

# Women's Liberation Center



# Women's Liberation Center

## LOCATION

Borough of Manhattan  
243 West 20th Street

## LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

## SIGNIFICANCE

From 1972 to 1987 this former firehouse was known as the Women's Liberation Center. The building was home to numerous lesbian and feminist organizations, and became an epicenter for women's engagement in the LGBT civil rights movement.



**243 West 20th Street**

New York City Department of Taxes Photograph (c. 1938-1943),  
Courtesy NYC Municipal Archives

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## Women's Liberation Center

243 West 20th Street, Manhattan

### Designation List 513

LP-2633

**Built:** 1866

**Architect:** Charles E. Hartshorn

**Landmark Site:** Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 770, Lot 17

**Calendared:** May 14, 2019

**Public Hearing:** June 4, 2019

On June 4, 2019, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Women's Liberation Center as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.3). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Thirty-seven people testified in favor of the proposed designation, including representatives of Assemblymember Richard N. Gottfried, City Council Speaker Corey Johnson, and City Councilmember Daniel Dromm. Speaker Johnson's testimony was jointly signed by State Senator Brad Hoylman, Assemblymembers Deborah Glick and Daniel O'Donnell, and New York City Council Members Margaret Chin, Daniel Dromm, Carlos Menchaca, Debi Rose, Ritchie Torres, and Jimmy Van Bramer. Also speaking in favor of the designation were representatives of the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, the Historic Districts Council, the New York Landmarks Conservancy, the Society for the Architecture of the City, the Victorian Society of New York, the Real Estate Board of New York, the National Parks Conservation Association, Save

Chelsea, and the Bowery Alliance of Neighbors, and 17 individuals. No one spoke in opposition to the proposed designation. The Commission received 124 written submissions in favor of the proposed designation, including from Bronx Borough President Reuben Diaz, New York City Council Member Adrienne Adams, the Preservation League of New York State, and 121 individuals.

## Summary

### Women's Liberation Center

The Women's Liberation Center is located at 243 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, in a former firehouse designed in 1866 by Charles E. Hartshorn. From 1972 to 1987, this building housed numerous lesbian and feminist organizations, and became an epicenter for women's engagement in the LGBT civil rights movement. In the Women's Liberation Center, activists in both the lesbian and feminist movements found common cause, joining together to provide community services and to push for radical political action that could serve all women.

The Women's Liberation Center was formed just as the "women's lib" movement was catching fire in New York City. The center was volunteer-run and organized as a collective, made up of a range of feminist social service groups, general women's political committees, and lesbian organizations. After briefly operating in a building on West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, the Women's Liberation Center moved into larger quarters at 243 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street, where it began to draw greater numbers of lesbian activists, who were then breaking off from male-dominated LGBT political organizations.

Lesbian Feminist Liberation, a lesbian rights group founded in 1972 by Jean O'Leary as part of the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), branched off from that group and began holding meetings at the Women's Liberation Center in 1973. From the West 20<sup>th</sup> Street building, Lesbian Feminist Liberation worked to bring public attention to the discrimination and legal injustices faced by lesbians. The group protested bigoted media representations

of lesbians, fought to raise visibility for women at LGBT political rallies and pride marches, and advocated in particular for lesbian mothers.

The Women's Liberation Center also housed the Lesbian Switchboard, a volunteer-staffed telephone service that provided peer counseling, referrals, and information about local events. During a time when the LGBT community was frequently stigmatized and forced to remain in the shadows, this service provided much needed mental health support and a sense of kinship among New York City's lesbians. Other groups that used the building included the Lesbian Lifespace Project, the Radicalesbians Health Collective, the Radical Feminists, and Older Women's Liberation. The ground floor of the Women's Liberation Center housed a wholesale food-buying cooperative.

The Women's Liberation Center disbanded in 1987 and many of its organizations moved to the LGBT Community Center in Greenwich Village. Since the late 1980s 243 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street has served New York City women as the home of Nontraditional Employment for Women, a skilled-trades workforce development program. The building's facade was sensitively restored in 1994, retaining most of the historic features present during the time it was associated with the Women's Liberation Center.



# Building Description

Women's Liberation Center

## Description

243 West 20th Street is a three-story former firehouse building designed in the Anglo-Italianate style by Charles E. Hartshorn in 1866. The building is located on the north side of West 20th Street between Seventh and Eighth avenues in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, on a lot measuring approximately 25 by 75 feet. The building has one primary facade facing West 20th Street, as well as a plain side facade partially visible above the adjacent building to the west.

At the time of 243 West 20th Street's association with the Women's Liberation Center, from 1972 to 1987, the building was intact to its historic 19th-century design.

## West 20th Street (South) Facade

The facade is clad in brick, and features cast-iron, sheet metal, and stone ornamental details. The building is organized into two main sections, the ground floor with its historic firehouse vehicular bay and entrance, and the second and third stories with three windows each.

The majority of the ground floor is taken up with a large cast-iron enframing surrounding a set of openings that historically served as the vehicular entrance for fire trucks. The cap-molded lintel that tops the vehicular bay is decorated with delicate floral motifs at the corners and a row of eight small rosettes arranged horizontally across its length. The enframing features three identical cast-iron fluted pilasters, two framing the opening and one dividing the main vehicular entrance from the pedestrian

entrance. Although the building retains the historic organization of its entrance openings within the historic enframing, the 1994 alteration resulted in the enlargement of the pedestrian entrance opening, and a reduction in size of the garage opening; the central pilaster appears to be historic but was shifted slightly to the west when these openings were altered.

Just above the ground floor are two metal attachments that previously held firehouse signage. The second- and third-story windows feature intact cast-iron arched lintels typical of the Anglo-Italianate style, as well as stone lintels and historic wood window surrounds. The third-story windows are slightly shorter in size than the second-story ones, a common proportion found in Italianate-style row houses which gives the building a sense of height it does not otherwise possess. The metal cornice is relatively simple, with intact dentils and floriated brackets that are also characteristic of the Anglo-Italianate style.

## Alterations

Both entrances, transoms, and all metal infill within the historic enframing at the ground floor are replacements; garage entrance bay reduced in size and pedestrian entrance bay enlarged; central pilaster on ground floor appears historic but was shifted to the west with the enlargement of the eastern bay; historic firehouse signage likely removed c. 1967 at its closure; windows replaced c. 2008; masonry repair c. 2008

## West Facade

This plain brick facade is only partially visible from the street and contains no designed architectural features.

## History and Significance

Women's Liberation Center

### LGBT Discrimination in the 1950s and 1960s

Discrimination and exclusion of lesbians and gay people from public life dates back to the very beginning of American history. Despite the obstacles they faced, the LGBT community nonetheless thrived in all five boroughs of 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 around the country, legalizing discrimination and making life for lesbians and gays even 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 to be 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 even castrated.<sup>3</sup>

Even the 1960s, an era known for its rapid political and social change, saw little legal progress in the way of LGBT rights. By the end of the 1960s, homosexual sex was outlawed in every state but Illinois. New York City was no exception. It was, according to David Carter, "the city that most aggressively and systematically targeted gay men as criminals."<sup>4</sup> In New York anti-gay legislation prohibited same-sex kissing and even dancing. New York 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 a bar 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 that 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 major LGBT organizations of the period were the Mattachine Society, primarily a men's group, which began in Los Angeles in 1950 and opened a New York 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, and membership tended to be urban, white, middle-class; they mostly did not attract the 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. From 1965-1969, there was 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, in 1966, members of the Mattachine Society staged "sip-ins," in which members of the group would approach bartenders and state that they were gay. Their 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 was raided as part of a police crackdown on gay clubs, the reaction of the bar's customers 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. As the crowd grew, its members became increasingly angry at the rough treatment some prisoners were receiving and resentful of the unfairness of the situation. 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. The protests and confrontations continued for the next few days until almost midnight Wednesday July 2, 1969, with the Stonewall 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 the topic of “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. 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 had 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>

The GLF, which was by design leader-less and as such suffered from a number of organizational problems, was relatively short lived but highly influential, and its members helped found a number of other significant gay liberation groups. Many were focused on subgroups of the LGBT population.<sup>19</sup> The



Lavender Menace, later officially organized as Radicalesbians, worked to introduce lesbian concerns into feminist discourse. The Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), founded by Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, helped homeless transgendered street youths. The Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), was also formed out of the GLF, with its constitution adopted in December 1969. Unlike the GLF, which aligned itself with a host of New Left causes, the GAA dedicated itself exclusively to advancing LGBT civil and social rights. It lobbied for the passage of local civil rights laws, the banning of police entrapment and harassment, the creation of fair employment and housing legislation, and the repeal of sodomy and solicitation laws. Its most famous activist tactic was the “zap,” a direct, public confrontation with a political figure regarding LGBT rights designed to gain media attention.<sup>20</sup> The GAA’s headquarters, known as the Firehouse, at 99 Wooster Street served as an important community center and hosted numerous social events, such as Saturday night dance parties and movie series.<sup>21</sup> The GAA had a number of subcommittees within its membership, including a women’s group that sponsored women-only events.

### **Lesbians and Second-Wave Feminism**

As in the LGBT movement, the feminist movement also faced a period of internal division in the early 1970s, with conflicts arising between those who favored working within the system, and those who favored more radical approaches. The feminist movement was additionally fragmented over the issue of whether and how to allow for lesbian participation. Lesbians were just as inspired as straight women by the “second-wave” feminist movement that had emerged in the previous decade, and many joined the broad fight for gender equality percolating in every arena of social and professional

life.<sup>22</sup> Yet some of the movement’s leaders, including Betty Friedan, president of the National Organization for Women, perceived lesbians as a threat to their cause, detracting from the real issues. In 1969 Friedan referred to lesbians as “the lavender menace” and pushed for their removal from the organization and from participation in the movements’ rallies.<sup>23</sup> Other feminists, however, such as Gloria Steinem and Ti-Grace Atkinson, did welcome lesbians into the movement, arguing that feminists and lesbians were united by their fight for women’s rights.<sup>24</sup>

This split over the inclusion of lesbians within the feminist movement was a significant factor in the development of radical feminist groups in the early 1970s. In general, these groups were interested in more than just mainstream political lobbying; they were interested in “consciousness-raising,” they pushed for direct social action as a means of advancing the cause of women’s rights, and they called for the inclusion of women of all races, ages, and sexual orientations.<sup>25</sup> For these radical groups, lesbians were seen as critical to the feminist movement, and in their commitment to women over men they could actually provide a model for all women.<sup>26</sup>

From its inception, the Women’s Liberation Center was mainly home to radical feminist organizations pushing for outspoken community engagement and direct political action.<sup>27</sup> The Women’s Liberation Center intentionally welcomed lesbians, and lesbian organizations were at the forefront of its most important demonstrations and community service work throughout its history. The Women’s Liberation Center was emblematic of the alliances that formed in the early 1970s between radical feminists and lesbians for the purposes of greater political mobilization.

### **243 West 20th Street**

Chelsea developed in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as a

middle-class residential neighborhood, and was filled with Greek Revival, Italianate, and Anglo-Italianate row houses, as well as commercial and institutional structures that served the community.<sup>28</sup> 243 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street was designed by Charles E. Hartshorn in 1866, replacing a smaller firehouse that had occupied the site since the early 1850s.<sup>29</sup> The building features intact Anglo-Italianate decorative motifs such as arched window lintels, a cornice with curved brackets, and a cast-iron enframingent with flowers and fluted pilasters around the large vehicular entrance. 243 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street housed Hook and Ladder Company No. 12 from 1866 to 1967, and it stands as an important reminder of the block's historic character and scale.

After the firehouse closed in 1967, 243 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street was declared surplus city property and auctioned off to a private buyer for residential use; however, this deal fell through and the building remained unoccupied until the Women's Liberation Center arrived in 1972.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Women's Liberation Center**

The Women's Liberation Center first opened in 1970 on the second floor of 36 West 22<sup>nd</sup> Street, in the Ladies' Mile Historic District, where it operated for approximately two years. The center was created just as the "women's lib" movement was catching fire in New York City, and was conceived as both a meeting place and a clearinghouse for information.<sup>31</sup> The center was volunteer-run and organized as a collective, made up of a range of feminist social service groups, general women's political committees, and lesbian organizations such as the Radicalesbians. The Women's Liberation Center was designed to provide space for organizational meetings as well as events like public speakers, self-defense lessons, and women's dances.<sup>32</sup>

In June of 1972, seeking larger quarters, the Women's Liberation Center moved into the former

firehouse at 243 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street. For over a year, the Women's Liberation Center was a temporary renter in the space, until New York City granted them a long-term lease at the end of 1973.<sup>33</sup> After its move to West 20<sup>th</sup> Street, the Women's Liberation Center was able to expand their activities, using the old firehouse dormitory as a performance hall, and the fireman's lockers as storage space for office files and archives for the numerous groups that met there.<sup>34</sup> At 243 West 20<sup>th</sup> Street, the Women's Liberation Center began to draw greater numbers of lesbian activists, who were then breaking off from male-dominated LGBT political organizations.

### **Lesbian Feminist Liberation**

Within the LGBT civil rights movement, many lesbians were frustrated by what they viewed as the second-class status of women in organizations like the GLF and GAA, both of which had membership in 1969 and 1970 that was 85-90% male.<sup>35</sup> According to interviews with lesbian members active in the early 1970s, both the GLF and GAA were rife with sexist treatment towards women. Arlene Kisner noted that at GLF meetings, men dominated strategy conversations, leading to an increasingly resentful group of lesbian members. At the GAA Firehouse, men generally took the microphones at press conferences, and some men stubbornly invaded the privacy of the women's committee, sitting on the floor at their meetings and refusing to leave. Men on the GAA entertainment committee, tasked with cleaning the firehouse and setting up the projector for events, refused to do so for women-only dances and movie nights.<sup>36</sup>

In response to these conflicts, in 1972 a new group dedicated to lesbian rights was formed out of the women's committee of GAA. The group, Lesbian Feminist Liberation, was co-founded by several women, including Jean O'Leary and Eleanor Cooper, lesbian activists who were pivotal figures in the

LGBT civil rights movement for over three decades.<sup>37</sup> Although the group first continued to hold meetings at the GAA firehouse on Wooster Street, O’Leary eventually felt that GAA and the gay rights movement in general were too male-dominated and were not sufficiently meeting the needs of their female participants.<sup>38</sup> In 1973, Lesbian Feminist Liberation branched off completely from GAA and began holding meetings at the Women’s Liberation Center on West 20th Street.

From the West 20th Street building, Lesbian Feminist Liberation worked to bring public attention to the discrimination and legal injustices faced by lesbians. The group protested bigoted media representations of lesbians, including in 1975 the showing on NBC of a film called “Born Innocent,” which depicted lesbians at a juvenile detention home solely as perpetrators of violence. Lesbian Feminist Liberation persuaded several corporate sponsors to back out of supporting the film, stating that the program was sexist against women in general and “slandorous” to lesbians in particular.<sup>39</sup>

Lesbian Feminist Liberation also fought to raise visibility for women at LGBT political rallies and pride marches, and advocated in particular for lesbian mothers, who often encountered difficult child custody battles after divorce. The group marched and sometimes led pride parades in New York City throughout the 1970s.<sup>40</sup> For over a decade, both Lesbian Feminist Liberation and GAA marched in support for various City Council measures to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation in New York City; both groups were key early supporters of the bill that eventually became law in 1986.

The group also held their own political protests in support of various feminist causes, holding their organizing meetings at the Women’s Liberation Center and taking advantage of the centralization of women’s groups there to advance their collective action. One especially well-

publicized event was a 200-person rally and dance session held at the American Museum of Natural History to protest its portrayal of female animals as subservient in displays. The rally was accompanied by a large lavender dinosaur.<sup>41</sup>

### **Other Lesbian Organizations at the Women’s Liberation Center**

The Women’s Liberation Center also housed the Lesbian Switchboard, a volunteer-staffed telephone service available during evening hours that provided peer counseling, referrals, and information about local events. During a time when the LGBT community was frequently stigmatized and forced to remain in the shadows, this service provided much needed mental health support and a sense of kinship among New York City’s lesbians. After the Women’s Liberation Center ceased operations in 1987, the Lesbian Switchboard moved to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center, where it remained until the Switchboard closed in December of 1997.<sup>42</sup>

Other groups that used the building included the Lesbian Lifespace Project, the Radicalesbians Health Collective, the Radical Feminists, the Anti-Rape Group, Older Women’s Liberation, and the Black Lesbian Caucus. The ground floor of the Women’s Liberation Center housed a wholesale food-buying cooperative known for a time as the Lesbian Food Conspiracy.<sup>43</sup>

### **Legacy of the Women’s Liberation Center and LGBT Activism**

In the mid-1980s, the Women’s Liberation Center disbanded and several of the lesbian organizations there, including the Lesbian Switchboard, moved into the new LGBT Community Center on West 13<sup>th</sup> Street in Greenwich Village, which became a centralized home for LGBT advocacy and community-based social support.

After founding Lesbian Feminist Liberation, in the late 1970s Jean O’Leary went on to become a co-executive director of the National Gay Task Force (now the National LGBTQ Task Force), which was the first national LGBT organization. O’Leary was also the first openly gay person to serve on a Presidential Commission, and a co-founder of National Coming Out Day in 1987, helping to bring LGBT identity and equality into the national conversation.<sup>44</sup> Starting in 1977, as the leader of LFL, Eleanor Cooper formed an alliance with GAA called the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, which brought together over 50 LGBT organizations to lobby for anti-discrimination and hate-crimes legislation in New York City and in Albany.<sup>45</sup>

The more vocal and radical forms of activism employed by CLGR and other LGBT political organizations that began at GAA and the Women’s Liberation Center proved effective in securing important legislative victories. In 1980 New York State legalized same-sex sexual activity between consenting adults, and in New York City, 1986 saw the passage of the bill banning discrimination based on sexual orientation. The New York State hate-crimes law was passed in 2000.<sup>46</sup> As time went on, other groups, such as ACT-UP, used similar tactics of direct action to bring into public view the discrimination experienced by the LGBT community, particularly during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>47</sup> Public awareness eventually led to greater cultural acceptance for the LGBT community during the 1990s and early 2000s.

By the turn of the 21st century, activists turned towards securing marriage equality, a process that occurred piecemeal throughout the nation. In New York State, domestic partnerships were recognized in 1998, and in 2011 the Marriage Equality Act in New York became law. In 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the landmark case *Obergefell v. Hodges* that same-sex couples were

guaranteed the right to marry, and marriage equality became legal nation-wide.

## Conclusion

From 1972 to 1987, the Women’s Liberation Center was a critically important advocacy space for women in the LGBT civil rights movement, and for lesbians within the feminist movement. Like the GAA Firehouse, the Women’s Liberation Center was a model for later LGBT activist spaces and community centers that would prove so important to the political fights of the following decades.

Since the late 1980s, 243 West 20th Street has continued to serve New York City women as the home of Nontraditional Employment for Women, a skilled-trades workforce development program. The building’s facade was sensitively restored in 1994, at which time the garage doors and main entry were replaced.<sup>48</sup> The building otherwise retains its historic window configuration, cornices, and intricate Anglo-Italianate ornament, all of which were present during its association with the Women’s Liberation Center.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This section adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *The Stonewall Inn Designation Report (LP-2574)* (New York: City of New York, 2015). Information in this section is 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 1, 14-17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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

<sup>6</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: 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, p. 5.

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

<sup>9</sup> NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, p. 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, p. 15. Morty Manford, a Stonewall participant, was somewhat more conservative, putting the numbers at 20 before the uprising and 600 two years after; NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, p.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, p. 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 the slogans included "Homosexuals ask for redress of grievances" and "Homosexuals are American citizens also." See NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, p.5.

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

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

<sup>19</sup> Duberman, 266.

<sup>20</sup> Notable zaps included confrontations with New York City Mayor John Lindsay on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art on April 13, 1970, and again at the taping of a television program on April 19, 1970.

<sup>21</sup> LPC, *Stonewall*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Second-wave feminism is usually defined as the diverse social movement in the 1960s-1980s that called for equal rights, opportunities, and personal freedom for women. See: Elinor Burkett, "Women's Rights Movement," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Encyclopedia Britannica Online, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Ivy Bottini was a lesbian activist who was a New York City chapter president of NOW. According to Bottini, Friedan orchestrated her removal in 1970. See: Ivy Bottini interview with Lillian Faderman, August 19, 2004, and Barbara Love, interview with Lillian Faderman, August 14, 2014, both cited in Faderman, 232.

<sup>24</sup> Judy Klemesrud, "The Lesbian Issue and Women's Lib," *New York Times*, March 4, 1973, 60.



<sup>25</sup> Faderman, 227-246.

<sup>26</sup> Vivian Gornick, "Lesbians and Women's Liberation: 'In Any Terms She Shall Choose,'" *Village Voice*, May 28, 1970, 5; Ti-Grace Atkinson, "Strategy and Tactics: A Presentation of Political Lesbianism," January 1971; reprinted in *Amazon Odyssey: The First Collection of Writings by the Political Pioneer of the Women's Movement* (New York: Links Books, 1974).

<sup>27</sup> See Laurie Johnston, "2 Groups Seeking a Firehouse Here," *New York Times*, October 28, 1973, 44 for a partial list of organizations.

<sup>28</sup> LPC, *Chelsea Historic District Designation Report (LP-0666)* (New York: City of New York, 1970).

<sup>29</sup> Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, "Plate 64: Map bounded by West 22nd Street, Sixth Avenue, West 17th Street, Eighth Avenue," 1857-1862, *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*; and "Manhattan, V. 3, Plate No. 34 [Map bounded by 8th Ave., W. 22nd St., 7th Ave., W. 19th St.], 1884, *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*.

<sup>30</sup> "News of Realty," *New York Times*, March 22, 1968, 80.

<sup>31</sup> Marilyn Bender, "Women's Lib Headquarters," *New York Times*, July 1, 1970, p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Bender, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Johnston, "2 Groups Seeking a Firehouse Here," 44.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America*; Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> Jean O'Leary interview with Lillian Faderman, February 18, 2004, cited in *The Gay Revolution*.

<sup>37</sup> "Jean O'Leary, 57, Former Nun Who Became a Lesbian Activist," *New York Times*, June 7, 2005, C16; "Cooper, Eleanor," *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975*, edited by Barbara J. Love (University of Illinois Press, 2006), 94.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*; "Women's Liberation Center," LGBT Historic Sites Project, <https://www.nyclgbtsites.org/site/womens-liberation-center/>.

<sup>39</sup> Les Brown, "Four Advertisers Drop Spots on Repeat of 'Born Innocent,'" *New York Times*, October 25, 1975, 59.

<sup>40</sup> See photographs, Lesbian Herstory Archives Digital Collection, [http://dcmny.org/islandora/search/?](http://dcmny.org/islandora/search/?type=edismax&cp=lesbianherstory%3Acollection)

[type=edismax&cp=lesbianherstory%3Acollection](http://dcmny.org/islandora/search/?type=edismax&cp=lesbianherstory%3Acollection)

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*; "Women's Liberation Center," LGBT Historic Sites Project.

<sup>42</sup> "The Lesbian Switchboard of New York City, Inc. Records," LGBT Community Center Archives.

<sup>43</sup> Johnston, "2 Groups Seeking a Firehouse Here," 44; "Women's Liberation Center," LGBT Historic Sites Project.

<sup>44</sup> "Jean O'Leary," C16.

<sup>45</sup> "Cooper, Eleanor," *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975*. In addition to the passage of the 1986 New York City anti-discrimination bill, CLGR also laid the groundwork for the New York State Hate Crimes Law that eventually passed in 2000.

<sup>46</sup> Raymond Hernandez, "Pataki Signs Bill Raising Penalties in Hate Crimes," *New York Times*, July 11, 2000.

<sup>47</sup> Jason DeParle, "Ruse, Rash, Effective, Act-Up Shifts AIDS Policy," *New York Times*, January 3, 1990, B1.

<sup>48</sup> "For Construction Students, On-the-Job Training," *New York Times*, June 21, 1996.

# Findings and Designation

## Women's Liberation Center

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 Women's Liberation Center 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 as a Landmark the Women's Liberation Center and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 770, Lot 17 as its Landmark Site.



Women's Liberation Center, 243 West 20th Street

Sarah Moses, June 2019





**Women's Liberation Center**  
Sarah Moses, June 2019



**Women's Liberation Center**  
Sarah Moses, June 2019



**Women's Liberation Center**  
 Jessica Baldwin, April 2019



**Women's Liberation Center**  
 Sarah Moses, June 2019



