

"The Story of Richard Mack and Manny's Den: How a Small Business Owner in a College Town Won LGBTQ Rights in the Years before Stonewall"

The Rutgers Oral History Archives Podcast
By Kate Rizzi

The year was 1965. The place was Manny's Den, a bar and restaurant in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Manny's Den was owned and operated by Manny and Leah Mack and their son Richard. One night in 1965, state agents of the Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control, the ABC, raided Manny's Den. This is what Richard Mack remembers.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

The ABC came in and said that we were allowing "apparent"--in quotes--"apparent homosexuals" to congregate in inordinate numbers, and this was against the ABC laws. So, they wanted to close us down.

The ABC suspended the liquor license of Manny's Den because the patrons were gay.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

My having gone to law school, I said, "This is crazy."

The Macks then challenged the suspension and took the case to the New Jersey Supreme Court, where ultimately, the court's ruling would legalize gay bars in the state and add momentum to the growing LGBTQ rights movement.

Intro Music

Welcome to the Rutgers Oral History Archives Podcast. I am Kate Rizzi. The Rutgers Oral History Archives, ROHA for short, is dedicated to documenting the life stories of people in communities throughout Rutgers University and New Jersey. ROHA makes those oral history interviews available to the public through our digital archive at oralhistory.rutgers.edu.

Today we are going to look at an important but little-known event in New Jersey history through the oral history interviews of Richard Mack and others. This episode is called "The Story of Richard Mack and Manny's Den: How a Small Business Owner in a College Town Won LGBTQ Rights in the Years before Stonewall."

The story begins in World War II-era New Brunswick. In 1944, Richard Mack's father, Manny, along with a partner, started a bar and packaged goods store at 111 Albany Street, right in the heart of downtown New Brunswick. The business became incorporated as One Eleven Wines & Liquors and was known as Manny's Den.

Manny, born Emanuel Makanoff, came from Eastern European Jewish roots. He and his family emigrated from Poland by boat when he was a child and settled in New York City.

Manny had a bit of a rebellious streak. During Prohibition, he worked running rum from the Caribbean to Florida, where alcohol was illegal but there was still a demand for it. Manny also worked as a waiter and vaudeville entertainer at resorts in the Catskills. It was there that he met his future wife, Leah Braverman, at the hotel that her family ran.

Manny and Leah married, and their only son Richard, nicknamed Dick, was born in New York City in 1933, the year that Prohibition ended. The family then settled in New Brunswick.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

Everyone knew my father, because he was in show business, as "Manny Mack," and they used to call him "Little Manny Mack," because he was short, and song and dance, and happy. My father was always very active with all the different shows that would be going on, that they would produce here in New Brunswick and Highland Park.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

I started to work there when I was twelve years old, less than that, from the day that my father went in there in 1944.

New Brunswick was known as Hub City. It was a transportation hub at the crossroads of river ways, rail lines and highways in Central New Jersey, en route from Philadelphia to New York City. Dick remembers the city of New Brunswick during World War II bustling with students and faculty from Rutgers University, industries, such as Squibb, Mack Truck, and Johnson & Johnson, hospitals, and the U.S. Army embarkation base across the Raritan River, Camp Kilmer.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

The merchants all got along very well together in New Brunswick. I loved to walk on the streets and just going past one store to another store. You'd go into the newsstand, and everyone at the newsstand knew you. Everyone would get the newspaper, and you could buy your candy there. You'd go into certain stores, where you would get your hotdogs and things. Of course, you had NJC on one end, and you had Rutgers at the other end.

NJC refers the New Jersey College for Women, later renamed Douglass College. This was the women's college of Rutgers, located about a mile down George Street from Manny's Den. A block away from Manny's Den was the Old Queen's Campus of Rutgers, the eighth oldest institution of higher education in the nation. Rutgers College was a men's college until 1972.

In the 1950s, Manny bought out his partner. He ran the packaged goods store and bar, and then he and Leah opened a restaurant. The restaurant had a busy lunch business that catered to employees of Johnson & Johnson and people who worked at the Middlesex County Courthouse. The kitchen at Manny's Den shut down at 10 PM. That was when people arrived at the bar.

Growing up, Dick attended schools in New Brunswick and then went to a private high school. He briefly attended college at Washington and Lee and then went to the Pennsylvania Military College. After graduating in 1955, Dick was commissioned an officer in the U.S. Army.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

I loved being in the service because I had the discipline of everything. Then, when I came out after six months, I went back to law school, was there for another year. I didn't really like law school, so I went into my father's business.

This was Seton Hall Law School. Dick also served in the Army Reserves for eight and a half years.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

But I really didn't like law school. My big excuse was that my father took ill; he had gall bladder attack and he couldn't work. So, I went in and I took over the business and started to work for him.

In the meantime, Dick had gotten married and was starting a family of his own. It was at this time, during the late 1950s, that Manny's Den developed a new customer base.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

There was a bar down on Albany Street that was a gay bar. To be honest with you, none of us knew that it was a gay bar; it was there for a number of years.

This was the Rutgers Cocktail Bar. Also in the neighborhood was a hairdressing school. Some of the students who attended were gay.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

It just happens that the gay bar was closed by the Alcoholic Beverage Control because they had--I think they called it "lewd, lascivious and immoral acts." Just the mere fact that you were gay was "lewd and lascivious and immoral."

When Prohibition ended, the power to regulate liquor went from the federal government back to the states. In New Jersey, the Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control was created. The ABC fell under the State Attorney General's Office in the Department of Law and Public Safety. The ABC had sweeping regulatory powers over the liquor industry in the state. But with these police powers, the ABC also ended up attempting to regulate a lot more than just liquor. The ABC shut down the Rutgers Cocktail Bar because it was a gay bar.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

They were closed, and some of the gay people started to come into our restaurant. Our restaurant, there was a review that was given about it, and they said it's the closest thing to Greenwich Village.

By day, the Macks worked the restaurant and packaged goods store, and at night, Manny's Den was a gay bar.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

When do single people come out, whether gay or straight? They don't come out until after ten o'clock at night. We had a piano there. As a matter of fact, it was a player piano. So, people could come in and put the music on, and they could sing to it or there were many talented people who could play the piano, [and] other talented people who could sing. The theater group

from Douglass College would come in. These were all theater people, and they loved to sing and tell stories. A lot of people were going to the movies. After the movies, they would come in and they would have sandwiches and cakes. My mother used to do the baking, so that the desserts were really great.

Business at Manny's Den continued to thrive into the 1960s.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

As I said, we had the best of two worlds when it became gay, because here we had a restaurant going, we had all these people who were coming in for lunch and dinner, we had all the people who were coming in after ten o'clock--I said is when singles come out--and we had a lot of the NJC, the Douglass College, people coming in. We had a lot of the Rutgers people who were coming in, who weren't afraid of the place being gay. It was a happy, fun place to be.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

We became very friendly with many, many of our customers, even my wife and family did too.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

It was a pleasure going to work. Why was it a pleasure? You're going into a bar, you're serving people, you're having a good time, you're hearing all this music, you have good food there, you have good drink there, you have nice people who were telling stories.

Adrian Schreiber Oral History Excerpt:

But it was one of these things with a long, long, narrow bar, and then, it had a back room. This was classic hidden gay stuff back in the day.

This is Adrian Schreiber, a student at Rutgers College in the 1960s and a regular at Manny's Den. Adrian describes the setup of the bar and the back room, which he explained to me was a second room. It wasn't a back room in the sense of anything inappropriate happening.

Adrian Schreiber Oral History Excerpt (continued):

So, there was one long bar, and it was a regular, you know, sit down, have your drink type thing. Then, there was the "back room," where you had to go through a curtain and there was an equal-sized room where dancing could

be had. It was primarily guys, maybe a couple women, but not many. There was also a red light on the ceiling. So, if a cop came in to the--and the only way you could enter was through the bar portion--so if a cop came in the door, the bartender would flick a switch and the red light would come on in the back and everyone would stop dancing, just stand around holding their beers.

Socially, Manny's Den provided a safe space for its customers. But the ABC was a looming presence over Manny's Den. The ABC would periodically send an agent to the bar.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

All he does is comes in, checks my liquor license, checks my bottles to see if the alcohol content is correct, checks the bottles to see whether there are any fruit flies in them--by the way, even if there is a fruit fly it's dead, so it can't harm you and a fruit fly can't harm you anyway. So, what they say is that the bottle is contaminated.

You see, the ABC went beyond just regulating liquor.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

You couldn't dance. That was the worst thing. If you had two men or two women dancing--two women was okay, but two men couldn't dance.

During the 1940s and '50s, the ABC developed rules to target gay bars and shut them down. Rule 4 stated that no bar should allow "any known criminals, gangsters, racketeers, pick pockets, swindlers, confidence men, prostitutes, female impersonators, or other persons of ill repute." It was the term "female impersonators" that the ABC used to police gay men congregating at bars. The ABC considered gay bars a "definite social problem." In 1955, the ABC director declared that gay bars posed a "threat to the safety and morals of the public."

ABC Rule 5 stated that a bar should not allow "disturbances, brawls or unnecessary noises," or allow the business "to become a nuisance." Rule 5 was expanded to prohibit "lewdness" and "immoral activities." During the 1950s, the ABC shut down gay bars as a "nuisance."

All across New Jersey, undercover ABC agents infiltrated gay bars and either suspended or revoked their liquor licenses. This had happened in New Brunswick before, at the Rutgers Cocktail Bar. It also happened at two bars that

are going to become central to this story: Murphy's Tavern on Mulberry Street in Newark and Val's Bar in Atlantic City. They were two gay bars that were repeatedly targeted by the ABC. The same thing was going on in New York, California, Pennsylvania and other states. These were the daily dealings of the "Straight State," a term coined by Princeton scholar Margot Canaday to refer to the vast system used to police and criminalize homosexuality in the United States.

Then comes the fateful night in 1965. Well, actually, there were four nights in late April and early May that ABC agents infiltrated Manny's Den. They were trying to shut it down.

On April 28, Dick was tending bar. Three ABC agents came into the bar and observed the bar's patrons. The key word here is observed; they were looking for "apparent homosexuals." These state agents took it upon themselves to identify who in the bar was homosexual. The way in which the agents made the determination was through watching the customers at Manny's Den, listening to their conversations, and then noting in their official reports, in reductive language, stereotypical behavior associated with gay men. The agents' reports are recorded in ABC Bulletins, which are records of division activities, disciplinary proceedings and court decisions.

On that first visit, an agent described the customers as "very effeminate." They talked "in a lisping tone of voice" and "used limp wrist movements." They laughed and giggled and "looked into each other's eyes" as they conversed.

Agents returned on May 1st, a Saturday. They noted that with the exception of one couple, all the patrons "appeared to be homosexuals." They were throwing kisses at each other, fluttering their eyelashes, and singing love songs to each other around the player piano. There was a "strong aroma of perfume exuded from these individuals."

On May 6, agents reported that there were fifteen male and two female patrons. The men all appeared to be homosexuals. An agent observed, "One of the women appeared to be a lesbian and was sitting with another woman who was a normal female."

When the ABC agents returned the following night, Manny and Leah were there. An agent confronted Manny and said, "I see all the girls are here tonight as usual." Manny defended his customers; they paid their tabs, they were law-abiding. Manny said, "Who are we to say what they are, what they do, ... who is to

care what they do when they leave. They are a well-behaved group and they are a good spending group."

Manny's Den was, in fact, a gay bar. But who gave the ABC agents the know-how to actually identify who was gay and then the authority to penalize that? Well, the State of New Jersey did. One of the ABC agents later testified that he specialized in investigating homosexual activity and that he had considerable on-the-job training.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

The only argument that they had was that we were allowing apparent homosexuals to congregate in inordinate numbers, period. That was it. That was written in the ABC law at that time.

The ABC charged Manny's Den with allowing homosexuals to congregate, thus being a public nuisance, and suspended the liquor license. The Macks were afraid of losing their license and for about a month discouraged gay customers from coming into the bar. They went to another local bar. Then, the Macks started to fight the ABC and encouraged their patrons to come back.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

Gay people still wanted to be with gay people and Manny's Den was still open for them; they were there. They were certainly being discouraged from going to the other bars because the other bars were concerned that they were going to be closed down. So, everything drifted right back to Manny's Den. So, there was really no problem.

There's another facet to all of this. Most people in the New Brunswick community at that time didn't even realize that Manny's Den was a gay bar.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

They didn't know what was going on in the nighttime unless they had read in the newspaper that the Alcoholic Beverage Control was going to close us down the bar for it being gay. People didn't even think about that it was gay until they said, "Oh, it's illegal. It's going to be closed down."

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

People did not care that there might have been seventy apparent homosexuals standing at the bar until it was written in the newspaper that the ABC was going to close them down because it was illegal.

The ABC outed Manny's Den as a gay bar. The straight bar owners then challenged the state in what would become a landmark case in New Jersey legal history.

After the ABC suspended the license of Manny's Den, the Macks called the division and spoke to an ABC lawyer. They asserted that the ABC's actions were discriminatory. If service cannot be denied based on race, then it should not be denied based on sexual orientation. The Macks, however, were ahead of their time in interpreting the law.

In the mid-20th century, LGBTQ individuals were denied basic civil rights. While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 provided constitutional protections to Americans based on race, religion, sex and national origin, the law did not protect people from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Gay, lesbian and transgender individuals were excluded from civil service and disqualified from military service. Homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association.

The U.S. Supreme Court was still decades away from guaranteeing sexual freedoms and civil liberties to LGBTQ Americans. The case involving Manny's Den came four decades before the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell allowed gay and lesbian individuals to serve openly in the military. It came five decades before the Supreme Court would extend Title VII employment protections to LGBTQ Americans. The New Jersey Supreme Court recognized marriage equality in 2013, but that came 48 years after Manny's Den started its legal battle against discrimination.

The Macks were not the only ones putting up a fight. The simmering gay rights movement was gaining strength across the country. In Washington DC, Frank Kameny was fired from a federal job in the late 1950s for being gay. Kameny co-founded the Washington chapter of the Mattachine Society. Local chapters of the Mattachine Society searched for legal cases to support in order to change the laws.

In San Francisco, drag queens and transgender women rose up at Compton's Cafeteria in 1966 and protested police harassment. The same year in New York City, gay rights activists went into bars, declared they were gay, and demanded to be served. They called this protest a Sip-in, fashioned after the sit-in protests that occurred in the South in 1960 to challenge segregated lunch counters.

Remember Val's Bar in Atlantic City. The ABC had suspended the license of Val's Bar three times between 1964 and 1967. Gay rights activists in New York City and Philadelphia rallied around the cause for Val's Bar. This comes from Marc Stein, a history professor, who writes about this in his book *Sexual Injustice: Supreme Court Decisions from Griswold to Roe*. The Mattachine Society in New York and Janus Society in Philadelphia raised legal aid for Val's Bar. The attorney Norman A. Oshtry, who had connections to the movement in Philadelphia, represented Val's Bar. They would soon end up joining forces with Manny's Den.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

What happened was that the person we used as our attorney was Theodore Sager Meth, who was in Newark. Give a little background of Ted, was that he taught me when I was going to Seton Hall. I just felt that he was probably one of the most intelligent men I had ever met, especially knowing the law.

Theodore Sager Meth went to Princeton University as an undergraduate. He got his master's in divinity at Union Theological Seminary and then his law degree at Harvard. Meth had a law practice in Newark and taught at Seton Hall Law School for 30 years.

Manny's Den was also represented by David Morris. He had gone to college with Dick's best friend. Morris, who was African American and gay, worked as a corporate attorney and volunteered on behalf of Manny's Den.

As the legal case proceeded, it was known as One Eleven Wines & Liquors. That was and still is the name of the Mack's corporation and the name on their liquor license. First, the Macks challenged the license suspension in an ABC hearing. While the case was ongoing, Manny's Den was open for business. The legal process took place between 1965 and 1967.

Those years witnessed a drastically changing society. The government escalated the war in Vietnam. Student protests grew at Rutgers and on campuses across the nation. Newark erupted into conflict in the summer of 1967, as communities of color protested police brutality and underrepresentation, and the National Guard occupied the city. Mack recalls in his oral history how New Brunswick narrowly averted the unrest that happened in other towns in the state. During that time period, Dick took over the business from his parents and closed the restaurant.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

We lost in the ABC hearing. We then took it to the Appellate Division in New Jersey and we lost there, even though there was another opinion saying that we should have won. Then, we went to the Supreme Court of the State of New Jersey. Now, there were two other gay bars that joined with us.

Those two other bars were Val's Bar in Atlantic City and Murphy's Tavern in Newark. The ABC had twice suspended the liquor license of Murphy's Tavern and then revoked the license in 1966. Val's Bar and Murphy's Tavern joined with One Eleven Wines & Liquors as appellants when the New Jersey Supreme Court combined the three cases.

On September 11 and 12, 1967, the New Jersey Supreme Court heard arguments in *One Eleven Wines & Liquors v. the Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control*.

Lawyers for the Mattachine Society submitted a friend of the court brief. The Mattachine Society recognized the One Eleven case as an opportunity to effect change.

The State Deputy Attorney General argued for the ABC that gay men congregating at bars violated Rule 5 and as a result the discipline doled out by the ABC was justified. ABC agents testified about what they had observed of the patrons at Manny's Den. Their testimony is quoted in the court's final ruling. ABC agents characterized the customers as being "effeminate," "chummy and close," walking with a "swish and a sway," extending their pinkies while drinking, and sipping drinks from a straw.

Reflecting on the language used by ABC agents, Dick remained firm in his stance that the ABC's actions were reductive, ridiculous and discriminatory. Those gathering at the bar were law-abiding citizens.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

In our bar, the only thing that they said was that there were apparent homosexuals, the twelve congregating, and that they were wearing tight pants, they were wearing fluffy sweaters, they were drinking tall drinks through a straw, they were making eyes at one another--just a lot of silly things that they were talking about in there.

Theodore Sager Meth and lawyers for Val's Bar and Murphy's Tavern asserted that there was no lewd or immoral conduct going on.

The lawyer for Val's Bar, Norman Oshtry, called as an expert witness the psychologist Dr. Wardell Pomeroy. For many years, Pomeroy had worked at the Kinsey Institute. He had first met New Jersey-born Alfred Kinsey in 1941 and then began working as an interviewer for Kinsey in his sexual behavior studies. These studies revolutionized and modernized society's attitudes towards sex and sexuality.

In front of the New Jersey Supreme Court, Dr. Pomeroy testified that it was not possible to determine through observation who was homosexual. He said that the majority of the American population was neutral on the subject of homosexuality at the time and that it was becoming more accepted. He offered the opinion that no adverse social effects would result from legalizing gay bars.

Theodore Sager Meth and David Morris submitted a brief to the court arguing that changes to ABC policy were long overdue.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

What they really wanted to do was say times have changed since the repeal of the Volstead Act and Prohibition in 1933, and that the law, which said that apparent homosexuals gathering in inordinate numbers was--why can't they go into a bar, as long as they're not doing anything which truly is lewd or lascivious, and then that's a matter of opinion what is lewd or lascivious.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

Ted Meth, when he got in front of the questions and the way he answered the questions for the Supreme Court, you could see, when you're sitting in the courtroom there, that the judges themselves sort of sat up taller and were listening to the answers that Ted Meth was giving. You knew that his answers were something that they were listening to and taking true note of.

On November 6, 1967, the New Jersey Supreme Court decided the case. The language in the decision reflects the times. Justice Nathan Jacobs wrote for the court, "Though in our culture homosexuals are indeed unfortunates, their status does not make them criminals or outlaws."

The court did acknowledge the need to consider the rights of the bar's patrons, along with the right of an establishment to serve them. The court also considered the legal battles going on in other states about anti-congregating laws.

What the court really scrutinized were the broad powers of the ABC. The court said that the "exercise of police powers must be reasonable and not go beyond the public need." In *One Eleven Wines & Liquors v. the Division of Alcoholic Beverage Control*, the New Jersey Supreme Court unanimously ruled that gay patrons could congregate at bars. The landmark ruling legalized gay bars in the State of New Jersey.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

As the Supreme Court said, and as our brief said, as times changed so must the laws.

Justice Haydn Proctor wrote a concurring opinion. Although homosexuals cannot be forbidden to patronize taverns, he wrote that they should not engage in kissing or other inappropriate actions contrary to public decency. That would be grounds for future disciplinary action. Nonetheless, the case marked a major victory.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

Manny's Den or *One Eleven Wines and Liquors* was one of the first to make it legal in the State of New Jersey. So, my parents and I were very, very proud of what we had done at that time. I even think that our attorney--I know David Morris was very pleased, but our attorney Ted Meth always had that on his resume that that was one of the things that he had won in the Supreme Court. So, it was very good. It did change a lot of things in the State of New Jersey, especially for homosexual rights.

To the patrons of Manny's Den, this was a big deal. The Macks had fought the law and came out victorious. This is Adrian Schreiber again, talking about Dick.

Adrian Schreiber Oral History Excerpt:

He challenged the law and took it to the Supreme Court in New Jersey and the New Jersey Supreme Court overturned the law and made him forever a hero in the gay community.

The same fight for the rights of LGBTQ individuals to congregate at bars would culminate less than two years later at the Stonewall Inn in New York City. After NYC Police raided the Stonewall and started arresting employees and customers, locals began rioting in protest. This continued for several days. After Stonewall, the simmering gay rights movement burgeoned into the modern LGBTQ rights movement. Gay rights groups started up all over the country, including at Rutgers.

We're going to hear from Morris Kafka-Holzschnag, a student and activist at Rutgers in the 1980s. Morris documented the history of the LGBTQ movement at Rutgers and explores the importance of the Macks' legal challenge.

Morris Kafka-Holzschnag Oral History Excerpt:

They took it to court and they won, before Stonewall. Before Stonewall, which was fought over the illegality of gay congregation in New York, gays could congregate in New Jersey because a New Brunswick club and two other clubs had this lawsuit. That club was mostly patronized by Rutgers men. It was an all-boy's school. This club was right under the railroad underpass from Rutgers. So, their history was intertwined.

In the fall of 1969, Rutgers sophomore Lionel Cuffie founded the Rutgers Student Homophile League with the help of student activists from New York City. This was the second LGBTQ group established on a college campus nationwide. The League later became known as the Rutgers University Lesbian/Gay Alliance. It's now known as the Queer Student Alliance. Over the years, it's been joined by many more groups, such as LLEGO, UltraViolet, Fusion and Transmissions. Through these groups, students at Rutgers have worked to effect changes on campus and in society, while also enjoying their social lives.

While a student at Rutgers, Morris Kafka-Holzschnag became involved in the Rutgers University Lesbian/Gay Alliance. Here is Morris on the relationship between Rutgers College and Manny's Den. In the background, you can hear his friend Rue Watson, who was present during the interview.

Morris Kafka-Holzschnag Oral History Excerpt:

You just know with an all-boys school, which has a Homophile League, that a gay bar around the corner is going to be patronized. [laughter] It's a great business plan. I mean, every man who was consciously homosexual who went to Rutgers probably was in The Den and definitely knew of it. As soon as you become out enough to talk to another gay person, they're like, "Oh,

there's this Homophile League and there's this gay bar." Those were your two central pivots. We were very fortunate because you could walk. I didn't have a car until I was just about twenty-two.

Manny's Den became ingrained into queer nightlife in New Brunswick. Students and community members had a place where they could safely and legally gather.

One such student was Rick Landman, who went to graduate school at Rutgers and frequented Manny's Den. As an undergrad at the University of Buffalo, Landman had founded the Gay Liberation Front and marched in the first March on Albany for Gay Rights. Landman was interviewed by ROHA Director Shaun Illingworth, along with two Rutgers undergraduates, in 2021. Landman notes the historic importance of the *One Eleven Wines & Liquors* ruling:

Rick Landman Oral History Excerpt:

I want to really focus in on this part of LGBT history that very few people know. Manny's Den and a few others decided to fight through the court system. ... Theodore Meth was the one that escalated the case all the way up to the Supreme Court of New Jersey in 1967. They ruled, two years ahead of Stonewall, that a bar owner, in this case, a heterosexual Jewish guy, Emmanuel Mack and his son Dick, legally could invite people into the bar even if they were gay. ... That was what I really was hoping that the students at Rutgers should be proud of, that in New Brunswick, it was that gay bar that two years ahead of Stonewall went all the way up to the New Jersey Supreme Court, and they decided in the right way.

But there's more. The landmark ruling was even used in future cases in New Jersey to assure gender equality in bars. Municipal ordinances and private policies often barred women from going to bars unaccompanied and from working as bartenders. In Bayonne, women were not permitted to sit or stand at the actual bar; they had to be seated while served drinks. In 1969, the Superior Court Appellate Division struck down that ordinance and ruled that women could congregate at the bar. The court cited the *One Eleven* precedent in *Gallagher v. City of Bayonne*.

Not until 2021 did the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General acknowledge the history of anti-LGBTQ enforcement by the ABC. In doing so, the Attorney General vacated the disciplinary actions taken by the ABC against gay bars before 1967. As a part of this reckoning, all ABC bulletins have been

made available online. That's how I was able to include in this podcast the language reported by ABC agents when they raided Manny's Den.

After the legal victory, Manny's Den became a nightclub. Dick also opened gay nightclubs in New Orleans, Phoenix and Chicago.

The history of Manny's Den mirrors trends in society over the past fifty years. During the 1970s, city planners began the process of redevelopment in New Brunswick. Johnson & Johnson decided to build its worldwide headquarters downtown.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

When we had to move from Albany Street, when J & J [Johnson & Johnson] came in and were knocking down all those buildings, we were literally evicted from there.

Manny's Den had to relocate. Dick wanted to move to buildings he owned on the corner of Church and George Streets. His dream was to name the club RPM, after his children Randi and Peter Mack, who had grown up in the family business.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

I had bought the two buildings, I had architectural plans, I showed it to them, and the City Council just didn't approve my moving. Part of [why] they didn't want me moving there was because it was a gay bar. They didn't want to have a gay bar on George Street there.

Instead, in 1980, Dick moved to Hiram Street in the historic Hiram Square Market area. Eventually, Manny's Den started going by The Den or The Den Nightclub. Peter Mack worked alongside his father.

The historic role that Manny's Den played in the fight for equality was passed down to subsequent generations of employees and patrons of The Den. Kent Hatfield, an Army veteran, was a New Brunswick resident and long-time employee at The Den.

Kent Hatfield Oral History Excerpt:

They won the lawsuit, which enabled gay people in the state of New Jersey now to congregate in one location if they want or however many clubs opened up. Once that happened, now the gay community had a safe spot. ...

Once the laws were changed, the Den became very big and it was a small place. So, it was easy for it to grow. Then, when it moved to Hiram Street, again, it was still a small place, but it had a great reputation. It's already been established for a while. Everyone knew that yes, it helped us in passing the laws so that we can go to a gay bar. There were other places in the state that started opening up.

Rutgers alum Morris Kafka-Holzschlag describes the scene at The Den and the DJ Albee Thomason:

Morris Kafka-Holzschlag Oral History Interview:

They bought a larger building and developed a piano bar, a dance floor with a real DJ booth, and a little patio out back. The next generation took over, and they explicitly advertised in the gay directories and the gay periodicals that were available then. They held events, where, for example, Dixie La Rue, who was a drag queen that played the piano and sang, would come and entertain. They catered to the gay people. It wasn't just that they were allowed. They were hiring gay entertainers. They hire Albee [Thomason] at the first location, the second location and the third location to be their DJ, who was a gay man of color who had been a fashion student that went to Traphagen but came from Somerset and who knew music, very passionate about dance music. [He] would go into the city and buy the latest records, and you would hear the newest music at The Den that no one else in town had. The gay clubs were famous for being the vanguard of dance music and fashion, and people would come in just for that.

Albee shared with me that he actually learned to DJ at Manny's Den. He had started going to The Den in about 1970 as a customer. One night, the DJ never showed up. Albee happened to have a large record collection and as such was drafted into the job. The night was a success and Albee became a regular DJ. Albee considered The Den a welcoming and socially comfortable space and the Mack Family allies at a time that the gay community needed support. Albee DJ'd and hung out at The Den at the Albany Street location, Hiram Street location and then its next spot.

In the '80s, the New Brunswick Development Corporation, DEVCO, set its sights upon the Hiram Square Market for redevelopment. To the dismay of preservationists and local businesses and families, the area was de-designated from the historic register. Much of the Hiram Market area was demolished. In 1988, the Den had to relocate again.

The club found a home in nearby Somerset on Hamilton Street in a converted bowling alley.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

I was fairly fortunate that as soon as we opened up here, no lie, there was a line around the block for people when they found out that The Den was opening up again. The only problem that we were having here, the first few months, [was we] had too many people coming in. We had to have a count and we had to stop so many people coming in.

When I interviewed Morris Kafka-Holzschlag in 2019, he and his friend Rue Watson recalled how popular The Den Nightclub was at its new location in Somerset. Rue went to Douglass College in the 1970s. Like Morris, she became involved in the Rutgers University Lesbian/Gay Alliance, settled in New Brunswick, and frequented The Den.

Morris Kafka-Holzschlag Oral History Excerpt:

When you went to the parking lot for this club in its last location, which opened in '89, there were Pennsylvania and New York license plates in that parking lot. People were coming that far to go to a nice dance club that was well air conditioned and had good entertainment at it. It was known in the tristate area. I can't say that that was true of anything else but The Melody. Rue Watson: It had the biggest dance floor of any club I'd been to, outside of New York City. Morris: Well, and the Pussycat Lounge maybe. Rue: Oh well. Morris: Asbury Park is a whole other chapter.

Dick and his son Peter ran the business, and then Peter took over when his father retired in 1993. In 2002, Peter opened his restaurant, Sophie's Bistro.

Den employee Kent Hatfield describes in his 2012 interview the close ties with the Rutgers community. Rutgers faculty and staff went to lunch and dinner at Sophie's Bistro. Departments would have holiday parties at Sophie's. LGBTQ organizations at Rutgers would organize buses to bring groups of student to The Den and then back to campus afterwards. Community and tradition were emphasized at The Den.

Kent Hatfield Oral History Excerpt:

We've had traditions come and go, but the main tradition at the Den that is still there, two of them. One, anybody and everybody is welcome into the

club. That has never changed and never will. Two, is that Monday before Thanksgiving, the entire staff gets together and have a Thanksgiving dinner as one family. That has never changed over the years. The people have changed, but the tradition has not. The things that we've done has not changed.

Peter told me that at first The Den was supporting Sophie's Bistro, but as the years went on, Sophie's Bistro ended up supporting The Den. As social trends changed, as online interaction grew, many gay clubs lost their customer base. In 2016, The Den nightclub closed. Sophie's Bistro continues as a restaurant to this day. The sign for The Den Nightclub still stands at 700 Hamilton Street.

Richard Mack Oral History Excerpt:

How many businesses, small businesses, can say that they have had the same ownership since 1944?

Richard Mack passed away on May 31, 2013. His legacy endures. One Eleven Wines & Liquors remains the name of the family corporation. And it is the name of the case that legalized gay bars in New Jersey and marked a victorious moment in a continuing movement. Its historic importance lives on in the collective memory of students and community members who went to The Den over the years.

Outro Music

Thank you for listening to the Rutgers Oral History Archives Podcast. I am Kate Rizzi. Subscribe to our podcast on Apple Podcasts and follow us on Soundcloud. Follow ROHA on major social media outlets @RUOralHistory. The Rutgers Oral History Archives is dedicated to documenting the life stories of people in communities throughout Rutgers University and New Jersey. ROHA makes those oral history interviews available to the public through our digital archive at oralhistory.rutgers.edu. To support ROHA, visit our website and select Support on the main menu.

Special thanks go to Randi Mack and Peter Mack. This podcast was written and narrated by Kate Rizzi and produced by Kate Rizzi and Shaun Illingworth. Fact checking was done by Zach Batista. Sound engineering and production is by Molly Graham. The oral history interviews of Richard Mack, Adrian Schreiber, Morris Kafka-Holzschlag, Rick Landman and Kent Hatfield are a part of the

Rutgers Oral History Archives. The interviews can be found online at oralhistory.rutgers.edu. Thanks also go to Albee Thomason.

This podcast has been recorded in the Rutgers College Class of 1948 Sound Booth, located at the Rutgers School of Arts and Sciences Building at 1 Spring Street.

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