
Guide to the Buzz Bense Records of the 890 Folsom Clubhouse

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Buzz Bense records of the 890 Folsom clubhouse

Dates: 1984-1991

Collection number: 1991-26

Creator: Bense, Bernard G.

Collection Size: 0.4 linear feet (1 box)

Repository: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society
San Francisco, California 94105

Abstract: Records of a variety of primarily gay male sex clubs that did business in a building rented and managed by California Certified Sex Educator Buzz (Bernard G.) Bense. The building was located at 890-894 Folsom Street in San Francisco. Bense leased and opened the building in 1986, and closed it in 1991 after it was sold by its owners. Legal documents, correspondence, public hearing documents, newsletters, publicity fliers, and other printed ephemera document groups holding events at the clubhouse, especially JO Buddies, business issues, and police harassment after the closure of San Francisco bathhouses in the wake of the AIDS epidemic.

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

Collection open for research. One folder containing personal information is restricted.

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Preferred Citation

Buzz Bense records of the 890 Folsom clubhouse, 1991-26, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society.

Acquisition Information

Donated by Buzz Bense in 1991.

Biography / Administrative History

The multilevel warehouse space at 890-894 Folsom Street was rented by California Certified Sex Educator Buzz (Bernard G.) Bense and opened in November, 1986. The building--also called the Sextine Chapel of Inanna and dubbed the "sex headquarters" by the *San Francisco Sentinel*--served as the clubhouse for the JO Buddies and the headquarters of Nomenus, a tax exempt religious corporation with the purpose of creating physical sanctuaries for the Radical Faeries, a spiritual, political, and community group. Buzz Bense was the founder of the JO Buddies, a gay masturbation circle, and has been called "a leading impresario of the city's sexual underground" by *Playboy Magazine*. The building's space was rented to a number of private-membership safe sex clubs, including the San Francisco Jacks, the Jack and Jill events of the Mother Goose Club, and the San Francisco Golden Showers Association (GSA) after the closing of San Francisco bathhouses and clubs in the wake of the AIDS epidemic. Most of these clubs catered to gay men; one club was geared toward lesbians (Club Klitz) and another, the Jack and Jill events of the Mother Goose Club, included gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and their friends. The building also housed a graphics studio. Various benefits for AIDS and other queer causes were held at 890 Folsom.

The major contribution of the 890 Folsom clubhouse was its availability for safe sex clubs and parties after the closing of the bathhouses, and members' organizing efforts in resistance to police harassment of group safe sex space from 1989 to 1991. Bense and other clubhouse leaders were particularly disturbed by the seizure of membership records, and the fact that the police checked identification of party participants and recorded their names at the July 14, 1989 raid. The resulting temporary closures of the clubhouse jeopardized its financial health, since some clubs relocated to new spaces.

The building was sold by its owners and a closing ritual was performed by the K'thar Sissies on September 1, 1991. Soon after, Buzz Bense opened a new club, Eros, on Market Street.

Scope and Content of Collection

Legal documents, correspondence, public hearing documents, newsletters, publicity fliers, and other printed ephemera documenting the activities and physical plant of the safe sex clubhouse operated by Buzz Bense at 890 Folsom Street in San Francisco from 1986-1991. Records also provide documentation of the activities of some of the clubs that utilized the space, including JO Buddies, SF Jacks, Blow Buddies U.S.A., Golden Showers Association, Pan International Global Jack-off, and the Jack and Jill events of the Mother Goose Club. Of particular interest is substantial documentation of police harassment of the club and its patrons that took place in 1987 and 1989, ostensibly for violations of city building codes and operation without proper permits.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged in five series:

- Series 1. Building files
- Series 2. Writings on safe sex practices
- Series 3. JO Buddies files
- Series 4. Files on other clubs renting the 890 Folsom clubhouse
- Series 5. Files on police harassment

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection.

Bense, Bernard G.

JO Buddies (San Francisco, Calif.)

Blow Buddies U.S.A. (San Francisco, Calif.)

Golden Showers Association (San Francisco, Calif.)

Pan International Global Jack-Off (San Francisco, Calif.)

SF Jacks (San Francisco, Calif.)

Mother Goose Club (Berkeley, Calif.)

Masturbation--California--San Francisco

Gay men--Health and hygiene--California--San Francisco

Gay men--Social life and customs--California--San Francisco

Gay men--Sexual behavior--California--San Francisco

Safe sex in AIDS prevention--California--San Francisco

Fliers (printed matter)

Newsletters

Box 1

Series 1 Building files 1985-1991

Physical Description: 6 folders

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series includes articles of incorporation and other organizational records, papers and correspondence related to the physical plant, architectural sketches, and records of clubhouse events and renters. Physical plant information relates to perceived police and fire department harassment, which was often conducted under the pretext of safety issues. Rental contracts offer information about various organizations that rented the facility. The event fliers file includes monthly calendars of events held at the clubhouse from 1989-1991.

Arrangement

Series is arranged topically.

- Box 1 Series 2 **Writings on safe sex practices 1990**
Physical Description: 1 folder
Series Scope and Content Summary
This series contains safe sex information and guidelines written by Buzz Bense.
Arrangement
Series is arranged topically.
- Box 1 Series 3 **JO Buddies files 1986-1987**
Physical Description: 5 folders
Series Scope and Content Summary
This series contains fliers and information about the JO Buddies club, some of which predates the opening of the 890 Folsom clubhouse. It also includes party rules and regulations for the club, containing information on safe sex policies, clean-up procedures, and efforts to comply with the law and safeguard against police harassment. Correspondence consists of national and international contacts regarding other JO clubs.
Arrangement
Series is arranged topically.
- Box 1 Series 4 **Files on other clubs renting the 890 Folsom clubhouse 1984-1991**
Physical Description: 9 folders
Series Scope and Content Summary
This series documents the activities of other clubs renting space at the 890 Folsom clubhouse, offering a glimpse of safer sex groups in San Francisco during the late 1980s. Materials document their rules, philosophies, and cooperation through interclub meetings. The series contains particularly extensive fliers for events hosted by the Jack and Jill events of the Mother Goose Club and the SF Jacks, for the latter including an almost complete set of monthly newsletters data from 1984-1991. The restricted roster for the SF Jacks club indicates a membership of 191 during 1986.
Arrangement
Series is arranged topically.
Access Note
A file of membership rosters for the SF Jacks club is restricted until 2012-01-01.
- Box 1 Series 5 **Files on police harassment 1986-1991**
Physical Description: 7 folders
Series Scope and Content Summary
This series documents arrests and incidents that took place in 1987 and 1989, and the steps taken by Bense and others to try and end such harassment. Materials include police reports, correspondence, and notes from meetings regarding police activity. After the July 1989 arrests, Bense and other clubhouse members appealed to the Mayor's Office, the Police Commission's Office of Citizen Complaints, and the San Francisco Human Rights Commission in order to stop the harassment and hold the officers involved in the incidents accountable for their actions. Documentation in this series provides substantial information on the response and resistance of clubhouse users to these incidents, and includes media coverage in San Francisco newspapers.
Arrangement
Series is arranged topically.