Old Tucson Studios On The Rawhide TV Series Movie Set

As the stroke of midnight on December 31, 1959 brought the decade of the 1950's to its end, population shifts around the United States brought many new arrivals as 107,300 inhabitants were then living within the 24.5 square mile Tucson city limits. The coming decade of the 1960's would at times shake the country's very concepts, its ways of thinking, the population, and its institutions while at the same time planting the seeds for events that would happen in the decades that would be coming up.

The 1950's Exhibits Collection©

Tucson Gay LGBTQ Museum And Library

Copyrighted-Registered-All Rights Are Reserved

Text, Audio, And Photographic Exhibits Format

7 of 47 Photographic Archived Exhibits