

LGBT Legal History Project

Arthur C. Warner

Sexual Civil Liberties Collection

[Arthur C. Warner](#) (1918 - 2007) was an advocate for the sexual rights of consenting adults over the course of five decades beginning in the mid-1950s. He sought to dismantle criminal laws in all 50 states against sodomy, sexual solicitation, and lewd conduct. Although he graduated from Harvard Law School, an arrest under such a law precluded Arthur from becoming a licensed lawyer. This triggered his national campaign for criminal law reform.

The first phase of Warner's national campaign (1966 - 1969) began when he formed a legal committee for an organization known as the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations ([NACHO](#)). This committee built upon the work he had done for a legal committee that he chaired in the 1950s for the Mattachine Society of New York.

The next phase of the campaign began when Warner founded the National Committee for Sexual Civil Liberties in 1970 ([NCSCL](#)). The committee was a "think tank" of gay men who shared Warner's vision of ending the criminalization of consenting adult sexual conduct and speech. Members included practicing lawyers and scholars from professional fields such as theology, sociology, psychology, and history and law. The committee worked largely behind the scenes to press for law reform, occasionally filing *amicus curiae* briefs in appeals that could accomplish reform through judicial precedents. Law professor Walter Barnett served as co-chair of the committee from 1970 to 1974 when the position was assumed by attorney Thomas F. Coleman who served as co-chair from 1974 to 1981.

The final phase of the campaign began in 1982 when the National Committee for Sexual Civil Liberties operated under the auspices of a nonprofit corporation known as the American Association for Personal Privacy ([AAPP](#)). The corporation was originally known as the Sexual Law Reporter during its tenure under the supervision of Thomas F.

Coleman. When Coleman became the executive director of the California Commission on Personal Privacy in 1981, he turned the corporation over to Arthur Warner who then used it as the new public face of the National Committee. AAPP filed *amicus curiae* briefs in court cases and worked with legislators to advance the cause of sexual civil liberties until the late 1990s when Arthur Warner turned his attention to the human brain and its development. He then founded the Sentience Foundation Inc., a nonprofit that sponsored research and programs to study the advancement of the brain's capacities, maintenance, and optimal health.

When Arthur died in 2007, his papers were donated to Princeton University. The [Mudd Manuscript Library](#) describes the collection as documenting "Warner's involvement in legal reform and other issues pertaining to gay rights," adding that the papers "consist of legislative and court documents about cases affecting gay civil liberties, and related memoranda, correspondence, and writings."

The Project

Long [admired](#) by Arthur Warner, attorney Thomas F. Coleman will identify documents in the collection most relevant to sexual civil liberties advocacy, annotate the documents with commentary providing historical context, digitize them, and publish them online. The goal is to make the collection accessible to current and future historians and students as well as advocates for LGBT rights so the contributions of Arthur Warner and his colleagues with the National Committee for Sexual Civil Liberties are more than an obscure historical footnote.

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