

# NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project

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## LGBT Historic Sites Recommendations for the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission

July 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

The NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, building off its previous list of landmark recommendations submitted to the Landmarks Preservation Commission in 2019, has created this follow-up report of additional site recommendations for consideration. In selecting these sites, our team reviewed the more than 350 historic site entries on our website ([www.nyclgbtsites.org](http://www.nyclgbtsites.org)) and considered their rarity, associations with pioneering LGBT people and events, and local and national significance. Sites are organized by residences of notable figures, organization and community spaces, and public art. This report provides a brief statement of significance for each site with a link to their respective website entry for more context, historic photos, sources, and building information.

## A NOTE ON PREVIOUS LGBT LANDMARK RECOMMENDATIONS SENT TO THE LPC

This report is a follow-up to the LGBT historic site recommendations that we submitted to the Landmarks Preservation Commission in May 2019. Sites from that list that the LPC has not yet designated are the Walt Whitman Residence, 99 Ryerson Street, in Brooklyn (which we noted as high priority); the Billy Strayhorn & Aaron Bridgers Residence, 315 Convent Avenue, in Manhattan; the Manford Family Residence, 33-23 171<sup>st</sup> Street, in Queens; the Christine Jorgensen Residence, 2847 Dudley Avenue, in the Bronx; and the Corduroy Club, 240 West 38<sup>th</sup> Street, in Manhattan. In June 2021, we also submitted a Request for Evaluation for the former National Gay Task Force Headquarters, 80 Fifth Avenue, in Manhattan.

Even though these sites are not outlined in the following list of recommendations, we still strongly support them as proposed New York City Landmarks for their significance to LGBT history and once again ask the LPC to consider them for landmark designation.



### **Pauli Murray Residence**

388 Chauncey Street, Brooklyn

Current LPC status: not designated

From 1947 to 1960, the prominent Black civil rights attorney and author Pauli Murray lived in an apartment on the top floor of this rowhouse at 388 Chauncey Street in Brooklyn. In her twenties, Murray became aware of her attraction to women. Based on her reading of the sex theorists of the day, principally Havelock Ellis, she thought of herself as a more male than female “invert” or “pseudo-hermaphrodite.” In 1951, she published her encyclopedic *States’ Laws on Race and Color*, which Thurgood Marshall, who distributed it to lawyers on his staff at the NAACP, called “the Bible” for civil rights litigators. Two years later, the NAACP used Murray’s final law school paper to prepare the Supreme Court case for *Brown v the Board of Education*. Murray’s critically acclaimed book *Proud Shoes* (1956), a family history from her viewpoint as a young mixed-race girl growing up in the Jim Crow South, eventually “became a staple of American Studies courses,” according to her biographer Rosalind Rosenberg. From 1956 to 1960, Murray worked as an attorney at a prestigious law firm where she met and became involved with Renee Barlow, the firm’s office manager. Murray and Barlow formed a long-term relationship until Barlow’s death in 1973. Murray’s prolific career later included co-founding NOW and being listed by Ruth Bader Ginsburg as a co-author in *Reed v Reed*.

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

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/pauli-murray-residence/>



### Lorraine Hansberry Residence

337 Bleecker Street, Manhattan

Current LPC status: located in the Greenwich Village Historic District

From 1953 to 1960, playwright and activist Lorraine Hansberry resided in the third-floor apartment of this building at 337 Bleecker Street. During this time, she wrote her groundbreaking play *A Raisin in the Sun* in the apartment and, in 1957, first read it aloud there to her friend Philip Rose, who went on to produce it. In March 1959, Hansberry made history as the first Black woman to have a play staged on Broadway, and she became the first African American playwright, and the youngest playwright ever, to win the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best American Play. *A Raisin in the Sun*, considered a classic and an early authentic portrayal of the Black experience on stage, has become part of established literary canon. While living on Bleecker Street, Hansberry was a dedicated civil rights activist. She also had relationships with women, counted many influential lesbians in her social circle, and submitted short stories and letters to national gay and lesbian magazines. These works provide important insight on homosexuality and gender expectations in 1950s America.

In 2021, the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project successfully nominated this site to the National Register of Historic Places ([link to nomination](#)).

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

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/lorraine-hansberry-residence-2/>





### **Lincoln Kirstein Residence**

128 East 19<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan

Current LPC status: located in the Gramercy Park Historic District

Lincoln Kirstein, a bisexual man who bought 128 East 19<sup>th</sup> Street in 1953 and lived there until his death in 1996, was one of the great cultural impresarios of the 20th century. He was instrumental in the creation of the Museum of Modern Art. Kirstein's greatest passion was for the ballet. After seeing early ballets of George Balanchine in Europe, Kirstein was convinced that he was the future of the art and persuaded him to come to America. Balanchine insisted that a school was a necessary precursor to a company. So, with the financial backing of several friends, Kirstein established the School of American Ballet (SAB; now associated with New York City Ballet) in 1934. He lived on East 19<sup>th</sup> Street with his wife and several of his male partners. In 1984, Kirstein received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

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

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/lincoln-kirstein-residence/>



**Mattachine Society & Daughters of Bilitis Offices**  
1133 Broadway, Manhattan

Current LPC status: located in the Madison Square North Historic District

From about 1959 to 1968, room 304 and, later, room 412 at 1133 Broadway were the offices of the Mattachine Society of New York; the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) were here until September 1961. Both groups – founded in California, in 1950 and 1955, respectively – were the first two gay rights groups in New York City, with chapters founded here in 1955 and 1958, respectively, thus predating those founded after the 1969 Stonewall uprising. In the 1950s and 1960s, Mattachine and DOB were considered quite radical for campaigning for the rights of gay men and lesbians to simply exist openly in society without fear of arrest or persecution. Among the important issues they raised were the roles of government, religion, and psychiatry as major agents of oppression; DOB chapter president Barbara Gittings (a nationally significant gay rights leader) called on libraries to be positive forces for change by offering appropriate books for young people grappling with their sexuality. Mattachine’s 1966 “Sip-In” at Julius’ bar, in Greenwich Village, took place during this time period, as did four of the earliest pickets for gay rights in the United States (three of which took place in New York City). By at least 1965, East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO), the first regional American federation of gay rights groups, shared space at 1133 Broadway as well. ECHO sponsored the famous July 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Reminders in Philadelphia from 1965 to 1969, which brought attention to the LGBT community’s lack of basic civil rights.

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

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/mattachine-society-daughters-of-bilitis-offices/>



### Imperial Lodge of Elks

160-164 West 129<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan

(photo courtesy of Eric K. Washington)

Current LPC status: not designated

A rare surviving Harlem building that hosted drag balls, the Imperial Lodge of Elks (also referred to as the Elks Lodge) was prominently featured in the documentary *Paris Is Burning* (1990), which focused on the city's 1980s ballroom scene. Drag queens, gay men, and trans women of color from several notable houses from that era competed here, including those from the House of LaBeija, the House of Xtravangaza, and the House of Ninja. A house in this context is a kind of surrogate family, headed by a “mother” and/or “father” (typically older drag queens, gay men, or trans women) who provide guidance and support for their “children,” largely gay or trans youth of color who were poor, homeless, and disowned from their families. Houses, and the balls, were therefore safe havens for LGBT youth who often survived through sex work. Voguing, a highly stylized dance, originated in the Harlem ballroom scene of the late 1980s. The building is an important example of the Colonial Revival style and is a major work by African-American architect Vertner Tandy, the first Black architect registered in New York State.

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

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/imperial-lodge-of-elks/>





### **Gumby Book Studio**

2144 Fifth Avenue, Manhattan

Current LPC status: not designated

Between 1926 and 1931, the openly gay Harlem figure Alexander Gumby operated the Gumby Book Studio, one of the preeminent literary and artistic salons of the Harlem Renaissance, on the second floor of 2144 Fifth Avenue in Harlem. Gumby hosted parties, performances, exhibitions, and receptions for nearly every literary and artistic figure of the Harlem Renaissance, including LGBT figures Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, Richard Bruce Nugent, and Wallace Thurman. The studio and part-time exhibition space also housed his vast collection of rare books, manuscripts, and volumes of scrap clippings primarily related to Black history from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Gumby therefore played an early and significant role in preserving and disseminating African American history. In 1950, he donated his materials, which he titled *The L.S. Alexander Gumby Collection of Negroiana*, to Columbia University.

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

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/gumby-book-studio/>



**Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop**  
15 Christopher Street, Manhattan

Current LPC status: located in the Greenwich Village Historic District

From 1973 to 2009, the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop was located on the first floor of 15 Christopher Street in Greenwich Village. It was the first gay and lesbian bookstore on the East Coast (and the first of its kind in the nation to operate long term) when it opened in 1967 at its original location at 291 Mercer Street. Owner Craig Rodwell – a significant pre- and post-Stonewall gay rights activist who was also the lead organizer of the first NYC Pride March, in 1970 – decided to move the store to this more prominent location on Christopher Street in 1973 to be nearer to the center of the city’s gay life at that time. Despite incidents of homophobic vandalism, the bookstore was an important fixture in the LGBT community, stocking an ever-increasing number of LGBT books, periodicals, and ephemera in an era when these kinds of resources were rare. Rodwell hosted book signing and meet-the-author events with the likes of Tennessee Williams, Rita Mae Brown, and Harvey Fierstein. The store closed in 2009 amidst increased competition from online booksellers.

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

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/oscar-wilde-memorial-bookshop-2/>



### **Julius'**

159 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan

Current LPC status: located in the Greenwich Village Historic District

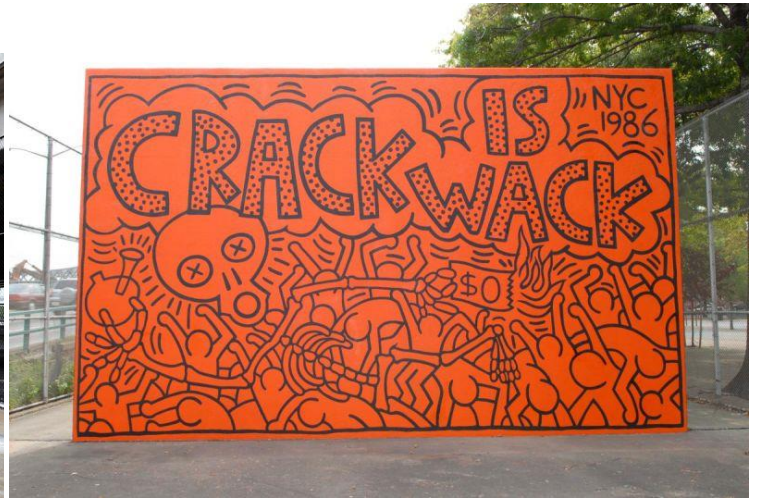
On April 21, 1966, what became known as a “Sip-In” was organized by members of the Mattachine Society, New York City’s first “homophile” group, to challenge the State Liquor Authority’s discriminatory policy of revoking the licenses of bars that served known or suspected gay men and lesbians. The Mattachine action was particularly important because bars were one of the few places where gay people could meet each other in the pre-Stonewall era. The group ultimately ended up at Julius’ at 159 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street in Greenwich Village. The publicized event – at which they were refused service after intentionally revealing they were “homosexuals” – was one of the earliest pre-Stonewall public actions for LGBT rights as well as a big step forward in the eventual development of legitimate LGBT bars in New York City.

In 2016, the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project successfully nominated this site to the National Register of Historic Places ([link to nomination](#)).

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

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/julius/>





### **Crack is Wack mural**

Harlem River Drive at East 128<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan

Current LPC status: not designated

The famous *Crack is Wack* mural was painted on both sides of a handball court wall by the openly gay artist Keith Haring in 1986. It is located in the Crack is Wack Playground off the Harlem River Drive at East 128<sup>th</sup> Street. The mural showcases Haring's signature style for which he became known around the world in the 1980s and is a rare surviving example in New York City of his street art *in situ*. Created at the height of the crack epidemic, the mural cautions young people from taking the dangerous drug. The piece is emblematic of how Haring used art to support causes he believed in (he was also active in creating works in the fight against AIDS). During this period, Haring had a studio on the top floor of 676 Broadway in downtown Manhattan, where the Keith Haring Foundation is still located. The Foundation recently oversaw a restoration of the *Crack is Wack* mural in collaboration with the city's Parks Department.

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

<https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/keith-haring-crack-is-wack/>