

Lawyer Associations

National Committee for Sexual Civil Liberties

Founded in 1970, the National Committee for Sexual Civil Liberties was the first organization in the nation created for gay attorneys. While many of members were lawyers focusing on the repeal of oppressive sex laws through the courts or legislatures, some participants were scholars and professionals in other disciplines.

Arthur C. Warner, a graduate of Harvard Law School, was co-chair of the National Committee as was law professor Walter Barnett. In 1972, Tom Coleman, a law student from Los Angeles, and Craig Patton, a law student from Ohio, joined the group. They worked closely with New York attorney E. Carrington Boggan – one of the founders of Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund – and others to successfully lobby the American Bar Association to adopt a resolution in 1973 calling for the repeal of laws criminalizing private noncommercial sex between consenting adults.

Membership in the National Committee was by invitation only. As the decade progressed, several gay lawyers and professors became members: Don Knutson, former USC law professor and founder of Gay Rights Advocates in San Francisco; Jay Kohorn of Los Angeles; Jerry Gerash, founder of the Gay Coalition of Denver; David A.J. Richards, professor at New York University School of Law; William Reynard, Denver attorney who served on the board of the national ACLU; Thomas DePriest, founding president of the Virginia Gay Alliance; Leonard Graff, legal director of Gay Rights Advocates; Thomas Horn, San Francisco lawyer; Larry Long, staff attorney with the San Francisco Bar Association; John Quigley, professor at Ohio State University School of Law; Matthew St. George, law student and later a lawyer in Los Angeles; John Vaisey, San Francisco gay rights litigator; and William Gardner, Buffalo gay rights litigator.

The National Committee held meetings in major cities throughout the nation. The organization and its members had many victories: winning major court cases enhancing sexual civil liberties; convincing law revision commissions in several states to recommend repeal of sodomy laws; securing executive orders from governors; and convincing bureaucrats to interpret existing laws in a manner supportive of gay rights.

In 1982, the association dissolved as such. After that, Arthur Warner and a small group of non-lawyers operated as the American Association for Personal Privacy.

References:

(1) Jeffery Kosbie, “How the Right to be Sexual Shaped the Emergence of LGBT Rights,” *Journal of Constitutional Law* (Aug. 2020) ([link](#))