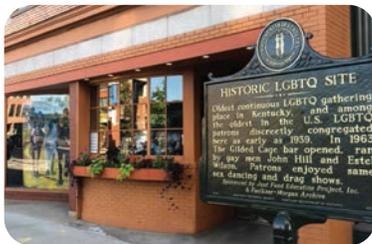
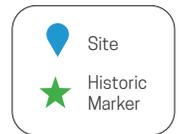




WALKING TOUR

Uncover the places where Lexington's lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer history happened! From bars, to theatres, to private homes, these sites tell remarkable stories of courage, freedom, and the struggle for equality. Use the suggested route on the map, or visit the sites in any order. The downtown walking tour is approximately one mile.



1 THE BAR COMPLEX 224 East Main Street

The Bar Complex is the oldest queer gathering place in Kentucky. First opened as the Gilded Cage in 1963, the bar has had several names over its fifty-year history, including the Living Room and Johnny Angel. Although the bar was vulnerable to frequent police raids, queer patrons still used the space for acts of identity and community, such as the 1970 wedding of Marjorie Jones and Tracy Knight, the first lesbian couple to ever sue for a marriage license.



2 GREYHOUND BUS STATION 219 East Short Street

In 1961, the Lexington Police entrapped gay men in the restroom of this Greyhound Bus Station during a "crackdown on perverts." Over the course of one evening, ten men were arrested for soliciting an undercover police officer. Lexington's newspapers published the men's names and addresses the next day, causing one of the arrested men, a music teacher named Vernon Ishmael, to commit suicide.



3 LYRIC THEATRE 300 East Third Street

Constructed during segregation, the Lyric Theatre was Lexington's Black movie house and performance space. On October 14, 1960, the theatre was raided by the Lexington Police during a drag show, and two queens were charged with "lewdness." Yet for decades, Lexington had enjoyed an open and celebrated Black drag scene, with famous performers such as Sweet Evening Breeze. In the 1930s, "Sweets" even advertised her "womanless" performances in Lexington's newspapers.



4 BELLE BREZING'S FIRST BROTHEL

314-318 North Upper Street

Born in 1860, Belle Brezing remains Lexington's most famous sexual outlaw. In this row house, Brezing opened her first brothel in the early t1880s. By the 1890s, Brezing had moved her operation to a large mansion on Eastern Avenue, where she built a national reputation for "the most orderly of disorderly houses." It is widely believed she was the inspiration for Belle Watling, the heart-of-gold madam in *Gone with the Wind*. Brezing's success in transgressing the sexual and gender norms of her time still endears her to many in Lexington's LGBTQ community.



5 HENRY FAULKNER HOUSE

462 West Third Street

This was the home of Lexington artist Henry Faulkner. Through his national reputation as a painter, Faulkner befriended many well-known LGBTQ people, including writers Tennessee Williams and James Herlihy and actor Vincent Price. Faulkner was unashamedly gay in a time when many LGBTQ people lived closeted lives. Faulkner's openness cost him dearly, including a police raid of this house. His home became a refuge for many young people, both gay and straight, in search of a freer way of life. Faulkner lived here until his untimely death in 1981.



6 LEXINGTON WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE

472 West Second Street

Organized in this house during the early 1970s, the Lexington Women's Collective was a communal-living group of feminist women, most of whom were lesbian identified. Informal in its structure, the collective was nevertheless robust and effective—sharing, debating, and disseminating feminist and lesbian literature while participating in social justice activism and lesbian-feminist community building. The group drew women from across the state to their consciousness-raising groups and women-centered events, and, sometimes, to live here with them.



7 CROSSINGS

117 North Limestone

Crossings began as a gay men's leather bar, opened in 1989 by members of COLT, Lexington's leather group. Known for its pool tables and intimate atmosphere, it is now a favorite watering hole for Lexington's diverse LGBTQ community. Crossings is also the home bar of the Imperial Court of Kentucky, the oldest Imperial Court east of the Mississippi River. Looking across North Limestone, notice the rainbow crosswalks leading to the Courthouse Plaza. The plaza is home to Lexington's annual Pride Festival, held the last weekend in June.



8 PHOENIX PARK

Corner of Limestone and East Main Street

A tavern opened here before 1800, and its guests may have included early Kentucky settlers Robert Craddock and Peter Tardiveau. Veterans of the American Revolution, the two prominent men were considered a couple by some. One Kentucky historian, writing in 1925, reported "the men were queer, but even their faults leaned to virtue's side." Around 1820, this site became The Phoenix Hotel. By the early 1900s, the hotel was known as a place where queer patrons could discreetly congregate and, in 1960, was the site of a police sting.



9 ALFALFA RESTAURANT

141 East Main Street

Susan Saxe, an anti-war activist hiding from the FBI, worked at Alfalfa in 1974. Using aliases, Saxe and her partner, Katherine Power, were welcomed into Lexington's lesbian community. Upon learning the FBI had discovered their location, the couple fled. Although no one in Lexington knew the couple's true identity, the city's lesbian community was harassed by the FBI. Agents intentionally outed residents and photographed patrons entering Lexington's gay bars. In 1975, five lesbian women and one gay man were imprisoned for refusing to cooperate with the FBI's Lexington investigation.



★ HISTORIC LGBTQ SITE 224 East Main Street

Located in front of the Bar Complex (Stop #1), this was the first LGBTQ historic marker in Kentucky. 224 East Main Street has a long and important LGBTQ history, and marks one of the oldest gathering places for LGBTQ people in the country. When the historic marker was dedicated in June 2018, along with the Wasson marker on Water Street, the event drew hundreds of Kentuckians and made national news.



★ FAIRNESS ORDINANCE 200 East Main Street

In 1999, the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government passed a fairness ordinance to protect the city's LGBTQ community. The ordinance outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity in housing, employment, and public accommodations. This groundbreaking, county-wide ordinance was the first in Kentucky to provide these protections, and, in the intervening years, has become a model for fairness ordinances across the Commonwealth.



★ COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY V. JEFFREY WASSON Corner of Quality and Water Street

On this site in 1985, Jeffrey Wasson solicited an undercover police officer, violating a Kentucky sodomy law that made homosexual acts illegal. Wasson, a young college student, challenged the charge. After a long legal battle, the Kentucky Supreme Court ruled that the sodomy law violated the state's constitution, thus extending equal protection and privacy rights to same-sex couples. Kentucky was the first state to decriminalize homosexuality after the AIDS crisis began. The ruling in the Wasson case was replicated by several other states, and, eventually, by the United States Supreme Court in 2003.



WANT MORE?

Check out these additional sites located outside the city's urban core.



THE PRIDE CENTER 389 Waller Avenue

Headquarters of the Pride Community Services Organization (PCSO), the Pride Center has been an LGBTQ gathering spot for over twenty-four years. Vibrant and diverse, the Pride Center continues its mission as a resource center, a free meeting space for LGBTQ groups, and home to an LGBTQ library. The PCSO also organizes Lexington's annual Pride Festival, held downtown every June.



SWEET EVENING BREEZE HOUSE 186 Prall Street

Located in one of Lexington's historic Black neighborhoods, this was the home of Sweet Evening Breeze, a well-known member of Lexington's LGBTQ community for over sixty years. In the backyard, she hosted mock weddings in which she played the bride. According to one account, she routinely "married" the quarterback of the University of Kentucky football team. Her home was also the meeting place for four drag queens after their arrest during a police raid at the Living Room (Stop #1) in 1970.



THE COUNTRY 841 Lane Allen Road

Located in a small strip mall, The Country was one of the first lesbian bars in Kentucky, opening in 1978. Owned, managed, and patroned almost exclusively by women, The Country was not just a bar, but a space for lesbian women to socialize, find partners, and galvanize for social and political activism. Various lesbian-centered groups mingled at The Country, including the all-female music group Amber Moon.