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Our Mission: To engage people to discover, document, collect, preserve and present the history of the LGBTQ+ community in central Pennsylvania through oral histories and material culture.

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history@centralpalgbtcenter.org

717-409-5781

LGBT Center of Central PA

1323 N. Front Street

Harrisburg, PA 17102

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Harrisburg LGBTQ+ History TOUR



**29 sites in three
tours of LGBTQ+
history in one guide:**

Tour A: Bars

Tour B: Organizations

Tour C: Pioneers & Activism

TOUR A: Bars

NOTES

A1. The Plaza Hotel bar, 400 block of Market St. (in front of the train station)

The Plaza Hotel once stood on this site. Its bar welcomed gay customers in the late 1960s through 1976, reportedly because the bartender at the time was gay. It closed in February 1976 when a fire burned the building to the ground, resulting in demolition. It had a notoriously cruisy men's room in the basement.



Courtesy of Dr. Eric Selvey

A2. Johnny Kobler's, corner of Court and Strawberry Streets

Johnny Kobler's restaurant and bar was a place where gay men could meet starting in the late 1950s. It served a mixed clientele with gay men congregating toward the rear of the famous Horseshoe bar. After the original owner passed away in 1953, the bar became gay-friendly until closing in 1961.



A3. The Warner Hotel Bar, Market Square, 17 N. 2nd St.

Known for its Circular Bar, the bar on the first floor of the Warner Hotel welcomed gay patrons in the 1960s, reportedly because the bartender at that time was gay.



Courtesy of the Historical Society of Dauphin County



Be sure to visit our new History Gallery in the lobby of the new LGBT Center of Central PA, 1323 N. Front Street in Harrisburg. There will be changing exhibits every three months on a topic of local LGBTQ+ history.

C5. Bare Wall Gallery, 712 Green St.

Bare Wall Gallery was a local gift shop opened in 1972 by Ronn Fink, who was later assisted in its operation by his partner Bob Deibler. LGBTQ+ themed cards, gifts and videos made it a popular stop for LGBTQ+ customers. The shop closed in September 2012 after the passing of Ronn, but the owners and the shop were well loved by the local community for 40 years.

C6. Father Sawdy's House, 920 Green St.

Father Wallace Sawdy became the Chaplain of Dignity/Central PA after learning about the isolation and increased suicide risk in the local gay communities. He notified his bishop about his decision and was surprisingly granted permission to lead the ministry. He hosted prayer groups and Bible studies in his home for gay communities. Father Sawdy was a significant ally and in 1983 he wrote a convincing letter to Harrisburg City Council in support of an anti-discrimination ordinance which, when passed, prevented discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

C7. Jerry Brennan's House, 257 Boas St.

Jerry Brennan was the second activist to form LGBTQ+ organizations in Harrisburg after Richard Schlegel. Brennan started Gay Community Services, which later evolved into two organizations: the Gay Switchboard of Harrisburg (April 1975) and Dignity/Central PA (July 1975). Dignity/Central PA continues today as the oldest continually operating LGBTQ+ organization in Central PA.



A4. The Strawberry Inn, 34 N. 2nd St.

The Strawberry Inn opened in 1979 as a gay bar on the first floor with 12 hotel rooms on the upper floors, making it the first gay hotel in Harrisburg. The bar closed following a tragic fire on January 23, 1984, that destroyed the building and killed Keith Baim, a gay bartender who was a resident of one of the hotel rooms. The Gay Switchboard of Harrisburg was also renting one of the rooms for its office, and all its equipment and records were destroyed in the fire.



Courtesy of the Historical Society of Dauphin County

A5. Clock Bar, (and successors), 400 N. 2nd St

The Clock Bar was the first known bar to welcome Harrisburg's gay communities. The bar, which opened in 1938, was named after the numerous clocks on the walls which told the time in different parts of the world. Harrisburg police and PA Liquor Control Board agents raided the bar in 1965 and forced it to close. After the Clock Bar closed, the bar's name and ownership went through a series of changes (400 Club, The Apple and the Frenchman, The Dandelion Tree and La Rose Rouge) until its final closing in 1990, through which it always remained a gay bar.



A6. State St., west of the state capitol building

With few options of places to meet and socialize, the first two blocks of State Street became a late-night cruising/meeting location for gay men for many decades. Police harassment and arrests were frequent. A raid in the summer of 1965 resulted in the arrest of 26 men and one juvenile. Many lost jobs, friends, families, and at least one died by suicide.

A7. The Neptune Lounge and Key Largo (The Paper Moon), 270-272 North St.

The Neptune Lounge opened as a gay bar in 1972. In 1985, a restaurant called Key Largo opened next door and was connected to the bar. Key Largo was later re-named The Paper Moon. The Paper Moon closed in the late 1990s, but The Neptune Lounge remained open until



2012. Both The Neptune Lounge and The Paper Moon hosted several drag shows by Lily White and Company, a local drag performance troupe that raised funds for local HIV/AIDS and LGBTQ+ organizations. Since 2012, it has become a complex of restaurants: Rubicon, Mangia Qui and Suba. Mangia Qui and Rubicon are LGBTQ+ owned businesses.

A8. LGBTQ+ Bars on 3rd St., 704, 706 N. 3rd St.

Stallions opened in 1986 at 706 N. 3rd St. It closed in 2024 and re-opened under new management as Karma. The 704 Lounge, opened in 2010, was previously called Shadows (1980-1984) and then The Strawberry (1985-2009), both also LGBTQ+ bars.



C3. Miller, Dixon, Drake, Certified Public Accountants, 200 North St.

Dan Miller opened his own CPA practice here soon after being fired from his job at a CPA firm in Camp Hill in 1990 for being gay. He was then sued by his former employer and the case garnered



national publicity including a cover story for the *New Yorker*. Miller was the first openly gay person elected to public office in Harrisburg, first as a member of City Council and then as City Controller and most recently City Treasurer. He also ran a campaign for mayor.

C4. Home of Benedict Arnold Trautwein (AKA Wesley, or Francis Parker), 623 N. 2nd St.

Wesley performed as a drag queen with the nationally known Jewel Box Revue and in various clubs in New Orleans and other cities in the 1940s and 1950s. Wesley later moved into this home and was a regular at local gay bars, especially The Neptune Lounge, always dressing glamorously in drag. Wesley would often be seen walking Wesley's dog Dennis near this home.



Tour C: Pioneers & Activists

C1. City Hall, 10 N. 2nd St.

In 1983, local gay and lesbian activists began advocating for Harrisburg City Council to pass a local non-discrimination ordinance. Councilwoman Jane Perkins agreed to introduce the ordinance. After several contentious public City Council meetings between local activists and conservative religious leaders and other opponents, City Council unanimously passed the ordinance. It was signed into law by Mayor Steven Reed and prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, becoming the second city in the state to do so after Philadelphia.

C2. Residence of Richard Schlegel, 205 State St.

Richard Schlegel lost his federal job with the Civil Aeronautics Administration (now the Federal Aviation Administration) for being gay in the “Lavender Scare” of Senator Joe McCarthy. Schlegel sued for reinstatement but lost in the U.S. Supreme Court. He moved to Harrisburg in 1962 and became Central PA’s first gay activist. He started the region’s first LGBTQ+ organization in 1965, a chapter of the Philadelphia-based Janus Society. He rented an apartment in this townhouse. Janus Society meetings held here, but not for long; he was soon fired from his job as Director of Finance with the PA Department of Highways (now PA Department of Transportation) for being gay. He then moved to Philadelphia and the Central PA chapter of the Janus Society folded.



Richard Schlegel, second from right



Interior of The Archives bar and restaurant, courtesy of Historical Society of Dauphin County.

The building immediately north of Stallions used to be a gay bar and restaurant called The Archives (1983-1987).

A9. LGBTQ+ Bars on Forster St.

The Brownstone Lounge at 412 Forster Street opened in 1994 and continues to be a popular LGBTQ+ bar. It features “bear” nights, drag shows, and other special events. What is now a restaurant and bar, The Sturges Speakeasy at 400 Forster Street, used to be a LGBTQ+ bar called La Cage (1980-1983) and then Pegasus (1983-1988).

A10. Silhouette (later known as D-GEM), 4425 N. Front St.

The Silhouette opened in 1975 as Central PA’s first lesbian bar. The bar changed ownership and name in 1976 to become D-GEM (the name was created from the initials of the first name of the four owners). D-GEM closed in the late 1990s.

A11. Bars at 891 Eisenhower Blvd.

B-tles opened in 1996 at this location as a predominantly lesbian bar, and in 1999 changed its name to the Pink Lizard. In 2008, it became Liquid 891, closing in 2014.

Tour B: Organizations

B1. Riverfront Park, S. Front St.

Riverfront Park was the location for the annual Pride Festival of Central PA from 1997 to 2017. At Pride, local LGBTQ+ communities and allies commemorate the 1969 Stonewall uprising which is widely considered to be the start of the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement. In 2018, the event moved to Soldiers' Grove east of the state capitol building. The first official Pride Festival in Harrisburg was held at Reservoir Park in 1992. Before then, the events were called "Open Air" festivals (1985-1987) and the Unity Festival (1989-91), held outside of Harrisburg.

B2. Holiday Inn (Crowne Plaza), 23 S. 2nd St.

The ballroom of the Holiday Inn was often used by South Central AIDS Assistance Network for annual meetings and by the Lily White and Company drag troupe for their hotel shows. This venue allowed Lily White and Company to produce larger and more lavish productions with sophisticated themes, scripts, choreography, set props and costumes than could be accommodated in gay bars.



B9. Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) of the Spirit, 2973 Jefferson St.

MCC of the Spirit purchased, renovated and moved into this building in 1996, becoming the first LGBTQ+ organization in Harrisburg to own property. TransCentral PA also uses the building as a meeting location.

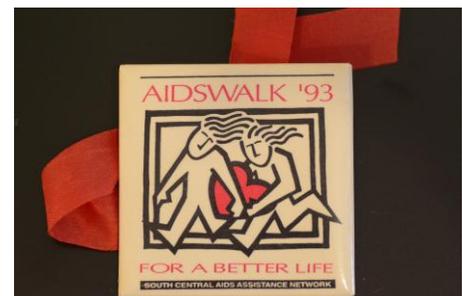
B10. Reservoir Park, Corner of State Street and National Civil War Museum Drive



Reservoir Park was the location of the first three Pride Festivals of Central PA (1992-94). Pride Festival next moved to Harrisburg Area Community College's campus, then to Riverfront Park, and now behind the Capitol at Soldiers' Grove.

B11. SCAAN headquarters, Kline Plaza, 1-799 S. 25th St.

The South Central AIDS Assistance Network's second office headquarters was in a second-floor office suite at Kline Village Shopping Center on the east side of Harrisburg. SCAAN remained for several years until it merged with the Lancaster AIDS Project.



B6. Gay and Lesbian Switchboard of Harrisburg, 217 Verbeke St. (rear)

The garage behind this house served as the first location for the Gay Switchboard of Harrisburg (Lesbian was added to the name later) in April 1975. Despite the garage being unheated and having a leaky roof, volunteers staffed the phone line for several hours every weeknight. The Switchboard provided a lifeline to LGBTQ+ people just coming out, seeking resources, or looking for information on where to socialize with other LGBTQ+ people.

B7. LGBT Center of Central PA, 1306 N. 3rd St.

In 2006, planning began for the LGBT Center of Central PA and in 2012, the Center opened at this location. The LGBT Center serves LGBTQ+ people and allies across Dauphin, Cumberland, York, and Lancaster counties. The Center closed this location in 2021 and offered mostly virtual programming until purchasing its new location at 1323 N. Front Street opening in 2024.

B8. Planned Parenthood Bldg., 1514 N. 2nd St.

Around 1990, Planned Parenthood made it known that they would very inexpensively rent space on their building's basement level to LGBTQ+ groups. South Central AIDS Assistance Network (SCAAN) was the first to move their headquarters into the building. The Gay and Lesbian Switchboard of Harrisburg moved in next. Dignity/Central PA followed with an office and meeting space for its Dialogue Discussion Group. The Bi, Gay and Lesbian Youth Association of Harrisburg (now Common Roads) began meeting there in 1993. With the concentration of groups, it had the feel of an LGBTQ+ community center. SCAAN soon outgrew their space and relocated to the Kline Village Plaza, but the other organizations continued to occupy the space for several years.



B3. Capitol Building, 501 N. 3rd St.

Pennsylvania was the first state in the nation to end discrimination of gay and lesbian state



employees when, on April 23, 1975, Governor Milton Shapp signed an executive order. Governor Shapp signed a second executive order in February 1976 creating the Pennsylvania Council for Sexual Minorities, the first official governmental body in the nation addressing gay and lesbian issues. The Council existed for about 10 years and made sweeping changes to governmental policy regarding LGBTQ+ people, as well as HIV/AIDS.

B4. Friend's Meeting House, 1100 N. 6th St.

In 1975, the first statewide conference of gay and lesbian people was held in this building and in The State Museum of PA.

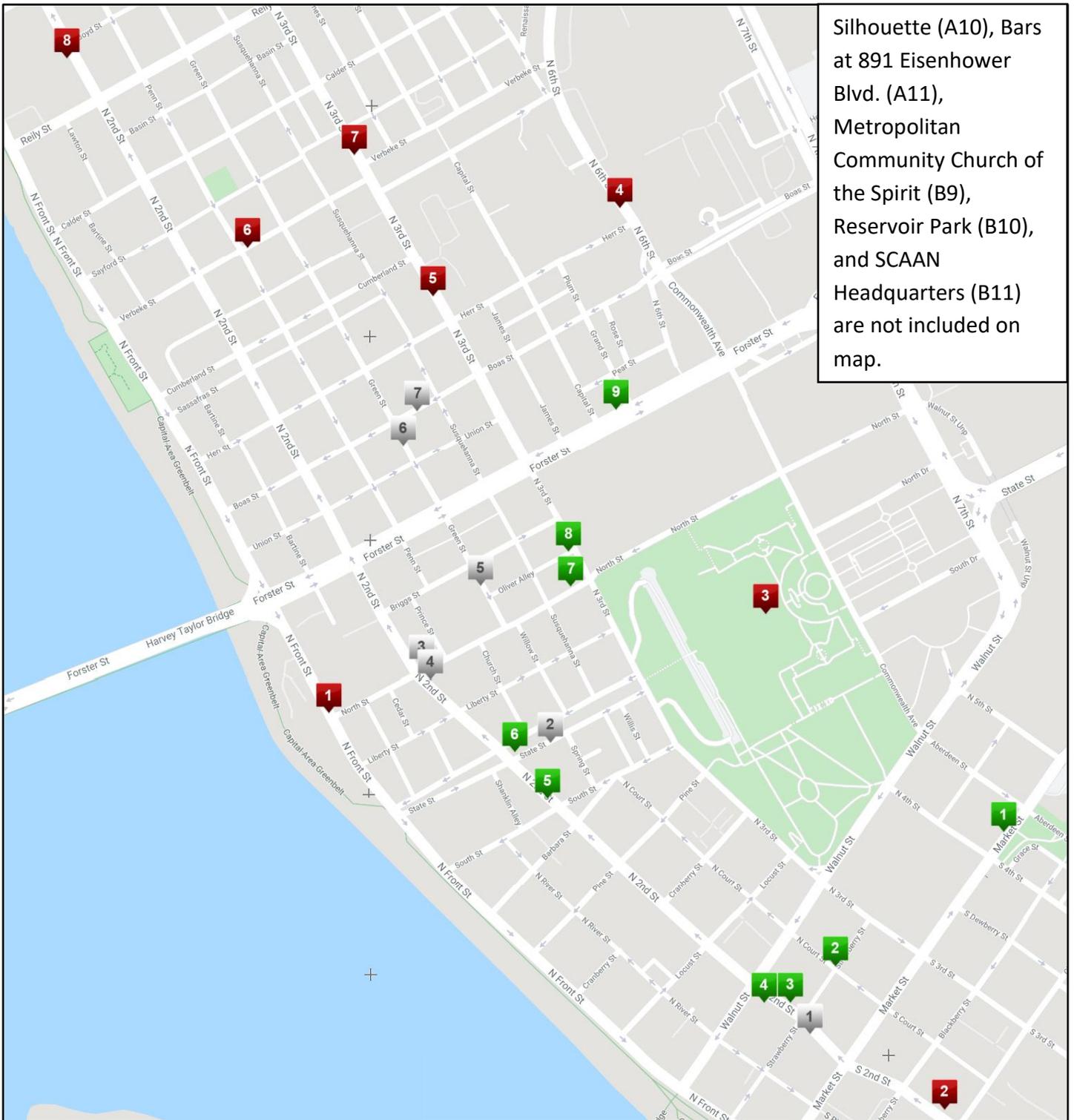


After struggling to find a public meeting space in Harrisburg, Dignity/Central PA, a LGBTQ+ religious group, was welcomed at Friends Meeting House in 1977. In 1980 Metropolitan Community Church, another religious group for gays and lesbians, also began meeting here. The two organizations would schedule their meetings to coincide, enabling them to come together monthly for a potluck dinner.

B5. Police Athletic League Building (now Midtown Arts Center), 1110 N. 3rd St.

Dignity/Central PA organized a gay volleyball group that played in this building in the late 1970s. The group later moved to the Salvation Army Building's gym on Green Street in the early 1980s and continued playing through the 1990s. Volleyball was a popular way to socialize outside of the bar scene.

MAP OF HARRISBURG



Silhouette (A10), Bars at 891 Eisenhower Blvd. (A11), Metropolitan Community Church of the Spirit (B9), Reservoir Park (B10), and SCAAN Headquarters (B11) are not included on map.

	Tour A: Bars		Tour B: Organizations		Tour C: Pioneers & Activism
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