

CAPITOL HILL DC Walking Tours Gay & Lesbian

A WALK DOWN PENNSYLVANIA AVE SE from 6th St to 7th, down 7th to the Navy Yard and back up 8th St. SE is a walk through more than 50 years of history, past the same buildings frequented by gays and lesbians since the 1950s.

Capitol Hill has long been a social and residential center for Washington, DC's gay and lesbian community. More remarkably, Capitol Hill has also been the center for innovative women's businesses, clubs, and communities.

For women, the Hill is where Lammas, the city's women's bookshop and de facto community center, was born, where the Furies created their collective and experimented with lesbian separatist living, and where the Washington Area Women's Center had its last incarnation.

The Capitol Hill area has also been home to the Metropolitan Community Church and gay-friendly houses of worship such as St. Mark's (3rd and A SE) where GLF, GAA and the Homophile Social League staged an early same-sex dance.

Eighth Street SE has been the heart of Capitol Hill's gay entertainment area for many years. In fact, several addresses on the street have been 'gay' for almost half a century. The building at 500 Eighth Street has been home to gay-friendly or gay establishments since 1949 when John Nocente and his wife opened Johnnie's.

Johnnie's and Dobkins' Grill, at 1104 Eighth St. SE (another longtime 'gay' address), anchored the street for gays in the 50s and early 60s. Johnnie's was known for its Christmas décor and sing-along parties on Sundays. Dobkins became a hang-out and pickup spot for sailors and marines. Washington, DC's first gay publishing house opened about 1964 at 507-13 Eighth Street SE. Lynn Womack's Guild Press published gay novels, gay guides, 'art' magazines, and in 1970 tried (unsuccessfully) to launch a national gay newspaper, the Gay Forum.

Capitol Hill saw the establishment of the city's first self-consciously lesbian bars. JoAnna's opened in 1968, and the Phase One opened in 1971.

JoAnna's triggered another Capitol Hill innovation, same-sex dancing, when it opened the first regular dance floor for women. Johnnie's, across the street, soon added its own (tiny) dance space. When the Plus One opened in 1968, it truly broke club owners' unwritten proscription of same-sex dancing by bringing the city its first gay disco dance club. The Plus One's success inspired the opening of three more gay discos in as many years.

The capstone to Capitol Hill's innovations was the 1973 opening of Lammas, a women's craft and bookstore that quickly became a community center for lesbians across the metropolitan area.

←[1] 601

Pennsylvania Ave SE

– Mr. Henry's restaurant, a friendly neighborhood restaurant and bar, has welcomed lesbians and gay men since 1966. Henry Jaffe, who also owned



the Cinema Follies building, opened six other restaurants. Mr. Henry's is also known for giving singer Roberta Flack her start in the music business.

←[2] 639

Pennsylvania Ave SE

– This is one of Capitol Hill's consistently 'gay' spots. The latest club in this spot is Remington's, a country-western



bar, which opened in 1987. The location's long history as a men's bar began with Sonny's in the 1960s, followed by the Life Raft in the 1970s and continuing from 1980 to 1987 as Equus. From the early 70s, the Life Raft, apart from having a big dance floor, was also known for having a rubber ducky in a fountain.

Patrons called themselves the Rubber Duckies. Before going country-western, the club had a drag show called "The Gold Dust Follies".

Unfortunately, the location has also drawn the attention of homophobic marines who attacked patrons of Equus twice in 1982 and tossed a tear gas bomb into Remington's in 1997.

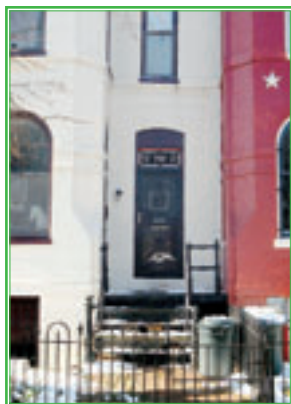
←[3] 705 7th St. SE –

Originally the home of Rev. Paul Breton, 705 7th St. SE became the home of DC's

Metropolitan Community Church in 1971. MCC began as the Community

Church, an outreach of the Homophile Social League. After several years at this location,

church functions moved to First Congregational Church at 10th and G Streets NW.



←[4] **1104 8th St. SE** –

Through the 50s and early 60s, Dobkin's Grill featured singing waitresses for a steady neighborhood and



Marine Barracks clientele. The bar became increasingly rough in the late 50s, as did its clientele. In 1984, BB Gatch moved the Bachelor's Mill, a popular African-American dance and drag club to 1104 8th St. SE. The 'Mill', a popular multilevel, largely African-American club, with drag shows and bingo on Wednesday evenings, also hosted several drag pageants. The Back Door Pub moved to the second floor here in 1988.

←[5] **819 L St. SE** — In 1993 Us Helping Us, an innovative local program providing holistic health information about the HIV/AIDS epidemic to African-Americans moved into its first official facility here. Us Helping Us continues working in this and adjacent buildings to reduce



HIV infection and provide support services to gay and bisexual men and transgendered persons.

←[6] **713 8th St. SE** – Sandy Thompson's club, Sheridan's Saloon and Steakhouse, was a popular country-western bar for four or five years. Sheridan's had weekend drag shows, and Wednesday evening drag bingo.

←[7] **539 8th St. SE**

– The site of two clubs: The Knickerbocker, a mid-1980s piano bar in the tradition of Johnnie's, and Wild Oates, a country-western bar opened by local club owners Bill Oates Jr. and Travis Thorn in the early 1990s.



←[8] **529 8th St. SE**

– When the Plus One opened here in 1968, it was the first gay-owned super-disco club for the gay community. It was an instant success for owners Henry Hecht, Donn Culver and Bill Bickford (later an owner of Remington's). A strong indicator of changing times and changing attitudes



was the willingness of gay men and women to line up in the street waiting to get in. The Plus One made same-sex dancing a 'fait accompli' in Washington, DC. A police attempt to intimidate patrons in the summer of 1968 failed miserably. The Plus One's success led in a few short years to the opening of the Pier 9, the Lost and Found, and Grand Central.

←[9] **525 8th St. SE**

– The Phase One is the oldest continuously operating lesbian bar in the city (the oldest in the city after



Nob Hill). Opened by Chris Jansen and Allen Carroll in July 1971, it offered women dancing, pool tables, and light meals. The Phase, as it's known, has become an institution in the lesbian community.

↪[10] **516 8th St. SE** – Hill Haven opened in the late 1980s and closed in the mid-90s to the regret of many women. More 'modern' than the Phase, it also offered JoJo's a special night for 'progressive women' in the 90s. In its last months it tried but failed to attract gay men as well.

↪[11] **507-513 8th St. SE** – The site of the Guild Press (1964-1972) is now the Shakespeare Theatre Studios. Lynn Womack's Guild Press published early gay guides, 'art books', and gay fiction and had a thriving mail order business. Womack and the press were prosecuted and fined for obscenity.



↪[12] **506 8th St. SE** – Dot Palmerton took over the Capitol Hill Town House Restaurant in 1978, moving it to the floor above Mr. Henry's [1] in 1980.



↪[13] **500 8th St. SE** – Since 1949, this building has been a 'gay site' on Capitol Hill. In 1949

John Nocente opened Johnnie's, one of the best known gay sing-along clubs. Johnnie's was famous for its year-round Christmas decorations. In 1974, BB Gatch and her mother opened the Club Madame as a club 'with a French accent.' The club held seasonal festivals and occasional drag shows. In 1978, Gatch renamed the club the Bachelor's Mill, attracting more of an African-American gay male clientele. The Mill became one of the

premier performance spots for African-American female impersonators.

Pageant promoter Marc King began his career here as club manager. In 1981, the club was briefly closed following an arson attack. Gatch moved the club to 1104 8th St. SE in 1984. The Back Door Pub, a quieter mixed bar

with large windows overlooking the street, was on the second floor above the Bachelor's Mill.

Banana Café, a popular restaurant

for Capitol Hill gays and lesbians has operated here since 1996.



←[14] 430 8th St. SE – For ten year's this was a prime location for the city's lesbian

community. In 1968 JoAnna's, the innovator of same-sex dancing on the Hill, opened. The club briefly closed in 1972 and was replaced by the Rendezvous restaurant but re-opened in March 1973 for another five years. It was succeeded by a women's country-western club, Round Up.



←[15] 424A 8th St. SE – Opened in May 1998 by two sisters, Ellington's On 8th, offers jazz and meals and attracts many women. Sundays have usually been women's night.

←[16] 321 7th St. SE – In 1973, Judy Winsett and Leslie Reeves opened a craft shop that metamorphosed into the city's leading women's book and art center, with

concerts, readings, and other entertainment. Lammas quickly became a de facto women's community center. Lammas opened a Dupont Circle branch in 1986 and closed on Capitol Hill in 1989.



←[17] **325 7th St. SE** – For seven years (1986 – 1993), noted author Doris Grumbach (Entering the End Zone, etc.) and her partner Sylvia Pike owned a second-hand book store called Wayward Books just two stores away from Lammas and next door to the Post Office. The shop was furnished with comfortable armchairs for readers to use while browsing the books.



←[18] **219 11th St. SE** – *The Furies* collective at 219 11th St. SE was, along with the Gay Liberation House and the Skyline Collective, among Washington, DC's best known communal living groups in the early Seventies. The twelve women (including Joan Biren, Charlotte Bunch, and Rita Mae Brown) living here constituted an important experiment in lesbians of diverse social and economic backgrounds living together and working to make their political and social beliefs a day-to-day reality. From January 1972 until mid-1973, the collective published its groundbreaking newspaper, the Furies, and distributed it nationally. When



the collective disbanded in late spring 1972, “the core of the newspaper staff decided to continue the paper as a project separate from the collective.”

#19| 1801 E Street SE – Congressional Cemetery (worth the long walk!) provides one of the few landscapes in the Nation’s Capitol that corresponds to



those described by Victorian travelers. The cemetery is the final resting place of Sgt. Leonard Matlovich, whose headstone reads “They gave me a medal for killing two men, and a discharge for loving one.” Nearby are the graves of J. Edgar Hoover and his ‘special friend’ Clyde Tolson. Also buried in Congressional is Peter Doyle, Walt Whitman’s ‘special friend’.



collects, preserves and promotes the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered history of metropolitan Washington, DC

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