

Los Angeles Gay Motorcycle Clubs, 1954-1980: Creating a
Masculine Identity and Community

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April 5, 2010

On New Year's Eve, 1967, the Los Angeles Police Department Vice Squad raided the Black Cat, a gay bar, arrested sixteen customers, and beat several bartenders unconscious. Until that night, wide-scale community protest against gay bar raids was unheard of. But the Black Cat raid incited a reaction: Los Angeles PRIDE (Personal Rights in Defense and Education) organized multiple protests outside of the bar the next day with “hundreds of onlookers [supporting] the parading picketers and activists [passing] out 3,000 leaflets to motorists explaining why they were there.”¹ Several years before the infamous Stonewall Inn Riots in New York City, activists began protesting police harassment in Los Angeles. Lillian Faderman's *Gay L.A.* brilliantly recounts the history of homosexuals in Southern California, but mostly overlooks the rise of gay motorcycle clubs starting in the mid 1950s.² Over a decade before the Black Cat raid and ensuing protests, a group of gay men got together to act out their own solution to police harassment—get on a motorcycle and ride off into the woods.

In 1954, a group of homosexual men in Los Angeles founded the Satyrs Motorcycle Club, today the longest continuously-running gay organization in America.³ Though American motorcycle culture had begun in the late 1940s and early 1950s, homosexuality was illegal at the time, making gay motorcycle clubs unique organizations seen as outlaws on two counts—their motorcycling and their homosexuality. As John Laird, member of the Satyrs since 1961 explained, motorcycling offered men an escape from the bars “because in those days the LAPD was on a real hunt for gay men.”⁴ Campgrounds became safe spaces for them to explore

¹ Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2006), 157. PRIDE was founded in 1966 and that was the first known use of that term in regard to gay rights, Faderman, *Gay L.A.* 155.

² *Ibid.*, 150. *Gay L.A.* has one short paragraph on gay motorcycle clubs, stating that their numbers increased in the 1960s and that they brought men out of the bars and to the campgrounds of the San Bernardino and Santa Monica Mountains, “where they explored literal new heights of sexual and personal freedom.”

³ Satyrs Motorcycle Club of Los Angeles, “The Satyrs M/C Web Site,” <http://www.satyrsmc.org>.

⁴ John Laird, in discussion with author, January 6, 2010, Fine Gold Manor in North Hollywood, CA., tape recording in possession of author. See Appendix I.

previously taboo sexual desires and gender presentations. The clubs became family—clubs were where members spent weekends and holidays, clubs helped them out if they were injured or in jail, and clubs gave them a supportive community in which to grow and develop their sexuality. Gay motorcyclists, encouraged by visual media, created and embraced a masculine gay identity, one that countered the pre-war feminine aesthetic of “fairies.” It was that new identity that bound them together. A changeover in power in the LAPD in the late 1960s resulted in a crackdown that radicalized the gay community of Los Angeles in the early 1970s, and that radicalization changed the timbre of the urban landscape from which the clubs emerged. Gay bikers, supported by their clubs, became confident enough in their masculinity and homosexuality by the 1970s that upon returning from the freedom of the woods, they stopped running and began to openly challenge the police. The transformation from a group of fearful, closeted gay men in the 1950s to the political, assertive gay men of the 1970s was due in large part to the supportive and identity-affirming community the clubs formed.

The Satyrs Motorcycle Club was founded on the Saturday after Thanksgiving in 1954, when a group of gay male friends, relaxing by a private pool in Los Angeles after the “annual Friday night orgy had just ceased,” realized that since they had so much in common (they were gay, they liked the same bars, and they all rode motorcycles), it made sense to form a gay motorcycle club.⁵ They chose the club name because the “half-goat-half-man Satyr from Greek mythology was always seen in cartoons with this flushed look on his face, rosy cheeks and all this, carrying a very voluptuous women off into the woods and so forth.” As John Laird, member of the Satyrs since 1961, explained: “Well, we were doing the same thing but excepting it was fellows we were carrying into the woods, and we went camping.” He continued: “We’d throw the tent on the back, throw the trick [slang for a prospective gay male sexual partner] on the

⁵ *Original Pride*, DVD, directed by Scott Bloom (Tragoida Moving Pictures, 2005).

back, and get on the motorcycle and ride away.”⁶ The campground was in a sense a “portable social space”⁷ for the men that gave them the freedom to express themselves sexually. Because of the constant possibility of police raids while at home or in town, the early days of the Satyrs were very secretive: “minutes could be taken but no names could be used...in case the records got confiscated by the police; it was a Gestapo state mentality. No one knew who the Satyrs were.”⁸ That secrecy was normal for any gathering of homosexuals in the highly repressive 1950s. As homosexuality was medically classified as a psychological disorder in addition to being illegal, groups were skittish about being labeled homosexual.⁹ Clubs were secretive about their inner workings and had codes of ethics to keep them together and safe.¹⁰ When Frank Chance, a member of the San Andreas Motorcycle club, mentioned his club’s name in a 1969 article in the *Los Angeles Advocate*, a gay newsmagazine founded in 1967 in response to the Black Cat raid, he was kicked out of the club.¹¹ From the first club founding in 1954 until the mid-1980s, gay motorcycle clubs did not want to be mentioned in any gay publication, because it might result in the outing—and firing—of members who worked for the government.¹²

Four years after the founding of the Satyrs in 1954, discontented Satyrs founded a second gay motorcycle club: the Oedipus Rex Motorcycle club.¹³ Other clubs followed soon after, and

⁶ John Laird interview.

⁷ Robert B. Ridinger, “Things Visible and Invisible,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 43, no.1 (2002): 1-9.

⁸ *Original Pride*.

⁹ “Gay is Okay with APA (American Psychiatric Association),” *Medical News & Perspectives*, Toronto, Ontario, August 12, 1998. <http://www.soulforce.org/article/642>. Homosexuality was considered a psychological disorder until 1973.

¹⁰ Durk Dehner, in discussion with author, January 6, 2010, Tom of Finland Foundation in Los Angeles, CA, tape recording in possession of author.

¹¹ “Bike Club Ousts Frank Chance,” *Los Angeles Advocate*, September 1969, 22, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. “Wheel Talk columnist, Frank Chance, has been expelled from the San Andreas Motorcycle Club. Decision by the eight-member club was based upon the fact that the club was opposed to publicity regarding any bike clubs in a homophile publication. Their club was the only L.A. club named in The ADVOCATE (March 1969).”

¹² John Laird interview.

¹³ *Ibid.* The name Oedipus Rex was, by legend, chosen because they wanted to name themselves the “mother-fuckers” but decided that the name Oedipus Rex was close enough.

most copied the Satyrs' model. Indeed, the Blue Max Motorcycle Club, founded in 1968, modeled its constitution almost exactly after that of the Satyrs,¹⁴ as did the Buddy Motorcycle Club, founded in 1965, and many others. As their model spread in the 1970s, motorcycle clubs as far away as New York City began asking for founding help from the Satyrs.¹⁵ The founders of the Satyrs started a phenomenon of gay motorcycle clubs that by 1979 had grown to over twenty clubs in California and many more throughout the country.

Los Angeles: The Perfect Place for Gay Motorcycle Clubs

The culture and the topography of Los Angeles were perfectly suited for a thriving motorcycle culture. Since the beginning of the 20th Century, Los Angeles had been the destination of choice for the adventuresome and the “land of milk and honey” for the many eager to leave hum-drum lives in the middle of the country. The wide open spaces, long roads into the mountains, and beautiful beachside highways made Los Angeles a mecca for motorcycle culture. The freeway system as it is today was fully developed by the 1960s and opened up whole new sections of southern California to vehicle traffic. “California—where freeways are a way of life—is by long odds the nation’s biggest motorcycle market,” explained journalist and motorcyclist Hunter Thompson.¹⁶ The chance to weave through the growing traffic or feel the glorious sunshine year-round on one’s shoulders while riding up the Pacific Coast Highway made buying a motorcycle especially appealing to residents of post-World War II Los Angeles.

¹⁴ “Blue Max Constitution,” Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹⁵ John Laird, confirmed by “Original Pride,” a documentary produced in 2006 on the origins of the Satyrs, suggests that most gay motorcycle club constitutions in the country came from the Satyrs original constitution.

¹⁶ Hunter Thompson, *Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), 93.

In addition, Los Angeles was well-suited to a budding gay culture due to the presence of the film industry and a rough frontier libertarianism. In describing Los Angeles in his book *The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, Reyner Banham notes “the city’s extremes include an excessive tolerance.”¹⁷ Initially a frontier town in Southern California, Los Angeles quickly bloomed into a huge metropolis without losing that frontier “anything goes” mentality. As early as 1896, an unknown author associated the town with homosexuality: “the City of Los Angeles should change its name to that of Sodom or Gomorrah [sic].”¹⁸ Los Angeles’s frontier history gave it an aura of independence, excitement, and sexual possibility. In addition, the burgeoning 20th Century film industry made everyone a possible star. Gay men and women found Los Angeles particularly attractive not just for “its sunshine and space and economic opportunities,” but also because “its size promised both anonymity and the possibility of being able to find a community.”¹⁹ Cultural institutions like art galleries, libraries, and major universities, coupled with a large ethnically diverse population, ensured the “cultural diversity and liberalism of the area.”²⁰ Duane Moller, owner of the Black Pipe gay bar in downtown Los Angeles, explained in 1973 that “the city and county of Los Angeles are a paradise in that we have here a metropolis and secluded areas, whichever is preferred.”²¹ Early in the 1960s, “homosexuals began not only to move permanently to [Los Angeles] in large numbers but also to visit [the city] as tourists and experience [its] unique sights and sounds as temporary, fantastic interludes in lives that for many were only nominally gay.”²² Moira Rachel Kenney, in *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of*

¹⁷ Reyner Banham, *The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 25.

¹⁸ “Los Angeles Disgraced,” *California Argus*, May 9, 1896, in La Fiesta Scrapbook, Braun Research Library, Southwest Museum, Los Angeles (MS 207S1), quoted in Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 14.

¹⁹ Faderman, *Gay L.A.*, 73.

²⁰ Institute of Homophile Studies, ONE Confidential, Aug-Sept 1965, 5.

²¹ David Cobbs, “A Glimpse of ??,” *Discover*, January 8, 1973, 20, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. The article is an interview with Duane Moller.

²² Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 216.

Place and Politics, points out that Los Angeles is the “greatest hidden chapter in American gay and lesbian history,” so perhaps it is no wonder that Los Angeles gay motorcycle clubs have been overlooked in popular gay histories.²³

World War II fostered the creation of permanent homosexual communities in Los Angeles. The city exploded with people thanks to the growth of wartime industries and the stationing there of enlisted men. Soldiers stationed in Linda Vista, California, were warned about the civilian gay life of Los Angeles. As one veteran recalled, “we were solemnly told that all queers in California wore red neckties and hung out at the corner of Hollywood and Vine, a myth we all accepted.”²⁴ Soldiers who were interested in finding gay men for sex at least knew that the possibility existed, and they knew where to start looking. Many of them went downtown and into Hollywood to find gay life. Gay bars near Hollywood Boulevard, to the chagrin of military officials, often had uniformed soldiers “packed three-deep.”²⁵ The WWII-inspired gay community and bar scene made Los Angeles a place where gay men could find sexual satisfaction and community. It was those very bars, packed due to the wartime influx of soldiers, that encouraged the creation of gay motorcycle clubs after the war.

Leather apparel became an important part of motorcycle culture during World War II, when multiple armies had motorcycle divisions in the European war zone. Tough leather bomber jackets were practical for German motorcycle corps, providing warmth and protection against scrapes and accidents. Prior to helmets, many officers in the Nazi army wore motorcycle caps made of leather as well or simply pulled the straps on top of their officer caps down for use as

²³ Moira Rachel Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 7.

²⁴ William Manchester, *Goodbye, Darkness* (New York: Little, Brown, 1979), 122, in Faderman, *Gay L.A.*, 123.

²⁵ Faderman, *Gay L.A.*, 73.

chin straps. The Gestapo wore black leather, perhaps setting the trend for the transition from brown leather to black leather in motorcycle gear during WWII.²⁶

World War II represented a revolution not just in leather color, but in sexuality and gender presentation for gay men. Before the war, Western society did not accept homosexuals as real men, instead labeling them as mentally unstable and “some kind of hybrid, dysfunctional creation” that could be best treated by shock treatment or prison time. Gay bars were patronized almost exclusively by queens (highly feminized gay men, usually in drag attire) and the straight-identified men seeking to pick them up. World War II opened the eyes of many gay men to their homosexual identities as well as options of gender presentation besides queens.²⁷ During the war, the artist Tom of Finland, an officer in the Finnish army, fell in love with another man, an experience that solidified his homosexual identity and contributed to his fascination with the visual stimulation of the Nazi war machine and its leather officer uniforms. According to Durk Dehner, Tom of Finland’s business partner, Tom’s experience of being in a position of power and loving another man made him want to “give homosexuals an identity that was fully man.” That identity would be “a kind of identity they could relate to,” different from “the cultural legacy of the brilliant Oscar Wilde, who promoted and flamboyantly embodied the androgynous aesthete.”²⁸ Because of his military experience and desire for masculine gay men, Tom wanted to portray a super male energy in his artwork. He drew men with highly exaggerated sex characteristics—huge pectoral muscles, bicep muscles, pant bulges and buttocks—that made them look extraordinarily muscular and masculine. He rejected the pre-WWII idea that the more

²⁶ Durk Dehner, interview. Tom of Finland, a gay Finnish artist, saw Marlon Brando’s film *The Wild One* in the early 1950s and switched from drawing brown leather to drawing black leather, causing many of his European fans to buy black leather outfits to match his drawings.

²⁷ Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two*, (New York: The Free Press A Division of Macmillan, Inc., 1990).

²⁸ Camille Paglia et al., *Tom of Finland XXL*, Ed. Dian Hansen (New York: TASCHEN America Llc, 2009).

masculine man in a homosexual relationship had to be the “top,” or the penetrator in a sexual situation. Tom drew his hypermasculine protagonist “getting ploughed” and enjoying it, breaking that taboo and affirming that masculine men could be penetrated during sex and still be “real men.”²⁹ His artwork, coupled with his own participation in and documentation of gay male life, made him an iconic center of the revolution of gay male masculinity after WWII.

In the spring of 1957, Tom of Finland’s drawings appeared on the cover of *Physique Pictorial*, a Los Angeles-based bodybuilding magazine “honoring the male physique” put out by AMG, the Athletic Model Guild.³⁰ The magazine was a thinly-veiled male erotic digest sold on newspaper stands throughout downtown Los Angeles starting in 1950. As homosexuality was illegal, the pictures of barely-clothed men in *Physique Pictorial* had captions suggesting innocent motives, such as young men in erotic poses “wrestling.”³¹ Tom’s artwork in the Winter 1958 issue of *Physique Pictorial* contained a series of drawings titled “Motorcycle Boys.” Featuring nude or mostly-nude men with exaggerated muscles on motorcycles, the drawings were sexy and scandalous.³² Always wearing a leather officer’s cap, leather gloves, and leather boots (and sometimes with Levi jeans but often without them), the men in his drawings portrayed a perfect sexual ideal for the gay men who purchased the magazine from the newsstand in downtown Los Angeles. Tom’s drawings linked masculine and leather-wearing men with motorcycles in the minds of many Los Angeles gay men. The Falcon’s Lair, a gay leather bar downtown, often purchased Tom’s art to use in advertising for its events. Soon after those first issues of *Pictorial*,

²⁹ Durk Dehner interview.

³⁰ Ibid. *Physique Pictorial* was founded by Bob Mizer in Los Angeles, CA in 1950.

³¹ *Physique Pictorial*, April 1960, Physique Pictorial Collection, Tom of Finland Foundation, Los Angeles, CA, 5, picture from film called “Sweeney vs Marsh,” featuring Roland Marsh and Jim Sweeney. See Appendix II.

³² *Physique Pictorial*, Winter 1958, images in possession of author. See Appendix II.

one could “go into any kind of bar and see Tom’s work.”³³ Gay motorcyclists enjoyed his work so much that in the late 1960s, their clubs began to use his artwork to advertise their own events.

Before Tom’s artwork hit Los Angeles, the 1953 movie *The Wild One* created and mass-marketed a hypermasculine role for straight and gay aspiring motorcyclists. The 1947 Hollister riots, where several hundred motorcyclists ravaged the small town of Hollister, CA, inspired the film and in turn inspired a generation of motorcyclists.³⁴ Starring heartthrob Marlon Brando, “the film is remembered almost entirely for Brando’s leather cap and jacket, his Triumph and his response to the question, ‘What are you rebelling against?’ [to which] Brando smirked winningly and replied, ‘What have you got?’”³⁵ Even gay motorcycle clubs like the Satyrs “hooked into this new rebellion” that gave motorcyclists “a lasting, romance-glazed image of themselves” as a hyper masculine rebel.³⁶ Any young gay man growing up in Los Angeles in the 1950s could buy a copy of *Physique Pictorial* on the newsstand and see *The Wild One* in theaters. With these hypermasculine motorcyclists serving as role models and sexual fantasies, the next logical step was to find them in real life. Quite conveniently, the Satyrs and Oedipus Rex Motorcycle Clubs were hidden just around the corner at the local gay bars.

Visual media like *Physique Pictorial* and *The Wild One* led many gay men to be attracted to masculine motorcyclists, but it was their experiences in gay biker bars that led them to join gay motorcycle clubs. The Satyrs Motorcycle Club had two favorite gay bars in Hollywood: Cinema Bar and The Club. Not yet labeled “biker bars,” they had black interiors, sawdust on the floor, and pictures of naked men in the back. John Laird joined the Satyrs in 1961 because he

³³ Durk Dehner interview.

³⁴ Hunter S. Thompson, “The Motorcycle Gangs: Losers and Outsiders,” *The Nation*, May 17, 1965, <http://www.thenation.com/doc/19650517/thompson>.

³⁵ “From James Dean to Roseanne to 90210... EVERYBODY’S A REBEL,” *Spy*, March 1992, Motorcycle Clubs Subject File III at ONE Archives.

³⁶ *Original Pride*; Hunter Thompson, *Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*, 90.

met two men at the Cinema Bar on Melrose, an avenue in the eponymous district of Hollywood. The men took Laird out to the parking lot and had sex with him on the hood of his T-bird. He enjoyed the experience so much that he followed the men around for the rest of the night and met their friends. The two men turned out to be members of the Satyrs Motorcycle Club. Soon after that night, Laird bought a Harley-Davidson motorcycle and began the initiation process to join the Satyrs.³⁷ His experience was not unique; many men throughout the early years of gay motorcycle clubs joined because of interactions with members they met in gay biker bars around Los Angeles.

Most gay motorcycle clubs, like the Satyrs, were associated with specific bars, and gay men who regularly frequented particular bars often ended up joining those clubs. Griff's, Falcon's Lair, Tailpipe, the Boxcar, the Truckstop, the Male Box, Handlebars, Cinema, Boots, and The Stud were among the popular gay biker bars in Hollywood, Los Angeles, and Studio City. Clubs often held "beer busts" at their favorite bar, recommending a \$2 or \$3 donation at the door and then giving everyone free draft beer all night. The LGSMC, another Los Angeles-based gay motorcycle club, had a beer bust at Griff's bar on Melrose Avenue on April 29, 1973, offering free draft beer with a donation and encouraging men to "Come with a friend!"³⁸ The invitation emphasizes that the clubs were eager to bring new gay men into their social circles. Once a gay man came to a beer bust, he had a new group of friends in the members of the club and many potential sexual partners when the beer, a social lubricant, flowed plentifully. The fast community of a night was just a taste of the full experience of joining a gay motorcycle club. Beer busts were put on as after-run celebrations, as Memorial Day events, in the case of the Inland Empire 76ers motorcycle club, as charity benefits, and sometimes for no reason other than

³⁷ John Laird interview.

³⁸ LGSMC (acronym unknown), April 29, 1973, flyer, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

a social occasion for the club to drink together and to check out potential members and sexual partners.³⁹ They sometimes incorporated outside entertainment; the Great American Yankee (G.A.Y.) Freedom Band, for example, played at a beer bust funded by a group of motorcycle clubs called “The Senate” in 1979.⁴⁰ Beer busts were an important way of keeping a club financially sound, socially bonded, and inundated with new members.

Poker runs were another way that gay motorcycle clubs connected with gay bars in Los Angeles. Clubs held poker runs on Sunday afternoons of weekends when a multiple-day “run,” or ride somewhere in a large group, was not scheduled. They advertised to their own members, to the members of other gay clubs in the area, and to their motorcycle-riding friends. Participants were given a map or directions to different bars and this instruction: “at each stop pick up some type of proof that you had made the designated stop...bar matches...napkins...or just use your own ingenuity.”⁴¹ When the run was over, if the participant had proof of all of the stops, he would draw a “poker hand” to be redeemed for prizes.⁴² These runs gave the participants a broad picture of the range of gay biker bars in the area, and with an occasional “beer break” during the afternoon, the men bonded with other participants and often made plans to return. This encouraged networking and relationships between the gay male participants and further strengthened the bonds of the clubs.

Between 1954 and 1960, the Satyrs and Oedipus Rex Motorcycle Clubs organized mostly informal activities like impromptu rides to the beach, up Angeles Crest Highway, down to San Diego or on longer trips in the summer to an open campsite area up North. After the 1950s, gay

³⁹ Inland 76ers, Motorcycle Club Subject File I, ONE Archives.

⁴⁰ Letter from Paul M. Barner, “Acting Caesar” of *The Senate*, September 15, 1979, Motorcycle Club Subject File II, ONE Archives. The Senate was described as “a fledgling independent organization of social and motorcycle clubs banded together for mutual support, [which] first saw the light of day in the summer of 1978.”

⁴¹ Satyrs Poker Run Flyer, March 7, 1970, Motorcycle Subject File II, ONE Archives.

⁴² Durk Dehner, interview. Confirmation found in Satyrs Poker Run flyer, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

men began to be attracted to the clubs not just through word of mouth and networking, but through bar flyers, often featuring Tom of Finland's artwork, advertising large-scale events like the Satyrs' now-famous Badger Flats run. As the 1960s progressed, groups began to collaborate on even larger events and connect to a building movement of gay organizing.⁴³

Gay motorcycle clubs in Los Angeles held a vast array of events, though much of their focus was on runs. The Satyrs' "Badger Flats" run is the oldest and most famous gay motorcycle run in the country, setting the example of an annual run that many other gay motorcycle clubs followed. Badger Flats, which began in 1962, takes place every Labor Day weekend at a campground in the High Sierra Mountains of California, at an altitude of about 8,500 feet.⁴⁴ Clubs like Oedipus Rex (est. 1958), Saddleback MC (est. 1965), San Andreas MC (est. 1965), Buddy MC (est. 1965), Blue Max MC (est. 1968), and Iron Cross MC (est. 1974) started yearly weekend runs soon after founding. Runs were times to enjoy the open road with the protection of a large group and to socialize with fellow bikers at the destination. Los Angeles clubs began fraternizing with recently-founded San Francisco clubs in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Saddleback Motorcycle Club, for instance, announced in 1973 that its 8th annual Easter run would be "about mid-way between Los Angeles and San Francisco... [with] the North mixing with the South with equal ease."⁴⁵ The extension of the gay male biker social circle into the North helped cement a communal identity as gay men.

⁴³ Blue Max Collection at ONE, Archives. Approximate Timeline: 1954 *Satyrs MC*, 1958 *Oedipus Rex MC*, 1960 *Warlocks MC*, 1963 *California Motor Club*, 1964 *Recon MC*, 1965 *Buddy*, *San Andreas*, and *Saddleback MCs*, 1967 *CSCMC*, 1968 *Blue Max MC*, 1969 *Golden State Cowboys*, 1970 *Pacific Coast MC*, *First Ladies*, 1971 *Argonauts MC*, 1972 *Wranglers MC*, *LOBOC MC*, 1973 *Broncos MC*, 1974 *Iron Cross MC*, 1977 *Centaur MC*, changed to *Sunriders MC* later in 1977, 1978 *Avengers MC*, 1979 *Senate*, Others, dates unknown: *Regiment of Black & Tans MC*, *Spartan MC*, *Pioneers MC*, *Corps of Rangers MC*, *Boots MC*, *Americana MC*, *Kingmasters MC*, *LGSMC*.

⁴⁴ Satyrs M/C Field Meets Thru the Years, in "The 22 Year Old Satyrs M/C Presents BADGER FLAT '76" program, President Dick Griffin introduction, 1976, GLBT Historical Society Archives, San Francisco, CA.

⁴⁵ Saddleback Motorcycle Corps, Los Angeles CA, 1973, flyer, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

Once at the campground, runs turned into sexually-charged competitions and socialization. The 1971 Satyrs Badger Flats Run had an event called “THE WEENIE,” which involved a no-hands hotdog transfer between the rider and his “buddy,” or friend who rode on the back of his motorcycle.⁴⁶ That highly sexualized event was one of many for the clubs and they were all performed in good fun. The privacy of the events allowed such sexual liberation and the men in charge took advantage of the chance to be risqué. At the 1968 Saddleback Easter Run, the fourth competitive event was “The Dressing Race,” in which teams had to see who “has the talent for getting out of and back into their clothes the fastest in an emergency (such as a raid).”⁴⁷ The Dressing Race reflects the importance of bar raids in the psyche of the men as well as the occasional nudity the freedom of a campsite permitted. The Blue Max motorcycle club bragged about their 1969 “entrance to the Buddy Motorcycle Club’s Mod Mod World Run when [they] entered NUDE on [their] motorcycles.”⁴⁸ The Mod Mod World Run itself seemed to be asking for such behavior, as the flyer sent to the gay biker community invited “anything that is old, new, past, present or the future that is campy and mod.”⁴⁹ Being naked was freeing and sexy. Excuses to be naked or create sexual tension arose out of a general need on the part of all of the clubs’ members to be comfortable with themselves and their desires. Organized runs like

⁴⁶ The 22 Year Old Satyrs M/C Presents BADGER FLAT ’76” program, President Dick Griffin introduction, 1976, Motorcycle Club Subject File I, ONE Archives. ‘THE WEENIE’ [line] Buddy and Rider are parked about 30 feet away from the table. The Buddy is mounted on the bike with his hands behind his back looped under his belt. He must maintain his hands in this position for the duration of the event. At signal, Buddy dismounts, runs to the table, picks up ‘THE WEENIE’ in his mouth from the bowl, runs back to the bike, transfers ‘THE WEENIE’ to the bike rider (the bike rider may not touch ‘THE WEENIE’ with his hands either or he will disqualify the Buddy) ride about 30 feet to the Finish Line (rear wheel across the Finish Line). Buddy then dismounts, gets ‘THE WEENIE’ from the Rider and puts ‘THE WEENIE’ in a narrow neck bottle. Time ends when ‘THE WEENIE’ is in the bottle or touches the ground after crossing the Finish Line.” This event was done “as a tribute to the 1975 Southern California Rider of the Year, Jerry Gilb...an event from the 1971 Badger Flat Field Meet when he was the Satyrs’ Road Captain.”

⁴⁷ Saddleback 3rd Annual Easter Run April 13-14, 1968, Bike Scene binder 1968, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

⁴⁸ “Blue Max 10th Anniversary,” Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. Blue Max 10th anniversary page describes how they were founded June 7 1968 with eleven members, joined the council in the fall of 1968, became incorporated June 23, 1968, and had their first open meeting on August 23, 1968. “The 1st Chapter of The Rose of No Man’s Land was presented at Badger Flats in 1968.”

⁴⁹ Buddy Club Mod Mod World Run, 1969, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

Badger Flats became mobile bars: gay men could socialize and drink with, hit on, and have sex with other gay men while in the woods, all without the fear of arrest. Outrageously sexual activities that would never be allowed in downtown Los Angeles were acceptable in campgrounds.

Gay motorcycle clubs participated in many activities that are reminiscent of heterosexual men's clubs: they held meetings, put on benefits for community groups, initiated members, and threw parties. Club meetings were highly regimented and run by the club president, who followed an agenda, ensured that the secretary was taking minutes, and dealt with club business.⁵⁰ Less formal were "open meetings" at the club's favorite bar, where drinking was encouraged. These meetings were run like regular business meetings but without the discussion of confidential matters.⁵¹ Outsiders were invited and encouraged to experience the inner-workings of the clubs, ideally to whet their appetite and make them want to join the club.

Like men's clubs, gay motorcycle clubs donated money and put on events to benefit the community. The Blue Max Motorcycle Club supported the *Los Angeles Times*' Summer Camp Fund, providing summer camp to "underprivileged youngsters" and also had a yearly run that benefited The Spastic Children's Foundation Training Center, for children with cerebral palsy.⁵² Several gay motorcycle clubs during the 1970 Christmas season threw toy parties to benefit children and senior citizens in need.⁵³ The Satyrs, during their fifty-six-year history, donated

⁵⁰ Blue Max Minutes, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

⁵¹ John Laird, interview.

⁵² *Los Angeles Times* to Blue Max M/C, thanking for the donation, in Chancellor 1974-5 folder in Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives; Chuck Schulteis, Road Captain of BM, no date, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. Announcing Nov 10, 1968 as a "one day Poker Run for bikes and cars to help inaugurate the Thanksgiving season. Because Thanksgiving is a time of year when food is an important part of our celebration, we would like to benefit the Spastic Children's Foundation with a request for a donation of non-perishable foods."

⁵³ Golden State Cowboys, advertising for Sunday December 6, 1970, Bike Scene 1970 binder, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. Oedipus Rex "Toy Party for the benefit of children at MacLaren Hall," December 14, 1969, and LGS flyers, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. Oedipus M/C had a "Toy Party for the benefit of children at MacLaren Hall" Dec 14, 1969.

money to many organizations, such as the McKinley Boys Home of Los Angeles, the Red Cross, breast cancer research, and AIDS organizations like Angel Food.⁵⁴

While there was a regimented process for getting invited to join a club, the initiation for gay motorcycle clubs can best be described as a wild college fraternity-style initiation. To be considered for membership in the Satyrs, a prospective member first had to make himself known to the club by attending events and, at least for the first couple of decades, own his own Harley-Davidson motorcycle. Once he had shown a commitment to the club, a current member would propose him at a (closed) business meeting and the group would vote on him at the following meeting. If voted in, he was announced at a big party and given the insignia of club membership: a vest, a belt buckle, and a personalized studded leather bracelet.⁵⁵ New Satyrs were called “baby Satyrs” and were required to carry a baby rattle everywhere they went. If they were caught without their baby rattle, they were forced to get up on a stand in front of the group and sing “You Are My Sunshine,” amid much laughter. Similar to fraternity initiations, initiation rites for the Satyrs included sitting on a block of ice pantless, eating “worms and gooey stuff,” drinking out of a goblet full of liquor,⁵⁶ being shaved, having weights tied to the testicles, and being doused in motor-oil.⁵⁷ Once a gay man had gone through this embarrassment, he became a full-fledged, dedicated, and initiated member of the Satyrs Motorcycle Club of Los Angeles.

Gay motorcycle clubs adopted and transformed traditional men’s club events. Thanks to the visual effects of Marlon Brando and Tom of Finland, gay bikers enjoyed a rebellious and

⁵⁴ John Laird interview.

⁵⁵ Ibid. In the same interview, Bobby Drake, WWII veteran and member since 1956, explained that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, each Satyr was given a black marble and a white marble and told to drop one into a little box. Laird elaborated: “If the box had all white marbles in it, the person became a member. If he had two black marbles, he still made it as a member. But if there were three black marbles, he was black-balled and did not become a member.” The Satyrs stopped using marbles as an election tool in the late 1960s “because we kept losing our marbles, frankly,” said Laird, and switched to paper ballots.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ *Original Pride*.

counter-cultural streak, akin to that of the Hell's Angels, which gave some of their events an edge not found in normal men's clubs. "Bike Christenings," for instance, were alcohol-fueled events in which gay motorcyclists gathered at a bar or a member's house to name the motorcycle of a member. The word "christening" might suggest a religious ceremony, but flyers advertising the event, which included a picture of a large motorcyclist wearing tight jeans, a leather jacket open to the chest, and a rakish sailor's hat with "wow!" written next to him, assured viewers that christenings were not serious religious ceremonies.⁵⁸ At Bike Christenings, naked or partially-dressed club members gathered around the bike and urinated on the front wheel.⁵⁹ This usually happened at gay or leather bars like Falcon's Lair, involved refreshments and free beer, and was racy and hyper sexualized. Christenings were a motorcycle-specific social activity to get the members of the club together to celebrate one member's newest purchase and his advancement in the world of motorcycling.

Hell's Angels and a Rebellion

Gay motorcycle clubs, like all American motorcycle clubs, were shaped by the history of the Hell's Angels, the most famous motorcycle club in America, founded in San Bernardino, California, in 1948. Hunter Thompson's *Hell's Angels: The Strange and Terrible Saga of The Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs*, describes the origins of the Hell's Angels: "Like the drifters who rode west after Appomattox, there were thousands of veterans in 1945 who flatly rejected the idea of going back to their pre-war pattern. They didn't want order, but privacy—and time to figure things out...They wanted more action, and one of the ways to look for it was on a big

⁵⁸ "THE ORIGINATORS OF BIKE CHRISTENINGS DO IT AGAIN [sic]," Rev. Jim Harris and Rev. John Rowe, Sunday, Oct. 14 from 3pm on, Falcon's Lair, Motorcycle Club Subject Folder II, ONE Archives.

⁵⁹ John Laird interview.

motorcycle.”⁶⁰ The desire for privacy and action led many men to motorcycle clubs, a place where “the extension of male ego ... [met] the challenge of danger, aloneness and daring”⁶¹ and yet included safety in numbers when that danger became too much to handle.

The public’s image of the Hell’s Angels as leather-wearing rapists who beat up old men in bars and generally caused havoc grew to national prominence with the media-blitzed Monterey Beach episode in 1965.⁶² The episode involved an accusation that several members of the Hell’s Angels gang-raped two young girls on the beach during a drunken party. The accused were never convicted and suspicion grew about the accuracy of the two girls’ testimony. Regardless, Thompson argued that the media blew the incident out of proportion and was responsible for catapulting the Hell’s Angels into the spotlight. Six months later, the California Attorney General released a report on the Hell’s Angels with a “compact description of [their] rancid, criminal sleaziness.”⁶³ The Angels’ reputation as “all-American bogeymen”⁶⁴ followed anyone on a motorcycle from then on.

The Hell’s Angels reputation helped shape the development of gay motorcycle clubs. In the 1960s, both clubs began to get kicked out of campgrounds because of their expressed liberal sexuality. The Attorney General’s report after the 1965 Monterey Beach incident had led to an increase in policing of the highways throughout California such that “the heat was so obvious that even respectable motorcyclists were complaining of undue police harassment.”⁶⁵ Independent motorcyclists were alone on the road, susceptible to threats from motorists and in

⁶⁰ Hunter Thompson, *Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*, 81.

⁶¹ Doug Hama, *The Motorcycle Mommas: Uncensored first-person stories of the outlaw cycle-club chicks – and their wild, wild ride along the razor’s edge of unbridled sex and savagery!* (North Hollywood: Venice Publishing Corp, 1967), 12.

⁶² “The Wilder Ones,” *TIME CALIFORNIA* section, March 26, 1965, Motorcycle Clubs Subject File III, ONE Archives.

⁶³ Hunter Thompson, *Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*, 18.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

deep trouble if arrested with no one to post their bail. As a result, motorcyclists developed a “desperate sense of unity [as] outcasts from society.”⁶⁶ In self-defense, some gay bikers followed the example of the Hell’s Angels and wore a chain as a belt in case of an attack on the road.⁶⁷ Despite the shared experience, the Satyrs and the Hell’s Angels rarely met, though, as Laird reported, the members of the Satyrs “never had a problem” with the Angels.⁶⁸ Although gay bikers encountered increased harassment, they were also intimidating-looking and therefore protected by the same fearsome image of the Hell’s Angels they resembled.

While there was no formal relationship between gay and straight clubs, they interacted occasionally. The most important contact between the Hell’s Angels and the Satyrs occurred on a run to Palm Springs in the late 1960s. Sources disagree on the details of the incident, but as best as can be determined, the Satyrs were on a run up to Palm Springs when they came upon a troop of Hell’s Angels. The Satyrs sped off in front, heading to a bar a couple miles ahead called “The Play Room.” The bar was predominantly a gay bar, but the Hell’s Angels were good friends with the bartender (it is unclear if the bartender was gay). The Hell’s Angels did not realize that the Satyrs were a gay club and raced after them in order to get to the Play Room first to protect their friend, assuming that the Satyrs were going to beat up the bartender when they discovered he worked at a gay bar. When both groups arrived, the fact that the Satyrs were a gay club and not intending to hurt the bartender after all became clear, and both clubs sat down to drink together. Sonny Barger, the famous president of the Oakland chapter of the Hell’s Angels, introduced himself to Satyr John Laird. Barger gave Laird a card saying that if he ever ran into trouble on the road with any Hell’s Angels, he should show them the card and he would be safe. As long as

⁶⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁶⁷ John Laird interview.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

gay motorcycle clubs like the Satyrs had “the balls to stand him up,”⁶⁹ Barger and his Hell’s Angels accepted their presence in the motorcycling world. Indeed, gay motorcyclists found that they felt confident enough together to stand up and fight back when confronted with the Hell’s Angels. That confidence would become vital later in the gay rights movement fight against police harassment.

The Hell’s Angels shared the gay clubs’ libertarianism, free sexuality, and love of motorcycles. That the Satyrs required their members to ride Harley-Davidson motorcycles, the only true brand of motorcycle according to the Hell’s Angels, surely helped their relationship. Laird bought his first bike from a Hell’s Angel who needed the money “to get out of town fast,”⁷⁰ a monetary transaction of necessity but respectful nonetheless. Harley-Davidson motorcycles were extremely important to the Hell’s Angels, who saw their “customized choppers” as ways to fight convention.⁷¹ The Harley-Davidson motorcycle has been described as “a dreadful, irresponsible machine with no redeeming social qualities—mechanical pornography to decent folk—that simply won’t go away... [a] death threat to collectivism and convention.”⁷² In seeing the motorcycle as “an instrument of anarchy, a tool of defiance and even a weapon,” the Hell’s Angels and gay motorcyclists agreed. Both groups, outlaws in their own ways, felt embattled in “the same feeling of constant warfare with an unjust world.”⁷³ The understood respect between those motorcyclists, founded on a mutual admiration of their machines and the ideals they stood for, allowed for cordial exchanges of conversation and beer between gay and straight motorcyclists during the 1960s and 1970s.

⁶⁹ John Laird interview.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Darwin Holstrom, editor, *The Harley-Davidson Century*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2002), 9.

⁷² Ibid., 11.

⁷³ Ibid., 153.

Gay Motorcycle Clubs embraced the masculine uniforms of outlaw clubs, a fact that contributed to many gay men's desires to join a gay motorcycle club. In explaining why he wanted to join the Iron Cross Motorcycle Club, founded in 1974, prospective member William D. Wilson ("Bill") wrote: "I find your members (you in particular) intelligent; masculine and interesting...I feel a comradeship between you gentlemen that is not frivolous but deep and sincere. *Your uniforms are macho, dignified and an absolute turn-on.* [emphasis added]" Others were simpler; in response to the question "Why do you want to be a member of the Iron Cross M/C?" men like professor Ralph Jay Lewis and chef James Joseph Housely, listed the uniform as a reason for joining—"Hot uniform too!" wrote Housely.⁷⁴ The Corps of Rangers, founded in 1973, often had events where "full dress uniform" was required and, later in the 1970s, had events where "no one admitted to any Uniform Event out of military/police/security type uniform! [*sic*]"⁷⁵ Uniforms were symbols of unity and regimentation in gay motorcycle clubs and fostered bonding between members over their shared masculinity. It was a protective boon for many gay motorcyclists, that simply by the way they dressed and by joining a club, they could perform conventional male gender behavior (masculine) yet remain divorced from conventional male sexual desire (for women).

While all gay motorcycle club uniforms reinforced the strong masculine image that Tom of Finland had heralded, some clubs especially embraced military features. One club, Blue Max Motorcycle Club, founded in 1968, made its niche in its worship of Kaiser Wilhelm II of Prussia and the Red Baron, a WWI flying ace honored by the Kaiser with the Blue Max "for his bravery and gallantry."⁷⁶ The club began its annual "Red Baron Run" in 1969, when the official and

⁷⁴ *Membership Application to the Iron Cross M/C*, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

⁷⁵ "San Diego Fall Inspection 1979," Corps of Rangers, Motorcycle Clubs Subject File I at ONE Archives.

⁷⁶ Blue Max, flyer honoring the Red Baron, 1974, "Chancellor 1974-75" folder, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

founding uniform of the Blue Max club included the Blue Max black vest, the Blue Max Medal on an antique chain (with “Pour La Mérité” inscribed on it), and Prussian helmets.⁷⁷ Pictures of the Blue Max Motorcycle Club from its early days show 15 or more men, all in full Prussian military regalia.⁷⁸ Tapping into a historical tale of pre-Nazi Germany, they adapted the strict Prussian attitude and uniform and eroticized it for their own devices. It was that unusual uniform that set Blue Max apart from other gay motorcycle clubs in town, but also reinforced the theme of highly masculine attire for gay motorcycle clubs of all kinds.

Another way that gay motorcycle clubs tapped into the rebellion of outlaw motorcycle gangs was through their association with the growing “leathersex” movement. Pushing the limits in a safe space was very important to members of the emerging gay “leathersex” community, and the woods provided that space. All gay motorcycle clubs supported leather as an outfit choice and a mix of bikers were involved in actual BDSM or leathersex. As Satyr John Laird said, sex was not necessarily kinky while on runs, but there were definitely gangbangs and “parties with nothing but people getting together.”⁷⁹ In general, members of gay motorcycle clubs had individual sexual preferences that they were allowed to figure out in the privacy (or explicit non-privacy) of their tents or the woods. Not all gay motorcyclists practiced “leathersex” explicitly, but all appreciated its availability and their association with it as a rebellious sexual behavior.

While tied to outlaw bikers like the Hell’s Angels, drugs had a limited presence in the lives of gay motorcyclists. Gay men in the 1970s used poppers, amyl-nitrate, to get high, and gay motorcyclists were no exception. John Laird claimed that the Satyrs introduced the Hell’s Angels

⁷⁷ “Official Uniform of the Day,” Blue Max M/C, November 5, 1968, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

⁷⁸ Pictures of Blue Max Motorcycle Club in Uniform, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. See Appendix III.

⁷⁹ John Laird interview.

to poppers in one of their few interactions.⁸⁰ Though drug use was present in the gay biking scene, there were also times when heavy drug use was forbidden, like one run to a ranch in Central California, when members were told: “absolutely no hard drugs allowed on the Ranch, violators...[will be] asked to leave.”⁸¹ Gay motorcycle clubs used drugs, militaristic attire, leathersex, and motorcycles as signs of counter-mainstream rebellion from society. Those signs represented the development of their masculine identity and the strength required to soon begin to fight back when the police raided a bar.

The Inter-Play of Masculinity and Drag

Masculine gay cultures that did not include gay motorcycles often felt a distrust of feminine-dressing and –acting gay men. Curt, a writer for *Discover*, magazine wrote: “last week I happened to be in one of the popular western bars in Los Angeles...one of the ‘butch’ numbers tore into a couple of drag queens who happened in...the hate in this young dudes eyes while he vocally attacked the rather nice looking guy in female getup... [represented] the distrust and dislike of one element of Gay Society for those of another mode of gay life.”⁸² While the dislike of more feminine gay men was present in general Los Angeles gay culture, that rift was not present in gay motorcycle clubs. The Satyrs in general “wanted to be more manly” and the spin-off of the Satyrs, Oedipus Rex, was made up of men not afraid to “kick their heels up”⁸³ and dress in “high drag” (the closest approximation to a female actress, as opposed to “campy drag.”

⁸⁰ *Original Pride* and John Laird interview.

⁸¹ Jack, “Welcome to Hangin’ Tree Ranch,” date unknown, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

⁸² Curt, “The Underside of Curt,” *Discover*, January 22, 1973, 1, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

⁸³ John Laird interview.

which usually meant a mop as hair and messy but outrageous makeup⁸⁴). This “prissiness,”⁸⁵ described Satyrs member Laird, gave Oedipus Rex a different vibe than the more masculine-acting clubs like the Satyrs, a differentiation that they accepted happily, as different clubs catered to different levels of camp and seriousness. Some clubs were more social and partied all the time, while others did a lot more riding and got together to be more serious about motorcycling. As Satyr John Laird said, “there wasn’t any real jealousy between the clubs.”⁸⁶ The available gender spectrum allowed gay motorcyclists to choose whichever emphasis they preferred.

Like the clubs’ initiation rituals, gay motorcycle club humor often involved playing with gender. Though hypermasculine and leather-wearing gay motorcyclists were the antithesis of drag queens, they did not eschew drag and camp like the “butch number” that Curt of *Discover* magazine described. The Satyrs, for one, adopted as a club mascot the singer Kate Smith. At each Badger Flats run, they would have a rendition of “God Bless America” with one of the members performing as Kate Smith in campy drag.⁸⁷ Drag was about having fun and exploring gender stereotypes without being labeled a queen, or worse, being arrested or beaten. Many events put on by a wide variety of gay motorcycle clubs at private gatherings included drag, as “camping” with the boys could be fun and liberating. Members enjoyed the freedom of their club that allowed a gay man to join up, wear leather, and ride a big manly motorcycle, and still occasionally put on a wig. The Oedipus Grecian Games, held throughout the 1960s and 70s, were another example of annual gender-bending because they contained drag shows performed by members of the club.

⁸⁴ Durk Dehner interview.

⁸⁵ John Laird interview.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ *Original Pride*.

Intra-club communication showed a campy streak; a letter to Blue Max from its corresponding secretary, posted April 1, 1970, ended with the obviously campy valediction “TA!! & Kissy, Kissy!!!”⁸⁸ The Saddleback Motorcycle Club, founded in 1965, also conveyed a sense of light camp in its correspondences. Members who made reservations for the club’s third annual Easter run, on April 13-14, 1968, received a thank you letter that featured a black-and-white picture of a leather-wearing and mustached biker. Drawn over that gruff picture was a brightly colored sun hat, accompanied by a scribbled “See you on the parade, sweetie!”⁸⁹ The sun hat and the Blue Max valediction are both examples of ways in which gay bikers were not afraid to occasionally embrace the more feminine stereotype of gay men within their own community.

A more consistent and visibly campy role within the gay motorcycle club community was the “First Ladies of Southern California Motorcycle Clubs,” founded in 1970. The “First Ladies” were the lovers of all of the CSCMC gay motorcycle club presidents. A roster was put out yearly and meetings were held with one “lady” representing each Council club. The group’s goal was to “show the Council of Southern California Motorcycle Clubs, united together, in a lighter and more informal vein”⁹⁰ with outrageous and campy runs and events like the 1977 “Scarlett O’ Leather” party and “the Annual Dolly Parton Hoedown and Bake Sale,” where attendees were told: “Be sure to ‘kiss’ your favorite First Ladies at the ‘KISSING BOOTH.’” The large-breasted drawing of Dolly Parton on the flyer for the Hoedown and Bake Sale comically displayed a series of baked goods, pantomiming an over-sexualized 1950s wife stereotype.⁹¹ Other First

⁸⁸ Corresponding Secretary to Blue Max, April 1, 1970, folder Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

⁸⁹ Saddleback Motorcycle Corps, “Thank your for your check and reservation,” April 13-14, 1968, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. See Appendix IV.

⁹⁰ First Ladies 6th Annual Run, 1976, Motorcycle Subject File I, ONE Archives.

⁹¹ First Ladies Annual Dolly Parton Hoe Down and Bake Sale, Motorcycle Subject File I, ONE Archives. See Appendix V.

Ladies events included the annual First Ladies Run, where awards like “Lady in Waiting to be First Lady,” “Eleanor Roosevelt Girl Scout Award,” and “Julie Andrews Sweetness and Light Award” were given out.⁹² The First Ladies were quite a bit campier than the average gay motorcycle club member. They did a lot of drag and “high camp” and their role as “wives” of the Presidents allowed them to act in an even more feminine manner. The First Ladies served a purely social role in the CSCMC, creating campy divertissements for the gay motorcycle community.

Gender humor made members of the clubs feel more comfortable. Most gay men “are softies on the inside,”⁹³ explained Laird, not like the bogeymen Hell’s Angels motorcyclists they were perceived to be by the public. Men in the clubs embraced both sides of the gender spectrum: “they would do the saluting and colors and all that stuff, highly masculine, and then [they were] able to do the other side.”⁹⁴ As Laird explained, being in a gay motorcycle club allowed “a life of acting out what we’d like to be.”⁹⁵ The fun gender-bending environment built up the confidence of men in the clubs regarding their identities and gender presentations, a confidence that would become vital to their survival as a persecuted minority.

Creating Alternatives to Traditional Religion

Organized religion has been inconsistent in its approach to the Los Angeles gay rights movement. Throughout the history of the movement, the overwhelming majority of organized Christian denominations have worked against homosexuals, denouncing them as sinful

⁹² Peter Bromilow, Social Secretary of the First Ladies, to President of Blue Max Hal Hegge, September 26, 1974, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

⁹³ John Laird interview.

⁹⁴ David Hensley, volunteer at ONE Archives, in discussion with author, December 28, 2010.

⁹⁵ John Laird interview.

sodomites hated by God. But there have been exceptions. Much of the positive religious work in Los Angeles for homosexuals began in 1968 with Reverend Troy Perry, who founded the Metropolitan Community Church, a Protestant church named for its birth in metropolitan Los Angeles, with specific outreach to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities.⁹⁶ Perry founded the MCC after a friend who was arrested during the 1968 raid of “The Patch,” a gay bar, lamented to Perry that God did not care about him because of his homosexuality.⁹⁷ Perry took that as a sign from God and founded the MCC on October 16, 1968.⁹⁸ Church membership grew so rapidly that by 1970, Perry’s church had over 700 worshippers. Those worshippers came from all parts of gay life and included, *Time Magazine* noted, “a few motorcycle boys in mustaches and black leather.”⁹⁹ Many gay motorcyclists, especially those who had been brought up in Christian households, attended Perry’s services. Hal Hegge, for example, the president of the Blue Max motorcycle club, attended MCC services.¹⁰⁰ The MCC, unlike most other Christian denominations, was a gay-friendly church and a welcome alternative to traditional religion.

Another reaction to religious ostracism was to take a religious-oriented family holiday and turn it into a bonding occasion for a new kind of family. The Saddleback Motorcycle Club first organized its Easter Run, also known as the “Fun Run,” in 1966. It included a traditional Easter Dinner, an Easter Hat Parade and Party, an Easter Egg Hunt and an Easter Puppy Raffle.¹⁰¹ Since these men staged their Easter celebrations out in the woods, they were not spending the weekend with their families or church groups. Instead, they were spending it with each other. It is likely that many felt uncomfortable going home or to church because their

⁹⁶ Faderman, *Gay L.A.*, 164.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁹⁸ “Introducing Rev. Troy D. Perry,” 1970, *Voice Monthly*, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

⁹⁹ “Hope for the Homosexual,” *TIME*, Religion section, July 13, 1970.

¹⁰⁰ MCC Service Program, Bike Scene 1970 binder put together by Hal Hegge, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹⁰¹ “Saddleback Motorcycle Corps,” April 13/14, 1968, Motorcycle Subject File II, ONE Archives. Flyer referring to the Kaweah River on the road to Sequoia National Park.

relatives or fellow churchgoers did not approve of their homosexual lifestyle. Others might have come to Los Angeles seeking their fortune and did not have the money or the desire to return to families elsewhere in the country. These feelings of ostracism and isolation were eased by a raucous weekend wearing silly Easter hats and riding motorcycles in the forest with their new family—their gay motorcycle club.

Even before Troy Perry launched his new church, gay motorcyclists had created their own religious ceremonies, and in a way, turned their new family into a new religion entirely. The largest such ceremony, the Blessing of the Bikes, was established in 1965 by the San Andreas Motorcycle Club, a gay motorcycle club with apparently more of a Christian bent. The Blessing of the Bikes took place in a parking lot and consisted of a procession of the club flags, a sermon, the blessing of each motorcycle and then, after the ceremony was over, a San Andreas open meeting at a member's house. At the third annual Blessing of the Bikes, the event was clearly advertised as "A San Andreas M.C. Event." But by 1979, for the 14th annual Blessing of the Bikes, the service had been taken over by "The Order of Fraternal Service," a "service-oriented group established to continue functions such as this Blessing of the Bikes." Regardless of who was nominally in charge, each year the event was held on Advent Sunday, St. Andrew's Day. It began with the procession of the club flags and, since the advertisements usually read, "Club colors encouraged," the Blessing was an opportunity to display pride in the symbol, flag, and uniform of one's gay motorcycle club. Pictures from the 1969 Blessing of the Bikes show representatives from a number of clubs, including Buddy M/C, Oedipus Rex M/C, Blue Max M/C, Warriors M/C, and San Andreas M/C.¹⁰²

The procession ritual mimicked traditional religion in the offering of Holy Communion and the order of service, but instead sanctified the *motorcycle*. The service included prayer: "AS

¹⁰² Unlabeled pictures, Dec 1969, Motorcycle Clubs Folder I, ONE Archives. See Appendix VI.

WE TRAVEL THE HIGHWAYS OF LIFE, SEND BEFORE US THY HOLY ANGEL [sic].”

The prayer was followed by a consecration of the medals: “IN THE NAME OF GOD, WE EXORCISE ALL INFLUENCES OF DANGER THAT THEY MAY BE BANISHED FROM THESE MEDALS WHICH WE ARE ABOUT TO DEDICATE TO HIS SERVICE [sic].” Also included was a blessing (the medals anointed with “Holy Chrism,”) and then each “machine” (motorcycle) was blessed and each rider received one of the “blest medals.”¹⁰³ The fifth annual Blessing was “officiated over by the Most Reverend Edmund W. Sheehan, Bishop of the International Liberal Catholic Church.” Instead of medals, he presented “pin type crosses. These crosses, plus...specific objects or...personal crosses, [were] blessed at the ceremonies before being presented.”¹⁰⁴ The small crosses handed out by the minister became blessed keepsakes and identity markers labeling the men as Christians.¹⁰⁵

For the less religious, the Blessing of the Bikes looked like “a ritual in order to have a safe ride.”¹⁰⁶ But for others, it was a chance to reach back to a religious upbringing that might have rejected them because of their homosexuality—and re-arrange their spirituality in a positive manner.¹⁰⁷ Motorcyclists like Hal Hegge of Blue Max collected the small pins depicting a cross and a motorcycle to put on their jackets, assuring a constant reminder of their spirituality in

¹⁰³ The Order of Fraternal Service, “The 14th Annual Blessing of the Bikes” program, Motorcycle Clubs Subject File III, ONE Archives.

¹⁰⁴ “Fifth Annual Blessing of the Bikes,” San Andreas MC, December 7, 1969, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹⁰⁵ The Hell’s Angels and other outlaw clubs put pins and patches on their jackets to symbolize various identities—the “1%er” patch for being part of the 1% of motorcyclists that the American Motorcycle Association would not recognize, the number “13,” signaling that the rider was a user of marijuana (M being the thirteenth letter in the alphabet), the “FTW” pin (“fuck the world”), and many others. Daniel R. Wolf, *The Rebels: A Brotherhood of Outlaw Bikers*, (New York: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 120.

¹⁰⁶ John Laird interview.

¹⁰⁷ The Blessing of the Bikes is another instance of Los Angeles being ahead of San Francisco, as it was not until 1978 that the first San Francisco-based motorcycle club had a blessing ceremony, put on by Reverend Bruce Hill of the MCC and the church’s bike group, the Alpha and Omega Club. Julie Smith, “Blessing of the Bikes,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 10, 1978, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

conjunction with their motorcycle.¹⁰⁸ While the Hell's Angels would break into churches and drive their bikes down the aisles wearing choir robes and cursing,¹⁰⁹ gay motorcycle clubs were the “good guys,” as John Laird argued. They were more respectful of religious institutions and more willing than the Hell's Angels to incorporate them into their own traditions, even going so far as to create new ceremonies to experience the spirituality of their new religion—the religion of the motorcycle.

Collaboration and Building a Movement

While all gay motorcycle clubs put on events for themselves, they also held events that brought clubs together. The most prominent conglomerate of clubs was the Council of Southern California Motorcycle Clubs (CSCMC), an organization founded in January of 1967.¹¹⁰ The CSCMC kept its clubs busy: Blue Max, founded in 1968, had to fit its first poker run, on November 10, 1968, into the “already dense social and bike event calendar,” of the CSCMC.¹¹¹ It is important to note that not all gay clubs in Los Angeles joined the Council. Some clubs, like Iron Cross, vehemently opposed the Council and its later incarnation, the Senate, because they thought that the two groups held “no useful purpose to our community.”¹¹² The CSCMC, as

¹⁰⁸ Blessing of the Bikes pins, Pin box, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹⁰⁹ Hunter Thompson, *Hell's Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga*, 164.

¹¹⁰ CSCMC Flyers, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. The CSCMC: “The purpose of this organization shall be to deliberate and act as a meditative body, without prejudice, among the subscribing clubs.” Required a club to be AMA chartered, have 10 or more members, be organized for at least a year, and have a constitution and by-laws. Flyers found in ONE Archives suggest founding date, assumed from CSCMC Officers list with the first president, Cliff Kogge of Oedipus Rex, beginning his term in January 1967.

¹¹¹ Chuck Schulteis, Road Captain of BM, no date, announcing Nov 10, 1968 as a “one day Poker Run for bikes and cars to help inaugurate the Thanksgiving season,” Bike Scene Binder 1968 in Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives; the CSCMC in 1972 consisted of the following motorcycle clubs: the Satyrs, Oedipus, Buddy, San Andreas, Saddleback, Blue Max, and Warriors. By 1976, two new clubs had joined the Council: PCMC and LOBOC.

¹¹² Chuck Lodine, der Fuehrer des Eiserne Kreuz M/C, to THE SENATE, July 12, 1978, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

indicated in its statement of purpose, wished to promote good club relations and work together on legal and financial issues. If conflict between clubs arose, the Council could mediate, or clubs would simply deal with the problems themselves in order to not offend fellow Council clubs and to work towards a consistent and unified movement of gay clubs.¹¹³

Some single-club events were regularly attended by all active clubs in the gay motorcycle community, like the Oedipus Rex yearly gala to celebrate the ascension of their new leader—the Coronation of the Rex.¹¹⁴ Each Coronation began with the National Anthem, the Pledge of Allegiance, and a procession of the flags of all the motorcycle clubs in attendance. Programs for the ceremony included a list of previous Rexes, starting with the first Rex, Jack F. of 1958, presumably the first to be coronated. Programs were also full of congratulations to the new Rex from other gay clubs and, especially in the 1970s, from gay-friendly establishments in the city—from restaurants and grocery stores to bars and automobile dealers.¹¹⁵ This royal reception for the new leader of Oedipus Rex made him an important leader in the organized gay biker community of Los Angeles, as all of the attention given to the coronation surely made the Rex a coveted position. While much of the pomp seems tongue-in-cheek, it was also an opportunity for men in the clubs to dress up and display their club pride by rallying around their flag in the procession. Each club tried to represent itself well and encouraged members to attend, furthering the feeling of being a family, where the presence of individuals was wanted and needed. The Presentation of the Colors fostered group unity and identification with the specific goals and

¹¹³Blue Max, “Blue Max Special Meeting,” Sept 7, 1969, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. Some members of Blue Max behaved poorly at the Satyrs Badger Flats Labor Day Run in 1969 (drunken violence) and called a special meeting, the “Badger Flats incident investigating committee,” to deal with the offenders¹¹³ to maintain good relations with the Satyrs.

¹¹⁴The most common one in the 1960s and 70s was Trouper’s Hall/Auditorium at 1625 N. La Brea in Los Angeles.

¹¹⁵“Coronation of Oedipus Rex XXX” (XL, XII, etc.) programs from 1969, 1973, 1978 etc, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection and Oedipus Rex Subject Folder, ONE Archives.

flag. While a bit over-the-top, the Coronations of the Rex were a dependable yearly event that brought gay men together and made them realize how enjoyable it was to spend time together.

The clubs also threw parties that did not neatly fall into categories but worked to create better social dynamics between clubs. For instance, San Andreas Motorcycle Club began an annual polka party in 1969.¹¹⁶ Buddy Motorcycle Club held its first annual Christmas Ball in 1964 and advertised its 1968 ball, which included free beer and a live band in downtown Burbank, with the tagline “Christmas is coming—Are you?”¹¹⁷ Other events included swim suit auctions, balls, talent shows, picnics, and Christmas parties.¹¹⁸

Another all-club event was the annual CSCMC “Motorcycle Olympics,” which began in 1968. These well-attended Motorcycle Olympics offered a good site for friendly competition between clubs. In the late 1970s, they were held in a parking lot of the Hollywood Bowl, a famous outdoor concert space. Each club submitted a motorcycle event, much like the obstacle courses that they participated in on their own runs. Some were simple motorcycle skills like riding the bike around cones, while others were more creative, like “The WEENIE,” mentioned earlier. Many events involved relays and props. Awards were given out—Gold, Silver and Bronze—for the winners of various events, and commemorative pins were made starting in 1970.¹¹⁹ The Motorcycle Olympics pleased the more serious motorcyclists and gave them the chance to show off their riding prowess.

Clubs were generally very friendly and kept in touch often. Inter-club communication included Blue Max sending flowers to LOBOC for their anniversary, and LOBOC writing back

¹¹⁶ “Annual San Andreas Polka Party,” March 7, 1969, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹¹⁷ Buddy MC, “Christmas is Coming—Are You?” 1968, 1968 Bike Scene binder, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹¹⁸ Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹¹⁹ CSCMC Motorcycle Olympics flyer, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

thanking them for gift.¹²⁰ Clubs also sent Christmas cards to each other and to their own members.¹²¹ This communication between clubs made the gay motorcycling family larger and more supportive. The growing network created by multi-club events like the Coronation of the Rex, the Blessing of the Bikes, and the work of the CSCMC created a broader gay motorcycle community that became increasingly vulnerable to police interference due to their growing confidence and the lessening chance that they would run away when harassed by the police.

Harassment Leads to Activism

Early official law enforcement harassment of gay motorcycle clubs consisted of park rangers kicking them out of campgrounds. The first Satyrs Motorcycle Club annual Labor Day run in 1960 was not in fact at Badger Flats, where it is today, but at Morro Bay campground. The following year, they were forced to move the run to King's Canyon, a second campsite. Finally, in 1962, they settled at Badger Flats.¹²² The reason for the multiple campsite switches was that both Morro Bay and Kings Canyon were next to Boy Scout Camps. Throughout those two weekends, as John Laird recalled, "young boys trickled over... [and] things were a little more *friendly* than parents would approve of."¹²³ What the parents of Boy Scouts saw in the Satyrs was a large group of drunk, leather-wearing motorcyclists with no women present and, as Laird

¹²⁰ Paul W. Kelly, president of LOBOC MC, to Hal Hegge, Chancellor and Members of the Blue Max M/C "for the floral arrangement...for their recent anniversary." Nov 19, 1974, Chancellor 1974-75 folder of Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹²¹ Christmas cards, 1970, 1971, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. Hal Hegge, as president of Blue Max in the early 1970s, received a yearly Christmas card from his club with a picture of him on his motorcycle. He also received cards from clubs that Blue Max had especially good relations with, such as the Kingmasters MC and the Recon Club of San Francisco. See Appendix III.

¹²² *Satyrs M/C Field Meets Thru the Years*, in "The 22 Year Old Satyrs M/C Presents BADGER FLAT '76" program, President Dick Griffin introduction, 1976, Motorcycle Subject Folder at ONE Archives.

¹²³ John Laird interview.

explained, “too much sex involved.”¹²⁴ Officials informed the Satyrs that they were no longer welcome and so they were forced to move to Badger Flats, where they were far from the public eye and relatively safe from police harassment. The woods only became a safe space when clubs were away from the general public.

Police harassment increased to a frightening level in the 1960s when the city of Los Angeles gained a reputation for having a “homosexual problem.” The Los Angeles Police Chief in 1963, Chief William Parker, was almost thrown out of the California State Assembly for losing his temper over the Criminal Procedure Committee’s 1961 decision to relax laws against prostitution and homosexuals. As a result of the 1961 changes, “we are flooded with homosexuals,” he claimed.¹²⁵ His claims were supported by the famous *Life* Magazine article “Homosexuality in America,” published in 1964, which said that “if the homosexual was familiar and perhaps even comforting in New York City, he was dangerous and disorderly in Los Angeles...the Los Angeles homosexual was looking for trouble and possibly engaging in prostitution.”¹²⁶ The article, however, also illuminated the hypocrisy of the heterosexual world: “The combination of a semiliterate and belligerent barkeep and a police force that dressed its attractive young officers in tight pants to lure homosexuals seemed to say that homosexuals were not the only Americans suffering from pathology.”¹²⁷ The practice of LAPD officers dressing in tight pants and posing as homosexuals in bars to arrest any man who reciprocated an interest was called entrapment. Fear of entrapment made it even more important that members of the gay

¹²⁴ John Laird interview.

¹²⁵ “Parker Threatened With Removal From Hearing-Assembly Chairman Warns Police Chief of ‘Histrionics’ on Anti-Homosexual Bill,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1963, 4.

¹²⁶ Paul Welch, “Homosexuality in America,” *Life Magazine*, June 26, 1964, in Meeker, 168.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

male biker community knew each other and protected each other while in Los Angeles's gay bars.¹²⁸

In 1969, LAPD Chief William Parker, who died in 1966 and was followed by various interim chiefs, was permanently replaced by the even more aggressive Chief Edward Davis. From 1969 to 1978, LAPD Chief Davis ruled Los Angeles with an iron fist. Davis, disgusted by gay men, said "under no conditions am I going to develop a working liaison with a group which promotes violation of the State homosexual laws...many neighborhood parks are made unusable because of their lying in wait in the restrooms... [also, some] exchanged children...for sex acts."

¹²⁹ Chief Davis's hatred of homosexuals led to an even stronger crackdown on gay bars. Many gay motorcyclists frequented the "Edgewater & Atwater clubs," two private bathhouses in the northern part of Los Angeles, which sent mailings to their customers, including Hal Hegge, president of Blue Max motorcycle club, warning about the police crackdown.¹³⁰ The gay publication the *Los Angeles Advocate* ran a cartoon about Davis's attempt to cover up charges against his officers of harassment.¹³¹ Davis's takeover of the LAPD is significant in the history of the movement, as his Vice Squad-led crackdown catalyzed many gay people into political action.

¹²⁸ Interestingly enough, not all law enforcement officials were as hostile as the LAPD Vice Squad. Another notable part of the 1969 Blessing of the Bikes ceremony was the presence of a California Highway Patrol officer. According to the announcement and advertisement for the Blessing, the officer attended in order to "present a short 'Highway Safety' talk." Pictures of the ceremony confirm his presence, standing behind a religious official during the sermon. The California Highway Patrol's main mission is to promote highway safety, so it made sense that they would take the opportunity to talk to a large group of motorcyclists, given how dangerous motorcycles are to ride. The officer's presence signaled a certain degree of good will toward the clubs, a degree that no LAPD Vice Squad officer would ever show. Unlabeled pictures, Dec 1969, Motorcycle Clubs Folder I, ONE Archives. See Appendix VI.

¹²⁹ Jim Kepner, *Quotations from Chief Ed (Or: Six Years With Foot-in-mouth Disease)*, Southern California: The Gay Radio Collective, 1976. Distributed as a public service by the Gay Radio Collective, producers of I.M.R.U. (independent, all-volunteer Gay Radio Collective), Southern California's gay radio program, which aired at 10:30pm on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Tuesdays of every month on Pacifica's listener-supported radio station KPFK/90.7 FM.

¹³⁰ Edgewater & Atwater Clubs, Inc. to Members, June 1, 1970, Bike Scene 1970 binder, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹³¹ Cartoon, *Los Angeles Advocate*, 1971, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. See Appendix VII.

Gay motorcyclists were well aware of the crackdown, and some even fought it with their own brand of campy humor. One example was a play, “The Massage Parlor, [*sic*]” performed by Blue Max at a run in the early 1970s. In the raunchy play, a masseur is masturbating a client when the massage parlor is raided. As the masseur and his customer are led out, the other customer in the room is revealed to be LAPD Chief Davis, who yells at the vice squad officers: “(furious) You idiot! I told you to wait until after I had my massage!”¹³² That kind of humor was often performed at gay motorcycle club talent shows during the nights of runs, reminding those in the audience of the challenge they faced at the bars back home and the reason they had temporarily escaped into the woods.

The Christopher Street West Parade, now known as the Gay Pride Parade, started in 1970 on the first anniversary of the Stonewall Inn riots in New York City, a milestone in Los Angeles gay political activism. The Gay Liberation Front, the group organizing the Los Angeles parade, ran into police resistance every year. “In 1971, the Christopher Street West Committee asked that only gay officers be assigned to policing the Gay Pride parade. The Department angrily denied that there were any gays in the LAPD.”¹³³ Gay motorcyclists were involved in the first gay parade in 1970. The Warriors, a gay motorcycle club founded in 1969, rode in Los Angeles’s first gay pride parade and began motorcycle participation in the parade that continues to this day.¹³⁴ Their presence in the first public display of homosexual pride in Los Angeles indicated a sensibility that the community of gay men formed by gay motorcycle clubs had rights worth fighting for.

¹³² “The Massage Parlor,” date between 1971 and 1974 as judged by surrounding papers, a short play in the Unprocessed Blue Max Collection folder “Chancellor 1974-75,” ONE Archives.

¹³³ Jim Kepner, *Quotations from Chief Ed*, 25.

¹³⁴ John Laird interview.

The most catalytic and politicizing attack of the 1970s on the gay motorcycling community was the 1972 raid of the Black Pipe, a leather bar deeply involved in the gay motorcycle scene. Many gay motorcycle clubs used the bar for open meetings, beer busts, and general social get-togethers. Before the raid, the Black Pipe held several get-togethers and runs to raise money for a new gay and lesbian services Center.¹³⁵ The club itself even sponsored its own motorcycle runs.¹³⁶ On the night of Sunday, August 20, 1972, the gay activist group H.E.L.P. Incorporated (Homophile Effort for Legal Protection) was throwing a fund-raising “Summer Festival” at the Black Pipe bar to raise money for the opening of its new Center, a place the organizers hoped would be a safe space to provide services to the general gay community. H.E.L.P. openly advertised the Festival to the community and even sent information about it to Public Relations officers in all LAPD divisions of northern and western Los Angeles. But around 6 p.m. that Sunday, the Black Pipe was raided. A dozen uniformed officers from the LAPD Wilshire Division burst in and hauled out twenty-one men to be “chained like animals,” dragged to the station, and charged with Lewd Conduct.¹³⁷ The owner of the Black Pipe, Duane Moller, one of those arrested, later said in an interview that he believed that the raids had political motives. Homosexuals in Los Angeles had been slowly gaining political power that election season, and as Moller said, “we were backing [Vincent] Bugliosi very strongly...Bugliosi was scheduled to make an appearance at the Black Pipe later that same afternoon.”¹³⁸ The Vice Squad had specifically targeted the festival’s voter registration table at

¹³⁵ “Afternoon of Madness at Black Pipe,” March 19, 1972, Bike Scene 1972 binder, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. “3rd Carl Todd Memorial Run,” July 9, 1972, Black Pipe, Bike Scene 1972 binder, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. Note: Carl Todd was hit by a drunk driver and killed June 10, 1970, and was riding without a helmet, so this memorial run was a “SAFETY RUN.”

¹³⁶ “California Gold Rush Days,” April 16, 1972, Bike Scene 1972 binder, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹³⁷ Larry Townsend to “Friends and Members of H.E.L.P.,” H.E.L.P. Incorporated, at 7221 Santa Monica Bl. Los Angeles, 1971, letter Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹³⁸ David Cobbs, “A Glimpse of ??.”

the bar, confirming a political motive for the raid. Larry Townsend, the president of H.E.L.P., explained it this way: “A couple of ‘fag-hating’ vice cops simply took it upon themselves to attempt to stop us from opening our Center and expanding our services to the Gay Community. They were also seeking to prevent our registering voters, and during the otherwise random selection of victims several officers were heard to ask: ‘Where’s the guy who was sitting at that (voter registrar) table?’”¹³⁹ Although Vincent Bugliosi, then candidate for Los Angeles County District Attorney, would go on to lose to incumbent Joseph Busch, H.E.L.P. opened its new Center soon after the raid, on September 1, 1972. Raids like the Black Pipe remained in the gay male motorcyclist consciousness and spurred many to political action. Gay motorcyclists even made a commemorative pin of the Black Pipe raid, which read “Remember August 20, 1972, the Black Pipe 21.”¹⁴⁰ Getting thrown in jail for being in a leather bar or for registering gay men to vote encouraged many gay motorcyclists to political activism.

The work of H.E.L.P. Inc. and its Center included protesting the actions of LAPD Chief Davis, supporting homosexual-friendly political candidates, and doing legal work for the gay community. The influence of Chief Davis on the gay community is visible in one of H.E.L.P.’s main campaigns—the “Chief Davis Protest,” encouraging gay people to refuse to pay their utility bills as a political statement.¹⁴¹ H.E.L.P. also worked for the election of Bugliosi, the gay-friendly politician who was supposed to have made an appearance at the Black Pipe bar the day of the eponymous raid. In a H.E.L.P. flyer sent to the gay male community, which included gay motorcyclists, Bugliosi was described as highly in favor of homosexual rights, in sharp contrast

¹³⁹ Larry Townsend to “Friends and Members of H.E.L.P.”

¹⁴⁰ Pin Collection, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives. See Appendix VIII.

¹⁴¹ “DON’T FORGET! DAVIS PROTEST!” HELP Inc., 1972. flyer, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

to the incumbent D.A., Joe Busch, who supposedly “oppose[d] any and all sex law reform.”¹⁴² H.E.L.P. often bailed gay members out of jail and proactively attempted to educate the gay community about exactly how to avoid arrest. The section labeled “Danger!!!” in the H.E.L.P. newsletter described recent reports of arrests, increased vice squad activity, and, in 1971, “roving gangs of punks” in Echo Park.¹⁴³ In addition, H.E.L.P. worked with certain attorneys who assisted gay men caught in vice squad raids. Gladys Root, a female attorney whose high heels, low-cut shirts, and extreme attire were said to distract juries, successfully defended many gay men who were victims of raids or entrapment. Attorneys such as Harry Weiss and Sheldon Anderson also became big names in the gay community for their work on entrapment and bar raid cases.¹⁴⁴ Organizing legal forces became one of H.E.L.P.’s big drives and integral to the developing power of the gay rights movement.

Raids and entrapment struck fear into the hearts of gay bikers and contributed to their desire to bond together and have fellow members to watch their backs. The violence of the Black Cat raid of 1967 and the injustice of the Black Pipe Raid were common occurrences when dealing with the LAPD Vice Squad. John Laird was arrested in a raid of the 1170, another bar owned by Dick Griffin, the owner of “Griff’s” and “the Stud,” two popular gay biker bars in the 1970s. At the time of the raid, Laird, who was having sex with another man on the pool table of the bar, was arrested for Lewd Conduct. He fought his conviction all the way to the California Supreme Court. The case prompted the passage of laws making it unconstitutional for the LAPD to raid gay bars on the belief that homosexual acts were occurring. The last raid Laird heard about was in 1982.¹⁴⁵ As patrons of bars like the Black Pipe or lovers of men who were victims

¹⁴² Citizens for Bugliosi, “We Must Elect BUGLIOSI,” 1972, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹⁴³ “Danger!!!” H.E.L.P., Inc. Newsletter, May 1971, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹⁴⁴ John Laird interview.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

of raids and entrapment, gay motorcyclists were forced into an awareness of and participation in the growing Los Angeles gay freedom movement.

During the later 1970s, the Los Angeles gay rights movement became more radical. Before 1975, California state law (Penal Code 288a from 1915) read “Any person participating in the act of copulating the mouth of one person with the sexual organ of another is punishable by imprisonment in the State prison for a term not exceeding fifteen years.” Using that law, police caught men cruising in parks or in public bathroom stalls having oral sex and prosecuted them. Albert Gordan, a Los Angeles attorney, worked with Morris Kight of the Gay Liberation Front in 1974 to force the law to be overturned.¹⁴⁶ Gay motorcyclists like John Laird, who had been caught in the bar 1170 raid having oral sex, were freed from a great deal of stress when their sexual activities were decriminalized and even more so later when raids were ruled unconstitutional. As the 1970s continued, gay motorcycle activism continued and radicalized, as shown by motorcyclists holding a “No Gay Holocaust in the US” poster in the 1978 CSW Parade.¹⁴⁷ Gay motorcycle clubs got involved in many of H.E.L.P.’s campaigns; for example, the Satyrs allowed a VD clinic to be set up at one of their runs in the late 1970s by the H.E.L.P. Center’s campaign against venereal disease.¹⁴⁸

The gay motorcycle club community was built through shared identity, experience, and ritual. Thanks to the hypermasculine image created by Tom of Finland’s artwork and Marlon Brando’s *The Wild One* in the 1950s, post-war gay men were no longer limited to the fairy stereotype. A desire for hypermasculinity led men to gay biker bars, which often led them to join the gay motorcycle clubs based there. Rituals similar to those performed by men’s clubs gave

¹⁴⁶ Faderman, *Gay L.A.*, 180.

¹⁴⁷ “No Gay Holocaust,” 1978, Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, ONE Archives.

¹⁴⁸ The 22 Year Old Satyrs M/C Presents BADGER FLAT ’76” program, President Dick Griffin introduction, 1976, Motorcycle Club Subject File I, ONE Archives.

club members pride in their organization's identity and created a tight community of friends and lovers. Other aspects of the clubs, like attire, drug use, motorcycles, and leather sex, typified an incorporation of the rebellious and risk-taking nature of the Hell's Angels, both for protection under that reputation and for expression of a rough, masculine identity.

Spending time with fellow motorcyclists in the wooded seclusion of campgrounds gave gay men a chance to grow comfortable with their newfound gay masculine identity and also explore their gender fully through drag. As one Satyr said, upon joining the club, "a lot in my life changed, in the first place I had a new group of friends that I liked, [but also] I became a lot more, let's say, open about myself."¹⁴⁹ In the privacy of the gay biker community, men could express themselves however they liked. In creating their own religious traditions, they also protected themselves from the pain of being turned away from conventional religions and grew in their identities.

Los Angeles early gay political organizing began in 1950, but was highly secretive and did not last.¹⁵⁰ The Los Angeles gay rights movement began in 1967 with the Black Cat Raid and catapulted into a national movement with the Stonewall raid in 1969.¹⁵¹ As the Los Angeles gay rights movement grew in power and influence, gay motorcyclists came out of the woods to discover the broader implications of their gay lifestyle. They realized that their identities, encouraged and developed through ritual, religion, and shared experience in their gay male motorcycling family, were not just personal statements, but political ones. Biking down the main street of Los Angeles in the first Gay Pride Parade in 1970 and every year thereafter reflected years of community and identity building. Remembering and protesting the Black Pipe Raid in

¹⁴⁹ *Original Pride*.

¹⁵⁰ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 58.

¹⁵¹ Faderman, *Gay L.A.*, 157.

1972 sparked decades of gay motorcycle involvement in the gay rights movement. Gay motorcycle clubs taught their members that as gay men, they were confident, masculine, and as worthy of rights as anyone else, regardless of what the police did. The transformation of the identity and community of gay motorcycle clubs between 1954 and the late 1970s reflects the transformation of the overall Los Angeles gay rights movement from a small, intimidated, and closeted group to a powerful force ready to fight for their rights.

Word count: 11,384.

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Bibliographical Essay

I had never heard of the phenomenon of gay motorcycle clubs until I read *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* by Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons for a course on the history of Southern California. At the time, I was attempting to prove how absurd it was that the general public's knowledge of epicenters of gay activism consisted entirely of New York and San Francisco, ignoring Los Angeles completely. To begin my paper, I made a list of the "firsts" that Los Angeles could claim: the first gay and lesbian religious organization, the first lesbian publication, the first gay and lesbian organization to publicly own property, the first national gay news publication, the first use of the slogans "Gay Power" and "Pride" on record, and the first gay motorcycle club in the country. It was the last one in that list that caught me by surprise. I had come across a short paragraph in *Gay L.A.* at the end of a section titled "Hollywood A-Go-Go" in the chapter "Rumblings of a Gay Revolution." The paragraph explained that the Los Angeles Satyrs were the first gay motorcycle club in the country, that the number of gay motorcycle clubs in Los Angeles increased during the 1960s, and that clubs used campgrounds to explore "literal new heights of sexual and personal freedom." Curious, I searched "gay motorcycle clubs" in every scholarly search engine I knew, only to discover that no historical research had been done on these clubs, at least in Los Angeles.

I found the ONE Gay and Lesbian Archives in Los Angeles, CA online and inquired with the head researcher there. I learned that one large donor had organized all of his materials by subject instead of by source, a bizarre organizational system which worked to my benefit when I arrived at the Archives to discover five large subject folders full of materials specifically on gay motorcycle clubs in Los Angeles. That initial research consisted of detective work in those

folders, sifting through flyers and letters trying to figure out the basics of who was in the clubs, how many clubs there were, where they went, and what they did. One interesting discovery I made in those folders was a collection of photos with a date stamp “Dec 1969” and no other label. The pictures featured religious figures speaking to and marching with what I could only assume were gay bikers, as the symbols on their flags were those of Oedipus Rex MC, Buddy MC, Blue Max MC, and a couple of others. I was completely stumped about how these gay men could be interacting in such a bizarre way with not just those religious officials, but also a police officer, as my research with secondary sources like *Out for Good*, by Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, and *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, by John D’Emilio, suggested consistently contentious relations with both religious officials and law enforcement.

The mystery was solved when I went back to ONE Archives over winter break and was allowed to explore the Unprocessed Blue Max Collection, a huge collection donated presumably upon the death of Hal Hegge, an early president of the Blue Max Motorcycle Club. I say presumably because most of the papers and letters had his name on them but the donor was anonymous. Within those boxes were flyers advertising a “Blessing of the Bikes” at which a California Highway Patrol officer was present. Reading those flyers led me to conclude that the pictures I had were of the 5th Annual Blessing of the Bikes in 1969, put on by the San Andreas Motorcycle Club in the parking lot of a local church, and that the officer present was a California Highway Patrol officer and not a member of the LAPD, a fascinating discovery.

The Unprocessed Blue Max Collection was an astounding, albeit disorganized, source. Boxes contained thousands of flyers about motorcycle club events, rosters of club membership, minutes of club meetings, pictures of clubs and even a large pin collection. It became very clear that the clubs themselves were far more organized than I had expected. Several binders put

together labeled “Bike Scene” followed by a year (1969-73) were the most helpful of that material. Those five binders were fastidiously organized and documented in detail the paper trail of all of the activities of gay motorcycle clubs in Los Angeles during those years, a chronological organization extremely helpful in creating a vivid picture of the activities of the clubs. The GLBT Historical archives in San Francisco were not as complete as those in Los Angeles and I found several repeat flyers advertising 1970s Badger Flats runs. One interesting thing there was a collection of videotapes of Badger Flats runs, where I could see gay bikers swimming naked and riding their motorcycles through obstacle courses.

Back at school, I looked into general material about motorcycle clubs, though all available material focused on heterosexual motorcycle clubs like the Hell’s Angels. The most helpful of those books was Hunter Thompson’s book *Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga.*, as he was very candid about the liberal sexuality and customs of the Hell’s Angels. He also discussed interactions between Hell’s Angels and gay men. I took issue with his generalization that a homosexual interested in motorcycles was “a cultist, a passive worshiper, and occasionally a sloppy emulator of a style that fascinates him.”¹⁵² All of the research I had done at ONE Archives suggested the very opposite—that gay motorcycle clubs were avid motorcyclists and even more legitimate bikers than the Hell’s Angels; they were even certified by the American Motorcycle Association, unlike the Hell’s Angels.

Daniel Wolf’s study of the Rebels Motorcycle Club of Canada gave a very useful, detailed explanation of the lives and practices of that outlaw motorcycle club, a club very similar to American clubs. He discussed how the intense ties formed between the men in the clubs often caused them to forsake relationships with women and explained the symbol and ritual of many

¹⁵² Thompson, 115.

biker practices. He confirmed Thompson's analysis of motorcycling as a type of rebellion against conventional culture.

Reyner Banham's *The Architecture of Four Ecologies* was especially helpful in understanding the frontier history of Los Angeles and forcing me to analyze how Los Angeles might be particularly suited to motorcycling and gay life. Other books that were useful in getting an idea of gay life in Los Angeles specifically were *Contacts Desired* and *Mapping Gay L.A.*

I watched multiple films, but the most useful were *The Wild One* and *Original Pride*. Watching *The Wild One* gave context to why men wanted to be and meet men like Marlon Brando, the leather-wearing rebel and therefore join gay motorcycle clubs. *Original Pride* was made by a former member of the Satyrs, Scott Bloom, and featured interviews of many Satyrs about the history and rationale behind what my archival sources told me the club did.

Marks Ridinger's article "Things Visible and Invisible" explored the reasons for the relative dearth of historical research done on the leather community in gay and lesbian studies and discussed the emergence of the post-WWII leather community. While it is true that leather culture is often overlooked in scholarly research, my own research disproved some of the generalizations he made about queer leather communities. He claimed, for instance, that "the social structures created by the leather community during the homophile era [the 1950s] were fairly independent of the gay bar," a statement which in Los Angeles was completely false—gay bars like Griff's and the Cinema were extraordinarily popular with the leather motorcycle community and in fact were where a great deal of their members met and socialized.

The sole journal article that I found that mentioned the Satyrs at all was another article by Ridinger, a linguistic study about the naming of leather clubs throughout the 20th century.

Unfortunately, it only served to point out that Greek and Roman names of leather clubs were relatively common and had no actual information about gay motorcycle clubs.

The Satyrs Motorcycle Club website allowed me to contact two older members of the Satyrs—John Laird and Bobby Drake. Both had been members of the Satyrs for over forty years (Bobby since 1956) and happily talked with me about their experiences and history in the club. Bobby had recently had a stroke and so his interview was cut short for health reasons, but John filled in almost every hole that I had in the archival research I had done. He explained why he joined the Satyrs, what an open meeting entailed, why they partook in drag when emphasizing masculinity, what the first ladies were, how clubs related to gay bars, why the Satyrs moved campgrounds before settling on Badger Flats (all I had before the interview was a program describing the history of campsites with no explanation for the change), how political the clubs were (the Warriors participation in the first CSW parade), the dynamic between clubs, and many other things. Laird's interview was by far the most helpful single source in writing this essay. The only weakness in his interview might have been a bias towards the Satyrs as opposed to other gay motorcycle clubs in Los Angeles, but I attempted to remain as unbiased as possible.

I also interviewed Durk Dehner, the former business partner of the artist Tom of Finland. I interviewed Dehner at the Tom of Finland foundation and he revolutionized what I thought about post-war masculinity and how it related to the clubs. From him I learned about Tom of Finland's impact on Los Angeles gay male visual culture through *Physique Pictorial*. Getting to look through the complete *Physique Pictorial* collection at the Foundation also gave me a great idea of the extent of homoeroticism in the magazines and their strong connection to motorcycling.

A weakness of the material that I dealt with was a lack of a broad body of information about clubs other than the Satyrs and Blue Max. The interviews and documentary about the Satyrs and the Unprocessed Collection focusing on Blue Max gave me a great overview of the day-to-day activities of those clubs and the clubs associated with them in groups like the Council. However, it was sometimes difficult to generalize about all gay motorcycle clubs in Los Angeles when I only had a smattering of flyers from clubs other than the Satyrs and Blue Max. Ideally, I would have also had time to do more interviews of old members of clubs, perhaps members of Oedipus Rex or San Andreas or the Warriors (though Laird mentioned that the Warriors have almost completely disappeared).

My ideas of gay motorcycle clubs developed radically throughout this process. Knowing nothing about them and that no one else knew anything about them either was at once frightening and thrilling. My early archival research allowed me to create a list of gay motorcycle clubs in Los Angeles and their founding dates. Reading flyers and seeing pictures allowed me to piece together what they spent their time doing: going on runs, having beer busts, Bike Christenings, polka parties, Motorcycle Olympics, Coronations of the Rex, and much more. My thesis began as a history and description of what the clubs were, but as I did more research on the growing political activism of Los Angeles in the 1970s, it became important to me to find out how involved the clubs were in that activism. The interview of Duane Moller, owner of the Black Pipe bar, in *Discover* magazine about the LAPD raid of the Black Pipe on August 20, 1972 became a turning point. Talking to David Hensley, a volunteer at ONE Archives who was peripherally involved with the gay motorcycle club scene in the 1970s, made me realize the trajectory of bar raids that began with the Black Cat, turned radical with the Black Pipe, and then continued into the later 1970s with other raids and activism. Finding a Black Pipe

commemorative pin in the Unprocessed Blue Max Collection proved that the Black Pipe raid was a big deal for gay bikers and that they wanted to remember the 21 men arrested on that night.

I ended my research in 1980 for two reasons. First is that the transformation in activism is most stark between 1954 and 1979. Second is that everything changed with the advent of AIDS. John Laird explained in his interview that the gay motorcycling community was especially affected by the crisis and that nothing was the same afterwards.

~ Many thanks to Bruce Cohen and the Cohen Fund for supporting this research. ~

Appendices

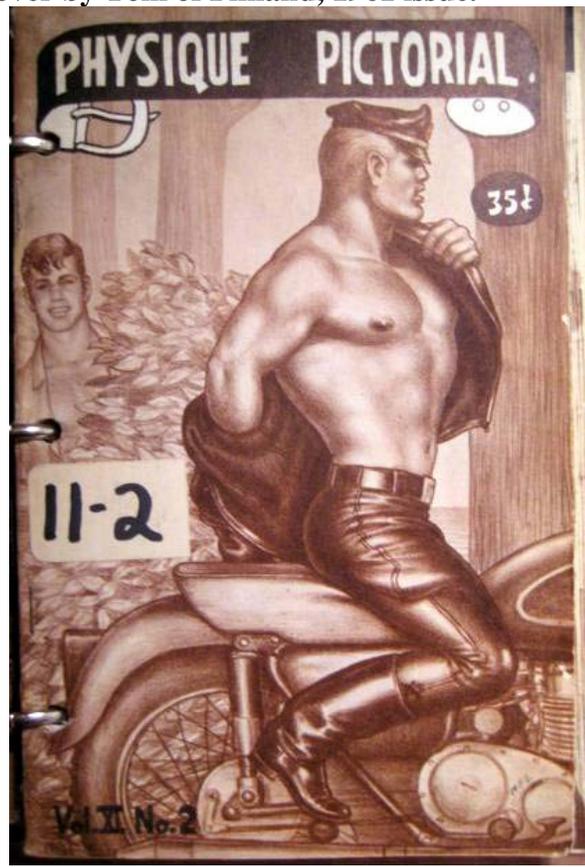
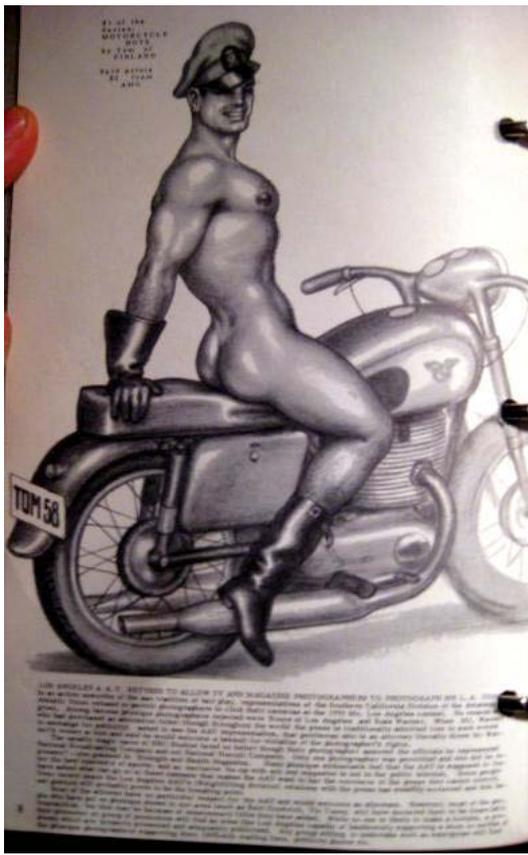
Appendix I, Picture of John Laird in 1968, used with permission of John Laird. John Laird (age 32) on front of bike, unknown man on back.



**Appendix II, Physique Pictorial Collection. Tom of Finland Foundation. Los Angeles, CA.
Top: *Physique Pictorial* April 1960, featuring Roland Marsh and Jim Sweeney.**



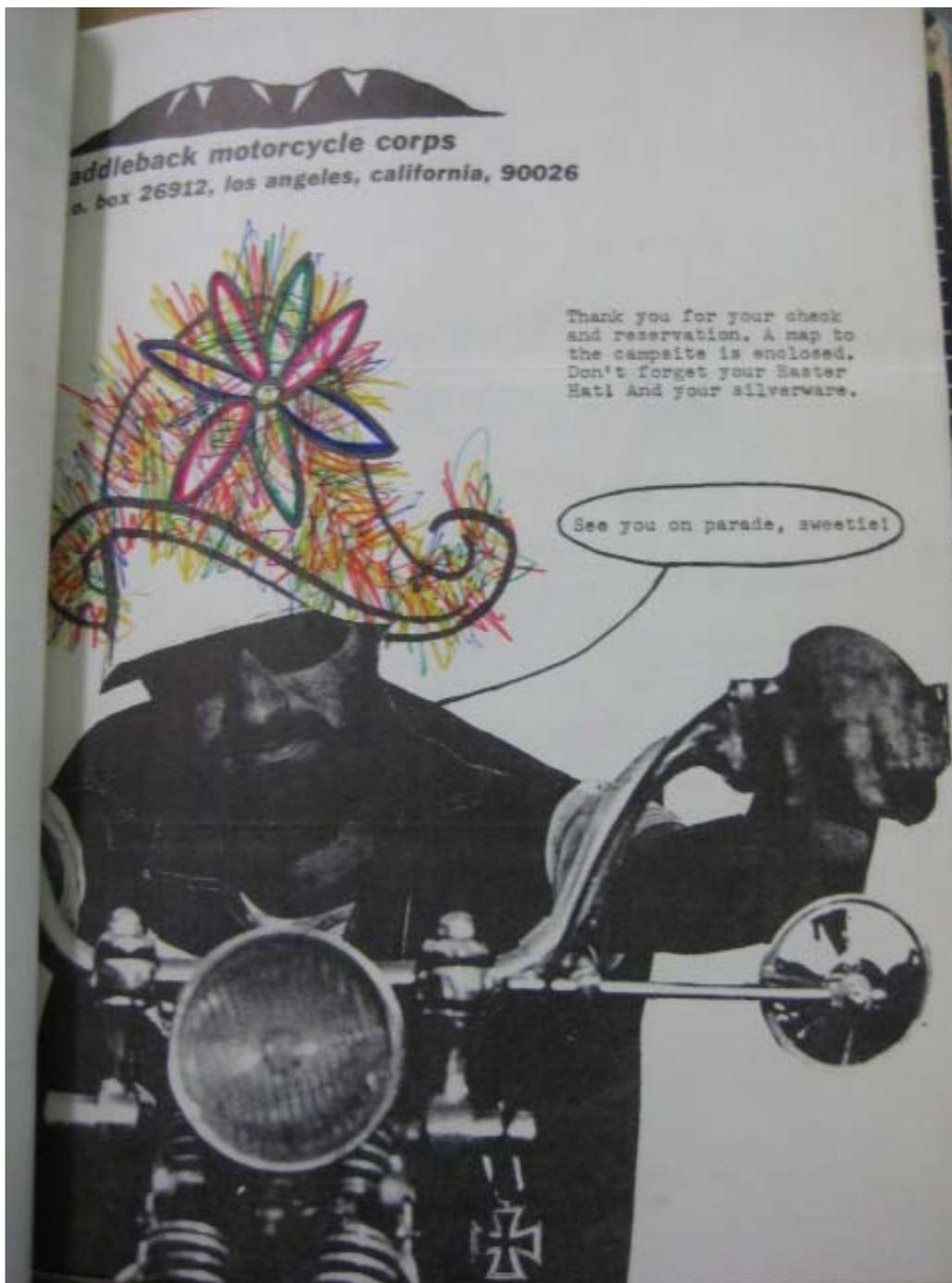
Left: Tom of Finland, 1958 issue. Right: Cover by Tom of Finland, 1961 issue.



Appendix III, Blue Max Motorcycle Club pictures. Unprocessed Blue Max Collection. ONE Archives. Los Angeles. Top: Blue Max Motorcycle Club, Date unknown. Bottom: Christmas card sent to Blue Max MC President Hal Hegge, 1971.



Appendix IV, Saddleback Motorcycle Corps Easter Run. April 13-14, 1968. Unprocessed Blue Max Collection. ONE Archives. Los Angeles, CA. Text: See you on the parade, sweetie!



Appendix V, The First Ladies Annual Dolly Parton Hoe Down and Bake Sale. Motorcycle Subject Files. ONE Archives.

THE FIRST LADIES present

THE ANNUAL

Join the First Ladies on their ninth Annual Fun Run. Saturday, October 27th 1979.

Bring your partner and dance the Virginia Reel

Trophies for:
Motorcycle Events!
Car Events!
Pedestrian Events!

Awards for Best Theme
Costumes - Bike - Car

Run Brooch

Be sure to "kiss" your favorite First Ladies at the "KISSING BOOTH".

Square Dancing

DANCING INSTRUCTION ON BACK OF PAGE

DONATION - \$5.00

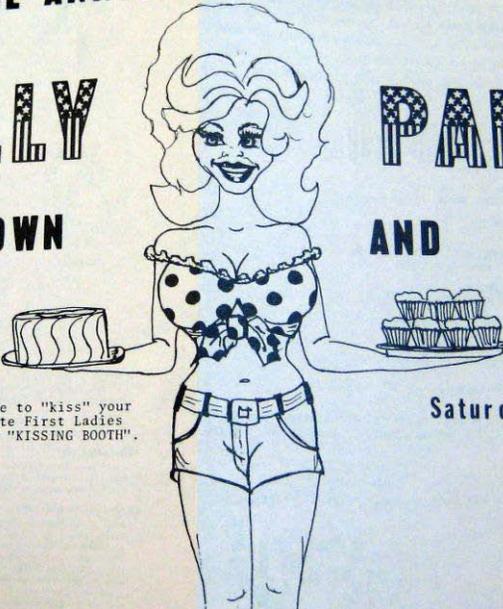
CLUB, GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL SQUARE DANCING WELCOME...WELCOME

DOLLY PARTON

HOEDOWN AND BAKE SALE

Saturday, October 27

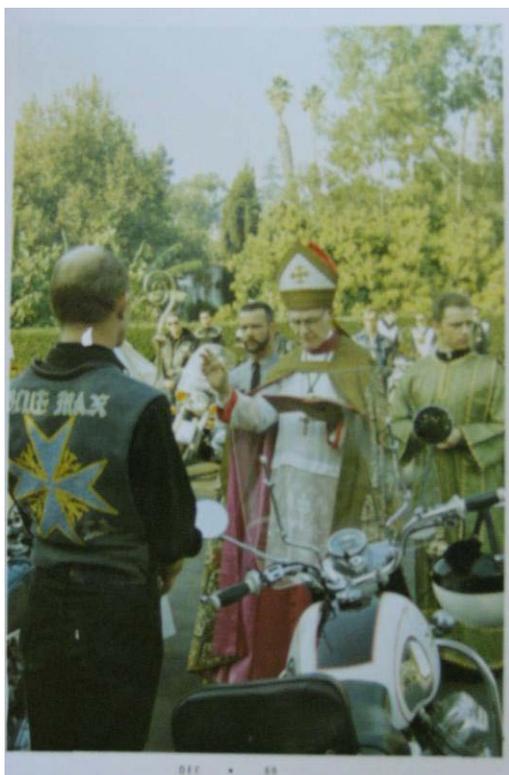
CHECK - IN WILL BE FROM 6:00 TO 7:00 P.M.
AT THE **STUD**
4216 MELROSE AVENUE
LOS ANGELES, CA



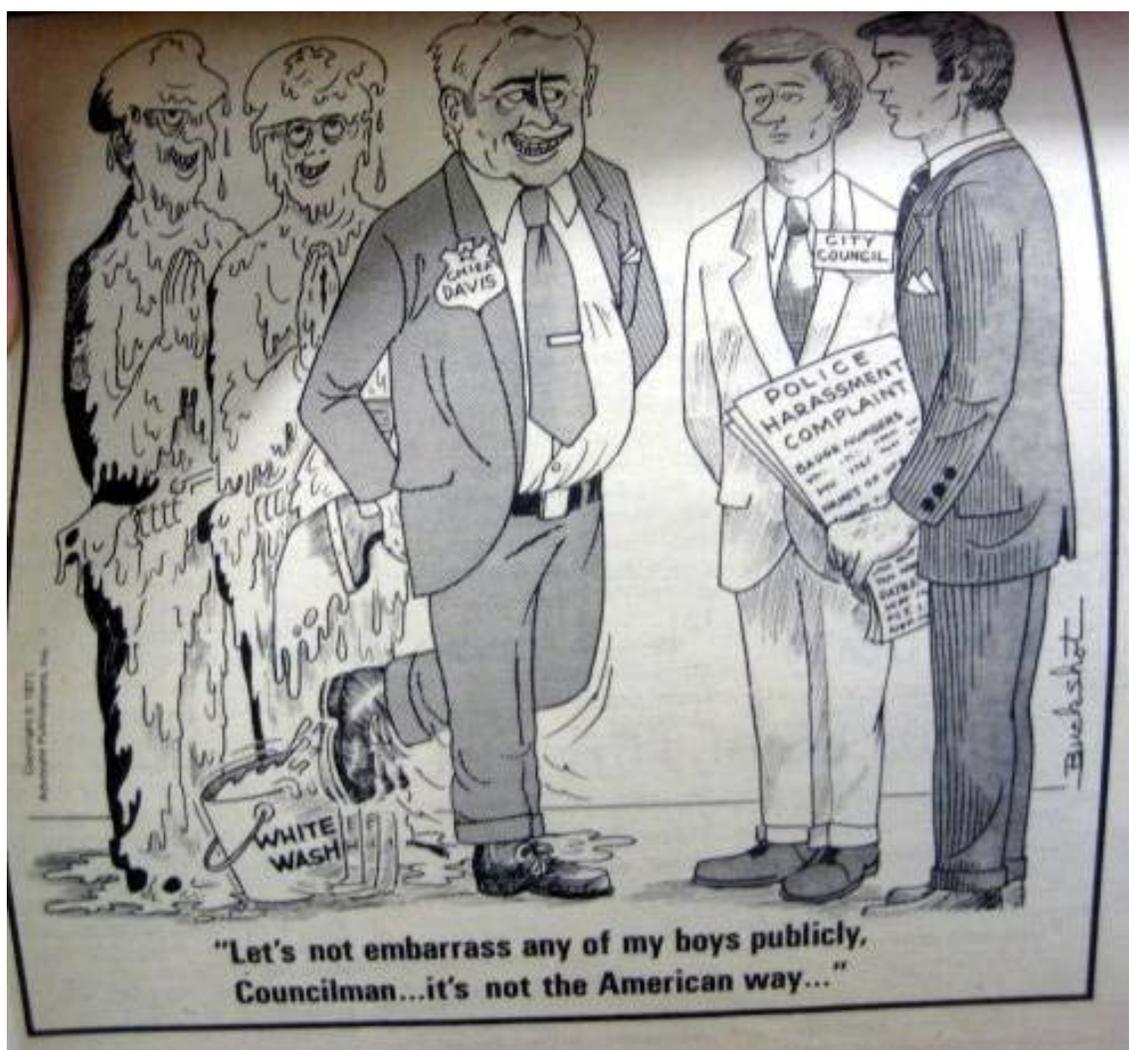
Appendix VI, Blessing of the Bikes, December 1969. Motorcycle Clubs Folder I. ONE Archives. Los Angeles, CA.



Note the California Highway Patrol Officer (Lower Right).



Appendix VII, Los Angeles Advocate, 1971 cartoon. Text: "Let's not embarrass any of my boys publicly, Councilman...it's not the American way..." Unprocessed Blue Max Collection. ONE Archives. Los Angeles, CA.



**Appendix VIII, Remember August 20, 1972, Black Pipe 21 pin. Pin Collection.
Unprocessed Blue Max Collection. ONE Archives. Los Angeles, CA.**

