

# 50 STATES: COLORADO

## *For Frenchy*

In the early 1880s, Charles “Frenchy” Vosbaugh moved to the small mining town of Trinidad, Colorado with his wife, Emma. The couple ran a restaurant in town for several years before Emma disappeared and Frenchy spent two decades working as a cook on a remote sheep ranch. In 1904 he arrived at the Mt. San Rafael Hospital in Trinidad with pneumonia where the Sisters of Charity who ran the facility quickly discovered that Charles had been born Katherine and had been living as a man for sixty years.

After a brief, and unsuccessful, attempt to force Charles to dress as a woman, the Sisters made the remarkable decision to allow him to live the remaining two years of his life as a male orderly at Mt San Rafael where he was affectionately known as “Grandpa.”

Seventy years later the same Catholic hospital became world-renowned for Dr. Stanley Biber’s pioneering gender affirmation clinic, earning Trinidad the moniker “Sex Change Capital of the World.” The clinic thrived for thirty years, and when Dr. Biber retired, he was succeeded by Dr. Marci Bowers, the first transgender person to perform gender affirmation surgeries.

For *50 States: Colorado*, Nick & Jake invited five transgender or gender non-conforming artists, writers, or activists from around the country to host potlucks and write eulogizing toasts to this unsung pioneer. Held simultaneously in Houston, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, New York, and Tahlequah, Oklahoma the parties were connected via video-conference to Trinidad where the artists hosted a gathering of community members, including a Franciscan nun who offered her own toast as a native Trinidadian and a friend of the Sisters of Charity, Dr. Biber, and Dr. Bowers.

These toasts and the video feeds from each city are presented here over footage from Trinidad and the surrounding mountains.

### **The toasts were written and offered by:**

- Stalina Emmanuelle Villarreal (Houston, at Diverse Works in an installation by Shiela Pepe)
- Carden Crow with Shronn Shulke (Tahlequah, at Riverbend Floats)
- Billy Noble (Minneapolis)
- Jaden Fields & Gene Luzala (Los Angeles, at APAIT)
- Cecilia Gentili & Jess Barbagallo (New York)
- Sister Regina Marie Massarotti (Trinidad, at Mt San Rafael Hospital)

### **The potlucks were attended by friends and family of the hosts including:**

James Axeen, Dorota Biczal, Devin Borden, Rachel Cook, Jazzmun Nichlala Crayton, Carl De Bono, David Dove, David A. Feil, Jamila Gaskins, Brother Harry Gonzales, Barbara Herring, Terri Jay, Justin M. Jones, Kristen Klein-Cechettini, Koomah, Laura Lark, Robin Mack, Michelle Miles, Chantal Pavageaux, Mallory Pillard, William Posados, Reyes Ramirez, Serena Reddick, Nina Rubin, Janice Rubin, Stephanie Saint Sanchez, Shronn Shulke, Noah Simpson, Roberto Tejada, Simbree Touchstone, Charles T. Wiese.

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## OUR PARTNERS

**Oklahoma State University:** Gender and Women's Studies, Department of History, School of Architecture, Department of Art, Graphic Design, and Art History, Oral History Project, Office of Multicultural Affairs, EQUAL, OSQ&A and GSSO.

**Community:** Tulsa Equality Center/OKEQ, Payne County PRIDE Fest, PFLAG Stillwater, Living Arts Kitchen, University of Central Oklahoma Melton Gallery, University of Central Oklahoma Women's Research Center and BGLTQ+ Student Center, *Herland* Archive, Living Arts Tulsa and Tulsa Artist Fellows.

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# 50 STATES: OKLAHOMA

*For Lynn*

*50 States: Oklahoma* honors the gay Cherokee playwright Lynn Riggs who most famously wrote the 1930 play *Green Grow the Lilacs* on which Rogers and Hammerstein based their iconic musical *Oklahoma!*.

Born in Claremore, Oklahoma in 1899 Riggs had a complicated and embattled relationship with his home state, living primarily in self-imposed exile in Santa Fe, New York, and Los Angeles where he was able to live, semi-closeted, with multiple lovers over the years. While *Green Grow the Lilacs* contains few hints of homoeroticism, many of his other plays feature overt gay themes. Riggs wrote that *Green Grow the Lilacs* was an attempt to capture luminously, through the simplest of stories, his nostalgic memories of his Oklahoma childhood.

In 1931 Riggs made an experimental film, *A Day in Santa Fe* in which he captured daily life in his adopted city. In response, Nick & Jake created an experimental documentary depicting a day in Northeastern Oklahoma. Following the exact shot structure of the original film, *50 States: Oklahoma (For Lynn)* is comprised of original footage documenting scenes of daily LGBTQIA+ life in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, the seat of the Cherokee Nation; filmed video portraits of members of the LGBTQIA+ community in Tulsa and Tahlequah standing in front of locations of key importance to their LGBTQIA+ Oklahoma identities; footage of the artists taking on the narrator role embodied by the mule delivering firewood in Riggs' film; and found archival footage of Two-Spirit gatherings projected onto trees at Discoveryland, a deserted outdoor amphitheater in Sand Springs where *Oklahoma!* was performed for decades.

The video is projected through an arrangement of two-way mirrored panels which reference the gay Oklahoman architect Bruce Goff. In 1949, six years before he would be forced to resign from the University of Oklahoma for being homosexual, he proposed a spectacular *Crystal Chapel* of diamond-shaped glass panels for the University's student religious center. Though the design was never realized, Frank Gehry later wrote that Goff's chapel "would have been the purest, most elegant embodiment of the metal and glass *Crystal Palace* fantasies that captivated architects from the nineteenth century onward."

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# 50 STATES: TEXAS

## *Pure Carbon*

In 1895 John Wesley Carhart, a prominent medical doctor from the small town of La Grange, TX wrote *Norma Trist: or Pure Carbon, A Story of the Inversion of the Sexes*, a novel featuring one of American fiction's first unambiguously lesbian protagonists. The edition was published at a small press in Austin and is most notable for its astonishingly sympathetic and progressive ideological defenses of homosexuality.

The complete text of the novel is presented here in loose graphite powder, in a font derived from the original typeface used in the first (and only) edition. The chapters are illustrated with images of what currently stands on the sites of historic lesbian and gay bars across the state of Texas. Chapters that relate to the heroine's sexuality are indicated with a metallic lip on the tables.

Loosely based on the sensational 1892 murder of Freda Ward by her lover Alice Mitchell in Memphis, the novel incorporates references to what was (at the time) cutting-edge medical thought on same-sex desire. Particularly worthy of attention is Chapter 27, in which Norma is put on trial for the attempted murder of her lover Marie (pp 121-124), as it contains arguments about the God-given nature of sexuality that read as if they could have been written a century later.

That aside, *Norma Trist* frequently takes the form of dime store fiction, replete with a ridiculous subplot involving a handsome Mexican captain and a search for buried treasure. Perhaps Carhart chose the format in the hopes that his ideas would reach a wider audience; perhaps he chose it in an effort to avoid censorship and protect his medical career. Either way, the book was reviewed and excoriated in medical journals (on largely moral grounds), and Carhart was arrested (though subsequently cleared) for obscenity.

Carhart's views on race are decidedly less enlightened than his views on sexuality. The book contains racist depictions of African American, Jewish, and Mexican characters. With the exception of a single racial epithet, which the artists omitted, Nick & Jake have included the complete text of *Norma Trist* in their work *50 States: Texas* in an effort to avoid sanitizing Carhart's legacy.

The artists were introduced to *Norma Trist* by reading Kim Emory's 1994 essay *Steers, Queers, and Manifest Destiny: Representing the Lesbian Subject in Turn-of-the-Century Texas* in UT Austin's *Journal of the History of Sexuality*. The text can also be accessed via a scanned digital copy through Houston Public Library and Google Books, which has recently made a digital copy available.

The novel is dedicated:  
"To one whom we dearly love;  
But who shall here be nameless."

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# 50 STATES: WYOMING

## *Prairie and Mountain Sketches*

The first completed installation in Nick & Jake's 50 States Project, *50 States: Wyoming* references William Benemann's, *Men in Eden: William Drummond Stewart and Same-Sex Desire in The Rocky Mountain Fur Trade* which chronicles the homosexual Scottish lord-turned-fur-trader's Western travels with his lover the celebrated Cree/French Canadian hunter Antoine Clement.

In 1843 the pair led an expedition of 100 likely same-sex-attracted men from St. Louis to a lake in the Wind River Mountains of Wyoming where they threw a riotous bacchanal, a farewell to the rapidly disappearing frontier, replete with wagons of liquor, heaps of canned delicacies from Europe, and a trunk of renaissance costumes.

In 2014 and 2015 the artists retraced the 1,200-mile journey with 18 panels of tinted wax poured over painted LGBTQIA+ cowboy silhouettes. At regular intervals they stopped, recorded their Cartesian coordinates, and collected a soil sample which they spread over a wax panel, before running over it with their truck to imprint a soil tire track as a record of their progress. At key points along the journey, the artists filmed themselves walking west with the newfound knowledge that these quintessentially American landscapes had been the forgotten stomping grounds of gay men.

This experience – seeing the Wyoming mountains with a profound sense of belonging – inspired the artists to create work exploring the little-known LGBTQIA+ histories of each state, and launched their 50 States Project.

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