

# Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse

(former Engine Company No. 13)



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## LOCATION

Borough of Manhattan  
99 Wooster Street

## LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

## SIGNIFICANCE

A major activist force in New York City and across the United States, the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) was founded in December 1969 “to secure basic human rights, dignity, and freedom for all gay people.” It was most prominent in 1971-74, when 99 Wooster Street, a former firehouse, served as the organization’s headquarters.





**99 Wooster Street**  
LPC, 1973

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Kate Lemos McHale, Director of Research  
Jared Knowles, Director of Preservation

## REPORT BY

Matthew A. Postal, Research Department

## EDITED BY

Kate Lemos McHale

## PHOTOGRAPHS BY

Sarah M. Moses, Research Department

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## Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse

99 Wooster Street, Manhattan

### Designation List 513

LP-2632

**Built:** 1881-82

**Architect:** Napoleon Le Brun & Son

**Landmark Site:** Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map  
Block 501, Lot 30

**Calendared:** May 14, 2019

**Public Hearing:** June 4, 2019

On June 14, 2019 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse and the proposed designation of the related landmark site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with provisions of law.

Thirty-nine people spoke in support of designation, including a representative of Councilmember Corey Johnson who read a letter signed by State Senator Brad Hoylman, State Assemblymember Deborah Glick and Daniel J. O'Donnell, Councilmembers Margaret Chin, Carlos Menchaca, Deborah Rose, Ritchie J. Torres, and Jimmy Van Bremer, as well as Assemblyman Richard N. Gottfried, Councilmember Daniel Dromm, Alice Austen House, Alzheimer Poetry Project, Bowery Alliance of Neighbors, Brooklyn Poets, Coalition to Save Walt Whitman's House, Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, Historic Districts Council, National Parks Conservation Association, New York Landmarks Conservancy, NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, Real Estate Board of New York, Save Chelsea, Society for the Preservation of the City, Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society, the Walt Whitman

Initiative, and two individuals. No one spoke in opposition.

The Commission received correspondence from the owner opposing designation. The commission received 261 written submissions in favor of designation, including from Bronx Borough President Reuben Diaz, Councilmember Adrienne Adams, the Preservation League of New York State, the Generations Project, and 257 individuals.

## Summary

### Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse

A major activist force in New York City and across the United States, the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) was founded in December 1969 “to secure basic human rights, dignity, and freedom for all gay people.” It was most significant in 1971-74, when the former firehouse at 99 Wooster Street served as the organization’s headquarters. This influential group lobbied for passage of LGBT civil rights legislation through sit-ins and picket lines. It also planned memorable “zaps” to confront politicians and celebrities about their positions on LGBT issues and gain media attention.

99 Wooster Street has been described as New York City’s “first gay community center.” In addition to containing alliance offices on the second and third floors, it was an important gathering place, where weekly committee meetings, Saturday night dances, and cultural activities were held. GAA produced weekly programs that were broadcast on cable television and published *Gay Activist*, a monthly newsheet. Many LGBT groups met in the building, such as Lesbian Feminist Liberation, Gay Youth, the Gay Men’s Health Project, and the Catholic group Dignity. The second and third floor interiors were partly destroyed by arson in October 1974 and GAA was evicted.

Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse stands on the west side of Wooster Street, between Spring and Prince Streets. A firehouse was built on the site in the early 1850s. This building was substantially redesigned by the prolific fire department architect Napoleon Le Brun & Son in 1881-82. Three stories tall, the painted cast-iron base incorporates a single

apparatus bay with rusticated piers. The second and third stories are red brick with stone trim and terracotta details. The exterior is identical to (former) Engine Company No. 27 at 173 Franklin Street (1881-82) in the Tribeca West Historic District.

99 Wooster Street is located in the SoHo-Cast Iron District. When the district was designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission in August 1973, GAA was leasing the building. GAA was the first homosexual group to adopt the *lambda*, a lower-case Greek letter, which became an international symbol of homosexuality and LGBT rights. A 1973 photograph taken for the Commission’s designation report shows a circular shield painted with this symbol.



## Building Description

Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse

the right (north) side) of the first floor, the clear and opaque glass panels in the center and side doors, a projecting metal sign, a small sign over the center doors, one-over-one metal windows (originally two-over-two windows) on the third floor, and a recessed bulkhead on the south side of the roof.

### Description

Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse is located in the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District at 99 Wooster Street, between Spring and Prince Streets. On the west side of Wooster Street, the three-story, three-bay facade has neo-Grec and Queen Anne-style ornament. The cast-iron first story has a wide center bay that incorporates twin glass-panel pocket doors, currently painted red. To either side of the center bay are piers, single glass-panel doors, and engaged piers with incised ornament. Above the center doors is a lintel with rosettes and rectangular stained-glass windows. Above the side doors are square gridded transoms and stained-glass windows. A single vertical row of quoins, crowned by fluted panels and blank cartouches, mark the left and right edges of the first story.

The second and third stories are red brick with stone trim. Divided into three bays, the center opening is wider and incorporates two windows. All of the windows are one over one. Above the center window on the second floor is a projecting molding. At the top of the third story is a grid of terracotta reliefs. These small rosettes, two to four squares high, extend the full width of the facade. A projecting bracketed cornice, probably metal, crowns the facade.

### Alterations

There have been few changes to the street facade since the Gay Activists Alliance occupied the building in 1971-74. Changes include the replacement of a window with a an entrance door on

# History and Significance

Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse

## Civil Rights and the Gay Liberation Movement

Discrimination and exclusion of lesbians and gay people from public life dates to the very beginning of American history. Despite obstacles faced, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community thrived throughout New York City, and included many of the city's most celebrated cultural figures. After World War II and through the 1950s, there were an increasing number of anti-gay laws passed in the United States, legalizing discrimination and making life for lesbians and gays more restrictive.<sup>1</sup> The "Red Scare" of the time not only prompted a search for Communist spies and sympathizers, but also for lesbians and gays, who were assumed easy targets for Soviet agents.<sup>2</sup> While there were no laws that actually made being homosexual illegal, the illegality of most homosexual acts made being gay a de facto crime. Lesbians and gays could be fired or denied housing, and in the most extreme cases, consenting homosexual adults who had sex within their own home could be convicted to life in prison, forced into psychiatric facilities, and castrated.<sup>3</sup>

Even the 1960s, an era celebrated for rapid political and social change, saw little progress in terms of LGBT rights. By the end of the decade, homosexual sex was outlawed in every state but Illinois. New York City was no exception. It was, according to historian David Carter, "the city that most aggressively and systematically targeted gay men as criminals."<sup>4</sup> In New York City anti-gay legislation prohibited same-sex kissing and even

dancing. Police could arrest anyone wearing fewer than three items of clothing that were deemed "appropriate" to their sex, and the State Liquor Authority made it illegal for bars to serve someone who was known to be gay.<sup>5</sup>

## LGBT Activism in the 1950s and 1960s

The discriminatory environment of the 1950s and 1960s meant that very few people would acknowledge they were homosexual.<sup>6</sup> In the 1950s, lesbian and gay activists and groups strove merely to have their right to exist recognized. The two leading LGBT organizations were the Mattachine Society, primarily a men's group, which began in Los Angeles in 1950 and opened a New York City branch in 1955, and Daughters of Bilitis, a women's group, which started in San Francisco in 1955 and established a branch in New York City in 1958. These organizations sponsored conferences and published newsletters. Membership tended to be urban, white, middle-class and they mostly did not attract younger or more radical members of the LGBT community.<sup>7</sup>

Starting in the late 1960s, some resistance and success on the part of the LGBT community began to build. In 1965-69, there were a series of peaceful July 4th demonstrations demanding equality in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia. These annual events were the largest peaceful demonstrations for gay rights of their time.<sup>8</sup> In New York City, in 1966, members of the Mattachine Society staged "sip-ins," in which members would approach bartenders and state that they were gay. These actions prompted a court case, and the court's decision forbade the State Liquor Authority from refusing to serve gay men.<sup>9</sup>

On June 28, 1969, when the Stonewall Inn at 53 Christopher Street (a New York City Landmark) was raided as part of a police crackdown on gay clubs, the reaction by customers was anything but

typical. Instead of hurrying off, they remained waiting in front of the club where they were joined by friends and passersby, mostly members the LGBT community. Participants began chanting “gay pride” and “gay power” and throwing pennies and other objects. The police were forced to retreat into the bar, which became the focus of attack. Eventually they were rescued but for more than two hours, the crowd fought back while anti-riot police tried to clear the streets. Protests and confrontations continued until almost midnight Wednesday July 2, 1969, with the Stonewall Inn often at the center of events.<sup>10</sup>

### **LGBT Civil Rights After Stonewall**

The legacy of Stonewall was the inspiration of a nationwide movement to secure LGBT civil rights. Almost overnight, a large number of new lesbian and gay organizations were established—by some counts rising from 50-60 groups before the uprising to more than 1,500 a year later and 2,500 within two years.<sup>11</sup> Most of these new organizations embraced more public and politically radical activist methods. These groups have sometimes been called the “Gay Liberation Movement” to distinguish it from the earlier, less activist “Homophile Movement” of the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis.<sup>12</sup> The seeds of the first of these new gay liberation organizations were being sown even as the Stonewall uprising was still simmering. On July 1 and 2, 1969, members of newly-formed Mattachine Action Committee (MAC) passed out fliers announcing a public forum on “Gay Power.”<sup>13</sup>

That meeting—held July 9 at Mattachine’s meeting rooms in Freedom House at 20 West 40th Street—attracted nearly 100 participants who enthusiastically voted to stage a protest of police harassment. At a second forum, scheduled a week later on July 16 at Saint John’s Episcopal Church in Greenwich Village, tensions rose between

Mattachine leadership—who wanted to “retain the favor of the Establishment”—and the more radicalized constituents who wanted to overthrow the “Establishment”.<sup>14</sup> The latter ultimately broke away from Mattachine-New York and established their own organization during a series of meetings on July 24 and July 31 at Alternate U at 530 Sixth Avenue, Manhattan. This new group called themselves the Gay Liberation Front (GLF).<sup>15</sup>

Several significant early demonstrations of LGBT political activism took place even as the GLF was taking shape. On July 4, 1969, just a day after the conclusion of the Stonewall riots, the Mattachine-sponsored fifth annual protest in Philadelphia was effectively taken over by young activists who broke with established decorum, holding hands and displaying signs with slogans such as “Smash Sexual Fascism!”<sup>16</sup> The difference in tenor with previous events was obvious; as one participant noted: “it was clear that things were changing. People who felt oppressed now felt empowered. They were ready to insist on their rights rather than just ask for them.”<sup>17</sup> On July 14, MAC members joined a picket line in support of inmates at the House of Detention for Women, one of the first times LGBT activists joined other leftist organizations in public protest. And on July 27, to commemorate the one-month anniversary of Stonewall, a gay power vigil and march was held in Greenwich Village, which has been called the “city’s first gay-power vigil” and “the first openly gay march not only in New York City but on the East Coast.”<sup>18</sup> Members of this short-lived but highly-influential organization helped launch many significant gay liberation groups, including the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA).

### **Gay Activists Alliance**

Gay Activists Alliance was established in December 1969, six months after Stonewall. A leading



organization in the gay liberation movement, founding members included Arthur Bell, Arthur Evans, Kay Tobin Lahusen, Morty Manford, Martin Robinson, and James (Jim) W. Owles, who served as the organization's first president. Owles said that GAA's primary goal was "to secure basic human rights, dignity, and freedom for all gay people."<sup>19</sup> When he ran (unsuccessfully) to represent Greenwich Village in the City Council in 1973, Owles claimed to be first "avowed homosexual" to campaign for public office.<sup>20</sup>

Membership was open to all people, regardless of sexual orientation. The Constitution to the GAA promoted a neutral "one-issue" approach, focusing almost exclusively on gay rights and the "liberation of homosexuals." It was a structured, political, non-violent organization in which policy decisions were made democratically – by male and female members at weekly general meetings run by *Robert's Rules of Order*. It lobbied the City Council and State Legislature to pass civil rights laws that would end discrimination based on sexual preference in employment and housing. GAA also filed a class action suit in New York that led to the end of sodomy laws in 1980.<sup>21</sup>

The group's most famous activist tactic was the "zap," a direct but non-violent, sometimes humorous, public confrontation with politicians and celebrities that was intended to promote the cause and generate media attention. GAA disrupted many events, organized well-attended marches and demonstrations, and held protests and sit-ins to shape public opinion and government policy. After May 1971, many of these activities were planned in the GAA Firehouse.

GAA had "a fine sense of theater," including a "knack for gaining the attention of the media."<sup>22</sup> In addition to organizing memorable protests and "zaps," it produced a weekly news program broadcast on Manhattan cable television and

published *Gay Activist*, a free monthly newssheet, which briefly became a tabloid-size newspaper in 1973. GAA claimed circulation reached 22,000 in the early 1970s.<sup>23</sup>

To publicize GAA's agenda, numerous committees were formed: National Gay Movement, News & Media Relations, Legal Action, Leaflets & Graphics, State & Federal Government, Agitprop (to encourage gay pride through pamphlets and lectures), Fair Employment (to fight discrimination in the workplace), and Municipal Government (to lobby for passage of civil rights legislation).<sup>24</sup>

GAA was also the first homosexual organization to adopt the *lambda*, a lower-case Greek letter, as a symbol of LGBT rights. A 1970 flyer claimed:

. . . members of Gay Activists Alliance uphold it as their symbol before the nation. It signifies a commitment among men and women to achieve and defend their human rights as homosexual citizens . . . the lambda now affirms the liberation of all gay people."<sup>25</sup>

People were encouraged to wear this now-familiar symbol, to show "that they are not alone – even in Moscow, Idaho, or Tulsa, Oklahoma."<sup>26</sup> When the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District was designated by the Landmarks Preservation Commission in August 1973, a large circular shield-like sign incorporating this symbol hung in front of the second floor windows, at center.

Active for more than a decade, GAA inspired the establishment of chapters throughout the United States, in Long Island, New Jersey, Chicago, and on various college campuses. Rifts, however, began to divide the organization in 1973. Though GAA continued to organize "zaps," particularly against singer and anti-gay rights spokesperson Anita

Bryant, the number of general meetings began to decline and members voted to dissolve the organization in October 1981.

### 99 Wooster Street

Prior to the end of the Civil War, 99 Wooster Street was the location of Oceanus Engine Company 11, staffed by 45 volunteer firefighters. To improve service, in 1865 New York State reorganized local fire protection, creating the Metropolitan Fire Department, which came under municipal control in 1870. At this time, 99 Wooster Street was known as Metropolitan (Steam) Engine Company 13.<sup>27</sup>

99 Wooster Street was redesigned by Napoleon Le Brun & Son. Work began in April 1881 and was completed in March 1882. Le Brun & Son were responsible for many notable buildings in New York City, including roughly 40 fire department structures between 1865 and 1895.

Identical to the former firehouse at 173 Franklin Street (part of the Tribeca West Historic District), the facade combines neo-Grec and Queen Anne-style elements. The first story is cast iron, with a single apparatus bay that incorporates engaged piers with incised ornament. The second and third floors are red brick, trimmed with stone banding. At the top of the third story is a grid of terracotta rosettes.<sup>28</sup> The facade is crowned by a bracketed metal cornice. In the lintel above the center doors a horizontal panel originally identified the engine company and its number, while a rectangular panel, installed between the second and third floors, probably listed public officials and dates of construction. The sign and plaque were removed before 1940.

Engine Company No. 13 relocated to 155 Mercer Street by 1948. It was later housed at 253 Lafayette Street. 99 Wooster Street became a warehouse in the 1940s and the building was sold in December 1970.

### GAA Firehouse

GAA leased 99 Wooster Street from April 1971 until October 1974. During this era SoHo was a lively hub of creative energy and activity. Loft living in former commercial buildings by certified artists was legalized by the Board of Estimate in January 1971 and there were a growing number of commercial art galleries, cooperative galleries, and alternative (non-profit) spaces.

Early GAA meetings took place at the Church of the Holy Apostles (a New York City Landmark) at 300 Ninth Avenue, at 28th Street. A committee began looking for a “community center” towards the end of 1970. Membership was growing and a large meeting space was needed, as well as smaller rooms for offices. Funds were appropriated for ads in *The New York Times* and *Village Voice* in December 1970<sup>29</sup> and a pledge drive was begun. A mimeographed contribution form proclaimed in early 1971:

GAA is on the move! The past year has seen much activity and involvement with the cause. We have had some successes. We must continue to grow. We need a center – a place of our own. The center committee has lined up a place . . . Will you give what you can to help make the GAA Center a reality?<sup>30</sup>

“During a driving tour of the Soho area” in March 1971, two members of the Center Committee spotted a “for rent” sign at 99 Wooster Street, between Spring and Prince Streets. *Gay Activist* claimed the three-story (plus basement) firehouse promised:

No hassles from other tenants. No problems with the heat being turned

down or the doors being locked after a specified hour. But, more important, a place that we could really call a home. A home in which we could be gay and proud, A home for love, peace, and homosexuality.<sup>31</sup>

A lease was signed on April 20, 1971.<sup>32</sup> Congressperson Bella Abzug and City Councilmember Carter Burden served as references. At the April 22, 1971 general meeting, motions were passed to name the center “GAA Firehouse,” and to “restore the Firehouse as close as possible to its original condition, consistent with the needs of the GAA.”<sup>33</sup>

Renovations started in May 1971 and the official opening took place in June, during Gay Pride Week, “when the entire building [had] been all fixed up.”<sup>34</sup> Much of the work was done by volunteers. *Gay Activist* reported:

. . . the Firehouse has a potential for bringing gay people together in ways beyond conventional meetings and dances. Gay Pride Week saw the first full schedule of such varied activities. Some activities occurred simultaneously, such as the political forums and street fair. Some were impromptu, others needed months of preparation . . . our facilities were used by members of the gay community, and by the sense of self-affirmation, political awareness, and joy these activities fostered.<sup>35</sup>

The cast-iron first floor was painted fire engine red and the GAA flag was hung from the sill of the center windows on the second floor. This flag, like the circular sign described previously, featured a

lambda.

GAA Firehouse became a “nexus for New York City gays and lesbians.”<sup>36</sup> Historian Charles Kaiser wrote in *Gay Metropolis* that it “functioned as the first gay community center in Manhattan.”<sup>37</sup> The white tile “meeting hall” on the first floor was decorated with a large collaged “agitprop” mural illustrating the gay liberation movement. This room served many activities, while the basement was sometimes used as a self-defense school.

There were well-attended weekly general meetings on Thursdays, dances on Saturdays, and “Firehouse Flicks,” a popular film series, on Fridays, organized by arts committee chair Vito Russo, who later published *The Celluloid Closet*, a 1981 book (and later film documentary) on homosexuality in Hollywood films. Historian Linda Rapp observed:

These events were an immediate hit. Not only did the dances provide significant sources of income for the GAA, but they also attracted new members. Some in the organization worried that the dances would distract attention from GAA’s serious political mission, but it soon became apparent that the Firehouse was important as a community center and a visible sign of gay men and lesbians in the city.<sup>38</sup>

Saturday dances were remembered as “wonderfully democratic events.”<sup>39</sup> An attendee recalled:

. . . [they] took place on the ground floor with a “very high ceiling because they had spaces for fire trucks. So it wasn’t at all claustrophobic, though it got pretty sweaty in there when it got crowded . . . There were hundreds and hundreds of people; at some point you

could not move. And I used to go up to the second or third floor, just to escape the mob.<sup>40</sup>

By the end of 1973, however, there were “instances of chaos and violence” and steps were taken “to insure the orderly operation of the dance” by creating a budget and hiring paid staff.<sup>41</sup>

The meeting hall also hosted political forums. For instance, in October 1973 three of the four mayoral candidates, as well as candidates for other city-wide positions, spoke before an audience of five hundred.<sup>42</sup>

Many organizations trace their origins to the GAA Firehouse. Some grew out of various committees, such as Lesbian Feminist Liberation and the Black Lesbian Caucus, later known as Salsa Soul Sisters, while others, including Dignity, Gay Youth (under 21), and the Gay Men’s Health Project clinic used space in the building for events and meetings. Additionally, GAA members helped establish such groups as the Metropolitan Community Church, Gay Synagogue, Gay Democratic Club, National Gay Task Force, Ninth Street Center, and Gay Academic Union.<sup>43</sup>

In August 1973, while GAA was leasing the building, SoHo was designated a historic district by the Landmarks Preservation Commission. On October 8, 1974 the second and third floor offices were destroyed by arson, suffering 30 to 50 per cent damage. According to *The New York Times*, the fire had been set in six places.<sup>44</sup> Writer Fran Lebowitz reported in *Interview* magazine:

Up to three quarters of the third floor was destroyed. The second floor was severely damaged. Water ruined the entire building . . . No one was hurt so thank God we won’t be hearing any tasteless remarks about flaming

faggots.<sup>45</sup>

Morty Manford, who was GAA president at the time of the fire, claimed it was “part of a wave of harassment against gays,” while Arthur Bell, a GAA founder, suggested it may have been caused by “factionalism” and the “burden” of meeting the \$1,500 monthly rent.<sup>46</sup> Following the fire, GAA was evicted from 99 Wooster Street.<sup>47</sup>

### Subsequent History

By June 1975, the building had been renovated and was available for new tenants.<sup>48</sup> In the 1980s, the first floor was rented as commercial space, with offices above. Tenants have included Peter Blum Gallery from 1993 to 2012, as well as various stores.<sup>49</sup>

### Conclusion

GAA was a major force in gay and lesbian activism. This early and dynamic LGBT organization was most influential during 1971-74, when the former firehouse at 99 Wooster Street served as its headquarters. As the leading gay liberation organization in New York City during this era, it played a prominent role in advancing LGBT civil and social rights.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This opening section is adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *The Stonewall Inn Designation Report (LP-2574)* (New York: City of New York, 2015), prepared by Gale Harris. Information in this section is also based on the following sources: David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004); John Strausbaugh, *The Village: 400 Years of Beats and Bohemians, Radicals and Rogues, a History of Greenwich Village* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2013); National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), *Stonewall, New York, New York (#99000562)* (listed May 27, 1999), nomination prepared by David Carter, Andrew Scott Dolkart, et. al.

<sup>2</sup> Strausbaugh, 457.

<sup>3</sup> Carter, 14-17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Information in this section is based on: NRHP, *Stonewall*; "About the National LGBT 50th Anniversary Celebration," 50th Anniversary July 4, 2015 @ <http://lgbt50.org/about>, accessed June 3, 2015; Sheryl, "Before Stonewall: The 'Sip In' at Julius," Off the Grid, Aug. 30, 2012, <http://gvshp.org/blog/2012/08/30/before-stonewall-the-sip-in-at-julius>, accessed June 4, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec 8, 5.

<sup>8</sup> "About the National LGBT 50th Anniversary Celebration;" NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec 8, 5.

<sup>9</sup> NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, 5; Sheryl, "Before Stonewall: The 'Sip In' at Julius."

<sup>10</sup> LPC, *Stonewall*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Statistic from Frank Kameny quoted in NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, 15. Morty Manford, a Stonewall participant, was somewhat more conservative, putting the numbers at 20 before the uprising and 600 two years after; NHRP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Kay Tobin, one of the founders of the Daughters of Bilitis said, "Up to 1969, this movement was generally called the homosexual or homophile movement...after the dramatic event in 1969, younger activists began calling it

the gay or gay liberation movement." NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Credit for organizing the Action Committee is shared by Dick Leitsch and Michael Brown, although Martin Duberman stated that "[Dick] Leitsch set up the Mattachine Action Committee and offered Michael Brown the job of heading it" and that "Brown warily accepted," while Carter claimed "Leitsch yielded to Brown's entreaties and agreed to form an Action Committee." Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993), 216; Carter, 210.

<sup>14</sup> Dick Leitsch, cited in Carter, 215.

<sup>15</sup> The name was chosen "in part as a tribute to the National Liberation Front in its war with the South Vietnamese and U.S. governments" and also "in hope that the new political entity would indeed be a 'front,' that is, not simply a new organization but a unified alliance with all other gay and lesbian groups." See Carter, 218-219.

<sup>16</sup> Carter, 217. In earlier years slogans included "Homosexuals ask for redress of grievances" and "Homosexuals are American citizens also." See NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, 5.

<sup>17</sup> Lilli Vincenz, quoted in Kimberly Scott, "Stonewall's Aftermath Spurred D.C. Success," *Washington Blade*, May 25, 1994, cited in NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, 15.

<sup>18</sup> Martha Shelly, quoted in Carter, 217-218.

<sup>19</sup> "Gay Activists Alliance: Historical Note," International Gay Information Center, Inc., The New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division (NYPL), 4, viewed online at <https://www.nypl.org/collections/articles-databases/archives-human-sexuality>. Additional sources include: "The GAA Firehouse: A SoHo Landmark," <https://sohomemory.org>; "The Gay Activist Alliance is Founded," December 21, 2017, Off Grid, <https://gvshp.org>; "Gay Activist Alliance (1969-1981)," <http://paganpressbooks.com>.

<sup>20</sup> "Homosexual Runs for City Council," *The New York Times*, January 28, 1973. See <http://jimowles.org/about/>

<sup>21</sup> Joe Kennedy, "A Brief History," *GAA 25<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, (December 3, 1994) 10, viewed at <https://gaynewsandviews.com>

<sup>22</sup> Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis 1940-1996* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 262.

<sup>23</sup> Clipping, *Gay Activist*, no date, International Gay Information Center, NYPL, viewed online.

<sup>24</sup> Committee files, International Gay Information Center,



NYPL, viewed online.

<sup>25</sup> Gay Activists Alliance, “Lambda” flyer, 1970, International Gay Information Center, NYPL, viewed online.

<sup>26</sup> Committee files, International Gay Information Center, NYPL, viewed online.

<sup>27</sup> “Fire Department,”  
<https://www.nytimes.com/1865/11/03/archives/the-fire-department-completion-of-the-metropolitan-fire-brigade-of.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Engine Company 27 was decommissioned in 1975. See Tom Miller, “The History of 173 Franklin” at <https://tribecacitizen.com>.

<sup>29</sup> GAA General Meeting Minutes, December 17, 1970, International Gay Information Center, NYPL, viewed online.

<sup>30</sup> “GAA is on the move!” 1971, International Gay Information Center, NYPL, viewed online.

<sup>31</sup> “GAA Finds a Home,” *Gay Activist*, May 1971, 6

<sup>32</sup> GAA General Meeting minutes, April 8, 1971, International Gay Information Center, NYPL, viewed online..

<sup>33</sup> GAA General Meeting Minutes, April 22, 1971, 2, International Gay Information Center, NYPL, viewed online.

<sup>34</sup> “New Gay Centers in New York and Chicago,” *Militant*, May 7, 1971, 2, viewed at <http://www.themilitant.com/1971/3517/MIL3517.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> “A Fair To Remember,” *Gay Activist*, (month?) 1971, 8, International Gay Information Center, NYPL, viewed online.

<sup>36</sup> “1969: The Year of Gay Liberation,” see <http://web-static.nypl.org/exhibitions/1969/closing.html>

<sup>37</sup> Kaiser, 263.

<sup>38</sup> Linda Rapp, “Gay Activists Alliance,” see <https://glbt.com>

<sup>39</sup> Kaiser, 263.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> “Report of the Ad Hoc Commission on the Management of GAA’s Dance,” December 5, 1973, International Gay Information Center, NYPL, viewed online.

<sup>42</sup> Kennedy, 9.

<sup>43</sup> David Thorstad, “Now We Are Six,” *Gay Activist*, 1975, International Gay Information Center, NYPL, viewed online.

<sup>44</sup> “Arson Destroys Gay Activist Site,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1974.

<sup>45</sup> Fran Lebowitz, “I Cover the Waterfront,” *Interview*, November 1974, 54, International Gay Information Center, NYPL, viewed online.

<sup>46</sup> The cost of “maintaining and keep the firehouse” was always an issue. An angry circa 1972 document criticized the introduction of “mandatory fees for any services rendered” which were turning the firehouse “into a private club.” The unidentified author claimed (entirely in caps): “the firehouse has all the bread it needs to continue.” NYPL Manuscripts and Archives Division.

<sup>47</sup> The NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, “Historic Context Statement for LGBT History in New York City,” prepared for the National Parks Service, 2018, viewed online.  
<https://parks.ny.gov/shpo/documents/FinalNYCLGBTContextStatement.pdf>

<sup>48</sup> “Firehouse,” classified ad, *The New York Times*, June 28, 1975, 48.

<sup>49</sup> “Peter Blum Gallery Will Shutter SoHo Branch,” *The Observer*, October 24, 1912, viewed online.

# Findings and Designation

## Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Gay Activists Alliance has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse at 99 Wooster Street as a Landmark and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 501, Lot 30, as its Landmark Site.



**Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse, 99 Wooster Street**

LPC, June 2019





**Third floor**  
Sarah Moses, June 2019



**First story**  
Sarah Moses, June 2019

