

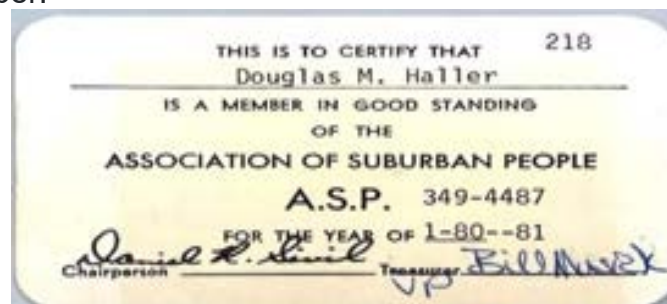


# QUEER HISTORY IN BERKLEY

**Rachel Patterson**

On Sunday, June 25, 2022, Berkley celebrated its queer community by hosting the Berkley Pride Block Party at 12 Mile and Robina with massive attendance. However, that inaugural event was not the first time queer locals have found a place to gather in Berkley.

Born out of a series of discriminatory arrests by Wayne County Sheriffs engaged in a sting operation targeting homosexual socialization, the cleverly-named Association of Suburban People was founded in late 1975. Membership was drawn from multiple Detroit suburbs, including Berkley, and initially consisted of gay white men. Perks of being a member included access to bail in case of all-too-common arrest; membership cards included the founder's phone number.



The Association aimed to provide opportunities for queer fellowship, networking, and political activism. According to a 1977 press release, "the primary function of the [Association of Suburban People] is to advance and defend the legal and civil rights of persons whose sexual or affectional orientations have subjected them to social or legal discrimination. The Association has established three major thrusts of activity. First, ASP will work to eliminate laws penalizing private sexual acts between consenting adults... Second, ASP will work to influence legislation enacted by State and Local governments to eliminate discrimination based on sexual orientation. Third, ASP will provide to its members and friends social alternatives to the bars in a suburban setting. Membership in ASP is open to any registered voter residing in the Detroit Metropolitan Area. It is not affiliated with any political party, but will endorse and support political leaders supporting its goals".



*1982 Association of Suburban People Executive Board*

Many of the group's events were held in private homes and often hosted by members. One such event was The Raunchy Western Revue, a wild west themed pageant of drag performances and camp held in member Chuck Latona's Berkley backyard.



Photo Courtesy of Tom Retzloff, Association of (Gay) Suburban People



Members hosted ski weekends, picnics, film showings, card nights, political activism events and forums for discussion on topics related to the queer experience.

August 16, Saturday -- Fruit (of course), Champagne, and Beer Party, Chuck Latona's home starting at 9:00. The address is 2524 Coolidge, Berkley. Come to rear door. FREE to members; \$2:00 others.

August 1980 ASP Newsletter

Sunday  
Oct. 10  
ASP MEETING - ROBERTO'S Coolidge & Cotolpo, Berkley  
Dinner at 5:30, Meeting at 7:00. No dinner served after 5:45. A Business Meeting with the election of the Information Officer, Reports from Committees and a discussion of "The Goals of ASP in 1983" led by the Executive Board.

ASP Calendar October 1982



1 1982 October ASP Calendar

The Association of Suburban People also held events in public spaces, including a dance at the Berkley American Legion in March of 1978, attended by more than 150 people. The 1978 edition of *The ASP News and Happenings* described the event as having turnout lower than anticipated, even losing \$75 hosting the event, but took pride in the fact that they had “liberated on American Legion Hall.”



*Flyer for the 1978 ASP Disco*

Enclosed please find a flyer for our Saturday, March 11 Disco Party in Berkley. Be sure to mark your calendar and then pass the flyer out to a friend or at the bar. The Hall is very nice and we are specializing in low drink prices for this dance. Bring your friends and party down,

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*ASP Newsletter March 1978*

Association business and membership meetings were held at Berkley restaurants, including Roberto's and the Spaghetti Company. In 1985 the Association changed its name to the SouthEastern Michigan Gay and Lesbian Association (SEMGLA), which better reflected the group's activism that by that point had spread throughout the metro-Detroit area.

Sunday, Feb. 22 -- January General Membership Meeting, The Spaghetti Co., Woodward at Catalpa (11½ Mile Rd.) Cash bar and dinner at 5:30 PM, meeting at 7 PM. Guest speakers from Metra Magazine. Open House after meeting. BYOB. mad; we need to demand, not beg.

*ASP Newsletter February 1981*

Sunday, Nov. 9 -- General Membership Meeting. Will be held at the Spaghetti company on Woodward at Catalpa (11½ Mile). Dinner at 6:00 PM; meeting at 7:00 PM. Cash bar prior to dinner. A general menu will be provided with a wide variety of items and prices. Open house following the meeting.

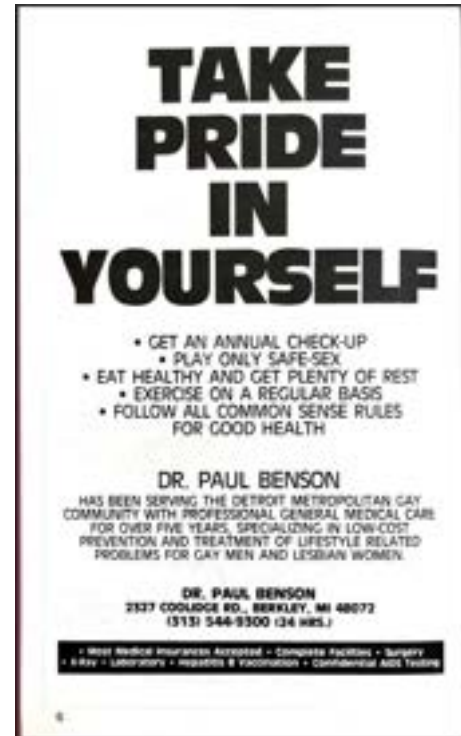
*ASP Newsletter November 1980*



Berkley's legacy of pride has also been exemplified by other members of our community; Dr. Paul Benson is a named supporter of early Michigan Pride Parades throughout the 1980s, as well as an HIV-related care provider. His clinic Be Well Medical Center, located at 1964 W Eleven Mile Road, has been proudly supporting the LGBTQIA+ community in southeast Michigan since 1980 as well as sponsoring our own Berkley Pride Block Party.



*Flyer from 1985 Detroit Pride Week*



*Flyer from the 1987 Detroit Pride Parade*

Have information about Berkley's queer legacy?

Please contact us, we are currently working to expand that part of the Museum collection.



### Visit Us

Berkley Historical Museum  
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Berkley, MI 48072  
248-658-3335  
[museum@berklemich.net](mailto:museum@berklemich.net)

The mission of the Berkley Historical Committee is to preserve and promote the history of the City of Berkley, Michigan and to engage the public through the administration and management of the Berkley Historical Museum.