



# Gay and Lesbian Philadelphia (Images of America)

*Thom Nickels*

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The diverse landscape of gay and lesbian Philadelphia is a story of highs and lows. From rustic post-Civil War days when Camden poet Walt Whitman crossed the Delaware River on a ferry or caroused Market Street "eyeing" the grocery boys, to the beginnings of ACT UP more than one hundred years later, the gay and lesbian community in Philadelphia has never lost its flair for the dramatic.

Gay and Lesbian Philadelphia is a historical look at the neighborhoods, events, and people that have been a part of this community. The 1920s saw the birth of private dance bars on Rittenhouse Square. It was a time when drag shows in straight bars were the order of the day, as was the presence of men in drag during the annual Mummer's Parade on New Year's Day. The pre-Civil Rights era, when segregation was the status quo, saw the proliferation of African American house parties in neighborhoods such as North Philadelphia, where black gays and lesbians formed a community. During the 1950s and 1960s, Rittenhouse Square was the site of informal public gatherings. These gatherings of friends and strangers helped set the stage for the Annual Reminder, the first public protest in support of "homosexual equal rights," which took place every Fourth of July at Independence Hall. Throughout all of these eras, members of the community faced challenges, celebrated victories, and continued to try to blend their lives with those of their gay and straight neighbors.

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