

**CONNECTING THE DEVIANT’S WAR TO THE PRESENT:
THE NEW MATTACHINE SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON DC**

By the end of 1971, the Mattachine Society of Washington DC (“MSDC”) consisted of a sole member: Dr. Franklin E. Kameny. Though he sought to keep the MSDC alive, it ceased operating, notwithstanding its distinction as the organization that conducted the first gay rights protests at the White House, the United States Civil Service Commission, and the Pentagon; that first openly declared that gay citizens would not accept governmental persecution¹; that organized letter-writing campaigns, congressional testimony, and public literature about the injustices faced by gay citizens; and that assisted the first openly gay congressional candidate’s campaign. The MSDC’s existence continued on paper only until eventually, the organization’s corporate charter lapsed.

Following Dr. Kameny’s death in 2011, a new MSDC was organized and re-purposed with a new mission: “archive activism” to ensure this history can never be forgotten or erased. Led by Charles Francis as President and Pate Felts as Vice President and Treasurer, the MSDC’s new mission is to obtain and preserve original, declassified documents located in government archives that speak to the history of LGBT Americans.² Since that time, the MSDC has undertaken extraordinary steps to unlock documents, once kept secret, that tell the story of the decades-long discrimination against LGBT Americans by its own government. It has located key documents at the National Archives and Records Administration, U.S. presidential libraries and archives, the Library of Congress, the FOIA Library of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, university libraries, and other private and public document repositories across the country.

The MSDC is once again a vibrant organization with a dedicated Board of Directors, a unique partnership with the international law firm McDermott, Will & Emery, LLP (“McDermott”), and an advisory board including prominent scholars, authors, and government officials.³ The reconstituted MSDC has completed significant projects highlighting its archival work including the following:

- With the help of McDermott, it filed an *amicus curiae* brief before the United States Supreme Court in *Obergefell, et al. v. Hodges, et al.* in support of the Petitioners’ appeals seeking marriage equality. The amicus brief included copies of original documents obtained by MSDC through its archival research to demonstrate to the U.S. Supreme Court the historic animus of the federal and state governments against the LGBT community.
- It arranged for the donation of “gay conversion therapy” papers to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History. These revelatory papers were written and preserved by the once largest “ex-gay” conversion therapy ministry, Love in Action (“LIA”) the nation’s largest conversion therapy ministry and program featured in the motion picture “Boy Erased”. Specifically, MSDC

¹ <https://exhibits.lib.berkeley.edu/spotlight/queer/catalog/22-924>.

² <https://www.washingtonblade.com/2014/05/14/new-mattachine-society-d-c-uncovers-lgbt-history/>

³ <https://mattachinesocietywashingtondc.org/board-of-directors/>.

arranged for the donation of the LIA “handbook” for its “Source Residential Program” and the “Steps Out Program Class Manual,” as well as a workbook belonging to Garrard Conley, an individual “treated” at one of these centers and author of the memoir, “Boy Erased.” The workbook is a valuable historic document that details the draconian practices and rules of LIA and the organization’s efforts to “cure” program attendees of their homosexuality. Conley generously donated his workbook to MSDC so that the organization could donate it to the Smithsonian to ensure its posterity and public access.

- In 2018, MSDC completed an original archival research project on the role of the St. Elizabeths Hospital for the Insane, the first federally-funded mental institution in Washington, D.C. that treated and attempted to “cure” homosexuals with a series of harmful, even barbaric aversion therapy treatments, well into the 1960s. This groundbreaking research, “Diagnosis: Homosexuality, St. Elizabeths Hospital and the Federal Assault on LGBT Americans,” was featured on the cover of the “Washington City Paper” (May 30, 2018) and presented before The Historical Society of Washington, D.C. at its annual conference (November 2, 2018). Complimentary to the research, the MSDC and its legal counsel McDermott completed and released an original white paper report, “The Pernicious Myth of Conversion Therapy: How Love In Action Perpetrated a Fraud on America” (2018) featured by the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. at one of the Press Club’s “Headliners” events.
- MSDC, with the help of McDermott, initiated a lawsuit in federal court in 2016 to obtain historical documents pursuant to FOIA from the government concerning Executive Order 10450 that implemented the Sex Deviates program created by J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI and the devastating effect it had on the lives of LGBT employees of the federal government (Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C. v. U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia) MWE won its motion for summary judgment to compel disclosure of previously requested historical documents that identified some 5,000 uses of the pejorative word “pervert” in the requested documents..
- In 2019, discovered and released records related to Dr. Lilli Vincenz, the first lesbian member of MSW, including a donation of her historic documentary film “Gay and Proud” to the Library of Congress. MSDC worked with McDermott to write and publish a historical legal analysis of Vincenz’ forgotten 2005 legal battle in Arlington, Virginia resulting from a denial of service from a video production store (Bono Film and Video) that claimed “Gay and Proud” violated its moral principles and religious liberty. The overview accompanied the release of original materials from Lilli’s archive chronicling her life of activism.

George Orwell is credited with having said, “The most effective way to destroy people is to deny and obliterate their own understanding of their history.” The MSDC is tirelessly working to ensure that the LGBT Community’s history is preserved and disseminated far and wide so that it cannot be forgotten. By remembering, documenting, and understanding the work

and progress made by civil rights pioneers such as Dr. Frank Kameny and others like him, the LGBT Community will be able to build on that progress and fulfill the mission that Dr. Kameny wanted the world to learn; that “Gay is Good.”

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