

**The New York Public Library
Humanities and Social Sciences Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

**Randy Wicker
Papers, 1958-1993**

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Summary

- Title:** Randy Wicker Papers, 1958-1993
- Size:** 2 archival containers (.8 lin. ft.)
- Source:** Gift of Jonathan Ned Katz, December 6, 1993
- Access:** In order to protect the privacy of individual persons a few letters received have been removed from the correspondence and sealed until the year 2020.
- Description:** Randy Wicker was a leader of the homophile movement in New York in the 1960's and a gay rights activist during the early days of the gay liberation movement. As public relations director of the Homosexual League of New York (an organizational title apparently invented for publicity purposes) he was instrumental in breaking down the taboo against the discussion of homosexuality by the mainstream media.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Randy Wicker (1958-) was born in Baltimore, the son of Charles Gervin and Iris (Leyh) Gervin. His given name was Charles Hayden Gervin which he changed (in 1967) to Randolfe Hayden Wicker, although in his published writings and in much of his later work as a gay activist, he adopted the more familiar version of Randy Wicker. He attended Washington and Lee University (1956-58), the University of Texas (1960) where he received the bachelor's degree, and the University of Connecticut Law School (for one semester).

He has been employed as editorial director of men's magazines for Countrywide Publications (New York, N.Y.); Underground Uplift Unlimited (subsequently, Underground Uplift, Inc.); and the editor of a quarterly publication entitled *Slim News*. He was also owner and director of Slogan Button Design and Retailing (now Uplift Lighting).

During the early 1960's Mr. Wicker, who had always regarded himself as gay without acknowledging it publicly, resolved to challenge the historic taboo of the "straight" media against publishing articles or broadcasting radio or television programs about homosexuality and the culture and lifestyles of the gay community. Convinced that a serious, candid and public discussion of these matters would lead eventually to gay men and lesbians being accepted as a legitimate minority, Mr. Wicker embarked upon a one-man public relations crusade.

Working days as a "straight" in the advertising field, and evenings as "public relations director" of the Homosexual League of New York (an organizational title which he apparently invented for public relations purposes) Mr. Wicker established himself as a kind of clearinghouse of information for the gay community. He deluged editors, publishers and producers with proposals for articles and for radio and television programs on gay men and lesbians, offered by mail free of charge literature on homosexuality, and issued his own "Wicker Report" of news and information for the gay community.

His greatest public relations coup occurred in 1962 with the broadcast by Pacifica Radio WBAI-FM in New York of his program "Live and Let Live" which featured a group of gays from a variety of backgrounds discussing with great dignity and seriousness of purpose their lifestyles, their moral code, and their attitudes towards one another and towards the "straight" world. The program was an instant success, received an enthusiastic response from the "straight" press, and was instrumental in leading ultimately to the breakdown of the media's code of silence regarding homosexuality.

Mr. Wicker was for a time (1963) secretary of the Mattachine Society of New York and a regular columnist ("The Wicker Report") for the Mattachine Newsletter. He has also been a regular columnist for *Gay* (newspaper) and for the *L.C.E. News* of San Francisco (the first "social variant" newspaper in America). Through the years he has contributed to (or been featured in) numerous "straight" and gay publications including the *Advocate*, *Escapade*, *Nation*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Nugget*, *Screw* and *Slim News*. With Kay Tobin (pseudonym of Kay Lahusen, the name she now uses) he co-authored *The Gay Crusaders* (N.Y., Paperback Library, 1972). In recent years Mr.

Wicker has operated his lighting business, Uplift Lighting, in New York City at 506 Hudson Street.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The bulk of the papers which fall in the period 1961-65, consist of correspondence, miscellaneous papers and printed ephemera, reflecting Mr. Wicker's efforts as a gay activist in New York to focus public attention upon the status of gay men and lesbians in America and to win understanding and support for their cause.

PROVENANCE

The papers of Randy Wicker came to the Library in December of 1993 included in a collection of personal papers of Jonathan Ned Katz which Mr. Katz donated to the Library.

SERIES DESCRIPTIONS

The papers are arranged into correspondence; miscellaneous papers; and printed ephemera.

The correspondence, which includes in-coming and out-going letters arranged chronologically in the period 1961-63, 1965 (and undated) is that of Randy Wicker as public relations director of the Homosexual League of New York with editors and publishers of mainstream newspapers and magazines, with officers of gay and lesbian organizations, with gays and others seeking information about the League, with readers of an article by Dan Wakefield on Randy Wicker entitled "The Gay Crusader" which was published in the June 1963 issue of *Nugget* (magazine), and with persons responding to the radio program "Live and Let Live" which featured a discussion by homosexuals of their lifestyles broadcast by Pacific Radio WBAI-FM in New York. Correspondence from Franklin E. Kameny of the Mattachine Society of Washington relates to his attempt to persuade the Pentagon to revise its policy regarding the service of homosexuals in the armed forces.

Other organizational correspondence includes Daughters of Bilitis (Barbara Gittings), Demophil Center (Prescott Townsend), Greater Philadelphia (magazine), League for Civil Education (Guy Strait), One, Inc. (Don Slater), and Sexology Magazine. There are also two letters (July 20 and Sept. 21, 1962) from David McReynolds (War Resisters' League), and one letter (July 12, 1962) from Norman Mailer.

The miscellaneous papers (1962-64, 1992-93) include a scrapbook of personal publicity relating to Mr. Wicker's activities as a gay rights activist including clippings of his articles in the *Mattachine Review*, press clippings regarding the radio program "Live and Let Live"; and photocopies of papers relating to his attempt to reorganize the Christopher Street Liberation Day Committee, sponsors of the annual Gay Pride Day in New York City.

The printed ephemera (1958-73 & n.d.), which is arranged by year, consists of flyers, bulletins, news sheets, and clippings of press and magazine articles relating to homosexuality and to the gay and lesbian community.

RANDY WICKER PAPERS

Container List

Container No.

- | | |
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| 1 | Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers |
| 2 | Printed Ephemera |