

# Mapping the Invisible: Reflections on Representing Place-Based Queer Histories

## ADVANCING EQUITY AND INCLUSION

*“LGBTQ2+ queer histories and spaces have been invisible and hidden for years. At times from LGBTQ2+ communities as much as those from outside the community. As many of these spaces change and disappear, it is essential to map out these places to show how LGBTQ2+ history remains a part of our everyday lives.”*

— Raegan Swanson,  
Executive Director of the ArQuives, Toronto, ON.

Too often, historic spaces of significance, whether historic homes, neighbourhoods, parks, etc. stand without acknowledgment of their layered and diverse histories. Many do not stand at all, having long been demolished. From targeted gentrification to demolition by neglect and lack of heritage protection to lack of public visibility, the place-based histories of diverse communities across this place now known as Canada are often rendered invisible. In representing Queer histories, one not only has to contend with the inequality of heritage conservation and public visibility but internal influences on visibility as well. “Queer spaces...were historically transitory spaces, ready to be uprooted at any moment. This was due in part to necessity, in order for the community to protect itself from police violence and societal repression. Indeed, this very violence continuously shaped Queer community spaces, forcing them to close, to change, to disappear,” observes Chris Marie-Cantwell,



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CHRIS MARIE-CANTWELL,  
ARCHIVES GAIES DU QUÉBEC

# HERITAGE IS LIVING HERITAGE IS LIVING HERITAGE IS LIVING HERITAGE IS LIVING

assistant archivist for the Archives Gaies du Québec. Similarly, historian Britt Bauer writes, “These are buildings that we walk or drive past every day, and yet we are unaware of the layered histories of these places, and the memories that inhabit them. These histories have been concealed, and the information that is accessible to the public is scattered and fragmented.”

Bauer is the author of the Historic Queer Winnipeg Walking Tour, an ongoing mapping project which identifies 32 sites that help tell the story of 2SLGBTQIA+ histories within the city of Winnipeg. Mapping projects, like Bauer’s, have grown in number in recent years, in part to tackle the problem of representation in regard to place-based Queer histories. Taking on different forms, from purely digital programming to physical maps, to curated walking tours, historians, Queer-focused organizations, and invested community members work to make these histories visible across the country. Examples include the Edmonton Queer History Project’s Downtown Map, Points of Pride’s interactive map of Hamilton, Ontario, the Québec Gay Archives 2021 exhibition “Walls have Ears” curated by V. Samoylenko, The Calgary Atlas Project’s “A Queer Map,” Forbidden Vancouver’s The Really Gay History Tour, and walking tours provided by the ArQuives in Toronto, to name a few.

During the summer of 2023, the introduction of the initiative “Queering the Historic Places Days (QHDPD)”, to the National Trust’s Historic Places Days program provided an opportunity to connect the work being done to map out these Queer place-based histories and showcase them on a national platform. Some historic places commemorated acts of protest and resistance such as the Jury Room bar, the site of the second known Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Picket in Halifax, NS, which was listed on Historic Places Days by Rebecca Rose, author of *Before the Parade: A History of Halifax’s Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Communities (1972–1984)*. Others recognize spaces that have served as resource centres for Queer communities for decades, such as the Rainbow Resource Centre in Winnipeg, Canada’s longest continuously serving Queer and Trans community centre. Others, from Lesbian bars to bookstores represent the multi-faceted lives of the Queer community across time and space.

As Dr. Kristopher Wells, Canada Research Chair for the Public Understanding of Sexual and Gender Minority Youth, at MacEwan University, puts it, “With hate crimes increasing across Canada, queer histories are now more important than ever. 2SLGBTQ+ communities have always been a vibrant and important part of Canadian society. By sharing our stories and histories, we are helping to make invisible lives visible in an attempt to honour the past and build a more inclusive future.”

By Audrey Gray