

THE PLACES BETWEEN
DENVER'S QUEER GEOGRAPHY, 1880-1920

by

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Exploring evidence of Denver's first queer communities from 1880 to 1920

Thesis directed by Associate Professor William Wagner

ABSTRACT

During the late-19th century in Denver, a queer entertainment district formed among “female impersonators” at the edge of the red-light district and the city’s Chinese community. This area was a culturally diverse cross-roads within the larger district of commercialized vice, the social liminality of which allowed for non-normative gender and sexual expression to exist relatively unimpeded for at least twenty years. After the turn of the century, the majority of Denver’s queer residents and communities appear to have clung to bohemian enclaves, eventually settling in the north Capitol Hill neighborhood, where the majority of Denver’s queer community still lives to this day. This study creates a queer geography of Denver from 1880 to 1920, mapping and analyzing the presence and movement of the city’s potentially queer enclaves and communities over a forty-year period—beginning near the red-light district and ending in Capitol Hill.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: William Wagner

DEDICATIONS

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and support of so many people. I owe a great deal of gratitude to my advisor and reading committee, whose guidance gave me the focus, direction, and confidence I needed to realize the full potential of this project. To David Duffield, the head of the Colorado LGBTQ History Project, thank you for your mentorship and everything that you do to curate Colorado's buried queer history. I would also like to thank all the historians who came before me for their invaluable contributions to the queer history of the centennial state; without your hard work, this project would not have been possible. In particular, I want to thank Tom Noel. Aside from your mentorship, reading your 1978 article motivated me to embark on this endeavor. Thank you to my family for a lifetime of love and support and thank you to my chosen family for teaching me the vital importance of queer community. Finally, there are not enough words to express my gratitude toward my wonderful husband, who is my best friend. Thank you; you are my rock and my joy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On an early September evening in 1901, Denver's "demimonde flocked" to a small, crowded, dime museum theatre erected amid the tangle of the Tenderloin's more notorious saloons. Located along 19th as it approached Market Street, the show featured "dances that had become too risqué for even the 'red light' district," attracting throngs of people titillated by the promise of "audacious kicking and abbreviated skirts." But it likely was not just the thrill of a "hootchie-kootchie show" that brought revelers to this corner of Denver's underbelly; it could also have been the area's reputation for taboo modes of sexual and gender expression. Regardless of individual motives, the entire audience "enthusiastically applauded" as "the prettiest girl in the company" took the stage. She was known by admirers as the "peach" of the Paris Electric Theatre company, and her "grace and beauty" even seemed to capture the pen of a *Denver Post* journalist attempting to convey both the wonder and scandal of the performance: "Raven locks fell in a murky flood upon her gleaming neck, and silken sashes encircled her slender waist and shapely bosom. Gaily colored hosiery and dainty slippers completed her scanty costume. 'She' decidedly was the hit of the show."

With the punchline delivered, the journalist wasted little time identifying the performer as 20-year-old Caesar Attell, a "female impersonator."¹ Whether the members of the audience knew this about the seductive star of the company is impossible to know, but it probably would not have been a secret, nor was it uncommon. However, the overtly sexual nature of Attell's performance set him apart from other professional female impersonators, since his sensual

¹ "Bag of Feminine Gear," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 8 September, 1901); "Paris Theatre Kicking Soubrette Proved to be Young Caesar Attell," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 10 September, 1901).

violation of normative gender expression could be classified as an act of lewdness by police.²

There were not many parts of the town where a theatre company would dare to open such a risky exposition, and the choice to open at this location was likely intentional. Here, within just a stone's throw away from the red-light district, Chinatown, and the city's most notorious stretch of saloons, existed a liminal space where two marginalized communities collided with the larger world of commercialized vice. This was a small district where participants regularly transgressed society's rigid standards of gender and sexuality, as well as a place where such transgressors could survive amid the support of others like themselves.³

The theatre where Caesar Attell performed existed a mile away and over a half-century apart from the only neighborhood that Denverites have popularly associated with the city's queer population, Capitol Hill. Located directly east and southeast of downtown, by the time of the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s and 80s, the neighborhood housed the majority of Denver's queer population and was the city's center for queer activism.⁴ To this day, Denverites still popularly associate Capitol Hill with the queer community due to the area's history and the enduring presence of queer culture in the neighborhood.⁵ Yet no scholarship has been dedicated to when or why queer enclaves actually began forming in Capitol Hill, let alone in other parts of town. However, newspaper accounts of perceived transvestism and "male prostitution" from the

² *Laws and Ordinances of the City and County of Denver, 1886*; William N. Eskridge, Jr., *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy Laws in America, 1861-2003* (New York: Viking, 2008), 29-30.

³ This geographic analysis was synthesized from the many newspaper articles that I cite throughout this paper, as well as from Denver City Directories (1880-1920), Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (1887, 1893, 1903, 1904, 1929), and the following secondary sources: Clark Secrest, *Hell's Belles: Prostitution, Vice, and Crime in Early Denver*, (Boulder, University Press of Colorado, 2002), 89-90; Thomas Noel, *The City and the Saloon* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1996) 28-29.

⁴ "History of the Center," The Center on Colfax, <<https://lgbtqcolorado.org/about/our-history>>, Last visited 7 December, 2022.

⁵ "Denver's Capitol Hill," *Colorado Encyclopedia*, <<https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/denver-s-capitol-hill>>, Last visited 7 December, 2022.

late-19th and early-20th centuries suggest that a queer world indeed existed in Denver prior to the community in Capitol Hill. These queer enclaves—like the one in which Attell scandalized audiences—formed across downtown for different reasons and at separate or overlapping periods of time. While some survived in one place for many years, others disappeared or shifted due to economic, social, or racial changes in the urban landscape.⁶

Though several historians have written about Denver’s queer communities after World War II, few have explored these dynamics during earlier eras. Terry Mangan, an archivist and local queer activist, was the first to write in any depth about the city’s queer history prior to the war. In an unpublished paper from 1976, Mangan drew upon secondary source materials, published medical studies, federal reports, newspaper articles, and oral histories to piece together a Colorado-focused queer history of the American West, roughly spanning the pre-colonial era to World War I. While his conclusions were drawn from disparate individual cases, Mangan identified several terms and places of interest that would prove integral for future research on the subject.⁷ A 1978 *University of Colorado Press* article by Thomas Noel briefly explored Denver’s pre-World War I queer history with the limited sources available at the time, yet the topic would remain largely untouched for almost forty years.⁸ In his 2014 Masters Thesis about Denver’s

⁶ Throughout this paper I will use various terms when classifying a person or group’s gender and/or sexuality. In reference to gender, I will use the binary pronouns prescribed to the person by the source in which they were recorded unless there is strong evidence to suggest that an individual was transgender, in which case I will use their proper pronouns. This is not to definitively label anyone as cis or transgender, but to maintain clarity within the limited context provided. If I am unsure of the full context of a person’s gender, I will use the pronouns *they*, *them*, and *theirs*. When referring to sexuality, I will only use labels such as homosexual/bisexual/etc. when discussing specific behaviors rather than to classify a person or population; I will also use those terms when alluding to an outside party’s use of them. In reference to *anyone* who was not cis and heterosexual, as well as behaviors that fell outside of that category, I will and have used the umbrella term “queer.” Understand that any such labels are always potentially inaccurate, especially within historical sources, and that I will make these classifications shrewdly and with compassion.

⁷ Terry Mangan, “*The Gay West*,” (Denver, CO: *Colorado Historical Society*, 1976).

⁸ Thomas Noel, “Gay Bars and the Emergence of the Denver Homosexual Community,” (Boulder, CO: *University of Colorado Press* Vol. 15 No. 2, 1978), 59-74.

post-war queer history, Keith L. More alluded briefly to 19th and early-20th century queer dynamics in the city, drawing primarily on Mangan's research and similar studies published about Seattle.⁹ In 2018, however, Springer Jackson devoted his entire undergraduate Senior Thesis to the development of queer identity in Colorado prior to World War I. While Jackson identified an impressive amount of potentially queer events and individuals, he only theorized about their connection to larger queer communities or enclaves.¹⁰

However, studies from several other American cities have demonstrated shared patterns in the demography and chronology of their earliest queer populations, presenting a rough template for local historians to identify pre-World War II queer enclaves and communities within their local urban areas. The first of these studies was written in 1994 by George Chauncey about New York City from 1890 to 1940. The sheer volume of primary sources that he explored and the explicit detail that they offered were indeed unique to older major metropolises like New York; but by presenting examples of communities that were undeniably *queer* during this period, Chauncey demonstrated that self-aware queer communities were able to form and endure within diverse urban environments.¹¹ Beginning in the early 2000s, historians began publishing similar studies about Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, Portland, Salt Lake City, and Los Angeles, with more local queer histories added every year. When compared with one another, patterns arose regarding the most commonly witnessed expressions of queerness, as well as the

⁹ Keith L. More, "Queen City of the Plains? Denver's Gay History 1940-1975," (Masters Thesis, University of Colorado, History Department, 2014), 20-25, <<https://lgbtqcolorado.org/dev2018/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Keith-Moore-Thesis-1-1.pdf>>.

¹⁰ Jackson Springer, "'Against the Order of Nature': Creating a Gay Identity Under the Law in Colorado, 1880-1914," (Senior Thesis, Princeton University, History Department, 2018), <https://lgbtqcolorado.org/dev2018/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/springer_jackson_thesis.pdf>.

¹¹ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York, Basic Books, 1994).

social and geographic niches in which queer individuals and behaviors were tolerated or even embraced.¹²

In order to recognize these patterns within Denver’s pre-World War I history, I keyword-searched through digitally archived newspaper articles from the period to identify potentially queer individuals or events. Though these accounts were anecdotal, I found them to be the most reliable sources through which to initially identify these occurrences, even if the authors or witnesses understood the accounts contextually different from my modern perspective. The majority of cases featured male or female “impersonators,” likely because of the visible nature of public transvestism, as well as the inherently queer nature of gender non-conformity. Drawing from the secondary sources discussed above, I also addressed case studies from other cities to analyze potential parallels among subjects of interest and to explore places and contexts that I would never have known to address. For example, if case studies in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Salt Lake City had not identified their early-20th century queer populations living near and within bohemian communities, I would never have known to explore Denver’s bohemian subculture.¹³ Finally, I used Denver City Directories and Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps from throughout the Progressive Era to locate and map these occurrences in order to identify any spatial relationships between individuals and events.

¹² Peter Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest*, Kindle version, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003), Kindle location 310-327; Jim Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town: Sodomites, Female Impersonators, Third-Sexers, Pansies, Queers, and Sex Morons in Chicago’s First Century*, (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2018); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in 20th-Century America*, (New York City, NY: Columbia University Press, 1991); Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles: and the Making of Modern Politics*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Tom Nickels, *Gay and Lesbian Philadelphia*, (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2002); D. Michael Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics Among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example*, (Chicago, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Clare Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, (London, UK: Duke University Press, 2015)

¹³ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 227-266; Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town*, 64-78; Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles*, Kindle Location 973-1086; Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics*, 116-117.

While the boundaries of a potentially queer entertainment district indeed took form within the downtown working-class neighborhoods, I still obviously lacked access to the residential, and therefore *private* world of queer Denverites. I took inspiration from projects published by Dan Bouk and D. Michael Quinn and began to search through Denver’s census records on Ancestry’s online database for the years 1900, 1910, and 1920, hoping to identify the settlement patterns of those who were potentially living domestically within homosexual partnerships.¹⁴ It is important to note that the Denver census for 1890 was destroyed in a fire, and the censuses for 1880 and 1870 lacked the information needed to adequately filter my results, so I was not able to address them in this study. I filtered my search by a subject’s listed relationship to the “Head of the Household”—including “partner,” “roomer,” and “friend”—and created spreadsheets containing only those who were evidently living with only one other person of the same listed-gender who was also not their kin. I mapped these data points, like I did with the potentially queer occurrences downtown, and again I addressed similar case studies from other cities to help contextualize the clusters and patterns that emerged. In fact, without the work of queer historians of the 90s and later, I would never have been able to understand the queer geography that was taking shape in front of me.

This research has shown me that the Capitol Hill neighborhood was not, in fact, the first queer enclave in the city, and that several potentially queer enclaves existed throughout central Denver from at least 1880 to 1920. Most of these residential enclaves formed separately from one another at different periods of time, but all of them shared certain characteristics. They all formed within areas that were either socially, racially, or sexually marginalized from respectable

¹⁴ Dan Bouk, “The Partners of Greenwich Village,” *Census Stories USA*, 3 July, 2018, <<https://censusstories.us>>; Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics Among Nineteenth-Century*, 152-174.

middle-class society, placing them within liminal urban spaces; and they all could be found within or very near to an entertainment district, two of which became long-term centers for queer venues and modes of recreation. In fact, it is the existence of these centers of queer entertainment that suggest that these disparate enclaves potentially associated with larger, self-aware, queer communities. One enclave that settled among the city's turn-of-the-century Bohemian community—surrounding the 1500 block of Glenarm Place—would expand eastward over the first two decades of the 20th century into the north Capitol Hill neighborhood, initiating the queer settlement of greater Capitol Hill by the dawn of the 1920s.

This study strives to analyze the evidence of Denver's first post-colonial queer enclaves and communities as they formed, dissolved, and/or shifted around the city's late-19th and early-20th century urban landscape. Chapter II will provide a short background of the social changes incited by the city's rapid industrialization during the 1870s and 80s, exploring the differences between vaudevillian and amateur "female impersonation," the different forms of "male" prostitution, and the significance of Turkish Baths to the interconnection of cis homosexual men around the turn of the century. The chapter will continue with evidence of the city's potentially first queer entertainment district, where female impersonation, sex work, Turkish Baths, and the Chinese racial enclave converged around a small area that I have termed the "Windsor District." Chapter III will introduce the rise of the Bohemian subculture in Denver after the turn of the century and its historical acceptance of queer behavior and identities, as well as the Bohemian and potentially queer enclave that formed just west of north Capitol Hill. The chapter will return to the Windsor District to explore a surge of recreational "male impersonation" during the late-1900s and early-1910s, continuing a couple blocks northeast to a predominantly Black and potentially queer enclave around East Turner Hall. Chapter IV will further analyze the mixed-

race enclave surrounding what I have termed the “East Turner Block” as it survived into the late-1910s, as well as focus on another predominantly Black enclave that formed only two blocks south of Denver’s first jazz venues along Welton Street. Finally, the chapter will end with the Bohemian and queer settlement of north Capitol Hill, which is an area that is still associated with Denver’s queer community to this day. I will conclude with an exploration and analysis of the potential ties between these spaces and the evolution of the city’s modern queer community.

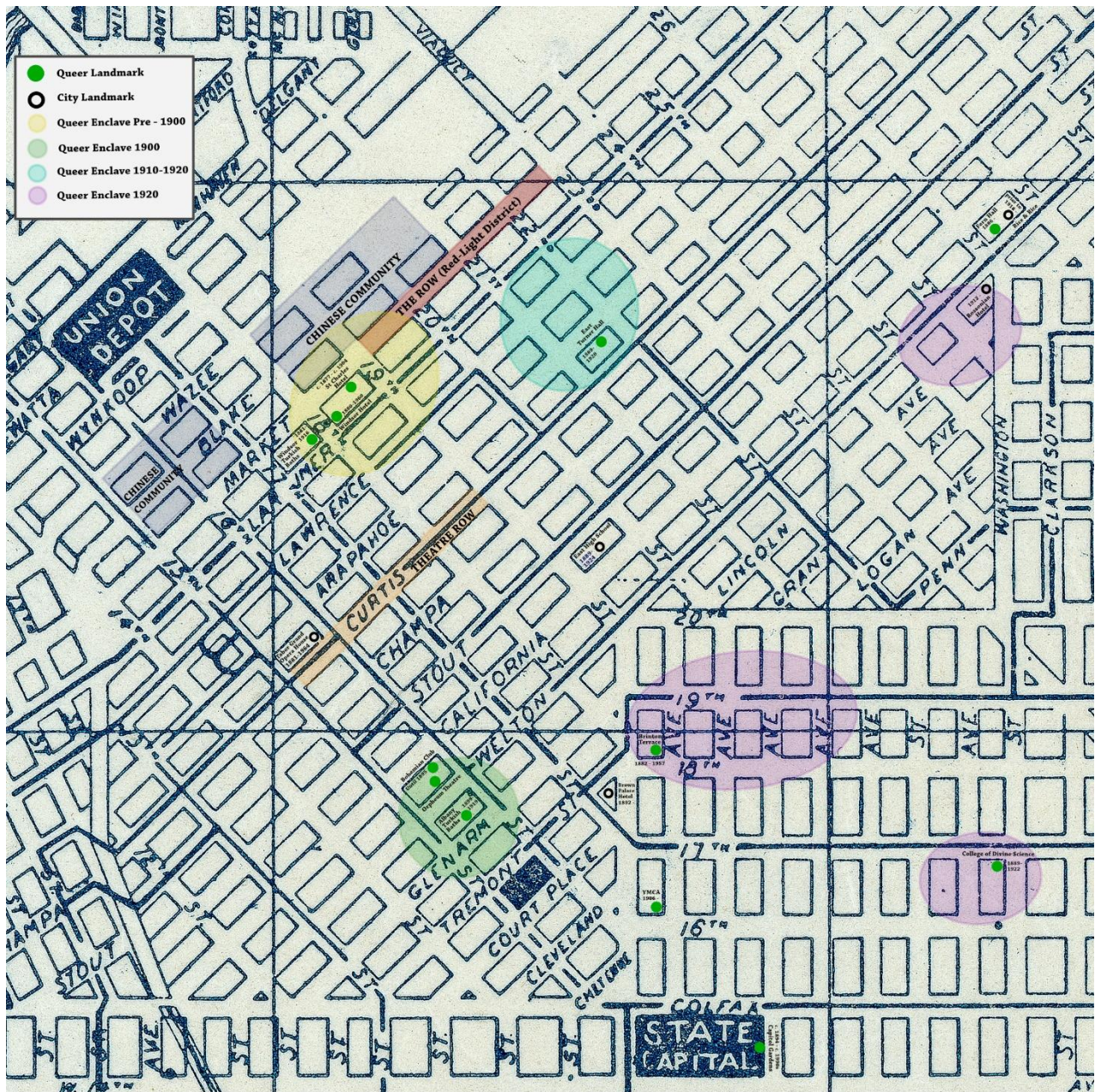


Figure 1. A map displaying the different areas (color-coded by time period) where queer enclaves or communities potentially existed in Denver from 1880 to 1920. “Queer Landmarks” are labeled as such due to their roles as spaces that potentially hosted queer or queer-adjacent communities.

CHAPTER II

IN THE SHADE OF THE WINDSOR – 1876 - 1899

Creating Vice vs. Respectability

The Denver that Caesar Attell knew was a place of rapid growth and re-invention as it transformed into the industrial center of the region. The mile high city was still only a territorial capital when the Kansas Pacific Railroad established a rail connection through Denver in 1870, enabling members of the working class to better afford the long trip across the Great Plains or through the Rocky Mountains, and thus sparking a massive population and building boom over the following two decades. Indeed, the population leapt from 4,759 to 35,000 between 1870 and 1880, reaching 106,713 by 1890, second only to San Francisco among the cities of the West.¹⁵ Such rapid expansion stalled after the Federal Government repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act in 1893, ending a program of Federal subsidization of silver and effectively causing the silver industry to crash. Given the region's economic reliance on mineral extraction and refinement, the panic immediately unemployed roughly 45,000 people throughout the state. It would take until the end of the decade for the state's economy to fully recover, and another similar boom would not come again until World War II. However, even though the mid-1890s were a time of economic stagnation, the social and ethnic dynamics of Denver were always in motion as the state's economy diversified and immigrants from China, Japan, and Mexico vied for space and employment within an increasingly racist and xenophobic society.¹⁶

¹⁵ Thomas Noel, *The City and the Saloon* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 1996) 67-77; Robin Courtney Henry, *Criminalizing Sex, Defining Sexuality: Sodomy, Law, and Manhood in Nineteenth-Century Colorado*, (Indiana University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2006), 116-117.

¹⁶ Thomas Noel, *The City and the Saloon*, 28; Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State, Fifth Edition* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2013), 198-203 & 212-216.

As the city's population exploded throughout the 1870s and 80s, so did that of American-born middle-class white women, who carried with them society's enforced standards of "respectability." However, respectable spaces required the strict designation of what and who were conversely *not* respectable, and therefore the division between the uses of public spaces became paramount.¹⁷ By the 1880s, Denver's wealthier citizens were relocating to the outskirts of the city—into what would become the first streetcar suburbs—while the historical center of town densified with the rapidly growing working-class population. Within these increasingly run-down neighborhoods, the city's "Tenderloin" took shape along Larimer Street from 15th to 23rd Streets, satisfying the city's growing need for commercialized vice. Around the same time, the city confined the expanding sex work economy within a single stretch of Market Street from 19th to 23rd Streets, known as "the Row," which ran along the northwest side of the Tenderloin.¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, such an area became notorious throughout the city for its diverse demographics and easy access to a wide variety of low-brow or even lewd modes of entertainment. Even though this area hosted one of the highest crime rates in Denver, police routinely overlooked behaviors that were otherwise forbidden throughout the city, as long as such behaviors remained within the confines of this cordoned-off world of vice.¹⁹ Counted among these behaviors was public female impersonation.

¹⁷ Thomas Noel, *The City and the Saloon*, 67-77; Robin Courtney Henry, *Criminalizing Sex, Defining Sexuality: Sodomy, Law, and Manhood in Nineteenth-Century Colorado*, (Indiana University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2006), 116-117; Richard Butsch, "Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies: The Re-Gendering of Nineteenth-Century American Theater Audiences," (*American Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 3, Sep., 1994), 378-380; M. Alison Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville*, (U.S.A, University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 87.

¹⁸ Clark Secrest, *Hell's Belles: Prostitution, Vice, and Crime in Early Denver*, (Boulder, University Press of Colorado, 2002), 89-90.

¹⁹ That taboo sexual and gender behaviors were legally overlooked in this area of the city is a significant argument within this paper, the evidence for which will be cited within "The Fairies of the Windsor District" section, from pp. 16-25.

A Lady by Footlight

The term *female impersonator* refers to a couple different types of individuals during the 19th and early-20th centuries, and they were each regarded and treated differently by both the working-class and dominant middle-class cultures. The most visible and widely perceived were professional female impersonators who performed within theatre companies on vaudeville stages. These individuals—regarded by society as cis “men” who performed “female” illusions—were actors of varying popularity and success, most of which depended on the quality and reputation of their theatre company.²⁰ Vaudeville was the most popular theatre form in the United States from the 1880s through the 1920s, usually consisting of several small acts featuring a range of different performance modes. A theatre company would perform what we would call a “variety show” as a single evening or matinee program, featuring any combination of the following: one act plays or operettas, comedy acts, dance numbers, musical numbers, magic shows, strongman acts, acrobatics, blackface minstrelsy, and female and male impersonation—just to name a few. The star of these shows, and often one of the first to be billed in advertisements, was the female impersonator.²¹

Theatrical female impersonation was popularized in the United States through blackface minstrelsy, which was a racist satirical mode of theatre that gained national popularity in the 1840s and remained popular through the end of the century—eventually as individual acts within a larger vaudeville show. Minstrel theatre originally featured white actors impersonating

²⁰ Butsch, “Bowery B'hoys and Matinee Ladies,” 390-398; “Amusements,” (Denver, CO: *Daily Rocky Mountain News*, 16 June, 1876); “Amusements,” (Denver, CO: *Rocky Mountain News*, 22 May 1881) keyword: J. Arthur Doty; “Amusements,” (Denver, CO: *Rocky Mountain News*, 15 June 1882); “Amusements,” (Denver, CO: *Denver Evening Post*, 3 Dec 1895); “Erminie Superbly Sung,” (Denver, CO: *Rocky Mountain News*, 27 Dec 1897); “Mahara Minstrels,” (Denver, CO: *Rocky Mountain News*, 1 May 1897); “Orpheum,” (Denver, CO: *Denver Evening Post*, 22 Oct 1905).

²¹ Alison Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville*, (U.S.A, University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 8-9.

enslaved Black people in the American South. They did this by covering their faces with black makeup and poking fun at middle-class modes and manners ostensibly through the perspective of enslaved Black people. In reality, these disparate variety shows used the platform to comedically mock the Black race through a white middle-class point of view. The female impersonators of the minstrel era were therefore required to depict comedically awkward characterizations of women by accentuating their masculine behaviors and features—in short, an institutionalized mockery of Black femininity.²²

This dynamic of a female-satire bled over into non-minstrel dime museums and burlesque shows, which preceded vaudeville throughout the 1860s and 1870s.²³ On a mid-June evening in 1876, the “great original and only” Alf Wyman added the finishing touches to his outfit and makeup, completing the costume with the ratty wig that he had worn on countless stages, in countless cities. Though he was the first female impersonator recorded to have performed on a Denver stage, he had likely been preceded by many. Vaudeville was in its nascent years in North America, and the type of performances produced by the Peak Family Parlor Comique Troupe but probably resembled a cross between minstrelsy and dime museums in their format, without the dominance of racial satire. On the night of June 16th, as Wyman listened for his cue to make his entrance at the Denver Theatre, he was billed toward the top of the broadside advertisement as a “comedian and female impersonator,” nothing more. While his high billing reflected the value of his specialized role within this traveling theatre company, his primary job was to perform goofy characterizations and well-delivered jokes.²⁴ There were no reviews of his performance because,

²² Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture*, (Chapel Hill: *The University of North Carolina Press*, 1991), 166-168; Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 113-114.

²³ Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 7-9; Lemons, J. Stanley, "Black Stereotypes as Reflected in Popular Culture, 1880-1920," (*American Quarterly* 29, no. 1, 1977), 102-106.

²⁴ "Multiple Classified Advertisements," (Denver, *Daily Rocky Mountain News*, 16 June 1876); ²⁴ Kibler, *Rank Ladies*, 68.

though he likely did his job and poked fun at the social construct of conventional female appearance and behavior, Alf Wyman was not the star of the show. In fact, few theatrical female or male impersonators gained widespread popularity until vaudeville was able to attract middle-class women back to the theatres by “cleaning up” the acts. During this time the role of male and female impersonators shifted from comedic gender satire—the expression of which was considered lewd among middle-class society—to convincing gender illusion.²⁵

The vaudevillian use of coarse female satire never truly died out, but it became less of a specialization and more of a component within a comedian’s larger bag of tricks. By the late-1880s and 1890s, Denver’s theatre goers expected those who were billed as the female impersonator to attempt convincing portrayals of socially acceptable feminine appearance and behavior, deviations from which attracted criticism and bad reviews from the press. However, when a female impersonator succeeded in producing a convincingly “feminine” performance, they were lauded with praise and often stole the show.²⁶ Almost twenty years after Alf Wyman presented his comical impersonation of feminine awkwardness, Richard Harlow was lauded by *The Rocky Mountain News* for delighting audiences at the Tabor Grand Opera House with his “absolute freedom from coarseness. [His performance] was an excellent makeup, an attractive interpretation and his singing was more than credible.”²⁷ In fact, such reviews focus on very little about a female impersonator’s performance other than the effectiveness of their female illusion,

²⁵ Henry Miles, *Orpheus in the wilderness: a history of music in Denver, 1860-1925*, (Denver, CO: Colorado Historical Society, 2006), 204-205; Melvin Schoberlin, *From Candles to Footlights*, (Denver, CO: The Old West Publishing Company, 1941), 261; Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979) 1-19.

²⁶ The following are positive reviews for well-known female impersonators Richard Harlow, Julian Eltinge, and John St. Leon. The Reviewers state the standards upon which the performances are judged: “Amusements,” (Denver, *Rocky Mountain News*, 15 June 1882); “Orpheum,” (Denver, *Denver Post*, 22 Oct 1905); “It’s a Real Present to Yourself to See Lind Do the New Dance of the Five Senses,” (Denver, *Denver Post*, 20 Dec 1908); “Amusements,” (Denver, *Rocky Mountain News*, 6 Feb 1881); “Amusements,” (Denver, *Rocky Mountain News*, 11 July, 1886).

²⁷ “Amusements,” (Denver, *Rocky Mountain News*, 3 Dec 1895)

with skills such character expression, movement and singing put into the context of how they served the expression of conventional femininity. The case for vaudevillian *male* impersonators was similar, but complicated by the societal limits of female expression.

Male impersonators were certainly a common staple in American theatres during the period, but the public display of a (perceived) woman wearing male attire was considered an act of lewdness, almost regardless of the quality of their performance. This automatically categorized shows containing male impersonation as closer to *burlesque*, which throughout the 1890s focused increasingly on modes of displaying the female body and was therefore considered to be smut by middle-class social standards. Society saw the act as vulgar due to its display of the unconstructed female form (i.e. un-corseted, shape of legs made visible, and hair pinned or covered to look cropped), and therefore male impersonation gained an association with prostitution.²⁸ While actors like Katie Emmett were able to gain middle-class audiences and even critical acclaim as excellent male impersonators toward the end of the century, advertisements for their shows usually displayed a note about the believability of their male illusions and therefore the respectability of such productions for (middle-class) female audiences.²⁹ However, society viewed both male or female impersonating actors as more reputable than those who cross-dressed *outside* of vaudevillian or even burlesque theatres.³⁰

²⁸ Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 152-155; Jim Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town*, 57.

²⁹ "Emma Abbott at the Opera House..." (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 18 December, 1884); "An Actress in a Boy's Part," (Salida, *The Salida Mail*, 28 April, 1891); "Amusements," (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 22 February, 1897); "Amusements," (Aspen, *The Herald Democrat*, 6 January, 1897); "At the Wheeler," (Aspen, *Aspen Daily Times*, 28 April, 1899).

³⁰ While society accepted male and female impersonation by professional actors within a theatre, male and female impersonation in other public spaces could subject an individual to harassment or even arrest under Denver's lewdness and obscenity laws; *Laws and Ordinances of the City and County of Denver, 1886*; William N. Eskridge, Jr., *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy Laws in America, 1861-2003* (New York: Viking, 2008), 29-30.

The Fairies of the Windsor District

Non-theatrical male and female impersonation in 19th-century Denver took a few different forms. The earliest surviving newspaper records in the state regarding sartorial gender violations are overwhelmingly about male impersonators. The earliest was an 1874 reminiscence of a “buck-skinned” woman “in male attire” called “Mountain Charley” whose business prowess and sensational tale of survival made local papers in 1859—copies of which no longer exist.³¹ Along with other buck-skinned-attired legends of the West, such as Calamity Jane, Colorado hosted a handful of crossdressing women who demonstrated the archetypal Western “virtues” of riding, drinking, shooting, and making money. However, while these cases potentially featured queer behaviors or individuals, the press was sure to heterosexualize them with either associated tales of cis heterosexual romance, or a conclusion where these individuals were “returned” to cis heterosexual society, usually “back East.”³²

The vast majority of reported cases of male impersonation in Denver from the 19th century involved women and girls who donned male attire simply to travel safely out West or to secure job opportunities that were only available to men. While these individuals participated in what would come to be considered a distinctly queer form of expression—the violation of binary gender norms—there is thus far no evidence to suggest that any of them did so as a reflection of their non-cis or non-heterosexual identities. Lillian Faderman clarifies that “they often saw

³¹ “Colorado Reminiscences,” (Fort Collins, *The Fort Collins Standard*, 22 July, 1874).

³² “City and Vicinity,” (Pueblo, *The Colorado Daily Chieftain*, 26 April, 1876); Untitled, (Pueblo, *The Colorado Daily Chieftain*, 29 April, 1875); “City and Vicinity,” (Pueblo, *The Colorado Daily Chieftain*, 2 September, 1876); “Female Horse Thief,” (Pueblo, *The Colorado Daily Chieftain*, 12 July 1878); “Multiple News Items,” (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 14 July, 1878); “Horse Thieves Killed,” (Colorado Springs, *The Colorado Springs Gazette*, 20 July, 1878); “Mountain Charley,” (Leadville, *The Leadville Daily/Evening Chronicle*, 15 July, 1879); “Death of Nettie Picket,” (Leadville, *The Leadville Daily Herald*, 18 August, 1882); “Charlie Parker,” (Denver, *The Queen Bee*, 10 October, 1883); “A Tragedy at Owl Creek,” (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 31 January, 1892); “A Weary Life’s History,” (Leadville, *The Leadville Daily Herald*, 15 February, 1885).

themselves not as men trapped in women's bodies, as the sexologists [would suggest] they were, but rather as women in masquerade, trying to get more freedom and decent wages."³³ This does not mean that genuinely queer cases did not exist, but they were likely misunderstood, overlooked, or simply not reported.³⁴ With hereditarian ideology still in its nascent years during the 1870s, the popular American consciousness did not yet know to associate alternative gender expression with taboo sexual practices. Moreover, the general lack of "respectable ladies" in Denver during this period stifled the need to heavily police either male or female gender comportment. Such censorship truly began during the 1880s, when the population boom brought a rapid migration of middle-class women across the plains for the first time.³⁵

The first reported examples of potentially self-aware queer individuals in Denver were non-theatrical female impersonators who violated gender norms outside of the vaudevillian context. In fact, the penalty for public male or female impersonation could be violence, arrest, or even a prison sentence if an individual was unable to pay the \$25 (and costs) penalty. The charge was often for *vagrancy*, an umbrella term often used to criminalize homelessness, physical or mental disabilities, sexual degeneracy, prostitution, or cross-dressing during the 19th century.³⁶ In

³³ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 42; "People and Things," (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 9 November, 1877); "The Female Mail Clerk," (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 5 July, 1885); "Living Lies," (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 27 November, 1885); "Mary Dressed in John's Clothes," (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 8 December, 1886); "Petticoats Renounced," (Salida, *The Salida Mail*, 27 August, 1889); "A Runaway in the Hills," (Leadville, *The Herald Democrat*, 28 December, 1894).

³⁴ A few isolated cases of convincingly queer subjects were recorded *outside* of Denver, however, like Charles Vaubough who lived and worked as a trans man for decades in Trinidad, even marrying a cis woman. His "true identity" was only discovered while being treated at the local hospital shortly before his death; "Was Man In All But Sex For Forty Years," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 7 October, 1906); "Woman Who Passed As Man," (Lafayette, *The News Free Press*, 12 November, 1907).

³⁵ Noel, *The City and the Saloon*, 67-77; Robin Courtney Henry, *Criminalizing Sex, Defining Sexuality: Sodomy, Law, and Manhood in Nineteenth-Century Colorado*, (Indiana University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2006), 116-117.

³⁶ Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs*, Kindle location 640-649; Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles*, Kindle location 1790-1803; William M. Eskridge Jr., *Gaylaw: Challenging the Apartheid of the Closet*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 258-267.

1885, however, Denver strengthened its lewdness and obscenity laws to further marginalize taboo behaviors in an effort to create normative public spaces for the rapidly expanding middle class.³⁷ Consequently, police targeted “problem bodies,” as Clare Sears called them, in order to cordon off those who were considered *degenerates* within marginalized spaces where their visibility to the upper classes could be controlled.³⁸ It was in these marginalized spaces, where middle-class convention was denied, that female impersonators found one another and built a community based on safety in numbers, and on controlling their own social and sexual agency.

In 1883, however, *The Rocky Mountain News* declared that it was “a very uncommon thing for men to be caught in Denver masquerading in the clothes of a woman.” Whether this meant that some female impersonators went unnoticed in public—assumed to be cis women—or stayed out of view in semi-private spaces, it is unclear. But on a summer evening in 1883, the Merchants’ police General Dave Cook spotted a “handsome looking woman” with “flowing brown tresses” walking down Larimer Street in an expensive looking gown of the “most ravishing and fascinating style.” Cook had been tipped off about this individual, otherwise he would not have realized that the “young lady” who was making “innumerable ‘mashes’ on the hearts of the tender young men who hang around in the shade of the Windsor hotel” was known as Edward Martino—an “alleged Spaniard” who Cook presumed to be a cis man dressed in female attire. When Martino began flirting “in a manner that nearly drove two or three young men of the dude order into hysterics,” Cook and other members of the Merchant Police

³⁷ *Laws and Ordinances of the City and County of Denver, 1886*; William N. Eskridge, Jr., *Dishonorable Passions: Sodomy Laws in America, 1861-2003* (New York: Viking, 2008), 29-30.

³⁸ Sears, *Arresting Dress*, 9-12.

intervened and arrested the mysterious “damsel,” who was apparently “not surprised” to be taken into police custody.³⁹

By the time of Edward Martino’s arrest at the corner of 18th and Lawrence Streets, Denver’s Red-Light District, or “the Row”—beginning just two blocks to the north at 19th and Market Streets—was a little over a decade old. The area was already occupied by the city’s largest Chinese community when the brothels went into business during the 1870s, creating an overlap of worlds that drove some of the Chinese occupants into the alleyways north of Market between 19th and 21st Streets. With the Tenderloin running along Larimer Street only one block to the southeast, the space between was a place where three worlds collided: the working-class entertainment district of saloons, dancehalls, and burlesque theatres along Larimer; the world of commercialized sex along Market above 19th Street; and the world of Chinese immigrants and popular opium dens from Market to Wazee Streets and within the conjoining alleyways.⁴⁰ Standing on 19th between Market and Larimer, a person stood within sight of every mode of commercialized vice that the city had to offer, and worlds away from the enforcement of middle-class moral hygiene. Though it was a “very uncommon thing” to spot a female impersonator in the streets of Denver, this was the place to do it if a person knew where to look and what to look for.

The court building where Edward Martino stood trial the following day was eleven blocks away from this liminal world. Here, a female impersonator—especially one who looked and sounded so conventionally feminine—drew a sizeable crowd. Martino was “allowed” to attend the trial in the full outfit that they had been arrested in, including their wig. If Denver was

³⁹ “In Female Attire,” (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 2 July, 1883).

⁴⁰ Noel, *The City and the Saloon*, 28-29; “Didn’t See It,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 7 February, 1900); “Chinese Girl Slavery in Denver Being Investigated,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 23 April, 1901).

to become a world-class city like Chicago or San Francisco, individuals like Martino needed to be placed firmly outside of the norm, and therefore paraded in court akin to the subjects of the curio shops and freak shows of Larimer Street. Martino evidently understood this and gave the court what it wanted by confessing their “male” identity and crafting a tale that they had donned the “disguise” to locate a long-lost sister, whose female attire the defendant wore. Though Martino denied wearing such attire to attract men, “to the average observer this explanation was unnecessary”—the defendant obviously donned female attire regularly and with the clear intention of “flirting” with men. Evidently, such flirtations could be lucrative since Martino was able to pay the \$25 “and costs” up front and “without any hesitation.” Despite being caught *this* time, Martino had likely made “‘mashes’ on the hearts of the tender young men” of Denver before, and quite possibly continued to do so with a lower profile.⁴¹

Though Martino restricted this behavior to the blocks around the Windsor hotel, where such behaviors were potentially becoming more common, their public interaction with normative (middle-class) men evidently crossed a line, even for the Windsor District. However, the most famous and archetypal of such communities from this era was in New York City’s Bowery neighborhood, also stretching along the city’s oldest thoroughfare. During the 1890s, this overcrowded working-class entertainment district sat where the Italian and Jewish immigrant communities overlapped with the world of commercialized sex (both interactive and performative). This was a homosocial world meant to offer cheap respite to working-class men living in crowded boarding houses with little to no privacy.⁴² Saloons, aside from their obvious recreational purposes, offered community resources like hot meals, groceries, local news, and

⁴¹ “Personating a Woman,” (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 3 July, 1883).

⁴² Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 33-36.

social interaction, and would even cash workers' checks—though payment in saloon credit was common.⁴³ In these areas, cheap and low-brow entertainment was a part of the social fabric of life and was offered in abundance. While such districts were certainly not representative of all urban working-class environments, the most vulnerable members of society often clung to these areas for survival—cheap living, cultural belonging, or relative anonymity. The diversity and density of such areas promised the comradery of shared eccentricities, and it was out of these working-class spaces that queer individuals were able to create their own enclaves of relative safety, based around a shared divergence from normative gender or sexual expression.⁴⁴

In a younger, smaller city like Denver, city officials needed to tightly regulate the balance between vice and respectability to stifle the former and expand the latter. Therefore, the police effectively compartmentalized vice and problem bodies into ghettos, restricting legal prostitution to the Row, and restricting the expansion of ethnic communities through unchecked vigilante violence and discriminatory business practices.⁴⁵ The result was the creation of a cultural, racial, and ethnic overlap that existed nowhere else in the city. In the block between 19th and 20th, and Market and Larimer: the worlds of the white working-class American, German and Jewish (and eventually Greek and Italian) immigrant, Chinese immigrant, and sex-worker (of any nationality or race) all intersected at the top of the city's entertainment district. Here, taboos reigned supreme; and though arrests in this area were common, few after Edward Martino involved the targeting of individuals for cross-dressing. This is likely because police had little reason to target

⁴³ Noel, *The City and the Saloon*, 63-64.

⁴⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 132-134.

⁴⁵ Clark Secrest, *Hell's Belles: Prostitution, Vice, and Crime in Early Denver*, (Boulder, University Press of Colorado, 2002), 77; Noel, *The City and the Saloon*, 26-28.

such individuals as long as they paid off their neighborhood officers and remained inside their enclaves within the world of commercialized vice.⁴⁶

But not every person to be labeled a *female impersonator* during the late-19th century dressed in full female attire, like Martino. Outside of a vaudevillian context, *female impersonation* referred to a small spectrum of individuals whom society perceived to be men but who displayed varying degrees of feminine appearance or behaviors. This could range from full female attire and makeup to simply an aesthetic element or two that was socially designated to be feminine— i.e. red neckties, white gloves, shoes with higher heels, long hair, tweezed eyebrows, or rouged cheeks or lips, to name a few—paired with feminine behavior. These visual and behavioral cues were not created by the mainstream culture to identify non-normative gender or sexual behavior but were used by participants of the queer subculture to identify a person’s interest in sexual interaction.⁴⁷ In this context, queerness was understood in hereditarian terms that classified those who violated cis heterosexual norms as “congenital invert.” Female-impersonating sex workers were the most visible examples of this and were therefore the class most closely associated with what we would call queer identity. They were also metaphorical beacons for both other queer individuals and those who never identified as sexually “abnormal,” but who nevertheless participated sexually in the subculture.⁴⁸

This system enabled those belonging to the “fairy” class—a more culturally specific term than female impersonator—to both seek out others like themselves and to gain relative autonomy over their social and sexual relationships with men. Though most fairies from the New York and

⁴⁶ Given that no other female impersonators besides Martino were arrested within the Windsor District, it’s possible that they regularly paid off police officers like the prostitutes of Market Street; Secret, *Hell’s Belles*, 77.

⁴⁷ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 41-42, 49-54; Boag, *Same Sex Affairs*, 1118-1172; Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town*, 81-83.

⁴⁸ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 49.

San Francisco models were sex workers in some capacity, individuals from outside of the community would sometimes don the tell-tale fairy aesthetics in order to advertise their willingness and availability to have sex with men. These aesthetic cues also specified a person's willingness to take the stereotypically *feminine* role during intercourse and were only understood in this context within the (semi-officially) designated area where female impersonation was both permitted and expected. Normative cis men who were aware of the subculture were therefore able to participate without risking their status as culturally normative men if they took the stereotypically *masculine* role during sex. Conversely, fairies were understood to have inverted gender identities, and therefore sexual interaction with one of them was contextualized as similar to coupling with a female prostitute. If everybody performed the sexual role that was socially prescribed to their projected binary gender, then a fairy enclave was accepted as a niche within the larger world of commercialized sex.⁴⁹

According to witness accounts reported in *The Denver Post* and *The Rocky Mountain News*, the fairies who occupied the space between the Windsor Hotel and the first block of the Row were burlesque performers, saloon singers, petty thieves, potential sex workers, dressmakers, and/or simply residents of the area (possibly belonging to one or more of the five listed occupations). In fact, all but one case of locatable female impersonation in Denver during the period occurred within a single block radius of 19th and Larimer Streets. Aside from Martino—who was the first publicized case of non-vaudeville female impersonation in Denver—all of these individuals clashed with law enforcement for reasons unrelated to their female impersonation. Therefore, their sustained presence in the area over nearly two decades indicates

⁴⁹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 41-42, 49-54; Boag, *Same Sex Affairs*, 1118-1172; Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town*, 81-83.

that their existence was recognized but not legally targeted after 1883, preserving a community that possibly remained intact until the abolition of prostitution and the Row in 1913.⁵⁰ It is likely that the occupations listed above were supplemented with sex work, and models from larger cities demonstrate that these individuals cultivated their own communities with other female impersonators, developing a distinctly queer culture and identity that served their role within the larger working-class milieu.⁵¹

As with any community, however, economic hardships and internal tensions could drive individuals to seek better, or more lucrative, lives for themselves. When police arrested an ex-convict and female-impersonating prostitute named Joe Gilligan for forgery and grand larceny in 1895, they discovered a wardrobe of female regalia in Gilligan's room, along with intimate letters from male acquaintances and family members. However, a book discovered by the police containing "the addresses of prominent men in the city" generated cries of "Oscar Wildism" and Denver's own Cleveland Street Scandal from the elated press. Though Gilligan's female impersonation and sex work were the primary focus of reporters for *The Denver Post*, the inmate was quoted threatening arrest to "others like himself" if they "intend[ed] to bother him." Evidently, Gilligan's relationship with Denver's sex-working fairy community had soured, and they were in the process of leaving it behind. Gilligan, however, claimed to be making "sufficient money without doing anything like forgery," meaning that the address book of

⁵⁰ These individuals—whom I located using Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps from 1887 to 1904—were discovered through the following newspaper articles: "In Female Attire," (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 2 July, 1883); "Personating a Woman," (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 3 July, 1883); "In Female Attire: J.B. Winslow, Alias 'Blondie' Parades as a Woman," (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 10 March, 1891); "A Queer Case, This," (Denver, *The Denver Evening Post*, 25 April, 1895); "Suicide at Pueblo," (Denver, *The Rocky Mountain News*, 28 July, 1895); "Suicided with Chloroform," (Pueblo, *The Colorado Daily Chieftain*, 28 July, 1895); "Female Impersonator Evans," (Denver, *The Denver Evening Post*, 3 January, 1898); "Bag of Feminine Gear," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 8 September, 1901); "Paris Theatre Kicking Soubrette Proved to be Young Caesar Attell," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 10 September, 1901).

⁵¹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 42-43; Boag, *Same-Sex Desires*, Kindle Location 412-413.

“prominent men” potentially reflected their status as a courtesan or modern escort rather than a district-bound prostitute. Unfortunately, social elevation was anything but easy for the fairies of the Windsor District as Joe Gilligan would spend nearly half of their life in and out of Colorado and California penitentiaries.⁵²

Despite the potentially frayed relations between members of Denver’s fairy community, their existence and survival were harbingers of the development of more diversified queer subcultures in the area. Yet, none would display their queerness so openly as the fairies of the Windsor District, shining a figurative beacon that is visible even to present-day historians. The sexual, racial, and class fluidity of this area not only offered relative safety to female impersonators, but also housed other spaces that fostered different modes of queer identity and expression. The one block stretch between the Windsor and St Charles Hotels housed one of Denver’s early bohemian communities during the final years of the 19th century, and the Windsor Turkish Baths—at the lower end of the district at 18th and Larimer—was catering to middle and upper-class homosexual white men by the 1890s.⁵³ Due to the already-established world of sexual liminality that surrounded them, it is likely that both of these social worlds gravitated toward the Windsor District for those very qualities.

Jockers, Punks, and Turkish Baths

While there are very few recorded first-hand accounts of Denver’s 19th-century queer community, one published written account offers an invaluable window into the city’s larger queer world, as well as into the different queer expressions contained within the Windsor

⁵² “A Queer Case, This,” (Denver, *The Denver Evening Post*, 25 April, 1895); California State Archives, Sacramento, CA, Secretary of State California State Archives San Quentin Prison Registers (1897-1910), 275.

⁵³ “Candlelight Club,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 15 January, 1895); “Czar Seeks Engineers,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 22 February, 1904); Denver City Directories, 1881-1914.

District. In 1893, German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld visited the United States to study sexuality in American society, and almost-20 years later he published his findings in *Homosexuality in Men and Women* (1914). Printed within the book was a letter written by a male homosexual professor from Denver about his knowledge of homosexuals in the mile high city. Though most of his observations were stories about individuals that he knew personally, the professor alluded to a few locations where “Uranians”—a period term for homosexuals—were known to gather in Denver: The Turkish baths, private bohemian parties, and around the gardens of the Capitol. The latter— known in modern times as *sodomy circle*—was described as the place where “male prostitutes” could sometimes be found, which was also true for the area during the late-20th century; could the Capitol gardens have hosted sex workers continuously from the 1890s through the 1980s?⁵⁴ Since the incomplete State Capitol building was opened 1894, one year after the professor referenced the location, the area around the State Capitol building would have been a massive construction zone since 1886, when the city broke ground on the project. Construction continued intermittently on the site until 1901, so perhaps the location became favorable for male prostitutes due to the homosocial atmosphere of a large long-term construction site, similar to a scaled-down mining camp.⁵⁵ While female and female-impersonating prostitutes were restricted to the area in and around the Row, young working-class men and adolescent boys hanging around a construction site (composed of other working-class men) likely drew little attention from moralists.

⁵⁴ Magnus Hirschfeld, *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes* (Berlin: Louis Marcus, 1914), 550-554, translated by James Steakley in Katz, Jonathan Ned. *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York City: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), 49-51.

⁵⁵ Carl Abbott, et al, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 247.

Referred to as *punks*, this type of sex worker was a product of the train-hopping tramp culture that flourished in the United States and throughout the West around the turn of the century. In their respective studies of transient men in America during the period, Nels Anderson and Josiah Flynt both found a rather codified system of homosexual coupling among adult men and adolescent boys who had been seduced by the idea of a shiftless life apart from societal constraints. While these couplings did not represent the majority of transient men and boys, it was a large enough proportion for them to notice many common dynamics that these distinctly homosexual relationships shared. The adult transient—or *jocker*—would ideally serve the role of mentor and protector to the boy, teaching him how to live the life of a vagabond, while the boy would handle the domestic chores. There was a consistent sexual dynamic between jockers and punks, but sexual roles were not always fixed like between fairies and the cis men with whom they coupled. However, when winter arrived and cities flooded with both idle seasonal laborers and transient hobos alike, many jockers abandoned their punks to weather the difficult months alone.⁵⁶ Consequently, these adolescent boys and young men often turned to theft and sex work to survive—not necessarily identifying their prostitution with non-normative gender or sexual identity. Therefore, although these individuals likely banded together in a common fight to subsist, any resulting community had little to do with a shared queer identity.⁵⁷

If the male prostitutes of the Capitol gardens were anything like those of the 20th century, then they were young financially vulnerable cis men surviving off (homosexual) sex work, regardless of their prescribed sexuality, much like the punks of the late-19th century. Though the male prostitutes of pre-AIDS Denver who plied their trade around the Capitol building likely did

⁵⁶ This dynamic would have been exacerbated during the mid-1890s following the Silver Panic of 1893.

⁵⁷ Boag, *Same Sex Affairs*, loc. 223-481, 1031-1106; Josiah Flynt, "Children of the Road," (*Atlantic Monthly* 77, no. 459, 1896), 58-71.

not participate in a train-hopping subculture, they served the niche of the stereotypically masculine prostitute within the larger economy of commercialized sex.⁵⁸ It is uncertain whether a solid chronological line can be drawn between the punks of the Capitol gardens and the prostitutes of sodomy circle, but considering the subcultural (and therefore under-studied) quality of both, a connection is entirely possible.

While this queer dynamic developed far from the city's demimonde, the only Turkish baths in the city when the 1893 letter was written was located conveniently at the corner of 18th and Larimer Streets, at the edge of the Windsor District. Turkish baths in the United States (as well as in Europe) were considered by Hirschfeld's friend—as well as queer historians like George Chauncey—to be one of the most popular meeting places for gay men, generally considered “very safe” since “the people you meet have not come there to blackmail.”⁵⁹ While sexual activity was understandably forbidden in the public bathing areas, clients had lock and key access to private dressing rooms or could arrange to rendezvous with one another in the privacy of a nearby hotel. When the Windsor Turkish Baths opened in 1880, it was the first establishment of its kind in the city and remained so for twenty years, until the Albany Turkish Baths opened ten blocks to the southeast in 1899.⁶⁰ Though the unidentified professor admitted that Denver's baths were less active than in cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, or New York, he claimed that “six out of nine of the masseurs who work[ed] in the baths of Denver [were] known to be tolerant and [were] probably themselves homosexuals.”⁶¹ Unlike the saloons and dancehalls populating the surrounding area, Turkish baths primarily catered to middle and upper-

⁵⁸ “History of the Center,” The Center on Colfax, <<https://lgbtqcolorado.org/about/our-history>>, Last visited 7 December, 2022.

⁵⁹ Hirschfeld, *Die Homosexualität*, 50; Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 207.

⁶⁰ Denver City Directory, 1899.

⁶¹ Hirschfeld, *Die Homosexualität*, 50.

class clientele, charging a base entry price “high enough to keep the ordinary male prostitute out,” which likely discouraged participation from many members of the working class as well.⁶² Ultimately, Turkish baths provided the middle-class luxury of privacy, but within the homosocial working-class template of public bathing.⁶³

So where did the “ordinary male prostitute” go when dissuaded by the entry fee of the Windsor Turkish Baths? Evidently their presence in the area was common enough for the professor to point out the need for exclusion. We know that Edward Martino propositioned men along the street in front of the Windsor Hotel, just across the street, but such visibility was likely what led to the arrest. The alleyways behind the Turkish Baths, however, may have proven a safer and more accommodating atmosphere for prostitution outside of the Row. But does the reference to the “ordinary male prostitute” refer to members of the fairy class, like Martino, or does it refer to male-presenting punks, like those in the Capitol gardens? It is difficult to discern the difference since both were referred to at the time as “male prostitutes,” if referenced directly at all. One could discern the use of the word “ordinary” to be a biased reference to their cis-male presentation, or perhaps it was meant to differentiate between streetwalkers and higher-earning escorts like Joe Gilligan. Whichever type, the accepted presence of queer prostitution in the area around the Windsor Hotel—and therefore outside of the legally-prescribed limits of the Row—merited a mention from Hirschfeld’s professor. Given the area’s liminal place between worlds of vice, it would not be unreasonable to believe that both male- and female-presenting “male prostitutes” could have utilized the district’s reputation for non-normative sexual transactions.

⁶² Hirschfeld, *Die Homosexualität*, 50.

⁶³ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 207.

Such a reputation would have fit in well with the ideologies of the subcultural movement that was quickly gaining influence around the Windsor Block and the rest of Denver. During the 1890s, groups of antiestablishment-minded artists, writers, musicians, poets, and journalists began to meet with greater frequency in public spaces along Market and Larimer, like the St. Charles Hotel wine room. They called themselves *bohemians* after the early 19th-century French movement of the same name, originating from the Latin Quarter of Paris.⁶⁴ The Denver meetings were small and informal at first, consisting of political lectures and debates, poetry readings, musical recitals and workshops, or simply holding space for like-minded people to socialize.⁶⁵ This was an anti-capitalistic movement based on the rejection of money and the reverence of artistic talent and development; a belief system that rejected the Progressive Era conventions of materialism, gender, and sex. Queer identities were generally acknowledged and welcomed within bohemian communities, which famously pushed the boundaries of normative gender and sexual expression, even among cis heterosexuals.⁶⁶ However, as Denver's bohemian community grew too large for the ballroom of the Windsor Hotel, they set their eyes on the cheapening prices of a nicer neighborhood south of the city's Theatre Row.

⁶⁴ Kotynek, *American Cultural Rebels*, 5-9.

⁶⁵ "The Candlelight Club," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 15 January, 1895); "Prosperous Bohemians," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 20 January, 1896); "Bohemia's Carnival," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 22 March, 1897); "Czar Seeks Engineers," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 22 February, 1904).

⁶⁶ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 227-232.

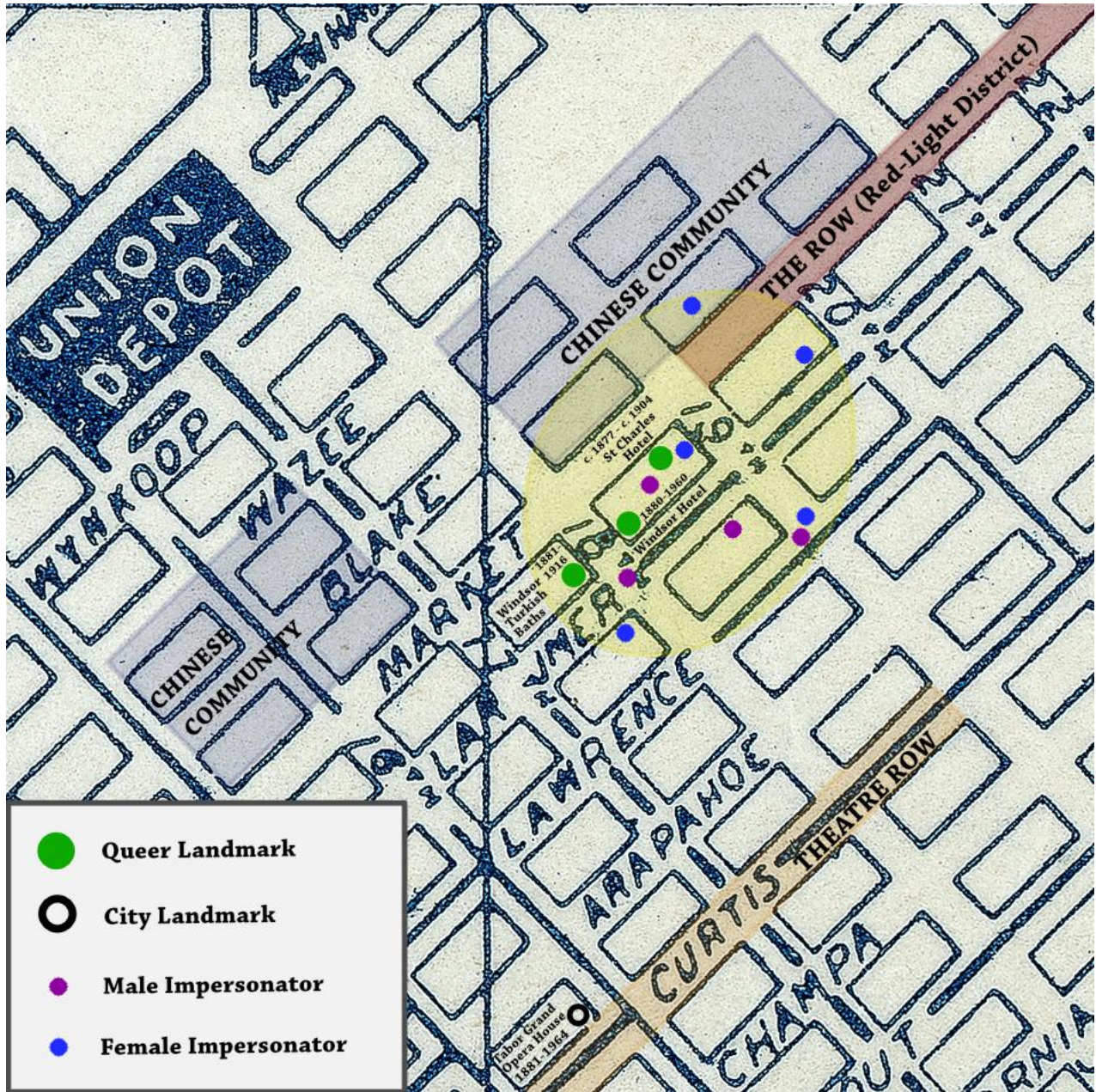


Figure 2. A Map of the Windsor District, including markers for where newspapers accounts have recorded occurrences of male and female impersonation. The few other occurrences of male and female impersonation occurred scattered throughout the city and are therefore not visible on this map.

CHAPTER III

MASQUERADES OF DENVER 1900 - 1914

Little Bohemia

Hirschfeld's 1893 letter from the unidentified professor referenced one more place in Denver where queer people would gather during the period, or more precisely, where they were included. The professor explained that "parties are given by a young artist of exquisite taste and a noble turn of mind, and some of his homosexual friends appear at these in women's clothing." Though the professor never used the word "bohemian," no other cultural context from 1893 could feasibly contain such a dynamic: a heterosexual artist throwing parties that casually featured fairies. What's more is that the professor labeled the fairies as "friends" of the artist, meaning they were likely not invited as performers or sex workers. During the Progressive Era, this dynamic—the social intermingling of non-homosexual artists with visibly queer people, namely fairies—was exclusive to and characteristic of bohemian communities.⁶⁷ This could also help explain why some of the earliest bohemian gatherings in the city occurred within the Windsor District, the very enclave of Denver's fairy community.

By 1900, however, the city's bohemian community had outgrown the Windsor District and was populating the area southeast of Theatre Row—Curtis Street between 15th and 19th Streets— and the immediate area surrounding the 1500 block of Glenarm Place. Spanning the blocks between, a string of fashionable bohemian establishments lived short but competitive lives catering to the ever-blurring line between the bohemian subculture and the newer more mainstream "haute boheme"—which referred to wealthy bohemians.⁶⁸ As the bohemian

⁶⁷ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 227-232; Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town*, XVI.

⁶⁸ As explained on pages 8 & 9, I created data sets filtered from the Denver Censuses from 1900, 1910, and 1920. I mapped the data points and I have drawn my theories about potential queer residential enclaves from that. I

movement gained popularity, mainstream society began to imitate the aesthetic and behavioral elements of the subculture, though without its anti-capitalistic foundations. In practice, however, true bohemianism was definitively marked by poverty, whether elective or circumstantial, compelling members of the community to rely heavily on one another for both artistic inspiration as well as survival. Often, if an area became known as a bohemian hub, middle and upper-class slummers would flood the local economy and drive up the price of living until the original bohemians could no longer afford their rent. So, while “haute” Bohemia moved in, “Little Bohemia” moved out.⁶⁹

How do we know that a queer population was even among the shiftless bohemian community of Denver? An answer could be in the method that I used to map such patterns of settlement. I sifted through the Federal Censuses for Denver from 1900, 1910, and 1920, mapping the addresses of those who labeled themselves as a “partner,” “roomer,” or “lodger” in relation to the head of the household. I also filtered the results to only include individuals who were perceivably living with only one other person of the same recorded gender who held no familial relation. The reason for this was to eliminate as many factors of convenience or survival as possible. While these pairs are certainly not representative of all queer relationships, it was the only living situation that suggested two people had at least four walls of privacy between them and others and that they were not kin. A person’s marital status factored very little into the analysis because most known queer individuals from this period married at some point during

determined the existence and location of “Bohemian” establishments in the city from Denver City Directories (1890-1920) and the following newspaper articles: “Prosperous Bohemians,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 20 January, 1896); “Bohemian Ball,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 26 February, 1901); “Little Hungary Roof Garden,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 1 July, 1906); “Bohemia,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 31 December, 1908); “New Year Ushered in with Glee,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 1 January, 1909); “Bohemia Amid Picturesque Surroundings of Nan-King Café,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 12 July, 1911); “Wealthy Man Poisoned at Party is Charge; Denverite is a Guest,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 5 August, 1913).

⁶⁹ Kotynek, *American Cultural Rebels*, 47-51.

their lives, often continuing their queer lifestyles apart from their spouses.⁷⁰ I also analyzed the data filtered to only show pairs that worked different occupations from one another to eliminate yet another factor of convenience, and though these results were scant, they only reinforced the potentially queer areas of interest.⁷¹

I had hoped to see an obvious correlation between suspected queer areas of town and the mapped points of data, but what I saw was a clear correlation between the settlement of *domestic partnerships*—as I will refer to these pairings from now on—and the most widely-advertised bohemian establishments of the decade, populating the blocks between Curtis (Theatre Row) and Welton Streets above 15th Street. However, most of these establishments did not yet exist in 1900 (at least in their widely advertised forms as “bohemian” venues) when the concentration of domestic partners was recorded to have occupied the space. In fact, by the time that these bohemian resorts gained city-wide attention—from 1907 to 1912—the majority of Denver’s domestic partners had moved several blocks northeast, as well as directly east into north Capitol Hill. Obviously, I wondered why there was such a clear spatial relationship between the settlement patterns of domestic partners in 1900 and the popular bohemian venues of 1907 to 1912, and yet they occupied this space nearly a decade apart. My guess is that the city’s most widely advertised commercial bohemian venues occupied the spaces where the true bohemians had *formerly* lived as residents, driven out by the price of popularity. One could assume that the popular bohemian venues of 1920 would have popped up in advertisements among the 1910 settlement of domestic partners to the northeast, but the advent of statewide prohibition in 1916

⁷⁰ While the examples of queer individuals who married into heterosexual partnerships during the period are too numerous to list, the following texts present examples and further explanations for this: Chauncey, “Gay New York,” 6-8; Elledge, “The Boys of Fairy Town,” 34-45; Faderman, “Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers,” 74-78.

⁷¹ U.S Census Bureau, City and County of Denver (1900, 1910, 1920), using ancestry.com; <<http://www.ancestry.com>> (January – April 2022).

likely stifled the exposure of either “true” or “haute” bohemian establishments, both of which probably moved underground.

Regardless of the exact location of the bohemian epicenter, the cluster of domestic partnerships around the 1500 block of Glenarm Place points to the city’s potentially densest queer enclave in 1900. The first distinguishing feature is the sheer density of this grouping of domestic partners, with ten partnerships filling a single block radius. On average, the difference in age between partners was just over 5 years, with an average age of 30.5, both lower than any other grouping of domestic partnerships in the data. With a perfect divide between male and female partnerships—all Caucasian—the bohemian context of this area is easy to believe given the location of The Bohemian Club’s former headquarters (as of 1895) only one block away. The Orpheum Theatre, where the legendary female impersonator Julian Eltinge would give one of his earliest Denver performances, stood in between old Bohemian Club and the newly constructed Albany Turkish Baths on Glenarm—the only other Turkish baths in the city.

All of this suggests that the densest grouping of domestic partnerships in the city was nestled among the turn-of-the-century bohemian headquarters, a low-brow vaudeville theatre featuring young female impersonators, and one of two Turkish Bath establishments in the city (the other being the Windsor Turkish Baths in the Windsor District).⁷² With such a close vicinity to the bohemian subculture, queer entertainment, and middle-class gay male cruising grounds, we potentially have a snapshot of Denver’s most consolidated queer neighborhood (both residential and commercial) at the turn of the century. The clear difference between this area and the Windsor District was that while the latter developed out of the diverse world of

⁷² Denver City Directories, 1895-1900; “Orpheum,” (Denver, *The Denver Evening Post*, 22 October, 1905); “Albany Turkish Baths,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 24 September, 1899).

commercialized sex, the former developed later (and for a shorter period of time) within the city's primarily white bohemian subculture. It is important to note, however, that a residential enclave of domestic partnerships *could* have potentially existed within the Windsor District during the final two decades of the century, but the census data for 1890 and 1880 were either unavailable or unusable for the purposes of this study.

By 1910, this settlement appeared to have dissolved and another seemed to have begun near and within the block of 18th and Lincoln Streets, which was a development called Brinton Terrace that a 1906 *Denver Post* article called Denver's residential "mecca" for bohemians.⁷³ As a later 1919 *Post* article would eventually confirm, as do the mapped partnerships from my 1920 Census data, this area would remain a major cultural center for both the bohemian community and for domestic partners into the early-1920s, suggesting that there was a correlation between Denver's bohemian communities and the settlement patterns of same-sex domestic partnerships.⁷⁴ Therefore, though all domestic partnerships were likely not indicative of a connection to the bohemian community, they appear to have created their densest settlements among them. Paired with the many accounts of urban queer individuals finding acceptance among bohemian communities, as well as the knowledge of the modern-day queer neighborhood that still exists in Capitol Hill, it is likely safe to assume that these clusters of domestic partners from 1900, 1910, and 1920 are at least partially indicative of the areas where queer people felt safe enough to settle with their partners and make lives for themselves.

Within the socially blurred lines of a bohemian gathering, queerness in its many forms was encouraged in the name of exploring one's true self, almost to the point of fetishization. For

⁷³ "Artists Make This Terrace Their Center," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 21 October, 1906).

⁷⁴ "Denver's 'Greenwich Village' Begun by Architect Sterner," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 1 June, 1919).

the first time, a person's non-normative expression of their gender and/or sexuality was not tied to gender inversion or sexual deviance because the normative structures of class, gender, and sexuality had already been purposefully deconstructed. Like the liminal area between Denver's worlds of commercialized vice, bohemian spaces created a world between worlds where participants safely flouted middle-class conventions and viewed other participants as fellow travelers rather than freaks.⁷⁵ Though we can only locate the hotbeds of bohemian activity within shiftless windows of time, it is the very nature of Bohemia to be shiftless. As a journalist from *The Denver Post* reflected in 1909, "Bohemia travels not in a beaten pathway and jealously guards her traditions from the beginning to the end of every year in the calendar."⁷⁶ However, back in the old bohemian stomping grounds of the Windsor District, a new demographic of queer participation suggested that the area's glory days were far from over.

"Masquerading in Male Attire"

When Mary Garcia donned a blue serge suit to explore the Windsor District's notorious nightlife in 1913, female impersonators had not been recorded within the area for years, having likely moved underground with the abolishment of prostitution in 1907. A musician living among the nearby bohemian community, Garcia was likely privy to the types of establishments that were rumored to have existed along Larimer. Given the short walking distance from their home further down 19th in the current bohemian quarter, this was potentially not the first time that Garcia ventured into the Windsor District unaccompanied by their husband; and with all luck, it would not be the last. While the bohemian parties that took place in their neighborhood between Curtis and Welton sometimes featured both non-normative gender and sexual

⁷⁵ Kotynek, *American Cultural Rebels*, 9-12; Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles*, Kindle Location 1060-1064.

⁷⁶ "Revelry Marks Advent of 1909 in All Bohemia," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 1 January, 1909).

expression, Garcia could have been searching for a more niche experience. The Windsor District also had an established tradition of queer-gender expression, and if Garcia looked hard enough, maybe they could locate a venue catering to lesbians and individuals called *male impersonators*. Surveying the busy streets of the Tenderloin, Garcia adjusted the golf cap partially obscuring their freshly cropped hair and strode down Larimer toward 18th Street.⁷⁷

What Mary Garcia did not know was that Patrolman Orbach stood across the street observing as they “unconsciously betray[ed] [themselves] in an effort to ascertain if [their] trousers were on straight.” He followed them into a saloon near 18th and Larimer and put a swift end to what could have been an eventfully queer evening. Down at police headquarters, Garcia attempted to avoid jailtime with a story about how the outfit was a costume for a (likely bohemian) masquerade ball on Larimer, and while waiting for a friend to join them, decided to have a drink in a nearby saloon. However, Deputy Chief Leyden found their cropped hair to be suspect—something that Garcia “could not explain”—and believing “that [they] had some other motive in donning [their] husband’s clothing,” held them in jail overnight. While Deputy Chief Leyden was likely not worrying (or even thinking) about Garcia’s gender or sexual identity, a perceived middle-class woman’s direct involvement with the Tenderloin’s nightlife was considered “lewd” by the standards of the blossoming Progressive Era, as was the wearing of male attire. Regardless of Mary Garcia’s true intentions, their exploits were simply understood within the context of *slumming*.⁷⁸

During the decade prior to World War I, the local newspaper reports of *male impersonation* surged to unprecedented rate. “Never has the forbidden district of the red lights

⁷⁷ "Woman Enters Bars As Man But 'Hitching Pants' Betrays Her," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 14 November, 1913).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

attracted so many people from the respectable actions of the city until just now. Every night parties of evidently respectable women...make their way... to see the life that the women of the half world live.”⁷⁹ Though the practice of slumming began in Denver as early as the 1880s, this 1906 proclamation by *The Denver Post* reflects the growing frequency of this pastime during the first two decades of the 20th century.⁸⁰ Since middle- and upper-class women could not visit saloons, brothels, or any other venues of commercialized vice without jeopardizing their status as respectable ladies, they would disguise themselves as men in order to frequent the popular vice districts of a city. While “slumming tours” were popular both among men and women of the middle and upper classes, only women risked arrest if their true identities were discovered. Indeed, such excursions could be a woman’s first personal experience with alcohol, tobacco, recreational drugs, gambling, or even commercialized sex.⁸¹ However, while the motives of these women to experience a city’s nightlife were understandable, it is difficult to discern whether a given case of male impersonation was simply a disguise or an expression of queer identity. Given Mary Garcia’s reported flirtations with women during their outing, their potential connection to bohemian communities, as well as the fact that they cut their hair rather than simply pinning it under a hat, it is more than possible that they were expressing their own queerness and/or searching for others.

⁷⁹ "Respectable Women in the Tenderloin," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 27 October, 1906).

⁸⁰ The following are all of the accounts of women slumming in Colorado that I could find: "A Mountain Maid's Frolic," (Las Animas via Denver, *Las Animas Leader*, 7 March 1879); "A Mad Masquerade," (Denver, *Rocky Mountain News*, 21 July 1884); "Masquerading Dora Dow," (Leadville, *Leadville Evening Chronical*, 21 Sept. 1888); "A Woman in Male Attire," (Denver, *Rocky Mountain News*, 29 Oct. 1889); "A Tough Female," (Aspen, *Aspen Daily Chronical*, 26 Sept. 1889); "They Went Slumming," (Denver, *Rocky Mountain News*, 17 June 1891); "A Runaway in the Hills," (Leadville, *Herald Democrat*, 28 Dec. 1894); "Young Woman in Men's Garb," (Denver, *Denver Evening Post*, 11 June 1899); "They Changed Clothes," (Leadville, *Herald Democrat*, 26 Oct. 1899).

⁸¹ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 42; Sears, *Arresting Dress*, 64-65.

Historians have presented differing theories for when male verses female queer communities initially formed within American urban centers, as well as for whether or not they formed in the same spaces. Though George Chauncey asserts that male and female queer communities formed around the same time and within the same spaces as one another in New York City, Lillian Faderman contradicts the claim, stating that the social stigma against female participation in urban nightlife during the 19th century, regardless of class, caused a stagnation in the development of queer female, non-binary, and trans-masculine spaces in most American cities. This stigma continued for middle-class women into the first decades of the 20th century, but by the 1910s, working-class women, other than prostitutes, were beginning to frequent saloons that served both food and drink, enabling them to participate in the saloon nightlife culture without affronting the norms of mainstream society. This also allowed women, non-binary individuals, and trans men who were aware of their sexological status as “congenital invert” to seek out one another within working-class saloons. Little is known about such venues outside of New York City and before the 1920s, but it was during this period that such lesbian bars allegedly formed, displaying a dual masculine-feminine dynamic similar to fairy communities. Such a display of perceived male impersonation was difficult to disguise merely as slumming, especially during the heightened surveillance of “female” comportment during the late-Progressive Era. Therefore, such dynamics gravitated toward the same sexually liminal places where queer men, non-binary individuals, and trans women had already formed their enclaves.⁸²

⁸² Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 59-60 & 79-81; Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 227-243; Boag, *Same-Sex Affairs*, Kindle location 124-136 & 1828-1852.

When Bird Lang—a potentially-trans man who had been “masquerading in male attire” in the area for the past four years—was arrested in 1910 for public drunkenness in the alleyway between 18th, 19th, Market, and Larimer Streets, they could have been frequenting the same venues as Mary Garcia. Indeed, given Garcia’s thorough exploration of the saloons on the 1800 block of Larimer, an overlap is more than likely—if not within venues of the same name, then within the same literal spaces.⁸³ When Helen Odom was arrested for wearing male attire at 19th and Lawrence the previous year, they declared that they were on their way to 18th and Larimer Streets, intending to pass through the same small stretch of commercialized vice as both Lang and Garcia, the same location where Ruth Meyers would be arrested in 1914, also dressed in male attire and being coaxed into trying cocaine.⁸⁴ Whether it was the Montana Bar, a venue of another name, or several such places along the 1800 block of Larimer, the nightlife here attracted alternate modes of gender expression at a rate that was unparalleled elsewhere in Denver.

This sudden appearance of male impersonators participating in the nightlife of the Windsor District from 1909 to 1913 could simply reflect the increased number of slummers who were frequenting the area, but the purpose of slumming was primarily to visit a city’s Red-Light district. Every single case of male impersonation within the Windsor District, however, occurred on Larimer (or in the alley) between 18th and 19th, close to, yet entirely outside of the Row. In fact, 67% of all locatable cases of male impersonation in Denver occurred within the Windsor District, as well as 100% of those who were interacting in any way with the world of commercialized vice. Could it be possible, then, that these individuals were part of—or

⁸³ "Woman 'Vag' Says She'll Be Good," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 22 February, 1911); "She Cursed Policeman and Had Let Beard Grow, Though in Female Garb," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 10 April, 1911).

⁸⁴ "Woman Wearing Trousers Held," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 25 November, 1909); "Girl Hobo Turned Over to Police by Boy Comrade," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 19 July, 1914).

attempting to participate in—the pre-existing queer subculture that was located there during the final two decades of the 19th century? Given that 75% of all locatable cases of male *or* female impersonation between 1883 and 1913 occurred within this small area, it is likely that the blocks of Larimer between 18th and 20th were the home to such establishments. If true, this would mean that the Windsor District served as Denver’s primary queer entertainment district for at least thirty years, likely moving underground in 1916 with the dawn of state-wide prohibition.

What’s Happening at East Turner Hall?

Just three blocks to the northeast of the Windsor District loomed an imposing and opulent brick and sandstone building called East Turner Hall. Built in 1889, the building loomed over a sea of one and two-story brick or wood-framed houses, vestiges of the former middle-class German and Jewish suburb that was built to feel worlds away from the rowdy saloons of south Larimer.⁸⁵ However, now this densifying area sat only a stone throw’s away from both the Row and the queer entertainment district, the result of a population and building boom throughout the 1870s, 80s, and early 90s. Perhaps it was a consequence of the Silver Panic of 1893, perhaps there were other reasons, but by the turn of the century, the neighborhood’s former residents had been partially replaced by a diversifying group of people. Though initially all-male, this was the only racially-diverse cluster of domestic partnerships from the 1900 census data, containing White (both American-born and immigrant), Black, and Chinese domestic partners living together—and with other members of their ethnic communities—within the same small

⁸⁵ “The East Turner Hall fire,” *Denver Public Library Digital Collection*, <<https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p15330coll22/id/18544>>, Last visited 29 October, 2022; Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1903 & 1904.

neighborhood. Since Caucasians made up 96.8% of the city's urban population in 1900, such a demographic is enough to ask the question: what was happening over at East Turner Hall?⁸⁶

By 1910, the density of domestic partners in the area nearly doubled and the demographics shifted to become predominantly Black, with an even divide between male and female. While Chinese residents appear to have moved away, back toward the Chinese enclaves above Market Street, a few American-born white domestic partnerships lived within a block of East Turner Hall, firmly yet uncharacteristically within this Black neighborhood. In fact, this area showed the only grouping of Black and mixed-race domestic partners from the 1900 and 1910 censuses and was one of two such areas to do so by 1920. Though the cluster of Black and mixed-race domestic partnerships is eye-catching—especially when all other clusters from 1900 and 1910 were almost-entirely Caucasian—the sudden increase of Denver's Black population between 1900 and 1910 likely reflects the dawn of the Great Migration.

While Black people have been present in Denver since its frontier days, passage across the Great Plains or Rocky Mountains before the arrival of the railroad was mostly restricted to middle and upper class individuals (mostly men), of any race, due the financial burden of such a trip.⁸⁷ After that, the majority of Denver's Black population worked either as railroad laborers, porters, or servants until the 1920s.⁸⁸ The Great Migration, beginning around 1910 and lasting in

⁸⁶ Abbott, *Colorado*, 475-476; Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals by Race, 1790 to 1990, and by Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities and Other Urban Place In The United States," (*United States Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce*), <<https://web.archive.org/web/20120812191959/http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/twps0076.html>>, Last visited 7 December, 2022.

⁸⁷ Noel, *The City and the Saloon*, 67-77; Robin Courtney Henry, *Criminalizing Sex, Defining Sexuality: Sodomy, Law, and Manhood in Nineteenth-Century Colorado*, (Indiana University, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2006), 116-117.

⁸⁸ "Immigration to Denver, 1920-Present," *Colorado Encyclopedia*, <<https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/immigration-denver-1920-present>>, Last visited 7 December, 2022.

phases until the 1970s, was a massive migration of Black people—and sometimes entire communities—from the American South to the Northern, Midwestern, and Western states of the country. During the first years of the 20th century, the Homestead Act was still in effect, providing adult American citizens or prospective citizens with 160 acres of government land—illegally seized from the Native tribes of the Western and Midwestern states— regardless of their race. Such equal access to privately owned land was a huge draw for Colorado’s earliest Black residents and put the region on the map for those migrating out of the Jim Crow South after the turn of the century.⁸⁹ Though the most widely-known historic Black neighborhood of Denver is the area surrounding 27th and Welton Streets—or “Five Points,” as the streetcar stop was labeled at this five-way intersection—evidently one of the city’s earliest Black and mixed-race communities developed within the vicinity of East Turner Hall, located between 21st and 22nd Streets on Arapahoe Street.

The Turnverein Society, who built East Turner Hall, was a German-American social and athletic club, originally centered within the German and Jewish communities of the late-19th century.⁹⁰ The club included a ballroom, theatre, gymnasium, dressing rooms, bowling alley, and meeting rooms, among other social and functional spaces. During the early 20th century, however, the “Turnhalle” catered to a diverse demographic, hosting Turnverein events, Jewish community events, bohemian masquerade balls, Black masquerade balls, and Black theatre companies.⁹¹ In fact, Oscar-winner Hattie McDaniel performed in front of her first audience at

⁸⁹ Stewart E. Tolnay, “The African American ‘Great Migration’ And Beyond, ” (Annual Review of Sociology , 2003, Vol. 29, 2003), 210-214.

⁹⁰ Katie Rudolph, “Remnants of the Past: Building Fragments of the 1890 Denver Turnverein Building,” The Denver Public Library, <<https://history.denverlibrary.org/news/remnants-past-building-fragments-1890-denver-turnverein-building>>, Last visited 7 December, 2022.

⁹¹ “Bohemian Ball,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 26 February, 1901); “People’s Sunday Alliance,” (Denver, *The Colorado Statesman*, 13 February, 1909); “All Star Minstrels East Turner Hall Thursday November 19,” (Denver, *The Colorado Statesman*, 31 October, 1909).

East Turner in her father's travelling minstrel show.⁹² Evidently, the events hosted at the hall mirrored the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood, hinting that the area was potentially a bohemian enclave as well. Given the density of domestic partnerships within the immediate area, the racial diversity, nearby masquerade balls, as well as the presence of young artists living in small or subdivided residences, the East Turner Block resembled a bohemian enclave better than any other part of the city at the time.

Could the bohemian—and potentially queer—communities of the Windsor District and East Turner Block be linked? With only two blocks separating the communities, it is possible that the clustering of domestic partners on the East Turner Block resulted from its proximity to both the center of the queer nightlife and one of the city's oldest bohemian communities, both within the Windsor District. Indeed, 100% of the Black domestic partnerships to have settled below 20th Street—the boundary of the historically enforced Black ghetto— between 1900 and 1920 were located within or along the edge of the Windsor District. Therefore, these two areas were linked by mixed racial dynamics unseen in any other part of the city, by their evident ties to the bohemian and potentially queer subcultures, as well as by their incredibly close vicinity to one another. While one of these areas historically demonstrated social and sexual liminality, the other was racially liminal, both of which appear to have attracted the qualities of the other. Given the continuing presence of Black domestic partnerships within the East Turner Block in 1920, as well as the racially mixed settlement of the Windsor District that occurred around the same time, a greater queer neighborhood potentially took form.

⁹² "Hattie McDaniel (1895-1952), *Black Past*, <<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/people-african-american-history/mcdaniel-hattie-1895-1952>>, Last visited 7 December, 2022.

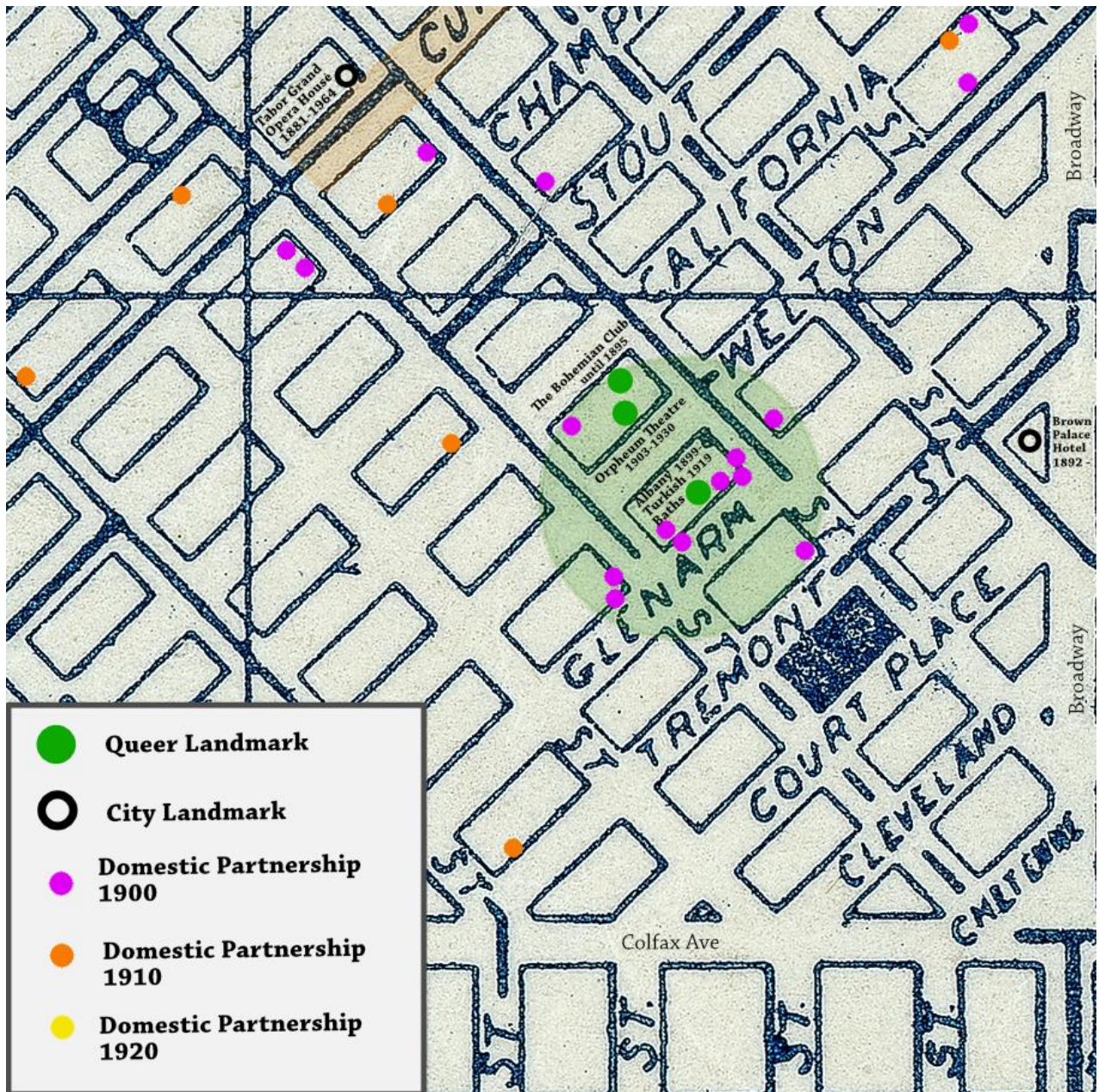


Figure 3. A map of the Glenarm Block, which appears to have hosted one of the city’s bohemian communities at the turn of the century, as well as the densest enclave of domestic partners from the 1900 Census data—who were all Caucasian. Also mapped are the Albany Turkish Baths, Orpheum Theatre, and old Bohemian Club (until 1895). The presence of the latter suggests that this was a prominent bohemian enclave leading up to the turn of the century.

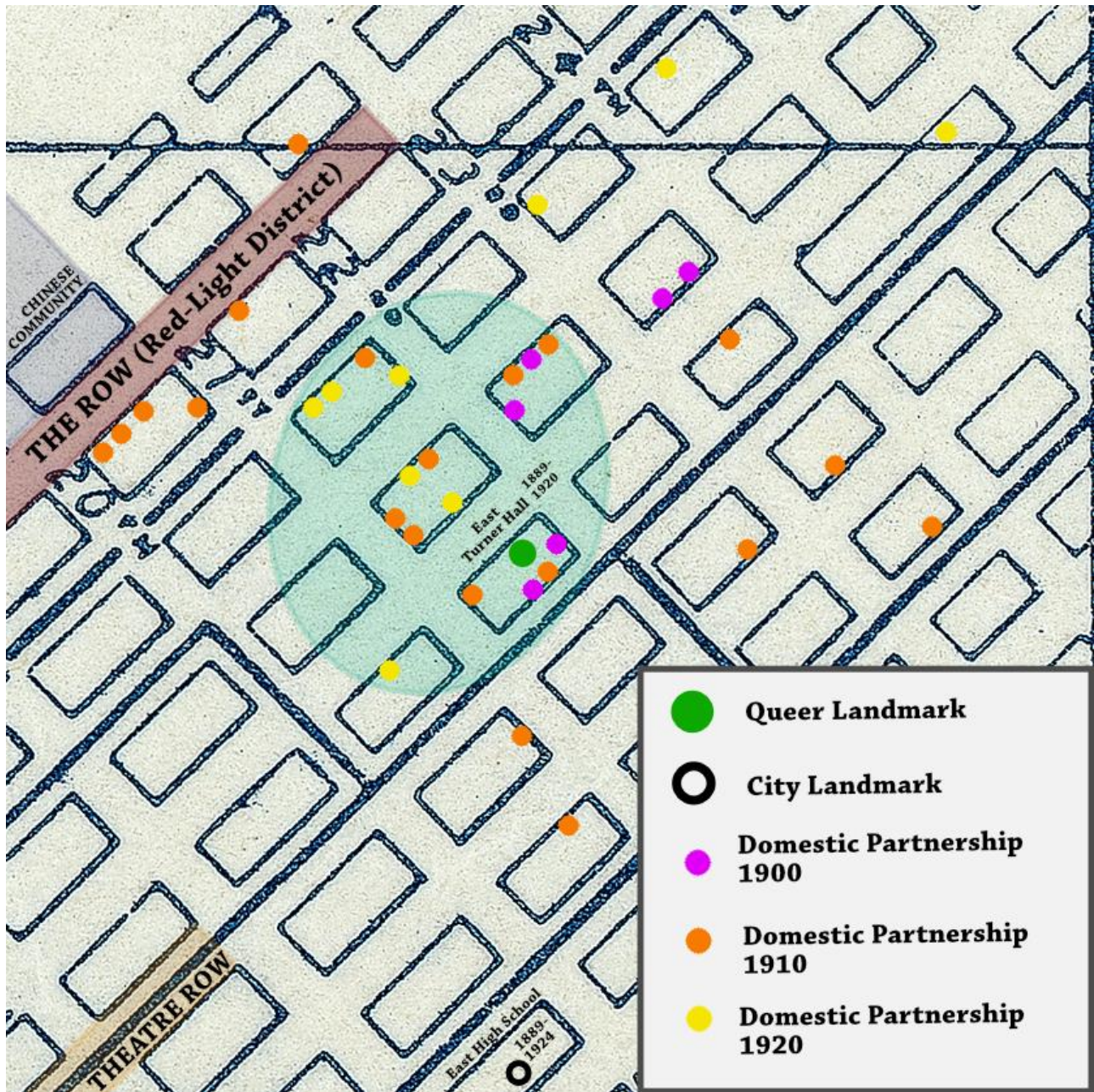


Figure 4. A map of the East Turner Block, which was a predominantly Black enclave of domestic partnerships that remained in the area from at least 1900 to 1920. It is worth noting that the domestic partnerships within the shaded area consisted predominantly of American-born Black or mixed-raced individuals, while those clinging to the edge of the Row or outside of the shaded area were mostly white immigrants.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEMPLE OF THE ARTS – 1915 – 1920

Harlem of the West

“JAZZ MUSIC” seemed to shout out from the page of *The Denver Post*. “A brazen, screaming, screeching, confusion of whang-banging, intermingled with moans and groans, cowbells, sleighbells, skillets, Chinese gongs, barnyard bedlam and all noises weird and unearthly that human ingenuity can suggest.”⁹³ Directed at a white readership, such a description reflected mainstream anxiety over the new musical style crooning out of the venues along north Welton Street. Only four blocks east of the East Turner Block, the area was rapidly populating with Black professionals, musicians, and laborers who had relocated to Denver primarily from the Jim Crow South. And at the center of it all was Fern Hall, featuring young couples energetically dancing to the syncopated “rag” of Morrison’s Jazz Orchestra as early as 1917.⁹⁴ This area of the Five Points neighborhood—surrounding the “Welton Corridor” from 24th to 30th Streets—was the Black entertainment district of Denver, hosting up to fifty bars and clubs during its height in the mid-20th century. But on a hot summer evening in 1917, the gyrating youth of Fern Hall were at the very beginning—and at the very center—of a cultural watershed that would transform this five-way streetcar stop into the “Harlem of the West.”⁹⁵

One thing to understand about the Five Points neighborhood is that it remained predominantly white until the 1920s, when a housing boom caused many of its white residents to move to newer and nicer neighborhoods. These neighborhoods developed racist laws to keep people of color out and prevent white businesses from catering to Black customers—beginning

⁹³ “JAZZ MUSIC,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 6 July, 1917).

⁹⁴ “Baseball,” (Denver, *The Denver Star*, 14 July, 1917).

⁹⁵ Laura M. Mauk, *The Five Points Neighborhood of Denver*, (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 6-8.

with the Black and Tan Order of 1916, which forbid businesses from serving multiple races in one establishment—effectively creating a Black ghetto within Five Points.⁹⁶ Back during the later 1910s, however, the area housed German, Jewish, Irish, and Hispanic residents with a rapidly growing Black population along the southeast side of the train tracks and around north Welton Street. Though white residents were still in the majority by 1915, the density of Black residents and businesses settling in the blocks around 26th and Welton began to reflect the growing influence of Black culture in that area. Unsurprisingly, such visibility served as a cultural beacon for Black migration in the West, attracting professionals, laborers, and artists alike throughout the 1910s. Simultaneously, the Welton Corridor also began to host a growing number of saloons and dance halls, developing into an entertainment district by late in the decade.⁹⁷ By 1920, Black domestic partners had settled in the blocks above 25th between California and Washington Streets, within a stone’s throw away from Fern Hall and Denver’s other nascent jazz hotspots like Rice & Rice Confectionary and Ice Cream Parlor.⁹⁸

These partnerships were both male and female—though predominantly female—working class, with an average age of 43 and an average age difference of just under 11 years. Though this cluster of domestic partnerships is noticeably smaller than the other, what’s notable is that all but one of these partnerships contained individuals who worked different occupations from one another, dramatically decreasing the likelihood that they were living together merely out of convenience. With an “artist” counted among these partners—an uncommonly listed occupation—one could assume that the housing conditions were also favorable for the bohemian

⁹⁶ "Public Safety and the Commissioner's Statement," (Denver, *The Colorado Statesman*, 28 June, 1913)

⁹⁷ "Five Points-Whittier Neighborhood History," The Denver Public Library, < <https://history.denverlibrary.org/five-points-whittier-neighborhood-history>>, Last visited 7 December, 2022.

⁹⁸ Untitled, (Denver, *The Colorado Statesman*, 15 June, 1918), 5.

lifestyle. The only white individual within this grouping lived with a Black partner, which would not have attracted the same attention as a heterosexual interracial pairing, but nonetheless reflected a mixed-race dynamic that was evidently absent from other parts of Five Points. By 1920, the Department of Safety's Black and Tan Order evidently had its intended effect in segregating businesses both above and below the 20th Street race line.

Queer historians have demonstrated how the Black queer communities of New York and Chicago first formed within Black entertainment districts toward the advent of the Jazz Age, attracting members of all races to the jazz venues that were unparalleled elsewhere in the city.⁹⁹ Given this grouping of Black domestic partnerships within Denver's jazz quarter, paired with the knowledge of where queer Black neighborhoods developed in cities like New York (Harlem) and Chicago (Bronzeville), it is entirely possible that this was yet another queer enclave tied to a nearby entertainment district. Furthermore, every single jazz performance north of 20th Street up until 1920 occurred at one of four locations: Fern Hall and Rice & Rice Confectionary on the same block, Old Colony Hall, and East Turner Hall.¹⁰⁰ Since Old Colony sat near 28th and Larimer Streets, far away from other similar venues or any groupings of domestic partnerships, it appeared to have served the Black community but lacked evident ties with any larger entertainment district or potentially queer area. East Turner, however, displayed a high concentration of domestic partnerships from as early as 1900 to 1920, and sat only a few blocks away from the Windsor Entertainment District. Given that the building was destroyed in a fire in

⁹⁹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 243-266; Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town*, 98-104; Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 68-70.

¹⁰⁰ The mass majority of these performances occurred at Fern Hall. Rice & Rice hosted jazz every Sunday starting in 1918, there were a handful of formal events at Old Colony which featured a "jazz orchestra," and a few jazz performances were recorded to have occurred in East Turner Hall.

1920, it is not surprising that East Turner is not popularly linked to Denver's jazz history. However, it appears to have been among the city's very first repeated jazz venues.¹⁰¹

One prominent thing that my data revealed to me was that the mixed-race dynamics between domestic partnership groupings became nearly non-existent by 1920—the only exceptions being the interracial domestic partnership mentioned on the previous page, and the Black domestic partners living south of 20th Street within the Windsor District. The other groupings of domestic partnerships from 1920, either white or Black, became homogenous. With the Ku Klux Klan establishing its Colorado chapter in 1915 and rapidly growing to cultural and political dominance by the 1920s, as well as the recent enforcement of the Black and Tan Order, this stark racial segregation of communities on either side of 20th Street and Park Avenue makes sense within the context of an expanding white supremacist mainstream.¹⁰² Interestingly, the only bastions of interracial communal dynamics among domestic partnerships in 1920 survived within the Windsor District, where venues appear to have potentially defied the 1916 Black and Tan Order, and within the Black entertainment district near 26th and Welton Streets, where the Order was more or less unenforced within predominantly-Black establishments. Such dynamics, however, did not survive in white communities, even among the bohemians spreading out within the stylish apartments and subdivided mansions of Capitol Hill.

Capitol Hill

Located south of 20th Avenue, the Capitol Hill neighborhood rises steadily uphill, ascending eastward from Broadway. When the city sprawl began to encroach on the first streetcar suburbs during the 1880s, like Curtis Park in northern Five Points, Denver's wealthiest

¹⁰¹ "Permit Given to Wreck Turner Hall," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 16 July, 1920)

¹⁰² Abbott, *Colorado*, 273-278.

residents began to build their homes on the higher ground east and southeast of downtown. However, when apartment buildings were constructed throughout the western part of the neighborhood during the 1910s and 20s, the wealthy moved further east to City Park, Park Hill, Montclair, and Hilltop, and south below 7th Avenue—the southern boundary of the greater Capitol Hill neighborhood. The area, in turn, transformed into a white working- and lower-middle class neighborhood, known to house the bulk of Denver’s bachelors and bachelorettes within the new sprawling apartment buildings and old subdivided mansions left behind. Such a transition began as early as 1906, when the white bohemians of Denver began to settle within the formerly prestigious residences at the very northwestern corner of Capitol Hill; a development called Brinton Terrace.¹⁰³

An ornate Tudor-style row of townhouses, journalist Francis Wayne called the residences the “nest of Denver’s Greenwich Village” in a 1919 feature he wrote for *The Denver Post*—a parallel meant to highlight the area’s bohemian culture.¹⁰⁴ The 1882 development originally housed members of Denver’s upper crust, but as the area densified, the wealthy tenants likely moved further east. As early as 1906, *The Denver Post* gossiped that “Brinton Terrace began to run down at the heels,” attracting bohemians who allegedly “like[ed] this sort of thing” because “the possibilities of a ‘come back’ [was] too alluring.”¹⁰⁵ Whether that was the actual reason for the bohemian settlement of Brinton Terrace or not, the opinion of *The Denver Post* was that there had “always been an aloofness among [the bohemians] because of widely separated residences. Now they [were] to be colonized.”¹⁰⁶ Though we know that Denver’s bohemian enclaves shifted

¹⁰³ “Denver’s Capitol Hill,” *Colorado Encyclopedia*, <<https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/denver-s-capitol-hill>>, Last visited 7 December, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ “Denver’s ‘Greenwich Village’ Begun by Architect Sterner,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 1 June, 1919).

¹⁰⁵ “Artists Make This Terrace Their Center,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 16 July, 1906).

¹⁰⁶ “Artists Make This Terrace Their Center,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 16 July, 1906).

around the area southeast of Theatre Row, it is true that even a semi-permanent location was difficult to nail down in any given year aside from the enclave along Glenarm Place. However, Brinton Terrace became the *known* center of Denver's "Little Bohemia" over the course of the 1900s and 1910s; and by 1920, it anchored one of the densest groupings of domestic partners in the city. The other two dense groupings were located only three blocks to the east and six blocks to the southeast, evidently spreading across North Capitol Hill.¹⁰⁷

When combined with their connection to the bohemian enclave at Brinton Terrace and the knowledge that the modern (post-WWII) queer community of Denver existed within the greater Capitol Hill neighborhood, these characteristics provide a compelling argument for the nascent-queer context of north Capitol Hill by 1920. These groupings of domestic partners were overwhelmingly upper-working class (literate labor), female, and were entirely Caucasian and American born. Most of them worked in different occupations from one another, and they had an average age of 38 with an average age difference of less than 7 years. They also held the highest density of artistic occupations found in any of my data, including an artist, music teacher, orchestra pianist, music company bookkeeper, and a magazine writer—all of whom were female. However, while a few male domestic partnerships clung to edges of these groupings or to the eastern side of Broadway, half of the 1920 male examples located south of 20th Street were still found along Theatre Row or within the Windsor District, indicating at the lasting draw that such areas potentially still held for queer men. But could such a skewed gender dynamic in Capitol Hill potentially hint at a larger cultural shift?

¹⁰⁷ "Denver's 'Greenwich Village' Begun by Architect Sterner," (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 1 June, 1919).

Such a shift could have been the introduction of Freudian theory into popular consciousness after World War I, sparking a profound change in the way that mainstream American culture understood and interacted with sexuality. Layering over hereditarian beliefs, Freudian theory shifted the focus from the body to the mind, stating that sexual desires reflected a natural yet complicated internal psyche that should be explored rather than repressed. This theory fit in well with the bohemian mindset, and when it settled within the post-war mainstream culture of the youth, America's first sexual revolution commenced.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, in trendy places like Greenwich Village and Harlem, where bohemians visibly violated conventional middle-class norms of sexuality, they also encouraged bisexual experimentation in everyone, but especially among young women. This was largely reflected by a cultural fascination with lesbianism throughout the 1920s, which was often fetishized by the heterosexual male-dominated mainstream. Bohemians accepted bisexuality among women as long as it was exclusively sexual in nature and temporary. While bohemians stigmatized long-term homosexuality in contrast, such permissiveness still allowed for queer subcultures to form and flourish within bohemian spaces.¹⁰⁹

This was potentially the case on the 1600 blocks between Pearl and Clarkson Streets, where one of the densest enclaves of female domestic partnerships formed within the shadow of the founding church of the Colorado College of Divine Science. The organization was founded and led by women who sought a divine path with a more harmonious relationship between science and religion, given how women's bodies and health were historically controlled by male medical "experts" or science-resistant religious leaders. This was an all-woman led and operated

¹⁰⁸ Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles*, Kindle location 918-969.

¹⁰⁹ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 82-88.

community that taught atypical and even taboo theories about a woman's role in modern Christianity.¹¹⁰ With musicians and writers living so closely together within such a small area—an unusual cluster within my data—it appears that Bohemia and the Church of Divine Science found comfortable common ground in their rejection of the mainstream, and potentially as a haven for queer partnerships. With two other groupings of (mostly female) domestic partnerships gravitating toward the bohemian cultural center of Brinton Terrace, this portion of north Capitol Hill potentially hosted a few small predominantly lesbian residential enclaves, or a larger residential queer community that stretched from Broadway to Clarkson Street, and from 16th to 18th Avenue. This could certainly have served as the foundation for the late-20th and early-21st century queer community that still calls Capitol Hill home to this very day.

As the late-Progressive Era rapidly re-interpreted Denver's public spaces during the mid-1910s with the Black and Tan Order, statewide prohibition, and the abolition of prostitution, the city's nightlife and problem bodies were effectively forced underground or into racial ghettos. However, the world of commercialized vice, marginalized subcultures, and interracial dynamics thrived within the semi-private/semi-public spaces of speakeasies. These underground venues may have survived within the Windsor District, or they could have potentially clustered near 17th and Glenarm Place, where Denver's queer nightlife would re-surface during the late-1930s and thrive into the early-80s. With the YMCA setting up its headquarters at 16th and Lincoln Street in 1906, two blocks directly south of Brinton Terrace, the establishment gradually replaced the role that Turkish Baths played for the gay men of Denver, likely encouraging their eventual migration eastward into Capitol Hill.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Nona L. Brooks, "The History of Divine Science," Althea Center for Engaged Spirituality, <<https://www.altheacenter.org/our-history>>, Last visited 28 October, 2022.

¹¹¹ Denver City Directory, 1906; Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1903-1904; Chauncy, *Gay New York*, 151-159.

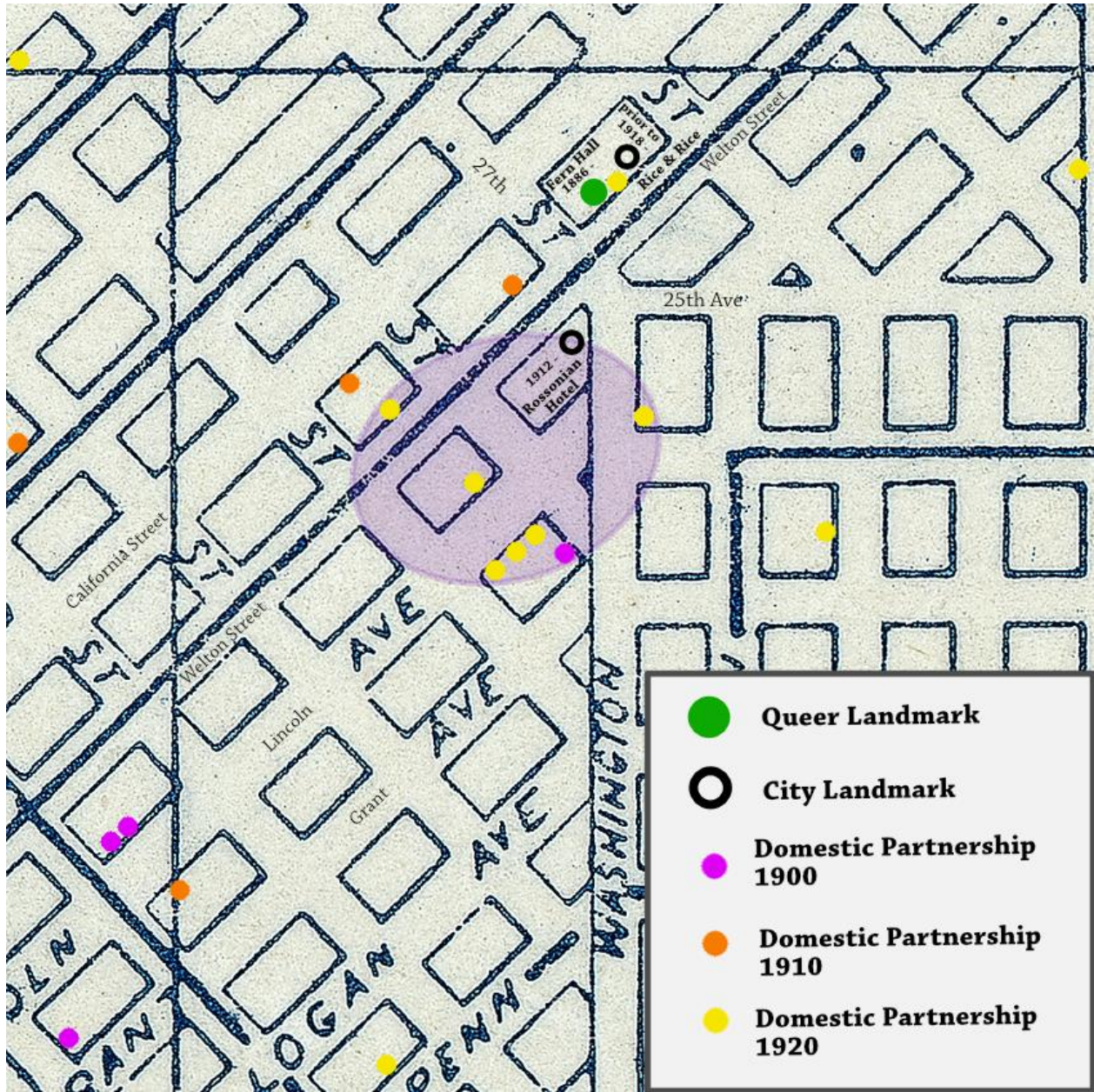


Figure 5. A map of the Five Points area along Welton Street and the small enclave of predominantly Black domestic partnerships. While this grouping is less dense than the others in this study, the demographics of these domestic partnerships highlighted them as a potentially queer enclave. Given its status as one of the earliest jazz venues in the city, Fern Hall is labeled as a potentially queer landmark due to the connection scholars have made between queer communities and jazz entertainment districts during the 1920s.

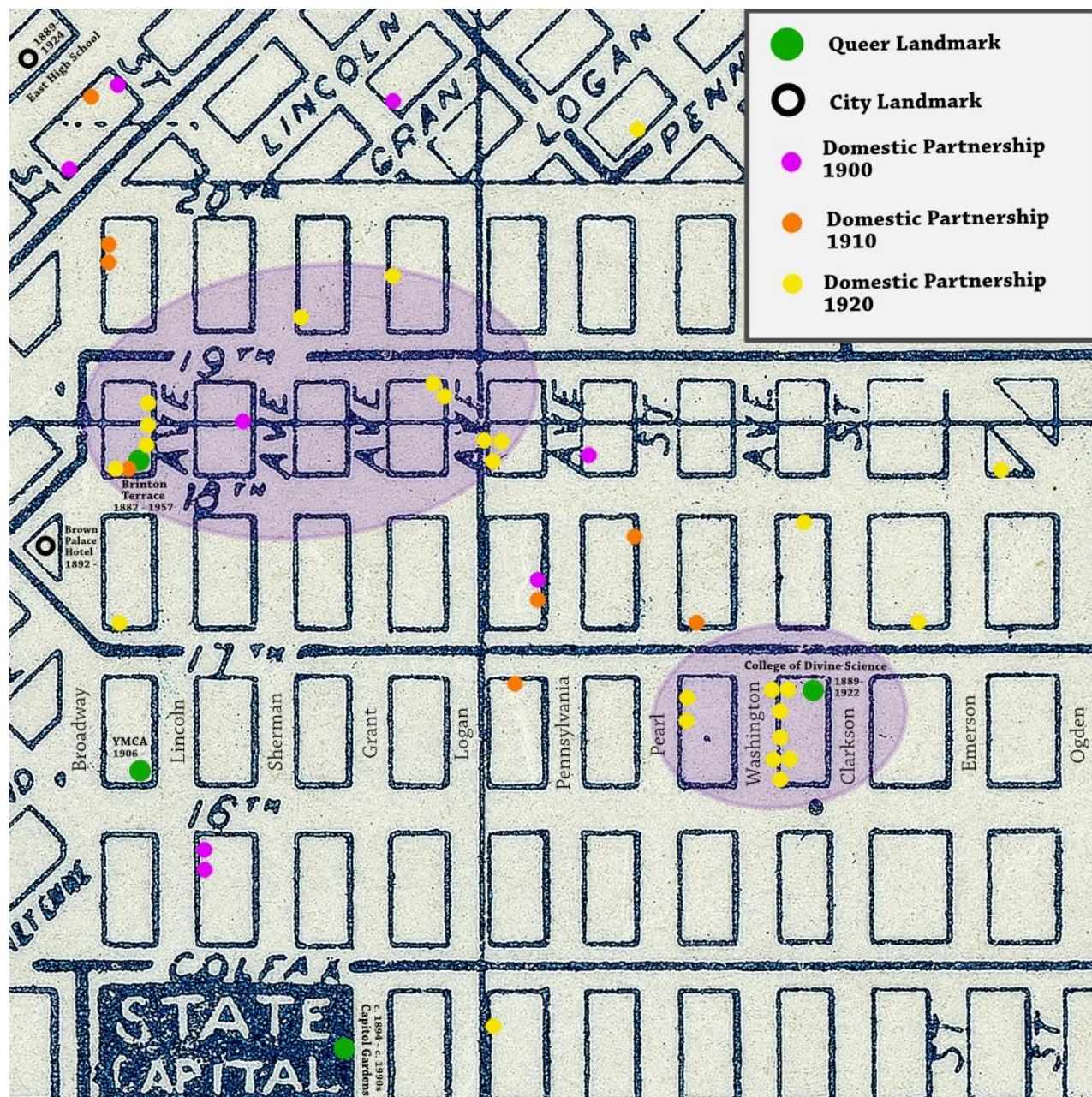


Figure 6. A map of the most prominent enclaves of domestic partnerships (all recorded as Caucasian) from the 1920 Census data. While one enclave appears to surround to the bohemian community in and near Brinton Terrace, the other clings to the College of Divine Science.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

It is clear at this point that Denver's Capitol Hill neighborhood was not the city's first queer enclave or community. Queer people in Denver had begun to band together for safety and belonging at least as early as the 1880s, creating a small self-aware queer community within the Windsor District that served a niche purpose in the larger world of commercialized vice. By the turn of the century, potentially queer residential enclaves had begun to form around East Turner Hall just a few blocks northeast of the Windsor District, as well as among the bohemian community surrounding the Albany Turkish Baths. While the mixed-race enclave around East Turner Hall remained in the area until 1920, when fire and early urban renewal transformed the surrounding blocks, the bohemian enclave spread eastward into north Capitol Hill during the first two decades of the century, planting the seeds for the queer community that would eventually become culturally synonymous with the area.¹¹²

Even though Denver's queer history prior to World War II has yet to be published, research by David Duffield—head of the Colorado LGBTQ History Project and a trailblazer in Colorado's early queer history—has confirmed the existence (and location) of a queer establishment in the basement of a steakhouse on 17th Street and Glenarm Place called the “Snake Pit.” Raided by police in 1939, this venue appears to have been the first entirely queer establishment recorded in the city of Denver.¹¹³ This would pin-point Denver's cis male homosexual nightlife during the late-1930s just one block northeast of the densest grouping of

¹¹² “Permit Given to Wreck Turner Hall,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 16 July 1920); “Owners of Property Soon to be Paid for Broadway Extension,” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 28 April 1920).

¹¹³ David Duffield, “Queer Spaces in Denver 1870-1980,” *Historic Denver* (Spring 2022), <<https://historicdenver.org/hd-news-spring-2022-cover-story/>>, Last visited 7 December, 2022; Noel, Thomas J. “Gay Bars and the Emergence of the Denver Homosexual Community.” *Social Science Journal* 15 (1978): 59-74.

domestic partnerships from the 1900 data, those surrounding the Albany Turkish Baths. Considering that the next three queer establishments to be identified were located only one block southwest on Glenarm and Welton, —Theatre Bar & Lounge (1955), The Back Door (1959), and The Court Jester (1961)—all within a single block of each other and the Snake Pit, it is likely that the blocks just west of the Brown Palace Hotel were home to Denver’s post-prohibition cis male homosexual nightlife.¹¹⁴ Evidently, this former residential queer enclave evolved into a queer entertainment district as the area densified. By the 1970s, similar establishments appeared along Broadway (only a block or two to the west) between 12th and 20th Streets, which would remain the center of the city’s cis male homosexual nightlife until developers transformed the area throughout the 1970s, and 80s.¹¹⁵

There are very few physical vestiges of Denver’s 19th and early-20th century queer communities, with the Windsor Block almost-entirely transformed due to its vicinity to Coors Field stadium. But despite the late-20th and early-21st century “rejuvenation” of the neighborhood, the area is still an entertainment district—albeit without the queer or racially diverse context. Though East Turner Hall burned down in 1920, the foundation and conjoining buildings survived to this day, as well as many of the historical residences in the surrounding blocks. The area around north Welton Street has been designated a Historic Cultural District, preserving much of the area’s original character. However, the larger Five Points neighborhood has been a 21st-century hotbed for gentrification and, regardless, has still suffered from transformative development projects. Capitol Hill has attracted the attention of preservationists for more than a generation, as well as a new wave of wealthy residents drawn back to the

¹¹⁴ “Homosexuals in Denver: Clientele Feels Safer in ‘Gay Bars,’” (Denver, *The Denver Post*, 16 February, 1965)

¹¹⁵ Advertisements throughout the issue, (Denver, *OUT FRONT*, Vol. I, No. 1, 2 April, 1976).

neighborhood's historical charm. Therefore, countless residences that housed Denver's mid and late-20th century queer community survive to this day, as well as much of the city's current queer population. Even though the city's urban landscape has changed dramatically over the last century, it is important to recognize that queer people not only existed throughout Denver's early history, but that they actually found one another and forged communities based on mutual support and a shared queer identity.

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