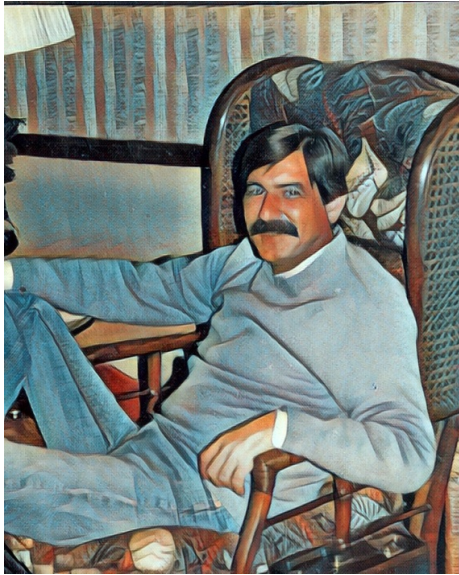


## Craig W. Patton



Craig W. Patton never intended to be a trailblazer for gay rights. In a way, he was conscripted into gay rights advocacy by the Ohio Supreme Court.

Craig grew up in Athens, Ohio – a community with about 20,000 residents located in the southeast region of the state. He was a student at Athens High School where he graduated in 1962. Craig then attended Ohio State University where he graduated No. 2 in his class. He enrolled in Ohio State University School of Law in Columbus, Ohio, where he graduated No. 10 in his class.

Craig passed the bar exam in 1971, expecting to be admitted to the bar forthwith and hoping to start practicing as a junior lawyer with a lawfirm in Columbus. However, there was a glitch.

*“Hearings by an Ohio Committee on the suitability of an Ohio applicant for admission to the Ohio Bar had outraged some civil libertarians because the committee reportedly delved into the explicit sex habits of the applicant.”*

Advocate - May 9, 1973

Craig had been in a same-sex relationship which broke up in the summer of 1971. Upset and vindictive, Craig’s former lover notified the local bar association that Craig was gay. This triggered an inquiry by the association since most forms of private consensual homosexual sex were criminal in Ohio. The association notified the Supreme Court that Craig had good moral character, a requirement for being admitted to the bar. The Supreme Court declined to accept the finding and sent the matter back to the local bar association for further inquiry. The association again recommended Craig for admission to the bar.

Instead of accepting the recommendation, the Supreme Court established a character and fitness committee – an entity that had never existed before. The committee conducted a thorough investigation, culminating in a “star chamber” hearing at which Craig and his former lover were required to testify. Fortunately for Craig, the lover was sorry that he had started this mess and became a witness on Craig’s behalf.

Committee members questioned each of them about their private sexual practices. Did they engage in oral or anal sex, both of which were felonies in Ohio? Committee members were frustrated when both men testified that mutual masturbation was the only

form of sex they had ever engaged in. Mutual masturbation was not a crime.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the committee voted 5 to admit, 3 to deny, and two abstentions. This constituted a bare majority in favor of admission to the bar. So in November 1972, Craig W. Patton became a licensed attorney in Ohio.

“In 1971, a graduate of the Ohio State University Law School who was an avowed homosexual sought admission to the Ohio Bar. To make that determination the Supreme Court of Ohio appointed a special committee which ultimately admitted the person in question. However, since the issue was dealt with by special committee, the fact that in Ohio homosexuality is not a reason for denial of admission to the Bar was not made a matter of public record.” Rhonda R. Rivera, “Our Straight-Laced Judges: The Legal Position of Homosexual Persons in the United States,” *Hastings Law Journal* (1979), fn. 349.

When he was in law school, Craig had aspirations to represent corporate interests, perhaps as a lobbyist in Columbus where state government officials are located. Gay rights advocacy was not on his radar. But after his experience with the bar admission process, he offered to help the National Committee for Sexual Civil Liberties – an organization that assisted him during the bar admission ordeal. He joined the committee which is where he met Thomas F. Coleman in November 1972 at a meeting in Buffalo, New York. Craig and Tom developed a friendship and became colleagues as the two young lawyers attended annual and mid-year meetings of the American Bar Association (ABA) to lobby the organization for gay rights and sex law reform.

Craig did become a lobbyist with a lawfirm in Columbus, representing clients such as U.S. Steel, Ashland Oil, and the Ohio Dental Association. Craig’s father was a well-connected dentist. But there was another dimension of legal practice that interested Craig. He became general counsel to the Club Bath Chain, a trade association of more than a dozen private men’s clubs in various cities throughout the nation. Because the baths were sometimes raided by the police, Craig would work with local attorneys and lawyers with the National Committee to challenge these raids in court.

By attending the ABA meetings twice a year, Craig became acquainted with E. Carrington (Carry) Boggan, a lawyer who was chair of the ABA’s Section on Individual Rights and Responsibilities. Carry was associated with attorney William (Bill) Thom. Carry and Bill were two of the original founders of Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund in 1973. A few years later, Craig, Carry, and Bill formed a boutique law firm in New York City handling specialized cases. The firm was relatively short lived.

Craig became the lawyer for the Leonard Matlovich Foundation in 1976. Leonard Matlovich was expelled from the military in 1975 for being gay but was ordered

reinstated by a federal judge. Matlovich became an icon in the gay community. In addition to running for public office, and giving lectures about his military experiences, Matlovich counseled gays and lesbians on their rights. He also founded the Matlovich Foundation and the Never Forget Foundation to fight for the rights of lesbians and gay men.

Craig bought a large house in Key West, Florida where he operated a guest house catering to gay tourists. Members of the National Committee for Sexual Civil Liberties sometimes met there for retreats.

With his lobbying work in Columbus, the business lawfirm in New York, and select legal work in Key West, Craig bought a private plane so that he could easily reach each point in the triangle.

Burning the candle at both ends, and with HIV spreading rampantly among gay men, Craig's health became compromised, resulting in major changes in his life. The New York firm was dissolved. He sold the Key West property. He left the Columbus firm and moved to Cleveland where he purchased a three-story townhouse that needed major renovations.

As his health deteriorated, Craig found himself at St. Luke's Hospital in Cleveland. Craig died two weeks later on November 18, 1987 at the age of 43.

A memorial service was held, after which a few of those in attendance took Craig's ashes to the shoreline of Lake Erie where they were scattered.

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