



NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project

nyc-lgbt-sites.org

LGBT Historic Sites Recommendations for the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission

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High Priority



Walt Whitman Residence
99 Ryerson Street, Brooklyn

Current LPC status: not designated

Walt Whitman and his family lived in this house when the first edition of his epochal first collection of poems, *Leaves of Grass*, was finished and published in June 1855. Whitman was intimately associated with Brooklyn, where he worked as an editor, journalist, and writer, and lived in many different residences (only this one is extant). Whitman's poetry was then considered controversial by some for its sensuality, and a later edition of *Leaves* included his famously homoerotic "Calamus" poems expressing male-male love. These made Whitman iconic in the United States and Europe as one of the first people to openly express the concept of men loving men. Today, *Leaves* is considered one of the most important American works ever written. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the eminent transcendentalist poet, honored Whitman with a letter praising the work in July 1855 and with a visit at the Ryerson Street home in December 1855. Although altered, the house is one of only two known extant sites, and the only residence, in New York City associated with the great American poet.

See more at NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project's web entry:
<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/walt-whitman-residence>

Priority Sites



Audre Lorde Residence

207 St. Paul's Avenue, Staten Island

Current LPC status: located in the St. Paul's Avenue-Stapleton Heights Historic District

Acclaimed black lesbian feminist, writer, and activist Audre Lorde lived here with her partner and two children from 1972 to 1987. Lorde, a Harlem native, was an acclaimed writer who became internationally renowned as a lecturer and civil rights activist, especially for women of color. While here, Lorde wrote scores of books of poetry and non-fiction, essays, and articles for scholarly journals. She often worked in her upstairs study. A selection of notable works written during this time include *Coal* (1976), *The Black Unicorn*, (1978), *The Cancer Journals* (1980), and *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982). In *Zami* she mentions Greenwich Village's Pony Stable Inn and the Bagatelle, two post-World War II lesbian bars that she had frequented. During her Staten Island years, Lorde also co-founded Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, and spoke at the 1979 National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

See more at NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project's web entry:

<https://www.nyclgbsites.org/site/audre-lorde-residence>



Christine Jorgensen Childhood Residence

2847 Dudley Avenue, the Bronx

Current LPC status: not designated

Trans woman and Bronx native Christine Jorgensen lived in this house with her family from her birth in 1926 until the early 1950s. After her overseas gender reassignment surgery made headlines in late 1952, Jorgensen returned to a media frenzy outside her childhood home in 1953 and became one of the most famous people in the world at that time. When she finally returned to New York in March 1953, an unprecedented 300 reporters met her at Idlewild (now John F. Kennedy) Airport in Queens. Here on Dudley Avenue, reporters hounded her parents for information, which forced them to stay with nearby relatives. Recalled trans historian Susan Stryker, “Jorgensen’s story became a lightning rod for many post-World War II anxieties about gender and sexuality, and called dramatic attention to issues that would drive the feminist and gay-rights movements in the decades ahead.”

See more at NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project’s web entry:

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/christine-jorgensen-childhood-residence>



Corduroy Club
240 West 38th Street, Manhattan

Current LPC status: not designated

The Corduroy Club was a private social club started in 1966, and in this building from March 1967 through 1971, that offered the largely older lesbian and gay community an alternative to the bar scene, holding such events as dances, card parties, plays, movies, and dinners. By 1968 it had a membership of over one thousand. The club was founded by members of the West Side Discussion Group (WSDG), initially part of the Mattachine Society of New York, that became a separate organization in 1956 and dropped its affiliation with Mattachine in 1965 after more militant leaders took over Mattachine. WSDG thus became an older and more conservative group within the homophile movement. The Corduroy Club helped to fund WSDG activities, and also hosted a number of other early LGBT organizations, including the Daughters of Bilitis, the Mattachine Society, and the Student Homophile League of Columbia University. The club was a significant effort by the pre-Stonewall LGBT community in New York to have a social space that was outside of the control of the Mafia, New York State Liquor Authority regulations, and police arrests and entrapment. WSDG touted it as “the only true private club in the U.S. operated by members of a homophile organization for all homosexuals.”

See more at NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project’s web entry:
<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/corduroy-club>



Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse
99 Wooster Street, Manhattan

Current LPC status: located in the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District

The Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) formed in December 1969 and became the most influential American gay liberation political activist organization in the early 1970s. From 1971 to 1974, GAA used this firehouse in SoHo as its headquarters, which served as New York’s most important LGBT political and cultural community center during these years. Many of the group’s activities were planned at the Firehouse, including sit-ins and picket lines. Perhaps GAA’s most famous tactic was the “zap,” a direct, public confrontation with a political figure regarding LGBT rights, designed to gain media attention. The building was also used by Lesbian Feminist Liberation, Gay Youth, the Gay Men’s Health Project, and the Catholic group Dignity. The Black Lesbian Caucus, one of GAA’s subcommittees, later became the Salsa Soul Sisters. The Firehouse also hosted numerous social events, particularly weekly Saturday night dances (crowds were said to be as large as 1,500 people), which provided income for the group’s activities, and “Firehouse Flicks,” a Friday night movie series.

See more at NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project’s web entry:
<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/gay-activists-alliance-firehouse>



Manford Family Residence

33-23 171st Street, Queens

Current LPC status: not designated

This unassuming house at 33-23 171st Street in Flushing was the longtime home of Jeanne (1920-2013) and Jules Manford (1919-1982) – important early allies of the LGBT community – and their children, beginning in the 1950s. Their son Morty Manford (1950-1992) was a veteran of the 1969 Stonewall uprising, an LGBT rights activist, and one-time president of the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA). In 1972, Jeanne Manford publicly spoke out in support of her gay son at a time when homosexuality was still classified as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. A year later, Jeanne and her husband Jules founded the nation’s first support group for parents of lesbian and gay children, now known as PFLAG, and held meetings in this house. In 2012, Jeanne was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal by President Barack Obama for her pioneering efforts with PFLAG and as an ally for LGBT rights. On April 26, 2014, the City of New York named the section of 171st Street between 33rd and 35th Avenues “Jeanne, Jules, Morty Manford PFLAG Way” in their honor.

See more at NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project’s web entry:

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/manford-family-residence>



Women's Liberation Center
243 West 20th Street, Manhattan

Current LPC status: not designated

In the early 1970s, the Women's Liberation Center was founded as an important meeting space for many women's groups, including those that specifically served the lesbian community. The Center operated here from 1972 to 1987. In 1973, Lesbian Feminist Liberation, a lesbian rights organization, began meeting here. The group, which had originally been the Lesbian Liberation Committee within the male-dominated Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), was founded a year earlier by Jean O'Leary. The group sought to bring attention to such issues as the difficulties divorced lesbian mothers faced in trying to keep custody of their children. It also worked to make lesbians more visible at political rallies and pride marches. The Center was also home to the Lesbian Switchboard, an evening telephone service, from 1972 to 1987. The volunteer-staffed Switchboard provided counseling, referrals, and information about events and organizations of interest to the lesbian community.

See more at NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project's web entry:
<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/womens-liberation-center>



Billy Strayhorn & Aaron Bridgers Residence
315 Convent Avenue, Manhattan

Current LPC status: located in the Hamilton Heights Historic District

Jazz great Billy Strayhorn lived here with his partner, jazz pianist Aaron Bridgers, from 1939 to 1948, though Strayhorn stayed until 1950. During these years, the openly gay Strayhorn forged his collaboration with composer Duke Ellington and wrote “Take the A Train,” “Lush Life,” and “Lotus Blossom,” as well as most of the music for the musicals *Beggar’s Holiday* and *Jump for Joy*. Strayhorn, however, publicly lived in the shadow of the older and more famous Ellington, one reason being that he was one of the rare men in the jazz world to be openly gay. A friend of Strayhorn’s once noted, “...the most amazing thing of all about Billy Strayhorn to me was that he had the strength to make an extraordinary decision – that is, the decision not to hide the fact that he was homosexual. And he did this in the 1940s, when nobody but nobody did that.”

See more at NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project’s web entry:

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/billy-strayhorn-aaron-bridgers-residence>



Caffè Cino

31 Cornelia Street, Manhattan

Current LPC status: located in the Greenwich Village Historic District Extension II

The Caffè Cino is widely recognized as the birthplace of Off-Off-Broadway theater and was located on the ground floor of this building from 1958 to 1968. It is also highly significant as a pioneer in the development of gay theater, at a time when it was still illegal to depict homosexuality on stage. The staging of Lanford Wilson's *The Madness of Lady Bright* in 1964 was both the Cino's breakthrough hit and an early play to deal explicitly with homosexuality. The Caffè Cino provided an important platform for newly emerging gay playwrights such as Doric Wilson, H.M. Koutoukas, Robert Heide, William M. Hoffman, Lanford Wilson, Tom Egan, Jeff Weiss, Ronald Tavel, Jean-Claude van Itallie, David Starkweather, Charles Stanley, Paul Foster, and Robert Patrick, and for directors such as Marshall W. Mason, Tom O'Horgan, and Neil Flanagan. The most successful production here was George Haimsohn and Robin Miller's *Dames at Sea*, which was directed by Robert Dahdah and introduced teenager Bernadette Peters in 1966.

See more at NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project's web entry:

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/caffe-cino>



James Baldwin Residence
137 West 71st Street, Manhattan

Current LPC status: located in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District

Literary icon and civil rights activist James Baldwin owned this Upper West Side remodeled rowhouse from 1965 until his death in 1987, using it as his residence when in New York City. As the first major black writer since the Harlem Renaissance to speak and write about same-sex relationships, Baldwin inspired a new generation of LGBT African-American writers in the 1950s and '60s. Beginning with his second novel, the groundbreaking *Giovanni's Room* (1956), Baldwin "pioneered fictional accounts of homosexuality and bisexuality in his fiction," according to biographer Douglas Field. Another then-taboo subject, interracial relationships, also featured in his writing. Baldwin and his family members, who also lived here, also entertained numerous black civil rights activists and literary figures, including Toni Morrison, who briefly resided here.

See more at NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project's web entry:
<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/james-baldwin-residence>



LGBT Community Center
208 West 13th Street, Manhattan

Current LPC status: located in the Greenwich Village Historic District

Since 1983, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Community Center has served as a vital support system for hundreds of thousands of people and meeting place for over 400 diverse community groups. Organizations founded at the Center include the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (now known as GLAAD) in 1985, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in 1987, Las Buenas Amigas in 1987, Queer Nation in 1990, and the Lesbian Avengers in 1992. Some significant organizations that have held meetings here include the Metropolitan Community Church of New York; Gay and Lesbian Youth; the Lesbian Switchboard; Dignity/New York, a Catholic gay and lesbian organization; Asian Lesbians of the East Coast (ALOEC); Harvey Milk High School; South Asian Lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA); Salsa Soul Sisters; and Senior Action in a Gay Environment (SAGE; now Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders). The Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, a tenant, was the leading community organization to promote the gay rights bill, which was approved by the New York City Council in 1986. The Gender Identity Project, which was established here in 1989, is the longest running service provider for the transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) community in the state.

See more at NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project's web entry:
<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/lgbt-community-center>