Prelude to a Gay Legend

Excerpt from The Diana Foundation: 65 Years of History

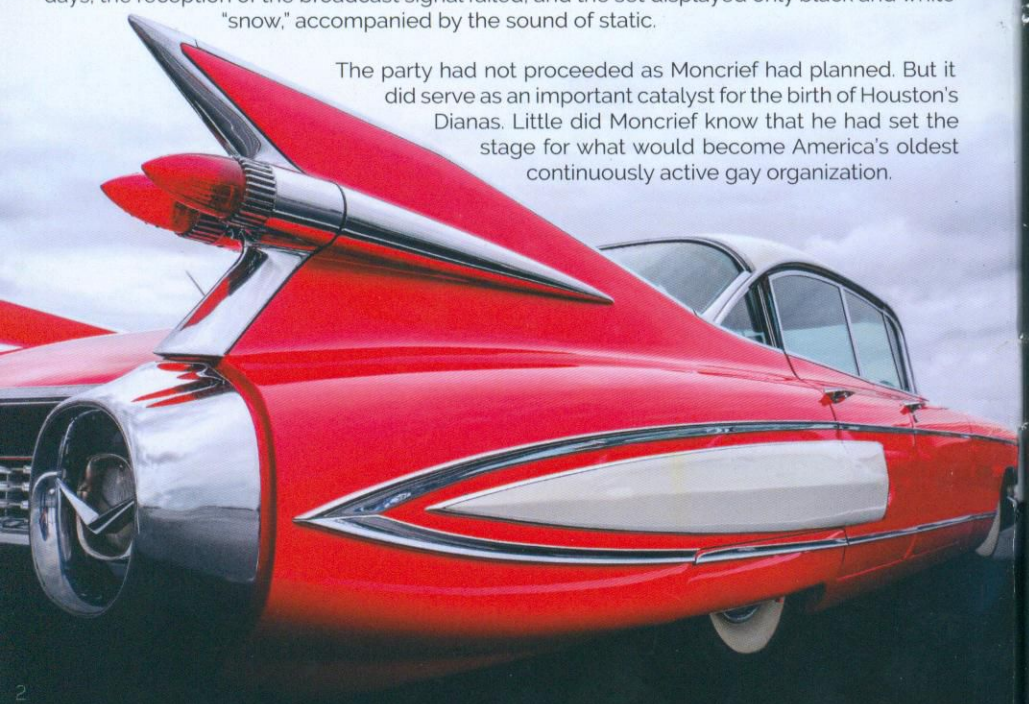
On Thursday, March 19, 1953, the country was buzzing. The annual Academy Awards — otherwise known as the Oscars — were to be broadcast on television for the first time that evening. David Moncrief, a gay man living in Houston, Texas, purchased a new television set as he was excited about the upcoming broadcast. Moncrief, and his roommate Curtis Wright, loved to entertain, and the impending Oscars broadcast gave them a perfect event to build a party around. Television was the exciting new technology of the times, and Moncrief knew his guests would be dazzled.

Moncrief invited a select group of approximately ten friends to join him at his apartment for a pre-awards cocktail party, which would be followed by the first televised Oscar broadcast. Houston in 1953 was not an accepting place for gay men and lesbians, so private house parties were the only way for them to socialize freely. Johnna Lee Mueller, in her early twenties and a model at Sakowitz department store, was delighted to be included on Moncrief's guest list. She arrived for the party dressed in after-five cocktail elegance, as would the other guests.

In the living room of Moncrief and Wright's apartment was an eye-catching plaster model of Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt. Nearly life-size, the statue stood in a corner. It had previously resided at Sakowitz, where Wright worked as a window dresser, and when the store no longer needed it, he decided it would add an eclectic touch to the apartment.

The statue reminded Mueller of the Diana statue on the grounds of Ima Hogg's Bayou Bend mansion in River Oaks. Diana's toga stopped just above the knees, and her right hand was bent up and backwards towards a quiver on her back. Mueller remembers eating hors d'oeuvres and enjoying cocktail chatter up until the time of the awaited Oscar broadcast. The moment finally arrived. Moncrief turned on the television set. But, as often happened in those days, the reception of the broadcast signal failed, and the set displayed only black and white "snow," accompanied by the sound of static.

The party had not proceeded as Moncrief had planned. But it did serve as an important catalyst for the birth of Houston's Dianas. Little did Moncrief know that he had set the stage for what would become America's oldest continuously active gay organization.





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