

tangents

news & views

by dal mcintire

The American homophile movement took a great stride forward toward maturity with the Mattachine Society's Sixth Annual Convention held this Labor Day weekend in Denver. The gay and beautiful Rocky Mountain city made a happy and lasting impression on the visitors from outside Colorado at the four-day meeting — 17 from California, 4 from New York, 3 from Illinois, 2 from Massachusetts and one each from Georgia, Louisiana, New Jersey, Michigan, Hawaii, Kansas and Wyoming. Twenty-three Coloradans registered for the convention, and a number of other persons made brief appearances. The arrangements had been well made by the efficient and smoothly organized Denver chapter of the Society, and the whole program went off extremely well.

The most surprising gain was in the matter of publicity. While American homophile organizations haven't hitherto been publicity-shy, none of them have ever taken the time or trouble to properly organize an effective publicity campaign. This the Denver group did, with publicity releases, personal contacts with newsmen, and press confer-

ences in which representatives of the Daughters of Bilitis and ONE, Inc., participated. The result was a full and fair coverage of the convention, in both the DENVER POST (five stories) and the ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS (four stories).

As the POST said on Sept. 5th: "Serious, intelligent and open discussion of a basic human problem is the aim of the sixth annual national convention of the Mattachine Society, Inc., now in session at the Albany Hotel, the editor of the National Matachine Review said here Saturday.

"Harold Call of San Francisco said the convention theme is 'New Frontiers in Acceptance of the Homophile.' The Friday night and Saturday sessions and the sessions Sunday all were scheduled as open to the adult public.

" 'The idea is to talk frankly about homosexuality — what it really is, and the intelligent attitude to take in facing the problems it poses for society,' Call said . . .

" 'Among those you love most deeply there is likely to be at least one homosexual person. It could be a son or daughter, brother or sister.

Most homosexuals are NOT insane, stupid, wilfully perverted, unnatural or socially incompetent as is often believed,' he said.

"The fact is that most homosexuals can and do lead useful and productive lives... But homosexuals as such, have only limited social and civil rights... This is why a group of responsible, socially conscious citizens, including many who are not themselves homosexuals, has formed the Mattachine Society. Its purpose is to encourage medical and social research pertaining to socio-sexual behavior and to publish the results of such research. It sponsors educational programs to aid social and emotional variants and seeks to promote among the general public an understanding of the problems of such persons... It seeks to help develop social and moral responsibility in those persons whose behavior may vary from accepted present-day standards...'"

That story in the POST also gave the post office box (7035, Capitol Hill Station, Denver 6) and the phone number of the Denver branch of the Society. As a result, several new people contacted the Society during and after the convention. Several other stories in both Denver papers accurately reported the activities of the convention and the purposes of the society—with a complete absence of the nasty little twists most publications put in when saying anything at all about the subject of homosexuality.

Sixty persons attended the reception in the Mural room of the Albany Friday night and were decked out with name tags—and remarkably few used pseudonyms. Many of the Denverites were gotten up fetchingly in fancy Western duds—this all being related to the city's centennial celebrations this year.

Saturday morning Donald S.

Lucas, secretary general of the Society, reported on the state of membership. Slightly over half (97) of the active members of the Society were in the San Francisco area, with 91 scattered between New York, Denver, Detroit, Boston, Phoenix, Chicago, Washington and Los Angeles, with the latter two groups temporarily dormant. There are also 86 subscribing members and a few in other categories such as Honorary Members. Mr. Lucas emphasized that the Society was neither a lonely-hearts club, nor a social club.

Reports from chairmen of the various areas followed. The Boston delegate referred to Provincetown as the first town in the U. S. to openly accept homosexuality. The Denver chairman mentioned the general response to convention arrangements. Of 112 persons invited to speak, only three (psychiatrists all) flatly refused, and one insultingly. The Detroit delegate urged the need for more careful standards for active membership. The New York chairman mentioned having gotten nearly 100 dollar-a-month pledges for the Area Council treasury. The San Francisco chairman announced Hal Call's appearance on a forthcoming B.B.C.-T.V. documentary with leading British literary critic, Ken Tynan, in a study of non-conformist groups in America. References were made to new homophile groups or groups studying deviant sexual problems in Washington, D. C., and Nassau County, N. Y.

At lunch, Russian-born Denver psychiatrist, Leo V. Tepley, M.D., spoke most charmingly on psychological aspects of homosexuality. "Wouldn't life be intolerable if all men's experiences were fully rational?" he asked. He noted that deviates have a high order of sensitivity.

An afternoon panel examined

"Civil Liberties and the Homophile." Dr. Wallace de Ortega Maxey, editor of the shortlived magazine, **Sex and Censorship**, unable to attend due to auto accident, was replaced on the panel by Dr. Robert Hamilton, psychology professor at San Francisco State College, who gave a perceptive account of the problems facing homophiles in the teaching profession.

Attorney Wm. F. Reynard, of the Colorado A.C.L.U. Board of Directors, said that while the Civil Liberties Union takes no position on the rights of states to pass laws against certain types of activities, it is concerned to see that the individual is treated with the due process of law accorded him by constitutional guarantee. He referred to the "forgotten" Ninth Amendment as the growing wedge for the maximum degree of freedom consonant with social welfare, and analyzed some of the social conditions leading to the current demands for these liberties being made by homosexuals. He discussed A.C.L.U. attitudes on various legal problems facing homosexuals.

The Hon. Robert E. Allen, majority floor leader of the Colorado House of Representatives, expressed consternation at the outmoded way in which the problem was handled by lawbooks, legislatures and police. "We certainly don't expect the police departments to have any skill in diagnosing or treating any elements of sexual variation," he said. Referring to the phrase, "crime against nature," he said, "We don't even describe murder that way, even though most people would agree murder is bad." He boldly recommended clarifications in the law, differentiating between homosexuality and criminal behavior; recognizing consenting behavior between adults; and more

careful definition of the indeterminate sentence laws as applied to certain classes of sexual offenses. "We've come through the greatest danger to the republic when all our international frustrations came out in McCarthyite self-devouring. Part of the price of working out of that was the desire for conformity and security," he said, and expressed his resolution to work for reformation of the law.

Fifty persons attended the annual banquet. Awards were presented in absentia to the Homosexual Law Reform Society of England, Robert Veit Sherwin author of **Sex and the Statutory Law**, Grove Press, for repeatedly bucking the censors with outstanding literary publications, and Berkeley FM station KPFA. Mrs. Leah Gailey, the mother who appeared on the KPFA program (text available for \$1 from ONE Book Service) was made member of the year, and five officers of the Daughters of Bilitis and ONE, Inc.; were awarded Honorary Memberships.

Omer C. Stewart, Ph.D., Professor of Anthropology at the University of Colorado, spoke on "Homosexuality Among American Indians and Other Aboriginal Peoples." Quoting homosexual passages from the Gilgamesh Epic, one of the oldest examples of literature, he pointed out that anthropology must trace back to "lower" mammalian behavior. He insisted on a clear distinction between widespread "berdache" customs among preliterate peoples, involving a male prostitute or kept boy, and transvestism, frequently but not necessarily found in the same cases. He described the many societies in which shamanism, frequently associated with berdache customs, was the chief route to honor, power and prestige. Tracing these customs around the world, in nearly every

tribe and people, he suggested that instances of disapproval of homosexuality, at least among American Indians, can be traced to Christian influences. He mentioned that in Depression years, male prostitutes among Southern California Indians charged a standard price of two-bits.

Color slides of the Mattachine offices were shown Sunday morning, followed by a panel discussion chaired by Arthur Maule of New York, in which Miss Del Martin, President of the Daughters of Bilitis, and James Kepner, chairman of ONE, talked a bit too long to give Harold Call, representing the Society, much of a chance to speak. Miss Martin, after outlining briefly the aims and purposes of the exclusive Lesbian organization, which now has added to its San Francisco headquarters chapters in New York and Los Angeles, reported on the very fine research project the Daughters have carried out in the past year, attempting to determine the general social status and degree of adjustment of their members. And she pointed up several snags they had run up against, with improperly worded questions. This excellent paper, containing a number of surprising conclusions, has now been printed in the Sept. 1959 issue of **The Ladder** and will be reprinted in ONE INSTITUTE QUARTERLY.

Mr. Kepner discussed the differences and similarities between the various organizations, suggesting that ONE addressed its voice chiefly to the homosexual and the Society more to the general public.

This was followed by an auto excursion to Central City, Lucius Beebe's lavish old gold mining town near Denver, site of the oldest Opera House in the West. Several members got themselves photoed in front of the "Glory Hole" there—a gay bar.

The Annual Business Meeting was held on Monday. New officers were elected (MacDonald Sardeson of San Francisco as chairman, Harry Bateman of Denver as vice chairman) and Los Angeles was chosen (if re-activated) as the site of the next convention—1960 being the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Mattachine movement in Los Angeles.

The Daughters of Bilitis had an orientation meeting Monday with a group of prospective members from Denver, and following that, ONE Institute had the first of three extension classes, the other two being on Tuesday and Wednesday nights.

This reporter left Denver with a glow. The convention was a huge success. The press coverage was revolutionary. The Denver group of the Society left all the visitors full of admiration.