Bois Burk papers

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Bois Burk papers
Collection Number: 1989-07
Creator/Collector:
Extent: 2 cartons (2 linear feet)
Repository: GLBT Historical Society
San Francisco, California 94103
Abstract: The Bois Burk papers include biographical and autobiographical materials with frank discussions of his sexuality and sex life; correspondence; materials related to his interests and activities; and news clippings (circa 1955-1980), which document gay issues, including aging and age discrimination; public sex, police entrapment and arrests. There are also records and notes on numerous gay organizations (especially the Society for Individual Rights); and gay liberation in Berkeley and San Francisco.
Language of Material: English
Access
Collection is open for research with the following exceptions: names of some correspondents may not be published.
Funding for processing this collection was provided by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).
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Preferred Citation
Bois Burk papers . GLBT Historical Society
Acquisition Information
Biography/Administrative History
Bois Burk was born in Kentfield, in Marin County, on November 4, 1906. His father, Frederic Burk, was an educator who founded the Frederic Burk School, a private school in San Francisco. Mr. Burk was also the first president of San Francisco State Normal School, the predecessor to San Francisco State University. His mother, Caroline Frear Burk, was a house wife who raised four sons: Frear (1900), Dean (1904), Norval (1905), and Bois Frederic (1906) on the five acre family "ranch" in Kentfield. Bois went to school in Kentfield and graduated from Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley in 1924. He entered the University of California (Berkeley) and obtained a degree in Economics in 1929. He was employed by two different insurance companies in San Francisco from 1929 to 1942, when he accepted a position as a clerk in the Physical Education Department at UC Berkeley. In 1956 he resigned or was forced from his job at UC Berkeley, apparently as a direct result of his homosexuality. It is unclear whether an incident occurred in the department, the University was notified of a sex-related charge elsewhere, or some other event occurred. As of 1989, Bois was no longer able to recall the events leading to his departure from a job he described as “wonderful.” Subsequent to 1956 he held a number of jobs. An attempt to obtain a position as a clerk with the federal government was denied by the Civil Service in 1959 due to “gross immoral conduct” (see folder 7). In the later 1940s Burk was interviewed by Alfred Kinsey as part of Kinsey's studies of the sex lives of American males. Burk began during this period to keep a record of his sexual activities. Most of his sexual contact consisted of anonymous encounters. He was arrested “several times” for sexual exploits. In 1952 he became an early member of the Mattachine Society in Berkeley. He was very interested in rights for homosexuals and began reading and attending many events related to the homophile movement. In 1954 he began to clip the daily newspapers for articles related to sex and homosexuality. In the 1960s he was active in the League for Civil Education and the Society for Individual Rights. The rise of Gay Liberation in 1969 was very exciting to Burk, who fully embraced the philosophy of Gay Lib. He continued to keep up with the gay rights movement in the 1970s and '80s, attending many events and recording his (often cryptic) responses on programs and handouts. In 1976 he filed an age discrimination suit against Club Baths after he was turned away at the door for being “an old toad.” He eventually won his landmark case. Although he had numerous long term friends, Burk never had a lover. He always lived alone, mostly in rooming houses and hotels in Berkeley. In 1989 relatives, concerned about is deteriorating condition, moved him into the retirement home on Sacramento Street in Berkeley. Burk died June 5, 1993.
Scope and Content of Collection
Bay Area native and lifelong resident Bois Burk (1906-1993) was a gay pioneer and activist who observed and participated in the unfolding of gay culture and the modern gay rights movement in the U.S. Burk was interviewed by Alfred Kinsey for his studies on the sex lives of American males, was an early member of the Mattachine Society in Berkeley and was active in the League for Civil Education and the Society for Individual Rights. In 1976 he filed an age discrimination suit against Club Baths after he was turned away at the door, and he eventually won his landmark case. The Bois Burk papers include biographical and autobiographical materials with frank discussions of his sexuality and sex life; correspondence; materials related to his interests and activities; and newscclippings (circa 1955-1980), which document gay issues, including aging and age discrimination; public sex, police entrapment and arrests. There are also records and notes on numerous gay organizations (especially the Society for Individual Rights); and gay liberation in Berkeley and San Francisco.

Indexing Terms
Gay men -- Sexual behavior.
Homophobia.
Age discrimination.
Society for Individual Rights

Bois Burke Container List