



*Testimony in Support of the Proposed Designation of the
Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse, 99 Wooster Street, Manhattan,
as a New York City Landmark*

Tuesday, June 4, 2019

My name is Andrew Dolkart and I am a co-founder/co-director of the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, a cultural heritage initiative founded by historic preservationists in 2015 to document historic places connected to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community in the city's five boroughs.

On behalf of both the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project and myself, I strongly support the designation of the former GAA Firehouse as an individual New York City Landmark.

The Gay Activists Alliance, or GAA, organized in 1969, was among the most significant post-Stonewall gay organizations in the United States. It was both a political force, seeking civil rights for the gay and lesbian community, and a social organization where LGBT people could socialize in a relaxed and supportive manner. The GAA occupied this former firehouse from 1971 to 1974. As a political entity, the GAA was amazingly effective, as a pioneer in vocal, public advocacy for LGBT rights. The group initiated what were known as "zaps," where they confronted politicians in a media-savvy manner in order to gain public attention to issues of discrimination against LGBT people and demand support for gay rights. Many of these zaps, and other political actions were planned in the Wooster Street building. At a time when vocal calls for gay rights were still novel, the GAA was incredibly successful in getting its demands publicized, setting the foundations for later LGBT advocacy for civil rights legislation, AIDS advocacy, marriage rights, and other issues, continuing to this day.

But the firehouse was more than just a place to plan political actions. It was the first LGBT community center in New York and among the first in the world. Developing a social scene away from the mob-operated bars, where LGBT people could feel safe and welcome was a crucial goal of the post-Stonewall movement. The firehouse hosted successful dances, often attracting over one thousand people, movie nights, called Firehouse Flicks, and meetings by such important early gay liberation groups as Lesbian Feminist Liberation, the Gay Men's Health Project, and the Black Lesbian Caucus.

The fact that the interior of the building was destroyed in an arson fire, widely seen as an act of homophobia, is an indication of the obstacles that the post-Stonewall LGBT rights movement faced and puts into perspective just how courageous the members of the GAA were in their public actions.