



Dancing as a Revolutionary Act

by Glenda Russell

“If I can’t dance—I don’t want to be part of your revolution.”
- Emma Goldman

Out Boulder will sponsor a barn dance at the Altona Grange (39th and Nelson Road) on Saturday, June 11, from 6:00 to 10:00 PM. A wonderful local bluegrass band will provide music for everyone’s listening and boot-scooting pleasure.

The barn dance will be fun in and of itself—and that alone is worth a trip to the Altona Grange. But the dance also represents an echo of an earlier time in the history of LGBT northern Colorado—a time when LGBT people claimed the power to create huge friendly and empowered gatherings in this area for the first time.

Consider the context: it was a time when LGBT people had access only to bars, many of which were run by the Mafia and all of which could expect unannounced visits by police who intimidated patrons and added to a sense of fear and hesitation around sharing public space with other LGBT people. The bars were not especially pleasant places, though they did offer the only opportunity for LGBT people to get together in large numbers, thereby breaking the chains of isolation that were so much a part of gay life in the 1950s and 1960s.

And then came Stonewall in 1969. Within a year, the Gay Liberation Front was an official CU student group—only it was a student group that included many members of the broader Boulder community as well as CU students. GLF—as it was most frequently known—took on the task of hosting dances at a ranch north of Boulder. These dances at Hidden Valley Ranch were held in—you guessed it—a barn. The dances had live bands and beer. Soon, each dance attracted hundreds of people, not just from Boulder and Denver but from throughout northern Colorado.

The Hidden Valley dances provided a great source of income for GLF. More importantly, they represented a sea change in queer life in the state. No longer were LGBT people dependent on the Mafia and seedy bars for their social life. The queer community took control of their own socializing. The dances were large and fun and quietly empowered gatherings put on by queer people for queer people. How different it was to have our own space that was vibrant and energized and open. How different it was to have a group dedicated to gay liberation running the show that formerly had been run only by the Mafia. Queer life would never be the same in the state.

Come on out to the grange on June 11. Enjoy yourself and meet some new folks. As you do, say a quiet word of thanks to Boulder's GLF for their early-1970s dances that changed a piece of the world. We all benefit today from their courage and vision. And that's worth dancing about!