
QUEER
HAPPENED
HERE

100 YEARS OF NYC'S LANDMARK LGBTQ+ PLACES

QUEER HAPPENED HERE

MARC ZINAMAN

FOREWORD BY *PEPPERMINT*

Prestel
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FOREWORD BY PEPPERMINT

I believe New York is one of the most unique and special cities on earth. To me, it represents vibrancy, success, community, and connection. And who am I? My name is Peppermint. I am an artist, actress, and drag entertainer who has lived and worked here since the early 2000s.

This book, and books like it, are increasingly essential in the attempt to redeem the once-lost stories of those in the queer community who have contributed to the tapestry of society. Throughout time, and even in recent years, queer culture and history have been successfully obscured and, in some cases, erased. This is part and parcel of why the New York City of today doesn't quite resemble the New York City I first laid eyes on.

Queer individuals have historically fled discrimination and persecution in small towns in search of community and support in larger cities like New York. They bring with them, of course, their imagination, panache, and artistic ambition.

One of my first jobs in the city was at the infamous Tunnel nightclub, where college students stood in line weekly to attend parties that featured as many types of music as they did so-called designer drugs. (At the time, Tunnel, Limelight, the Roxy, Palladium, and Twilo were the royal houses of clubland; the huge "anything goes" warehouse dance clubs.) The Tunnel building is now an office building. I remember standing with one of my drag queen friends, socializing in the bathroom, watching her wig burn on a sconce at Limelight while we were waiting to go into the H. R. Giger-decorated room (the creator of the Xenomorph monster in the movie *Alien*). Limelight is now some sort of shopping center.

I eventually went on to work at the original XL nightclub, where I once hosted the Pussycat Dolls in the weekly return of the game show *Faggot Feud*. Chelsea at the time was where most of the white middle-class gay men hung out, so naturally it was a good (albeit basic) starting point for a queer college kid to look for community. Even Big Cup, the gay internet café where folks would meet up and leave messages on the board for each other throughout the week, was buzzing.

In the '90s, a night of going out dancing could end in one of several ways for a young LGBTQ+ person: losing yourself at the dance club, losing your life on the way home from the dance club, or risking your life in a heated night of passion after the dance club. Which is not necessarily unique to New York or the '90s,

but the realization that so many of my friends were perfectly fine with any of those outcomes shows the mindset of many queer New Yorkers at the time.

It has been said that, ultimately, what we as individuals want to do is make a mark on the people, places, and institutions around us. If the cultures, customs, and attitudes of a particular city, state, or town are formed by its residents and citizens, then New York City has a lot to offer. I'm reminded of this every time I return after having been gone for a while. When I set foot back in New York, there is a vibration that is palpable. The city seems to have its own energy.

Historically, queer people in Western cultures have been forced to remain in the shadows for fear of retaliation or the threat of violence, under which circumstances our community developed not only our own enclaves, our own neighborhoods, our own "queer ghettos", but also our own languages to communicate with each other. While different ethnicities, nationalities, and cultures are able to pass traditions down while raising their families, the queer community must *manually* pass its traditions (and spoken and unspoken languages) from generation to generation while continuously adapting to ever-changing social and political pressures. In New York City, queer traditions have passed from the gay club, to the gay café, to the gay beach, to the gay bookstore, even to the gay sex club.

Yes, I am still very tickled knowing that the fancy designer shops and exclusive restaurants inside the triangular building on Hudson, near 14th Street in the Meatpacking District, were once home to some of the raunchiest sex clubs in the area—J's Hangout and Hellfire Club. Both were unceremoniously shuttered due to the "threat of unsafe sex" (which was more like moral judgment than concern for the health of LGBTQ New Yorkers) after a wave of family-friendly actions by the infamous Giuliani administration. If you visited these places in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, you would have probably witnessed one, two, or maybe ten people engaged in the sloppiest of moments situated somewhere between what is now the wine bar and the salad station in one of those pricey eateries.

This is what I mean by queer people really having a way of leaving their mark, even if it's no longer visible. In this book, we are taking a blacklight to the proverbial satin sheets that make up the fabric of our beautiful and diverse home. You already know: sex happened here, drugs happened here, rock and roll happened here, and yes, queer happened here.

Peppermint is a New York City-based actress, musician, and public speaker who made history in 2018 as the first out transgender woman to originate a principal role in a Broadway musical.

INTRODUCTION AND EARLY QUEER LANDSCAPE

James Brace (Jimbo) bartending at Splash with dancer, circa 1990s.

Although I was born and raised in New York City in the 1990s, it would take nearly two decades for me to realize that LGBTQ+ people and their history had been around me all along. Instead, like many queer folks, I spent my youth—in New York City of all places—feeling like a freak, thinking no one else had ever endured the shame I was going through. How taken aback I was when, in my twenties, I discovered that queer author and Civil Rights activist James Baldwin once lived around the corner from me (and also

briefly in my grandmother's building ten blocks away); that my childhood bedroom window overlooked sex-positive, gay rights champion Mae West's mansion; and that every single day on my way to school, I passed the building that previously housed the Continental Baths, one of the most lavish, legendary gay bathhouses of all time.

When I finally did creep out of the closet in 2008, one of the first gay bars I snuck into was Splash, which was in its final years of operation. I knew nothing about the place's history. Instead, I turned my eighteen-year-old nose up at how dead it seemed, and how elderly its (probably thirty-something-year-old) clientele appeared. I never went back, and Splash would close shortly thereafter. It would take another decade before I found out that it had, in fact, revolutionized the gay bar experience when it opened.

As I got older, I began immersing myself in LGBTQ+ culture and history. Several books and documentary films I consumed mentioned nightlife spots like Paradise Garage, the Saint, and GG's Barnum Room, which I had previously never heard of, but which all sounded out of this world. Wanting to learn more about these places, I started researching various spots daily, building a simple map for myself with addresses, dates, facts, and photos. Each time I dug a little deeper, new spaces emerged, many of which had very little documentation. Hoping to fill in some of the historical gaps, I started reaching out to LGBTQ+ elders for interviews to capture their personal memories of these long-lost places. I relished connecting with older LGBTQ+ individuals—an opportunity that is all too rare—and realized there was no better way to commemorate queer bars and nightclubs than to record the stories of the people who created them, worked in them, or patronized them.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020, I found myself with significantly more time on my hands. And, like so many LGBTQ+ people, I was affected by the indefinite closure of queer bars, clubs, and nightspots. I spent a lot of time ruminating on the sheer importance of these gathering spaces and the crucial role they've played for so many throughout our community's history. I immersed myself in even more research, map-building, and interviews, and eventually realized I had pinned nearly 1,000 LGBTQ+ spots on my New York map. I determined that more people my age needed to know about these places and began sharing them online with others via Instagram. Thus, Queer Happened Here was born.

I'd like to mention a few criteria that went into making this book. For one, it is a book after all, and therefore comes with physical constraints. *Queer Happened Here* only highlights spaces in Manhattan, though there have been many historically important LGBTQ+ places in Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island, which deserve their own books. Additionally, by no means are the spaces that *do* appear in this book the definitive or most important LGBTQ+ spots to have existed in New York City. In fact, they are but a small selection, aiming to represent diverse people and experiences across the queer spectrum. Some venues are very famous and feel impossible to leave out; others might be more obscure or only lasted a year. Taken together, I hope these paint a broad, vibrant picture of LGBTQ+ history and its ever-changing landscape in New York City.

Additionally, many of the spaces included in this book may have moved to different addresses over the years, closed and reopened, been renamed, or operated beyond the decade in which they are positioned in this book. Thus, attempts to provide them all with exact addresses or firmly ground them within a particular chapter by their dates of operation may be loose and imperfect. Some spaces have also been included in chapter introductions in order to provide additional breadth and flavor to the era in question.

Lastly, a comment on language. The vocabulary used by and against the LGBTQ+ community has constantly shifted over time and continues to do so today. We've been called, and have called ourselves, all sorts of names: inverts, homophiles, homosexuals, pansies, butches, faggots, trannies, dykes, friends of Dorothy, and so much more. Some of these have been empowering, others have been belittling, and several have managed to swing both ways. Many of these terms will appear throughout this book in their historical contexts, but for the most part, "LGBTQ+" and "queer" will be used as umbrella terms to refer to the broad spectrum of people whose sexual and gender expressions were anything but normative during their time. "LGBTQ+" and "queer" are thus not historically accurate, but intentionally used here for ease, inclusivity, and consistency.

With that, I welcome you to travel through my beloved city's LGBTQ+ history, and remind you that queer continues to happen here, and everywhere.

A member of the Cercle Hermaphroditos (likely at Paresis Hall), circa 1890s.

Before diving deeper into our story in the 1920s, let me briefly paint the scene as to what came before. Queerness certainly existed in the pre-colonial Americas, as many native and indigenous tribes used non-binary gender structures. The Diné (Navajo), for example, incorporated four gender identities, including the feminine and masculine Nádleehi. Similar concepts existed in other tribes, such as the Lhamana (Zuni) and Asegi (Cherokee). In more modern times, the term “two spirit” is sometimes used to describe these identities.

Shortly after the first European settlers arrived in the 1600s to what would become New York City, the presence of LGBTQ+ individuals was already being documented. Unfortunately, this only occurred through reporting on criminal activities since, during the time of the American colonies, sodomy was considered a capital offense. The first documented sodomy trial in the New York area took place in 1646, when Jan Creoli was convicted

for his second offense and sentenced to death. Throughout the 1600s, several more individuals were convicted of sodomy—or "buggery"—and the punishment would remain the death penalty until 1796, when it was reduced to a sentence of fourteen years of either solitary confinement or hard labor.

During the 1800s, the area of present-day New York City nearly doubled its number of residents, becoming America's most populous urban center. In this period of immense growth, the city also saw an uptick in homosexual subculture. Much of the early urban development started at the southern tip of Manhattan, and by the 1840s, some of the first public green spaces (like City Hall Park and Washington Square Park) became cruising grounds for gay and sexually curious men. Meanwhile, places meant to provide housing and bathing facilities for young, single men, like YMCAs and bathhouses, became "major centers for the gay world and served to introduce men to gay life," according to historian George Chauncey in his book *Gay New York*. In 1903, police conducted the first recorded vice raid on the Ariston Hotel Baths, during which 26 men were arrested and 12 brought to trial on sodomy charges.

Other queer venues documented by vice squad raids included brothels like Paresis Hall, which rented out young men to paying male clients. Paresis Hall was also particularly notable for leasing one of its floors to the Cercle Hermaphroditos, a transgender organization whose members stored their women's clothing there due to the illegality of, and public hostility towards, dressing as the opposite sex.

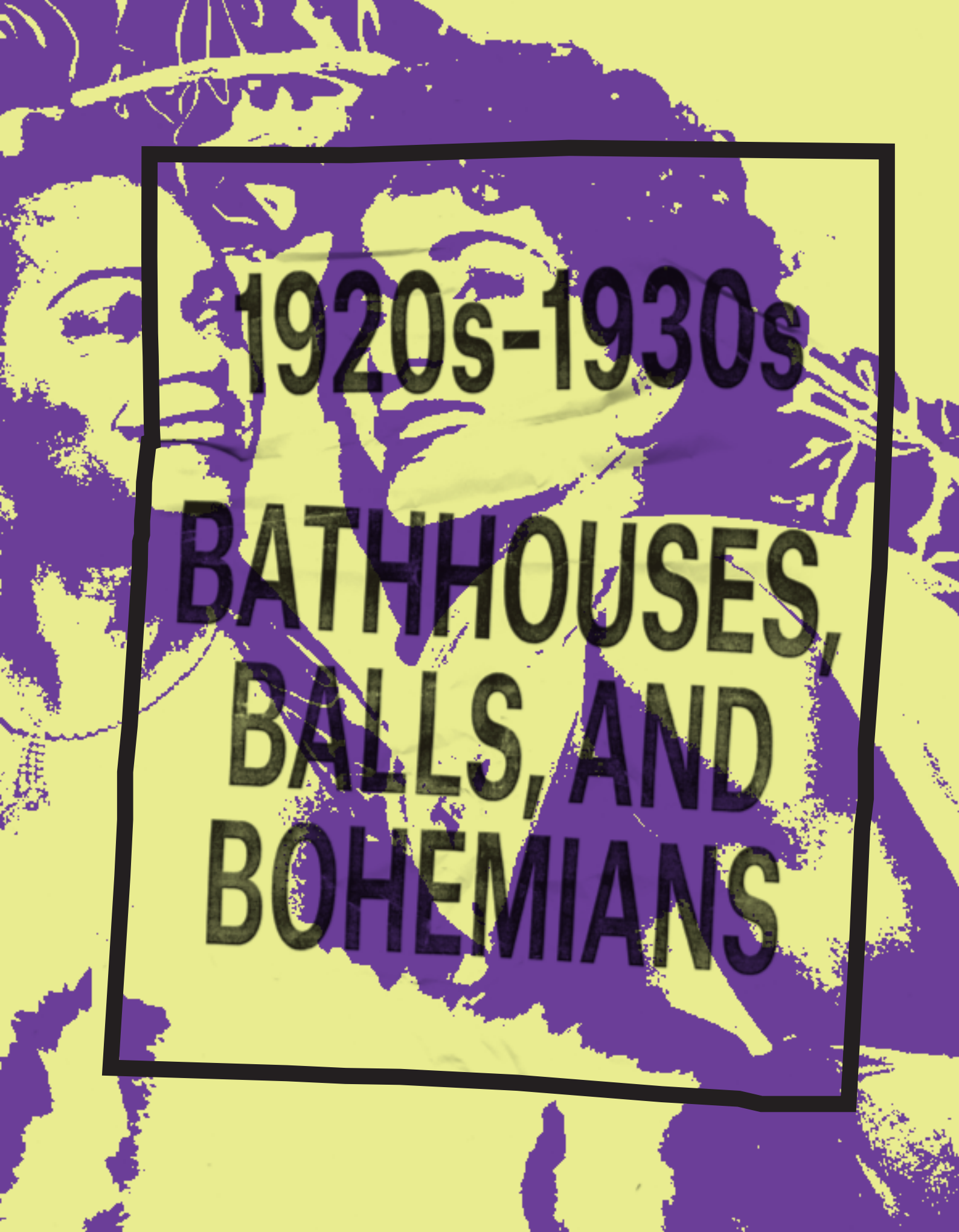
The late 1800s and early 1900s saw saloons, dive bars, and tearooms downtown become notorious gathering spots for LGBTQ+ folk, whose "rowdy" behavior tended to attract the vice squad. During the early 1890s, for example, the Slide at 157 Bleecker Street was considered New York's "worst dive" because it was rampant with "fairies"—men who dressed as women and solicited other men. The Slide was shuttered by cops in 1892, its proprietor charged with keeping a "disorderly house."

Other spots included the Black Rabbit at 183 Bleecker, another "fairy" bar frequently subjected to raids, and the Mad Hatter at 150 West 4th Street, a space for queer women owned by Eliza Helen Criswell and her partner, Mathilda Spence. Venues like Webster and Walhalla Halls hosted masquerade balls where queer folk could dress in drag and dance with one another.

Much of early homosexual life in New York would be understood through the documentation created by several notable queer figures. These included photographer Alice Austen and her partner, Gertrude Tate, illustrator J. C. Leyendecker and his partner, Charles Beach, the gender-variant Murray Hall, and the celebrated poet Walt Whitman, who arrived in the city in 1841 and quietly wrote of his attractions to and affinities for the city's "robust, athletic" working-class men.

LGBTQ+ life in New York City would continue to grow but remain primarily underground until the onset of World War I in 1914, which would disrupt much of American life for the next four years. The war also disrupted traditional gender roles, brought together communities of same-sex individuals *en masse*, and accelerated the significant migration of people to major urban centers like New York City. All these elements would contribute to a post-war period in the 1920s that saw a massive boom in the expression of LGBTQ+ culture and the development of queer spaces.


HAMILTON LODGE BALL
@ ROCKLAND PALACE
HARRY HANSBERRY'S CLAM HOUSE
JIMMIE DANIELS' NIGHTCLUB
CENTRAL PARK
EVERARD BATHS
STEWART'S CAFETERIA
WEBSTER HALL
EVE'S HANGOUT
HOWDY CLUB


1920s-1930s
BATHHOUSES, BALLS, AND BOHEMIANS

POST-WORLD WAR I, PROHIBITION, AND THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Mt. Morris Baths in Harlem was one of the longest-operating bathhouses in New York City. Through the 1920s and into the 1960s, it was the only gay bathhouse to admit Black men.

With World War I over and the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918 subsiding, the start of the 1920s was a breath of fresh air. The Roaring Twenties marked the arrival of the Jazz Age, the Harlem Renaissance, and increased social tolerance for minorities and homosexuals. In New York in particular, nightlife venues emerged as spaces where people from diverse backgrounds could interact.

The Harlem Renaissance allowed queer artists and intellectuals of color to shine. Many queer-centric venues thrived during the "Pansy Craze" of the 1920s and early 1930s, which saw a growing appetite for LGBTQ+ entertainers and allowed for their greater visibility. The target audiences of these clubs were mostly straight, with queerness used for humor. Many female and male impersonators (the terms "drag queen" and "drag king" were not yet used) experienced surges in popularity. In addition, everyday people—both gay and straight—would partake in drag themselves, as drag balls at Webster Hall and Rockland Palace became all the rage.

While many were simply out to enjoy themselves after the war, conservative efforts were putting a damper on the experience. Prohibition went into effect in 1920, forbidding the manufacture and sale of alcohol nationwide. Perhaps no place in the country did a better job at skirting

Prohibition than New York, as underground speakeasies flourished throughout the city. Many were operated by organized crime syndicates. This configuration would also mark the Mafia's early role in the operation of LGBTQ+ nightspots, which became even more prevalent when Prohibition ended in 1933.

The New York State Liquor Authority, formed in 1934, forbade the employment in bars of anyone convicted of a felony or crime—a rule that specifically targeted homosexuals, who were more likely to have an arrest record than their heterosexual peers. With sly insinuation, the SLA also expected bars to keep out "disorderlies" or risk being raided and shut down, signaling that same-sex couples could not be caught together.

Several other laws greatly affected LGBTQ+ life. In 1923, the state passed the Schackno Bill, making it a misdemeanor for any man to proposition another man. Meanwhile, in 1927, the city's Cabaret Law came into effect, prohibiting "musical entertainment, singing, dancing or other form[s] of amusement" at any institution that also sold drinks or food, unless that venue obtained the proper license. These licenses were notoriously expensive and hard to come by, and targeted nightlife venues catering to LGBTQ+ folks, people of color, and other marginalized communities.

The year 1927 also saw the Wales Padlock Law, which barred theatrical performances from depicting "sexual perversion". The Hays Code went into effect in 1930, setting strict guidelines on what was morally acceptable in films and explicitly prohibiting homosexuality onscreen. In 1933, Mayor Fiorello La Guardia began cleaning up the city in preparation for 1939's World's Fair. His edicts included the increased entrapment of gay men, as well as the prohibition of any form of drag between 14th and 72nd Streets.

Since nightlife venues and cultural institutions came with such complicated baggage, LGBTQ+ people often gathered in other types of spaces like parks and bathhouses, which became important destinations where gay and bisexual men could socialize and have sex.

By the mid- to late-1930s, the Pansy Craze was over, and the effects of the Great Depression left their indelible mark. A shift towards conservative values began sweeping the country. As a result, many LGBTQ+ people felt compelled to conceal their sexual orientation once more. By the end of the decade, however, many were all too distracted by the nascent global war that would soon arrive on American shores.

WEBSTER HALL

125 EAST 11TH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10003

The Rocky Twins, Norwegian brothers who performed at Webster Hall, circa 1920s.

Considered by some to be America's first LGBTQ+ nightclub, Webster Hall was constructed in 1886 at 125 East 11th Street between Third and Fourth Avenues and quickly turned into an important gathering space for the city's queer community. Initially a "hall-for-hire" that served weddings and union rallies, it became a bohemian enclave when it started hosting masquerade balls that promoted gender-fluid drag and same-sex dancing, earning it the nickname "Devil's Playground." These events attracted many LGBTQ+ folks, who could feel at ease letting their hair down under its mansard roof.

One of the earliest documented masquerade balls at Webster Hall was a 1913 fundraiser for the socialist magazine *The Masses*. The event was so successful that, by the end of the decade, the venue was hosting balls at least twice a week, each of which became increasingly outlandish. According to historian George Chauncey, Webster Hall was the site of an annual gay and lesbian drag ball by the mid-1920s, along with numerous other mixed-crowd masquerades heavily attended by homosexuals. Chauncey also mentions an instance where a police investigator reported observing "phenomenal men" there made up to look like young women in rouge, wigs, and expensive gowns.

When Prohibition began in 1920, Webster Hall became a speakeasy, and as long as the police were properly paid off, its dances grew even more raucous. Among the many notable queer individuals who attended events during this time were artist Charles Demuth, poet Langston Hughes, and writer Djuna Barnes.

Over the decades, Webster Hall has undergone several renovations, changes in ownership, and temporary closures, but it remains open as one of New York's longest-running nightclubs that always holds space for LGBTQ+ events. Today, it is primarily a concert venue for indie bands that also hosts occasional dance parties. One of the most popular LGBTQ+ events there in recent years has been a recurring party by DJ Ty Sunderland and drag queen Aquaria which, in honor of the venue's queer history, is fittingly called Devil's Playground.

Top Left: 1924 invitation to the early arts and literary magazine *Playboy*'s Fête Futuriste.

Top Right: Poster for Costume Ball and Carnival of the Artists and Writers Dinner Club, 1933.

Bottom: A 1920s drag ball at Webster Hall.

EVERARD BATHS

28 WEST 28TH STREET NEW YORK, NY 10001

Everard Baths exterior, 1905.

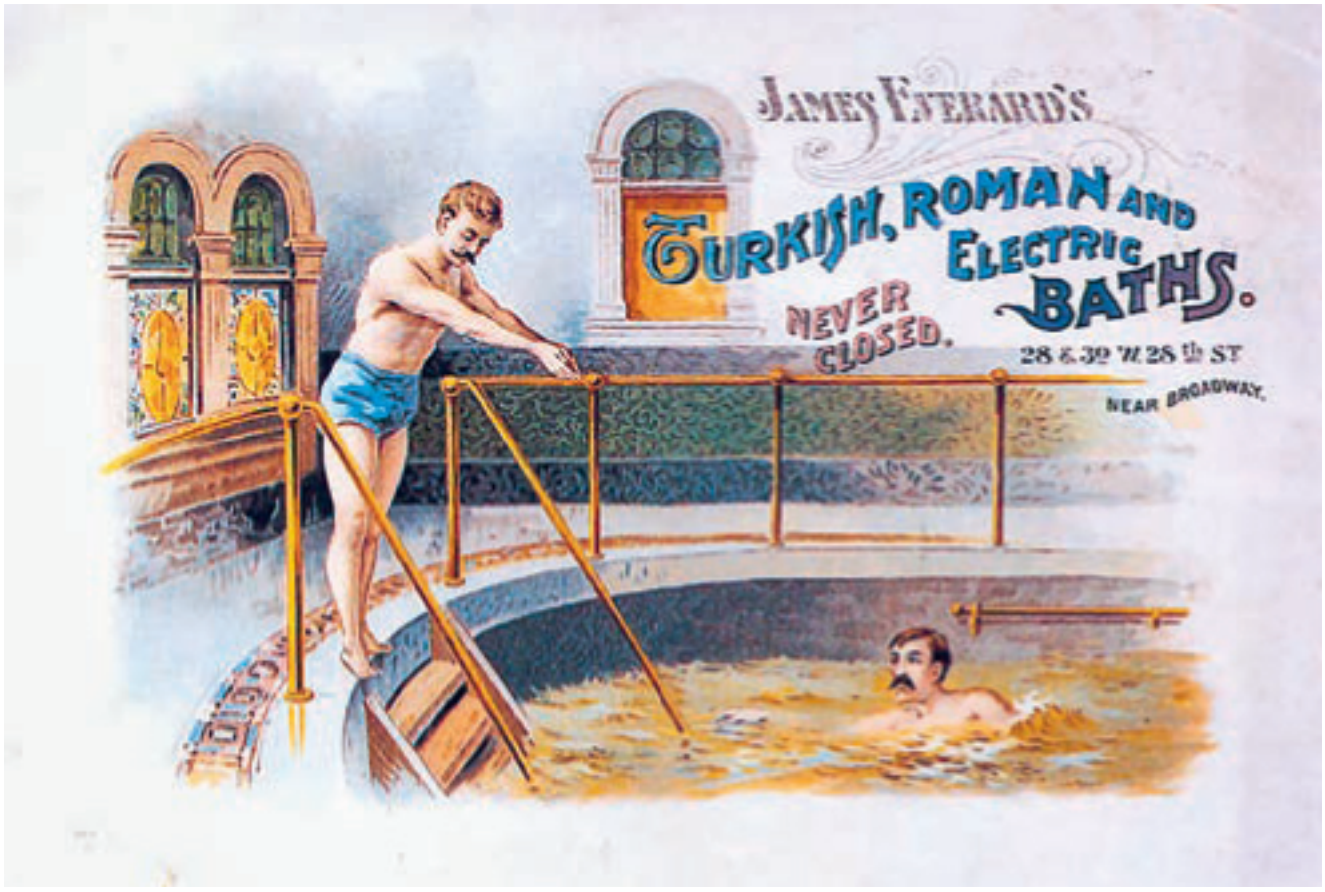
Founded by financier James Everard in 1888, the Everard Baths was a Turkish bathhouse located in a former church building at 28 West 28th Street between Sixth Avenue and Broadway. Like many bathhouses at the time, it was intended to promote general health and fitness—but as early as 1919, the Everard Baths was subject to documented police raids in which customers were arrested for "lewd behavior." By the 1920s, the Everard Baths was heavily patronized by homosexual men, and according to historian Neil Miller, was considered to be the "classiest, safest, and best known of the baths," earning it the cheeky nickname "Everhard."

In 1921, a new owner renovated the baths, and an ad from the following year declared "everything new but the location." The expanded venue now included a swimming pool, a huge dormitory on the second floor where "most of the activity takes place," as well as private cubicles on the higher floors.

The Everard Baths operated as a gay bathhouse for many decades, attracting prominent patrons along the way, including Truman Capote, Gore Vidal, Clifton Webb, Rudolf Nureyev, and Larry Kramer. In the book *Lavender Culture*, journalist and LGBTQ+ activist Arthur Bell recalled his time there: "It represented freedom to me—a place where I could have sex without plodding through the required conversation of a bar, where points are given for social status and artistic tastes...Everard's was a haven where I could stare at crotches in dimly lit hallways, wander the steam room, which smelled of sweat and Lysol, and screw with a cast of thousands who... were faceless and nameless."

Survivors of the Everard fire, 1977.

In 1977, the Everard Baths would tragically make headlines when a fire killed nine men, injured nine more, and destroyed two upper floors. (While the venue was temporarily closed, many of its clientele migrated to St. Marks Baths (see p. 54)). Despite this, the baths reopened and remained a popular gay destination until 1986, when Mayor Ed Koch shut it down permanently during his campaign to close all bathhouses in response to the AIDS epidemic. Today, the unassuming building houses wholesale product distributors, with not even a whiff of what went down within its walls for nearly a century.



Cover of a booklet advertising the original Everard Baths, 1892.

Getting a rub-down at the Everard Baths via the *New York Herald*, January 22, 1905.

Thomas Von Foerster, patron: "I remember the Everard Baths had a very large, very beautiful Art Deco swimming pool. But it also had a very nice, very active steam room. It was always lovely to sit in that steam room and hear the grunts, the groans, and the moans, but not be able to see much of anything."

HARRY HANSBERRY'S CLAM HOUSE

146 WEST 133RD STREET NEW YORK, NY 10030

As one of New York City's most notorious speakeasies, Harry Hansberry's Clam House was also one of Harlem's leading LGBTQ+ establishments during the Harlem Renaissance, thanks in part to its top-hat-wearing, tuxedo-donning performer, Gladys Bentley. Bentley, who got her start at the venue, made a name for herself singing raunchy revisions of popular songs and was so synonymous with the club that patrons at the time would even call the venue Gladys' Clam House.

Located at 146 West 133rd Street, Harry Hansberry's Clam House first opened circa 1920. At the age of 16, Gladys Bentley moved from Philadelphia to Harlem, and upon hearing that the Clam House was looking for a male pianist, applied for the job. According to Bentley herself, she wore "white full dress shirts, stiff collars, small bow ties, oxfords, short Eton jackets, and hair cut straight back." She was hired and began performing there regularly, perfecting her male impersonation act and ultimately skyrocketing her career. At the club's height, queer Hollywood stars like Tallulah Bankhead would often drop by to check out Bentley's racy shows.

Bentley was openly lesbian and often sang in a deep, snarling voice about "sissies" and "bulldaggers." She would mention female lovers in her lyrics and openly flirted with women in her audience. Her success at the Clam House led to her playing at other

Gladys Bentley with cane, circa 1930s.

A Nightclub Map of Harlem indicating Gladys' Clam House by E. Simms Campbell, 1932.

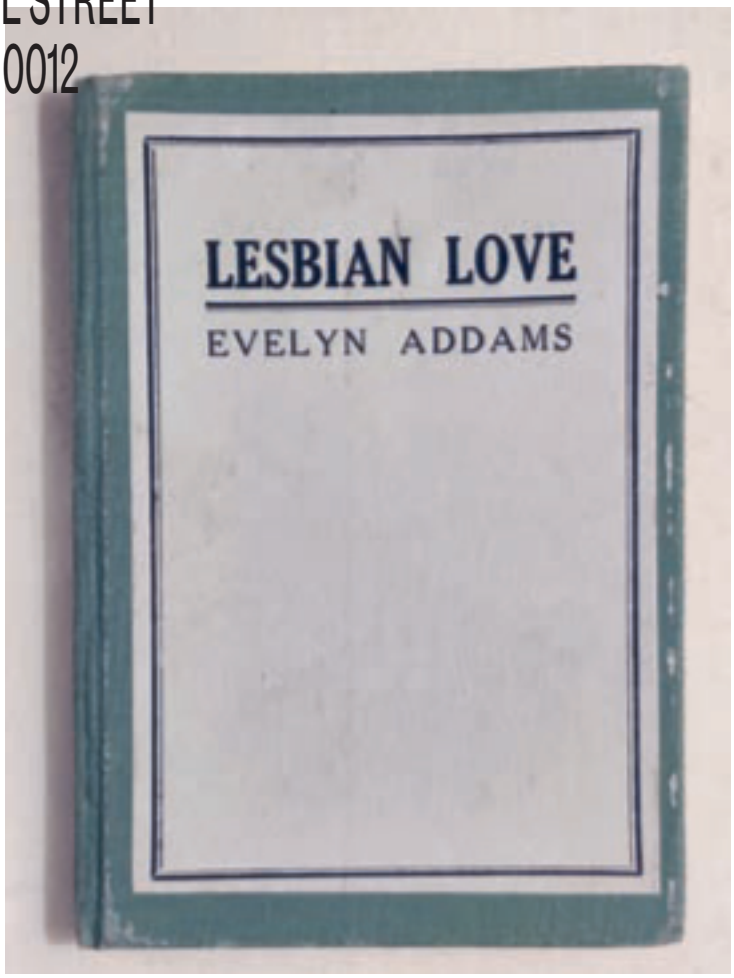
popular venues during the Harlem Renaissance, including the Apollo Theatre, the Cotton Club, and the Ubangi Club, where her shows often included drag backup dancers. She also toured throughout the US and landed several recording contracts.

When Prohibition was repealed, Harlem speakeasies fell out of favor, which likely led to the Clam House's closing. Concurrently, Bentley's success waned. She relocated to California, where she tried to salvage her career but failed to achieve earlier levels of popularity. Further complicating matters, US law had veered more conservative, and Bentley was frequently harassed for wearing men's clothing, at one point needing to carry special permits to perform.

By the McCarthy Era, Bentley returned to wearing dresses and swiftly claimed to have married a man in 1952. Around this time, she also studied to be a minister and penned a devastating article for *Ebony* magazine entitled "I Am a Woman Again," in which she claimed to have been "cured" of homosexuality after taking female hormones and undergoing an operation. On January 18th, 1960, Bentley died unexpectedly of pneumonia at her home in Los Angeles, aged 52. Despite the tragic latter half of her life, she is now lionized by the LGBTQ+ community, seen as an early, visibly queer Black woman and a pioneer for drag kings.

EVE'S HANGOUT

129 MACDOUGAL STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10012



The only known original copy of Eve Adams' *Lesbian Love*, written under a stylized pseudonym.

In 1924, Polish-Jewish émigré and radical lesbian Eve Adams (born Chawa Złoczower) opened a tearoom in the basement of 129 MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village. Often cited as one of NYC's earliest lesbian bars (though it served no alcohol and allowed in other folks), the venue has over the years been referred to as Eve Adams' Tearoom, Eve and Ann's, Eve's Place, and most frequently, Eve's Hangout. In June 1926, Robert Edwards, a frequent Adams antagonist, described the Hangout in his conservative newspaper, the *Greenwich Village Quill*, as a place "where ladies prefer each other. Not very healthy for the she-adolescents nor comfortable for he-men."

Adams was born in 1891 in Mława, Poland, and arrived in America in 1912 as a politically fervent youth. She became known around Greenwich Village for wearing pantsuits and an androgynous bob. In 1924, she opened her small, dimly lit tearoom in the cellar of a row house that instantly became a popular destination for lesbians and gay men to meet. At the time, *Variety* magazine noted—possibly falsely—that the tearoom's entrance even displayed a sign that read "Men are admitted, but not welcome."

Early in 1925, Adams published the groundbreaking book *Lesbian Love*, one of the first works of American lesbian literature. The following year, she was arrested and convicted of obscenity for publishing the book, and on other morality charges. After a series of deportation hearings, she was sent back to Poland in 1927, and Eve's Hangout was forced to close. By 1930, Adams was living in Paris, hawking forbidden books and

erotic literature. In 1933, she met Hella Olstein Soldner, with whom she formed an incredibly close bond. When the Nazis ascended to power, Adams wrote to several US friends in the hopes of escaping Europe, but to no avail. In 1943, she and Soldner were arrested and shipped to Auschwitz. Neither would survive the war.

Over fifty years later, a college student found a green clothbound book in the lobby of her apartment building, discovered to be the only extant copy of *Lesbian Love*. In one section, entitled "How I Found Myself," Adams chronicles an early encounter with another woman: "She only smiled and drowned all my fears with her kisses and ardent caresses...I didn't know where I was or what happened to me—it was a thing too sublime to give an account of...All that I know is that it was one of the greatest and most significant events of my life, which will never be forgotten, and that the memories are always just beautiful."

129 MacDougal Street, the basement of which housed Eve's Hangout, photographed in 1939.

Eve Adams in Paris, 1934.

CENTRAL PARK

79TH STREET TRANSVERSE
NEW YORK, NY 10024

Bethesda Fountain, circa 1901.

Nearly since its creation in 1857, Central Park has had numerous vital affiliations with the LGBTQ+ community. One of the earliest came in 1873 with the commission of the Bethesda Fountain, a sculpture "dedicated to love," according to the Parks Department. Its designer, Emma Stebbins, took this quite literally and is said to have modeled the statue after her lover, actress Charlotte Cushman. Stebbins' statue is also notable for being the earliest public artwork by a woman in New York City.

With the turn of the 20th century, Central Park became a major social center and cruising ground for the queer community, particularly near Belvedere Castle and the benches by Columbus Circle. By the 1920s, the lawn at the upper end of the Ramble, an area north of The Lake, had become the primary homosexual hotspot, earning it the nickname "the Fruited Plain." Other spots in the park soon became popular with gay men too, including areas near the 72nd Street Transverse and the southeast walkway to the Mall, dubbed "Vaseline Alley" or "Bitches' Walk" due to its concentration of loitering homosexuals.

To counter the rise in homoerotic activities, police were sent into the park as early as 1921 to entrap and arrest gay men for "lewd activities," a practice which would continue for many decades. Over the years, a number of notable individuals would be caught cruising there, including future gay rights leader Harvey Milk in 1947. (Despite the numerous arrests and gay bashings, the Ramble remains a favored spot for cruising and outdoor sex to this day.)

Charlotte Cushman and Emma Stebbins, circa 1860s.

Couple Roger Pegram and Frank Bushong in Central Park, 1951.

Two men stand flirtatiously on a bridge in the Ramble, circa 1950s.

Cruising in the Ramble, circa 1950s.

Central Park has also played other vital roles in LGBTQ+ history. In 1970, on the first anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising (see p. 92), a march celebrating Christopher Street Liberation Day set out from Greenwich Village, culminating in a "gay-in" held at the park's Sheep Meadow. This became an annual event, now known as the Pride March (see p. 102). For two decades, the parade routed through Central Park, before it was moved to end on Christopher Street in the West Village.

During the AIDS crisis, the park served as a stage for several important demonstrations. One landmark event occurred in 1989, when organizers unfurled 1,696 panels of the AIDS Memorial Quilt on the Great Lawn, reading out countless names of victims of the disease. The park's role in the fight against AIDS continues today with AIDS Walk New York, which is the world's largest single-day AIDS fund-raiser and has been held since 1986.

In recent years, the legalization of same-sex marriage has made Central Park a destination for countless gay proposals and marriage ceremonies. The park's own website even highlights this fact: "Central Park welcomes all couples, including same-sex and gender neutral, to walk down the aisle in a quintessential New York City wedding ceremony!"

From servicing on both knees to proposing on just one, queer folks have used Central Park as a shelter, haven, and mecca for over a century. The park has been a firsthand witness to how far the LGBTQ+ movement and its history have come.

Randy Wicker, LGBTQ+ activist: "When I first came to New York City, I had never heard of gay bars. Then I read a book in which a guy sees a sailor going into a gay bar. And so I went on a hunt. I sat in the park with bright red stockings on up to here, because I wanted to make sure I looked like an obvious homosexual. Sure enough, I got picked up and then that guy introduced me to the first gay bar I ever went to, called Lenny's Hideaway, one of the most transformative experiences of my life."

Two gay men in Central Park, circa 1940.