



# Alexandria Times

Established in 1797 as *The Alexandria Times and Advertiser*

## Out of the Attic

### The French Quarter Cafe

*Alexandria Times, July 2, 2020*

In 1991, Murray Greenberg, owner of Alexandria's French Quarter Café, and two other plaintiffs sued the office of Virginia Attorney General Mary Sue Terry. Terry's office declined to contest the lawsuit, and so U.S. District Judge Albert V. Bryan, Jr. ruled in favor of Greenberg and his co-plaintiffs. Their victory was a big step forward for the LGBT community in Virginia, overturning a 1934 law that prohibited the sale of alcohol to "homosexuals."

According to the October 25, 1991 edition of the *Washington Blade*, a former Alcoholic Beverage Control commissioner speculated that the discriminatory law had its roots in the desire of Virginians to overturn Prohibition in Virginia, a year after the 21st Amendment ended the federal prohibition on the sale of liquor. The former commissioner guessed that the "wet" crowd was willing to prohibit the sale of alcohol to "homosexuals, pimps, panderers, drunks, and 'B-girls'" to allow "respectable" Virginians to indulge again.

The French Quarter Café's owner Greenberg had, of course, been selling alcohol to the LGBT community for a long time at 808 King St. And while the statute was rarely enforced, Greenberg and his co-plaintiffs, lesbian activist Dale Barnhard, and the Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association of the College of William and Mary sought to formalize the end of the discriminatory prohibition.

Barnhard noted that she and a female companion had been asked to leave a dance club in Alexandria because they were afraid of losing their liquor license for violating the 1934 law. The Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association of the College and William and Mary joined the lawsuit after they had been denied a request to rent a hotel suite for an event.

Bryan ruled the three sections of Virginia's liquor laws pertaining to gays "unconstitutional" and "void." It permitted the serving of alcoholic drinks to members of the LGBT community, the entrance of LGBT members into establishments that served liquor and the hiring of LGBT individuals by licensed establishments to serve drinks.

Twenty-nine years later, it seems amazing that such discrimination was still on the books in 1991.

Greenberg, as one might imagine, was overjoyed by the decision, inviting the Washington Area LGBT community to The French Quarter Café that October 26 for a "Victory in Virginia Day" celebration. The celebrations didn't last forever, as the bar closed in 1994. Today, the building is occupied by an establishment that serves food and drinks of all kinds to patrons regardless of their sexual orientation, thanks, in part, to The French Quarter Café.

*"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.*

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