

# PLANTING THE RAINBOW FLAG

PLACES OF LGBTQ HISTORY IN MARYLAND





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# INTRO

Maryland is a state of varied landscapes and varied populations, encompassing a rich and diverse history. The land that now comprises the state has witnessed twelve thousand years of human habitation; one of the earliest settlement efforts of the English in North America; the founding of the United States and subsequent battles over the meanings of American freedom; hundreds of years of immigration, industrialization, and urbanization; and the consequences of being located in one of the most populated and most powerful regions of the country. And throughout this history, we find evidence of same-sex love and desire and of gender variance. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) perspectives have been underrepresented in Maryland's historical narrative, yet they comprise an important part of that larger story.

As of 2021 Maryland's population is over 6 million, of which just over half is white at 57.8 percent; 31.4 percent are Black or African American, 11.1 percent is Latino, 6.9 percent is Asian American, and 3.1 percent is mixed race. In January 2019, the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law reported that 198,000 Marylanders, or 4.2 percent of the state's population, self-identified as LGBT (the category of Queer was not included in the question).

These numbers make Maryland twenty-second on a list of U.S. states and the District of Columbia with the highest percentages of LGBTQ residents. The institute has also calculated geographic breakdowns of the state's LGBTQ population, but these are based on older data. According to statistics from 2010, the Maryland counties with the highest percentage of same-sex households were Baltimore County, Prince George's County, and Montgomery County, respectively.





In 2018, the Maryland Historical Trust and Preservation Maryland partnered together to complete a study of LGBTQ history within the state, in order to assist historic preservationists in identifying and evaluating places significant to that story. The study, completed in 2020, was authored by Susan Ferentinos, PhD. with support from Benjamin Egerman. A full version of the report is available online at [www.presmd.org/lgbtq](http://www.presmd.org/lgbtq)



This booklet is an abridged version of that larger study. It offers a condensed overview of the history of gender variance and of same-sex love and desire, along with highlighting just a few of the Maryland sites that are significant to LGBTQ history. If you would like to know more about specific sites related to LGBTQ history in Maryland, Benjamin Egerman, who served as research assistant for this project, has created a digital map of identified places, using the HistoryPin platform. The map allows individuals to add information about LGBTQ-related sites, so if there's a site you know about that is missing from the map, please add it. [www.historypin.org/en/lgbtq-america/lgbtq-maryland/](http://www.historypin.org/en/lgbtq-america/lgbtq-maryland/)

## PARAMETERS OF THIS STUDY

This report uses the phrase “LGBTQ history” as a shorthand for the topic of this report, even though this term is relatively recent and even the concepts of sexual and gender identities are only a little more than a century old. Broadly speaking, Americans before the twentieth century were unfamiliar with the concept of sexual identity. Both homosexuality and heterosexuality are medical constructs that developed in late-nineteenth-century Europe and became firmly entrenched in the United States in the early twentieth century. Same-sex sexual activity, as a behavior, was present—and was largely viewed as troubling—but engaging in that behavior did not mean you were a certain type of person until the twentieth century.

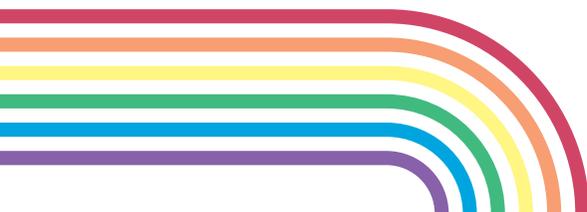
The same was true of gender crossing. Furthermore, originally the concepts of homosexual identity and transgender identity were conflated. Someone who was assigned female and who desired other women sexually was understood to have an inverted gender. American cultural understanding did not allow for sexual identity and gender identity as two separate concepts until the mid-twentieth century, and the wide usage of the term “transgender” was not adopted until the late twentieth century. Bisexuality—the attraction to more than one gender—was vexing for just about everyone, and more often



than not, this sexual identity was simply lumped into the same categories of “deviance” as homosexuality and gender variance, or it was ignored entirely.

Changing historical constructions of gender and sexuality mean that people in the past understood their desires in ways that are wholly different from how we might understand ours today. A seventeenth-century white man in colonial Maryland may have desired other men and acted on that desire regularly, but he would not necessarily have seen that as being inconsistent with marriage to a woman. Elite men in Anglo society were largely immune from punishment for sexual indiscretions, regardless of the letter of the law, and marriage was considered more of an economic transaction than a declaration of love. Likewise, someone raised as a woman in the nineteenth century may have adopted a male identity and spent decades living as a man, but there’s a good chance that this person understood that decision as personal choice, rather than an indication that they were, in fact, inherently male-gendered.

For these reasons, this report takes an inclusive approach in defining LGBTQ historic resources in Maryland. We can find motivations, actions, and desires in the past that resonate with our contemporary understanding of what LGBTQ means, but we will not find pre-twentieth-century Americans adhering precisely to our twenty-first-century understandings of sexuality and gender. Instead, this study includes those events, people, and places that resonate with our current understandings of LGBTQ experiences, that seem to exist on the spectra of same-sex love and desire and of gender variance even when no specific evidence of same-sex sexual activity or transgender identity exists. Because this evidence is exceedingly rare, instead we have utilized two questions in determining what stories to include. One is: Does this event, person, or place stand out as somehow out of the ordinary (some might say “queer”) in that they do not fit solidly into the sex and gender norms of their time? The other question is: Would this story, if it reached an isolated young person struggling with their own sexual or gender identity, provide consolation to them that they are not alone, but instead part of a long line of people who have faced some of the same challenges they are currently facing? When the answer to either question was yes, we chose to include the story.



# LGBTQ HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

## THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

At the dawn of the seventeenth century, roughly forty cultural groups resided within the geographic area that was to become the state of Maryland. These Indigenous groups included the Choptico, the Mattawoman, the Patuxent, and the Piscataway on the Western Shore; the Choptank, the Pocomoke, and the Wicomico on the Eastern Shore; and Susquehannock at the head of the Chesapeake Bay. In all, Native Americans numbered about eight thousand to ten thousand people when the first Europeans arrived.

Very little is known about the gender and sexual practices of these specific Indigenous groups, and what evidence we do have about North American Indigenous cultures generally can be difficult for Westerners to understand, because prior to European contact these cultures had radically different concepts of sex and gender than Europeans did. Scholars have pieced together some information about the sexual and gender practices of the Iroquois (also known as the Haudenosaunee) in the period after European contact, and this scholarship may hold some relevance to the Susquehannock, whose territory included part of what became the Maryland colony and who shared some cultural attributes with the Iroquois who resided further to the north.

Among the Iroquois (post-contact), conquest rituals could involve men of a conquered group engaging in sex acts with men of the conquering group and performing tasks traditionally performed by women. Iroquois cultures may also have recognized a third gender, less common than either male or female, that contained elements of these other two genders. The European colonizers referred to Indigenous Americans who did not fit into binary gender constructions as “berdache,” but in the twenty-first century, “Two Spirit” is the more common—and less objectionable—term.

Africans first arrived in the Maryland colony in 1642, as captive laborers. In the early decades of colonization, African slavery existed alongside European indentured servitude, and thus the African population remained fairly low until the turn of the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century, 33,200 enslaved Africans were transported to the colony, compared with 96,000 indentured servants brought from England. Nevertheless, the presence of Africans would have introduced additional sex and gender systems into the



Maryland territory. Many of the northern and western African cultures from which most captives originated allowed space for same-sex sexual activity, and some also recognized gender categories beyond the binary European models.

As an English colony, however, Maryland laws were based on English cultural standards, and English laws applied, including the Buggery Law of 1533, which made sodomy a capital offense. In the words of the law, those convicted of “the detestable & abominable vice of buggeri committed with mankind or beest... shall suffer suche peynes of dethe, and losses, and penalties of their goodes, cattals, dettes, londes, tenements, and heredytamentes, as felons benne accustomed to do accordynge to the order of the common lawes of this realme.” This law seems to have remained in force in Maryland until 1793, well after Maryland had severed its ties to England and become part of the United States. While surviving records from the colonial period are not comprehensive, it appears that one man in the Maryland colony, William Sewick, was indeed executed under this law, in 1681.





# PICKLE PARK

SCAGGSVILLE, MD

**This rest stop--the only one on the interstate between Baltimore and Washington--and the wooded area around it were well known as a gay cruising spot since the late 1970s, and is listed as such in the Damron's Guide for Men for many years. In 1988, Maryland Highway patrol organized multiple sting operations, resulting in numerous arrests. Baltimore Sun coverage ran under the headline, "Police go undercover to root out homosexual activity."**

Despite the official law of the land, however, it is likely that the Maryland colony experienced a sizable amount of same-sex sexual activity among its seventeenth-century settlers of European origin. Same-sex or gender-imbalanced environments—frontier areas, ships, military institutions, prisons, same-sex colleges, convents, and seminaries, for example—are likely to foster sexual activity between members of the same sex, and Maryland in the early decades of European settlement was just such a place. The sex ratio among colonists in the Chesapeake was one woman for every four men, and for a few years, between 1634 and 1635, the ratio was even higher, with men outnumbering women six to one.

In addition, the Chesapeake Bay has shaped the history of the land that surrounds it. Maryland from its beginning was a maritime colony, and seafaring men and same-sex desire have a longstanding association. On the one hand, seafaring meant global travel in eras when most people rarely traveled more than fifty miles from their birthplace, lending sailors a worldliness and familiarity with far-off cultures and practices. On the other hand, months spent at sea with only other men for company led to both homoerotic shipboard customs and a reputation for randiness once ashore. The combination of these circumstances led in many cases to homosexual activity among sailors, whether onboard or in port.



Such connections were well established by the time of Europeans. John Smith, who first explored the Chesapeake for the English, noted in 1607 that while ships were docked near the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia, “sailors would pilfer [food from the ship] to sell, give or exchange with us, for money, saxefras, furs, or love.” The reference to “love” is notable, because the colony at that time was all men. A note in the margin of Smith’s original text states, “The sailors’ abuses,” indicating that both Smith and his anticipated readers would understand the connection between sailors and homosexual activity.

Furthermore, for most of the seventeenth-century period of colonization, Maryland would have had a frontier feel about it. The population was in constant flux, the result of ongoing immigration and a high death rate. In addition, many of the elements that anchor society—kinship networks, churches, established towns—were lacking. In such circumstances, it is easy to imagine a certain dispensing with societal prescriptions.

The uneven sex ratio of the early Maryland colonial period likely also demanded a relaxing of traditional English gender norms, since there were not enough women to perform traditionally female domestic tasks and those women who were present in the colony would have needed to learn certain skills of survival that in more refined circumstances could be reserved for men.

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One particularly intriguing story of relaxed gender norms involves Margaret Brent (c. 1600–1671). Brent immigrated to the Maryland colony in 1638 with three of her adult siblings. She never married and served as the sole executor of Royal Governor Leonard Calvert’s will, upon his death in 1647. As part of these duties, she assumed power of attorney for Lord Baltimore, the owner of the colony’s royal charter—a role that previously had been held by the governor. In this era, a woman taking on these roles was extraordinary, even in a colonial outpost. Nevertheless, in early 1648, the Maryland Assembly ruled that she could indeed assume this power. Brent followed up with an additional request that she be allowed to vote in Assembly, a petition that was denied.

Although there is no evidence that Brent was romantically attracted to women or thought of herself as a man, her unmarried status, her choice to travel to the colony in its first five years of European settlement, her political role in the colony, and her claim of the right to vote in Assembly demonstrate a refusal to confine herself to the gender role assigned her. Although she did not assume a male identity, in many ways she did in fact “live as a man,” according to the tenets of the seventeenth-century English gender system. As such, Brent’s life has relevance to the larger history of gender variance and reminds us that historical circumstances where cultural mores are not as strictly enforced create room for sexual and gender expressions that in stricter circumstances might be considered “deviant.”

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Religious pluralism was another facet of colonial Maryland, and this too may have contributed to a slightly more relaxed approach to the policing of others. Initially settled by Catholics, Maryland's Toleration Act of 1649 protected the right of Christians, whether Catholic or Protestant, to practice their religion and made it a crime to disparage another's religion. The law established Maryland's reputation as a place of religious plurality. However, the law very specifically did not protect spiritual practices rooted in belief systems other than Christianity, such as those of Indigenous Americans or Africans.

Numerous elements of early colonial life in Maryland—the mixing of cultures, the uneven sex ratio and subsequent relaxing of European gender norms, the frontier quality of European settlements, and religious plurality—suggest that this may have been a time and a place with some room for variant sexual and gender practices. However, the seventeenth century also saw the beginnings of a formalized racial hierarchy in Maryland, which both provided more legal rights to European Americans than to other ethnicities and likely enabled European Americans to exercise a greater range of behavior before being subject to punishment.

Despite the fact that indentured servitude was the dominant labor system in Maryland until the 1690s, the colony enacted a series of laws in the 1660s allowing and establishing the parameters of chattel slavery and restricting the rights of Africans and African Americans. Most notably, a 1663 law declared that all Africans entering the colony would be enslaved for life and that their children would inherit their parents' enslaved status.

The mid-to-late seventeenth century was also marked by ongoing skirmishes and land disputes between Europeans and Indigenous nations, as well as between different Indigenous nations as they fought for access to diminishing resources brought about by the English invasion. War and reduced circumstances led to the death of many Indigenous Americans, while many others chose to migrate out of Maryland to establish themselves in less disputed territory. Still others moved to reservations established by the colony.

Maryland's early colonial era was thus a place of both cultural mixing and cultural subjugation. This social flux likely led to some added freedom with regard to sexual and gender practices, as people dealt with new cultural influences and new physical circumstances. Yet, this same period also saw the introduction of European-influenced cultural practices and laws that greatly restricted the movement and autonomy of Africans and Indigenous Americans and likely subjected their sexual and gender expressions to surveillance and forced adherence to European belief systems.

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By the dawn of the eighteenth century, the majority of white Marylanders were native-born instead of immigrants and lived in traditional family groups, although among whites, men still outnumbered women. Significant numbers



# CORPUS CHRISTI CATHOLIC CHURCH

**BALTIMORE, MD**



**This church was the earliest meeting spot for Dignity, an organization of LGBT Catholics. The local chapter was started in the late 1970s by Sister Jeannine Gramick, and was initially treated with some amount of cautious acceptance. Beginning in the 1980s, the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington, DC both began distancing themselves.**



# SUSAN SILBER HOUSE

SILVER SPRING, MD

Susan Silber is a longtime legal advocate for LGBTQ+ people and local head of the ACLU. She became city attorney of Takoma Park in 1981 and has worked to strengthen LGBTQ+ civil rights and protections at the local, county, and state-wide level.





of Indigenous Americans had been killed or had migrated away from the area of European settlement, and those who remained were confined to reservations established by the colonial government. In contrast, the African and African American population was growing at unprecedented rates.

One of the biggest changes to take place in Maryland during the colonial period was the emergence of chattel slavery as the dominant labor system, with the number of people held in lifetime slavery exceeding the number of indentured servants by the turn of the eighteenth century. The number of permanently enslaved people in Maryland nearly tripled in the thirteen years between 1697 and 1710, increasing from three thousand to eight thousand. By 1710, enslaved people comprised about 18 percent of the population.

The arrival of large numbers of Africans to the colony might have made African sexual and gender practices more evident to the European Americans in power. However, because of the economic, political, and religious dominance of European Americans, Western understandings of gender and same-sex desire prevailed. Having been forced into a system of slavery, Africans' autonomy in Maryland was greatly constricted. As a method of enforcing the slavery system, enslavers routinely punished people for practicing their African cultural traditions.

By the 1750s, the gender imbalance had mostly evened out among the European American population of Maryland, except on the western frontier of the colony. Among bound laborers—primarily enslaved but including some indentured servants—70 percent were men, suggesting that same-sex sexual activity remained a relatively common option among this group. The Indigenous population in Maryland had continued to decline, though their exact numbers are difficult to determine. One 1756 estimate put their number at 140; a 1761 estimate put it at 120. The remaining Indigenous people in Maryland were likely comprised of Choptanks and Nanticokes living on reservations on the Eastern Shore.

By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, Maryland was part of a transnational exchange of goods and ideas enabled by the ships that regularly traveled between Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and North America, often referred to by historians as “the Atlantic World.” This cultural development had two significant impacts on the history of same-sex love and desire in the North American English colonies.

First, the Atlantic exchange of ideas brought news of European cultural trends to the American colonies. By the mid-eighteenth century, Europeans were becoming aware of small groups of men in large cities—London, Paris, Amsterdam—who behaved effeminately and much preferred the company of each other to the company of women. This information in turn crossed the Atlantic and arrived in North American port cities where it was disseminated throughout the colonies. North Americans, like their European counterparts, incorporated this news of what might now be called gay subcultures into their understandings of sexual categories, desire, and behavior.

Second, the eighteenth-century trans-Atlantic exchange of ideas brought the Enlightenment to the New World, a development that sparked revolutions in



both North America and Haiti, as well as opening up cultural space for variant sexual and gender practices. During the Enlightenment, “the rational method of inquiry was favored over blind religious faith, and the individual (unquestioningly assumed to be a white man) was given unprecedented authority in determining his own destiny.” However, along with prizing individual decision-making, Enlightenment thinkers also praised the role of nature and the common good in regulating individual behavior. Monarchies and the Church fell out of favor as the regulators of behavior, but the Enlightenment by no means favored anarchy.

The result was mixed messages with regard to same-sex sexuality. The Enlightenment’s emphasis on the individual led to a dislike of laws governing morality, which in turn led to cultural acceptance of a greater range of sexual practices. However, the new importance of nature and the common good meant that same-sex sexuality remained problematic. Sodomy remained a crime, even as the reasoning behind the laws changed. In the Enlightenment, sodomy was illegal not because Christianity said it was a sin, but because it had the potential to destabilize what was then considered the “natural order.”

Yet, while sodomy remained a crime, romantic connections between men, particularly propertied men of European descent, became increasingly idealized. Revolutionary-era thinking prized the idea of “sensibility” as a necessary component of democracy (again, at this time reserved only for propertied white men). Emotional capacity, empathy, and strong bonds of friendship became desired traits among men. In fact, intense individual attachments between men were praised as an expression of the democratic ideal.

This enthusiasm for male relationships likely had a lot to do with the founders’ tenuous hold on power. Elite women, the middling classes, Indigenous Americans, and enslaved Africans were also being exposed to the revolutionary ideas of the era; yet, the rewards of American democracy were denied to them. In such a political climate, some sexual indiscretions among the powerful could be overlooked.

Related to these contradictions was a shift in understandings about women. At the same time eighteenth-century men were embracing ideas of self-determination, cultural ideals for women began emphasizing their docility and deemphasizing their sexuality. This construction of female identity explains, in part, the near-absence of sources dealing with female-female sexual activity in this era. Sexual expression not initiated by a man was simply inconceivable to most people. In addition, this reconceptualization of the genders as polar opposites would have significant influence over the course of the nineteenth century, as we shall see in the next section.

Another body of intriguing evidence from this period lies in a few surviving examples of people assigned a female gender at birth who adopted a male identity and fought in the war for independence. Deborah Sampson of



Massachusetts is perhaps the best-known example of this phenomenon. Sampson served for seventeen months in the Continental Army under the name of Robert Shurtliff and was wounded in combat before her former identity was discovered. After the war, she returned to a female gender and eventually married a man.

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While no residents of Maryland are known to have crossed genders and served in the Revolutionary War, one famous Marylander from this period has captured the attention of some who seek predecessors to today's LGBTQ identities. Benjamin Banneker (1731-1806), who grew up near Ellicott Mills in Maryland, is one of the most widely known African American historical figures of the eighteenth century; he also left no evidence of attraction to women. Born of a mixed-race free mother and an enslaved African father, Banneker was born free, inheriting his mother's status as was the law. He learned to read and from childhood displayed a distinctive aptitude for mathematics and science. In adulthood, he was renowned for his work in astronomy and for being part of the team, along with Andrew Ellicott, to survey the land that was designated to be the new nation's capital, Washington, D.C. Banneker was also an early abolitionist, corresponding with Thomas Jefferson in the 1790s concerning the question of racial equality.

Banneker never married, nor does any evidence of romantic attachments with women survive. He also did not leave any record of same-sex attachments, although his personal writing occasionally references taboo desires. As one example, Banneker once declared many hardships more tolerable to the "pungent stings . . . which guilty passions dart into the heart."

We also know that he was raised in a family that did not rely on community standards when making personal choices. His maternal grandmother, Molly Welsh, arrived in the colony from England as an indentured servant, possibly as punishment for committing the crime of stealing milk. Despite these humble beginnings, she became a tobacco farmer with the means to purchase two enslaved Africans, one of whom she entered into a long-term domestic partnership with, despite the fact that it was illegal for them to marry, given their different races. The couple had four daughters. Their oldest daughter Mary also entered into a long-term relationship with an enslaved man. This man adopted the Christian name of Robert and took his (non-legal) wife's surname, Bannaky or Banneker. Benjamin was the child of Mary and Robert.

The dearth of evidence concerning any romantic interest in women, the references to taboo desires, and the family history of deciding one's own moral course regardless of community standards combined to lead some LGBTQ historians to identify Benjamin Banneker as an LGBTQ ancestor. Much of this discussion took place in the 1990s, during a period of "reclaiming" historical figures that seem to have desired members of their same sex or whose attractions were ambiguous. While the evidence is by no means definitive, we can find multiple LGBTQ popular cultural references to Banneker as an ancestor.

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Overall, the eighteenth century was a period of dramatic change for Maryland and the rest of the English colonies. By the end of the century, the colonies had fought a revolution to free themselves from colonial rule and established the United States of America. The Enlightenment played an important role in this revolt and the states' subsequent experiments in democracy. The new worldview inspired by the Enlightenment, coupled with the dramatic social upheaval of the revolution and the establishment of the U.S. government, also introduced new understandings about gender and same-sex desire. The changes were not universal, however. Ideals of self-determination and democracy were not accessible to all, and even among the elite, older ideas comingled with the new, creating a plurality of views about sexuality and gender, among other things.

## THE NINETEENTH CENTURY THROUGH THE CIVIL WAR, 1800-1870

The emphasis on gender differences that began in the post-Revolutionary War era only increased in the nineteenth century. The early republic, as the period 1780-1830 is known, saw a major economic shift, which in turn altered culture, class distribution, and understandings of gender. In the early years of the new nation, a system known as the household economy prevailed. Largely self-sufficient, households in this era labored together to provide for their needs and barter for whatever goods and services they were unable to produce themselves. However, the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a shift known as the Market Revolution. Closely related to the Industrial Revolution, which concentrated the means of production into fewer hands, the Market Revolution saw the rise of money—not barter—as the predominant means of exchange. Increasing numbers of people sought work outside their own households, so that they could earn wages and thus buy the goods and services they were no longer producing for themselves and their families.

Amid this substantial economic change, gender divisions grew more pronounced. In the market economy, men became associated with wage earning and, by extension, the public world, and women became associated with domestic work (generally unpaid) performed in private homes. Physical space itself became gendered, as men and women spent increasing time apart from each other (men in public, women at home). These new circumstances led to changing ideas; men and women began to be described as having vastly different temperaments and vastly different societal roles, an ideology that historians traditionally have referred to as “separate spheres.”

Of course, for many people in America, the ideal of separate spheres did not reflect personal reality. Rural households, which dominated western Maryland before the Civil War, continued to labor together in a structure more reminiscent of the household economy than the market economy. Enslaved Marylanders continued to lead lives where their labor was exploited by whites, and idealized gender roles had virtually

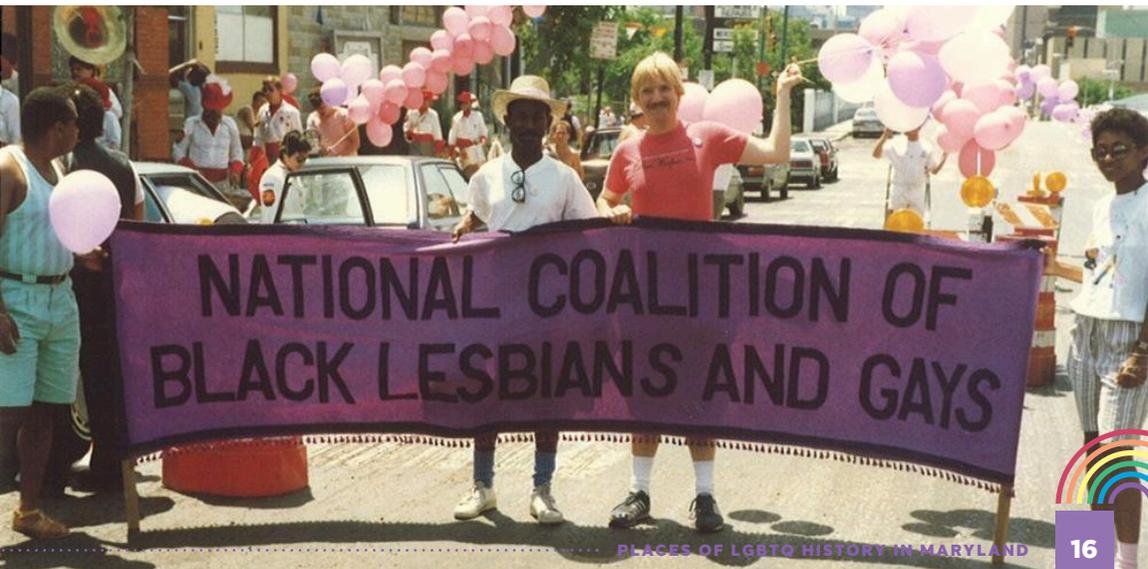


no relevance. Likewise, the extremely wealthy had lived more gender-segregated lives than other Americans since long before the revolution.

Such momentous cultural and economic shifts were felt throughout society, but they prompted two changes that had particularly profound impacts on the history of same-sex love and desire and of gender crossing. The first change lay in increasing urbanization. As the means of production and opportunities for wage work became concentrated, so did population. Existing cities grew rapidly, while new ones sprung up around mills and transportation hubs. As people sought wage labor, many—especially young people, both men and women—left the circle of their relatives and sought opportunity in urban centers. Both the large numbers of residents and the separation of individuals from their families and the neighbors they had grown up with created unprecedented opportunities for anonymity. Free of the community surveillance and gossip of small-town life, some recent migrants to the city found themselves able to act on desires—to love those of their same sex or live as a different gender—for the first time in their lives.

The trend toward the market economy and urbanization played out in Maryland as well as the rest of the United States, though it was tempered in parts of Maryland by the presence of slavery. The market economy requires a free market and wage labor, and thus, it serves as a challenge to economies based on slavery. Thus, in the nineteenth century, Maryland— Influenced by both the free market leanings of the North and the slavery economy of the South—became something of an economic hybrid.

After the War of 1812, the city of Baltimore boomed, becoming a national hub of shipping and shipbuilding. By 1850, Baltimore was the second largest city in the United States (New York was the largest) and was home to 29 percent of Maryland's population (up from a mere 4 percent of the state's population in 1790). It was also the most ethnically diverse location in Maryland. Seventy percent of the state's fifty thousand foreign-born residents lived



in Baltimore City, as did the largest population of free black residents in the United States, drawn there by Baltimore's embrace of wage labor.

Amid such expansive growth and diversity—in Baltimore, as in other nineteenth-century cities—finding others like oneself became easier, regardless of one's particular interests. Fells Point, the Baltimore neighborhood most associated with the harbor, became an area known for urban nightlife and vice (a term used historically to describe behavior that was illegal and/or considered immoral—prostitution, same-sex and interracial sexual activity, gambling, drugs, and excessive drinking). Quite likely, this Baltimore neighborhood included LGBTQ social outlets by the mid-to-late nineteenth century, as we know it did by the mid-twentieth.

The second major change for LGBTQ people brought about by the Market Revolution resides within the ideology of separate spheres. As gender roles were elaborately delineated and physical space itself became gendered, individuals were granted far less room for deviation from gender norms. We can see this in the proliferation of laws in the United States that made it illegal for people to wear clothing that did not conform to their assigned gender. Such strict gender conventions likely led to increasing numbers of people who did not fully identify with their assigned gender to chafe against such roles and explore the possibilities of crossing the gender divide.

Benjamin Egerman, a researcher on this report, has uncovered an example of early-nineteenth-century gender crossing in Maryland. In this instance, a “comely youth” dressed in male clothing was arrested at the Baltimore Horse Market in 1838 for attempting to sell a stolen horse. Upon arrest, police determined the thief to be “a bona-fide woman” who had been “living as a man” for three years.

Another development in the nineteenth century that was closely linked to the rise of separate spheres was the phenomenon that historians now refer to as romantic friendship. Under an ideology that posited the genders as so vastly different from each other that opportunities for mixed-gender socializing were limited, strong emotional attachments between members of the same sex were common and encouraged. Seizing on the romanticism so common in the arts during this period, such relationships frequently involved declarations of love and devotion, pet names, and physical affection that involved kissing and caressing. Such behavior was widely accepted, and in fact encouraged, among the white middle class as a healthy distraction from the dangers of premarital heterosexual romance. And while it is quite likely that most of these relationships did not involve genital contact, they indisputably involved romantic love and thus hold relevance for our understandings of the history of same-sex love and desire. Furthermore, surviving evidence indicates that some romantic friendships did indeed extend to sexual relations, though what significance participants ascribed to such activity is less clear.



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Although romantic friendship was largely a practice of the white middle and upper classes, some working-class and African American women engaged in romantic friendships as well, even while rejecting other middle-class gender practices. One of the most documented romantic friendships of African American women (one of whom was also working class) took place in the 1850s and 1860s between Addie Brown (c. 1841-c. 1871), a free African American domestic servant from Connecticut, and Rebecca Primus (1836-1932), a free African American school teacher also from Connecticut. After the Civil War, Primus traveled to Royal Oak, Maryland, on the Eastern Shore, to open a Freedman's Aid Society school for emancipated African Americans, where she taught from 1865 to 1869, a period when a great deal of the couple's surviving correspondence was written.

Rebecca and Addie shared both a close emotional bond and physical intimacy. The women's letters are rife with references to physical contact, such as when Addie wrote to Rebecca, "I did miss you last night. I did not have anyone to hug me up and to kiss. I don't want anyone to kiss me now [that Rebecca is away]. I turn Mr. Games away this morning. No kisses is like youes." In another letter, Addie fantasizes about being married to Rebecca, and she regularly signed her letters to Rebecca "Addie Brown Primus," adopting Rebecca's last name, as a married woman would do with her spouse. Although fewer of Rebecca's letters to Addie survive, there are suggestions that Addie's feelings were reciprocated, not least of which is the fact that Rebecca saved Addie's love letters for the remainder of her life, sixty-two years.

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In an example of life and art reinforcing each other, separate spheres, the mysteries of the opposite sex, and same-sex romantic friendships were all represented, and in fact, praised, in a new genre of art and literature to emerge in the nineteenth century, romanticism. Maryland's most well-known contribution to literary romanticism lies in the writings of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), who lived in Baltimore for most of his adulthood. A leading figure in the genre of dark romanticism and often credited as being the father of mystery writing, Poe's work emphasized the macabre and characters tortured by secrets. Although there is ample evidence of Poe's romantic attachments to women and no evidence that he engaged in homosexual activities, contemporary literary scholars frequently cite his works as examples of nineteenth-century homoeroticism in literature. What twenty-first-century readers find homoerotic, nineteenth-century readers most likely saw as simply a reflection of then-current gender ideologies that romanticized the bonds and affection between members of the same sex.

Nevertheless, regardless of Poe's intentions, his stories and poetry have provoked recognition in LGBTQ readers for the last 175 years. The detailed description of bonds between men in some of his writing, combined with his recurring theme of secrets have resonated with generations of

LGBTQ individuals who saw in the author a kindred spirit. Such figures—widely recognized in general culture, but with particular resonance within underground LGBTQ subcultures—formed the basis of an informal code LGBTQ people used to identify each other in a period before wide acceptance of LGBTQ identities. Thus, Poe contains relevance to LGBTQ history, even though he does not seem to have been attracted to men himself.

The Civil War, 1861-1865, further added to Americans' mobility, continuing a trend that had been sparked by the Market Revolution. Soldiers on both sides traveled far from home and faced new, often terrifying experiences. Although most soldiers who survived the war returned to their home states, the war nevertheless offered a taste of a wider world that no doubt prompted some to seek their destinies in more anonymous surroundings, such as the nation's



# CLUB HIPPOPOTAMUS & GRAND CENTRAL

## BALTIMORE, MD

**The Hippopotamus (far right) opened in 1972 and was the location for the yearly Baltimore Pride Block Party from 1975 through 2016. Throughout the 70s and 80s, action was taken against discriminatory practices against Black LGBTQ+ people, especially Black Lesbians. Closed at the end of 2015, and the space has since been leased to CVS.**

**Grand Central (left) was opened in 1991 and announced it was closed in 2020. Both it and the Hippo had multiple areas for bars, performances, and dancefloors. This means that from 1991 until 2015, the city's two largest gay bars were across the street from one another.**



expanding cities or the western frontier. We also have more evidence of gender crossing—whether temporary or permanent—from the Civil War than from earlier American wars, most likely because of the greater numbers overall who were involved in the fighting. The sophistication and style of journalism by the 1860s is likely also a factor. Historians have more evidence of gender crossing because more instances of this phenomenon found their way into the press during the Civil War and later (since many who crossed genders during the war were not discovered to have done so until their deaths years later).

Some soldiers raised female, such as Franklin Thompson, Harry Buford, and Henry Clark, chose to return to a female identity after the war.

Others, such as Albert Cashier, retained a male identity for the rest of their lives. Nevertheless, all of these examples serve to remind us that times of social disruption allow space for untraditional behavior, and people often take advantage of that space for a variety of purposes.

Although none of the known cases of gender crossing among Civil War soldiers involved Maryland residents, Benjamin Egerman, in the course of research for this project, has uncovered a Civil-War-era incident that hints at gender variance. In 1862, *The Baltimore Sun* reported that the police had apprehended an individual on Baltimore Street, near Eutaw, and taken them in for questioning. Police ultimately identified the person in question as Charles Walter. At the time of their apprehension, Walter had been wearing widow's clothing and been registered at a hotel under a female name. Ironically, police had arrested Walter six years earlier while wearing male attire. In the words of the *Sun*, "his effeminate appearance excited suspicion and Marshal Herring had him arrested on the charge of being a woman in male attire."

Two of the major themes of the nineteenth century—the Market Revolution and the Civil War—caused significant social upheaval for the young United States. From the perspective of LGBTQ history, these disruptions allowed for greater mobility, which in turn gave individuals greater anonymity and freedom to pursue their individual desires, rather than being constrained by family and community expectations. However, in the aftermath of the Civil War, this same social flux caused some in the United States to long for the culture they had lost, in which Anglo-Americans held nearly all the power. As we shall see in the next section, this impulse had some surprising consequences for American understanding of same-sex desire and gender variance.

## THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1870-1920

While the United States was embroiled in a civil war, learned men in Europe were beginning to develop medical theories about same-sex attraction and gender nonconformity. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a German lawyer and journalist, first presented the idea that desire for one's own sex indicated a personal characteristic, rather than simply thoughts (and sometimes





# HOWARD CALDER HOUSE

JARRETTVILLE, MD

**In 1889, Howard Calder proclaimed in the pages of the Baltimore Sun, “I was a girl until I was about twenty-five years old. Then I noticed a change coming in my sex. I was becoming a man. I certainly have been one for over ten years” after attempting to elope with one Catherine Beall. Both Calder and Beall were from wealthy families in Harford County and, after being married in a nearby Catholic Church, attempted to move to Baltimore. Beall was found and abducted by her family, and Calder took the case to court, where he eventually lost. Later, he would marry another woman and move to Virginia, then Florida, where he again became a news item when he died and was examined by the coroner.**

deeds). Ulrichs, who was himself attracted to other men, published his ideas in Europe in 1864, and they in turn served as the foundation for nineteenth-century thinking about same-sex attraction and gender variance.

Over the next twenty-five years, European scientists further developed theories about what would come to be called homosexuality and inversion (a precursor to our contemporary concept of transgender, though one that conflated sexuality and gender identity). However, such ideas did not find traction among North American doctors until the early 1890s. Yet, even in the absence of medical theories, various developments in the United States were underway that would affect the course of what we now call LGBTQ history.



While the anonymity of the city allowed for greater ease in finding others who shared similar desires, in the eyes of many, it also increased moral danger, particularly for young people venturing to the cities on their own in search of work. Numerous charitable organizations stepped in to create “wholesome,” often single-sex, social activities and living accommodations for new arrivals to the city. Of these, perhaps the most well-known was the Young Man’s Christian Association (YMCA).

By the late 1860s, the U.S. YMCA had emerged as a force of Christian morality in the American city, providing both lodging and recreation for single men. In its early decades, the YMCA encouraged strong emotional attachments between men, in the spirit of nineteenth-century romantic friendship. However, as the nineteenth century drew on, the locker rooms and dormitories of the YMCA developed a reputation as places for sexual rendezvous between men. This association only became stronger in the twentieth century, in part because of a scandal in Portland, Oregon, in 1912, where the local YMCA was discovered to be the site of an extensive network of gay sexual activity. These associations in the popular imagination caused the organization, over time, to emphasize heterosexual sex education and the development of (traditionally defined) masculinity.

In Maryland, the Baltimore YMCA was founded in 1852, and in 1859, it became the first branch in the United States to design and build a building exclusively for organizational purposes, when it built the West Baltimore YMCA Building. The Central YMCA building was erected in 1878 at Charles and Saratoga streets, and in 1937, the Central YMCA served as the setting for a gay man’s sexual coming of age in the novel *A Scarlet Pansy*, by Robert Scully. Although the specifics of the scene were fictitious, Scully’s choice of setting serves as further evidence of the popular association of the YMCA with male-male sexual encounters.

Also during this era, discoveries of gender crossing continued to generate sensationalistic stories in newspapers, and multiple such stories appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1889, the *Sun* reported on a couple who had married in Harford County, Maryland, and who were later determined by authorities to be two women. The husband in question had been raised female as Hanna Calder, but at the time of this story both Calder (then going by Howard Calder) and his wife, Catherine Beall, insisted he was male. This incident is particularly noteworthy because it took place outside of an urban environment, in rural Harford County.

A few years later, in 1896, the *Sun* announced that “A Bright Young Girl...Has Been Going about Town in Male Attire.” This article described a fourteen-year-old named Theresa Smith who had been investigated by police for being associated with a gang of boys suspected of committing a robbery. When out in public with male friends, Smith dressed in male attire, concealing their long hair in a cap; when at home with family, Smith dressed in female attire. In 1902, the newspaper reported on another marriage between two people authorities determined to be women. Herman G. Wood, known legally as Lydia Lotta Sawyer, was arrested shortly after marrying Ernestine L. Rauk,



“on the technical charge of obtaining \$100 from Mrs. Rauk under false pretenses.” Rauk refused to press charges against her husband but also would not allow him back into her home upon his release from police custody.

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In addition to these examples, another Marylander gained notoriety in the late nineteenth century for his flouting of gender norms and is now the subject of a book-in-progress by scholar Channing Gerard Joseph. William Dorsey Swann was born enslaved in 1858, most likely in Hancock, Maryland, where he spent his early childhood. By the 1880s, he was living in Washington, D.C., where “he not only became the first American activist to lead a queer resistance group; he also became, in the same decade, the first known person to dub himself a ‘queen of drag’—or, more familiarly, a drag queen.” Swann was arrested multiple times in D.C. for hosting gatherings of African American men elaborately dressed in female attire and competing in female impersonation and dance contests, events that Joseph identifies as precursors to the contemporary ballroom scene, popular in some LGBTQ communities of color. In 1896, Swann petitioned President Grover Cleveland for a pardon after serving jail time; the petition was denied. Nevertheless, this effort makes Swann “the earliest recorded American to take specific legal and political steps to defend the queer community’s right to gather without the threat of criminalization, suppression, or police violence,” according to his biographer.

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In addition to ongoing urbanization and more frequent references to gender crossing in the popular press, the late nineteenth century also saw a boom in women’s higher education. Although some women’s educational institutions were established in the decades before the Civil War, such as the Cambridge Female Academy (founded in 1830 in Cambridge, Maryland) and the Patapsco Female Institute (founded in 1837 in Ellicott City, Maryland), it was not until the 1870s that women’s colleges offering education on par with men’s colleges became common. Smith College, Wellesley College, Radcliffe College, and Bryn Mawr College were all founded between 1872 and 1886. In Maryland, Hood College, in Frederick, opened as a women’s college in 1893.

The effect of women’s colleges on LGBTQ history was two-fold. First, the all-female environments produced a culture of female crushes, romantic relationships, and sexual experimentation. Second, the production of college-educated women introduced the possibility of women earning professional salaries, which, in turn, greatly expanded the ability of women to financially support themselves and thus forego heterosexual marriage if they chose.

Indeed, a surprising number of college-educated women in this era chose not to marry men and instead partnered with other women. Between 1880 and 1900, about 10 percent of American women never married, but about 50 percent of female college graduates remained single in this same period. Many of the well-remembered women of the late nineteenth century and early





# LUCY DIGGS SLOWE HOUSE

BALTIMORE, MD



**For several years while teaching history at the Baltimore Colored High School (now known as Frederick Douglass High School), this was the home of Lucy Diggs Slowe, an advocate of Black women’s education, award-winning tennis player, and the first Dean of Women for Howard University.**

twentieth century followed this path. To name just a few examples, Hull House Settlement founder Jane Addams, author Willa Cather, painter Romaine Brooks, and reformer Lillian Wald were all partnered with other women. The practice was common enough that such female partnerships became known as “Boston Marriages,” a term that references the 1886 Henry James novel *The Bostonians*.

Maryland natives Mary Elizabeth Garrett (1854-1915), Mamie Mackall Gwinn (1860-1940), and Martha Carey Thomas (1857-1935)—better known as M. Carey Thomas—were staunch advocates for women’s education and also were all involved in female partnerships, like so many other educated women of their generation. Thomas and Gwinn were childhood friends who formed a romantic relationship as young adults. They joined with Garrett and a few other women to form a social club, known as the Friday Night, in the 1870s and 1880s.

Garrett was the daughter of one of the wealthiest men in Baltimore, John Work Garrett, president of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Upon inheriting a portion of her family’s fortune in 1884, she became a major American philanthropist, using her donations to improve educational and political opportunities for women. With her friends from the Friday Night, she founded the Bryn Mawr School for Girls, a college preparatory school that opened in Baltimore in 1885. Garrett’s largest philanthropic gesture was providing a significant portion of the money needed to establish Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, with the stipulation that the school admit women on equal terms as men.

Thomas became an even more prominent advocate for women’s higher education and served as the second president of Bryn Mawr College, near Philadelphia. She was also an ardent suffragist. However, though she dedicated her life to expanding opportunities for white women, Thomas was also a proponent of eugenics and held anti-Semitic beliefs. In her private life, she eventually partnered with Garrett, while, for a time at least, continuing her romantic relationship with Gwinn. Eventually, Gwinn married a man, and Thomas and Garrett remained partnered for the rest of their lives.





# MARYLAND STATE HOUSE

ANNAPOLIS, MD

**Throughout the 1970s through the end of the 1990s, attempts to abolish Maryland's sodomy laws and extend legal protections to LGBTQ people were proposed, and failed numerous times. In 1973, the state passed a law asserting marriage as between one man and one woman, earning it the distinction of being the first state to outlaw same-sex marriage. After numerous attempts, the state amended its civil rights statutes to include sexuality in 2001. This was extended to gender identity in 2014. Although ruled unconstitutional statewide in 1998, the sodomy law is still on the books.**

Garrett, Gwinn, and Thomas were not the only Maryland women to openly partner with women at the turn of the twentieth century. African American educator Lucy Diggs Slowe, who grew up in Baltimore and spent her early teaching career at the city's all-black high school, met her future partner, playwright and educator Mary Burrill, in 1912. Slowe moved to Washington, D.C., where Burrill lived, in 1918 and eventually became the first dean of women at Howard University. The two women shared their home and their lives for nearly twenty years, from the time Slowe moved to DC until her death in 1937.

An important thinker in the development of the social work profession, Mary E. Richmond (1861-1928) also had multiple romantic relationships with women. Richmond grew up in Baltimore and spent her early career at the Charity Organization Society (COS) of Baltimore. Later in her career, she played a leading role in the development of the casework model of social work, the contribution for which she is most remembered. Richmond never legally married and shared a romantic relationship with fellow social worker Zilpha Drew Smith, although the two never lived together. In the 1910s, Richmond later paired with artist Louisa Eyre, whom she referred to as her partner.



Historians understand women's entry into higher education, the establishment of the social work profession, and changes in scientific thinking that took place during the period from 1880 to 1920 as being part of the same larger historical trends. They refer to this period as the Progressive Era and see in all these developments the mark of white elite efforts to maintain control over a society that was becoming increasingly modern, urban, and diverse. The idea that same-sex desire and gender variance are immutable personal characteristics, as well as signs of mental illness, gained traction in the United States during this era and serves as an excellent illustration of this larger trend.

Although scientists in Europe began formulating the modern construction of homosexuality in the 1860s, such concepts did not gain wide acceptance in the United States until the 1890s, the very period when psychology and medicine were becoming standardized and—not entirely coincidentally—the traditional moral order was being challenged by the anonymity and cultural diversity of American cities. As originally presented by American medical experts, homosexuality and defiance of assigned gender roles were parts of the same “problem.” According to such theories, these conditions were particularly common among “lower orders” of people—coded language for people of color, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe (many of them Jewish), and the poorer socioeconomic classes. This conflation of various human traits—sexual identity, gender expression, ethnicity, and economic circumstance—helps explain why a lively discussion of “sexual perversion” in American cities could take place over the same decades that middle-class professional women were forming lifelong partnerships with other women while staying largely free from social condemnation or accusations of lesbianism.

Others were not so fortunate in escaping official notice for their same-sex sexual activity. The 1892 murder of Freda Ward by Alice Mitchell, her lesbian lover, in Memphis, Tennessee, captured national headlines for months. In a similar vein, numerous mass arrests of gay men in the early decades of the twentieth century made national news. This press coverage indicates that by the early twentieth century, homosexual networks and subcultures were developing throughout the United States. Examples of these mass arrests include Portland, Oregon, in 1912-1913; Long Beach, California, in 1914-1915; and Newport, Rhode Island, in 1919-1921. The Newport scandal involved recruits at the Newport Naval Training Station and caused a great deal of embarrassment for the U.S. Navy, which may have had an impact on life at the U.S. Naval Academy in Maryland.

Throughout this period, amid all these other changes, the United States debated the issue of women's suffrage. Although the Maryland legislature resisted granting women this right, there was nevertheless an active suffrage movement within the state. The ability to vote was a key element in women gaining political power and having their interests represented. This was an issue that affected all women, but in many ways, it was even more crucial for unmarried women who did not have husbands to represent them at the ballot box. The idea that men



represented the interests of their wives and thus women did not need the vote was a major argument used by those who opposed women's suffrage, who apparently assumed that all women were married and that all husbands had their wives' best interest in mind. Despite this opposition, the right to vote was finally granted to women in August 1920 by the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

## THE INTERWAR PERIOD, 1920-1940

Historians often characterize the 1920s as the start of American modernity. Cultural changes that had been slowly developing solidified in this era and created aspects of American society that remain recognizable a century later, in our own era. To begin with, the 1920s marked the rise of the consumer age. The number of available consumer goods exploded, and conspicuous consumption became a standard part of American culture.

In addition, more and more opportunities for social life moved to commercial establishments—movie theaters, restaurants, dance halls—which in turn enabled Americans, particularly young people, to separate their social lives from their family lives. These establishments, along with the spread of radio broadcasting, contributed to the growth of a national, rather than regional, culture. Yet another consequence was what some historians refer to as the first American sexual revolution, where sexual experimentation outside of marriage became more common and people became more accepting of moral values that did not match their own.

With a national popular culture, the expansion of commercial entertainment, and upheaval in traditional sexual morals, occasional references to homosexuality and a queer underworld began to appear in mainstream culture. Before 1934 (when the film industry implemented a strict set of moral guidelines), Hollywood films incorporated a surprising amount of bawdy humor and unorthodox sexual situations. For instance, the first film to win the Best Picture Academy Award, *Wings* (1927), features a kiss between two men and offers a glimpse of a lesbian couple in a nightclub scene. Numerous works of the New Negro Renaissance, also known as the Harlem Renaissance, depicted LGBTQ content. Examples include Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* and Wallace Thurman's *The Infants of Spring* (1932). Jazz songs, such as Ma Rainey's "Sissie Blues" (1926), also referenced queer cultures and situations.

Furthermore, numerous cultural figures were either openly LGBTQ or did not go to particularly great lengths to hide it. Examples include composer Cole Porter, who could be described as bisexual, and playwright Noel Coward, who was gay, and who were both regular visitors to the estate of Harvey S. Ladew, known as Ladew Gardens, in Monkton, Maryland. Singer Billie Holiday, who spent part of her youth in Baltimore, had relationships with both men and women, and author Gertrude Stein, who attended Johns Hopkins Medical School for two years, was quite open about her nontraditional gender expression and romantic relationship with Alice Toklas.



# VICTOR CULLEN REFORMATORY

SABILLASVILLE, MD

**In 1967, 2 teenage boys who had run away from Victor Cullen Reformatory alleged “widespread homosexuality” at the institution. The response was one of shock and led to an investigation headed by Governor Spiro T. Agnew. The investigation grew to address the entire penal system in the state, leading to the firing of the head of the Department of Corrections and staff at multiple prisons and juvenile facilities, detailed in the release of a 98-page report in 1969.**



In urban centers during this era (and earlier in some places), we find evidence of “Pansy Balls,” African American gay cultural events where performers would dress flamboyantly and entertain audiences with campy humor and performance. These events were reminiscent of William Swann’s events from the 1880s, discussed previously. In the 1930s, the Baltimore Afro-American reported on annual Pansy Balls held at the Monumental Elks Lodge in Baltimore. Coverage of these events describe audiences in the hundreds, drawn from throughout the Mid-Atlantic.

However, even while some segments of the population were becoming increasingly comfortable with sexual liberalism and cultural references to LGBTQ identities, the medical and psychiatric fields were simultaneously creating an approach to sex and gender that framed variance as a problem in need of a cure. The designation of homosexuality as a medical and psychological disorder led to seventy-five years of involuntary incarceration of and disturbing medical interventions on LGBTQ individuals. This period lasted roughly from 1895 to 1973 for same-sex desire and even longer for transgender identity, which was not removed from the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders until 2012.

New theories related to LGBTQ activity emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, and none of them signaled good news for LGBTQ individuals. In 1920, Edward J. Kempf, a psychiatrist working at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C.,

introduced the psychiatric theory of “homosexual panic,” the idea that a person would get so discomfited by sexual advances from someone of the same sex that they would temporarily lose control of rational thinking and hence, their behavior. Before taking his position at St. Elizabeths, Kempf worked at the Phipp’s Psychiatric Clinic, part of Johns Hopkins University, from 1912 to 1914.

Kempf’s theory has been used ever since its development, though with decreasing success, in criminal cases involving violent crimes against LGBTQ individuals, where defendants employ a “homosexual panic” defense to justify attacking an LGBTQ person. One example comes from the Eastern Shore, where one John Dobson used this defense while on trial for the 1952 murder of William Andrews in Cambridge, Maryland. Dobson claimed that Andrews made sexual advances toward him, and as a result his conviction was reduced from first- to second-degree murder.

Yet, between World War I and World War II, there was also a liberal wing of psychology that saw homosexuality as primarily problematic in that it interfered with a person’s ability to operate comfortably in mainstream society. Influenced by interwar anthropology’s study of other cultures, these psychologists were more likely to see same-sex desire as being influenced by an individual’s culture, rather than as a biological defect.

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Herbert (Harry) Stack Sullivan (1892-1949) belonged to the more liberal arm of psychology, which advocated for compassionate treatment of same-sex desire. He worked at Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital in Towson, Maryland, from 1922 to 1930 and served as Director of Clinical Research beginning in 1925. During this time, he rose to national prominence for his success at treating schizophrenia in young men. In this era, diagnoses of schizophrenia and homosexuality were often conflated, and some of Sullivan’s treatments involved what amounted to a sympathetic approach to same-sex desire in his patients.

Sullivan was himself gay, although professionally closeted (in this era, no admittedly homosexual psychologist could have found employment). He met James Inscoe in 1927, while working at Sheppard Pratt, and the two were partnered until Sullivan’s death twenty-two years later. James, in fact, eventually changed his name to James Inscoe Sullivan.

Harry left Sheppard Pratt in 1930, but returned to Maryland in 1939, when he and James relocated to Bethesda. Harry held a supervisory position at Chesnut Lodge Hospital, in Rockville, and taught at branches of the Washington School of Psychiatry. In 1940, he began work as a consultant to the War Department during the mobilization for World War II, preparing training materials and leading live trainings in the psychiatric screening of potential military recruits. Although the military did implement psychiatric guidelines during World War II that precluded LGBTQ people from serving, Sullivan was not a proponent of this approach.





The period between the two world wars saw the rise of the modern age and its attendant revolution in sexual mores, which created a bit of space for LGBTQ experiences to be represented in popular culture. Yet modernity was not embraced by all, and those furthest from the moral mainstream often received the brunt of measures to reign in the sexual liberalism of the age. An example of this is found in psychology's treatment of sexual and gender variance. By and large, members of this profession still saw these characteristics as problematic.

## THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY, 1940-1970

The United States' entry into World War II profoundly affected American life, expanding the reach of the federal government, restoring economic prosperity after a decade of economic depression, and prompting yet another period of expanded geographic mobility. Yet this was an ambivalent time for LGBTQ individuals. While some news stories in the mainstream press and the start of LGBTQ magazines helped sexual and gender variant people to find each other; the postwar glorification of traditional gender roles and the nuclear family created suspicion of those who did not fit easily into these ideals.

The expansion of wartime industry, as well as military recruitment, prompted internal migration nationally, as people followed job opportunities and military assignments. As with other times in the past, migration away from families and towns of origin enabled many LGBTQ individuals to act on their sexual or gender identities. In fact, historian Alan Berubé has argued that it was during World War II that the gay bar became the center of LGBTQ social life, in part because it provided an efficient means for LGBTQ military people in a new location to find sexual liaisons. While Baltimore and Annapolis likely had numerous establishments that catered to an LGBTQ clientele in the 1940s, the earliest one we have evidence of dates from 1942, Cicero's Cafe in Baltimore.

Within the military, gays and lesbians had mixed experiences. On the one hand, the military changed from a policy of punishing soldiers for sodomy, as it had done previously, to barring homosexuals from service. (Transgender identities were still so poorly understood that they would have fallen under the category of mentally ill or homosexual and barred on those grounds; likewise, bisexuals would have been lumped into the category of homosexual.) Pre-induction screening amounted to verbal questioning, and few individuals admitted to same-sex attraction. However, once in the military, to be outed as gay or lesbian meant a dishonorable discharge, which would then become part of one's permanent record and likely interfere with future employment. A dishonorable discharge would also mean the forfeiture of all military benefits, including medical care through the Veterans' Administration and opportunities through the G.I. Bill.

On the other hand, military service provided many gays and lesbians an opportunity to leave their hometowns and find others like themselves. The mobilization needs of the United States meant that, in reality, gays and lesbians often had a fair amount of leeway—forming romantic relationships



or transgressing gender norms—before receiving any official censure. The female branches of the military, most established during World War II, were in fact desirable places for women who defied traditional feminine stereotypes to find satisfying work and social life.

The end of the war in 1945 introduced the specter that the wartime economic prosperity that had elevated the U.S. out of the Great Depression would not be able to survive demobilization. Americans feared they would lose the economic gains of the war years, and thousands of returning service personnel needed to find peacetime employment. As a result of these fears, women lost their wartime jobs en masse. Propaganda, both government and industrial, portrayed women who sought to keep their jobs after the war as unpatriotic and selfish. Assisting the transition of women out of the labor market, popular culture and advertising reified images of the heterosexual nuclear family and the roles of mother and housewife. To a large extent, the imagined future became reality, as the United States experienced a surge in the birth rate between 1946 and 1965, which became known as the Baby Boom.

For obvious reasons, this was not an ideal development for LGBTQ Americans. With marriage and parenthood such a dominant cultural expectation, unmarried adults were viewed with suspicion and were regularly questioned about their failure to marry. Society's romance with the "traditional" family led to a concurrent entrenchment of traditional gender roles, making those who deviated particularly noticeable. Likewise, the effort to push women out of the workforce led to economic hardship for many women, especially those who did not have a male provider, such as lesbians.

Connected to these changes, the end of World War II also marked the start of the Cold War. The Soviet Union and the United States emerged from the war as major global powers and, although allied in wartime, the postwar world soon became a battleground between democratic capitalism and communism. In the United States, traditional white, middle-class gender roles and the nuclear family were cast as a patriotic imperative, representing the "American way of life." This further complicated the lives of LGBTQ individuals, as failure to comply with societal norms became increasingly seen as un-American.

The conflation of "difference" with communism had severe economic consequences for many people who identified (or were perceived) as LGBTQ. Beginning in the late 1940s, the federal government began to oust people suspected of being LGBTQ from federal employment. The alleged reasoning behind this move was that homosexuals were both morally weak and subject to blackmail. As a result, the thinking went, they were easy targets for Soviet spies and should not have access to inside information about the federal government. This purge of federal employees continued into the 1960s and has become known in retrospect as the Lavender Scare. State and local governments followed suit, as did many businesses in the private sector. Given its preponderance of federal employees, Maryland was no doubt particularly affected by the Lavender Scare.





Even before the Cold War, same-sex desire could prove costly for government workers. A World-War-II-era scandal involving Marylander (Benjamin) Sumner Welles (1892-1961) was an important precursor to the later purge of LGBTQ employees from the federal government. A long-time diplomat, Welles was also a close personal friend of President Franklin Roosevelt. He served as Under-Secretary of State from 1937 until his resignation in 1943.

Although Welles was married to three women in his lifetime, rumors of homosexuality dogged his career. In reality, he was most likely bisexual. In September 1940, traveling with the president and other officials, Welles propositioned multiple Pullman porters on the train that was transporting the dignitaries back to Washington. Nearly all Pullman porters were African American men, and racial dynamics were likely part of Welles's decision making. Given his wealth and political position, as well as the mistreatment and prejudice afforded to African Americans, Welles likely believed that he would not suffer any significant consequences from this behavior. Instead, Welles's political rivals seized upon the story, and working out of the public eye, lobbied the president to dismiss Welles. After a period of defending him, Roosevelt eventually asked for Welles's resignation.

Another Marylander who figured prominently in the Lavender Scare was Whitaker Chambers. Chambers was a member of the Communist Party in the United States in the 1930s, and in 1948, while testifying before the House Un-American Activities Committee, accused State Department official Alger Hiss, a Baltimore native, of being a communist spy. Chambers also acknowledged engaging in same-sex sexual behavior, and the subsequent investigation of Hiss seemed to suggest that the two had had a sexual relationship. Although the statute of limitations prevented Hiss from being tried for espionage, he was convicted of perjury in 1950. The scandal further strengthened the conflation of homosexuality and the communist threat in the American mind.

Related to government suspicion and surveillance, police harassment of LGBTQ individuals and businesses was very common in the mid-twentieth century, and this situation proved extremely problematic for LGBTQ individuals. The names of people arrested during police raids of gay bars and cruising grounds were often published in local newspapers, bringing the danger that people arrested would become the target of violence and lose their jobs, their homes, and their families, in addition to dealing with the arrest. One example of a police raid in Maryland comes from 1955. Baltimore police raided the private home of an African American man and arrested a group of men who called themselves the "Friendship Club" and regularly met to have sex with each other. Another example occurred in 1966, when police hid in a drop-tile ceiling in order to observe men having sex with each other in the restroom at Loch Raven Reservoir in Baltimore County. Twenty men were arrested as a result of this voyeuristic police operation.

All was not lost, however. Even in the midst of this constriction of LGBTQ lives, there were signs of change. In 1948 and 1953, scientist Alfred Kinsey



published the results of an extensive study of the sexual experience and habits of white Americans. Published under the titles *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, and known colloquially as the Kinsey Report, Kinsey's findings caused a media sensation. Among his unexpected findings, Kinsey's study indicated that homosexuality activity was much more common than anyone had realized: 37 percent of males and 13 percent of females reported same-sex experiences that had led to orgasm. Furthermore, from his data, Kinsey determined that 10 percent of the male population and 2-6 percent of the female population had been exclusively homosexual for at least three consecutive years. What had previously seemed like a rare sexual aberration suddenly revealed itself to be quite common.

At about the same time as the Kinsey Report, Christine Jorgensen made national headlines when she announced that, after growing up in a male body and serving as a soldier in World War II, she had traveled to Europe and undergone gender-affirmation surgery. Jorgensen was glamorous, blond, and conventionally feminine, and the fact that she had been assigned male at birth fascinated the American public.

The combined effect of the Kinsey Report and the publicity surrounding Christine Jorgensen was to assure LGBTQ people in the United States that they were not alone, and in fact, might exist in numbers far larger than even they had realized. Thus, even amid the height of the Cold War fear of "perversion" and the increased repression of LGBTQ individuals, the 1950s also witnessed the first American contributions to the medical understanding of and response to gender variance, as well as the start of a national LGBTQ political movement, known as the homophile movement.

In the 1950s and 1960s, a few medical professionals in the United States began to understand transgender identity as something separate from homosexuality. Led originally by endocrinologist Harry Benjamin, and spurred on by pressure from individuals who identified as gender variant, a small number of doctors in the United States began providing gender-affirming medical interventions. The doctors at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore, were part of this rare group when they founded the university's Gender Identity Clinic in 1966.

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Funded by the Erickson Educational Foundation (a philanthropic organization started in 1965 by transgender philanthropist Reed Erickson) Johns Hopkins University established a Gender Identity Clinic in 1966. This clinic was the country's first medical facility to provide coordinated care for transgender patients who wished to receive gender-affirming medical intervention. John Money, a psychologist whose research focused on gender identity (and who was himself bisexual), was named director of the Johns Hopkins clinic, and under his direction it became a leading advocate of gender-affirming treatment for both transgender and intersex patients. The clinic performed ten gender-affirmation surgeries in its first six months and initiated the use of the now commonplace terms "gender identity" and "sexual orientation."





**The Homophile Social League was a social club formed in 1970 and offered “dances, trips, judo classes, and a host of other activities aimed at broadening the range of activities for the area’s homosexuals.” This apartment building in the Oak Ridge Apartments complex was likely home to newsletter editor-in-chief Paul Breton or another leading member, as it is listed as a contact address on their newsletter, the Washington Blade, and other sources.**

Money and his clinic were not without their critics, however. In 1974, another Johns Hopkins faculty member, Jon K. Meyer, coauthored a professional paper that was deeply critical of the clinic’s methods, arguing that they were not as effective as the clinic claimed. Amid the subsequent controversy, the clinic closed in 1979. In the late 1990s, Money’s work came under even more serious criticism, when journalist John Colapinto published a Rolling Stone article and later a book, about one of Money’s most well-known cases. As a result, John Money’s work has left a mixed legacy.

In addition to their continuing negotiations with medical and government authorities, LGBTQ communities began their first sustained political organizing in the postwar period, a historical trend referred to as the homophile movement.





# UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

**COLLEGE PARK, MD**

**The Student Homophile Association formed here at the Stamp Student Union in 1970. It was succeeded by the Gay Student Alliance. SHA was one of the earliest gay student organizations at US universities and colleges, and legally fought administrators on being denied funding offered to all other student groups.**

In Los Angeles, Harry Hay—who ironically, was a member of the Communist party until he was asked to leave because of his homosexuality—applied his training in political systems (obtained through his work with the party) to the information about homosexual activity contained in the Kinsey Report. He realized that gays and lesbians in the United States were numerous enough to constitute a sizable political constituency. He organized what would become the country's first national gay rights group, the Mattachine Society, in 1949, and over the course of the next decade, local chapters sprung up in cities across the country.

Also in the 1950s, a group of women in San Francisco including Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon started a lesbian organization in 1955, which they called the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB). Originally conceived of as a lesbian social club, the group soon took on an advocacy role as well, and, like the Mattachine Society, local chapters began spreading across the country. In 1956, DOB started a newsletter, *The Ladder*, which became the first nationally distributed lesbian periodical in the United States.

Although there were no known Maryland chapters of either the Mattachine Society or the DOB, Washington, D.C., had a visible homophile movement. In the Washington area, Frank Kameny, who had lost his job in the federal government as part of the Lavender Scare, organized a local LGBTQ political effort. Originally a chapter of the national Mattachine Society, in 1961 the Mattachine Society of Washington was founded as an independent group. Though operating from Kameny's home in D.C., this group likely had some members who were based in the Maryland suburbs.

In the 1960s, LGBTQ homophile political organizing became more sophisticated, more visible, and more radical. Activists in D.C., Philadelphia, and New York joined forces in 1962 under the umbrella of the East Coast Homophile Organization (ECHO) and for the rest of the decade, pro-LGBTQ advocates in these cities coordinated with each other in their strategizing and attended protests in each city, which had the effect of increasing numbers and thus visibility.

Beginning in roughly the mid-1960s, American social movements became increasingly radical, representing a shift from requesting change within the established political system to demanding a full restructuring of society. The LGBTQ movement was no exception, and by the mid-1960s, strains of a more radical approach, which came to be known as gay liberation, were emerging. Gay liberation is often understood as starting in the immediate aftermath of the 1969 Stonewall Uprising, but recent scholarship argues instead that Stonewall was one of a series of spontaneous protests that began in the late 1960s and represented the increasing radicalization of LGBTQ political efforts.

These other spontaneous protests—like Stonewall—involved a significant number of gender-variant participants. In 1965, tensions over the treatment of young gender-variant clients at Dewey's Lunch Counter in Philadelphia sparked an uprising. A similar chain of events took place in 1966 at Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco. At the same time, in early 1969, Carl Wittman, an activist in San Francisco, published "The Gay Manifesto," which outlined many



of the tenets of the gay liberation movement, months before Stonewall.

Although, in retrospect, there are indications that gay liberation was emerging in the late 1960s, nothing caused these various threads to coalesce into a new political movement until June 1969, when a routine police raid on a Greenwich Village gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, sparked five days of spontaneous protests in New York City. As with the Dewey's and Compton's protests, a significant number of participants were gender-variant youth and people of color. The Stonewall Uprising originally received only limited press coverage, but local activists spread the word throughout the nascent gay liberation movement. Apparently, the time was ripe for action. Stonewall captured the imagination of LGBTQ communities throughout the United States, and eventually, the world. Within weeks, activists had organized themselves into groups demanding wholesale change in the treatment of LGBTQ Americans.

## **GAY LIBERATION, LESBIAN FEMINISM, AND AIDS, 1970-1996**

Journalist Michael Bronski offers a concise explanation of the ways that homophile activism differed from gay liberation. "Whereas homophile groups argued that homosexuals could find safety by promoting privacy, gay liberation argued that safety and liberation were found only by living in, challenging, and changing the public sphere." While homophile activists essentially argued that their sexual identity should not be of any concern to authorities and thus discrimination based on sexual identity should cease, gay liberationists celebrated the ways in which they deviated from societal norms.

A key strategy of gay liberation was visibility, as embodied by the popular rallying cry of the 1970s, "Out of the closets and into the streets!" Coming out of the closet—that is, openly declaring one's LGBTQ identity—was seen as essential to social transformation. In gay liberation thinking, being out was a declaration of personal pride, a rejection of the shame that society had historically heaped onto LGBTQ people for their difference. It would also give the American public a more accurate understanding of LGBTQ political power. Finally, the thinking went, it would accelerate LGBTQ acceptance by mainstream society, because the vast majority of heterosexuals would realize that they actually knew someone who identified as LGBTQ, a fact that was hidden when sexual and gender minorities kept these identities secret from most of their associates.

Shortly after the Stonewall Uprising in June 1969, LGBTQ activists in New York City formed a group called the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), to advocate for greater rights and visibility for gays and lesbians. Other chapters of GLF quickly sprung up around the country. Baltimore's Gay Liberation Front formed in spring 1970, in response to a police raid on male prostitutes working in the area known by gay men as the Meatrack, bounded by Cathedral Street, Park Avenue, Monument Street, and Madison Street. By August 1970, Baltimore GLF reportedly had fifty dues-paying members, "most of them in their teens





# SISTERFIRE/TAKOMA PARK JUNIOR HIGH

## TAKOMA PARK, MD

**Started in 1982, Sisterfire was a women’s festival held each year in Takoma Park at the field behind this middle school. Held until 1989, the festival was a touchstone for many of the area’s lesbian, bisexual, and queer women.**

and practically none over 30. Most live in the downtown area, and some live together. A few are students, while others range from office workers to department store clerks and employees in advertising agencies.” An LGBTQ rights group started in 1971 at University of Maryland in College Park. They originally called themselves the Student Homophile Association, but soon changed their name to the Gay Student Alliance. In 1975, the Baltimore Gay Alliance formed and immediately set up an LGBTQ switchboard and began advocating for civil rights protections at the city and state level.

Within a couple years, activists also established the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Baltimore (GLCCB). Community centers became common throughout the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, as sites of community, support, information, and advocacy. In Baltimore, the GLCCB was an offshoot of the Baltimore Gay Alliance, handling the non-political aspects of the organization, including a small gay health clinic, which would eventually become Chase-Brexton, a statewide LGBTQ health services organization.

By 1973, discussion of LGBTQ rights had spread beyond Baltimore and College Park and had even reached the secondary-school level. In spring 1973, a collective living near Columbia, Maryland, began publishing an underground newspaper titled *Changes*, advocating for gay liberation, birth control, and an end to racism. In May and June of that year, twenty students were suspended from Howard County high schools for distributing the newspaper, which school officials found objectionable because of its “advocacy of homosexual lifestyles and the graphic illustrations...



of contraception.” In April 1974, three additional students were suspended from Wilde Lake High School in Columbia, Maryland, for distributing the paper.

Alongside of gay liberation, the more radical side of LGBTQ activism, the women’s movement and the African American civil rights movement were experiencing similar developments, with parts of these efforts becoming increasingly radical. However, both of these movements were split on the issue of homosexuality, with some leaders fearing that acceptance of gays and lesbians among their ranks would threaten the legitimacy of their efforts in the eyes of the larger American public. Betty Friedan, while president of the National Organization of Women, went so far as to call lesbians within the women’s movement “the lavender menace.” Still, many LGBTQ women and people of color chose to devote their energies to these movements instead of gay liberation, or to divide their time across multiple efforts.

Gay liberation tended to privilege the interests of white gay men, while the women’s movement and African American civil rights movements tended to privilege the interests of heterosexuals. As a result, in the 1970s, both LGBTQ women and people of color would form specific groups devoted to the range of issues affecting them. In the 1990s, transgender folk and bisexuals would also form branches of the LGBTQ movement advocating for their specific needs.

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In August 1968, a national gathering of feminists took place over three days at the Friends School in Sandy Spring, Maryland. Later known as the Sandy Spring Conference, this event was one of the first convenings of the radical branch of the women’s movement and drew representatives from Boston, Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, Florida, and North Carolina. The conference was organized by a group of women who had all had romantic relationships with women. Topics discussed at the Sandy Spring Conference included feminism’s relationship to other social justice movements of the era; the possibility of recruiting radical African American women to the cause (the Sandy Spring event appears to have been attended solely by white women); and whether heterosexuality was compatible with feminism, a topic that suggests a nascent lesbian feminism. This conference is credited with establishing some major tenets of radical feminism.

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The radical branch of the women’s movement advocated for including lesbian rights in their efforts, but lesbians quickly began to articulate their own ideology, lesbian feminism. Lesbian feminism saw heterosexuality as a major keystone in enforcing male supremacy. As such, lesbian feminists argued that, in order to bring about true equality between the sexes, women needed to devote their political, emotional, and sexual energy exclusively to other women.

One element of devoting their energies to other women was the creation of a separatist “women’s culture,” which relied on women-owned businesses and centered around female artists. Lesbian-feminist publishing and





# THE BULL RING

## HAGERSTOWN, MD

**Major gay bar for the area, operating early 70s-mid-to-late 80s. Opening advertisement placed in 1974 issue of Eastern Standard Times. Ultimately closed following the opening of the Deer Lodge in nearby Boonsboro. During the 1970s, this bar was the nearest safe space to dance, drink, and meet others to not only Western Maryland, but also most of West Virginia and Central Pennsylvania.**

music were two of the greatest contributions of this movement, and Maryland made contributions to both these efforts. Diana Press, a lesbian-feminist publishing house, and Women: A Journal of Liberation both operated in Baltimore in the 1970s. Additionally, Sisterfire, a women's music festival, ran annually from 1982 to 1989 in Takoma Park.

In Baltimore alone, within the span of a few years, women founded a commune (1971); a women's publishing company, Diana Press (1972); a feminist therapy collective, the Women's Growth Center (1973); a women's bookstore, 31 Street (1973); a Women's Liberation Center (1974); a lesbian production company (year not known); a Women's Law Center (mentioned in print in 1976); and a Lesbian Community Center (established as an independent location in 1978). Diana Press, in particular, had a national impact on the world of lesbian publishing. Among their notable printings were works by Rita Mae Brown and Judy Grahn, collected essays by the Furies Collective, and a reprinting of Jeannette Foster's *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (originally published in 1956). A nationally circulating lesbian-feminist periodical, *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, was also published in the city from 1969 to 1983.

In addition, one of the most prolific photographers of the lesbian-feminist movement, and to a lesser extent the wider LGBTQ movement, was Joan E. Biren, also known as J.E.B., based in Silver Spring, Maryland. And although other liberal-leaning Maryland cities such as Frederick, College Park, and Takoma Park likely had lesbian feminist institutions as well, further research is needed to ascertain specifics. Rural land collectives were also part of lesbian feminism's agenda, so evidence of this type of site in rural parts of the state may still emerge.

Paulette Young, an African American Baltimore native, became a leader in the Baltimore LGBTQ movement of the 1970s, while also remaining active



within the local lesbian feminist community. One of the original co-chairs of the Baltimore Gay Alliance (BGA)—founded in 1975—Young oversaw the organization as it started a gay and lesbian switchboard, newsletter, and youth group, as well as advocating for better relations with local police and a repeal of the state’s sodomy law. Prior to her time at the helm of the BGA, she served as one of the co-founders of Baltimore’s Lesbian Community Center, and while working for the BGA she also helped found and was elected the first president of the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Baltimore (GLCCB). Another founder of the GLCCB was Louis Hughes. Also African American, he was active in local gay liberation efforts, while at the same time growing increasingly aware of the issues facing LGBTQ people of color that were not being specifically addressed by gay liberation.

By the late 1970s, people of color nationally were growing frustrated with the failure of the gay liberation movement, the lesbian feminist movement, or the Black Power movement to address the specific issues of those who were both racial and sexual minorities. These activists began to form coalitions across specific ethnic groups and articulated a political vision that incorporates various components of identity.

In Maryland and D.C. in the late 1970s, African American LGBTQ activists A. Billy Jones-Hennin, who is bisexual, Darlene Garner, and Delores Perry organized a coalition of queer black activists from Baltimore and Washington, D.C., and in 1978, the coalition began calling itself the National Coalition of Black Gays (NCBG) and incorporated as a nonprofit in Columbia, Maryland. Louis Hughes served as a founding board member. Eventually, local chapters formed, prompting members in Baltimore and the District to split into separate chapters of the national coalition. In 1983, the group added lesbians to their name.

As part of its efforts to build relationships with other groups working at the intersection of race and sexual identity, NCBG organized a national Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference in Washington, D.C. in 1979. The conference was timed to coincide with the first National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights in October 1979. The event was an opportunity to build a national network of LGBTQ people of color to discuss issues unique to their intersectional identities within the larger March on Washington. It was a foundational event in the history of intersectional political organizing.

Amid all this political activism, gay bars continued to flourish just as they had since World World II and would continue to do for the rest of the twentieth century. In a period before the Internet, bars were a crucial part of the subculture, where LGBTQ people could meet each other and socialize relatively openly. Multiple bars have come and gone in Maryland. Two examples out of many are Leon’s, a gay bar that has operated since 1957 in the Mt. Vernon neighborhood of Baltimore, and the Bull Ring, which operated from 1974 to 1982 in Hagerstown.





Although bars were an important aspect of LGBTQ culture, they often served as the exclusive domain of white gay men. A 1984 lawsuit, initiated by the group Black and White Men Together, alleged that two LGBTQ bars in Baltimore, the Torch and the Porthole, subjected African Americans to greater scrutiny than European Americans before allowing them to enter these clubs. The case was ultimately decided in favor of Black and White Men Together. In response to both overt discrimination and the more general feeling of not being welcomed in bars primarily catering to white men, other groups within the LGBTQ community either pursued other forms of socializing (such as private parties and potlucks) or opened their own bars. Baltimore examples of the latter include J. J. Gallagher's, a lesbian bar that operated from 1979 to 2007, and Club Fantasy, a predominately African American bar that in the late 1980s had designated gay nights.

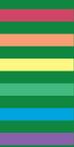
Within LGBTQ culture, as well as politics, the post-Stonewall era was marked by a celebration of queer sexuality, theatricality, and an emphasis on public visibility. The epitome of these sentiments can be found in the work of Baltimore native (and current resident) John Waters. As a director, writer, producer, and actor, Waters has been involved in over twenty-five films that use gross-out gags, dark humor, and a campy sensibility to revel in an absurdist view of American culture. His flamboyant film style and his unabashed embrace of his homosexuality have made Waters an LGBTQ cultural icon throughout the United States. In addition, Waters introduced the world to Divine, also known as Glenn Milstead (1945-1988), who starred in many Waters's films, including *Pink Flamingos*, *Polyester*, and *Hairspray*. Like Waters, Divine was a Baltimore native and is credited with bringing the LGBTQ art form of drag performance into the mainstream cultural consciousness.

Yet, amid all the joyous campiness of gay liberation and LGBTQ culture in this era, many political activists continued advocating for change within existing social structures, even while also supporting the fun, celebratory aspects of the age. The 1970s also saw the start of widespread, often successful, efforts to get sexual identity included in anti-discrimination statutes at the local and state levels. Inclusion of gender identity—as a separate category from sex—in anti-discrimination laws would come much later.

In Maryland, Howard County was the first to approve the inclusion of sexual orientation as a class protected from discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodations. This measure passed in 1975. In 1983, Montgomery County considered a similar measure, and although it was originally expected to pass easily, opponents to the bill mounted a sizable opposition. The Suburban Maryland Gay Alliance, headed by Robert Mitchell Coggin, testified in support of the bill, which eventually passed in 1984.

As in Montgomery County, throughout the United States, the political gains of the LGBTQ movement in the 1970s and 1980s sparked a backlash, where conservative political groups joined together to protest against the growing societal and legal acceptance of sexual and gender variance. In addition, the early 1980s saw a new challenge to LGBTQ communities, in the form of AIDS.





# JOHN WATERS HOME

TIMONIUM, MD

**This is the home that legendary filmmaker and Baltimore icon John Waters grew up in, where he would befriend Glenn Milstead (Divine) and embark on their career together. He lived here until he enrolled at NYU in 1964.**



In 1981, the first news of an unidentified epidemic began to spread through the medical literature, the gay community, and soon the national press. Because the first patients were gay men, the disease was originally referred to as Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID), but the name soon changed to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) when it became clear that gays were not the only people who were falling ill. Nevertheless, the toll on LGBTQ communities was devastating, decimating three generations of gay men and transwomen and traumatizing the LGBTQ community, which commonly refers to the period between 1981 and 1996, when a viable treatment was finally identified, as the plague years.

The extent of the disease was soon apparent within the LGBTQ and other outsider communities, such as sex workers and intravenous drug users. Yet, official response to the crisis was abysmally slow. In the absence of a coordinated government response to the epidemic, local LGBTQ communities stepped in to care for the sick and the dying. African Americans—both gay and straight, both trans and cisgender—were especially hard hit, and Baltimore was the site of the first national conference on African American communities and AIDS, held in 1985.

In Maryland, the first AIDS service organization, the Health Education Resource Organization (HERO) formed in Baltimore in 1983 and provided information and assistance for people with AIDS. Further south, Whitman-Walker Clinic in Washington, D.C., which was founded in the 1970s as a venereal disease clinic for gay men, launched an AIDS Education Fund, also in 1983, to provide services for people with AIDS in the D.C. metro area. Prejudice and lack of information prevented mainstream society from providing for the needs of people with AIDS; so, LGBTQ communities scrambled to fill in this gap.

After the initial confusion abated and people began to adjust to the new reality of the epidemic, the need for organized resistance became clear. In 1987, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) was created by activists in New York City, and they soon became the loudest voice of

the era demanding government response to the epidemic and fighting the societal prejudice and institutional homophobia that was making life with AIDS so much more difficult. The group took a broad view of the epidemic, linking it to larger issues of inequality in American society.

One of ACT-UP's largest and most successful protests took place at the campus of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, on May 21, 1990. Dubbed "Storm the NIH," this protest involved a day-long takeover of the NIH grounds to protest the use of standard drug trials on potential AIDS treatments. The usual drug-testing policy, which the NIH had influence over, studies recipients over a long-term period and involves a control group (trial participants who receive a placebo treatment), standards that activists found unethical in the face of such large death rates. This protest, and subsequent negotiations between activists and the NIH, resulted in a major change in NIH procedures, which now call for input from affected communities when testing and distributing experimental treatments.

The significance of ACT-UP's efforts has recently become more widely apparent, in the wake of the 2020 COVID-19 epidemic. Protocols for emergency drug testing, developed as a result of ACT-UP's efforts, were used in 2020 to find treatments and vaccines for this new virus. In addition, many of the key government officials in the COVID-19 outbreak, most notably Dr. Anthony Fauci and Dr. Donna Birx, were also active in the fight against AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s.

A viable treatment for AIDS was finally developed in 1996, making the disease chronic instead of quickly fatal, for those with the economic resources to afford treatment. Although in the United States, the worse of the crisis was over, the history of AIDS was just beginning. It has become a global pandemic in which the world's poor suffer and die disproportionately. While some local health organizations such as Chase-Brexton and Walker-Whitman Health have continued to serve the health needs of LGBTQ people, with the shift of demographics in who dies from AIDS, the energy of the national LGBTQ political movement has shifted away from AIDS, to focus on other issues.

## **THE TURN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY, 1996-2016**

After AIDS ceased to be a death sentence for those with the resources to access medical treatment, the priorities of the LGBTQ movement changed. In the 1990s, in place of transforming society, the movement once again returned to the goals of acceptance and fair treatment within the existing social structure. The major LGBTQ issues at the turn of the twenty-first century were LGBTQ service in the military, the push for transgender equality, and the legalization of same-sex marriage. And all of these issues revolved around accessing basic rights rather than challenging existing structures.

Perhaps the most widely publicized LGBTQ issue of the 1990s involved the question of whether LGBTQ Americans could openly serve in the military.



As discussed earlier, although sodomy was behavior subject to discipline within the military from at least the World-War-I era, homosexuality (that is, same-sex desire, regardless of actual behavior) became grounds for dismissal—rather than discipline—from the U.S. military beginning in World War II. And although this policy was challenged by numerous individuals in the 1970s and 1980s, it remained official policy for the next fifty years.

One case that challenged the LGBTQ ban in the 1970s had direct connections to Maryland. In 1976, E. Lawrence Gibson, a civilian instructor at the Naval Academy and resident of Annapolis, was dismissed from his position in connection to the dishonorable discharge for homosexuality of his partner, Vernon Berg III, a recent Naval Academy graduate who, in fact, identified as bisexual. Berg was one of the first members of the U.S. armed forces to fight a military discharge on the grounds of homosexuality, and in 1978 a court ruled that his discharge had been without grounds. By this time, however, Berg was no longer a sailor, having resigned in the wake of his investigation.

Despite earlier individual challenges, by the early 1990s the military still had not officially lifted the ban against LGBTQ service. Like Berg and others before her, in 1992 army nurse Magarethe Cammermeyer, stationed in Washington state, received a discharge when it was discovered that she identified as lesbian. Unlike the earlier cases, however, Cammermeyer was eventually reinstated to the military on appeal. That same year, 1992, President Bill Clinton was elected on a platform that included allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military. It appeared for a moment that public opinion had changed regarding this issue.

In reality, though, Clinton soon met with unexpected political resistance to the idea. The eventual congressional compromise was the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy, which was enacted into law in 1993. It stated that gays and lesbians (again, both bisexual and transgender people were not consistently recognized at this point in history) could serve in the military, as long as they did not admit to being homosexual. Sadly, this law actually led to an increase in the number of military personnel dishonorably discharged for homosexuality. In the seventeen years DADT was military policy, seventeen thousand people were discharged for “telling” (or being told on).

Activists both inside and outside of military service worked for nearly two decades to repeal this law and allow LGBTQ people to serve without conditions. When President Barack Obama took office in 2009, his administration joined the effort, and Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell was repealed by Congress in 2010. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Defense announced that openly transgender people would also be allowed to serve. These changes allowed the 91,500 Marylanders employed by the U.S. military in active-duty, reserve, and civilian roles to better integrate their personal and professional identities and to uphold the military’s ideal of personal honor, which they’d been prevented from doing by the DADT policy (military personnel) and the climate it created (military civilians).

Two significant changes brought about by the repeal of DADT and the end of the transgender ban had particular relevance to Maryland. First, transgender





# FIRING OF LAWRENCE GIBSON

**ANNAPOLIS, MD**

**Connected to early military case of Vernon Berg III, one of the first openly gay people in the military to fight against his discharge for homosexuality, his partner, Lawrence Gibson, was also fired from a teaching position at the Naval Academy in 1974.**

military personnel were finally able to be open about their identity and begin gender-affirming medical treatment. The first openly transgender person in the U.S. military was Shane Alejandro Ortega, who was on active duty in the U.S. Army when he came out as transgender, though he has since retired from service. Ortega is a native of Maryland; having been born here in the late 1980s, while his mother served at Patuxent Naval Air Station.

The other significant change with particular relevance to Maryland involved the fact that the repeal of DADT meant that the nation's military academies—including the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis—began accepting openly LGBTQ candidates. The Naval Academy class of 2013 was the first cohort in which an openly gay couple attended the Ring Dance, an academy tradition in which students celebrate the end of their junior year. The first same-sex marriage ceremony to take place at the Naval Academy was held in May 2014. Such milestones signaled a significant change to military culture.

The question of whether transgender people should be permitted to serve in the U.S. military reflects a larger cultural debate over the role of transgender Americans in contemporary society. Although gender-variant activists have been advocating for themselves within LGBTQ organizations since at least the 1960s, transgender issues did not begin to gain traction within the gay and lesbian movement or garner mainstream public attention until the 1990s. It was in this decade that “transgender” became the word consistently used to describe those who identify with a gender different than the one they were



assigned at birth. This was also the period when what had previously been described as “gay and lesbian” became more commonly known as “GLBT” (and now, LGBTQ), an effort to be more inclusive of bisexual and transgender issues. However, bisexual and transgender advocates continue to struggle to have their specific issues treated equally within the larger LGBTQ movement. As historian Genny Beemyn notes, in many cases “...the ‘T’ seems to stand for ‘token,’ rather than ‘transgender.’” Very often, the “B” has also been silent.

Maryland has followed this national trend of transgender rights lagging behind those of sexual minorities. In 1976, in Salisbury, Maryland, Shannon Powell, initiated an employment discrimination suit against her employer, Read’s Pharmacy, after she was fired on her first day of work when her superior discovered she was a transwoman. Her case was dismissed before trial, but it remains an early example of transgender activism on the Eastern Shore. In the 1970s, all LGBTQ individuals faced discrimination in the workplace, but transgender individuals waited longer than others to receive protection from such behavior. After decades of efforts, in 2001 Maryland amended its civil rights statutes to prohibit discrimination based on sexual identity in 2001, after decades of effort by activists. However, it took another thirteen years, until 2014, for discrimination based on gender identity to also be included.

Similarly, transgender representation in public office has only recently begun, while openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual candidates experienced success in this area since the 1990s in Maryland and since the 1970s in other parts of the United States. Bruce Williams was the first openly gay elected official in Maryland, when he was elected to the Takoma Park City Council in 1993, but the first openly transgender candidate was not elected to public office in Maryland until 2018, when Laura Hart won a seat on the St. Mary’s County Democratic Central Committee.

Other openly-LGBTQ elected officials in Maryland include Anne Strasdauskas (elected Baltimore County Sheriff in 1998); Maggie McIntosh (came out while serving in the House of Delegates, 2001; term began 1992); Richard Madaleno (House of Delegates, 2002); Patrick Wojahn (College Park City Council, 2007); Heather Mizeur (House of Delegates, 2007); and Evan Glass (Montgomery County Council, 2018). LGBTQ people have also served as mayors of Maryland towns, including Bruce Williams (Takoma Park, 2007); Jim Ireton (Salisbury, 2009); and Patrick Wojahn (College Park, 2015). In 2014, Heather Mizeur ran for Governor of Maryland, in a bid to become the country’s first openly LGBTQ candidate elected governor of a state. She lost to her opponent, and that honor instead went to Kate Brown, a bisexual woman elected governor of Oregon in 2016.

An ongoing transgender issue facing LGBTQ communities concerns violence directed at those whose gender presentation challenges mainstream society’s expectations. While all LGBTQ people live under the threat of individual violence, transgender people—particularly transgender women of color—are significantly more likely to be targets of such incidents. Indeed, the Transgender Day of Remembrance, an annual event held every November, developed as a means



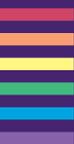


of memorializing those trans members of LGBTQ communities who have been murdered in acts of hate, and their numbers are astoundingly high. In Maryland, transwoman Bailey Reeves, of Rockville, was only seventeen years old when she was shot and killed in Baltimore in September 2019. At a memorial vigil held in her honor, speakers noted that Reeves was the seventeenth transperson murdered in the United States that year (only nine months into 2019) and the third transperson, all women, killed in Maryland in the same nine-month period.

The turn of the twentieth century also witnessed increased advocacy within LGBTQ communities for bisexual acceptance. A national bisexual movement became visible at the 1987 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, when bisexual activists from around the country marched in a specifically bisexual contingent. The effort continued to grow in the early 1990s. The first organizing conference specifically held for bisexuals was held in 1990 in San Francisco, and over 450 people attended. The following year, Alyson Books, an LGBTQ publishing house, published *Bi Any Other Name: Bisexual People Speak Out*, drawing attention to the needs and experiences of people who identify as bisexual. Lorraine Hutchins, a longtime bisexual activist and founder of the organization BiNet USA, co-edited this volume. Hutchins is a long-time resident of the D.C. suburbs in Maryland.

Arguably, the largest LGBTQ political victory of the last generation was the legalization of same-sex marriage throughout the United States. Evidence of marriage-like ceremonies among same-sex couples exist throughout U.S. history and especially the twentieth century. The Metropolitan Community Church alone estimated that, as a denomination focused specifically on LGBTQ communities, it had performed over 85,000 same-sex union ceremonies in its first thirty-five years of existence (1968-2003). Legal recognition of these unions was another matter, however. The first attempts to have a same-sex union legally recognized in the U.S. occurred in 1970, when same-sex couples in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Louisville, Kentucky applied for marriage certificates and joined together in a lawsuit when they were denied, arguing that the law did not specifically state that marriage must be between a man and a woman. The case was quickly dismissed, however, and led to something of a backlash, as a series of states passed laws in the 1970s adding this man-and-woman proviso to their marriage statutes. Maryland, in fact, was the first state to do so, in 1973. In 1984, Steven B. Jacobs and John M. LeBedda, a gay couple who had been together for ten years, filed a complaint with the Howard County (MD) Office of Human Rights protesting the fact that they could not legally marry. The complaint was denied.

Yet, despite these earlier efforts, same-sex marriage did not become a major focus for the LGBTQ movement until the turn of the twenty-first century, when it became the most absorbing LGBTQ political issue for more than a decade. Historian George Chauncey has argued that LGBTQ experiences in the 1980s and 1990s heightened the sense of urgency around this issue. First, Chauncey argues, growing visibility gave LGBTQ communities a taste of public acceptance that led to a desire to have same-sex partnerships recognized and protected in the same way opposite-sex unions were. Second, the horrors of the AIDS epidemic brought



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Launching the “Storm the NIH” protest in 1990, one thousand protesters from ACT UP demand that the NIH increase treatments for opportunistic infections from AIDS, improve representation of women and people of color, and form a Women’s Health Committee. The NIH responded by inviting ACT UP! Activists to work with them to rewrite testing and treatment protocols to address their concerns.



the need for legal protections into sharp focus for many who identified as LGBTQ. Finally, according to Chauncey, the 1980s and 1990s saw a marked increase in the number of same-sex couples, particularly lesbian couples, raising children together, which also heightened the need for legal protections for these families.

The push for same-sex marriage began as an effort to have domestic partnerships recognized for the purposes of health insurance, bereavement leave, and legal protections. In 1992, software company Lotus extended domestic partner benefits to its employees, making it the first publicly traded company to do so and starting a slow and steady trend of other employers following suit. Takoma Park, Maryland, granted domestic partner benefits to its city employees in 1993, making it the first Maryland municipality to do so.

In 1993, the Supreme Court of Hawaii ruled that the state's ban on same-sex marriage was unconstitutional and sent the relevant case back to trial court to decide the issue of whether Hawaii had "a compelling state interest" to maintain the ban. This case did not succeed in legalizing same-sex marriage in Hawaii, but it did set off another wave of legislation around the country explicitly stating that legal marriage applied only to male-female couples. The national-level Defense of Marriage Act passed in 1996, which had the effect of denying federal marriage benefits to same-sex couples, even when such unions began to be legally recognized in some of the states.

The tide began to turn—slowly—in 2000, when Vermont became the first state to recognize same-sex unions, although rather than simply including such unions in marriage statutes, the state created a different category of relationship. Massachusetts was the first state to legalize same-sex marriage when the state's Supreme Judicial Court ruled the Massachusetts same-sex marriage ban illegal; the ruling went into effect in 2004. The next ten years witnessed an epic political battle between proponents and opponents of same-sex marriage. Maryland legalized same-sex marriage in 2012, after an extended effort by a coalition of LGBTQ-rights organizations. A leader in this fight was the group Equality Maryland, founded in 1990 to advocate for LGBTQ protections at the state level. Among the group's many achievements was its work on Maryland's Civil Marriage Protection Act, which passed the state legislature in 2012 and was approved by voters later that year, making Maryland—along with Maine and Washington, which voted the same day—the first states to legalize same-sex marriage by public vote.

A major victory for the supporters of same-sex marriage came in 2013, when the United States Supreme Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act in *United States v. Windsor*. This ruling meant that same-sex couples who were legally married were eligible to receive federal marriage benefits, such as social security payments from a deceased spouse and the ability for a foreign national to obtain legal residency in the United States upon marrying a U.S. citizen. Although this ruling did not apply to state marriage benefits, it prompted a wave of state laws recognizing same-sex marriage as well. It took another two years for same-sex marriage to become fully legal in this country. In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* declared that state bans on marriage equality were unconstitutional.



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Although *Obergefell v. Hodge* involved a male couple from Cincinnati, Maryland did play a role in this case that fully legalized same-sex marriage in the United States. Jim Obergefell and John Arthur had been a couple for about eighteen years, when Arthur was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a fatal neurological disease, in 2011. He entered hospice care in 2013, and the couple decided to legally marry, even though their home state of Ohio did not recognize same-sex marriage at the time. By this time Arthur's disease had progressed to the point that he needed a medical transport plane to travel to a state that would allow the couple to wed. The couple chose Maryland as their destination, and on July 11, 2013, they flew to Maryland and were wed in the plane on a tarmac at BWI airport, as Arthur was too sick to be moved from his bed.

Arthur died three months later, and Obergefell sued the state of Ohio to be listed on Arthur's death certificate as his spouse. The case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled 5-4 in Obergefell's favor. The effect of this decision was to mandate that states recognize the legal marriage of same-sex couples, legalizing same-sex marriage throughout the United States.

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## CONCLUSION

This historical overview of LGBTQ Maryland has considered the ways that the state's history dovetails with the larger national story of sexual and gender variance. But it is just a start. Putting Maryland into the larger context of the United States required a certain type of research—focused on published sources rather than finding local hidden treasures. Some of those treasures—copies of local LGBTQ publications, memorabilia from local LGBTQ businesses and events, personal recollections and photographs—have already found their way to libraries and archives and only await a committed soul to read them and put them into a larger story. Other treasures are still to be found. They currently reside in individual basements and attics, and perhaps no one knows about them but their current owners. Such items are vital to understanding and honoring the local nuances of LGBTQ history in Maryland.



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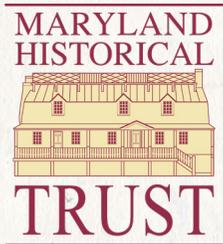
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