

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Earl Hall multiple property: no
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 2980 Broadway not for publication
city or town New York vicinity
state New York code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10027

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Roger Daniel Murray 1/17/18
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
DSHPO
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:) _____	_____	_____

Earl Hall

Name of Property

New York County, NY

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

private

public-local

public-State

public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

building(s)

district

site

structure

object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/university

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/university

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th century revivals/Classical Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone
walls brick, limestone, granite

roof copper
other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Earl Hall

Name of Property

New York County, NY

County and State

8 Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria considerations

(mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

social history

Period of Significance

1966-c1985

Significant Dates

1966

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

na

Cultural Affiliation

na

Architect/Builder

McKim, Mead & White

Primary location of additional data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Earl Hall

Name of Property

New York County, NY

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10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property .3 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	18	587495	451802	3			
	<i>Zone</i>	<i>Easting</i>	<i>Northing</i>		<i>Zone</i>	<i>Easting</i>	<i>Northing</i>
2				4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Andrew S. Dolkart contact: Kathleen LaFrank, NR Coordinator, NY SHPO

organization NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project date September 2017

street & number 116 Pinehurst Ave telephone 518-237-8643 x 3261

city or town New York state New York zip code 10033

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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New York, New York County, NY

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Setting

Earl Hall is a three-story building located at the western edge of the campus of Columbia University in the New York City borough of Manhattan, New York County, New York. Its front facade faces east into the campus and its rear elevation faces west towards Broadway. The building occupies a key location in the original plan for Columbia. Earl Hall is sited in the center of the western rank of buildings on the campus and is flanked by a pair of classroom buildings: Lewisohn Hall (originally the School of Mines) to the south and Mathematics (originally Engineering) to the north. Earl Hall faces the west elevation of Low Library (NR listed), the central building on the campus, and is balanced to the east by St. Paul's Chapel (NR listed). To the west of Earl Hall is a flight of stairs leading to a gate that gives access to the campus from Broadway. Across Broadway is an entrance gate to Barnard College. To the south, north, southeast, and southwest of the building are modest landscape plots (the landscaping is not historic and includes a pair of stone Japanese lanterns). The building has been a key element of the Columbia University campus since its completion in 1902 and it retains its integrity to a very high degree. The nomination boundary is defined by the immediately surrounding sidewalks, which define its site within the larger campus setting.

Exterior Description

Earl Hall is a three-story building built of red brick laid in Flemish bond with many of the headers burned.¹ The building has a limestone portico and trim, granite stairs and base, and a copper dome and lantern. The symmetrical building has a central plan, with a deep wing extending to the east towards the campus and a shallower wing extending to the west towards Broadway. The front entrance to the building is on the second floor and is raised above campus level by a long flight of twenty-two granite stairs with triple, stepped wing walls of granite. The top wing walls support Renaissance-inspired bronze torchères with classical ornamental

¹ The names of floors in Earl Hall is inconsistent in the historical record. Some early records refer to ground floor, first floor, and second floor, others to first, second, and third floor. In this report, Earl is described as a three-story building. This coincides with the room numbering system currently in use

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details, including acanthus leaves, rosettes, egg-and-dart molding, and grape vines. The bronze base supports a central glass orb surrounded by four additional orbs.

The stairs lead to a two-story, limestone portico that projects slightly from the facade. The portico is formed by four fluted Greek Doric columns, each with a modest base and a capital with simple abacus and echinus. The columns support a Doric entablature with a central, lozenge-shaped panel, inscribed EARL HALL, flanked by three triglyphs to each side. The apex of the pediment is capped by an antefix in the form of an anthemion with scrolls, while each end of the pediment also has an anthemion antefix with scrolls facing in each direction. The brick infill of the pediment is outlined by two courses with alternating raised headers. The main entrance is located in the center of the facade, between the two central columns, and is reached by a single granite step. It consists of a pair of wood and glass doors with a transom above. The entrance is set within a limestone enframingent with crossetted corners. Above the enframingent is a low foliate scroll with a central anthemion. The top of the anthemion overlaps with a cyma reversa molding bordering a raised limestone panel on which is inscribed:

ERECTED FOR THE STUDENTS
THAT RELIGION AND LEARNING
MAY GO HAND IN HAND AND
CHARACTER GROW WITH KNOWLEDGE

The letters of this inscription get smaller with each line from top to bottom. The panel on which this is inscribed has Doric taenia and guttae at its bottom corners.

The entrance is flanked by a pair of tall one-over-one double-hung wood windows each with a simple limestone base and sill. Each window has a simple limestone lintel that is flush with the brick facade. Above these windows, between the second and third stories, are raised, rectangular limestone panels. The third story is articulated by three one-over-one double-hung wood windows, each with a limestone sill and lintel. The lintels

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extend into a limestone beltcourse that runs across the facade behind the portico. Behind the end columns, the facade projects slightly, creating shallow pilasters with limestone capitals. To either side, the facade steps back slightly, in two sections, creating corner piers with limestone architrave, limestone and brick frieze, and limestone cornice; the frieze and cornice extend along the side elevations.

The first floor of the side elevations is clad entirely in granite with a projecting granite base capped by a heavy cyma reversa. On the side of the stairs, beneath the portico on each side, are a rectangular opening and tiny slit opening, all of which are sealed. The side elevations of the projecting wing are two bays deep and the bays are divided by brick pilasters with simple limestone bases and capitals. On the ground floor each elevation was designed with two one-over-one double-hung windows crisply cut into the granite, with no enframements. The easternmost window on the south side has been lowered and sensitively converted into an accessible door. On the south side a small slit window is located between the main windows. Above the granite base is a limestone beltcourse. On the second and third stories are rectangular one-over-one double-hung windows with limestone sills and lintels. The windows of the second story are taller than those on the third story. Raised limestone panels are set between the floors, and the entablature described above completes the ensemble. The windows and panels are outlined by bands of header bricks with every other brick pulled out.

The central mass of Earl Hall is a compact octagon. Because of the deep front wing and the shorter rear wing, the three-bay-wide south and north facades of the main section of the building read as transepts. The transitions between the front and rear wings and the main mass of the building are four narrow, single bay facades that form the short sides of the octagon. Each has a single window in the basement and on the first floor, a blind window of brick on the second story and a single limestone panel. The ornamental detail echoes that described on the side elevations of the front wing, with the addition of raised headers forming a rectangle inside the blind windows. On the south and north elevations, the three bays of the main section of the building are divided by shallow brick pilasters with limestone bases and capitals. The pilasters support a limestone Doric entablature

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with triglyphs and a central lozenge-shaped panel in the frieze. Above is a limestone pediment with brick infill highlighted by two brick bands with raised headers. On the south elevation the openings have one-over-one double-hung wood windows; on the north side, the windows have four-over-four metal sash with wire glass panes; this is an alteration completed at an unknown date. The limestone sills, lintels, and panels are the same as those described previously. There are no header brick details on this portion of the facade.

The rear elevation, facing west, has a granite ground floor with a watertable capped by a cyma reversa. A rear entrance, located in the center of this elevation, is reached up four granite steps. The entry with double doors of oak and glass has a simple enframing and is crowned by a scroll and anthemion. The entry is flanked by iron bracket lamps, each in the form of a volute ornamented with acanthus, anthemion, and rosettes. Atop the bracket, tiny scrolls support a glass globe. There is a single window opening to either side of the entrance, each with a one-over-one double-hung wood window. Four brick pilasters articulate the three bays of this facade and support a Doric entablature with triglyphs and a central lozenge-shaped panel, capped by a pediment with brick infill highlighted by bands of raised header bricks as seen elsewhere on the facade. At either end, an additional pilaster is set back slightly from the plane of the facade. On the second story are three rectangular one-over-one double-hung wood windows with limestone sills and lintels, while the third story has three pseudo-openings filled with brick with the rectangles formed by raised header bricks described on the short angled bays of the side elevations. Raised headers also appear around the limestone panels between the second and third stories. The side elevations of the west wing are one-bay wide, with one-over-one double-hung wood windows on each floor. The windows on the second and third floors are the limestone panels between these floors are outlined with raised header bricks.

Earl Hall is crowned by a dome. The dome sits on a tall, brick attic level that rises above the pediments. The attic is capped by three courses of raised header bands and is crowned by a limestone cornice with a complex series of moldings. Above the attic is a ring with a limestone base and brick above. The ring is broken into

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twenty square panels by brick dwarf pilasters with limestone bases and capitals. The square panels are alternately filled with circular windows with limestone surrounds and circular limestone panels. Each limestone roundel consists of three sections, one atop the other – the lower section is flush with the brickwork; the second section is raised slightly and takes the form of a smooth ring; while the outermost section is a convex circular panel. The pilasters support a relatively simple limestone entablature from which springs a Guastavino tile dome that is clad in copper. The dome is divided into four large and four small panels; the large panels have raised moldings along their edges. Rising from the center of the dome is a lantern with eight sections – alternating paneled Doric pilasters resting on volutes and openings divided into five small square lights. The pilasters support a full entablature with a projecting cornice. Above the cornice the lantern is capped by a concave pinnacle crowned by an astragal molding, atop of which is a ball.

The exterior of the building retains its original character with the exception of the replacement of the one-over-one wood windows on the north facade with six-over-six metal windows with wire-glass panes, the conversion of a window into an accessible door at the first-floor level, and the addition of a non-contributing, iron fire stair on the north elevation. The stair connects to the building at the central window of the third floor. The dates of these alterations are not known.

Interior Description

The front entry doors lead into the second floor which remains largely as designed by McKim, Mead & White. The doors open into a large, rectangular reception hall and lounge (the original floor of small square marble tiles may be extant beneath the current carpet) and plaster walls and ceiling. A ceiling molding has a frieze with raised disks capped by a cornice. To the left, along the south wall, is an oak mantel with Doric pilasters, paneled frieze, and a marble firebox surround. To the right is a stair leading down to the first floor and up to the third floor. The stair is of cast iron, with the visible sides (the south side facing the entrance hall and the north side facing the stair leading to the first floor) ornamented with panels and classical moldings. The treads are marble.

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The stairway has a wrought-iron railing with simple balusters and horizontal bands at top and bottom wrought into a wave pattern. The railings connect to small cast-iron newel posts. The railing has a wood hand rail. At the base of the stair leading from the second to the third floor is an ornate wrought-iron composition with bellflowers, acanthus, and rosettes.

A segmental arch separates the reception hall and lounge from a wide hall flanked by meeting rooms and offices. The walls of the hall have plaster baseboards and cornice moldings. The entrances to the first, or easternmost spaces are set at an angle, facing the reception hall. To the left is the office of the chaplain (room 202), entered through a single bowed oak door (the door is convex on the reception hall side and concave on the office side) with oak enframing; the top half is translucent glass with horizontal panels below. To the right are double oak doors set into an oak enframing, each with a transparent glass pane, a horizontal rectangular panel and a larger vertical rectangular panel below. Above these doors is an oak transom. The double doors lead into a meeting room (now known as the Schiff Room) with plaster walls demarcated by pilasters that support plaster ceiling beams that divide the space into two sections. The east end of the room is curved and has a central fireplace with an oak mantel ornamented with a crossetted molding and deep cornice, and a brick firebox surround. Along the hall there are two painted doors to either side (probably oak) leading into subsidiary rooms, primarily used as offices. Towards the ceiling are rectangular hopper windows (now painted out) originally used for ventilation. At the end of the hall are double oak doors leading into a rectangular room (now known as the Dodge Room; room 205) that extends the full width of the building. This room has plaster baseboard and cornice. Four bronze bracket lamps with glass globes are located on the east and west walls. Room 110 has been divided into several spaces, but retains its heavy ceiling moldings and a fireplace with a simple surround

The stairs leading down from the entrance hall to the first floor is in three parts – five steps heading north, nine heading east, and five heading south. They provide access to a small first-story lobby. The lobby is separated

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from a hall by a modern door (there is a marble threshold indicating that there has always been a door at this location). The hall, extending from this lobby to the rear entrance of the building, has offices and meeting rooms to either side. There are doors to three rooms on the south side, one (room 105), with a historic wood door, now painted. There are four openings on the north side, none of which has a historic door. The entry at the west end of the north side is a portal that leads to the entrances to three offices, two of which (rooms 106 and 107) have historic wood doors, now painted. The floor of the hall is laid in small square marble tiles, white for the main field and gray for borders. All of the rooms on this floor have simple baseboards and cornice moldings. Room 101 has a simple oak mantel on its east wall.

The stair leading from the main entrance hall to the third floor is set against the north wall. It is divided into three sections with two landings -- three steps facing north, then seventeen stairs heading west, and seven stairs heading south. Attached to the north wall at the bottom landing is a bronze plaque commemorating the presence in Earl Hall of the headquarters of the United States Army's Air Service School for Radio Officers in 1918-1919. The stair leads to the third floor landing with marble baseboards and the same square, white and gray, marble floor tiles used on the first floor. The frieze at the ceiling of this space has guttae, creating the appearance of a vestigial Doric entablature. The space has been truncated at the south side by a partition in order to create an office (room 304). This office is entered through an oak door sensitively designed to match other doors). It retains its original marble floor and frieze. Two rooms to the east originally had doors from the vestibule, but only one room is accessible from the vestibule today (Fireplace Room, room 303). The entrance to room 303 has an oak door with an oak surround. This room has a small corner mantel of oak with a brick firebox surround. The second room at the east end of the floor is now entered through room 303 or room 304, via an oak door with an oak surround. Immediately west of the lobby, a pair of oak double doors leads into the auditorium. Each of these doors has two long vertical panels. The doors are topped by a transom, divided into two sections, each with four small panels. On the auditorium side, the doors are set within an enframingent with paneled Doric pilasters supporting an entablature with a pediment. The room is octagonal in shape, echoing the

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shape of the main central mass on the exterior and has a flat wood floor. The room has plaster baseboards, chair rails, and cornices. Each of the small sections of the octagon is marked by a niche, above which is a rectangular panel now used for ventilation. The wider sections are demarcated by segmental arches, each with a console keystone ornamented with laurel branches. To the west, beneath the segmental arch is a proscenium that once surrounded a raised stage (no longer extant). The proscenium has a heavy molding in the form of bundles of rods tied together with a ribbon. This molding replaces the original proscenium surround, which was in the form of a heavy foliate molding. In the center of the proscenium, on axis with the entrance to the room, set atop the molding, is a small round seal of Columbia flanked by cornucopia with rosettes; above is an anthemion flanked by volutes and bellflowers. The auditorium is a domed space. The dome is articulated by ten openings, echoing the ten roundel openings at the base of the dome, that can best be described as quatrefoils, each with four small right-angled projections. Each opening is surrounded by a similarly shaped plaster molding. The dome culminates in a lantern with the opening surrounded by a series of heavy plaster moldings, including acanthus and Greek key motifs. Inside the lantern is a balustrade railing. Besides the removal of the stage, the only other change to the room is the addition of acoustical tiles to the walls; these are barely visible.

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Summary

Earl Hall is significant under criterion A in social history for its early and significant association with Columbia's LGBT community. Columbia University was the first university in the United States to have a gay student group – the Student Homophile League -- founded in 1966 and officially recognized by the university in 1967.¹ The idea dates to the summer of 1966, when two Columbia students vacationing in Cherry Grove on Fire Island, a popular gay resort, decided to try to form a chapter of the Mattachine Society, an early gay rights group, at Columbia. They looked for an ally on campus and found university chaplain John Dyson Cannon, who responded with support and courage. On October 28, 1966, three students organized a meeting sponsored by Chaplain Cannon that took place in the Dodge Room on the second floor of Earl Hall.² This is considered the birthday of the Columbia group.³ In 1967, the Student Homophile League was established with the assistance of Chaplain Cannon with offices and meeting spaces in Earl Hall. Over the next few years, the group was located in various rooms in the building. An Earl Hall location was appropriate, as the building's donor had specified that it be used to help students balance their intellectual, physical, and spiritual life. Given that homosexuality was severely stigmatized in the 1960s and that gays were not just discriminated against but labeled as deviants or sinners, the need for an advocacy group and/or a place of companionship or refuge for young people was a critical need on university campuses. Although the university resisted, national advocates such as Franklin Kameny and Barbara Gittings supported the group, and advocates and students fought hard to overcome the administration's objections. Finally accepted, the group hoped, among other goals, to initiate discussion and dialogue about homosexuality, invite speakers to campus, effect the integration of homosexuals into the religious life of the community, encourage homosexuals to accept themselves, and offer counseling services. Beginning in 1970, the Homophile League's successor organization, Gay People at Columbia (also

¹ See LGBT context beginning on page 10 and footnote 43 for complete sources.

² The details of this meeting are from William E. Kahn Jr., Director of Students' Interests, to Columbia University Vice President Lawrence Chamberlain, Columbia University Interdepartmental Memorandum, November 9, 1966. Historical Subject Files, box 224 folder 10, University Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York.

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known as Gay People at Columbia-Barnard), which also had offices at Earl Hall, began holding regularly scheduled monthly gay dances in the Earl Hall auditorium. These dances grew into one of the most important gay social events in New York and eventually attracted large numbers of LGBT people from all over the city. By the 1980s, these dances, the first at an American university, drew attendance of over 1,000 and had evolved into one of the most important LGBT social events in New York City, an event that was especially popular with younger men and with men who felt uncomfortable in gay bars and clubs.

The period of significance for Earl Hall under Criterion A in social history for its association with LGBT history is 1966-c1985. This period begins with the first meeting to discuss establishing the Student Homophile League at Earl Hall in 1966 and extends to c1985, encompassing the establishment, growth and significance of the Earl Hall dances. Earl Hall is exceptionally significant in the period 1970-1985 for its association with the gay dances held in the ballroom in the period before the AIDS epidemic forever changed social life for gay men. The first gay dance open to the public was held at Earl Hall on June 19, 1970, and the dances soon became a rare publicly accessible event that provided primarily young gay people with a safe social space to gather and socialize. Over the next five years, the importance of the dances increased. In 1981, the AIDS virus began its destructive path through the gay community. As the epidemic spread and one method of transmission was identified as sexual contact, the year 1985 marked a watershed in the understanding of the severity of the crisis in New York City. The year 1985 also marks the year when AIDS became a national issue. The death of several celebrities from AIDS, notably Rock Hudson and Ricky Wilson, the opening of Larry Kramer's play, *The Normal Heart*, and the premier of the television drama *An Early Frost*, brought the enormity of the crisis to general public awareness. In the same year, the drinking age in New York State was raised to twenty-one, and most bars began requiring identification. This meant that most of the younger gay students were more restricted in where they could dance legally, and the Columbia dances became a more important social venue. As those

³ Robert A. Martin ("Stephen Donaldson"), "Student Homophile League: Founder's Retrospect," in Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson, eds., *Homosexuality and Government, Politics, and Prisons* (New York: Garland, 1992), 259.

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who attended the dances can attest, they were welcoming to younger gay men and lesbians, accepting of everyone no matter how they looked or dressed, and were more low key than events at venues such as bars, clubs, and discos. Thus they were an important social space and they played a vital role in bridging the gap between the pioneering early days of gay rights advocacy at Columbia and the often AIDS-related political activism that became evident beginning in the late 1980s.

Earl Hall

Earl Hall occupies a key location on the campus of Columbia University as planned by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White for the university's new campus on Morningside Heights.⁴ Columbia was established by royal charter on October 31, 1754 as King's College. The school had a close affiliation with the Anglican (later Episcopal) church, but the charter opened the college to men of all religions. Classes were held at Trinity Church on Broadway and Wall Street until 1760, when the school moved into a building on Park Place and Church Street, built on land donated by Trinity. In 1857, Columbia College moved to the block bounded by East 49th and 50th Streets and Madison and Park Avenues. By the late nineteenth century this campus had become cramped and inadequate. With the accession of Seth Low to the presidency of Columbia in October 1889, the school began to evolve into a great modern urban center for higher education. As *Century Magazine* editorialized, Low was the perfect choice for creating "the great metropolitan [i.e., urban] university" in America.⁵ Low expanded the curriculum to include more fields relevant to modern life and he also opened up admissions to better reflect the diversity of New York City's population. Most significantly, he persuaded the trustees that Columbia needed a new campus and that it should be in the city and not at a suburban location,

⁴ The history of Columbia, especially relating to Morningside Heights, is largely based on Andrew S. Dolkart, *Morningside Heights: A History of Its Architecture and Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); For a general history of Columbia, see Robert A. McCaughey, *Stand Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) and *A History of Columbia University 1754-1904* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1904).

⁵ "The New President of Columbia College, *Century* 39 (February 1890): 635.

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since it was New York City that gave Columbia its unique character and set it apart from rival schools such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton.

In 1891, Low established a committee to look into a new location for Columbia and the committee eventually settled on property between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue from 116th Street to 120th Street, then owned by The Society of the New York Hospital and used as part of its Bloomingdale Insane Asylum. The hospital had decided to move the asylum to a more rural location in White Plains and sell its Manhattan property in small pieces so that, over time, the value of unsold parcels would rise. Columbia announced that it would purchase this property in late 1891. At the time, neither Low nor the Columbia trustees had any idea how an urban university could be designed for the site. After a long and complex design process involving several prominent New York architects, Columbia finally chose McKim, Mead & White, with Charles McKim the partner in charge of the project.⁶ McKim and Low worked closely together to create a campus that would use the limited square footage of the new site in an efficient manner while also becoming a complex of great architectural distinction. McKim's final plan was an impressive collection of individual buildings that could be built over time, an important aspect of the project, since Columbia did not have the money to erect most of the campus buildings at the time. The initial buildings would be located on the southern two-thirds of the site, with the campus facing south towards the city. The design focuses on a central library (Low Library) with a Greek cross plan. The library is sited behind and above a large open plaza (South Court). The library was to be flanked on three sides by secondary buildings – a chapel to the east (St. Paul's Chapel), a student building to the west (Earl Hall), and a building to the north that would combine a dining hall, academic theater, and memorial hall built atop a gymnasium (University Hall, only partially built and later demolished). There would also be twelve tertiary buildings, six to the east and six to the west of the library, that would house classrooms and

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the design process, see Dolkart, *Morningside Heights*, 115-125 and Barry Bergdoll, Janet Parks and Hollee Haswell, *Mastering McKim's Plan: Columbia University's First Century on Morningside Heights* (New York: Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, 1997).

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laboratories. The juxtaposition of buildings would create four intimate courtyards (three of the classroom buildings were never built, so only one of these courtyards was completed). Initial construction included the library, South Court, the four northernmost classroom buildings, and the gymnasium. Classes began on the new campus on October 4, 1897.

The first addition to the campus was the student's hall (also referred to as the assembly hall, now Earl Hall), built with a \$100,000 gift from William Earl Dodge Jr. (1832-1903), the head of the family's metallurgy firm, Phelps, Dodge & Co.⁷ Dodge, a devout Presbyterian, was a generous philanthropist, giving especially to organizations that furthered his religious and moral beliefs. He succeeded his father as president of both the Evangelical Alliance and the National Temperance Society, was a supporter of the American Sunday School Union, and was especially active in the spread of the YMCA movement, funding, for example, a YMCA building on West 23rd Street in Manhattan. He was also on the board of directors of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Natural History, and the New York Botanical Gardens.

In May 1900, Dodge wrote to Seth Low proposing a donation towards the construction of a campus building for religious use.⁸ In a subsequent letter, written ten days later, Dodge made it clear that he wished to donate \$100,000 for the project, that he wanted the building to be overseen by the Young Men's Christian Association, but that it should be freely available to Catholic and Jewish students as well as to Protestants. He asserted, "I should not wish distinct dogmatic or denominational teaching should be allowed."⁹ In the official letter of donation Dodge makes it clear that he had chosen the YMCA to take charge of the building because "this Association is a permanent organization, because it is engaged in the conduct of similar work in many colleges

⁷ For Dodge, see "William E. Dodge, Dead," *New York Times*, August 10, 1903, 1; "William Earl Dodge," *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 13 (New York: James T. White & Co., 1906, 352); and "William E. Dodge, Jr." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_E._Dodge_Jr. (Accessed August 2017).

⁸ William Earl Dodge Jr. to Seth Low, May 6, 1900. Central Files, box 660, folder 12, University Archive.

⁹ Dodge to Low, May 16, 1900, Central Files, box 660, folder 12, University Archive.

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and because in this way, the results I desire to obtain seem to me most likely to be permanently secured.” He went on to require that “the Charter under which it is to be administered to be so broadly interpreted as to permit organizations of Roman Catholic students or of Hebrew students whose objects are to promote the spiritual and religious life of such students, to hold their meetings in this building, as freely as others.”¹⁰ The building was also to be used for concerts, lectures, debates and other appropriate purposes. With this gift, Dodge hoped to balance the intellectual life, physical life, and spiritual life of students. He stated, “the University has made ample provision for the intellectual and physical training of its students. My desire is to make this contribution to the development of the spiritual side of the students’ life.”¹¹ The building would not just serve the men of Columbia College but also the women who attended the affiliated Barnard College and Teachers College.

Almost as soon as Dodge proposed the gift for construction of what would be named Earl Hall (Dodge refused to permit his surname to be used in naming but acquiesced to the use of his middle name) Low began discussions with Charles McKim.¹² By June, a design had been accepted by Dodge and the college’s building committee, although Dodge questioned the need for a dome and a stone portico. The dome and portico were crucial to McKim’s design vision for Columbia and he was adamant that they remain on the building. All of the buildings that surround Low Library have porticos, echoing that on the library itself, and both buildings that flank the library (Earl and St. Paul’s Chapel of 1905, designed by I. N. Phelps Stoke) have domes. The materials chosen for Earl Hall are those that McKim chose for all of the campus buildings with the exception of the limestone and granite Low Library – a dark red brick laid in Flemish bond with randomly placed burned headers, a granite base, and limestone trim. On the interior, Earl was planned for student activities and included lounge spaces where students could socialize. The major space was the auditorium on the third floor, with its

¹⁰ Dodge to Columbia University Trustees, May 23, 1900. Central Files; also in Columbia College, *Minutes of the Board of Trustees*, June 4, 1900, and quoted in “Students Hall,” *Columbia University Quarterly* 2 (September 1900): 367-68.

¹¹ Dodge to Columbia University Trustees.

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ornate dome. The auditorium could seat 400 people. This room had a modest stage (removed) but never had built-in seating, thus permitting flexible use.

When classes began at Columbia, the new classroom buildings were largely occupied by the sciences, which needed specialized laboratory spaces. The old buildings of the asylum were adapted for other classrooms. The site that was to be occupied by Earl Hall was the location of West Hall, an asylum building that would need to be partially demolished to accommodate the new structure; however, the West Hall space was still needed for classes. Thus, it was decided to build Earl in two sections. The center and rear of the building were built first so as not to disturb West Hall for another year, while the front section and portico were added in 1901. Construction of the entire building was completed by March 1902.

As construction moved ahead on Earl Hall, an advisory committee was established to decide how the building would be used and what student organizations would be housed in the new building. As the *Columbia Spectator* reported, "it is entirely evident that it will not be possible to grant to each organization the exclusive use of one room."¹³ Responding to the requirement Dodge had set with his donation, preference was to be given to religious organizations of all denominations. This would be followed by organizations with ethical objectives, literary organizations, and miscellaneous organizations.¹⁴ As recorded in June 1902, the building did house the diversity of organizations for which it had been planned, with groups ranging from religious associations to literary and debating societies, to the Glee Club and Mandolin Club.¹⁵

Over the following decades, Earl Hall continued to be used for religious purposes and for other student groups, as well as for lectures, debates, and other special events. However, the influence of the YMCA eventually

¹² For the naming of the building, see Columbia College, *Minutes of the Board of Trustees*, October 1, 1900.

¹³ "Earl Hall," *Columbia Daily Spectator* 44 (April 12, 1901): 3.

¹⁴ "Earl Hall."

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waned. By 1921, the president of the YMCA wrote to President Butler noting that both sides were dissatisfied with the arrangement for administering Earl Hall and a new plan was approved for a trial period of five years. This was renewed periodically until 1946, when a new structure, with a committee of six individuals, evenly divided between the YMCA and Columbia, was formed. According to a study completed in 1969, this committee only met once and no appointments were made to it after 1960. The report concludes, "It appears from the foregoing that the original intent of Mr. Dodge that Earl Hall be managed by the YMCA has long since been abandoned by the YMCA and that the University has, in fact, assumed responsibility for the management of Earl Hall."¹⁶ The building is now managed entirely by the university, with the Office of the Provost in charge.

Earl Hall and LGBT Significance

In the mid-1960s Earl Hall became a significant site in the history of LGBT civil rights, as well as an important location for the development of LGBT social life outside of bars.¹⁷ This was possible largely through the input and support of Columbia's then-chaplain, the Reverend John Dyson Cannon, who sponsored the university's first officially recognized gay student group in the United States, established in 1966 and formally recognized as the Student Homophile League in April 1967. A bisexual Columbia sophomore named Robert A. Martin Jr. developed the idea of creating an organization that would advocate for the rights of gay and lesbian students at Columbia University and Barnard College. Because homosexuality was seriously stigmatized in the late 1960s, Martin undertook this advocacy using the pseudonym Stephen Donaldson. Martin had joined the New York chapter of the Mattachine Society, the first major gay rights group in the country, in 1965. In the summer of

¹⁵ "Dedication of Earl Hall," *Columbia University Quarterly* 4 (June 1902): 260-61.

¹⁶ "Report of the Committee on Religious Life (Earl Hall), prepared by Thacher, Proffitt, Prizer, Crawley & Wood, October 20, 1969. Central Files, box 523, folder 18, University Archive.

¹⁷ The most complete history of early gay activism at Columbia is Ann Kansfield, "Early Rumblings: A Two Part History of the Student Homophile League and Gay People at Columbia," paper completed in partial fulfillment of the Women's Studies major, 1998. Historical Subject Files; Box 224, folder 11, University Archives. Also see Bill Retherford, "Under the Rainbow," *Columbia* (Summer 2016): 32-38.

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1966, Martin met another Columbia student, James Millham, while vacationing in Cherry Grove on Fire Island, a popular gay resort. The two students decided to try to form a Mattachine chapter at Columbia. They looked for an ally on campus and found John Dyson Cannon, an Episcopal priest who was the university chaplain. Martin credits Cannon for his support and courage in backing the idea of a student group focused on homosexual issues on campus:

Our first task was to find an ally and protector. This turned out to be John Dyson Cannon, Chaplain of the University, an Episcopal priest of great courage, unshakeable devotion to his ideals, wisdom and a gentle understanding of the needs of gay students. To me, the Rev. Cannon cannot be praised too highly. Without him, we never would have gotten started. He put his neck on the chopping block for us. . . . He was our formal sponsor, he brought us into Earl Hall, letting us use his office as our mailing address, his phone as our phone, the rooms in Earl Hall for our meetings. He was our lightning rod.¹⁸

On October 28, 1966, Martin, Millham, and one other student organized a meeting sponsored by Chaplain Cannon that took place in the Dodge Room on the second floor of Earl Hall. Martin considers this meeting to be the birthday of the Columbia group.¹⁹ Fortunately, the tenor of the discussion at this meeting is known because Columbia's Director of Students' Interests, William E. Kahn Jr., completed a detailed interdepartmental memorandum describing the proceedings.²⁰ Besides the two students and the Reverend Cannon, the meeting was attended by about twenty-five people, including representatives of the dean's office of Columbia College, the residence halls of Barnard College, the counseling service of Columbia College, religious advisers, and the Health Service of Columbia University (unfortunately, a complete list of attendees is not included in the Kahn memorandum). Two invited outside guests who were among the most important national leaders of the fight for gay and lesbian rights were also at the meeting. They were Franklin E. Kameny of the Washington chapter of the Mattachine Society, the first major gay rights group in the country (Franklin E. Kameny House, Washington, D.C., National Register listed) and Barbara Gittings of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first major

¹⁸ Martin, "Student Homophile League: Founder's Retrospect," 258.

¹⁹ Martin, "Student Homophile League," 259.

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lesbian organization in the United States. Chaplain Cannon explained that the meeting had been called because “religious groups were becoming more and more interested in the problem of homosexuality.” The contentious meeting highlighted Kameny’s and Gittings’s “positive approach” towards the subject of homosexuality, in opposition to views voiced at the meeting by Dr. Robert Michels, a member of Columbia’s psychiatric staff, who claimed that the homosexual was a “sick person.” The meeting became especially contentious when Martin “drew an analogy between the Negro’s civil rights movement and the homosexual’s fight for his civil rights.” Martin concluded the meeting by noting that he hoped to establish a branch of the Mattachine Society at Columbia and requested that the Committee on Student Organizations suspend its rules that a group file for recognition with a list of the names of members, since most gay and lesbian students did not want their names to be made public. Although a Mattachine chapter was not established at Columbia, this meeting, with its prominent gay activists discussing civil rights issues with a group of Columbia administrators, made it clear that gay rights was beginning to become an issue at the university.

Two days after the meeting in the Dodge Room, on October 30, 1966, Martin and heterosexual Barnard sophomore Eileen Anderson, sent a letter to the Columbia University Committee on Student Organizations announcing their intention to register the Student Homophile League (SHL) as an official Columbia organization, asking that the group not be required to file a membership list. They also applied to the President’s Advisory Committee on Student Life.²¹ The group received support and some financial assistance from within the gay community. An article in *Drum*, an early gay news magazine, reported that “a group of Columbia students, with the cooperation of their Chaplain’s office, are forming America’s first homophile organization of a university campus,” and there were contributions from the West Side Discussion Group and

²⁰ William E. Kahn, Jr to Lawrence Chamberlain.

²¹ This is explained in “Statement of Student Homophile League to Columbia University Committee on Student Organizations,” February 13, 1967, 1. Columbia University Archives, Central Files, box 651, folder 21.

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from the New York chapter of ONE, two early gay-rights groups.²² On February 13, 1967, Martin and Anderson had a hearing before the Committee on Student Organizations. They issued a statement that was submitted at the meeting in which they explained the goals of the organization, noting, in particular, that “SHL is a homophile, not [a] homosexual organization.”²³ By this, they meant that it was not exclusively a group of homosexuals, but was open to homosexuals, heterosexuals and bisexuals. In fact, the statement notes that of the four active members, one was homosexual, one bisexual, and two heterosexual.²⁴ The statement also emphasized that “we are not a social organization.”²⁵ The SHL couched its request for recognition within the liberal traditions of the university:

We believe first of all that there is no question as to whether the controversiality of issues to be handled by an organization should be a factor in granting recognition. . . . Columbia has a noble tradition of granting freedom of speech, assembly, and press to all organizations which do not infringe upon the rights of others, regardless of the popularity of their opinions. This tradition is of great importance in Columbia’s deserved reputation as a liberal, tolerant, and academically free institution.

You may be assured that no possible activities of the Student Homophile League could infringe upon the rights of others or the unimpeded functioning of the University. . . . Our activities are primarily intellectual and educational rather than activist. We would pursue our goals not by mass demonstrations or “confrontations,” but by correspondence, academic research, white papers, newsletters and the like.²⁶

Martin and Anderson also asked that they not be forced to submit the names of members, quoting from statements of the ACLU and other organizations and from a Supreme Court case, as well as explaining why anonymity was a social necessity at the time.²⁷ The request to suspend a membership list was rejected. To deal with the requirement, Martin “went around to the most prominent student leaders and asked them to become

²² “New York,” *Drum* no. 22, December, 1966, 5; apparently, a flyer seeking contributions was included in an issue; Martin, “Student Homophile League,” 259. A second article about the Columbia group appeared in *Drum* no. 25, August 1967, 4, 10

²³ “Statement of Student Homophile League,” 2.

²⁴ “Statement of Student Homophile League,” 2.

²⁵ “Statement of Student Homophile League,” 2. Emphasis in original.

²⁶ “Statement of Student Homophile League,” 1.

²⁷ “Statement of Student Homophile League,” 2-4.

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pro forma members.”²⁸ The Committee on Student Organizations did promise to keep the names of members secret. The SHL was officially recognized by the Committee on Student Organizations on April 28, 1967, thus becoming what scholars have concluded was the first such organization at any college or university in the United States.²⁹ The group was based in 202 Earl Hall, the office of Chaplain Cannon, who had supported its establishment.

In its Statement of Purposes, the newly established SHL declared that it was organized “to inform and enlighten the Columbia-Barnard community and general public about homosexuality, including legal, sociological, psychological, and personal aspects.” The group hoped, among other goals, to initiate discussion and dialogue about homosexuality, invite speakers to campus, effect the integration of homosexuals into the religious life of the community, encourage homosexuals to accept themselves, and offer counseling services. As part of the recognition of the SHL, the founders agreed that it would not be a social group that would organize parties and similar events.³⁰ As Martin later wrote, “it was part of our understanding with the university that we would not embrace social functions – no dances.”³¹ Thus, the Statement of Purposes concluded by emphatically noting that “IT IS NOT A PURPOSE OF THIS SOCIETY TO ACT AS A SOCIAL GROUP OR AGENCY FOR PERSONAL INTRODUCTION.” This, of course, was somewhat disingenuous, since gay students would

²⁸ Martin, “Student Homophile League,” 259.

²⁹ See, for example, Martin, “Student Homophile League,” 258; Murray Schumach, “Columbia Charters Homosexual Group,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1967, 1; Foster Gunnison Jr., letter to Sharon Nadeau, April 30, 1972 (Stephen Donaldson Papers, box 17, folder 13, Gay People at Columbia-Barnard 1971-1975, New York Public Library Manuscripts Division); Kansfield, “Early Rumblings,” 2; Retherford, “Under the Rainbow,” 34; John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 209; David Allyn, *Make Love Not War: The Sexual Revolution: An Unfettered History* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2001), 152; Tony Cawthorn and Vicki Guthrie, “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students, in Michael J. Cuyjer, May F. Howard-Hamilton, and Diane L. Cooper, eds, *Multiculturalism on Campus: Theory, Models, and Practices for Understanding Diversity and Creating Inclusion* (Sterling, Va.: Stylus Publishing Co., 2012), 296; and Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 65.

³⁰ Student Homophile League of Columbia University, “Statement of Purposes,” [1967]. Historical Subject Files, Box 224, folder 10, University Archives; see also “Student Homophile League of Columbia Univ.,” announcement of the formation of the SHL.

³¹ “An Open Letter, Martin to Gay People at Columbia-Barnard, March 6, 1982, quoted in Kansfield, “Early Rumblings,” 5.

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obviously be meeting one another and becoming socially (if not sexually) involved by attending SHL events. The group also published a General Declaration that placed the struggle in a human rights context and concluded with “the homosexual has a moral right, in our pluralistic society, to be homosexual; and being homosexual, to live free from unwelcomed pressures to conform to the prevailing heterosexuality, and free from penalty, disability, or disadvantage arising from the mere state of non-conformity in sexual orientation.”³²

Just before its official recognition, the SHL members prepared a press release announcing the existence of the new group.³³ The *Columbia Daily Spectator*, the Columbia student newspaper, published an article and a favorable editorial about the founding of the SHL.³⁴ WNEW radio interviewed Martin. On May 3, 1967, probably as a result of the *Spectator* article, the *New York Times* published a sympathetic front-page piece entitled “Columbia Charters Homosexual Group.”³⁵ The article began in a matter-of-fact manner stating that “Columbia University has issued a charter to a student group that seeks equal rights for homosexuals” and went on to quote from interviews with Martin (using the Stephen Donaldson pseudonym) and Chaplain Cannon and to list some of the points in the SHL’s General Declaration. The article did make several errors. As Donaldson and the founders of the SHL made clear, it was not a homosexual group, but a homophile organization, welcoming to all people, and Columbia registered the group, as they did all student groups that met their criteria, but did not grant it a charter. The *Times* item was picked up by newspapers in other cities. As Martin described it:

That afternoon [May 3, 1967], the *World-Journal-Tribune* did a big, sensational story. . . : all the papers, all the TV stations, radio stations suddenly were doing stories, the next couple of days were frantic as media which had all ignored the press release suddenly wanted the information I had already given them. The story spread abroad: incoming mail told us of

³² Student Homophile League, “General Declaration,” [1967]. Historical Subject Files, Box 224, folder 10, University Archives.

³³ Student Homophile League of Columbia University, press release, written April 26, 1967, issued April 28, 1967. Central Files, Box 651, folder 214, University Archives.

³⁴ “Adjustment Problem: Undergraduates Form Group to Help Homosexual Students,” *Columbia Daily Spectator* 111, no. 104 (April 27, 1967): 1 and “The Homophile League,” editorial, *Columbia Daily Spectator*, 111, no. 104 (April 27, 1967): 4.

³⁵ Schumach, “Columbia Charters Homosexual Group.”

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coverage in Paris' *Le Monde*, various London papers, and newspapers in Australia, Japan and other distant points.³⁶

The Columbia University Archives collection includes articles from Chicago, Gainesville, Garden City, Milwaukee, Passaic, Pittsburgh, Providence, and San Francisco.³⁷ *Time Magazine* also picked up the story.³⁸

The publication of the *New York Times* article was a complete surprise to Columbia's administration and it was unprepared for the reaction, which was immediate and mostly negative. Donaldson recalled that "alumni reaction was immense." University vice president Chamberlain said the university got more mail on this issue than on anything he had seen in his seventeen years at Columbia, almost all of it negative.³⁹ Letters were sent to President Grayson Kirk and other administrators demanding that the group be disbanded and editorials and opinion pieces written in newspapers decried Columbia's action. The Columbia University archives has preserved many of these outraged letters. Comments included "I honestly think that this was one of the most outrageous moves the university has made"; "such action can only have the most disastrous consequences in respect to Columbia's reputation"; "I see no reason to glorify sickness nor to form recognized societies consisting of sick people" (written by a doctor); the decision is "utterly deplorable from every standpoint"; the group will "undermine" the "moral standards of 'weaker students,'" and the group would be an "assemblage of depraved youths who would lead others astray"; that it was "sickening to think that the office of the Christian Chaplain should be used as a meeting and organizing site" for such a group; and, finally, a statement that "tolerance has its limits. Let the pansies go elsewhere."⁴⁰

³⁶ Martin, "Student Homophile League," 260.

³⁷ Historical Subject Files, Box 235, folder 11 and Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives.

³⁸ "Students: Equality for Your Fellow Man," *Time*, May 12, 1967, in Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives.

³⁹ Robert A. Martin, Jr. to Dan Pinello, letter September 22, 1971 (Donaldson Papers, box 19, folder 5, Student Homophile League 1967-69).

⁴⁰ Letters to President Grayson Kirk, May 3-11, 1969. Historical Subject Files, Box 224, folder 10 and Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives.

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The sentiments published in newspapers reflected the general societal perception of homosexuality in the 1960s. For example, in its lengthy editorial, "Columbia's Mistaken Step," the *Christian Science Monitor* wrote that "There is a growing conviction among those who have studied the problem most closely that many persons become homosexuals only through solicitation. Anything which makes such solicitation easier through lending it an air of social acceptability, can only facilitate the spread of what is both a personal and a social tragedy" and concludes "We hope that no other university or college will follow Columbia's mistaken lead in this matter and that Columbia itself will reexamine its action."⁴¹ And in his Legal Periscope column, published in the *Los Angeles Daily Journal*, a legal newspaper, Columbia alumnus Kenyon Roberts wrote a piece called "Sick, Sick, Sick!" which opens by stating "while I try to be broadminded about the aberrations of our time, this does seem to be carrying things a bit far" and goes on to assert that "homosexuality is a vice – a harmful moral disease. On that level it destroys those who are its victims and contaminates ever-widening circles of those around them," concluding "Now really, have we reached the stage where we can seriously debate whether homosexuality can be tolerated in open society as a way of life? Dear Mother [a reference to Columbia], thy radiance has a tendency to get distinctly murky these days!"⁴²

President Kirk appears to have responded to each of the letters of complaint (several of his responses survive). In these letters, Kirk noted his distaste for the group, promised to revisit the manner in which student groups were recognized, and always disclosed that he knew nothing about the SHL's press release. In a letter to one Columbia alumnus, Kirk made his views clear:

while a comparatively small group of students is involved in this distasteful and thoroughly disapproved project, the University administration is making every effort to see that such

⁴¹ "Columbia's Mistaken Step," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 5, 1967, 20; Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives.

⁴² Kenyon Roberts, "Legal Periscope: Sick, Sick, Sick!," *Los Angeles Daily Journal*, May 24, 1967. Historical Subject Files, Box 235, folder 11 and Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives. This article was sent to President Kirk by Sheldon C. Houts, a 1949 graduate of the School of Law, who hoped that "appropriate action" would be taken.

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unconstructive activity, damaging to Columbia and its students, is discouraged and that the University does not in any way sanction or approve the goals described in THE TIMES.⁴³

Reflecting the discomfort that Kirk felt over the establishment of the SHL is a letter to the editor written by Wesley First, the director of university relations, published by the *Times* two days after the article was written. In this letter First downplays the establishment of the SHL, noting that the group had followed the rules for student organizations and had been registered, which, as he noted, “does not constitute approval of the program nor disapproval.” He also made it clear that Columbia did not believe that the SHL was a “Homosexual Group” because it had both homosexual and heterosexual members and its purpose was “civil libertarian – not one of advocacy.”⁴⁴ President Kirk went so far as to solicit the opinion of the university’s law firm, Thacher, Proffitt, Prizer, Crawley & Wood, as to whether the SHL violated any provisions of the New York Penal Law. Henry W. Proffitt noted, “I have been unable to find any clear-cut reason, under New York law, which might serve as the basis for withdrawal of this group’s registration.”⁴⁵

Chaplain Cannon also reported that he received a significant amount of mail on this issue, “mostly critical and confused but in some instances supportive and laudatory.”⁴⁶ He received so much mail that, rather than responding to each letter, he wrote “A Statement of Concern” that was published in the weekly bulletin of the university’s St. Paul’s Chapel. He defended his role in helping to establish the SHL as a recognized student group and explained how he “met on a number of occasions with interested persons – including members of the administration – in an attempt to assist in clarifying the problems which prompted the formation of the group and the problems which attended their attempt to be registered at Columbia.” And finally, he stated, “advocacy

⁴³ Kirk to Frank E. Joseph, May 8, 1967. Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives. President’s Kirk’s response to the letters is discussed in Allyn, *Make Love Not War*, 152-153.

⁴⁴ Wesley First, “Homophile League at Columbia,” letter to the editor, *New York Times*, June 3, 1967, 30.

⁴⁵ Henry W. Proffitt to Grayson Kirk, June 8, 1967. Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives.

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of a particular norm is no excuse in a pluralistic society for vicious intolerance or inhumane ridicule and oppression.”⁴⁷ Cannon’s actions clearly created tension between him and President Kirk. Kirk had requested that Cannon send him copies of all of the responses that he had sent to the letters that he had received on this issue. Cannon refused and also told Kirk that the inquiries of Henry Proffitt left him with “the impression of a ‘witch hunt.’” He concluded his letter to Kirk by stating, “I trust . . . that the Student Homophile League will not be subjected to continuing abuse and misunderstanding by those within the University who, under normal circumstances, view such activities in an enlightened and humanitarian manner.”⁴⁸

While most of the letters received by Columbia expressed negative feelings towards the establishment of the SHL, there were also a few positive letters of support. Jayne Nikolic, chairman of Christian Social Relations for the Episcopal Churchwomen of the Diocese of New York, told President Kirk that the university’s “stand in permitting these courageous young men to organize themselves into the Student Homophile League is quite laudable and I wholeheartedly support you.”⁴⁹ Foster Gunnison Jr., class of 1949, sent a quite prescient letter to university vice president Lawrence Chamberlain. Gunnison was a gay activist who, in 1967, wrote the pamphlet *An Introduction to the Homophile Movement*. In his letter, Gunnison discloses, “The initial shock was replaced by a feeling of pride. I can well imagine the courage it must have taken on the part of the administration not to blow the whistle on this one. I presume the aftermath has been pretty tough on all of you, but I rather think the day will come when Columbia will be generally recognized for having done the right thing...and been the first

⁴⁶ John Cannon to Grayson Kirk, May 18, 1967. Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives. One letter survives, from James E. Kinnear, representing the Men’s Class at Riverside Church, whose members “were filled with loathing and disgust”; James E. Kinnear to John Cannon, [c. May 7, 1967]. Central Files, box 651, folder 19, University Archives.

⁴⁷ John Cannon, “A Statement of Concern,” May 21, 1967, 1, 3. Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives.

⁴⁸ Cannon to Kirk, May 18, 1967.

⁴⁹ Jayne Nikolic to President Grayson Kirk, May 11, 1967, Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives.

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to do it.”⁵⁰ And Donaldson reported that the SHL “received a great amount of mail from gay alumni, including a couple hundred dollars in donations.”⁵¹

Despite the negative publicity and the discomfort of President Kirk and other administrators, the SHL continued to be a recognized student group. The university, however, did put roadblocks in the way of the SHL’s activities, refusing, for example, to let a statement from the group, describing what they did, go out to incoming fall 1967 freshmen along with statements from student organizations. Acting Dean Henry S. Coleman made this decision because he thought that parents of incoming freshman might misinterpret the letter as encouragement to their sons to become homosexuals when they arrived at the university.⁵²

The SHL did not initially have a large membership. There were eleven people in attendance at the first general meeting of the group on May 4, 1967.⁵³ Martin recalled that in the early years there were between fifteen and thirty members.⁵⁴ But, as he noted, the group held regular office hours in Earl Hall, counseled students who were struggling with coming out, responded to requests for information from those interested in establishing similar groups on other campuses, and prepared informational statements (written by Martin), about the

⁵⁰ Foster Gunnison Jr. to Dr. Lawrence Chamberlain, May 29, 1967, Historical Subject Files, box 224, folder 10, University Archives; Besides his activism and involvement in several early gay and lesbian rights organizations, Gunnison established the Institute of Social Ethics in Hartford, Connecticut, which collected gay and lesbian material. The collection is now housed at the University of Connecticut and contains extensive archival material on the SHL and on Bob Martin. For biographical information on Gunnison, see Social Networks and Archival Contexts, <http://socialarchive.iath.virginia.edu/ark:/99166/w67c08nm> (Accessed August 2017). Gunnison is a central focus in Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993).

⁵¹ Martin to Pinello, September 22, 1971.

⁵² “Homophiles Denied Mailing Privileges,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, September 29, 1967, 1 and “Homophile Letter Held Up to Avoid Parental Reaction,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, October 2, 1967, 1. The statement, signed by Stephen Donaldson, is in Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives.

⁵³ Student Homophile League, “Newsletter,” May 1967, Foster Gunnison Papers, University of Connecticut Archive, box 30, folder 373.

⁵⁴ Martin, “Student Homophile League,” 260; also in Kansfield, *Early Rumblings*, 12.

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relationships between homosexuality and psychiatry, the law, and the military.⁵⁵ One of the group's most important activities was holding "rap sessions" on individual floors of college dormitories to discuss issues about being gay and the relationship between gay students and their straight dorm neighbors.⁵⁶ Martin recalled that in 1968-69 raps were held "on well over 30 dorm floors."⁵⁷ The SHL sponsored lectures, including a March 1968 talk by Frank Kameny that attracted over 350 people and another on the issue of homosexuality in prison.⁵⁸ In April 1968 the group picketed a symposium at the College of Physicians and Surgeons (Columbia's medical school) called "Current Concepts: Homosexuality," that included several notoriously homophobic panelist, but no gay speakers.⁵⁹ Members of the SHL also attended dances sponsored by other campus groups and made a point of dancing together. Martin recalled a "zap" on a straight dance during the 1968-69 academic year. Such actions, according to Martin, "caused a sensation the first time it happened in Livingston Hall, but was eventually accepted."⁶⁰

All of these actions raised the profile of the SHL on campus and, for the first time, gay people and issues relating to homosexuality were openly part of campus discussions. And, while the group could not organize social activities on campus, it did organize events off campus. In April 1967, the SHL held a fundraiser at the Corduroy Club, a private gay and lesbian social club located at 240 West 38th Street, open to students from Columbia, New York University, and City College, that included dancing and a movie.⁶¹ On May 2, 1969, an

⁵⁵ Statements relating to psychiatry and the Naval ROTC are in Stephen Donaldson Papers, box 19, folder 5 and in Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives and a question and answer sheet about Selective Service policy on homosexuality is in University Protest and Activism Collection, box 72, folder 6, University Archives.

⁵⁶ Martin, "Student Homophile League," 260; also in Kansfield, *Early Rumblings*, 12-14.

⁵⁷ Martin to Editorial Board, *Pride of Lions*, letter May 10, 1972 (Stephen Donaldson Papers, box 17, folder 13).

⁵⁸ For Kameny lecture, see *SHL Newsletter*, vol 2, no. 1 (March 24, 1968): 3; for prison lecture, see printed announcement, both in Gunnison Papers, box 30, folder 373.

⁵⁹ P & S Club, College of Physicians and Surgeons, "Current Concepts: Homosexuality" symposium, program and speaker biographies, April 23, 1968. Gunnison Papers, 4-23-68, box 30, folder 374.

⁶⁰ Martin to Editorial Board, *Pride of Lions*; Martin, "Student Homophile League," 261.

⁶¹ "S.H.L. Night at the Corduroy Club," April 4, 1968. Gunnison Papers, box 30, folder 374.

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advertisement in the *Columbia Spectator* announced the “First NYC All-College Gay Mixer.”⁶² As the title denotes, this appears to have been the first public intercollegiate gay dance in the country. The dance took place in the parish hall of the Church of the Holy Apostles on Ninth Avenue in Chelsea (National Register listed), a major site of early LGBT activism. Martin and other members also assisted groups on other campuses that wanted to establish SHL chapters. The first effort to follow Columbia’s lead was at the University of Hartford, but this failed. By the fall of 1967, there were chapters at Cornell and Stanford that were affiliated with the Columbia chapter, as well as unaffiliated chapters and similar groups at New York University, the University of Minnesota, MIT (in conjunction with other Boston schools, including Harvard and Boston University), Rutgers, and other colleges.⁶³

By 1970, the social and political status of homosexuals in America, and in New York in particular, was changing, as gay men and lesbians were becoming more militant in demanding their rights. The Stonewall rebellion had taken place in late June and early July 1969, marking a new militancy in the LGBT community (Stonewall, the first LGBT property listed on the National Register, is a National Historic Landmark) and several activist gay liberation groups had been established. Thus, it is no coincidence that in late spring, 1970, only a year after Stonewall, the SHL disbanded and was replaced by a more activist group, Gay People at Columbia (GPC; often referred to as Gay People at Columbia-Barnard, or GPCB). A June 4, 1970 announcement that GPC had replaced the SHL states that GPC “differs considerably from its predecessor in purpose and outlook.” The statement takes note of the fact that there were now three gay liberation groups in New York City – the Mattachine Society, and two new groups, the Gay Activists Alliance and the Gay Liberation Front – representing the conservative, liberal, and leftist wings of the movement, so a political action group was not needed at Columbia. “Hence, GPC does not stress the liberation goals of the Student Homophile

⁶² *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 1, 1969, 5.

⁶³ Martin, “Student Homophile League,” 260 and Gunnison to Nadeau. An undated letter from Martin to Robert Hermann at Cornell, concerning the establishment of the SHL at that campus is in Historical Subject Files, box 224, folder 10, University Archives. The Stanford Chapter was announced in *SHL Newsletter*, 1.

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League. Rather, it seeks to provide a place on campus where gay students, faculty, alumni, employees, etc. can meet, not just as gays, but as individuals with other common interests, and with self respect.”⁶⁴ This statement notwithstanding, GPC did become involved in gay liberation activism as well as in social pursuits. The first chair of GPC was Morty Manford, who would remain a leading figure in LGBT rights causes until his death in 1992.⁶⁵ A 1971 typed broadside, addressed to incoming students of the class of 1975, contextualizes the formation of GPCB:

The past two years has witnessed the phenomenal multiplication of Homosexual organizations in this country from about 20 groups to about 600 groups. . . .Gay women and men have united and organized to resist their common oppression. . . .The campus group, Gay People at Columbia, replaced the Student Homophile League which differed in purpose and outlook. When the SHL was recognized as a campus organization by the Columbia administration in April 1967, its primary purpose was to fight the intense discrimination jeopardizing many of the legal and social rights of Homosexuals.⁶⁶

The piece goes on to note the formation of the GLF and other groups that have taken up this fight since the SHL had been established. Like the SHL, GPCB maintained offices in Earl Hall, although, as with all groups that had used Earl Hall since it opened in 1904, GPC was assigned space in different rooms over time. In 1970, it was in room 109 Earl; in 1971, room 105; in 1972, room 103; and 1977, room 304. The group’s letterhead gives Earl Hall as its address, but no specific room is noted. Events were held in other Earl Hall spaces. In the early 1980s, for example, GPC sponsored movie nights in the Schiff Room on the second floor. A poetry reading was held as a student orientation event in the Schiff Room in September 1977. That same year, Earl Hall was the site of a mass meeting, attended by over three hundred people, of the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, organizing to fight Anita Bryant’s anti-gay crusade in Florida.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Statement, June 4, 1970. Gunnison Papers, box 30, folder 375.

⁶⁵ Manford’s parents founded the organization now known as PFLAG – Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

⁶⁶ “Barnard-Columbia Class of ‘75,” Fall 1971. Historical Subject Files, box 224, folder 10, University Archives.

⁶⁷ Andy Humm interview, September 21, 2017. Anita Bryant is a singer and former spokesperson for the Florida Citrus Commission who became a vocal opponent of gay rights in the late 1970s, leading a campaign that successfully rescinded a gay rights ordinance in Dade County, Florida.

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Gay Dances at Earl Hall

GPC soon courted controversy by creating a gay student lounge in the basement of Furnald Hall, a college dormitory, over the objection of university administrators.⁶⁸ It also organized educational events, including the continuation of rap sessions (on dorm floors and in Earl Hall).⁶⁹ The fulfillment of the GPC's social goals is most successfully evident in the inception of gay dances at Earl Hall. The sponsorship of dances was a key goal enunciated in GPC's June 1970 statement, since they would "bring many people together in an atmosphere of fun and congeniality."⁷⁰ These were the first regularly scheduled gay dances at an America university. The first gay dance at Columbia occurred on July 26, 1969. This was an invitation only event celebrating Bob Martin's birthday.⁷¹ The first public, GBC dance was held on June 19, 1970. The dances soon evolved into a publicly accessible event held in the auditorium on the third floor of Earl Hall. By the 1980s, the dances had become one of the most important LGBT social events in New York City, one that was especially popular with younger men and with men who felt uncomfortable in gay bars and clubs. As those who attended the dances can attest, they were welcoming to younger gay men and lesbians, were welcoming to everyone no matter how they looked or dressed, and were more low key than events at other gay venues such as the Gay Activists Alliance and commercial venues such as bars, clubs, and discos. Michael Susi remembers that in the early 1980s the only

⁶⁸ The lounge controversy is discussed in Kansfield, *Early Rumblings*, 17.

⁶⁹ "Gay Rap Session for Columbia University," broadside, September 25, 1970. Historical Subject Files, box 224, folder 10, University Archives.

⁷⁰ Gay People at Columbia, Statement.

⁷¹ Unsigned memorandum to Dr. Andrew W. Cordier, Columbia's interim president, written between July 15 and July 26, 1969. The application from the SHL to hold this dance and an invitation are extant. Central Files, box 651, folder 21, University Archives.

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larger public event for gay people was the annual Gay Pride March in June.⁷² The early dances were advertised on crudely drawn broadsides. The June 1970 “Gay Dance” had go-go girls and boys as entertainment, with “everybody welcome.” The following month, Gabriel, a Turkish belly dancer, “direct from Istanbul” performed.⁷³ According to Garrett Glaser, who attended some of the earliest dances, they were “really nice” with a “genuine, simple, naive vibe.” Glaser was not a Columbia student, but he had friends at the college so knew about these dances. He recalls about 100-120 people at these early dances; Allen Young, who had attended Columbia in the early 1960s, went to some of the first dances and estimates that there were fifty to one hundred participants; while Brad Gooch, a Columbia College student in 1969-73, recalls that there were “not tons of people,” perhaps forty to sixty at the first dances that he attended in the early 1970s. Gooch recalls that the participants were largely men, with only a few women. The dances were advertised in Greenwich Village and on the Upper West Side and they also attracted men who were not from the university. Gooch notes that “mostly men from the West Village and other points a No.1 IRT subway ride away would show up.” He also notes that “having grown up in the repressive 1950s in America, “I had never danced with a boy. I did so, for the first time, to the song “Ain’t No Mountain High Enough,” at Earl Hall.⁷⁴

The dances were always held on Friday nights 9:00 pm until 2:00 am., eventually settling into a rhythm of the first Friday of the month. Participants climbed the stairs to the front entrance of Earl Hall. Michael Susi recalls attending with groups of his undergraduate Columbia friends and that people lined up outside before the doors opened. Inside, a table was set up where one paid a nominal admission – early dances cost \$1.50. During the early years, the back of the hand of each participant was stamped with a purple ink stamp; later wrist bands were issued. At first, light refreshments were served, but by 1972 beer was available at two or three spots in the

⁷² In July-August 2017, Andrew Dolkart interviewed Garrett Glaser, Brad Gooch, Andy Humm, Maria Ramirez, Adam Rosenberg, Lav Savv, and Michael Susi regarding their experiences at the gay dances. Interviews with Paul Lerner, Mark Venaglia and Allen Young occurred in October 2017.

⁷³ Historical Subject Files, box 224, folder 10, University Archives.

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building, with drink tickets purchased at the admissions desk. Adam Rosenberg, who chaired the dance committee beginning in 1983, remembers that when New York raised its drinking age to twenty-one in 1985 color-coded wrist bands were provided so that no one who was under age could purchase alcoholic beverages. Paul Lerner, a Columbia undergraduate from 1979-1983, remembers how packed the second-floor reception hall was with people socializing. Free coffee and cookies were available in the Schiff Room at the back of the second floor in the 1970s. By the 1980s, Adam Rosenberg recalls a piano and the availability of wine and cheese on the second floor. Coats were checked in the Dodge Room on the entrance floor. The dance was in the auditorium on the third floor. One of the organizers of the dances described the physical characteristics of the space in an article from April 1972, in the first issue of *Pride of Lions*, the GPC's short-lived (only two issues) newspaper, which also comments on the group's efforts to attract a diverse crowd. He wrote:

Earl Hall is well suited for the dance. There are rest rooms, check rooms, coffee ... and upstairs a huge dance hall where lights are low, the music hot, and you.
Who are you? Are you Gay Black, Gay White, man, woman, 18 or 50? Who cares! What is important is that you come out, have gay pride and leave the dance with a sense of Gay power.⁷⁵

Initially, the quality of the sound in the auditorium was poor, with music on tape and simple speakers in a space that did not have ideal acoustics. But, as Glaser asserts, people "did not go for the music, but for people." By 1972, GPCB reported that "there now appears to be a regular crowd which comes to these dances."⁷⁶ Indeed, Brad Gooch recalled that by 1972, the dances had "hit their stride." By 1973, the quality of the music had improved, "music, once the low-point of any dance, has become a pleasing combination of disc jockey and a 6-speaker stereo system."⁷⁷ Glaser remembers the music being quite eclectic, and not strictly dance music. In fact,

⁷⁴ *Columbia College Today: Take Five* <https://www.college.columbia.edu/cct/latest/take-five/take-five-brad-gooch-%E2%80%999973>. Gooch also discusses this in his interview.

⁷⁵ Q.M., "Gay Dances Are Liberating," *Pride of Lions* 1 no. 1 (April 1972): 2. Historical Subject Files, box 224, folder 10, University Archives. Ellipses in original.

⁷⁶ "The Proceedings of Gay People at Columbia-Barnard Autumn Term, 1972," January 1973, 1. Historical Subject Files, box 334, folder 10, University Archives.

⁷⁷ Donald Ferruggia, "Report of the Dance Committee," in "The Proceedings of Gay People at Columbia-Barnard, Autumn, 1973," 1974. Historical Subject Files, box 224, folder 10, University Archives.

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he notes that when dance music came on, people poured onto the dance floor. Several people recall that by the 1980s the sound system was excellent and the music well-chosen and quite loud.

The Columbia dances provided a venue where mostly gay men could socialize away from the bar scene, which, in the 1970s, was still largely dominated by the Mafia.⁷⁸ The other alternatives were the dances held by the Gay Liberation Front until it disbanded in 1972 and the Gay Activists Alliance at its headquarters in a former firehouse at 99 Wooster Street in SoHo before it burned in an arson attack in 1974. Garret Glaser recalls that GLF dances attracted men and women of all races and were, in general, more “proletarian” than those at Columbia, while the dances held by the GAA had “hotter guys” and were “very sexual.” In contrast, Columbia’s dances were more “collegiate” and more “innocent,” although attendees recall a great deal of cruising at the events. Gay activist and journalist Andy Humm recollects that by the mid-1970s, the dances were “pretty renowned in the city,” attracting 250-300 people a night and were “vibrant” and “happy” events.

Garrett Glaser notes that in about 1974-75 the character of the dances changed as they became more sophisticated and began to attract more and more gay men from outside of the Columbia community. By the 1980s, Mark Venaglia, who first attended in 1983, shortly after he graduated from college and moved to New York, remembers that Columbia students generally came to the dances early in the evening and that a diverse crowd from downtown came later. The dances reached their peak of popularity in the 1980s, by which time they had become a “well-oiled machine,” according to Adam Rosenberg. The advertisements for the dances were now more sophisticated than the hand drawn broadsides of the early years. An ad for the September 18, 1981 dance has the head of a sexy man with a moustache, with the come-on line, “Would YOU like to dance?”⁷⁹ This

⁷⁸ This context is explained more fully in the National Register nominations for Stonewall and Julius’ Bar, both written by Andrew Dolkart, on file nysparks.com/shpo.

⁷⁹ *Columbia Spectator*, September 17, 1981, 3.

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ad also refers to the event as “A Gay and Lesbian Dance,” although women continued to be a minority at the events.

Rosenberg believes that the dances played an important role in the city, where people came out and where they could meet others in a friendly environment. He recalls 800-1,000 people at some dances in the 1980s and a record attendance of 1,600, with attendees spilling down the Earl Hall steps onto the surrounding lawns. Campus security required that they thin out the crowd. The heavy attendance reflects the popularity of the dances as well as the GPC dance committee’s extensive poster campaigns in the West Village and the East Village and their advertisements in the *Village Voice*. The price of admission had also gone up to twelve dollars, so the dances were generating a great deal of money for GPC, permitting the group to support other organizations. Rosenberg notes that “The Dances funded the revival and expansion of LGBT groups and activism on campus during the 80s, including the re-founding of Lesbians at Barnard, the Gay Reading Group, protesting discriminatory US military recruitment on campus, and establishment of groups at TC [Teachers College], Law Business, P&S [Physicians & Surgeons], the Gay Health Advocacy Project and more.”⁸⁰

By the 1980s, the GLF and GAA were no longer active and the competing dance venues were the downtown clubs with their velvet ropes, door attendants who only admitted select people, and extensive drug use. Alternatively, gay men could frequent the gay bars that had proliferated in Greenwich Village and nearby neighborhoods, but these often had a strong sexual undertone where some men did not feel comfortable. Venaglia found the bars “terrifying, impersonal, and often intimidating spaces.” In contrast, he felt that the Columbia dances were “spectacular” and “a breath of fresh air” – “healthy and wholesome,” with “an “energy instantly different from any other gay environment.” It was a place where gay people could feel “normal,” just

⁸⁰ Adam Rosenberg to Andrew Dolkart, email, July 13, 2017.

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having “a great open experience among other gay people.” Paul Lerner also found the bars to be uncomfortable, but felt that the Earl Hall dances were “really fun,” “a friendly environment,” and had a “terrific energy.” They were also, Lerner felt, a place where young gay men could feel comfortable. Rosenberg reports that the Columbia dances were so popular that clubs did not organize major events on the first Friday of the month so that they would not compete. Maria Ramirez, a student at Columbia between 1988 and 1992, recalls the “fabulous dances” during this period, with many people coming from downtown, including what, at the time, would have been called “drag queens.” She even remembers drag shows early in the evening and notes that one of the great things about the Columbia gay dances was that they were nonjudgmental. As with others who attended the dances in the 1980s, Ramirez recalls that they were packed and that women were a relatively small number of attendees. However, Lav Savv, a Columbia student between 1990 and 1994, recalls going to the dances with friends from Barnard, since it was more relaxing to attend with women. By his sophomore and junior years he was attending the dances with a group of gay male friends and straight women. He calls the dances his “pre-game.” His group would attend the Columbia dance and then, after it ended, go downtown to the clubs, which were open later. He recalls the auditorium as being dark, the dance floor “really packed,” and the music loud. Savv observed that in contrast to the downtown clubs, everyone was welcome at Columbia, there was no velvet rope, and you did not have to dress or look a particular way to get in and have fun

The year 1985 marked a watershed in the understanding of the severity of the crisis in New York City and it was also the year in which AIDS became a national issue. The late 1980s was a period of political activism in the gay community, peaking late in the decade and early in the 1990s with the AIDS crisis. As the 1980s progressed, Rosenberg recalls that activism increased. Politicians would come to the dances and hand out buttons and fliers; investigators on research projects would attend to interview people about safe-sex attitudes and other issues, and tables would be set up to get signatures for various causes. Andy Humm remembers setting up a table to get signatures in support of a Gay Rights Bill at the New York City Council and to recruit people to work on the campaign.

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Earl Hall was a center of gay life at Columbia beginning in 1966 with the first inklings of a student group seeking gay rights on campus. Under the auspices of the Office of the Chaplain, Earl Hall became the official home of America's first collegiate gay rights group, the Student Homophile League and its more activist successor, Gay People at Columbia/Gay People at Columbia-Barnard, beginning in the 1970s. It also became a major social center for gay students at Columbia as well as for the greater LGBT community in New York with its highly successful monthly dances, beginning in 1970 and reaching a peak of popularity in the mid-1980s, by which time LGBT students and their student groups were considered a vital part of Columbia University life.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is defined by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification

Earl Hall sits amidst a large multi-building campus, including several buildings that have already been listed on the National Register. The campus itself has been determined eligible. This nomination signals out Earl Hall for its important association with LGBT civil rights. Thus, the boundary has been drawn to include only Earl Hall and follows sidewalks around the building that define its site within the larger campus.

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Photographer: Andrew S. Dolkart
NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project
116 Pinehurst Ave
New York, NY 10033

Date: 2017

Tiff Files: CD-R of .tiff files on file at
National Park Service
Washington, D.C.
And
New York State Historic Preservation Office
Waterford, NY 12188

Views:

- 0001: façade looking northwest
- 0002: façade looking west
- 0003: rear elevation looking east
- 0004: south elevation looking north
- 0005: north elevation looking southwest
- 0006: dome looking east
- 0007: south elevation detail looking northwest
- 0008: pediment looking northwest
- 0009: lamp looking northeast
- 0010: reception hall looking southwest
- 0011: stair looking south
- 0012: Schiff Room looking east
- 0013: first floor hall looking west
- 0014: third floor vestibule looking south
- 0015: room 303 looking northwest
- 0016: auditorium looking west

See continuation sheet





Central Park, NY
Quadrangle

Earl Hall



1:24,000
1 in = 2,000 ft

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



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Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



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