Abstract

The Dill Pickle Club, a popular site of radical discourse in the 1910s, 1920s, and early 1930s in the neighborhood around the Newberry Library, has popularly been cited as a "center" for the developing gay and lesbian community in Chicago during the period. When taken in the context of the "pansy craze" that was flourishing during the period, however, the club's role becomes one more of consumption than of community, begging the question: why does that story perpetuate itself today? Looking at the limits of drawing a history constructed mostly from straight observers and the way that research into queer history has been done in the city of Chicago, with most of the information rooted in a single historian's research work, provides a glimpse into how that narrative is constructed. Finally, exploring alternative methods to pursue queer history offer a route to prevent narratives like that of the Dill Pickle Club from becoming exaggerated.