

P2155 Higgins, Thom L., 1950-1994
Thom Higgins papers, 1950-1994 (bulk 1970-1989).
2.25 cu. ft. (5 boxes and 1 oversize folder).

THOM L. HIGGINS: An Inventory of His Papers

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Thom Higgins, the son of Leo and Katherine Higgins, was born on June 17, 1950, in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin. The family later moved to Minnesota, where Higgins attended Catholic elementary schools in New Brighton and Roseville. He attended Catholic high schools in Minnesota and North Dakota and entered the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks in May 1967 as part of a special program for gifted high school students. He concentrated his studies in journalism and theater and was associate editor, arts and entertainment editor, and columnist for the school paper, *Dakota Student*. In March 1968 he was suspended for his involvement with an underground student publication entitled *Snow Job*.

After his suspension Higgins moved to St. Paul and worked as the chief announcer and program manager for the Radio Talking Book Network (RTBN), a state service for the blind (1969-1970). He also freelanced as a writer for the *Minnesota Daily* and for *Hundred Flowers*, a Twin Cities underground newspaper.

Higgins was the first person in Minnesota to be granted a presidential conscientious objector draft classification (1969). After leaving his position at RTBN in 1970, he became heavily involved in political activities, including volunteer draft counseling and work with Minnesota Clergy and Laity Concerned, two committees of the Minnesota Human Rights Council, and the steering committee of the University Strike Against the War (May-June 1970).

During the remainder of the 1970s Higgins worked as an advertising copywriter. In addition to freelance work, he was employed by a number of Twin Cities firms, including Olson's Planned Interiors (1971), Scoutten Associates (1972-1973), and Colle & McVoy Advertising (1973-1974). During this period he also wrote for the magazine *MPLS*. and remained politically active, working for Jack Baker's campaign for Minneapolis City Council (1973), Gary Flakne's campaign for Hennepin County Attorney (1974), and Steve Carter's campaign for president of the Minnesota Student Association at the University of Minnesota (1976).

In 1981 Higgins entered the nursing program at Minneapolis Community College and received his associate degree in 1983. He worked as a nurse until his death in 1994.

Throughout his adult life Higgins was a leader in the gay rights movement. He was a founding member and officer of several gay organizations, including FREE (Fight Repression of Erotic Expression), The Gay Imperative, and the Church of the Chosen People, a gay pagan religion established in 1975. He was also a member of Target City Coalition and the Cuban Refugee Task Force of Positively Gay.

Frank Hennessy
August 1996

CONTAINER LIST

| Location | Box | |
|-----------------|------------|---|
| P2155 | 1 | Personal papers and miscellaneous related material: 1950-1970. 7 folders. |
| P2155 | 2 | 1971-1976. 7 folders. |
| P2155 | 3 | 1977-1982. 7 folders. |
| P2155 | 4 | 1983-1994. 3 folders. FREE, 1970. 2 folders. Pie file, 1977. |
| P2155 | 5 | Church of the Chosen People, 1975-1982. Memorial sacrifice, 1977. Cuban refugees, 1980, 1990. Nursing school, 1981-1983. |
| +240 | | Printed matter, [undated, 1973-1985]. 1 oversize folder containing 52 items. |

DESCRIPTION OF THE PAPERS

Personal papers and miscellaneous related material, 1950-1994.

The personal papers are arranged chronologically and document the events in Higgins' life as outlined in the biographical sketch. In addition to the papers described below, a considerable amount of personal correspondence with friends and family is found throughout this series.

The earliest papers (1950-1964) include copies of Higgins' birth certificate and an assortment of grade school papers, programs, awards, and newspaper clippings.

Papers related to Higgins' attendance at Assumption Abbey Prep in Richardton, North Dakota (1965-1966), include registration material, prayers and hymns, class papers, and programs and other papers related to school sports, theater, and musical events. There is also a group of programs, correspondence, and miscellaneous related papers connected with Higgins' participation in the North Dakota state student congress (1966).

The most prominent papers associated with Higgins' activities at the University of North Dakota consist of a collection of articles he wrote for the student newspaper (1967) and a group of papers documenting his suspension from the University (March 1968), including an original and copy of the underground paper, *Snow Job*.

Papers from 1968 to 1970 primarily reflect Higgins' political activities, the most significant being correspondence and forms related to his dealings with the Selective Service and a group of notes and printed matter connected with the student strike at the University of Minnesota in spring 1970.

Beginning in 1971 and continuing through the mid-1970s there are papers related to Higgins' work as a copywriter, including correspondence, client lists, radio scripts, brochures, and print advertisements. Also included are copies of articles Higgins wrote for *MPLS*. (1972) and correspondence, advertising material, and other printed matter related to the election campaigns of Jack Baker (1973), Gary Flakne (1974), and Steve Carter (1976).

Papers from the late 1970s are related primarily to Higgins' involvement in the gay rights movement and consist of correspondence, legal documents, minutes, brochures, flyers, newspaper clippings, and printed matter. Topics include Target City Coalition, a nonprofit corporation created to further gay rights in Minnesota (1977), Anita Bryant and her campaign against gay rights (1977), Gay Pride Day in Minneapolis, and an attempt to amend the Minneapolis civil rights ordinance (1977).

The remaining papers consist primarily of personal correspondence and a group of legal documents related to a grievance Higgins filed when he was discharged from his position as a nurse with Metropolitan-Mt. Sinai Medical Center, Minneapolis (1979).

FREE, 1970.

Includes correspondence, a constitution, minutes, newsletters, pamphlets, articles, and newspaper clippings related to Higgins' participation as a member and officer of FREE, a University of Minnesota student organization and one of the first gay rights organizations in the Twin Cities. Topics include FREE's structure and goals, its weekly dances, the group's efforts at eliminating job discrimination, including a court challenge on behalf of Higgins, who claimed to have been fired by the State Service for the Blind due to his connection with FREE, and a regional gay convention sponsored by FREE and held at the University. There is also a group of articles and reprints on various topics related to homosexuality.

Pie file, 1977.

In October 1977 Higgins gained nationwide notoriety for throwing a pie in the face of Anita Bryant at a press conference in Des Moines, Iowa. The file includes magazine and newspaper clippings related to this and other pie throwing incidents.

Church of the Chosen People, 1975-1982.

Includes correspondence and newspaper clippings related to the church's attempts to gain tax exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service (1975-1982) and a small group of flyers and miscellaneous related material connected with a public sacrifice the church sponsored in memory of the "gay victim" (June 1977).

Cuban refugees, 1980, 1990.

Includes a press release, newspaper clippings, and a roster related to Higgins' work with Positively Gay's Cuban refugee task force, which during the 1980s worked to resettle gay refugees, most of whom were held in a federal settlement camp at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin.

Nursing school, 1981-1983.

Contains documentation of Higgins' education in nursing at Minneapolis Community College including correspondence, registration material, copies of his transcripts, licensure examination results, and articles he wrote for the student paper, *Metronome*.

Printed matter, [undated, 1973-1985].

Includes material on the political campaigns of Jack Baker [1973], Steve Carter [1980?], Gary Flakne [1974], Patrick Hero Schwartz [197-], and Tom Burke; other political campaign matter (including an anti-Allan Spear flyer); advertising samples; Gay Pride Day events [undated, 1985]; and an invitation [197-] to a Festival of Love and Life sponsored by the Coalition Against the ABM [antiballistic missile].