

[KRISTEN SCHUMACHER] Using audio excerpts from our podcast along with photos from the UW-Archives, this short video aims to tell the story of two gathering places in the Madison LGBT community. Lysistrata and the Hotel Washington had much in common. In their time, both were considered the hub of gay and lesbian life in Madison, both were innovative and ever changing businesses led by enterprising individuals, and both ended tragically, burning to the ground and leaving behind a great void in the community. Hotel Washington and Lysistrata live on in the memories in those who spent time there as places where one can meet, mingle, have fun, and of course, be themselves.

Chapter 3: Rodney Scheel and the famous Hotel Washington as told by Lewis Bosworth, Alix Popp and Martha Olson.

[SCOTT SEYFORTH] So Rodney operates the Back Door through the '70s and in 1975 he buys the property that is Hotel Washington, that becomes Hotel Washington, and the first thing that he runs there he continues a café that is open on the main floor, a eatery there, and he renames it the Hot L Café after a 70's show that was on at the time called the The Hot L of Baltimore, which was about a café in Baltimore. This television show was important to the gay community at the time because it was the first television show on network tv that had a recurring gay character. And then he goes about over the course of the next, well, until he dies, completely re-inventing the inside of this building as, into multiple venues, it becomes a complex, kind of a remarkable complex unlike anyplace in Madison, unlike anyplace almost anywhere. After the Hot L the next thing that they open is a bar in the basement called the Barber's closet. It was located down an exterior stairwell, and then you went through a door into a small room that appeared to go nowhere, like you were trapped, but if you looked you could open a secret panel through which you entered the actual Barber's Closet.

[ALIX OLSON AND MARTHA POPP] that great door that you would open up. That was a very romantic place, it was where you went for a serious date.

[SCOTT SEYFORTH] And then in '79 they continued renovating the inside of this place, then he opens in the basement another bar called Rods. It is in the basement of the building, in the parlance of its day it was a leather levi bar. He ended up creating a big outdoor patio in the back of the bar that was very popular in the summer. And then they had a big dance floor in the back room and another room that showed adult male videos. It became a very popular destination for men throughout Wisconsin and Northern Illinois. And then they went up and completely gutted several of the top two floors and took out everything. And then built in the big empty cavern of a space a big dance bar

[LEWIS BOSWORTH] Then he opened another part of our history certainly, what was called-- I'm also aghast at the fact that people call things something, and the name sticks, even though it's completely meaningless, For example, Rodney decided on the third floor of his hotel building, he would opening a new bar. And til the day the building burned down, it was still called The New Bar. The New Bar. And it was a dancing place, and many people may remember it. So I and my late partner used to hang out there. And we would watch Jeopardy, one of our favorite things. And so we had Rod's in the basement. And then we had The New Bar, which remained The New Bar. And then behind Rod's in

the basement, we had The Back Bar. So there were actually three places in the building that could have been decidedly called gay bars.

[SCOTT SEYFORTH] they had a music venue in a bar on the first floor in the back called Club du Wash that hosted different bands every night of the week. They had a micro cafe, a micro bar, they had a espresso bar, they had 10 permanent rooms for residents and, they kept some of the hotel rooms and they had 22 hotel rooms for guests because people would come in from around the state, people would come up from Chicago. It was a destination. Hotel Washington burned to the ground in a fire on February 18, 1996. And that's what happened. I think the report was that someone emptied a cigarette, into a trash can, you know cigarette butts into a trash can. And that was the end of the Hotel Wash. Rodney Schell died of AIDS in 1990 and his brother took over the running of the, the management of the bar. And there were efforts when it burnt down in 1996 to have it rebuilt but it just never came to fruition.

[KRISTEN SCHUMACHER] Chapter 4: Creating a women's space in the 1970's: Lysistrata opens in 1977, as told by DJ Wipperfurth, Liz Lenzke, Alix Popp, and Martha Olson.

[DJ WIPPERFURTH] We all were sitting around, commiserating that the only places we had to go is bars. And a lot of times I'd say, but whose fault is that? That's ours. We don't do anything about it. Then the lesbian potlucks started out of all that stuff. Some women got that idea and started that, and started having it transferred around to different homes and stuff. And then Catherine put together the works to put together Lysistrata.

[SCOTT SEYFORTH] Lysistrata was a gathering place for the Madison feminist community and it offered a multi-purpose space for socializing, entertainment, and meeting. Events at Lysistrata included poetry readings candidate's receptions, issue debates, films, lectures, dances, benefits for local women's causes. And there was food, it was a restaurant, and a wonderful restaurant. The food was delicious and it was healthy. It has the first salad bar in Madison the first Madison take back the night march was planned at Lysistrata in 1978. Lysistrata was a place where women made friends, and lovers, and change in their community. It was a women's restaurant, bar, and performance space that was developed by the Lysistrata cooperative whose board included Carla Dubinski, a lawyer in town, Kay Clarenbach, one of the founders of the national organization for women and a professor on campus, Ruth Bayer, who was a professor on campus, Katherine Rouse, and Andrea Mosedeling, Janet Brewer

[LINDA LENZKE] Thursday night was women's night at Lysistrata. And then frequently, that was a definite night that I'd go dancing every Thursday. And often on the weekends. Lysistrata, at that time, was positioned as a feminist restaurant and bar collective and appealed to a wider community of men and women, but I hung out there a lot. And it was a wonderful environment. It was beautiful. Light wood, lots of windows. It was at a time where the police and fire departments were recruiting women. A lot of the women who hung out at Lysistrata were the first recruiting classes for police cadets and the fire department. And a lot of different women's organizations had their meetings at Lysistrata. So it was really a place to go to meet the community of women in Madison. And it had, definitely, more of a political bend to it. There were other women's bars and gay bars in

Madison at the time, but Lysistrata was really more-- it still maintained its feminist definition.

[MARTHA POPP] And there were certain days and nights, I can't remember, where you would dress up. Remember Mary Bennett and a bunch of us dressed up to be waitresses one night in some kind of vintage costumes. There were so many activities from there it really was the hub

[ALIX OLSON] It was, it was great. Some nights I would cocktail waitress out at the tables when they would have the fancy dress up stuff like what you were talking about other times it was just straight bartending. Ed Durken, who was then the Fire Chief would come in all the time and Gene Parks I would always serve Gene gin, because that was his drink, it was just like this incredible place where people came. It was like when you first come to town people go to room to sort of get hooked up, well people came to Lysistrata for the same reason.

[SCOTT SEYFORTH] And again, a fire destroyed Lysistrata and 4 other adjoining businesses on February 8, 1982 and left the local feminist community bereft. Arson investigators concluded the blaze was intentionally set, but no suspect was ever arrested. Press reports at the time suspect, the building was connected to 4 other businesses, press reports at the time suspect it was one of the other business owners of one of those other businesses that set the fire. So it was not intentionally trying to burn down Lysistrata, but maybe trying to burn down a different business.

[KRISTEN SCHUMACHER] Long after Lysistrata and the Hotel Washington burned, many of our interviewees spoke of them as important parts of gay and lesbian life in Madison. The two businesses reached a proud clientele, and their loss was felt far and wide by Madison residents from all walks of life. Whether it was a hang out where one could grab a drink, a venue to debate important issues, a spot to grab lunch, or a place of employment, it is now wonder that Lysistrata and the Hotel Washington live on in the memories of so many.