

Walt Whitman Democratic Club records, 1975-1984

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Finding aid prepared by John Anderies

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

John J. Wilcox, Jr. LGBT Archives, William Way LGBT Community Center
2015

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Summary Information

Repository	John J. Wilcox, Jr. LGBT Archives, William Way LGBT Community Center
Creator	Britton, Jeffrey H., 1947-2012
Title	Walt Whitman Democratic Club records
Date [inclusive]	1975-1984
Extent	1.2 Linear feet (3 boxes)
Language	English
Abstract	<p>Formed in 1976 as the Gay Democratic Caucus, the Walt Whitman Democratic Club was a political organization of gay Democrats based in Philadelphia, PA. Founded and led by president Jeff Britton, the Club was active from 1976 to 1982, and according to Britton, was inspired by similar groups active in Washington, DC and on the West Coast. Its mission was "to research issues, to question candidates on legislation affecting the civil rights of gay people and to endorse local, state and federal candidates who support efforts to end discrimination against gay people." It met regularly at the Gay Community Center of Philadelphia (GCCP) as well as in the homes of Britton and other Club members. Membership dues were \$5 per year. The collection is divided into three series: I. Business records; II. Subject files; and III. Printed materials.</p>

Preferred Citation note

Walt Whitman Democratic Club records, John J. Wilcox, Jr. LGBT Archives, William Way LGBT Community Center, Philadelphia, PA.

Biographical/Historical note

Formed in 1976 as the Gay Democratic Caucus, the Walt Whitman Democratic Club was a political organization of gay Democrats based in Philadelphia, PA. Founded and led by president Jeff Britton, the Club was active from 1976 to 1982, and according to Britton, was inspired by similar groups active in Washington, DC and on the West Coast. Its mission was "to research issues, to question candidates on legislation affecting the civil rights of gay people and to endorse local, state and federal candidates who support efforts to end discrimination against gay people." It met regularly at the Gay Community Center of Philadelphia (GCCP) as well as in the homes of Britton and other Club members. Membership dues were \$5 per year.

Britton has said that when he founded the Club, "there was no gay rights organization in Philadelphia, the Gay Activists Alliance having been torn asunder by a few egomaniacs." The organization's first newsletter in the summer of 1977 described what Britton hoped to accomplish and saw the discouraging headlines of Anita Bryant's anti-gay "Save Our Children" campaign as an opportunity to harness the unity being felt by Philadelphia's gay community.

Many of us are disturbed and temporarily discouraged by Anita Bryant's success in Dade County. That feeling is understandable and the logical question many of us ask is "Now What?" Bryant has united us in a dramatic way and we as gays need to be preactive instead of reactive. This is, to take the initiative in educating the general public about our cause, form new alliances with other minority groups and strengthening existing friendships, endorse and support candidates for public office, get our community registered as voters and create the habit of voting twice a year. In this last area, particularly in Philadelphia, lies a great deal of untapped strength for gay people--that is the ability to influence, sometimes decisively, who wins an election. Another area in which we are lacking is political education within the gay community. The WWDC plans to play an important role in this area through open forums, guest speakers, and teach-ins.

The 1977 campaigns for Philadelphia District Attorney and Controller were successful victories for the Club. Ed Rendell, who until that time had had no political experience, became the first major city candidate to tour gay bars for support. He was endorsed by the Club for District Attorney and won both the primary election and the general election that year. Bill Klenk was endorsed for Controller and was reelected to his position. Both men attended a Candidates Night sponsored by the Club and held at the Gay Community Center of Philadelphia. Five openly gay committeepersons were elected to the Democratic City Committee.

In 1978, the Walt Whitman Democratic Club put much of its energy into researching, engaging with, and endorsing candidates for the 1978 Gubernatorial election. Questionnaires were sent to all eight of the Democrats and Republicans running for governor, and those who would engage with the organization were invited to speak before the group. The questions asked each candidate whether he would 1) reissue the 1975 executive order barring discrimination against state employees on the basis of sexual orientation; 2) retain the Governor's Council for Sexual Minorities; 3) work for legislation barring discrimination

on the basis of sexual orientation in areas; 4) work to expand the mandate of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission to protect citizens against discrimination based on sexual orientation; 5) work for the revision of the penal code to eliminate laws regulating private sexual acts between consenting adults; 6) direct state agencies to fund organizations, facilities, and programs which serve gay clientele; 7) direct state agencies to not discriminate against their clients on the basis of sexual orientation; 8) work for legislation to prohibit consideration of sexual or affectional preferences as a factor in any judicial determination of child custody or visiting rights.

The answers to these questions led the Club to rank the candidates rather than endorsing just one: Robert Butera (R) - acceptable; Robert Casey (D) - unacceptable; Pete Flaherty (D) - acceptable; Henry Hager (R) - acceptable; Ernest Kline (D) - preferred; David Marston (R) - unacceptable; Arlen Specter (R) - unacceptable; Richard Thornburgh (R) - acceptable. For the general election, the Club endorsed Peter Flaherty but Richard Thornburgh prevailed. However, the Club also opposed a proposed change to the City Charter that would have allowed Mayor Frank Rizzo (R) to serve a third term. This motion was defeated and the Club also helped to elect a total of 10 openly gay committeepople to the Democratic City Committee.

In 1979, long simmering disagreements between the Club's president, Jeff Britton, and the publisher of the *Philadelphia Gay News*, Mark Segal, became public, and the controversy would haunt the Club to its final days. In the Club's June 1979 newsletter, in an opinion piece called "Don't Play Us Cheap," Britton criticized the *Philadelphia Gay News* and its publisher for "lack of political courage" in the matter of endorsing candidates, and for failing to "support the Walt Whitman Democratic Club, the only gay political organization in the city!" In the fall of 1979, disagreements over the endorsement for Philadelphia Mayor, also caused friction. Club vice president Scott Wilds promoted Lucien Blackwell in the pages of the August 1979 newsletter, while President Jeff Britton went on the record in the September 1979 newsletter as a supporter of Bill Green -- all before the Club voted on endorsements later in the month, ultimately picking Green. This controversy led Wilds to resign from the Club and file a complaint with the City Commissioners over alleged violations of the 1979 Campaign Finance Act. In June 1980, the new vice president Leslie Phillips called for unity in the community: "Separatism within our community is perhaps our most self-defeating problem. It is time for all of the various segments that make up our community to realize that the struggle is one that we will win only by being together" and "I am equally troubled to see our community so split that what began seemingly as a personal feud over a mayoral endorsement last fall has become a vendetta and a cause celebre in the gay media. I am addressing, of course, the split in our Club last October between supporters of William Green and Lucien Blackwell which resulted in the resignation of one of the club's officers and ultimately the formation of a rival gay political organization."

The Walt Whitman Democratic Club did have some successes in 1979 and 1980. In 1979, the Club sponsored a National Gay Conference in Philadelphia, whose primary purpose was the planning of the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. The Club also signed on to an amicus brief filed by the National Abortion Rights Action League in the matter of *Roe v. Casey*, which sought to determine whether welfare recipients could be reimbursed for medically necessary abortions. And with more Club-endorsed Democratic wins in local government, they solicited resumes and applications from gay Philadelphians who were willing to serve on advisory boards and commissions in city government, submitting these names to the Deputy Mayor. In 1980, the Club helped to elect 31 openly gay committeepersons to the Democratic City Committee.

With the rise of the Moral Majority in the 1980s the group concerned itself with growing threats of new national legislation against gays and lesbians, such as the Family Protection Act of 1981. They also pushed for a gay rights ordinance from Philadelphia City Council. What they received was a policy statement from Philadelphia Managing Director W. Wilson Goode that sexual orientation would not be used against city employees in hiring or promotion. Seeking a position on a larger stage, Jeff Britton launched his own campaign for the position of State Representative of the 182nd District, going up against incumbent Samuel Rappaport and the feminist attorney Babbette Josephs. However, a stirring of both old controversies and new--again played out in the pages of the *Philadelphia Gay News*--made Britton's already long-shot position even more untenable. After Rappaport was re-elected, the Committee to Elect Jeff Britton declared bankruptcy. The activities of the Walt Whitman Democratic Club petered out by 1983.

Jeffrey H. Britton (1947-2012) was the founder, president, and driving force behind the Walt Whitman Democratic Club. Born in Pennsylvania, Britton grew up in Washington, DC, and received a B.A. from the School of Government and Public Administration at American University in 1968. He received his M.Ed. degree from the College of Education at Temple University in 1971. Employed as a history teacher at the Philadelphia High School for Engineering, he was a member of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers and the Pennsylvania Federation of Teachers. Britton was briefly a staff member for U.S. Senator Joseph S. Clark (D - Pennsylvania). He served on the Committee on Community Tensions of the Fellowship Commission (the nation's oldest private metropolitan human rights organization), founded the 9th Police District Town Watch as well as the Center City South Neighborhood Association, and was Vice President of the Central Philadelphia Reform Democrats. He was a Democratic Committeeman, for Ward 30, Div. 21 in Philadelphia. In 1982, Britton ran unsuccessfully in the Democratic primaries for Pennsylvania State Representative from the 182nd district. He was a member of Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) and wrote on Philadelphia and Pennsylvania politics for the national gay news magazine, the *Advocate*. Following his time in Philadelphia, Britton lived in Palm Springs, CA, where he worked as a cultural writer and critic at the *Desert Sun*. He was working as a freelance journalist in San Diego at the time of his death.

Others who held leadership positions within the Club include Michael Graham, Allen W. Kratz (b. 1947), Leslie Phillips (b. 1945), Rick Rosen (b. 1949), Ken Ruisi (b. 1942), Louis Sacco, Craig van Baal (b. 1950), and Scott Wilds (b. 1951). Those whose name appear in the records with some frequency, but who were not known to have positions within the Club, include Robert F. Eimers (1946-1998), David R. Fair (b. 1952), Walter J. Lear (1923-2010), Mark Segal (b. 1951), and Anthony J. Silvestre (b. 1946).

Scope and Contents note

The collection is divided into three series: I. Business records; II. Subject files; and III. Printed materials. The business records are comprised of correspondence sent and received from 1976 to 1983. There are very few materials from 1980. In addition to covering local and state elections and ballot initiatives, topics include civil rights concerns for gays and lesbians, adding a gay rights plank to the Democratic

National Committee platform, potential violations at local gay bars for fire code and serving minors, police brutality and entrapment of homosexuals by the National Park Services, outreach to other political organizations, Club fundraising activities, and controversies surrounding Jeff Britton and *Philadelphia Gay News*. Also in this series are Club newsletters, press releases and other materials distributed to members, as well as stationary and member mailing lists.

The subject files series includes materials on organizations affiliated with the Walt Whitman Democratic Club or of interest to Jeff Britton specifically. These include the Center City South Neighborhood Association, the Gay Rights National Lobby, the National Association of Gay and Lesbian Democratic Clubs, the National Conference on Gay and Lesbian Concerns, the Pennsylvania Gay Conference, the Pennsylvania Democratic State Committee, and the Philadelphia Convention for a March on Washington. Also, here are filed materials on abortion rights, Britton's campaign for State Representative, civil rights court cases filed in Pennsylvania, petitions and miscellaneous materials concerning gay rights in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, Rep. Samuel Rappaport's attendance record, and the establishment of a prison rape support group.

The final series of printed materials includes newspaper clippings, magazine and journal articles, and full issues of newspapers, on topics of interest to the Club. Also found here are a range of pamphlets which were periodically distributed by the Club in its mailings, as well as political brochures of candidates supported by the Club.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

John J. Wilcox, Jr. LGBT Archives, William Way LGBT Community Center 2015

Conditions Governing Access note

This collection is open for research use.

Conditions Governing Use note

Copyright restrictions may exist. It is the responsibility of the requester to seek permission from the holder of the copyright to reproduce material from the John J. Wilcox, Jr. LGBT Archives of the William Way LGBT Community Center.

Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Provenance unknown.

Related Materials

Related Archival Materials note

John J. Wilcox LGBT Archives, William Way LGBT Community Center, Philadelphia, PA: Walt Whitman Democratic Club (Philadelphia) misc. file in the Ephemera collection. Includes materials not found in the Walt Whitman Democratic Club records. These include some flyers and handouts, as well as correspondence and press releases related to public controversies involving Club president Jeff Britton.

Temple University, Philadelphia, PA: Scott Wilds papers, Record Group MSS PP 061.

Controlled Access Headings

Corporate Name(s)

- Democratic National Committee (U.S.).
- National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.
- Walt Whitman Democratic Club.

Geographic Name(s)

- Philadelphia (Pa.)

Personal Name(s)

- Britton, Jeffrey H., 1947-2012

Subject(s)

- Elections
- Gay activists
- Pennsylvania--Politics and government

- Political campaigns
- Political clubs

Business records

Collection Inventory

Business records		
	Box	Folder
Correspondence sent, 1977: primarily regarding the 1978 Pennsylvania gubernatorial campaign	1	1
Correspondence sent, 1978: regarding the 1978 Pennsylvania gubernatorial campaign; statewide civil rights protection; fire code violation among Philadelphia gay bars; entrapment of homosexuals on local Federal property by the National Park Service; Philadelphia police brutality; attempt by local United Way to suppress Gay Community Center of Philadelphia (GCCP) application for grant funding; WWDC annual fundraising dinner; outreach to other gay political clubs and student groups	1	2
Correspondence sent, 1979: regarding support of H.R. 2074 amendment to the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include members of sexual minorities; Philadelphia police brutality; concern over gay issues in the media; minors being allowed into Philadelphia gay bars; opposition to appointment of Reuben Askew as Special Representative for Trade Negotiation in the Unites States; the National Gay Conference in Philadelphia; Philadelphia mayoral election	1	3
Correspondence sent, 1981: regarding H.R. 2074; WWDC endorsements for 1981 elections; gay physicians and healthcare professionals wishing to establish a local clinic; the WWDC 5th anniversary brunch honoring Congressman William Gray, The Welcomat's Bill Tonelli and Dan	1	4

Business records

Rottenberg, Rainbow Disco's Diane Lusk, Dignity's Joe Tozzi and Ann Butchart

Correspondence sent, 1982: primarily regarding Jeff Britton's candidacy in the Democratic Primary for State Representative in the Pennsylvania General Assembly against incumbent Rep. Sam Rappaport; endorsements of Britton's candidacy; alleged defamatory letter to the editor in <i>Philadelphia Gay News</i> by Britton's "arch enemy" David Fair; bankruptcy of the Committee to Elect Jeff Britton; Philadelphia Gay Rights Bill; interest in investing in a bathhouse in Washington, DC; Britton's attempt to have Leslie Phillips, transgender treasurer of National Association of Gay and Lesbian Democratic Clubs, removed from office	1	5
Correspondence received, 1976: regarding attempts to add gay rights to the 1976 Democratic National Convention platform; and others	1	6
Correspondence received, 1977: primarily regarding regarding the 1978 Pennsylvania gubernatorial campaign; also 1977 campaigns for Philadelphia District Attorney and Controller; including GOP candidates in the Walt Whitman Democratic Club's activities; Philadelphia police brutality; Philadelphia's Anita Bryant Roast Committee	1	7
Correspondence received, 1978: regarding campaigns for various state positions; Britton's candidacy for committeeman; fire code violation among Philadelphia gay bars; entrapment of homosexuals on local Federal property by the National Park Service; proposed charter change that would have allowed Frank Rizzo to serve a third term as Mayor of Philadelphia	1	8
Correspondence received, 1979: regarding endorsements of Philadelphia judicial, city council, controller candidates; opinion piece by David R. Fair on opposition to the March on Washington; concern by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends Committee on the Civil Rights	1	9

Business records

of Homosexuals over content of a travel club enclosure accompanying a WWDC mailing; concerns from multiple individuals about Jeff Britton's and Mark Segal's public disagreements; attempts to include a gay rights plank on the Democratic National Convention platform; responses to WWDC questionnaire to Philadelphia City Council candidates		
Correspondence received, 1980: regarding U.S. Senate Bill S. 2081 to amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation; recommendations for individuals to serve on City of Philadelphia boards and commissions	1	10
Correspondence received, 1981: regarding National Gay Task Force (NGTF) request to not introduce Federal pro-gay civil rights legislation, and the Stonewall Gay Democratic Club's opposition to this; the Sexual Reform Act of the District of Columbia City Council; the Family Protection Act S. 1378	1	11
Correspondence received, 1982: primarily regarding Jeff Britton's candidacy in the Democratic Primary for State Representative in the Pennsylvania General Assembly against incumbent Rep. Sam Rappaport; controversy concerning Jeff Britton's potential appearance at a Black and White Men Together (BWMT) meeting; effort to pass City Council bill that would restrict the placement of honor boxes near public artworks, notably a bust of Walt Whitman by Leonard Baskin at 5th and Oregon Sts.; information on libel law presented by Leonard M. Sagot Associates	1	12
Correspondence received, 1983: regarding dedication of Baskin bust of Walt Whitman at 4th [5th] and Oregon Sts.	1	13
Correspondence sent and received, Pennsylvania Governor's race, 1977-1978: primarily regarding the 1978 Pennsylvania gubernatorial campaign; responses from candidates to questions on gay rights;	1	14

Subject files

opposition to Senate Bill 83, which proposed ban on gays in certain state jobs in corrections, mental health, youth care, and police work, including position papers on "Why We Are Opposed to Senate Bill No. 83" and "Fact Sheet on Homosexuality"; concerns expressed over Walt Whitman Democratic Club's endorsement of Kline over Casey

Walt Whitman Democratic Club newsletters and press releases, 1977-1978	2	1
Walt Whitman Democratic Club newsletters and press releases, 1979-1981	2	2
Walt Whitman Democratic Club stationery, undated	2	3
Walt Whitman Democratic Club mailing and membership lists, rubber stamp, and blank membership cards, undated	2	4

Subject files

	Box	Folder
Abortions Rights material from Babette Josephs, including amicus brief to Roe v. Casey, which WWDC signed on to, 1979	2	5
Britton campaign for State Representative in the Pennsylvania General Assembly, 1982: includes Jeff Britton's Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Political Committee Registration Statement; Britton's State Ethics Commission Statement of Financial Interests; news release of candidacy; list of local and national endorsements; statement by Britton on crime; campaign buttons; Jeff Britton for State Representative handbills; sample ballot	2	6

Subject files

Center City South Neighborhood Association, 1976-1977: includes newsletter and minutes of the second meeting	2	7
Gay Rights National Lobby, undated: brochures from the organization and blank petitions opposing anti-gay bills and amendments	2	8
H.R. 7775 legislation, 1977: a bill to prohibit discrimination on the basis of affectional or sexual preference	2	9
National Association of Gay and Lesbian Democratic Clubs, 1980-1982: includes bylaws; background information; agenda of the founding conference in Philadelphia; founding conference participants	2	10
National Conference on Gay and Lesbian Issues, 1979: program, held in Chicago, Illinois	2	11
Pennsylvania court cases, 1975, 1979: includes Commonwealth of Pennsylvania v. Bonadio (Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, Western District), 1979; Hosler v. Bellefonte Area School District (Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania), 1978	2	12
Pennsylvania Democratic State Committee Affirmative Action Plan, 1979-1980: also information concerning H.R. 2074	2	13
Pennsylvania Gay Conference, 1978: program and background information on the conference	2	14
Petitions (blank), undated: in support of revisions of immigration and naturalization laws (concerning sexual orientation); in support of lawsuit against Philadelphia Mayor Frank L. Rizzo, Police commissioner Joseph	2	15

Subject files

O'Neill, several members of city government, and the Philadelphia Police Department to stop police abuse in Philadelphia; for recall election to determine if Philadelphia Mayor Frank L. Rizzo should be removed from office		
Philadelphia Convention for a March on Washington material, 1978-1979: position statements of the March by Women's Caucus Philadelphia Convention for a March on Washington, Ad Hoc Committee on the Philadelphia National Convention, Gay Activists Alliance of Washington, DC, Harvey Milk United Fund and others; list of national contacts; list of attendees; budgetary information; regulations on the use of Arch Street Meeting House for the Convention; official schedule of events at the Convention; request for non-uniformed police protection at the Meeting House (in light of assassinations in San Francisco); flyers for an event at Allegro to meet conference attendees	2	16
Philadelphia and Pennsylvania gay rights issues, 1975-1979m undated: copy of Governor's Office Executive Order on Expansion of Commitment Toward Equal Rights, 1975; Lesbian and Gay Town Meeting, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1979; "Some Accomplishments of Pennsylvania's Council for Sexual Minorities"; "The major issues affecting homosexuals in the Commonwealth are"; draft of letter on "the increasing political strength of Philadelphia's gay community"; flyer in support of Giovanni's Room bookstore demonstration	2	17
Prison Rape Support Group of the Pennsylvania Program for Women and Girl Offenders, Inc. 1976-1977: correspondence, clippings on task force created to support men who have been victimized by prison rape	2	18
Rappaport's Pennsylvania House of Representatives attendance and voting record, 1982	3	1

Printed materials

Printed materials	Box	Folder
Articles and clippings, 1977-1982 and undated: on the campaigns of various subjects including Lucien Blackwell, Ernest Kline, Ed Rendell, Frank Rizzo, and Jeff Britton himself; also clippings and articles on homosexuality, gay rights, and other issues	3	2
Newspapers, full issues, 1976-1982: includes issues of <i>Philadelphia Gay News</i> ; the <i>Village Voice</i> ; <i>Philadelphia's New Gay Life</i> ; <i>San Francisco Chronicle</i> ; <i>Welcomat</i>	3	3
Pamphlets, 1976-1984 and undated: on topics such as alcohol, civil rights, discrimination, gay teachers, homosexuality and the law, the March on Washington, the Mattachine Society, ministry, Parents of Gays, religion, sexually transmitted diseases	3	4
Political brochures and flyers, 1976-1981 and undated: for campaigns at various levels from Philadelphia Committeeman to President of the United States	3	5