



*Testimony in Support of the Proposed Designation of the
Women's Liberation Center, 243 West 20th Street, Manhattan,
as a New York City Landmark*

Tuesday, June 4, 2019

My name is Amanda Davis and I am the project manager 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.

The Project strongly supports the designation of the Women's Liberation Center as a New York City Landmark. While the fight for women's rights and equality is a long-standing one, it feels particularly pressing today. Not only because women's rights are under threat, but also because American women are making incredible gains in positions of authority, perhaps most recognizably in the rise in the number of women running for, and winning, political office. The former Women's Liberation Center in Chelsea serves as an important and tangible legacy of women rising up and claiming their right to public space, as well as finding their voice in a world largely controlled by men. This was also true for lesbians, many of whom broke away from gay male-dominated groups in the early days of Gay Liberation, which, of course, also coincided with the beginning of Women's Lib.

One such group was the Lesbian Feminist Liberation, founded at the Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse and later moved to this center on 20th Street, another former city-owned firehouse. While headquartered here, the group, founded by Jean O'Leary, took part in a number of activist events in 1973. In August, for example, it led a 200-person demonstration – featuring a large lavender female dinosaur – at the American Museum of Natural History on Central Park West to protest the museum's tendency to depict females of all species as subservient. The group also 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.

As we have noted on our website, several other lesbian and feminist groups met here between 1972 and 1987. Appropriately, the building retains its ties to women's causes, as it currently holds the Non-Traditional Employment for Women, a program to train women in the construction trade. This building's significant connections to the ongoing fight for women's and lesbian equality should be recognized and honored with New York City Landmark status.