

First Pride parade shunned by local media



Our History
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Cincinnati Enquirer
USA TODAY NETWORK

Cincinnati's first Pride parade was held 50 years ago on April 7, 1973.

Not that you would have known that by reading a newspaper. The Cincinnati Enquirer and The Cincinnati Post didn't report on the parade, one of the first Pride events in Ohio.

"Despite press releases and a parade permit, only Channel 9 covered the event and only to show an irreverent skit where characters hit each other," Ken Schneek wrote in his history book, "LGBTQ Cincinnati."

But it was reported in the May 1973 issue of the Independent Eye, Cincinnati's underground newspaper from 1968 to 1975:

"Seventy-five people marched without incident beneath banners proclaiming themselves to be members of the Cincinnati Gay Community, Saturday, April 7. They marched from Washington Park to Fountain Square, escorted by a full complement of Cincinnati police. At the Square speeches and skits were presented to a crowd of about 400."

That parade in 1973 was part of a three-day Gay Pride Weekend, April 6-8, that included a gay community dinner and a dance at St. John's Unitarian Church at 320 Resor Ave., Clifton. The weekend was in celebration of the first year of the Cincinnati Gay Community, the first Cincinnati-wide LGBTQ+ group.

Gay activism was on the rise then. Gay Pride Week was usually at the end of June to commemorate the anniversary of the Stonewall uprising in New York on June 28, 1969, when police raided a gay bar, sparking six days of protests and rioting that was a turning point in the gay rights movement.

Another local milestone was June 24, 1978, which Cincinnati Mayor Jerry Springer proclaimed to be Lesbian-Gay Pride Day. The next year, Mayor Bobbie Sterne was criticized for doing the same, but refusing a request for a Respect for Life Day proclamation on the anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision on abortion, because, she said, it was not appropriate for a mayor to proclaim official days on subjects so controversial.

The culture wars were being fought more than 50 years ago as well.

The Pride rally took place again in 1980, but without a mayoral proclamation. In 1985, Gay Pride Day began with a parade from City Hall to Fountain Square, then a festival held behind The Dock, a gay bar on Augusta Street, beneath the free-

way overpasses on the west side of Downtown.

Gay news in straight media

Before the city's first Pride parade, local media coverage of gay issues was sparse and mostly negative.

Such was the case in September 1964, when The Enquirer published a three-part series, "Cincinnati's Hidden Problem," written by crime reporter Frank Weikel. The purpose of the report, as stated, was to call attention to "the growing number of homosexuals who are plaguing public places."

Nine years later, when Ohio statutes that outlawed homosexual activity were repealed, the Enquirer Magazine published a much more representative story, "Living the Gay Life" by reporter William J. Speers, on Nov. 4, 1973. It was likely the most forthright discussion of the topic in Cincinnati's mainstream media at the time.

The article did briefly mention the Pride parade seven months earlier. Speers also spoke to dozens of people in the gay community, profiling seven individuals who discussed struggles with gay dating, social acceptance and sexual identity.

"A lot of people think that homosexuality means who you go to bed with. It's more than that. It is an innate part of your identity," Powell Grant, a 30-year-old graduate student, said in the article. "It is something you discover in yourself. You can squelch it but you're just a homosexual suppressing gay feelings."

Much of this was probably eye-opening for Enquirer readers at the time. These days, such topics are openly discussed. Back then, it was taboo. Most of the seven people featured are identified by first names only as they feared repercussions if they were outed.

"If you have to use one word to describe my life it's frustration. We are preoccupied with our sexuality not because we want to be but because we must be," said Daphne, who in 1973 worried she would be fired if her employer found out she was living with her part-



Photo of the first Gay Pride Parade at Fountain Square on April 7, 1973, as appeared in the Independent Eye, an underground newspaper. Before the city's first Pride parade, local media coverage of gay issues was sparse and mostly negative. INDEPENDENT EYE/PROVIDED BY CINCINNATI & HAMILTON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

ner, Laura. "Society will not let us forget it. ... You use a hell of a lot of energy keeping people from finding out. And it is very draining and very sad to me."

Nearly a decade later, The Enquirer published "Homosexuals: A Cincinnati Report," a 28-page special section, on April 4, 1982.

According to the introduction: "The Enquirer report is an attempt to provide a context to understand the lives of perhaps 140,000 Cincinnati-ans who are gay."

The 18 stories ranged from "Why are some people homosexuals?" and "Not a crime, but still a sin" to "Saturday night in the gay bars," plus features on a lesbian couple, gay artist Hudson, and Gale Rose, described as "once Cincinnati's leading gay madam" who has "two portraits on her mantle - one of her as a woman, the other as a man."

"Jaws dropped all over the region..." Schneek wrote in his 2020 history. "A special section of this length in 1982 about the LGBTQ community from the city's paper of record was truly a stupefying increase in visibility."

In the section, reporter Tom Shroder wrote about gay news in the media.

"Gays tend to see The Enquirer, the city's largest news organization, as the worst offender" of news coverage of gays that was "unbalanced and demeaning, completely failing to reflect their contribution to the community."

He cited The Enquirer in 1981 publishing the



"Homosexuals: A Cincinnati Report," a 28-page special section published by The Enquirer on April 4, 1982, brought a lot more attention to the gay community. ENQUIRER FILE

case of Obergefell v. Hodges, deciding whether to extend marriage rights to same-sex couples. The Enquirer wrote: "We hope this Supreme Court, in 2015, will take a stand for equal rights for people who happen to be LGBT."

Just this week, The Enquirer's page 1 announcement of "Summer's Kickoff" on May 31 featured a photo of the Cincinnati Pride Parade front and center.

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