

When I moved into the abandoned "Lena's Lunch" restaurant on South Main Street in White River Jct., I soon learned — even before I had learned what day of the week our errant landlord was supposed to have the dumpster emptied — that I was going to be living in the "Old South End." In her glory days "the cops wouldn't even dare" set foot into the Old South End for fear of mayhem at the hands of the rambunctious citizens. I arrived in the summer of 1992, but many of my neighbors had been there for their entire lives — in not a few cases over eighty years. They weren't timid people.

"I remembered eating here," said one "old timer," sitting down at our dusty former lunch counter at the filthy former eatery. I asked him if he remembered Lena's Lunch. "Yes," he said, but this was before that. Before that I thought the place had been a bar. "Yes, but before that," he said it had been an Italian restaurant called Papa Guiseppis Italian... "Yeah, I ordered my sub, and they were closing up, and then what happened but the waiters and whatever all came out they were all dressed as women and they all started doing impersonations of — o, you know — Judy Garland and Barbra Streisand."

Oh my God, I thought, I'm living in a former queer bar — what hallowed memories. There ought to be a plaque! I wondered how those girls survived in a town like this. The "Old South End" you see, is the rough section of a rough town, a neighborhood that could serve as a definition for the "Wrong Side of the Tracks," although — running virtually at my back door and through-out White River Junctions Downtown — the tracks are prominent and neither side can be said to be nudging its way into respectability quicker than the other.

A tiny, brand new hamlet of not over thirty structures in 1860, by the turn of this century White River obtained its identity through the over forty passenger and freight trains a day that passed through her epicenter. Barely edging above the 2,000 mark in the permanent population, this meant a significant percentage of her community was just "passing through." Those that weren't actually transient worked at jobs related to the rail road — road repair, freight, shoveling coal. This living tide of humans, arriving and departing daily and nightly with time to spare and money to spend, also spawned numerous service industries, both legitimate and ill.

But it was during prohibition that the town really came into its own. Crates came down the river in barges, large boats, and small and those crates were full of bottles con-

## THERE OUGHT TO BE A PLAQUE; OR NOTES FOR A QUEER HISTORY OF WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, VERMONT

"THE GATEWAY TO VERMONT;" DRAG QUEENS, CRUISING, AND BIKER GANGS

BY OLESTRA

taining something stronger than Moxie. Children in the neighborhood were paid by bootleggers to unload boats and pile bottles in impromptu "storage" dug in the muddy river banks. Rumors of tunnels from river to Main Street are still active. And when a raid was effected, as much contraband as possible was dumped overboard. When the "heat was off" those same children would be pressed into service as divers, and given a nickel a bottle salvaged from a watery grave.

By the turn of the century there were at least in town, the eatery at the depot seating 150 people. Along with a commodious dining room, there was a bar at the Hotel Coolidge, the center and the largest building in town. Featuring semi-circular booths, a mural painting and art-deco/rustic decor, the bar was a popular hang-out for men, and a very cruisey joint. While not a queer bar, it was a reliable place to go and expect to find regulars who were "members of the community" as well as plenty of furtive strangers, waiting for the next day's train, who would entertain anonymous liaisons in the rooms. Thus, a combination of the Volstead Act, large transient population housed in an immense and rambling hotel, and unscrupulous tenement landlords, made White River jct. — much to the vexation of its hardworking full time residents — a hangout for toughs, a haven for bars, and South Main Street "the most dangerous neighborhood in Ver-

mont," according to a member of the local police in the mid 1990's.

In the 1960's, the town was host to the notorious biker gang, the "Mind Benders," who once caused mayhem by squatting on the bridge from the railroad underpass to the Municipal Building and demanding a toll of all unlucky travelers. At some point during the 60s or 70s, the small basement space just inside this underpass housed a queer bar, habituated primarily by men and perhaps called the "Side Door Lounge." And then, of course, there was Papa Guiseppis Italian Restaurant. There may have been brawls between the transvestite waiters and the Mind Benders, but these are, at present unsubstantiated.

And then there was the Dartmouth connection. The ivory tower and White River Jct. — the tough town just five minutes down river — have always been engaged in an uneasy dance, with local people getting a "leg up," so to speak, through ivy league connections and the academics of all categories coming down to "Tunnel Town" for less genteel entertainment. This reminiscence, from the late 1930s, gives us one perspective, from the Junction point of view.

"[A parade of drunken Dartmouth boys] essayed full possession. [At the Bijou Theater, they were] repulsed at the entrance, put up ladders and swarmed in second-story windows. They tore down curtains and threw out seats. The fire

alarm was sounded and the firemen turned water on the mob. The boys retaliated by throwing stones gathered at the nearby sand-bank. The firemen withdrew to the vicinity of the hydrants to protect hose lengths. The students could throw the farthest. During a sortie, students were driven back through an alley. They undertook a surprise attack from the rear, at which, with 140 pounds hydrant pressure, the fireman knocked them all flat. One of the drenched students stuck his head around a corner and yelled, "Say, you fellows are real firemen!" People on Gates street, caught within range of the melee opposite the theatre, rushed into stores. Merchants locked stores and safe doors. Railroad men entered the fray in behalf of the townspeople. The severest casualty was when Bill St. John, an energetic plumber defending the water supply, broke a student's jaw with a hydrant wrench... The state of siege lasted four hours. [Charles R. Cummings, editorial in *The Vermonter*, magazine, vol. 38, p. 71, White River Jct., 1933]

According to several sources who were good looking White River Junction boys in the 1940s and 50s, there was a member of the Dartmouth English Department faculty who was quite notorious for his quite notorious parties. Only the best looking boys from the college and young men of the area were invited and the usual result was an out-and-out orgy.

The old "Alumni Gym,"

had a men's room that was very well known as a meeting place for men interested in exercising muscles and hormones as well. The east bathroom at Baker, according to numerous sources — as well as the author's own experience, has been a cruising spot "for at least a hundred years." Although this library was actually built in 1928, its graffiti and the abrasion of generations of Dartmouth maintenance teams, attest to its service. The Hopkins Center herself, downstairs from Spaulding Auditorium, is said to have had a men's room with large comfortable stalls, open — no doors — "you could watch for hours." There were greasy holes carved in the partitions as well. Maintenance teams, again, patched over these buddy-holes time and time again. Activity finally subsided with the advent of co-education. Much to the relief of administrators intent on a squeaky clean image for the ivy league institution, it became a women's bathroom. Another site for a potential plague.

Dartmouth men's rooms were so active, in fact, that the College had a security officer and would-be NARC who set up semi-permanent surveillance to prevent any horny tools being exercised incognito, or otherwise. According to members of the Dartmouth staff, this officer prosecuted his "moral enforcement" rather over-zealously and is still spending an unusual amount of time at the glory holes.

With the advent of the electronic age, but before the internet, CUCME and the newsgroups, came the first

QUEER, p21

### Curbside

**ROCK STAR** ©1998 BY R. KIRBY

Drew suggested I try writing down stuff like he does, so here goes nothing... I really don't know if this'll work for me. I'm not a writer... I'm not sure what I'm even supposed to write about. But OK, I guess I'll start with the dream I had last night...

I was in this band and we were rocking out in this big-ass arena with hundreds of people screaming and yelling for us like we were Van Halen or something.

I was, playing my head off and totally loving it. I looked out at the audience and mostly what I saw was all these FAGS jumping up and down and going wild, so you know this was a dream and nowhere NEAR reality!! It was SO COOL.

Then all of a sudden, you know how dreams go, it's another day, and I'm in this big-time record execs office and he's talking real seriously about all the things he can do for me, and the one thing I've gotta do first in order for all this great stuff to happen that makes me a big-time star. Namely, I have to fuck him.

HEH HEH HEH

OH, NOW I GET IT

RUB RUB

I remember thinking: yeah, sure, I'll fuck you, no problem... If you can really move me along to the next level, I'm willing to put out a little. It might even be fun, especially since I get to be on top — then I might even get to hurt you a little bit... I just gotta get my music out there!!

SO WHERE D'YA WANT IT, DADDY-O?

WELL! = SNORT = DRUOL = OH UH

I wake up with a raging hard-on. I think this dream is really significant and that I should work even harder and get as good as I can get. I think I really can be a musician! I don't know if I really have to fuck somebody to get somewhere though. I'm sure Drew wouldn't go for it, no matter what. Still, maybe if I

HEY, WHAT'S UP?

GAH!