Thomas Waddell papers

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Thomas Waddell papers
Dates: 1961-1987
Collection Number: 1998-21
Creator/Collector: Waddell, Tom, 1937-1987
Extent: 8.8 linear feet (4 cartons, 1 box, 3 oversize boxes, 1 oversize folder)
Repository: GLBT Historical Society
San Francisco, California 94103
Abstract: This collection contains material related to Dr. Thomas Waddell (1937-1987), who is best known for founding the Gay Games. It includes correspondence, subject files, memorabilia, and a small amount of photographs.
Language of Material: English
Access
Collection is open for research. Funding for processing this collection was provided by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) and the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR).
Publication Rights
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Preferred Citation
Thomas Waddell papers. GLBT Historical Society
Acquisition Information
Biography/Administrative History
Waddell was born Thomas Flubacher in Paterson, New Jersey to a Catholic German-American family. His parents separated when he was in his teens, and at the age of fifteen he went to live with Gene and Hazel Waddell, for whom he did chores; they adopted him six years later. The Waddells were former vaudeville acrobats and encouraged Tom to take up gymnastics. [Gene Waddell is one of the men in the famous photograph of acrobats balancing atop the Empire State Building.] Aware of his homosexual feelings in high school, Tom excelled in athletics as a means to compensate for them. Waddell attended Springfield College in Massachusetts on a track scholarship. Originally majoring in physical education, he switched to pre-medicine following the sudden death of his best friend and co-captain of the gymnastics team, Don Marshman, an event that moved him deeply. Waddell attended medical school at New Jersey College of Medicine, a division of Seton Hall University. He traveled on a U.S. State Department-sponsored track and field tour of Africa in 1962, and interned at Beth El Hospital (now Brookdale Hospital), in Brooklyn, New York, in 1965. In 1965 he traveled from Brooklyn, New York to participate in the Civil Rights Movement in Selma, Alabama. Drafted into the Army in 1966, Waddell became a preventive-medicine officer and paratrooper. Entering a course in global medicine, he protested when he found out that he would be shipped to Vietnam. Expecting a court-martial, he was instead unexpectedly sent to train as a decathlete for the 1968 Olympics. At the Mexico City Olympics, Waddell placed sixth among the 33 competitors. He broke five of his own personal records in the ten events. After discharge from the Army, Waddell served residencies at Georgetown University and Montefiore Hospital (in the Bronx). At Georgetown, he did research on viruses at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. In 1970, he began a graduate fellowship at Stanford University. While there, he met Lee Bryan, with whom he had a five-year relationship. In 1972, in a track meet in Hawaii, Waddell injured his knee in a high jump, which ended his career as a competitive athlete. Waddell established his private practice on 18th Street in the Castro neighborhood of San Francisco in 1974. He also served in the Middle East as medical director of the Whittaker Corporation from 1974 through 1981. Part of his job entailed serving as personal physician for a Saudi prince and a Saudi businessman, and he eventually became the team physician for the Saudi Arabian Olympic team at the 1976 Montreal Olympics. In 1975, he met landscape designer Charles Deaton, twelve years his senior, and they became lovers. A June, 1976 issue of People magazine featured them in a cover article. They were the first gay couple to appear on the cover of a major, national magazine. Soon after returning to San Francisco in 1972, Waddell joined a gay bowling league. It inspired him to consider organizing a gay sporting event modeled on the Olympics. He followed through with the idea in the early 1980’s. The first Gay Olympics was to take place in San Francisco in 1982 in the form of a sports competition and arts festival. But a few weeks before the event was to begin, the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) sued Waddell’s organization over its use of the word “Olympic.” Despite the
fact that the USOC had not previously protested when other groups had used the name, they alleged that allowing “Gay Olympics” would injure them. They succeeded in securing an injunction just nineteen days before the first games were to begin. Nevertheless, the games, now re-christened the “Gay Games,” went forward. They were a great success, perhaps because they emphasized sportsmanship, personal achievement, and inclusiveness to a far greater degree than the Olympics. In 1987, the United States Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, ruled in favor of the USOC. The court affirmed the USOC’s right to collect legal fees from Waddell and it placed a lien on his home. In 1987, a few weeks before Waddell died, the USOC waived its legal fees and removed the lien. In 1981, while founding the Gay Games, Waddell met two people with whom he formed major relationships. One was public relations man and fundraiser Zohn Artman, with whom he fell in love. The other was lesbian athlete Sara Lewinstein. Both Tom and Sara had longed to have a child, and they decided to have a one together. Their daughter, Jessica, was born in 1983. In 1985, Waddell was diagnosed with AIDS. To protect Jessica’s and her mother’s legal rights, Tom and Sara married in 1985. Although dogged by the USOC’s lawsuit, Waddell lived his final years with bravery and dignity. He saw the enormous success of Gay Games II in 1986, and even participated, winning the gold medal in the javelin event.

**Scope and Content of Collection**

This collection contains correspondence and other materials related to Dr. Thomas Waddell (1937-1987), who is best known for founding the Gay Games. Most of the letters come from friends, family and lovers, but there is also some professional correspondence and a small amount of correspondence from Waddell. The bulk of the letters are between Waddell and his first lover, Enge Menaker, a radical socialist journalist more than 40 years his senior, who he met at a children’s camp in Massachusetts in 1959. Subject files include materials related to his medical practice, the Gay Games I and II, and the Middle East and Whittaker Life Sciences Group, where Waddell worked for a number of years. There is also memorabilia from the Gay Games and the 1968 Olympics; a small amount of personalia and financial records; notebooks, notes, fragments of writing and sketchpads; and a small amount of photographic material.

**Indexing Terms**

Gay Games
Olympic athletes
Homophobia.

[Thomas waddell Container List]