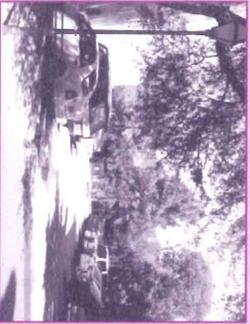




7 Gibbs Street Former Home of Laura Bragg

Built in 1804, the home at 7 Gibbs Street begins this lavender historic site tour. Residence of Laura Bragg, lesbian feminist and first female Director of the Charleston Museum, the house marks the spot where Bragg and her socialite "Boston wife" Belle Heyward shared a residence and worked to build a strong intellectual and supportive community for lesbians, other women, intellectuals, and scientists alike. Bragg lived at 7 Gibbs for 12 crucial years. While there (and because she suffered ill health and a severe hearing impairment), she often worked from her home as Charleston Museum's first female Director in 1920. The same was true when Bragg co-founded the Charleston Free Library, initiated a successful preservation effort to save the historic Heyward-Washington House, and co-founded the Poetry Society. This group began in her home at 7 Gibbs and later drew the likes of poets Gertrude Stein and Edna St. Vincent Millay. Quite literally, Laura Bragg made history within the Georgian-style walls of 7 Gibbs.

368 King Street Charleston's Club 49



The parking lot before you marks the demolished site of Charleston's Club 49, the one-time mainstay of Charleston gay nightlife during the 1940s and 50s. Built in 1944 and demolished by 1985, the short-lived 2-story club once embodied brick, stucco, glass, and stone and reflected a hybrid of commercial Mission, Art Deco, and Art Moderne architectural styles. Charleston's Club 49 marks an important stop on this tour in that its history provides a unique look into how Southern gays might have lived during the

repressive McCarthy era. Second only to bathrooms for gay men and public beaches for lesbian women, gay bars provided the definitive gay space for LGBT Americans during the 1950s. But congregating publicly was never easy. Patrons risked discovery if they were "in the closet" and harassment either way, as well as gay and lesbian liquor lounges reaffirmed troubling cultural divisions down the lines of race and class. However, despite difficulties, gay bars flourished because LGBT citizens wanted to leave their homes and socialize just like everyone else. At Charleston's Club 49, the atmosphere emanated swank. Patrons wore formal attire including tails and tuxedos. The front of the club catered to gay male couples while the rear of the bar hosted "mixed" or heterosexual couples. The second floor offered gambling to all of the club's customers

and cocktails flowed freely throughout. Unfortunately, Charleston's Club 49 was demolished in 1985 during Charleston's project for urban renewal. Its ill-fated demise is one that is shared by hundreds of historic gay spaces throughout the United States.

14 Queen Street Home of the Candestrick Murder

On Halloween Night 1958, a bachelor named Jack Dobbins was bludgeoned to death in his home at 14 Queen by John Joseph Mahon, a young Navy Serviceman Dobbins had met earlier in the evening at Charleston's Club 49. When standing trial for the murder, Mahon told jurors that although he had followed Dobbins to his home, stole from him, and then crushed Dobbins's head using an ornate brass



candlestick, he was not guilty on the basis of self-defense. According to him, he had killed Dobbins after Dobbins made unwelcome sexual advances towards him. Thus, Mahon felt justified. The Candestrick Murder achieved hate-crime status three-days later when jurors agreed with Mahon and found him Not-Guilty of all charges. The Candestrick Murder represented an unfortunate but common plight for gays across America. Gay citizens became the target of violent predators throughout the 20th century as criminals discovered that the judicial system would not demand civil rights for LGBT people.

56 Society Street Former Home of Gordon Langley Hall

56 Society St. is a historic and private Ansonborough residence, and a site that presents one of the rowest pictures of Charleston during the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement. This site embodies a history that challenges everyone. It eloquently illustrates the complicated and disturbing treatment that blacks suffered at the hands of whites, gays suffered by straights, and that blacks suffered by gays in Charleston between the years 1960 and 1970. Originally built by renowned medical scientist and one-time Charleston Mayor Joseph Johnson in 1835, 56 Society made LGBT history starting in 1962. At that time, British author Gordon Langley Hall moved into the home and began a major restoration of it. Working closely with the Historic Charleston Foundation, Hall transformed the classic Greek Revival style single house back to its original glory. With Hall's contribution, 56 Society St. became an excellent example of high style Charleston preservation and one that Hall always "planned to share with his adopted city."

However, Gordon Hall was always a bit of an outsider, and in the end, the people of Charleston would not accept him. Many considered Hall to be a "black sheep" because he suffered gender confusion and was a person born intersexed. By 1966 after surviving many years of ill health, Hall opted to undergo sex-reassignment surgery to improve his condition. Thus, in 1968, Hall had a sex-change operation and returned to 56 Society shortly after as Dawn Pepita Hall. Because of his impressive wealth, Charleston socialites were sympathetic to his (now her) cause. However, less than a year later after Dawn Hall decided not to dilign herself

with elite Charleston bachelors and instead chose to marry a local black mechanic, white Charlestonians rejected both Dawn and her mate, John-Paul Simmons. Local whites did everything in their power to stop Dawn and Simmons from being married. "Friends" tried to talk Dawn out of it; they harassed them with phone calls, they killed their beloved pets, shot out their windows, and even hung Simmons in effigy on Society Street! However, Dawn and Simmons persevered and were married in the parlor of 56 Society after being banned (because of segregation) from all of the churches of Charleston. Because of their bravery, Dawn Hall and John-Paul Simmons became the first interracial couple ever to be married in the city of Charleston. The year was 1969.



5 Liberty Street The Arcade Theater and Nightclub

Augustus E. Constantine, a Greek-born architect and one of the more prolific but "under-appreciated" Charleston designers of the 20th century, built the Arcade Theater in 1947. It is the most recent site of this tour, and many preservationists contend that the unique period within which it was built enabled Constantine to utilize the controversial Art Moderne style. This was a decision that Constantine would likely not have made at any other time, and thus reinforces the building as an important asset to Charleston's downtown character. After 28 years as a historic movie theater, the Arcade closed its doors to moving pictures in 1975. However, in 1984, the Arcade Theater would reopen as one of the city's most infamous lavender hotspots. One can only imagine the courage that it took for local gay persons to brave Southern homophobia and national hysteria over the newly discovered AIDS virus to congregate publicly in such a traditional city as Charleston in the 1980s. Gay men, more open-minded heterosexual couples, and drag queens flocked to the Arcade to let loose, dance, and to enjoy the gender-bending performance art. The Arcade operated as "one of Charleston's few gay hang-outs... a nightclub that became one of the city's gay landmarks." As a celebrity establishment that many gay and straight citizens adored, it was a treasure-trove disco that hosted some of the most famous drag queens in the business. Besides Toni L'Amore and Angel Austin, the Arcade provided a stage for Savannahian showstopper Samantha Sinclair, Brooke Collins, Charleston's infamous Miss Africa, and the Lady Chablis.

Unfortunately, city officials revoked the Arcade's license to Operide in 1997 because of its "controversial" character. Shortly after, the College of Charleston purchased the property and initiated plans to demolish the building to make room for a new business school. The Arcade will fall sometime this year, presenting just one more disturbing example of a lavender landmark sacrificed.

