



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS
FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Policy Brief:
**A Strategy for Heritage Preservation of
2SLGBTQ+ Spaces**

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DEFINITIONS

Heritage conservation, also referred to as historic preservation or commemoration, is a movement in planning designed to conserve old buildings and areas to tie a geographic location's history to its population and culture.¹ Heritage conservation encompasses the identification, protection, and promotion of culturally and historically important tangible things, such as objects or neighbourhoods, or intangible things such as folklore or customs.^{2,3}

The preservation of spaces for two-spirit individuals, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans people, queer and questioning individuals, and others (2SLGBTQ+), here on referred to as queer spaces, refers to efforts to identify and designate sites of significant value to the queer community, including sites of historical significance, sites of significant queer-related events, and sites related to important queer figures.

ISSUES AND EVIDENCE

The lack of 2SLGBTQ+ historical commemoration in Canada

In 1981, the National Historic Sites of Canada system plan identified areas of underrepresentation in Canadian history, and the most recent updates in 2000 and 2019 built upon the 1981 system plan to introduce a thematic framework addressing underrepresented topics in the National Program of Historical Commemoration.⁴ These plans sought to build a more inclusive system of national historic designations by increasing designations related to three

¹ Amanda Briney, "The Importance of Historic Preservation," *ThoughtCo*, last modified April 10, 2019, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/historic-preservation-and-urban-planning-1435784>.

² Gordon Fulton, "Heritage Conservation," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last modified March 4, 2015, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/heritage-conservation>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Parks Canada, *Framework for History and Commemoration: National Historic Sites System Plan*, Ottawa, ON: Parks Canada, 2019.

underrepresented areas, Aboriginal History, Women's History and Ethnocultural Communities' History.⁵ From 2011 to 2016, 66 new national designations related to these underrepresented areas were approved by the Government of Canada.⁶

The absence of 2SLGBTQ+ identities in the definition of HSMBC's underrepresented areas exemplifies a gap in Canada's commitment to 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Since the HSMBC was established in 1919, 3,600 designations of national historic significance have been made, but none are explicitly designated to queer heritage.^{7,8} As such, under current efforts, queer heritage is not considered of equal significance to other culturally important sites, events, or figures.

A key principle of historic preservation is the power of places: a conviction that extant places matter and that they can inform current generations about the lives of people and events of the past.⁹ Many young people today continue to grow up struggling as they come to terms with their gender identity and/or sexuality, and discovering tangible, physical evidence of queer history, especially in a public place, can help affirm a vital connection to a community with a rich, yet poorly visible, past. As there are still parts of Canada where people do not feel comfortable being themselves in terms of their sexuality and gender identity, having physical queer places that are recognized as unquestionably worth preserving are important to build a sense of belonging and connectedness among queer communities.

⁵ Parks Canada, *Framework for History and Commemoration*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Parks Canada, "Directory of Federal Heritage Designations," *History and culture*, last modified December 11, 2018, accessed July 22, 2019, <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/culture/dfhd>.

⁹ "Stonewall 50: Defining LGBTQ Site Preservation," *Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation*, last modified April 6, 2019, accessed July 23, 2019, <https://www.arch.columbia.edu/events/1237-stonewall-50-defining-lgbtq-site-preservation>.

Existing Policies and Programs: United States National Park Service’s LGBT thematic study and Underrepresented Communities Grant Program

In 2016, the United States National Park Service (NPS) released a 1,200 page, first-of-its-kind thematic study on the country’s queer population as part of the agency’s overall effort to preserve more places that have significance for ‘underrepresented’ populations that also includes Latinos, Pacific Islanders, and Indigenous Americans.¹⁰ The report lists around 1,300 locations deserving of recognition and states that American history has long focused its celebrations on straight white men.¹¹ This is reflected in National Historic Landmarks and the National Register of Historic Places, as just 14 of 90,000 sites are currently listed explicitly because of their historic significance for 2SLGBT+ people.¹² The NPS administers grants through their Underrepresented Communities (URC) Grant Program to support the survey, inventory, and designation of historic properties that are associated with these underrepresented populations.¹³ For example, the NYC LGBT Historic Sites project, a URC grantee, created a map-based archive of 100+ significant queer sites in New York City and spearheaded the campaign to increase the representation of these sites in municipal, state, and federal heritage registries.

RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

Governmental actors

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, under Parks Canada, directed by Ron Hallman and overseen by the Honourable Johnathan Wilkison, the Minister responsible for Parks

¹⁰ Katy Steinmetz, “National Park Service Releases First Report on historic LGBT Sites,” *Time Magazine*, last modified October 11, 2016, accessed July 23, 2019, <https://time.com/4523492/lgbt-theme-study-nps/>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ National Park Service, “Underrepresented Community Grants,” *National Park Service Preservation Grants*, last modified July 15, 2019, accessed July 17, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/preservation-grants/community-grants.html>.

Canada, holds significant power to work with the 2SLGBTQ+ community to diversify HSMBC designations. Including sexual and gender diverse communities in HSMBC designations would recognize queer heritage as equally important to Canadian history and expand the HSMBC's commitment to other underrepresented communities.

Public and other actors

The Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies led a proposal to provincially recognize University College as the site of the first on-campus meeting of the University of Toronto Homophile Association in 1969. Similar 2SLGBTQ+ institutional or community activist groups with resources and experience have the potential to lead proposal efforts and would benefit from governmental support to increase capacity.

Working in collaboration with the Parks Canada and institutional or community activist groups, provincial, territorial, and municipal heritage agencies can provide proposal guidance, resources, and experience to the designation process. Agencies that are more knowledgeable about local contexts can work with community activist groups to identify and categorize possible designations for queer sites using federal support.

POLICY AND PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Expanding the definition of 'underrepresented' to include 2SLGBTQ+ communities

Through a simple definitional change, expanding Parks Canada underrepresented areas as listed in the 2019 system plan to include 2SLGBTQ+ communities would establish that queer heritage has a place in Canadian history. Further, this change would unlock funding and investments from Parks Canada for public designation proposals of 2SLGBTQ+ heritage sites and reaffirm Canada's commitment to 2SLGBTQ+ rights and equality.

Thematic study into possible sites of commemoration to serve as a guidebook and toolkit for nominations

Like the thematic study conducted by the United States National Park Service, a report identifying 2SLGBTQ+ sites of commemoration spearheaded by Parks Canada would provide a starting point for private and public actors to begin proposal processes. Further, an associated toolkit for the proposal process would provide community and activist groups with the necessary tools and advice to expedite nominations.

Create a specific grant program to increase the number of 2SLGBTQ+ designations administered by the HSMBC

The creation and funding of a specific grant program towards increasing 2SLGBTQ+ diversity among HSMBC designations would provide a “catch-up” mechanism to account for decades of exclusion of queer heritage from Canada’s history. As seen with the NPS URC Grant Program, grants administered to provincial, territorial, and municipal heritage agencies and community and activist groups to investigate queer sites worthy of designation is a proven way to increase the number of designations.

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