



## The 1920's–1930's Exhibit Collection©

Tucson Gay LGBTQ Museum And Library

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Text, Audio, And Photographic Format Exhibit

*"It Is This Music, You Just Can't Stop Dancing"*

1926 Lesbian Visiting the Barrio Tiberon in Tucson

The early 1920's in Tucson opened with a population of 20,092 within the city's 5.7 square mile limits and for many a new need emerged for the modern, the wild, the fun, the flamboyant, and the sexual after all the seriousness of the then gone World War 1 Period (see 1900-1910's Exhibit ) was soon left behind. Tucson and America suddenly felt rich, free of the old days, and wanted to party to show it.

The 1920's in Tucson suddenly began to ROAR!

However, in the somewhat conservative Tucson, the wild students from all around the big cities of the United States attending the University of Arizona, and locals who loved a good time on the wild side contrasted sharply with the sometimes only outwardly appearing stalwart conservative leadership of Tucson.



1922 Around Town

But, if you wanted fun on the wild side, there was never any trouble finding it in the Tucson of the 1920's. Even while alcohol was officially outlawed in the United States in what was termed by many as 'The Grand Experiment' that actually took effect on a cold January 16, 1920, in Tucson the booze still flowed very freely.



1925 \*Homosexual (Gay) Actor Ramón Navarro  
Appearing In The Movie Ben-Hur

Alcohol was being made in various size stills and even in people's bathtubs from the campus of the University of Arizona to the warehouses of the downtown area, to Congress Street area hotels, and right up to on top of Mount Lemmon.

Considering that Nogales, Mexico was only a quick drive 60 miles to the south, any kind of hard liquor, wine, or beer a person ever really wanted was easily available as loads of illegal booze constantly made their way first up to Tucson for sale to its residents, and then went on to hundreds of other U.S. towns and cities.



1924 Drag King

Tucson's two Red Light Flesh & Fun Districts of the time, one called the **Barrio Tiberon** located in what would one day be called Tucson's 4th Avenue Arts District, and the other downtown just off of Congress Street were in full swing 24 hours a day, but after dark the intensity of the festivities often found very few human boundaries.

One such establishment, **The Prospector** located just off 4th Avenue was operated by a Lesbian known as Choo Choo Clarissa for her unstoppable spirit who catered to \*Homosexuals (Gays, Bisexuals, Lesbians), and anyone else who liked watching or participating as the genders bended at all hours of the day and night. The Music and Performances were live, the booze flowed freely, was often drank right out of each other's shoes, and the smell of marijuana drifted through the air inside **Choo Choo Clarissa's Pleasure House**.



1930 Downtown

Local Tucson Police and Tucson city officials were often not overly interested in enforcing a very unpopular federal law that split the nation and came from a Congress thousands of miles away back east in Washington, D.C. With the small size of Tucson at the time, there were seldom any of the only 1,520 Federal Prohibition Agents stationed around the United States in the city.

Occasionally, small token raids might be carried out just to placate the federal officials, but they almost always turned out to be almost empty warehouses or homes used as party places containing only a few bottles of hard alcohol to be confiscated just to show they had done something. Even the federal government itself did not always willingly enforce their own new ban on alcohol.

Curiously and almost ironically, one of Tucson's most avid and vocal supporter of the local citizens right to drink alcohol during prohibition were the all local Catholic Churches which maintained that the Federal Government did not have the right to define the morality of citizens.



1923 Around Town

In yet another ironic twist the Ku Klux Klan strongly supported the outlawing of all alcoholic beverages throughout the entire United States for any reason.

The federal law of the 1920's did have one interesting loophole however. Certain United States farmers (a simple garden in the back yard often qualified as a farm) were allowed to make up to 200 gallons of wine or hard cider each year and large numbers of people began making their own alcoholic beverages right at home.

To do so, they often used 'bricks' of wine, sometimes called 'blocks' of wine. To meet the booming demand for grape juice, grape growers in California increased their growing areas over 700% in just the first five years of prohibition alone.



1925 'Mixer' Dance

The juice was commonly sold around Tucson as 'bricks or blocks' of Rhine Wine, 'blocks' of port, and so on along with a warning label: After dissolving the brick in a gallon of water, do not place the liquid in a large jug up in the cupboard for twenty days, because then it would turn into wine.....

One enterprising grape block producer sold nine varieties: Port, Virginia Dare, Muscatel, Angelica, Tokay, Sauterne, Riesling, Claret and Burgundy.



1920's Popular Song

As the 1920's came to a close the heady "This Will Never End Mind Set", cash borrowing binges, taking out personal, business, property and other loans to buy very highly inflated far over their value and often downright phony stocks by the public, business, large investors, trust funds, and even the banks all finally came home to roost on the morning of October 29th, 1929.

That 'Black Friday' morning the **New York Stock Exchange** located back in New York City took a tumble that led to a roller coasting up and down whipsaw only ending with the stock market finally bottoming out in 1932 with 89% of that stock market's value having disappeared into thin air as the country's biggest but by far not its first or even its last depression or financial panic hit the entire nation hard.

Curiously, the residential and property values of the time had already begun their downward slide and had already hit bottom four (4) years before in 1925 but few noticed or gave that economic indicator much of any interest.





1933 Around Town

Although Tucson was a remote small town far away from the big cities of the United States, its population in early 1930 of 28,546 citizens could not escape the serious effects of the Great Depression of the 1930's.

Local Tucson banks suddenly closed their doors unable to return their depositors money and never reopened (at that time no FDIC Insurance existed and depositors were on their own if anything happened), many people employed in Tucson suddenly lost their jobs.

Property owners lost their homes and commercial properties unable to make the payments and soon slept in tents or out on the open ground, and some children ended up homeless surviving as best they could out on the hot dusty dirt streets of Tucson as parents could no longer feed or shelter them.

On Tuesday August 22, 1933 the **Southern Pacific Railway Company** announced that their roundtrip coach car ticket from Tucson to Phoenix and back to Tucson would be \$2.45.



1935 Chevrolet Newspaper Advertisement In Tucson

In Tucson both of Tucson's Red Light Districts, the \*Homosexual (Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual) club owners and their customers soon pitched in to cook up huge pots of stew containing any animal that strayed by and all the vegetables they could get their hands on, beg for, or steal from Tucson's numerous small roadside Truck Farms and private back yard gardens located everywhere around the area.

Hundreds and in time many thousands were fed in the 1930's by the very establishments and people that just a short time before the newly impoverished had turned their noses up at, regularly had the money at one time to frequent, or simply had no idea that a \*Homosexual (Gay or Lesbian) had in some way made their one bowl of soup meal each day then possible. Along the way on December 5, 1933 President Franklin Delanor Roosevelt signed the 23rd Amendment that repealed prohibition, and Tucson was once again officially and legally 'Wet' once again.



1933 The "Tucson Froggy Boys" Club

That Great Economic Depression of the 1930's at the time did however bring all men and women in Tucson (aka The Old Pueblo) even closer together than they had been before. Out of that many lasting bonds, friendships and at times same sex relationships were formed that flourished well into the future decades.

During the same time around Tucson, the **Pioneer**, **Congress**, **Mac Arthur**, and **Santa Rita hotels** cafe's-restaurants and only a very few bars continued to be discrete places for \*Homosexuals (Gays-Lesbians) to meet if you knew which side of the room to be seated at, and at what times to go as long as you were totally discrete at all times when you were there.



1935 Pioneer Hotel In Downtown Tucson

As the decade of the 1930's was in 1939 coming to a close, in Tucson there were 35,236 people living within the 7.7 square miles of its city limits. Gone (almost gone) were all the horses-wagons on the dirt streets of Tucson, Vaudeville Acts began disappearing as Moving Pictures and Radio took over, ice delivery's for the ice box a.k.a. refrigerator, the public's confidence in banks, making your families clothes at home by hand and or machine sewing, buttons started going out as zippers finally became accepted, 10 cents a gallon gasoline, and dressing very young boys in girls clothes a.k.a. Breeching to name but a few began their fade into history.

The earliest known recipient of a Male to Female Sex Reassignment Surgery was Lili Elbe in Berlin, between 1930 & 1931. The operation was started with the removal of the male sex organs and performed by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld.

The patient Lili Elbe went on to have four more subsequent operations that included a last unsuccessful ovarian transplant which then resulted in her death.



1931 Stone Avenue Tucson

All around America there was a feeling of hope for a better future just around the corner going into the next decade. That feeling was being reinforced, and at times created by the President Franklin Delanor Roosevelt during his weekly Fireside Chats to the public heard over the radio in most people's homes and in public places.

At times here and there in the latter 1930's early newspaper articles began reporting in short article clips on their back pages that the Japanese Imperial Military had marched into China after starting their military campaigns in 1931 in Manchuria, China with their full attack coming later on July 7, 1937.

Not much later, the Nazi German Army marched and bombed its way into Poland in a Blitzkrieg Attack that began its attack on September 1, 1939.



1933 Home Entertainment Center in Tucson

Many of the people and those in the government of the United States still remembered the last 'War To End All Wars' (aka World War 1) as it had sent it's young men and nurses over to the war in 1915 (see 1910's-1900's Exhibit) and wanted no part of going "Over There" into get caught up in "Someone Else's Problems" once again anytime soon.



1932 Around The University  
of Arizona Tucson

However, like a volcano, if the rumblings are a warning sign often leading up to something bigger, the  
\*Homosexuals (Gays & Lesbians) of the time period would surely figure right into it along with everyone  
else in many far reaching ways during the worldwide upheaval of the upcoming decade



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