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# Lancaster LGBTQ+ History TOUR



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

**Tour A: Bars**

**Tour B: Organizations**

**Tour C: Pioneers & Activists**

## TOUR A: Bars

### A1. *The Fiddler, 10 S. Prince Street*

The Fiddler was a popular bar in the LGBTQ+ community during the 1970s. Opened in 1976 by Joe Cardin, the Fiddler became Tally-Ho's competition, as both bars became gathering spaces for LGBTQ+



patrons. In 1978, the Fiddler underwent renovations and reopened as a discotheque, the first of its kind in Lancaster. During its operations, the Fiddler hosted numerous disco parties and drag shows.

### A2. *Tally-Ho Tavern and The Loft Restaurant, 201 W. Orange Street*

Tally-Ho Tavern and The Loft Restaurant was a bar and restaurant complex located in downtown Lancaster. The bar first opened in 1966 after George Centini purchased the former bar space Ebey's. Following the closure of the Village Tavern in 1968, Centini decided to redesign the bar space and convert the Tally-Ho Tavern into an LGBTQ+ bar. In ca.1972, Centini and his partner Gary Hufford expanded the business and opened The Loft Restaurant, one level upstairs from Tally-Ho Tavern. During this period, the bar and restaurant remained fixtures in the LGBTQ+ community. The bar eventually closed in 2021.



Central Pennsylvania was the *Philadelphia Gay News*, which did not directly relate to the concerns faced by the local LGBTQ+ community. *Gay Era* informed the local LGBTQ+ residents about national news stories and continued to publish until 1978.



### C4. *Betty Finney House Corporation, 625 W. Chestnut Street*

The Betty Finney House Corporation was a local organization which sought to provide housing to homeless HIV/AIDS patients. The Betty Finney House first opened in 1988 after Betty Finney raised concerns to her church about the ongoing homelessness crisis resulting from HIV/AIDS. This location featured a four-bedroom apartment unit, and Jerre Freiberg, a longtime facility director, also managed 72 additional patients who were placed at nearby group homes with available space. By 2002, the Betty Finney House closed and merged with the Gathering Place.

### C5. *Gays United Lancaster, 3002 Marietta Avenue*

Gays United Lancaster was the first LGBTQ+ activist organization to exist in Lancaster. Created by Bari Weaver, David Leas, and Sam Wilson in the 1970s, Gays United Lancaster joined with other local LGBTQ+ organizations such as the Pennsylvania Rural Gay Caucus to advocate for the political rights of LGBTQ+ citizens. This group frequently held meetings, the first of which was at this location and attracted nearly 25 community members. Over the years, Gays United Lancaster organized various dinners and dance parties to connect members together. Gays United Lancaster would later pave the way for future activist organizations like Pink Triangle Coalition.

## TOUR C: Pioneers & Activists

### ***C1. Isaac's Restaurant and Deli, 44 N. Queen Street***

Isaac's Restaurant and Deli is a chain of sandwich shops located in Central Pennsylvania. Created by Isaac Williams and longtime LGBTQ+ rights activist Phil Wenger in 1983, this branch location in downtown Lancaster also served as a regular meeting spot for various LGBTQ+ affiliated organizations in Lancaster. This location served as the headquarters for the Lancaster AIDS Project, which was a grassroots organization that sought to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS in the community. Additionally, the site also hosted numerous meetings for the Pink Triangle Coalition, an LGBTQ+ organization based in Lancaster in the 1990s.



### ***C2. Lancaster Women's Center, 230 W. Chestnut Street***

The Lancaster Women's Center was a support center based in Lancaster that served local women during the 1970s and 1980s. It became a pinnacle in the community for lesbian and bisexual women as it provided numerous social groups to connect members together. One of its first groups, the Lesbian Discussion Group, soon became the active Women Oriented Women (W.O.W.) social group.

### ***C3. Gay Era Newspaper, 332 N. Mulberry Street***

The *Gay Era* was an LGBTQ+ newspaper printed in Lancaster in the 1970s. First published by longtime activist David Leas in 1974, *Gay Era* became the first newspaper specifically created for the LGBTQ+ community in Central Pennsylvania, and was circulated to other nearby cities including Harrisburg, York, Reading, State College, and Williamsport. At the time, the only publication which appeared in

### ***A3. Village Tavern Night Club, Corner of E. Chestnut and N. Christian Streets***

The Village Tavern Night Club was a longtime bar and entertainment venue in Lancaster. Originally opened in 1953, the Village Tavern Night Club was one of the only spaces for the LGBTQ+ community to congregate in Lancaster during the 1950s and 1960s. At this location, there were two bar facilities: the Village Tavern on the main level and the Rathskeller in the building's basement, which was the hangout spot for the LGBTQ+ community. By 1968, the Village Tavern closed and the LGBTQ+ community did not have a social gathering space. The Village Tavern later reopened at a new location in 1971 and became a concert venue, attracting performers such as Bruce Springsteen and Cyndi Lauper.



*Courtesy of LancasterOnline*

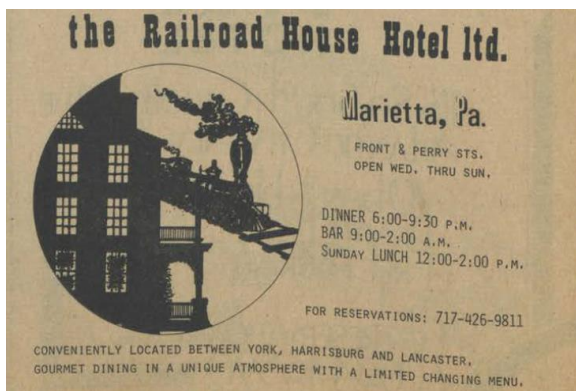
### ***A4. Sundown Lounge, 429 N. Mulberry Street***

The Sundown Lounge was a bar which specifically catered to lesbian and bisexual women in Lancaster. When the bar first opened in 1976, the majority of LGBTQ+ bars were geared towards gay men, and the Sundown Lounge became only the second lesbian bar in the Central Pennsylvania region. The Sundown Lounge continues to remain a popular destination in Lancaster today.



### **A5. Railroad House, 280 W. Front Street, Marietta**

The Railroad House was an inn that featured a popular LGBTQ+ bar in the 1970s and 1980s. In September 1976, David Leas and his then partner Marlon purchased the Railroad House, which featured hotel rooms, a restaurant, and a downstairs space. Originally, the basement became an unsuccessful folk music den before transforming into a popular LGBTQ+ bar in 1979. The bar's equidistant location between Lancaster, York, and Harrisburg attracted a greater number of patrons. The bar existed until 1986, when David and Marlon separated.



## **TOUR B: Organizations**

### **B1. The Closet, 21 N. Prince Street**

The Closet was a short-lived LGBTQ+ bookstore in Lancaster. Opened by Nancy Helm in May 1991, the Closet sought to be a place of refuge for LGBTQ+ individuals to shop, gather, and socialize with other members of the community. This place of refuge, however, soon became a site of terror, as the Closet endured two bombings and threats from a local chapter of the KKK between May and August 1991. Due to this surge in anti-LGBTQ+ crime, Nancy Helm decided to close the Closet by January 1992.



*Nancy Helm in The Closet bookstore, courtesy of the Historical Society of Dauphin County.*

### **B7. Clipper Magazine Stadium, 650 N. Prince Street**

Clipper Magazine Stadium is a baseball stadium in Lancaster which serves as the recent home of the Lancaster Pride Festival. After continual success at Binns Park, the Lancaster Pride Festival selected Clipper Magazine Stadium as its new host site in 2019. While the event was canceled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the event returned in 2021 and 2022 with an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 patrons, a record attendance.

### **B8. Unitarian Universalist Church, 538 W. Chestnut Street**

The Unitarian Universalist Church is a place of worship located in Lancaster. Since 1995, the church has been recognized as a "Welcoming Congregation," a designation provided to churches which embrace the LGBTQ+ community. The congregation has been the longtime home of the Lancaster chapter of PFLAG, a national LGBTQ+ organization. Over the years, the congregation was the host of other support groups for the local LGBTQ+ community, including Interweave in the late 1990s, and Common Roads, a branch of the youth organization created by the LGBT Center of Central PA in Harrisburg, in the 2000s.

### **B9. Buchanan Park, 901 Buchanan Avenue**

Buchanan Park is a park located in downtown Lancaster which served as the first site of the Lancaster Pride Festival. Following an unsuccessful attempt to host a festival at Binns Park in 2007, Barry Russell and the Rainbow Rose Community held the first Lancaster Pride Festival at Buchanan Park in 2008. The first festival attracted approximately 2,500 people and continued to grow in subsequent years. The Lancaster Pride Festival continued to be held at Buchanan Park through 2015 before relocating to Binns Park in 2016.

#### **B4. Binns Park, 100 N. Queen Street**

Binns Park is a park located in downtown Lancaster which has served as the second home to the Lancaster Pride Festival. The event was supposed to debut at Binns Park in 2007; however, a permit issue prevented Barry Russell and the Rainbow Rose Community from organizing the event that year. Eventually, the festival returned to Binns Park in 2016, where it remained for three years before relocating to Clipper Magazine Stadium in 2019.

#### **B5. The LOOP, 117 E. Chestnut Street**



*Courtesy of the Lancaster LGBTQ+ Coalition*

The LOOP, opened in 2022, is the second home of Lancaster's LGBTQ+ Community Center, home of the

Lancaster LGBTQ+ Coalition, providing an array of social events, social services and other programs to the Lancaster LGBTQ+ Community. Their first location was at the rear of the Candy Factory, 342 N. Queen St.

#### **B6. J.A. Sharp Custom Jeweler, 322 N. Queen Street**

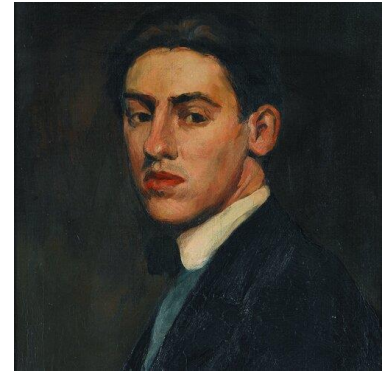
A lesbian-owned business founded by Jude Sharp, Sharp's Jewelers has been providing one-of-a-kind designs and hand-made jewelry by Jude and other jewelry items for the LGBTQ+ community and the general public since the 1980s, including commitment rings, Holy Union rings, wedding rings and many other items.



*Courtesy of Jude Sharp*

#### **B2. Demuth Museum, 120 E. King Street**

The Demuth Museum is an art museum which celebrates the life and legacy of Charles Demuth, a noted painter. Demuth was best known for his work in the genre Precisionism, a style of watercolor and oil painting.



Throughout his life, Demuth was an openly gay male who embraced his sexuality through his self-portraits and other artworks. Demuth was born in Lancaster and lived at this location with his mother. In 1981, this home was converted into a museum and remains under the management of the Demuth Foundation.

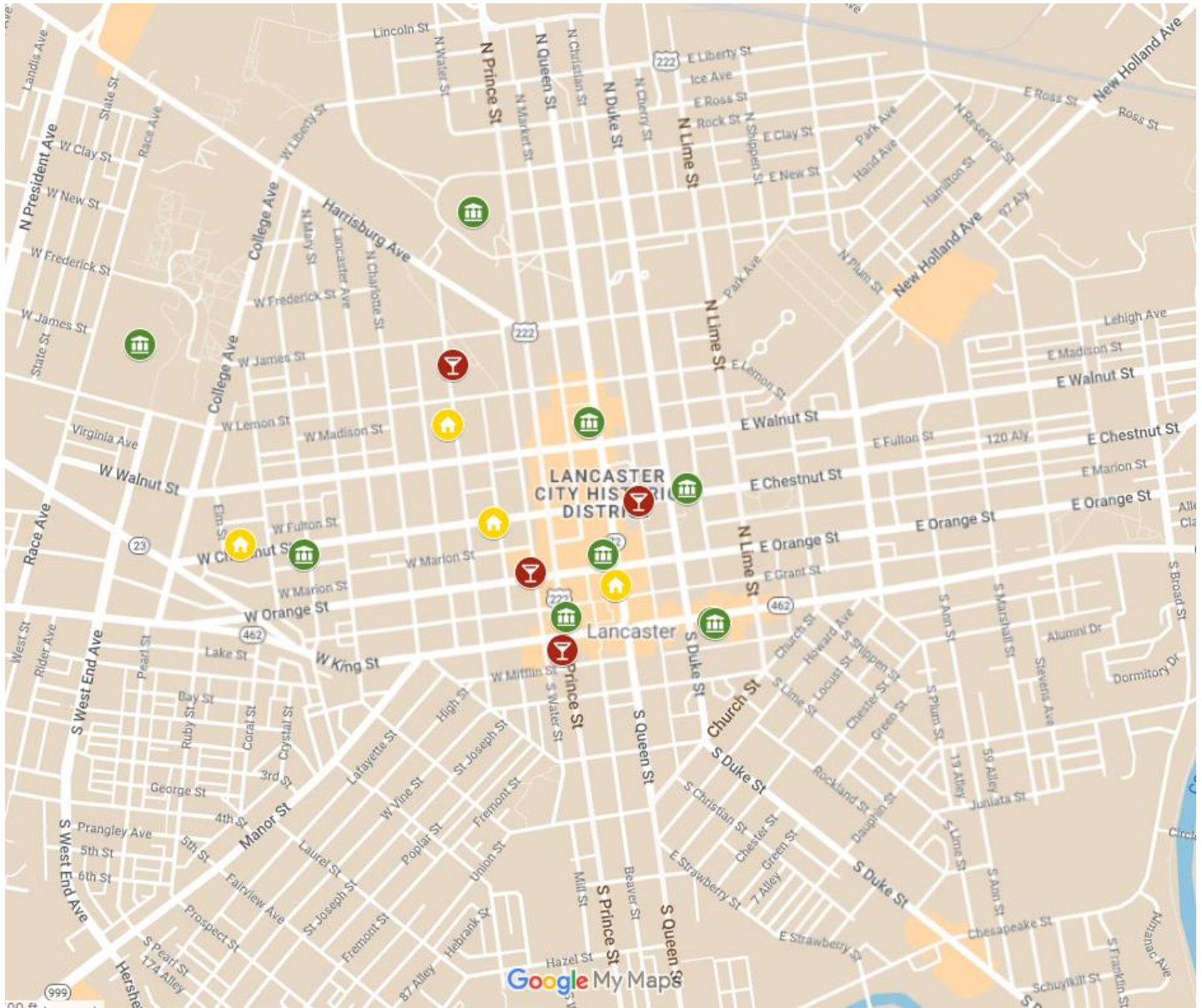


*Courtesy of the Demuth Foundation*

#### **B3. Porta's House of Wigs, 124 E. King Street**

Porta's House of Wigs was a local wig shop based in Lancaster during the 1970s. This shop was particularly friendly to the LGBTQ+ community, as an advertisement in the November 1977 *Gay Era* issue suggests they were particularly welcoming to transgender individuals and drag performers. In addition to selling wigs and costumes, the shop also specialized in other products, such as jewelry and head items.

# MAP OF LANCASTER



**Tour A: Bars (red)**

**Tour B: Organizations (green)**

**Tour C: Pioneers & Activists (yellow)**

***Sites not included on map:***

*Railroad House (A5)*

*Gays United Lancaster (C5)*