

The OWL Party and the 1976 election—the joke that changed Washington politics

Contributed by Kathy Perciful, wife of the late Jack Perciful

It was after hours at Tumwater's liveliest night spot, the Tumwater Conservatory. Four people were sitting around the bar with one fellow off in the corner. The four were the two club owners, Red and Donna Kelly, Donna's brother, Darrell Griswold the bar manager, and Bob Kelly, a regular at the jazz joint and an erstwhile music performer's agent.

They were in heavy discussion about the politics of that year's 1976 election. Drinks were being consumed briskly and the conversation centered around the need for more (some) humor in politics. There was unanimity that a new political party,



L-R: Jack Perciful, Treasurer; Red Kelley, Governor; Don Ober, Commission for Public Lands



Governor's Mansion, ca. 1980. See below for more details.

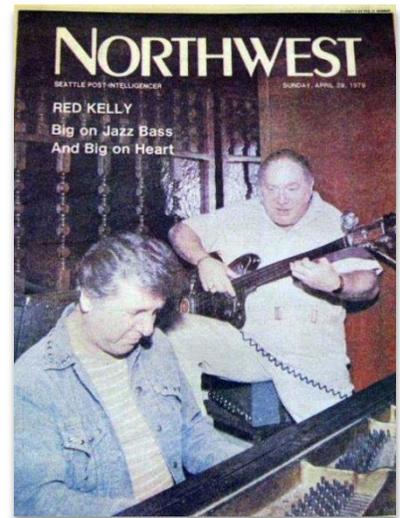
born in satire, would make the upcoming election more interesting. As Red would report later, "it (the owl party) grew from a lot of hilarity, a little booze and good people with quick minds."

All eventually headed off to bed, except for John White, the man in the corner. John was a stringer for the Associated Press. Unbeknownst to the others, he went straight to his office and filed a story about this new political party called the Owl Party.

At 9 AM the next morning, the phone rang. It was NBC in New York calling, requesting information on the Owl Party. The theme, a double acronym of OWL, "Out With Logic, On With Lunacy" was contrived on the spot by Red and a new political party was born.

Darrell Griswold, the bartender, submitted photos and voters pamphlet statements for the slate of candidates to the election officials. No money was collected at the time so the Owl Party candidates filed as indigents.

Red Kelly, who promised to heal the Continental Divide, ran as Governor. Jack "The Ripoff" Lemmon ran as Lieutenant Governor. Pianist, Jack "Penny-Pinching" Perciful ran as Treasurer. Guitarist Don "Earthquake" Ober, who had always maintained that it was not San



Seattle P.I. article, 1979

Andreas's fault, filed for the post of Land Commissioner. "Bunco Bob" Kelly was nominated as Attorney General as he was the only veteran; "Fast" Lucy Griswold as Secretary of State; Ruthie "Boom Boom" McInnis, who had the best hearing of the slate, filed as Auditor and Archie "Whiplash" Breslin as Insurance Commissioner. Little did anyone know how this tongue-in-cheek political party would change Washington politics forever.

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Details on the Governor's Mansion Photo in Kathy's own words:

"The picture is of Governor Spellman and Mrs. Spellman on the right. (He would occasionally visit Jack at the Capitol Bar and Grill and sing a tune or two.) From the left, Dave Stetler, drums, Bill Hobart, trumpet, Norm Hoagy, Seattle band leader, Jack Perciful (sporting a goatee I absolutely abhorred) and Red Kelly."

Kathy Perciful shared the beginning of the story with me a month or so ago, and I was transfixed. This first installment does whet one's appetite for more details. If you'd like to learn more right now, read the Legacy WA article on the OWL Party [here](#). I'm hoping that Kathy will regale us with more details soon. If you have information to contribute to this fascinating story, [contact me](#). Thanks!

—Amber Raney