

BOOKS

"Bestial practices"

New book reveals Oregon courts used homosexuality to oust progressive politician

BY MITCH GOULD

In 1904, writes University of Colorado historian Peter Boag in his new book *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (University of California Press, 2003; \$24.95 softcover), Oregon was already "one of the leaders of the progressive movement."

To help win the war on alcohol, the Anti-Saloon League hired a broad-shouldered, baby-faced attorney named Edward McAllister. He had just arrived in Portland, minus his wife. He soon joined with a classmate from Virginia to create a law partnership.

McAllister then commenced racking up big enemies. He joined a group that proposed a stiff tax on lands owned by real estate speculators and helped spearhead Oregon's now-famous citizen initiative system. During the election of 1912, he was also involved with controversial issues such as capital punishment, the vote for women and a funding measure that punished University of Oregon. As Boag tells it, "The results of the election did not bode well for McAllister."

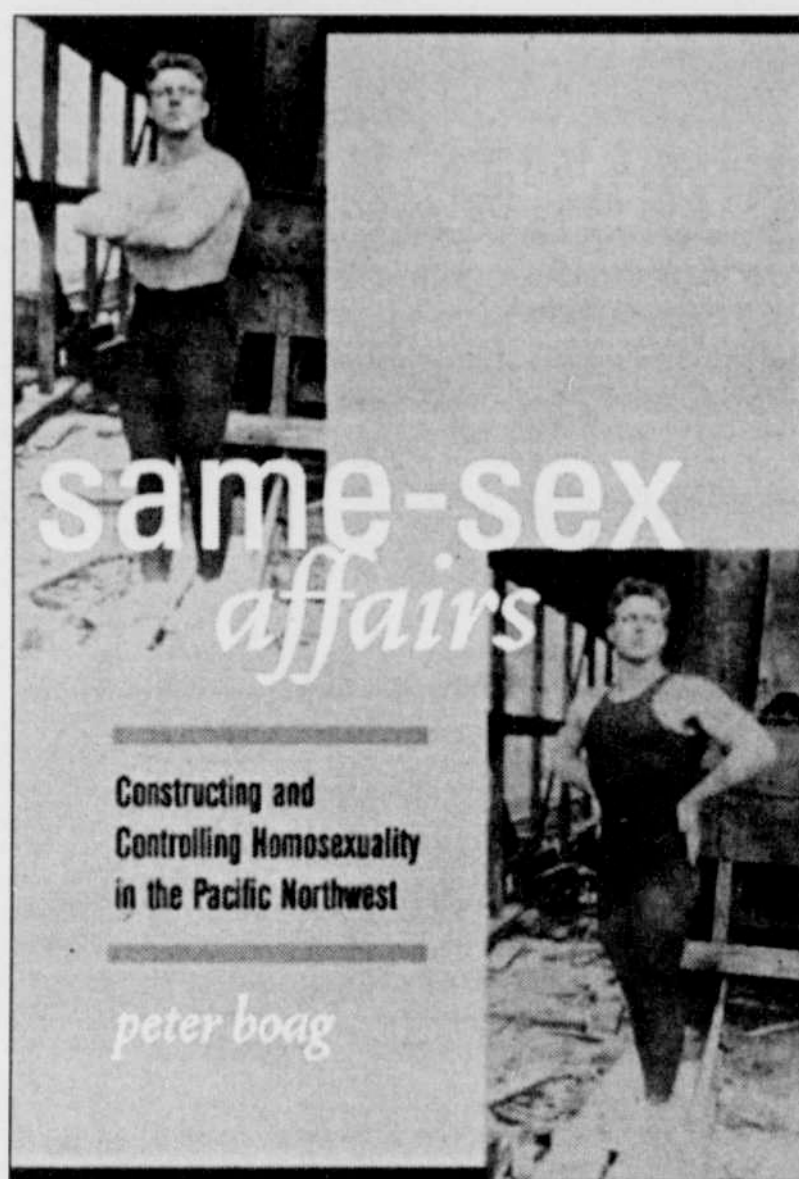
When the election was over, voters soundly trumped most of McAllister's causes. The exception: a repeal of funding for U of O. The university's hometown expressed its outrage in the pages of the *Eugene Daily Guard*.

Hardly a week passed before the *Daily Guard* broke the story of McAllister's "bestial practices" in a homosexual panic called Portland's "Vice Clique," which implicated 68 men. It was followed by similar scandals in 1913 Philadelphia, in 1914 Los Angeles and, just after World War I, in 1919 Newport, R.I. (Is the timing of these other panics a coincidence? If not, we need a plausible explanation, but you won't find one in *Same-Sex Affairs*.)

McAllister lived and worked on Southwest Washington Street—the heart of Portland's gay district. His law office was practically on the corner of the city's "Whitechapel" vice district (nicknamed in reference to Jack the Ripper). During the trial, local men testified that he picked them up and took them home or to his office.

In February 1913, McAllister was convicted of sodomy. "The weight of public opinion against him for his role in the single tax movement, for his stand on university appropriations," says Boag, "played a role" in his conviction. "Nor did being a Democrat in a Republican city and state help his case."

Although the lawyer won his case on appeal, he was disbarred, and his impeccable reputation destroyed. He moved to a southern Oregon farm near Myrtle Creek, where he became active in small-town associations such as the Masonic Lodge. He was only 58 when he died from a stroke in 1926. The *Myrtle Creek Mail* said he was widely respected in the area but "had known tragedy, and persecution, and disappointment."



It's too bad McAllister is the closest thing *Same-Sex Affairs* offers to a hero. Credit Boag with being inclusive: He demonstrates how poor immigrants, transient laborers and the homeless also suffered politically at the hands of homophobic opportunists. But this is a book about sex, crime and victimization; the word *love* never rates its own entry in the index.

Boag is too occupied teasing out sexual sub-species among the homeless and impoverished—based upon small variations in gender identity and sexual techniques—to study the basic question of whether love and commitment helped any of these desperate men lead worthwhile lives.

The author's best results are an account of how the press wavered in covering this "unprintable" topic. But instead of his explanation (censorship), reticence may well have been a humane strategy, which is unexplored.

To his credit, Boag tries to make sense of these events as expressions of great social changes, which is a difficult task for any historian. But he fails to address the steady rise in U.S. churchgoing prior to the scandal, and he gives too little notice of the concern with sexually transmitted diseases just before the widespread introduction of a new syphilis cure (a history brilliantly covered by Alan Brandt).

Despite these drawbacks, *Same-Sex Affairs* draws upon a wealth of original, first-class scholarship, and it provides a unique perspective into the lives of the men who really built Oregon. That includes the loggers and sailors who actually created its vast wealth and the progressive politicians who strove to make the state a national model for good government. **J**

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Seventh Portland Lesbian & Gay Film Festival



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