Dedication of Ohio Historical Marker Honoring
Natalie Clifford Barney

October 25, 2009
Ohio Historical Marker Dedication Ceremony honoring
Natalie Clifford Barney: Dayton's French Literary Connection
Cooper Park and Dayton Metro Library, St. Clair at Third Street, Dayton, OH 45402
Sponsored by The Living Beatitudes Community and the Greater Dayton LGBT Center

October 25, 2009 at 2 PM

Master of Ceremonies: Joe Gallagher for The Living Beatitudes Community
Matt Williams, signer for the deaf and hard-of-hearing

Presenters

John Gantt, Executive Director for the Greater Dayton LGBT Center

Rob Berger, Gay Ohio History Initiative, (GOHI)

Jim Strider, Acting Executive Director Ohio Historical Society

Tom Barry, Director of Institutional Advancement at the Ohio Historical Society

Leon Bey, Past President of the Greater Dayton LGBT Center

Rhine McIn, Mayor of the City of Dayton

Facilitators: John Zimmerman and Steve Makovec
Judy Goldsmith: Natalie Clifford Barney’s letter written to her mother dated 1894

Host: Judy Goldsmith will now read a letter from Natalie to her mother, written in 1894 when Natalie was not yet eighteen. The letter is a striking in its depiction of feminist principles that we still grapple with today.

When you are in the right, stick up for your rights, you owe it to yourself as a woman… It seems to me that those who dare to rebel in every age are those who make life possible – it is the rebels who extend the boundary of right, little by little – narrowing the confines of wrong and crowding it out of existence. So long as women like you will forgive anything, men will do anything – What better proof of this do you want than your own life! … Be strong and demand what is right, and your due whenever an occasion presents itself. You owe it to [papa] as well as yourself to show him that “women are no longer content to be part of the livestock about the place.” They have acquired the right of reason – in matters concerning themselves in particular and the welfare of the world at large. You remind me of what other women have done in all ages, and how patiently they have submitted. You see the same thing over and over again; but I have not seen any particular case where any great good has come from unjust submission… How are we ever going to improve things – surely not by acceptance and submission! Everything (society, politics) is in a groove and the longer it is left alone the deeper it becomes wedged in– between conventionality and habit. It requires a few – many – strong people to pull together and lift it out of the mire into which it has fallen!
Host: Natalie was well known for her distilled wit on the human comedy, through dialogs, fragments and epigrams. Many of these works originated in her salon, where the conversation centered on literature and the other arts. The following epigrams are read by Pam Dolence.

- The Romantics appropriated all the big words, leaving us only the little ones.
- Novels are longer than life.
- It is time for dead languages to be quiet.
- How many painters have only seen color on the palettes of others

Kathy Frazier: This reading is based on Natalie as seen through the character of Valerie Seymour in “The Well of Loneliness.”

Host: “The Well of Loneliness” was a famous lesbian novel. In it, Radclyffe Hall based her character, Valerie Seymour, on Natalie Clifford Barney. From this record, we learn the traits of Natalie’s character.

* Kathy Frazier reads this excerpt.

Natalie wrote delicate satires that were very outspoken but then, Natalie’s life was very outspoken — she was ... a kind of pioneer. Her charm lay less in physical attraction than in a great courtesy and understanding, a great will to please, a great impulse to beauty in all its forms.

Natalie was bilingual; she was also quite rich. She hated drink like the plague.

Natalie moved well with the quiet and unconscious grace that sprang from perfect proportions. Her face was humorous, placid, and worldly; her eyes were very kind, very blue, very lustrous. She had luminous eyes, having the pale yet ardent light of the fanatic. She had masses of thick fair hair...
one could see at a glance that it hated restraint.

Natalie's flat was ...large and [in] rather splendid disorder. There was something blissfully unkempt about it, as if its mistress were too much engrossed in other matters and much was where it ought not to have been, while over the whole lay a faint layer of dust – even over the spacious salon.

She lived life with a great calmness of spirit for nothing worried and few things distressed her. She was firmly convinced that in this ugly age, one should strive to the top of one's bent after beauty.

There she was, this charming and cultured woman, a kind of lighthouse in a storm-swept ocean.

When it came to the heart ... her love affairs would fill quite three volumes, even after having been expurgated. Natalie was no libertine in love's garden, but rather a creature born out of her epoch, a pagan chained to an age that was Christian... All intelligent people realized that she was a creature apart....

In [Natalie's] salon, the percentage of brains was generally well above average. For together with those themselves being normal and had long put intellect above bodies, were writers, painters, musicians and scholars – men and women who, set apart from their birth, had determined to hack out a niche in existence. Such people frequented Natalie Barney's salon.

As for those who were ashamed to declare themselves, lying low for the sake of a peaceful existence, she utterly despised such of them as had brains; she insisted they were traitors to themselves and their fellows.

Pam Dolence: Selected Epigrams

She had much to say about personal qualities:
- Fatalism is the lazy man's way of accepting the inevitable.
- Youth is not a question of years: one is young or old from birth.
- If we keep an open mind, too much is likely to fall into it.

Raeanna Biddle: "Brute", a prose poem by Natalie Clifford Barney

Host: Natalie Clifford Barney was famous - perhaps infamous - for her many love affairs. Her life and temperament provided many inspirations for her writings. The poetic prose worked "Brute" is part of a collection of pieces that speaks to the emotionality of her life. Here... "Brute" is being read by Raeanna Biddle.

You love me! You love me!...If I do not yield to your desire, it is because I love you...entirely because I love you. Please understand, I want so much for you to understand me! So many men have possessed me without understanding me, that I want someone to understand me without possessing me! All the days of my life I have dreamed only of Love, I have lived for Love, for Love pure and simple, and that is the one thing I've never found. I've always embraced one of the forms of love but never love itself. I have looked for it everywhere but believe the aging smile upon my lips which know no more of its kiss than if they had never touched other lips! Do not imagine that I set any limits on my quest. I have searched barefoot in the streets and decked in golden tunics in the houses of kings. I have sought it in crime and in art, and in the one I found only a little courage and in the other so much vanity...

You want inexpressible joy, you will have it, more exquisite than you can imagine. You will unwind not only the veils from my body but also the veils from my soul; you will watch not only the rhythmic swaying of my hips but all the subtle shifts of my mind. You will possess me in every way except that in which others have possessed me... No, don't come near... No, not that... I want to stay fresh for you and forever virgin like an untapped spring... Do you want that?
Pam Dolence: Selected Epigrams

Natalie often spoke about love and no one knew better than she how inconstant, inconsistent and contradictory love could be.

- To have or not to have, which is worse?

- Eros is the youngest of the gods. He is also the most tired.

- Infidelity makes the heart grow fonder.

- Courtship is its own reward.

- The advantage of love at first sight is that it delays a second sight.

Vicki Hahn: “Untitled Poem” by Renee Vivien to Natalie Clifford Barney and “The Unknown Women” by Natalie Clifford Barney

Host: Renee’ Vivien was Natalie’s first lover. Although together a brief 10 years, their’s was a passionate yet tumultuous love affair and Renee’s death left Natalie solemn. It is reputed that in 1909 on her deathbed, Renee’ received her last rights and after swallowing the host stated, “This is the best moment of my life”. Also a prolific writer and poet, Renee wrote the following verse to Natalie. It is being read by Vicki Hahn

You see, I am of the age when the maiden gives her hand
To the man her weakness seeks out and fears.
And I have not chosen a travelling companion
Because you appeared at a bend in the road.
I felt the sweetness and the fear
Of your first kiss on my silent lips.
I hear lyres break under your feet.

With what kisses can I charm your languorous soul…
What loving rhythms, what passionate poems
Are worthy to honor her whose beauty
Wears its Desire upon its forehead like a diadem?

...Here is the night of love so long promised
In the shadows I see you grow divinely pale.
And then the unknown woman – persuasive and fearsome, sweet and terrible, turned to me and said. “If you love me you will forget your family and your husband and your country and your children and you will come and live with me. If you love me, you will leave everything you cherish, both the places you remember and the places you long to go; and your memories and your hopes will be nothing but desire for me. If you love me, you will look neither forward nor backward, you will know me only, and your destiny will carry my footprint alone. If you love me, infinity will be my lips, you will have no prison but my arms and all your desires will be for my body.”

And, sobbing, I replied, “I love you.”

---

**Salon Reception**

*Fruit & Cheese -- Chocolate Orange Cake -- Coffee -- Sparkling non-alcoholic wine*

Thanks to the following for their contributions to the reception: Steve Makovec, Leon Bey, Joe Gallagher, Vicki Hahn, Doug Grewe, Randy Phillips and other contributors including the Greater Dayton LGBT Center and The Living Beatitudes Community.
Thanks to the following for contributions to make this Ohio Historical Marker honoring Dayton native Natalie Clifford Barney a reality.

**Mayor Rhine McLin**
Commissioner Nan Whaley
Commissioner Dean Lovelace
Commissioner Joey Williams
Commissioner Matt Joseph
David Slivken, Asst. Dir.
The Dayton Metro Library
Stephen Seboldt, Chairperson
Downtown Priority Board

**City of Dayton Staff:**
John Gower, Director Planning & Community Development
Brian Inderrieden, Planning Manager
Mike Humston, Department of Public Works
Pete Hager, Director Central Services,
Kery Gray, Clerk to Commission,
Kathleen Riggs, Dept. of Planning & Com. Dev.

**Funding:**
The Ohio Historical Society
Gay Ohio History Initiative
Rob Berger
The Greater Dayton LGBT Center
The Living Beatitudes Community
Leon Bey and David Wright
Joe Gallagher
Steve Makovec
John Zimmerman and Kenneth Feller
David Lauri
James Saunders
Eli Begley
Dick Considine and Stan Dixon
Michael and Susan Considine

**Randy Phillips:** Project Videographer,
Marketing and Promotion, Graphics
Paul Woodie
Matt Williams: Signer
John Gantt, Dir. LGBT Center

**Reader’s Theatre:**
Judy Goldsmith
Racanna Biddle
Kathy Frazier
Pam Dolence, President, The Living Beatitudes Community
Vicki Hahn, Board President, The Greater Dayton LGBT Center
Side One

NATALIE CLIFFORD BARNEY

Natalie Clifford Barney was born in Dayton on October 31, 1876. Her family was wealthy and industrious, including her great grandfather who founded the Dayton Academy, Cooper Female Seminary, and the Dayton Car Works. Natalie, who knew that she was a lesbian by age twelve, lived an outspoken and independent life unusual for a woman of this time period. Her openness and pride about her sexuality, with shame, was at least one hundred years ahead of its time. She published *Some Portrait-Sonnets of Women*, a book of love poems to women under her own name in 1900. American painter Romaine Brooks was Barney's partner and companion for fifty years.

GREATER DAYTON LGBT CENTER
THE LIVING BEATITUDES COMMUNITY/DIGNITY DAYTON
GAY OHIO HISTORY INITIATIVE
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Side Two

NATALIE CLIFFORD BARNEY

Natalie Clifford Barney moved to Paris, France in 1909 where she wrote fiction, verse, essays, drama, epigrams, and several memoirs. She hosted in infamous literary salon for fifty years where the leading writers and artist of the time gathered. In 1927, she formed a group to honor female writers because the French Academy was limited to men. Barney repeatedly sought to advance the rights of women and is considered a top French feminist writer of the 20th century. She was the inspiration for characters in at least twelve books, including Valerie Seymore in the *Well of Loneliness*. Barney died in 1972 and is buried in Paris while her parents are interred in Dayton in Woodland Cemetery.

GREATER DAYTON LGBT CENTER
THE LIVING BEATITUDES COMMUNITY/DIGNITY DAYTON
GAY OHIO HISTORY INITIATIVE
OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Barney, Natalie Clifford (1900). *Quelques Portraits-Sonnets de Femmes*, Paris: Ollendorf. This is the first book published by Barney and is a series of love poems written to women.


