



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TWILIGHT GUARD

Prepared for the Atlantic Motorcycle Coordinating Council
By the Members of the Twilight Guard
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The Twilight Guard, as currently constituted, is a gay men's leather organization serving the leather, bear and fetish community in the northeastern suburbs of New York City. Our traditional area of operation is Westchester County, New York, and Fairfield County, Connecticut.

BACKGROUND

The Twilight Guard did not emerge from a vacuum. At least two other leather-oriented organizations had been operating in this region before the Guard. The Thunderbolts MC, a gay men's motorcycle and leather club, had been in existence in the area since the 1970s; however, by the early 1990s that club's activities had started to falter. Two of the club's members, Rick and J.T., were owners of the Brook Café in Westport, Connecticut, which was one of the oldest continuously operating gay bars in the country and which served as the Thunderbolts' home bar.

In 1992 Sean and Ralph Arena bought the Brook Café from previous owners Rick and J.T. With the Arena brothers now owning the bar, the Thunderbolts felt the need to move elsewhere, and attempted to reestablish themselves at the Labyrinth bar in New Haven, Connecticut. However, that bar went out of business after six months or so, leaving the club without a home bar. Further, with several key members either passing away or moving away from the area, the club dissolved within the year.

The Brook Café remained a focus for leather activity in southwestern Connecticut. In 1992 Eagile Masker started the Connecticut MCs, an organization set up to promote and run the first Mr. Connecticut Leather Contest at the Brook Café. The

Connecticut MCs operated for nearly three years, promoting such contests as Mr. Connecticut Leather and Mr. Connecticut Drummer, as well as holding monthly bar nights at the Brook Café.

The various events promoted by the Connecticut MCs attracted a variety of people in the gay community from southwestern Connecticut and the adjoining parts of New York. With the establishment of a set of local leather contests, noted above, the Connecticut MCs began to interact with other area groups such as the Leatherfolk of Connecticut, a pansexual group based around Hartford, Connecticut, and the original Hartford Colts, who subsequently dissolved in 1996. It was from this background that certain people emerged to help form the Twilight Guard; for example, the Connecticut MCs' original members included Sandy Steever, who served as vice president and club liaison for that club. However, the Connecticut MCs was a loose amalgamation of individuals, had no back-patch, no charter and no membership as such. It was, in effect, primarily a production company organized to promote and host leather contests.



Logo from America's oldest gay bar, circa 1990



Adjacent Westchester County also provided members for the Twilight Guard. What Westchester shared in common with Fairfield County was a suburban milieu, one in which leathermen wished to establish a permanent presence rather than always resorting to New York City. Two other founding members of the club, Mike Dallalio and Sean Campbell, both leather titleholders, came from this area.

A CLUB IS BORN

After nearly three years, when Eagle Masker finally left the area and the Connecticut MCs disbanded, a group of six men met at the Hardrock Café in the Stamford Town Centre on Saturday afternoon, July 15, 1995. Over a broad-ranging discussion at lunch, a plan was launched to form a leather club to promote the cause of leather in the region. During the next month, decisions were taken on the name of the club, its logo and colors. At about the same time, the decision to become a back-patch club came to the fore, and steps were taken to develop a charter and set of by-laws.

The band of six soon grew to eight; they took over the slate of activities left behind by the Connecticut MCs and held their first bar night at the Brook Café in September 1995. Other bar nights, contests, fundraisers and charity events soon followed. In October 1995, at its second public outing, the Twilight Guard held its first production of the Mr. Connecticut Leather contest. The evening was a great success on many fronts, including membership. The winner of this contest was the then Vice President, Mike Geraty. This was followed by a cycle of contests, at the rate of about one every four months.

WE GET FORMAL

After considering some alternative proposals, the name Twilight Guard and its accompanying logo were composed by Sean Campbell, voted by the club and subsequently registered with the Secretary of State of Connecticut. A charter was established for the club, based on a review of the articles of the STARS MC, as well as those of the Long Island Ravens MC (whom the Guard would meet in November of 1995), which in turn owed much to the charter of the original Hartford Colts MC. The charter was reviewed and finally adapted by the membership in 1996.

The charter formally established the offices of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. During the summer of 1996, after our first formal elections were held, the Twilight Guard held its first anniversary on August 1st, a ceremony was mounted in Westport to install the officers. The Long Island Ravens MC, together with its pipe and drum band, took a central part in this ceremony as members of the Ravens lighted candles held by the newly elected officers of the Twilight Guard. The ceremony was attended by members of other area leather clubs such as Excelsior M.C. from New York City. The enduring friendship between the Twilight Guard and Long Island Ravens would later be symbolized through the exchange of club colors in Bay Shore, New York in 2003.

At the time it was formed, the Twilight Guard set for itself a general agenda of promoting the leather, SM, bear and fetish communities through social, charitable/service and educational activities. It should be noted that, due to issues circulating in the community at the time as well as our interaction with other groups, the Twilight Guard was originally constituted as a pansexual group, although the majority of members were, in fact, gay leathermen.



Our social mandate was carried out by holding bar nights, contests and similar events, as well as by taking part in similar events held by other organizations. The charitable and service mandate was served by raising money for organizations such as local AIDS groups, family service organizations, emergency funds and other worthy groups. The educational mandate was realized by having our members offer presentations and lectures to various groups in our area about the leather community. These three mandates have remained at the club's core throughout its existence.

CLUB AND CONTEST CIRCUITS

As noted above, The Twilight Guard inherited the contest portfolio left open by former producer Eagile's departure. Since a number of the club's founding members were titleholders, this seemed a natural transition. The club promoted Mr. Connecticut Leather (with the winner going directly to the International Mr. Leather competition), Mr. Connecticut Drummer (feeding into Mr. New England Drummer held in Boston, MA and, from there, to International Drummer in San Francisco, CA) and Mr. Connecticut Bear. Mr. Connecticut Bear remained a local, state-level contest, due in part to a widespread perception in the community that no winner of the International Mr. Bear contest would ever reside outside of the state of California.

With its portfolio of three contests, the club and its membership began to establish a presence within the "contest circuit"; we were able, for example, to attract 1995 IML winner Joe Gallagher as head judge for Mr. Connecticut Bear during his reign. The club and its members interacted increasingly with a number of area clubs, such as the Long Island Ravens and the STARS MC, not to mention the Journeymen

from Syracuse and Pittsburgh MC. Certain titleholders and officers from the club started to travel heavily on the contest circuit of Atlantic region, to fulfill their title's obligations, to represent the club and to serve the community as judges, tally masters, etc. At this time, it should be noted, only a handful of members were regular travelers on the club and contest circuits. Over time, this continuous schedule of traveling opened a rift between traveling, and nontraveling members, which would exact a price on both individuals and the club.

The various contests were intended to provide a focus for the local leather communities, a promise they only partially realized. Although running contests proved to be fun for many members and raised some awareness of the leather lifestyle in our local gay community, we came to discover that contests also tended to deplete local resources. Out of the approximately 15 contests that the Twilight Guard ran, only three titleholders helped to promote and strengthen our local community. The remainder either used the Connecticut titles as a stepping stone away from Connecticut, were never heard from again or had little impact on the development of our local leather community. Operating three (and potentially four) contests a year took its toll on the membership, as well, some of whom believed we should explore other ways of cultivating the local leather community.

A major disruption in the balance of the contest circuit had a ripple effect on the club: when Drummer magazine, its accompanying organization and contest became defunct, there was no national organization or regional sponsors to support a series of Drummer contests; Mr. Connecticut Drummer was dropped from the club's roster of events. This naturally left a gap in the club's event schedule; given the club's pansexual mandate and member-



ship, the Twilight Guard offered to step in and produce the 1st Ms. New England Leather contest.

In preparation for the contest, and having issued an early announcement of the Ms. New England Leather contest, the Guard established a working relationship with a promoter to structure the contest along IMSL guidelines, which the Connecticut contest would feed into. Sadly, the contest was cancelled two weeks before its debut, and for several reasons. First, there turned out to be a general lack of enthusiasm for the contest within the larger community. Second, a certain amount of opposition arose because the Ms. New England Leather contest was to be produced by a pansexual club, not an all-women's club, and to be chaired by a gay man, something which apparently did not sit well with some members of the leatherwomen's community. The upshot was that the contest was tabled.

WE REORGANIZE

As noted earlier, under the Twilight Guard's original charter, the club was conceived of as pansexual. At one point, we had three female full members, one of whom was an officer. As some members became increasingly vocal about having the club become more politically oriented and, particularly, pro-feminist in its activities, sides tended to form up around the male-female divide. This division was exacerbated in part by the frustration, noted above, surrounding the proposed Ms. Connecticut Leather Contest. As the debate mounted, the stress started to fray the club, in no small part because it was no longer serving a social function and providing an environment in which all members could feel comfortable.

As tensions mounted, during the summer and fall of 1997 the three female full members resigned from the club; the charter was subsequently amended to reflect more accurately the Twilight Guard's mission as a gay men's club. Also during mid-1997, the Arena brothers were unable to renew the lease on the club's home bar, the Brook Café. When the Brook Café closed, the Arenas open another bar in Norwalk called "The Townhouse," just a few miles from the Brook Cafe. As the only gay bar within a 30-mile radius, the Twilight Guard followed the Arenas to Norwalk.

Shortly thereafter, it became clear that our relationship with our sponsors was deteriorating. In retrospect, we now know that they were planning to re-establish themselves in Hartford and operate a drag club. Material support for the club's activities—in exchange for bringing business to the bar—dried up. In the end, the lack of even basic moral support from our sponsors negatively impacted some of our planned activities, making the club and its



Program from the 1996 Mr. CT Leather contest, and flyers for Mr. CT Bear 1997, Ms. New England Leather 1998, and Mr. CT Drummer 1997 Contest.



well-wishers feel unwelcome. Once it became apparent that they were no longer focused on the leather or the gay communities of southwestern Connecticut, we decided to part company. This period coincides with the last Mr. Connecticut Leather contest that the Guard would produce, as well as the shelving of other contests.

WE TREAD WATER

Six months after the Brook Café closed, it reopened with new management under the name, "The Cedar Brook Café." Further, the head bartender of the old Brook Café had opened his own gay bar in Brewster, New York, called "Brewster Station." These two bars extended invitations to the Twilight Guard to hold recurring bar nights; the club decided to alternate between the two bars for a while, one bar one month, the other bar, the other month. Not only did this allow us to cast our net more broadly, it ensured that we wouldn't find ourselves at the mercy of just one bar.

Finding new venues where we could hold club activities and bar nights proved to be the easiest part of 1997; nothing adequately prepared us for the dislocations to follow. To follow job opportunities or relationships (and, in some cases, both), a number of members left our area, traveling to such diverse destinations as California, Ohio, Massachusetts and upstate New York. These members became ambassadors, but were no longer able to pursue active membership. At its lowest point, membership sank to six full members.

With the resources then left available to it, the club was able to hold bar nights in order to provide leatherfolk in the area with an environment in which they could freely and comfortably socialize. Charitable work was not neglected, and the club has

continued to raise money, though in somewhat smaller amounts, to fund a variety of charities in the surrounding area. From this point forward, the club focused on its social, charitable and educational functions, leaving aside political and contest-oriented activities until such time as the membership might decide to take them up again.

WE REBUILD AND STRENGTHEN OUR TIES

Standing on less pomp and circumstance, we began to rebuild membership. Hindsight suggested to us that the earlier difficulties faced by the club were attributable in part to an overly generous admittance policy; going forward, we decided to require a longer probationary period in which members and candidates for membership could get to know each other better. While the potential of appearing too exclusive has been a concern since adopting this policy, it has resulted in a far more stable membership, with people who genuinely enjoy each other's company.

Travel became a dominant theme during this rebuilding period. Learning from mistakes of the past, we now began to travel as a group. Although an end in itself, it served as a means to build the club: we sought our relationships with other leather clubs, activities and resources in the area to strengthen and promote the Twilight Guard. For example, we held bar nights at the Long Island Eagle, participated in the 7th All-Club Bar night at the L.U.R.E. along with Renegades NY, Iron Guard, Journeymen, GMSMA, Defenders NY, and Excelsior MC. This would not be the last time that the Guard would team up with Excelsior MC. In late March of 2003 the two clubs would hold a joint bar night at the much-lamented L.U.R.E. in New York City, for that bar's last club bar night before closing its doors in April 2003. We took



part in leather pride events, and served as judges, contestants and contributors in a variety of area contests (e.g., Long Island Leather, Empire State Bear). And naturally, we attended many, many runs.

WE JOIN THE AMCC

Several of the clubs we interacted with were members of the Atlantic Motorcycle Coordinating Council, and as our club grew, some of the AMCC clubs suggested we consider membership. Members of the Twilight Guard began to attend AMCC meetings as guests of the Council as early as 1999. Even without being a member of AMCC, the Twilight Guard's Vice President, Sean Campbell, volunteered for and began serving on the Outreach Committee during the summer of 2001. We presented our application for membership to the AMCC at the December 2002 meeting hosted by Empire City, MC in New York City. We were sponsored by Excelsior MC and the Promethean Guard. At the next AMCC meeting, held in February 2003 and hosted by C.O.M.M.A.N.D. in Baltimore, Maryland on the occasion of the Mr. Maryland Leather Contest, the Twilight Guard was voted in as the 30th member club of Council. At that meeting, we were sponsored by Excelsior, M.C. and seconded by our old friends the Long Island Ravens, MC, who stood in for the Promethean Guard whose representative was delayed in interstate traffic.

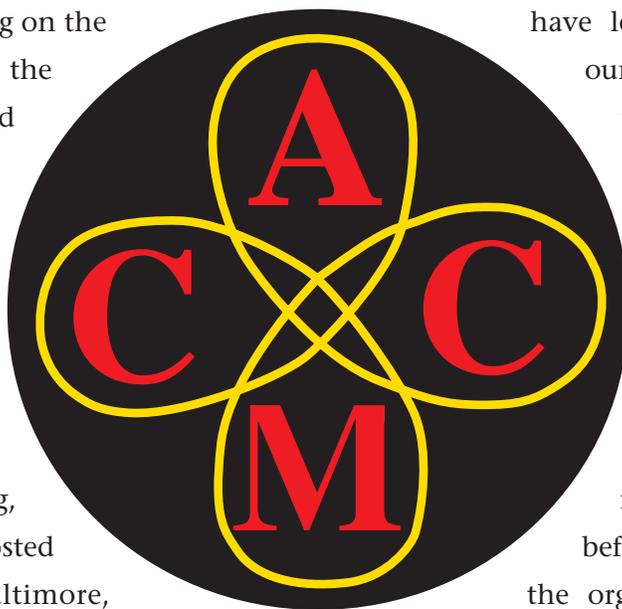
Since joining the AMCC, the Twilight Guard's membership has become more active in events put on by AMCC members and in the operations of the

Council. For example, the Twilight Guard's President, Sandy Steever, was elected to the Executive Committee to serve as Secretary of the AMCC for 2005-2007. Since joining the AMCC, membership has grown, and our members are becoming more active in the leather community.

At the time of this writing, the Twilight Guard is celebrating its tenth anniversary. As we look towards the future, we believe that leather clubs such as ours will become a main focus of activity of the leather community, particularly as leather bars redefine themselves and as a number of the smaller leather contests and even the contest circuit grow distant from certain constituencies.

During our first decade of existence we have learned much about ourselves, our club and the leather community. We have often let ourselves be guided in the first instance by the substance of issues important to the club and the community, and only later, if at all, would we find a form to express that inner core. For example, we began functioning as a club a year before we settled on a charter for the organization. And although this

lack of formality sometimes expressed itself in a certain amount of drift for the club, commitment to the ideal of brotherhood has been a constant theme in the club's mission and activities, and one that has permitted us to respond to changes in our own club and around us in the leather community. At its core, the club has been a shared projection of the energy, talent and aspirations of its members, permitting us to endure through difficult times and adapt to the new. ▼





Top: Handbills from 2002 - 2006.

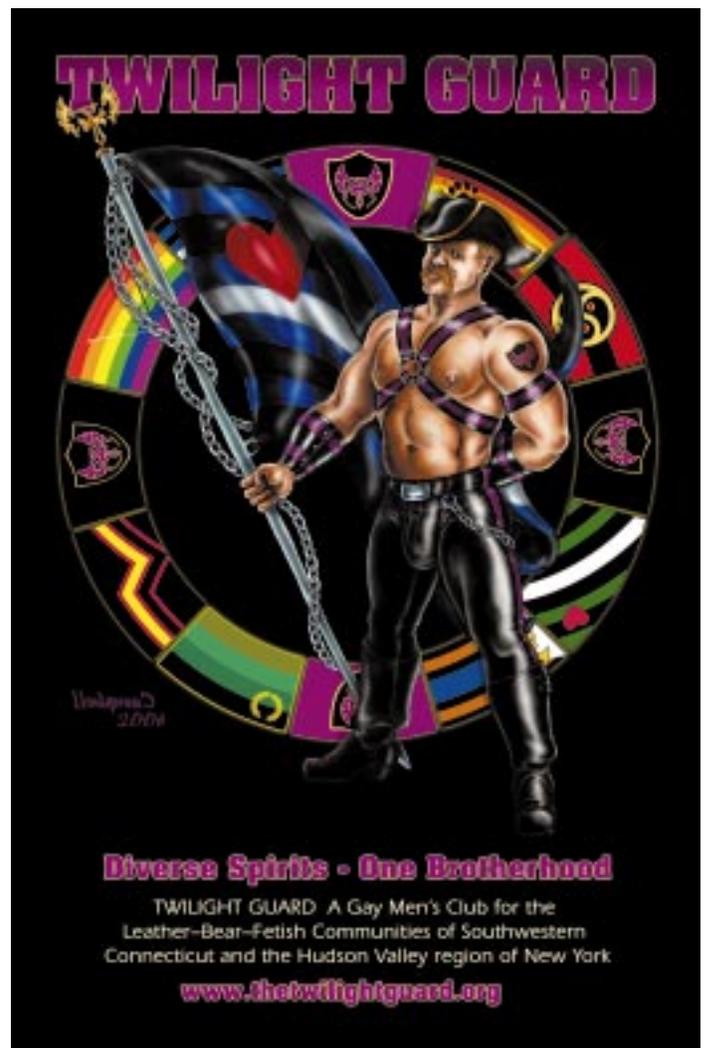
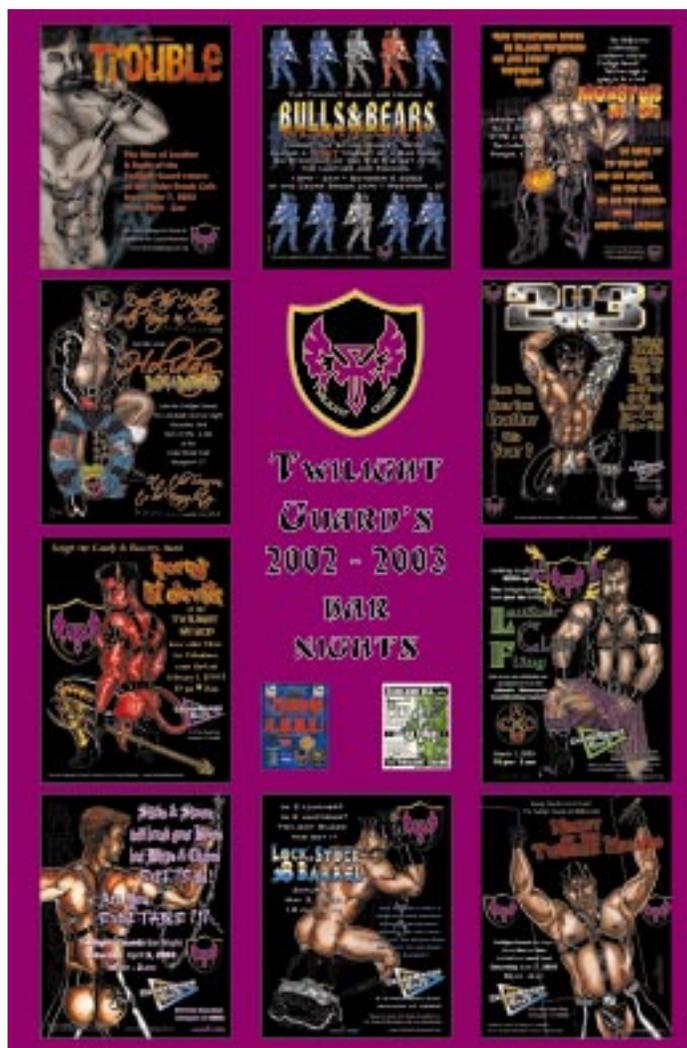
Bottom left: Flyers from 2002-2003 bar nights.

Bottom right: Recruitment poster 2006, which, in a first for the Twilight Guard, features New England regional influence.

fighters who died on September 11, 2001 and a call to rally the community for Gay Pride Month in June 2002. (see collected images right hand side, on page 7, Sins series are mark as so).

These images, defining the club, have appeared in a variety of media, from posters to handbills to web images.

All with all true art, these images present their creator's vision, encapsulate the times and provoke viewers to their own understanding. ▼



Behind the “TWILIGHT”

The word “twilight” has lost its historical meaning for most contemporary gay men and women, but has a proud history in our community. When choosing a name for the club, the founders wished to select one that would be inclusive and so embrace bears and-fetishists, not simply traditional leathermen. Nor did they wish to limit the club's boundaries to a specific geographic region. In researching a name, Cassell's Queer Companion, A Dictionary of Lesbian and Gay Life and Culture (1995, William Stewart) offers the following insightful entry:

“Twilight: Beginning in the 1920s, this become a standard media adjective for anything to do with the lesbian and gay community. The twilight world of the homosexual was used to describe anyplace where we (lesbians and gay men) congregated, on the margins of what we all know to be the sun-saturated habitat of the hetero. Commonly used in the blurb of the backs of lesbian pulp fiction novels in the mid-twentieth century, even in the 1990s the word was still going strong.”

The color most often associated with twilight is purple, which is also very popular in the gay community. Purple or lavender is created by combining pink and blue, and serves as a fitting symbol for a group that neither follows traditional gender roles within society nor conforms to the expectations of suburban life. It also is expressive of the Twilight Guard's attempt to meld the values of both old guard and new guard leather. As in other leather organizations, the word Guard represents a traditional leather standard. However, it also targets a broader community than such terms as "MC," or motorcycle club, convey in the gay community.



Astronomical symbol for Ceres, "sickle" variant



About the Design

What exactly does the talisman of the Twilight Guard represent? It has been seen as a sword, an ankh, a key, and even the number seven. It may be interpreted as all of these things or none, leaving it to viewers to arrive at with their own understanding. The wings were suggested by one of the founding members as representing a rebirth from the ashes of the old. The actual talisman is based on the astronomical symbol for Ceres, which has at least four variations. Our talisman is based on the variant called the “Astronomer's Cross,” to preserve with the “twilight” theme. It was purposely designed to embrace the various symbols and concepts noted above, so viewers might interpret the icon from their own perspective.

The colors used for the Twilight Guard's logo reflect basic color theory; yellow and violet are complementary colors, which when placed on a field of black, naturally create vibrancy. The result is thus a unique design, which in the words of one commentator, “can be seen and not mistaken from across a room.” ▼

