

RAINBOW HISTORY PROJECT

Dupont Circle

LGBT Walking Tour



First D.C. Pride, 1975, 20th Street

The offices, restaurants and stores of today's Dupont Circle offer few hints of when the neighborhood attracted individuals and groups associated with a variety of progressive political causes, including a growing sense of LGBT community. In the 1960s, Dupont Circle took a central role in social change and activism for African-American civil rights, women's equality and an end to the Vietnam War. It also created a foundation for Washington, D.C.'s LGBT community to claim its own place in public life.

Beginning in the 1970s, Dupont established a reputation as a major "gayborhood" of Washington, D.C. While still gay-friendly today, the neighborhood's central role in D.C.'s LGBT life has largely been eclipsed by other neighborhoods.

The following walking tour of neighborhood landmarks offers a brief introduction to the pioneering community that thrived in Dupont Circle through social progress, change and challenges.

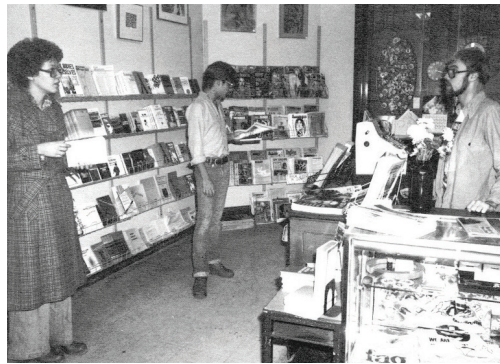
1

1724 20th Street, NW

This townhouse was a hotbed of counterculture and antiwar activity in the 1960s and early 1970s. Known as the Community Building, its history as the city's first unofficial gay and lesbian center began in 1971, when entrepreneur Deacon Maccubbin took over a craft store in the building to launch Earthworks, a head shop that also carried gay books and periodicals. In 1974, Maccubbin opened Lambda Rising, an independent gay bookstore, in the building. Lambda Rising was the first out-identified, non-bar business in Washington. The business started with 250 volumes with a daily goal of making \$25 in sales.

Lambda Rising and 1724 20th Street quickly became an anchor for D.C.'s LGBT life. The building provided space for organizations, media and the Gay Switchboard, among others, to meet.

In 1975, Lambda Rising sponsored D.C.'s first official Pride celebration, which took place on 20th Street between R and S Streets for two years, expanded to S Street for two years, then moved to a larger location at the grounds of Francis School [A](#) in 1980.



Lambda Rising, mid-1970s

2

2012 S Street, NW

The popularity and importance of Lambda Rising meant a move to this larger space in 1977. The store was here until 1984, when it outgrew its space again and moved to 1625 Connecticut [5](#).

3

St. Margaret's Episcopal Church

1830 Connecticut Avenue, NW

St. Margaret's began to blaze a trail for gay acceptance in the early 1970s, when it provided space for the Gay Men's Counseling Collective, an early peer counseling group. In 1987, the church offered a home to Dignity, an organization for Gay Catholics, after Georgetown University banned the group from its campus. It also hosted several social groups.

4

Washington Hilton

1919 Connecticut Avenue, NW

Unlike the neighboring states of Maryland and Virginia, the District of Columbia did not maintain an outright ban on public cross dressing. Nonetheless, the city's major hotels maintained an across-the-board ban on drag events. This came to an end in February 1968, when Ken White (a.k.a. Black Pearl) successfully challenged the ban to stage the Black Pearl International Awards at the Washington Hilton. The hotel also hosted drag events that included White's annual awards show and the Miss Adams Morgan Pageant. A 1978 performance by anti-gay crusader entertainer Anita Bryant drew more than 3,000 protesters.

5

Lambda Rising

1625 Connecticut Avenue, NW

Lambda Rising bookstore was a community institution by the time it moved to this location, its third and most visible, in 1984. The store closed in 2010.

6

Women In The Life

1623 Connecticut Avenue, NW

Community activist Sheila Alexander-Reid launched this organization in 1993 as a safe space for lesbian women of color to socialize, network and access educational and support services.

7

Rascals

1520 Connecticut Avenue, NW

Rascals was a major multi-floor gay men's dance club from 1979 to 1992 that welcomed drag performances by amateurs unaffiliated with the more formal Academy, which had dominated the city's drag scene its founding in 1961.

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Dupont Circle

Dupont Circle has played a major role in all aspects of LGBT life in D.C.: a meeting spot and a place to “see and be seen”; a place of celebration, including a reviewing stand for the annual gay Pride parades, and home to Youth Pride events and Dyke Marches; and a place for the community to gather in protest and sorrow. It has a history as a meeting and cruising area for gay men that dates back to the early 20th century.



Dyke March through Dupont Circle

9

1426 21st Street, NW

In 1986, Lammas, a woman’s bookstore and de facto community center, opened its second store here. Like Lambda Rising, the store provided much more than books; it offered a place to meet, be seen, and to attend readings and discussions.

10

2122 P Street, NW

The popular piano bar Friends operated on the left side of this building. In the 1990s, the location became home to two popular Latino gay clubs: Escandalo (1994-1997) and Deco Cabana (1998-2000). Both clubs hosted popular drag shows and gave Latinx gays and lesbians their own gathering place.

11

Mr. P’s

2147 P Street, NW

When George Dotson opened Mr. P’s in 1976, it was the first bar in Washington, D.C., to cater specifically to a gay clientele. (Previous “bars” were gay-friendly venues, usually restaurants.) With Mr. P’s success, other gay men’s bars soon followed—including on the same block.

The Fraternity House **B**, launched by Glenn Thompson later in 1976 at 2122 P Street, NW, ran until 2012, adopting the name Omega from 1997 until its closing. P Street Station, later renamed Danny’s and finally The Fireplace **C**, opened at 2161 P Street, NW.

12

1415 22nd Street, NW

A succession of gay and lesbian establishments occupied this venue making it one of the city’s most enduring LGBT social landmarks. In 1984, Badlands, a popular gay and lesbian dance bar, opened. Shortly after its opening, it was protested because of its practice of carding to exclude African Americans. The issue was resolved by D.C. law. Club owner Glen Thompson renamed the bar Apex in 2002, and the club operated for nine more years before shutting its doors in the summer of 2011. Later that year, the venue re-opened as Phase One of Dupont under Allen Carroll, a local gay entrepreneur who envisioned a scaled-up version of his Capitol Hill women’s bar. Prior to its abrupt closure in 2013, the women’s club held periodic events.

13

P Street Beach and the Black Forest

23rd and P Streets, NW

The park area that divides the intersection of 23rd and P streets from the banks of Rock Creek is significant to the LGBT community both for its history of momentous political events and for its lengthy record of intimate personal encounters. The large grassy “beach” has been a popular site of socializing and sunbathing, and at night, the nearby “Black Forest” has been a men’s cruising hotspot. In 1972, P Street Beach was site of the city’s first, unofficial Pride celebration (before official Prides began in 1975). Several Pride celebrations took place on the grounds of the neighboring Francis School. **A**



This program was supported through a Historic Preservation Fund Grant administered by the National Park Service, Department of Interior, and also Target Community Relations. Funds were used for the identification, protection, and/or rehabilitation of historic properties and cultural resources in the District of Columbia. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or disability in its federally assisted programs. If you believe that you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.

For in-depth information about these landmarks and other historic LGBT neighborhoods, go to rainbowhistory.org.