

# The Lesbian Herstory Archives



## DESIGNATION REPORT

# The Lesbian Herstory Archives

## LOCATION

Borough of Brooklyn  
484 14th Street

## LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

## SIGNIFICANCE

A Renaissance Revival-style row house designed by Axel Hedman in 1908 that has served since 1991 as the headquarters of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the nation's oldest and largest collection of lesbian-related historical material.



**484 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Brooklyn**  
2022

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# The Lesbian Herstory Archives

484 14th Street, Brooklyn

## Designation List 528

LP-2662

**Built:** 1908

**Architect:** Axel Hedman

**Landmark Site:** Borough of Brooklyn, Tax Map  
Block 1103, Lot 31

**Calendared:** June 28, 2022

**Public Hearing:** October 25, 2022

On October 25, 2022, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Lesbian Herstory Archives as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Six people testified in support of the proposed designation, including representatives of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the Historic Districts Council, and the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, and two individuals. No one spoke in opposition. The Commission also received 34 letters in support of designation, including from representatives of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the New-York Historical Society, the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, the Alice Austen House, NYC Dyke March, and 24 individuals.



## Summary

### The Lesbian Herstory Archives

The building at 484 14th Street in Park Slope, Brooklyn, is culturally significant as the home since 1991 of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the nation's oldest and largest collection of lesbian-related historical material. The three-story Renaissance Revival row house was originally constructed as a two-family dwelling in 1908 and designed by Axel Hedman for the Prospect Park West Realty Company. No. 484 14th Street is located within the city's Park Slope Historic District, which was designated in 1973.

The Lesbian Herstory Archives is an entirely volunteer-run non-profit organization founded in 1974 by activists Joan Nestle, Deborah Edel, and others, housed until 1991 in Nestle and Edel's apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. The Archives began as a grassroots attempt to end the silence around lesbian history, and to create a physical archive for study, analysis, and community gathering. At a time when the LGBTQ+ community faced enormous legal and social discrimination, the Archives fought to bring lesbian cultural artifacts into public view, and to normalize them as an integral piece of American history. The project was intentionally feminist in nature--using the term "herstory" to note the rejection of patriarchy--and inclusive, with women of color counted among the organization's early supporters and contributors.

The Archives were conceived as a living repository and grew to include a wide variety of materials dating from the 1950s to the present with a national scope, collected and donated by lesbians themselves. Materials in the Archives include

periodicals, files on lesbian activist and community groups, audio-visual materials, oral histories, and the personal and professional papers of lesbians from a diversity of cultural, ethnic, and class-based communities. Among many others, significant collections include those of the organizations Daughters of Bilitis, the Salsa Soul Sisters, and the New York Chapter of ACT-UP, as well as the papers of Archives cofounder Joan Nestle, 1960s LGBTQ+ organizer Barbara Gittings, and the African American activists Mabel Hampton and Audre Lorde.

The collection had outgrown its space at Nestle and Edel's apartment by 1990, and by 1991 the Archives had raised enough funding to purchase 484 14th Street in Park Slope, Brooklyn. After more than a year of renovations, the building was transformed into a new headquarters for the Archives, with exterior alterations limited to accessibility and security improvements necessary for the building's new use. Since 1991, the Archives has added materials relating to more recent lesbian individuals and organizations, and to issues like lesbian parenthood, political organizing in the 1990s, and the marriage equality cases of the 21st century. In recent years, the Archives has been noted by scholars for its unique position as a non-institutional, community-based collection funded solely by private and non-governmental sources.

As a nationally important collection of LGBTQ+ historical materials, the Lesbian Herstory Archives plays an essential role in telling the story of a mostly unseen community of women who contributed to New York City's and America's cultural, political, and social history. No. 484 14th Street is culturally significant as the Archives' headquarters for over 30 years, where it expanded its collection and has served as a vital educational organization, community space, and center for lesbian history and culture.

# Building Description

The Lesbian Herstory Archives

## Description

The Lesbian Herstory Archives headquarters at 484 14th Street is a three-story Renaissance Revival-style row house designed by Axel Hedman for the Prospect Park West Realty Company and constructed in 1908. The building is located on the south side of 14th Street between Prospect Park West and Eighth Avenue and was constructed as part of a row of seven buildings by the same architect with alternating designs featuring round and angled projecting bays. Originally constructed as a two-family dwelling, the building was converted into a three-family residence in 1945, and into offices for community use with one residential apartment in 1992.<sup>1</sup> The building has one primary facade facing 14th Street.

## Primary 14th Street (North) Facade

The facade is clad in limestone with a brownstone base and features a low L-shaped stoop, full-height three-sided angled bay, stone sill courses below the first- and second-story windows, and extensive carved stone ornamentation across the facade.

Similar to the other houses within this row, the main entrance, with a double-leaf wood door with glass panels and metal grilles, is enframed by a rope molding and topped by a decorative lintel featuring a molded cornice and carved frieze supported by half-pilasters with foliate corbels. The pilasters extend to the second story sill course and frame a simply-incised spandrel panel. The first-, second-, and third-story window openings feature a variety of classical decorative motifs. At the first story, the openings are enframed by bead-and-barrel moldings, the center

opening features a decorative lintel similar to that at the entrance, and below the sill course are incised rectangular spandrel panels. Second story windows feature simple incised geometric panels below the molded sill course. The window opening above the entrance is framed by bead-and-barrel molding and a full surround featuring pilasters, scrolls, and molded cornice topped by a scrolled pediment. In the projecting bay, the center opening features a rope molding and simple enframing. At the third story, a simple sill course connects the four windows, and the spandrel panels beneath the windows at the angled sides of the projecting bay feature elaborate carvings. The building is topped with a pressed-metal cornice with modillions, dentils, egg-and-dart molding, and a frieze with foliated decoration.

## Alterations

When 484 14th Street was designated as part of the Park Slope Historic District in 1973, the building was intact to its period of construction in the early 20th century, contributing to the character of the historic district. After purchasing 484 14th Street in 1991, the Lesbian Herstory Archives received Commission approval for minor alterations intended to enhance accessibility and security necessary for the building's new use as an LGBTQ+ nonprofit headquarters, including a wheelchair lift and railing at the stoop, and replacement iron security grilles on the basement windows and an iron gate at the under-stoop entrance that are in keeping with others found in the historic district.

## History and Significance

The Lesbian Herstory Archives

### LGBTQ+ Civil Rights in New York City

The Lesbian Herstory Archives emerged in the 1970s as a counterpoint to the systemic homophobia the LGBTQ+ community had experienced throughout history. Discrimination and the exclusion of lesbians and gay people from public life in New York City and throughout the country dates to the very beginning of American history, even as the LGBTQ+ community has thrived here. After World War II and through the 1950s, there were an increasing number of anti-gay laws passed around the country, legalizing discrimination and making life for lesbians and gays even more restrictive.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the 1960s, an era known for its rapid political and social change, homosexual sex was still outlawed in nearly every state, including New York, where anti-gay legislation prohibited same-sex kissing and even dancing. Indeed, even appearing to be homosexual was criminalized: New York City police could arrest anyone wearing fewer than three items of clothing that were deemed “appropriate” to their sex, and the State Liquor Authority made it illegal for a bar to serve someone who was known to be LGBTQ+.<sup>3</sup>

The discriminatory environment of the 1950s and 1960s meant that very few people would acknowledge their sexuality.<sup>4</sup> In the 1950s, lesbian and gay activists and groups strove merely to have their right to exist recognized. The two major LGBTQ+ organizations of the period were the Mattachine Society, primarily a men’s group, which began in Los Angeles in 1950 and opened a New York branch in 1955, and Daughters of Bilitis, a women’s group, which started in San Francisco in

1955 and established a branch in New York City in 1958. These organizations sponsored conferences and published newsletters, and membership tended to be urban, white, middle-class; they mostly did not attract the younger, more diverse, or more radical members of the LGBTQ+ community.<sup>5</sup>

Starting in the late 1960s, some resistance and success on the part of the LGBTQ+ community began to build. From 1965-1969, there was a series of peaceful July 4th demonstrations demanding equality in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia.<sup>6</sup> In New York, in 1966, members of the Mattachine Society staged “sip-ins,” in which members of the group would approach bartenders and state that they were gay. Their actions were followed by a State Supreme Court case in 1967, with the court’s decision forbidding the State Liquor Authority from refusing to serve gay men.<sup>7</sup> On June 28, 1969, when the Stonewall Inn was raided as part of a police crackdown on gay clubs, customers fought back against anti-riot police who had come to clear the streets, drawing crowds and continuing to protest the mistreatment of LGBTQ+ people for the next several days.<sup>8</sup>

The legacy of Stonewall was the inspiration of a nationwide movement to secure LGBTQ+ civil rights. Almost overnight, a large number of new lesbian and gay organizations were established—by some counts rising from 50-60 groups before the uprising to more than 1,500 a year later and 2,500 within two years. Many of these new organizations embraced public and politically radical activist methods.<sup>9</sup>

Important LGBTQ+ activist groups founded in New York City during the post-Stonewall period included the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), and Lesbian Feminist Liberation, an organization dedicated to raising lesbian visibility that formed in 1972 as a

response to the GLF and GAA's predominantly male membership and their sexist treatment of female members.<sup>10</sup> Lesbian Feminist Liberation soon began meeting at the Women's Liberation Center at 243 West 20th Street, a designated New York City Landmark, that was home to numerous women-run feminist and lesbian organizations from 1972 to 1987.

### **Lesbians and Second-Wave Feminism**

As in the LGBTQ+ movement, the feminist movement also faced a period of internal division during a moment of struggle to gain equal rights. In the late 1960s, conflicts arose between women who favored working within the system, and those who favored more radical approaches to achieve equality. While the National Organization for Women fought on a broad level for women's legal rights, smaller and more disparate "women's liberation" groups formed in cities across the country. These groups, including the Redstockings based in New York City, were influential on the movement in their own way, publishing outspoken manifestos and developing concepts like "consciousness-raising" that helped women consider the ways sexism may have affected their lives.<sup>11</sup>

The feminist movement was additionally fragmented over the issue of whether and how to allow for lesbian participation. Lesbians were just as inspired as straight women by the "second-wave" feminist movement that had emerged in the previous decade, and many joined the fight for gender equality percolating in every arena of social and professional life.<sup>12</sup> Yet some of the movement's leaders, including Betty Friedan, president of NOW, perceived lesbians as a threat to their cause, detracting, in her view, from broader issues such as employment discrimination and political representation. In 1969 Friedan referred to lesbians as "the lavender menace" and pushed for their removal from the organization and from

participation in the movements' rallies.<sup>13</sup> Other feminists, however, such as Gloria Steinem and Ti-Grace Atkinson, welcomed lesbians into the movement, arguing that feminists and lesbians were united by their fight for women's rights.<sup>14</sup>

This split over the inclusion of lesbians within the feminist movement was a significant factor in the development of radical feminist groups in the early 1970s. In general, these groups were interested in more than just mainstream political lobbying; they were interested in consciousness-raising, they pushed for direct social action as a means of advancing the cause of women's rights, and they called for the inclusion of women of all races, ages, and sexual orientations.<sup>15</sup> For these radical groups, lesbians were seen as critical to the feminist movement.<sup>16</sup>

### **Beginning of the Lesbian Herstory Archives**

The Lesbian Herstory Archives were created in 1974 by activists Joan Nestle, Deborah Edel, Sahli Cavallaro, and other women who were members of a feminist consciousness-raising group that formed within a mostly male New York City advocacy organization known as the Gay Academic Union.<sup>17</sup> As the founders described in the Archives' first newsletter, the basis of the project was to "collect and preserve our own voices... We undertook the Archives, not as a short-term project, but as a commitment to rediscover our past, control our present, and speak to our future" with a large-scale diverse collection that could tell the full story of lesbians in New York City and across the country.<sup>18</sup> In November 2022, Archives coordinator Saskia Scheffer stated in an interview that the organization's mission remained the same almost 50 years after its founding: "if you don't collect your own history, you become someone else's interpretation."<sup>19</sup>

The Archives were a grassroots attempt to



end the silence around lesbian history, and to create a physical archive for study, analysis, and community gathering. At a time when the LGBTQ+ community faced enormous legal and social discrimination, the Archives fought to bring lesbian cultural artifacts into public view, and to normalize them as an integral piece of American history. The project was intentionally feminist in nature, using the term “herstory” to note the rejection of patriarchy, and inclusive, with women of color counted among the organization’s early supporters and contributors.<sup>20</sup>

Conceived as a living repository, the Archives grew to include a wide variety of materials dating from the 1950s to the present with a national scope, collected and donated by lesbians themselves. Archives newsletters called on lesbians throughout the United States to donate papers and ephemera telling their stories.<sup>21</sup> From its earliest years, the Archives were comprised of several subsets of carefully documented archival material, including books and manuscripts, biographical files, geographical and organizational files, photographs, periodicals, and ephemera such as t-shirts, buttons, and banners. Materials in the Archives eventually included files on lesbian activist and community groups, audio-visual materials, oral histories, and the personal and professional papers of lesbians from a diversity of cultural, ethnic, and class-based communities. Among many others, significant collections include those of the organizations Daughters of Bilitis, the Salsa Soul Sisters, and the New York Chapter of ACT-UP, as well as the papers of Archives cofounder Joan Nestle, 1960s LGBTQ+ organizer Barbara Gittings, and African American activists Mabel Hampton and Audre Lorde.<sup>22</sup>

As Joan Nestle described it in 1990, the Archives’ early attempts to gather memorabilia from everyday lesbians across the demographic spectrum were intended to “bring home the message that all

lesbians were worthy of inclusion in herstory, that... if you have the courage to touch another woman, you are a famous lesbian.”<sup>23</sup> Archives volunteers held lectures throughout the country with slideshows of historical material to spread this inclusive message within the lesbian community. Nestle stated that at the beginning of the Archives’ formation, “we had to clarify that our archives, our family album, our library, was not primarily for academic scholars but for any lesbian woman who needed an image or a word to survive the day.”<sup>24</sup> The Archives were meant to “change secrecy into disclosure, shame into memory,” and offer lesbians a representation of their own history that had for too long been hidden.<sup>25</sup>

The Archives were housed from 1975 until 1991 in Nestle and Edel’s apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and began with their own papers and those of other early members. Although most of the earliest founders were white, working class, and Jewish, from the beginning the Archives’ principles were geared to the inclusion of all lesbians, past and present, and in fact a number of early supporters who helped shape the collection were women of color, including activists Mabel Hampton and Georgia Brooks, and poet Irere Sabasu, among others.<sup>26</sup> Nestle published a list of the Archives’ founding principles in 1979, stating that “race and class must be no barrier” to access; “the archives should be housed within the community” rather than at an academic institution; the archives should be “a place where ideas and experiences from the past interact with the living issues of the lesbian community;” and it should be staffed by lesbians who could pass down archival traditions to new generations.<sup>27</sup>

By 1990, the Archives had outgrown its small space in Nestle and Edel’s apartment, with a library of more than 10,000 volumes, 12,000 photographs, 1,400 periodical titles, 1,000 organizational and subject files, 200 special

collections, and thousands of other documents including film and video footage, posters, buttons, art and artifacts, and personal effects.<sup>28</sup> That year, the Archives began raising funds to purchase their own building that could serve as a research center for the lesbian community. Nestle wrote that a key model for the Archives' future was the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, which had similarly begun as a way to document the full history of a community.<sup>29</sup> Just as the Schomburg was located in the historically Black neighborhood of Harlem, in the late 1980s the Archives looked to Park Slope, Brooklyn, which had become a center of lesbian culture in New York. According to Saskia Scheffer, the organization was drawn to 484 14<sup>th</sup> Street in particular for its accessible location near a subway stop, its affordability, and because a row house within a residential neighborhood could provide a comfortable, home-like setting for visitors that was embedded within the community it served.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Design and Early History of 484 14th Street**

Park Slope, Brooklyn, developed in the late 19th century as a primarily residential community near Prospect Park. 484 14th Street is a three-story Renaissance Revival row house originally constructed as a two-family dwelling in 1908 and designed by Axel Hedman for the Prospect Park West Realty Company. The building was constructed as part of a row of seven similarly designed buildings characterized by alternating curved and three-sided bays, L-shaped stoops, and limestone fronts. The alternating bays and corresponding cornice lines of the row introduce a rhythmic flow to the otherwise straight-lined block. In 1973, 484 14th Street was included within the city's Park Slope Historic District.<sup>31</sup>

Classically inspired styles such as the Renaissance Revival gained popularity in America

as a reaction to the picturesque styles of the Queen Anne and Romanesque Revival. The revival of Renaissance inspired forms originated in America with the construction of McKim, Mead & White's Villard Houses (a designated New York City Landmark) on New York's Madison Avenue between 1882 and 1884. Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 played a major role in making the public, as well as the architectural profession, aware of the grandeur of ancient and Renaissance architecture and planning, resulting in a nationwide flurry of classically inspired buildings on every social level and scale, from the most opulent mansions and public buildings to the most modest residential structures. The Renaissance Revival style was popular in New York City from about 1880 to 1910, and was characterized by simple, restrained designs, light-colored facades, subdued classical ornament concentrated around the door and window openings, applied detail including motifs of wreaths, baskets of fruit and garlands of flowers, L-shaped stoops, entrance surrounds featuring a full stone enframing, wood double-leaf doors with glazed openings, sometimes with iron grilles, and metal cornices with Renaissance-inspired ornament.<sup>32</sup>

In the first decade of the 20th century, 484 14th Street and surrounding blocks were home primarily to middle-class New Yorkers of European descent, as well as more recent immigrants from Germany and Russia. The earliest documented owner of the building was a German American woman named Matilda Levy and her sister, who rented out the additional apartment to a family headed by a New York-born metal salesman.<sup>33</sup> By 1930, the residents of this block were mainly first- and second-generation Irish, Russian, Hungarian, and German Americans, some of whom had servants living with them. 484 14th Street was owned from 1921 to 1943 by a local dentist of Hungarian descent, who resided there with his family and a servant, and rented out the

other apartment to tenants including a New York-born insurance salesman, and two women from Denmark who worked as hospital maids.<sup>34</sup>

Reflecting the economic and demographic changes occurring in mid-20th century Brooklyn, 484 14th Street was converted in 1945 from a two-family residence to a three-family one, and in 1950, the building appears to have been home to four separate family groups spread across the lower and upper floors, including two Syrian American families, one of whom owned the building at the time.<sup>35</sup> 484 14th Street continued to be used as a multi-family residence until it was purchased in December of 1991 by the Lesbian Herstory Archives.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Lesbian Community in Park Slope**

Starting in the late 1970s, an LGBTQ+ community began to coalesce in Park Slope, Brooklyn, with a notably large population of lesbians arriving over the next decade. According to analysis of the 1990 census, which was the first time same-sex unmarried partners were counted, New York City had the highest number of same-sex couples of any city in the country, present in neighborhoods across the five boroughs and across all racial categories.<sup>37</sup> While the largest number of male couples lived in Chelsea and the Upper West Side in Manhattan, lesbian couples lived in greatest numbers and concentration in Park Slope.<sup>38</sup> Nearly a third of the lesbian couples reported living with children, and about half of the lesbians included in the data reported earning less than \$25,000 per year per person.<sup>39</sup>

Like other neighborhoods in this part of Brooklyn, such as Boerum Hill and Gowanus, by the early 1980s Park Slope was in the midst of substantial economic and demographic change. In the prior decades, the southern part of the neighborhood experienced considerable decline and disinvestment, with residents facing social problems such as high unemployment and crime, as well as discriminatory

lending practices known as “redlining” that had made mortgages hard to come by.<sup>40</sup> As new residents began to arrive in the 1970s seeking more affordable housing prices, civic groups were organized to revitalize the neighborhood and quality of life improved, although new tensions started to arise over the beginnings of gentrification.<sup>41</sup> Many new residents were members of the LGBTQ+ community, and despite the large population that grew in the neighborhood, there were also reports of hate crimes, and especially violence against women.<sup>42</sup> Security became a concern for many in the Park Slope lesbian community, and new organizations arose dedicated to the issue, including Brooklyn Women’s Martial Arts and Center for Anti-Violence Education, and Brooklyn Residents Against Bias-Related Violence, which operated out of space at 363 14th Street and organized a march in 1990 to protest what they perceived as police indifference.<sup>43</sup>

By the 1990s, the large lesbian community in Park Slope supported numerous commercial, cultural, and community spaces. There were multiple lesbian bars, LGBTQ+ bookstores, and a range of political and social organizations active in the neighborhood at that time. Organizations with outposts in Park Slope during the 1980s and 1990s included the political groups Lambda Independent Democrats and the New York State Gay and Lesbian Lobby, and social groups such as Slope Activities for Lesbians, Hikin’ Dykes, and Brooklyn Lesbians Together.<sup>44</sup> Starting in 1996, Brooklyn Pride was based in Park Slope and held their annual march through the neighborhood. The sheer concentration of formal and informal institutions that grew there during this period led some to refer to Park Slope as New York’s “only lesbian neighborhood.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Lesbian Herstory Archives at 484 14th Street**

In the late 1980s, the Archives had outgrown its small space and began a fundraising campaign to

buy a larger property.<sup>46</sup> Drawn to the large lesbian community in Park Slope, Brooklyn, and the scale and residential typology of its row houses, by 1991 the Archives had raised enough funding to purchase 484 14th Street, most of it through small-dollar donations from lesbians across the country.<sup>47</sup> After more than a year of renovations, completed by lesbian architects and contractors, the building was transformed into a new headquarters for the Archives, with Commission-approved exterior alterations intended to enhance accessibility and security necessary for the building's new use as an LGBTQ+ nonprofit headquarters.<sup>48</sup>

Since its 1991 move to Park Slope, the Lesbian Herstory Archives has been noted by scholars of library science for its unique position as a community-based collection independently operated by volunteers, intentionally located outside of a university or library, and funded solely by private and non-governmental sources.<sup>49</sup> Compared to traditional archives set within formal institutions, the Archives has become well known for the way it continues to reflect the ideals of its early founders. The 1991 purchase of 484 14th Street and subsequent completion of mortgage payments in 1996 was, for the Archives, an enormously significant achievement in the goal of having “a home of our own,” a permanent headquarters that could serve as a direct response to the pervasive homophobia, sexism, and lack of lesbian space the community had experienced throughout history.<sup>50</sup>

The Archives quickly made full use of the former row house in Park Slope, using the basement, first, and second floors for archival display and storage, and the third floor for a caretaker's apartment.<sup>51</sup> The first floor was redesigned with custom shelving for the Archives' book collection, and also houses a kitchen, offices, a wheelchair-accessible bathroom, and space for events. Additional storage and study spaces are found in the

basement and second floor of the building.<sup>52</sup>

The Archives has continued to expand its collection over the last 30 years while headquartered at 484 14th Street. These additions include new special collections, and many more documents, ephemera, photographs, and audio-visual materials. In the 1990s and early 2000s, new materials were donated pertaining to a diverse array of lesbian individuals and community organizations across the country, including important documentation of lesbian groups in South Carolina, Michigan, and the Pacific Northwest; files on important lesbian writers and artists; materials relating to the Lesbian Avengers, a direct-action civil rights group, and from the 1979 and 1993 National Marches on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. In recent years the Archives has also continued to expand the breadth of their coverage of lesbian culture, including among many other topics materials on LGBTQ+ public health issues, lesbian parenthood, and community events such as New York City's Dyke March and Michigan's Womyn's Festival.<sup>53</sup>

In the 21st century, documents pertaining to marriage equality were also added to the Archives' collections. These include records relating to a significant New York State Court of Appeals marriage case in 2006, and documentation of marriages that took place in the early 2000s in locations where it was legal before same-sex marriage was allowed in New York State in 2011 and federally in 2015.<sup>54</sup> These documents, given to the Archives by lesbian couples who participated in the events, provide a critically important record of both the legal and personal impacts of the decades-long struggle for LGBTQ+ marriage rights.

In addition to growing their Special Collections, the Archives has further broadened their national reputation by holding numerous volunteer-led events and traveling exhibitions across the United States and at their home in Park Slope,



continuing their long tradition of bringing the Archives out into the lesbian community through public lectures, exhibits, and other events. Traveling exhibitions on African American lesbians and on lesbian pulp paperback illustrations, lectures given in Iowa, Illinois, and North Carolina, and a marathon reading of work by Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich held at the Archives are just a few examples from the last three decades.<sup>55</sup> The Archives has also contributed extensively to important LGBTQ+ exhibitions sponsored by larger institutions such as the New York Public Library in 1994, and the New York Historical Society in 2019.<sup>56</sup>

In the last 20 years, the Archives has greatly increased public access to their collection by digitizing a significant portion of their photographs, audio-visual materials, and Archives newsletters. Available digitized recordings include oral histories such as “Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold” documenting the lesbian community of Buffalo, New York; recordings of Audre Lorde readings and speeches; and oral history interviews with Daughters of Bilitis founders and with Mabel Hampton, an early supporter of the Archives who tells about her life as an African American lesbian in mid-20th century New York.<sup>57</sup> These digital collections have become a central means of making lesbian history more visible and relevant to younger generations.

## **Conclusion**

As a nationally important collection of LGBTQ+ historical materials, the Lesbian Herstory Archives continues to play an essential role in telling the story of a mostly unseen community of women who contributed to New York City’s and America’s cultural, political, and social history. 484 14th Street is architecturally significant as an intact reminder of Park Slope’s 19th century beginnings and has more recently become culturally significant as the Archives’ headquarters since 1991. For more than 30

years, this building is where the Lesbian Herstory Archives has expanded its collection, grown to national prominence, and served as a vital educational organization, community space, and center for lesbian history and culture.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Certificates of Occupancy, New York City Department of Buildings, 1945 and 1994.

<sup>2</sup> This section adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *The Stonewall Inn Designation Report (LP-2574)* (New York: City of New York, 2015), prepared by Christopher Brazee, Corinne Engelbert, and Gale Harris. Information in this section is based on the following sources: David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004); John Strausbaugh, *The Village: 400 Years of Beats and Bohemians, Radicals and Rogues, a History of Greenwich Village* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2013); National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), *Stonewall, New York, New York (#99000562)* (listed May 27, 1999), nomination prepared by David Carter, Andrew Scott Dolkart, et. al.

<sup>3</sup> NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Information in this section is based on the following sources: NRHP, *Stonewall*; "About the National LGBT 50th Anniversary Celebration," 50th Anniversary July 4, 2015, <http://lgbt50.org/about>; Sheryl, "Before Stonewall: The 'Sip In' at Julius," *Off the Grid*, Aug. 30, 2012, <http://gvshp.org/blog/2012/08/30/before-stonewall-the-sip-in-at-julius>.

<sup>5</sup> NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec 8, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> "About the National LGBT 50th Anniversary Celebration;" NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec 8, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, p. 5; Sheryl, "Before Stonewall: The 'Sip In' at Julius."

<sup>8</sup> LPC, *Stonewall*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Statistic from Frank Kameny quoted in NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, p. 15. Morty Manford, a Stonewall participant, was somewhat more conservative, putting the numbers at 20 before the uprising and 600 two years after; NRHP, *Stonewall*, sec. 8, p.17.

<sup>10</sup> Jean O'Leary interview with Lillian Faderman, February 18, 2004, cited in *The Gay Revolution*. This section adapted from LPC, *Women's Liberation Center Designation Report (LP-2633)* (New York: City of New York, 2019), prepared by Margaret Herman. According to

Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), the GLF and GAA in 1969-1970 were at least 85% male; Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Elinor Burkett, "Women's Rights Movement," Encyclopedia Britannica (August 23, 2022), <https://www.britannica.com/event/womens-movement>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Second-wave feminism is usually defined as the diverse social movement in the 1960s-1980s that called for equal rights, opportunities, and personal freedom for women.

<sup>13</sup> Ivy Bottini was a lesbian activist who was a New York City chapter president of NOW. According to Bottini, Friedan orchestrated her removal in 1970. See: Ivy Bottini interview with Lillian Faderman, August 19, 2004, and Barbara Love, interview with Lillian Faderman, August 14, 2014, both cited in Faderman, *The Story of the Struggle*, 232.

<sup>14</sup> Judy Klemesrud, "The Lesbian Issue and Women's Lib," *New York Times*, March 4, 1973, 60.

<sup>15</sup> Faderman, 227-246.

<sup>16</sup> Vivian Gornick, "Lesbians and Women's Liberation: 'In Any Terms She Shall Choose,'" *Village Voice*, May 28, 1970, 5; Ti-Grace Atkinson, "Strategy and Tactics: A Presentation of Political Lesbianism," January 1971; reprinted in *Amazon Odyssey: The First Collection of Writings by the Political Pioneer of the Women's Movement* (New York: Links Books, 1974).

<sup>17</sup> Joan Nestle, "The Will to Remember: The Lesbian Herstory Archives of New York," *Feminist Review* 34 (Spring 1990), 86; Lesbian Herstory Archives (LHA) Newsletter 1 (June 1975). Many LHA newsletters have been digitized here: <https://lesbianherstoryarchives.org/collections/newsletters/>.

<sup>18</sup> LHA Newsletter 1 (June 1975); Polly Thistlewaite, "Building 'A Home of Our Own:' The Construction of the Lesbian Herstory Archives," CUNY Academic Works (1998), 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> Archives coordinator Saskia Scheffer interview with LPC staff, November 17, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Joan Nestle, "The Will to Remember: The Lesbian

Herstory Archives,” *Feminist Review* Spring 1990, no. 34, Perverse Politics: Lesbian Issues (Spring 1990): 88. Nestle, “Notes on Radical Archiving from a Lesbian Feminist Perspective,” *Gay Insurgent* 4/5 (Spring 1979), cited in “An Early Conversation about Gay and Lesbian Archives: From the Pages of the Gay Insurgent, 1979: Jim Monahan & Joan Nestle,” *Out History*, <https://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/an-early-conversation-about-ga/voice-2-joan-nestle>. LHA Newsletter 10 (January 1990), 1-4 on the significance of Mabel Hampton.

<sup>21</sup> See especially LHA Newsletters 1-4 (1976-1978).

<sup>22</sup> Thistlewaite, 8. LHA Special Collections, <https://lesbianherstoryarchives.org/collections/special-collections/>. The Audre Lorde Residence in Staten Island is a New York City Landmark, for more information see <http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/lp/2642.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Nestle, “The Will to Remember,” 88.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>26</sup> Thistlewaite; Lesbian Herstory Archives, “A Brief History,” <https://lesbianherstoryarchives.org/about/a-brief-history/>.

<sup>27</sup> Joan Nestle, “Notes on Radical Archiving from a Lesbian Feminist Perspective,” *Gay Insurgent* 4/5 (Spring 1979), 11, cited in Thistlewaite, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., and Interview with Joan Nestle, “Saluting ‘Feminism and Queer Courage,’” *Newsday* (New York) (November 19, 1992), 133.

<sup>30</sup> Saskia Scheffer interview with LPC staff, November 17, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> LPC, *Park Slope Historic District Designation Report* (New York: City of New York, 1973), 140.

<sup>32</sup> This section adapted from LPC, *Park Slope Historic District Extension II* (LP-2558) (New York: City of New York, 2016), prepared by Donald Pesa, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Kings County, Office of the Register, Conveyance Liber 3126, 491 (March 25, 1909); U.S. Census, 1910.

<sup>34</sup> Kings County, Office of the Register, Conveyance Liber 4047, 205 (June 1, 1921); Conveyance Liber 6382, 46 (September 1, 1943); U.S. Census, 1930, 1940.

<sup>35</sup> Certificate of Occupancy, Department of Buildings, 1945; Kings County, Office of the Register, Conveyance Liber 6582, 308 (August 31, 1944), Conveyance Liber 8639, 100 (June 16, 1958). U.S. Census, 1950.

<sup>36</sup> See New York City Automated City Register Information System (ACRIS).

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Mandell, “Gays in Mainstream,” *Newsday* (June 22, 1995), 6-7, 24. The census counted 11,688 same-sex couples, including 3,387 lesbian couples, living in New York City, with experts noting this was very likely an undercount of the true number.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 7. \$25,000 in 1990 equates to \$56,000 in 2022.

<sup>40</sup> This information adapted from LPC, *Park Slope Historic District Extension Designation Report* (LP-2443) (New York: City of New York, 2012), prepared by Cynthia Danza; and LPC, *Boerum Hill Historic District Extension Designation Report* (LP-2599) (New York: City of New York, 2018), prepared by Jessica Baldwin and Margaret Herman. According to Home Owner’s Loan Corporation maps from 1937 grading neighborhoods on a color-coded scale of A to D, 484 14th Street fell within an area marked with a yellow “C”, noting the “infiltration of a lower population” and “limited” availability of mortgage funding. See “Mapping Inequality: Redlining in America,” <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=14/40.663/-73.979&mapview=graded&city=brooklyn-ny&area=C5>.

<sup>41</sup> See Suleiman Osman, *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Ruth Michael Lindner, “At the Intersection of Community and Change: Gentrification and the Lesbian Community of Park Slope, Brooklyn 1970-1999” (M.A. Thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Frank McKeown, “Cops accused of insensitivity toward lesbians,” *Daily News* (July 30, 1990) reports on two separate assault incidents in Park Slope that year.

<sup>43</sup> Jen Jack Giesecking, *A Queer New York: Geographies of Lesbians, Dykes, and Queers* (New York: NYU Press, 2020) and related website: <http://jgieseking.org/AQNY/>; McKeown, “Cops accused.”

<sup>44</sup> Giesecking, map of LGBTQ+ organizations: <http://jgieseking.org/AQNY/AEQNYorgsmap/index.html>

<sup>45</sup> Giesecking, “Mapping Lesbian and Queer Lines of Desire: Constellations of Queer Urban Space,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (2020), 1. See also Tamar Rothenberg, “‘And She Told Two Friends:’ Lesbians Creating Urban Social Space,” in *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, edited by David Bell and Gill Valentine (New York: Routledge,

1995), 150-165.

<sup>46</sup> LHA Newsletter 10 (February 1988), 4; LHA Newsletter 11 (January 1990), 11; LHA Newsletter 12 (June 1991), 2.

<sup>47</sup> According to the interview with Saskia Scheffer on November 17, 2022, donations came in from across the country through the Archives' newsletter appeals, and included funds raised from slideshow parties and other small gatherings held within the lesbian community.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Francis Cohen, "In Lesbian Archive, Education and Sanctuary," *New York Times* (April 7, 1996), 9. LHA Newsletter 14 (June 1993) describes the work and the LPC approval process from the organization's perspective. See LHA Newsletter 13 (June 1992), 2-3 and LHA Newsletter 16 (December 1996), 3 for a list of alterations and repairs made to the building at the time of purchase, including the addition of a wheelchair lift, new security grilles and under-stoop entrance gate, and repairs to the roof and areaway; see also LPC permit files.

<sup>49</sup> Agatha Beins, "Making a Place for Lesbian Life at the Lesbian Herstory Archives," in *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives, Researching Sexual Histories*, edited by Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015), 27-28. According to LPC's interview with Saskia Scheffer, the Archives also has had an influence on other similar organizations in the United States and globally, including the Interference Archive in Park Slope, the digital-only Queer Indonesia Archive, an LGBTQ+ archive in Belgrade, Serbia, and others.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 28. LHA Newsletter 16 (December 1996), 1-3.

<sup>51</sup> Certificate of Occupancy, New York DOB, 1994; LHA Newsletter 14 (June 1993), 3; Jonathan Mandell, "'Herstorical' Collection Takes Root in Brooklyn," *Newsday* (February 28, 1995), B2.

<sup>52</sup> LHA Newsletter 14, 3; Victoria A. Brownworth, "Speaking for the Voices that Were Silenced," *The Advocate* (November 30, 1993), 643.

<sup>53</sup> "Lesbian Herstory Archives Special Collections," <https://herstoryspecialcollections.wordpress.com/>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. The New York Marriage Equality Act took effect on July 24, 2011; the Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* on June 26, 2015 required all 50 states to recognize same-sex marriage.

<sup>55</sup> See LHA Newsletter 12 (June 1991); "Lesbian Herstory Program Scheduled," *Herald and Review (Decatur, IL)* (December 19, 1993); "Lesbian Herstory Archives," *Chapel Hill News* (1996); Virginia Wageman, "Pulp Covers Offer Peek Into Pre-Feminism Lesbian Culture," *Honolulu Advertiser* (May 30, 1999), 60; Alexis Clements, Flavia Rando, and Shawn(ta) Smith, "Living Our Lives Through Their Words: Reflections on the Marathon Reading of Work by Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, November 17, 2012," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 34, no. 2 (2013): 261-269.

<sup>56</sup> "The Gay Movement: Reviewing Its History," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (June 23, 1994), 1, 55; "Stonewall at 50: Museum Looks Back at Birth of LGBT Rights Movement," *New York Daily News* (May 5, 2019), 7.

<sup>57</sup> "Lesbian Herstory Archives Digital Exhibits," <http://herstories.prattinfoschool.nyc/omeka/exhibits/>



# Findings and Designation

## The Lesbian Herstory Archives

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that The Lesbian Herstory Archives has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City, state, and the nation.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark The Lesbian Herstory Archives and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 1103, Lot 31 as its Landmark Site, as shown in the attached map.



The Lesbian Herstory Archives, 484 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Brooklyn

Bilge Kose, November 2022





**Main Entrance**

Kate Lemos McHale, November 2022



**Third Story and Cornice**

Kate Lemos McHale, November 2022



**Areaway and Entrance**  
Kate Lemos McHale, November 2022

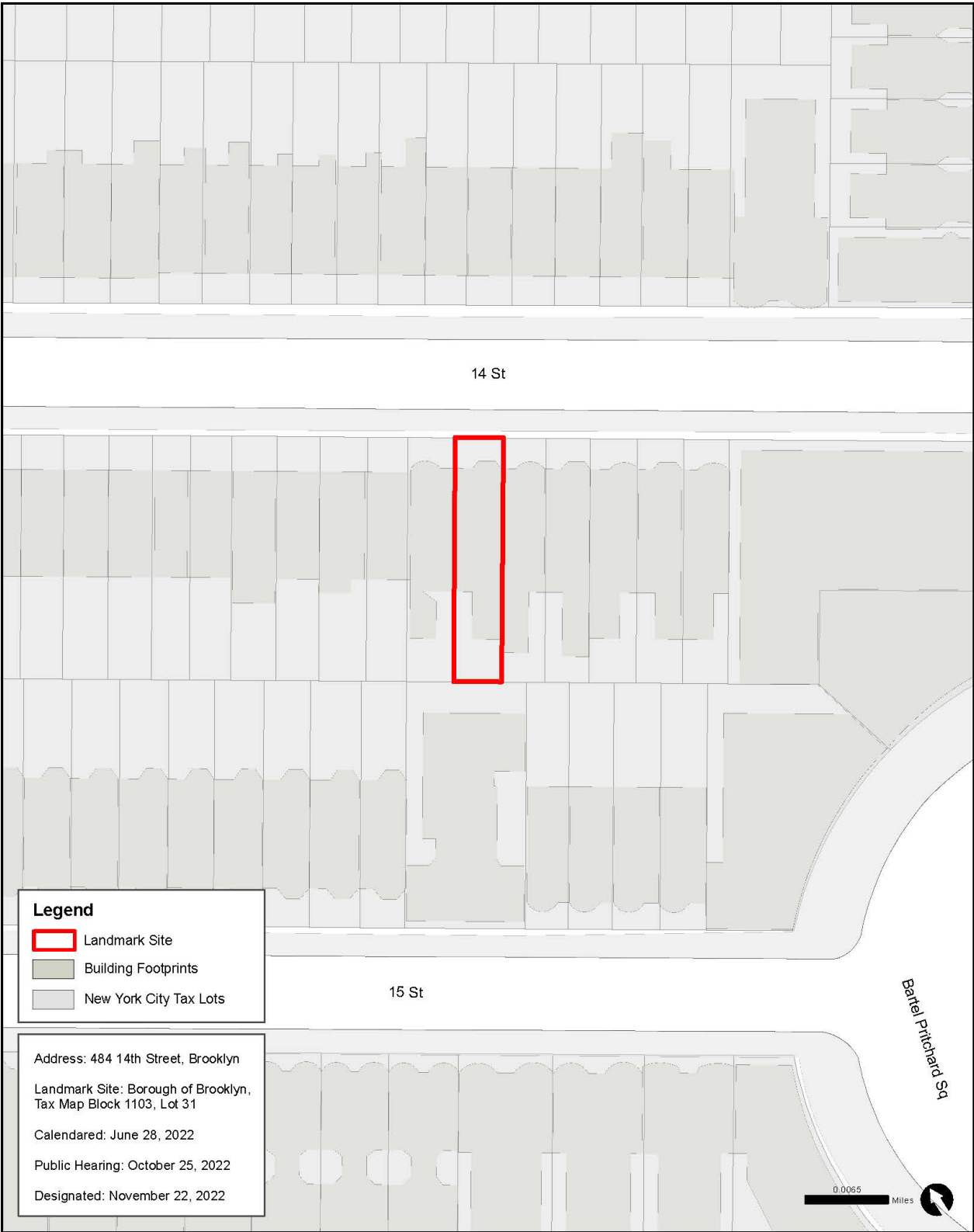


**484 14<sup>th</sup> Street**  
Bilge Kose, November 2022





**482-486 14<sup>th</sup> Street**  
Bilge Kose, November 2022



Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 21v4, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DHW, Date: 11.22.2022