

Queer Space: Athens, GA

Self-Guided Tour

Last Updated: May 2023

Land Acknowledgement: I acknowledge that this nation was founded upon the exclusions and erasures of many Indigenous people's cultures and stories, including those of the Muscogee-Creek, Cherokee, and Chickasaw peoples who took care of the land upon which I work and live in the state of Georgia. I wish to pay my respects to the Indigenous land caretakers past, present, and emerging. [Learn more here.](#)

Labor Acknowledgment: I further wish to acknowledge the enslaved peoples, primarily of African descent, whose labor built much of the wealth of this country and state. I recognize my complicity in the white supremacy that continues to inflict damage upon their descendants and see resources and actions toward accountability and making amends.

What is a Queer Space? [Listen to the introduction here.](#)

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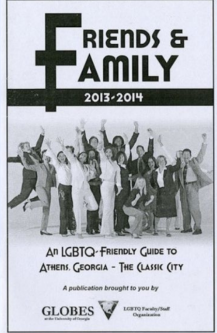
Lay Park

Slightly tucked away north of downtown, this park was the second location of the *Athens Pride* picnic.

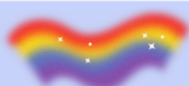
We all may be familiar with the *Athens Pride and Queer Collective* organization which holds a festival and parade each year, but you can't have *Athens Pride* without GLOBES



- the Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Employees and Supporters group! The first Pride began in 1998 when *GLOBES* held a Pride Picnic at Lake Herrick. Annette Hatton started this group in 1994 alongside Nancy MacNair and Vernon Wall. It was a way for gay employees, mainly in the university setting, to gain support and community.




BOOKLET, "FRIENDS AND FAMILY: AN LGBTQ-FRIENDLY GUIDE TO ATHENS, GEORGIA - THE CLASSIC CITY," 2013-2014 GLOBES (GAY, LESBIAN OR BISEXUAL EMPLOYEES AND SUPPORTERS) RECORDS, HARGRETT LIBRARY.



GLOBES contributions:

- (Left) Published the Friends & Family Guide to Athens, GA annually providing names of safe spaces, businesses, and people in town
- 2005: Advocating to pass "soft benefits" for domestic partners of the LGBTQ community at UGA, then the secured benefits in 2012 which were passed in 2013.
 - Collaborating with college employees in the USG system to secure their benefits
- Monthly meetings and a community listserv
- Bringing in nationally known LGBTQ speakers
- Funding the Annette Hatton Student Leadership Award Scholarship at UGA



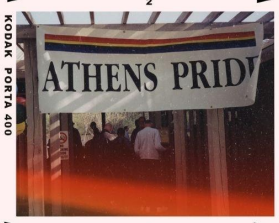

Annette started it for what she describes as a “selfish reason” - she didn’t have a community, so she created it.

GLOBES was especially important in 2005: *GLOBES* worked to pass “soft benefits" for domestic partners and spearheaded an effort for full domestic partner benefits. Another step to secure domestic partner benefits occurred in 2012. UGA music professor Adrian

Childs was instrumental in the soft benefits victory. Ricky Roberts wrote an excellent proposal for the university council seeking full health insurance benefits, which the university council endorsed but the regents vetoed. *(Photo above L to R: Deidre Kane, Annette Hatton, and Ricky Roberts)*

In 2013, the University System of Georgia extended voluntary benefits to domestic partners. In 2014, *GLOBES* helped to pass a resolution through University Council to add “gender identity and expression” to the University’s Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment (NDAH) and Equal Opportunity (EO) policies.

PRIDE BEGAN IN 1998 AS A PICNIC ORGANIZED BY GLOBES: Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Employees and Supporters.

PHOTOGRAPHS, ATHENS PRIDE PICNIC, 2006.
GLOBES (GAY, LESBIAN OR BISEXUAL EMPLOYEES AND SUPPORTERS) RECORDS, HARGRETT LIBRARY

GLOBES began in 1994 when Annette Hatton was looking for community amongst queer employees at UGA. Nancy MacNair and Vernon Wall (also known as Coretta Scott Queen) helped her organize a meeting on May 17th, 1994. GLOBES inspired change, community, and allyship within Athens.

The organizing of *GLOBES* created tangible change, and we have people like Annette to thank for doing that work. A committee was formed after *GLOBES* to focus more on the *Athens Pride* events due to the growth. Though the event had already taken place at the pavilion on Lake Herrick for years, having a committee and board for Pride helped the event take off. In 2011, they moved to Lay Park to expand, and in 2013, they achieved non-profit 501c3 status. Since then, Athens Pride has taken up the streets of Downtown for festivals and partied it up at Terrapin, a gay-owned brewery, to show pride.

Cameron Jay, 2021-22 President of Athens Pride and Queer Collective, had his very first pride at the Lay Park festival in 2014 and came in with a hat covering his entire face. After the event, Cameron left with a smile and his hat completely off of his head! It was a major step in his coming-out process. Flash forward to the present



day - Cameron Jay started an Athens Rainbow Crosswalk Initiative in 2019 through Athens Pride, collecting 8,000 signatures to install the crosswalk on College Avenue. In October 2022, the crosswalk was painted. *Crosswalk Photo: Jessica Gratiny, R&B*



In 2022, Athens Pride merged with Athens Queer Collective, a group of old Athens Pride board members who broke off from Athens Pride years before due to seeking more of a focus on community engagement and year-round events. Athens Pride at that time had a narrowed focus on the annual festival. As years passed and

leadership changed, priorities and values changed towards community support, and the groups merged to become Athens Pride and Queer Collective (APQC). The following summer, APQC raised the first Pride Progress Flag over City Hall and hosted their first Athens Pride Parade which brought nearly 3,500 people out. The parade ended at Lay Park! *Flag photo: Sidney Chansamone, R&B*

Athens Pride and Queer Collective (APQC) is a very active group in town, hosting sports leagues, support groups, and an annual festival and parade. If you want to check them out please do so on social media or their website athenspride.org.

Memorial Hall

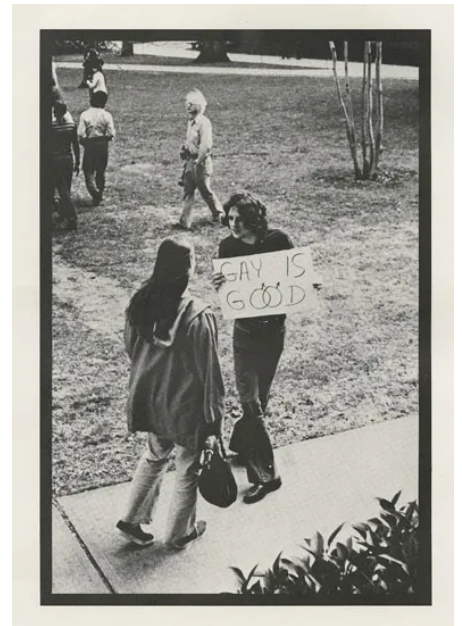
101 Sanford Drive | Research Assistants: Callan Berry and John Jardin

Huge thank you to CJ Bartunek's research, interviews, and article, [linked here](#).

March 10th marks the anniversary of a dance at Memorial Hall that started a revolution. Sounds a bit silly, right? Dancing being controversial? Especially a student-organized dance?

Let's back this up a bit and set the scene. It's 1971 - a time of social revolution. With anti-war sentiment in regard to the Vietnam War and the Stonewall riots occurring in 1969, students were speaking up and organizing to make a change on their campuses and communities. *Photo: 1972 UGA Pandora Yearbook, courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library.*

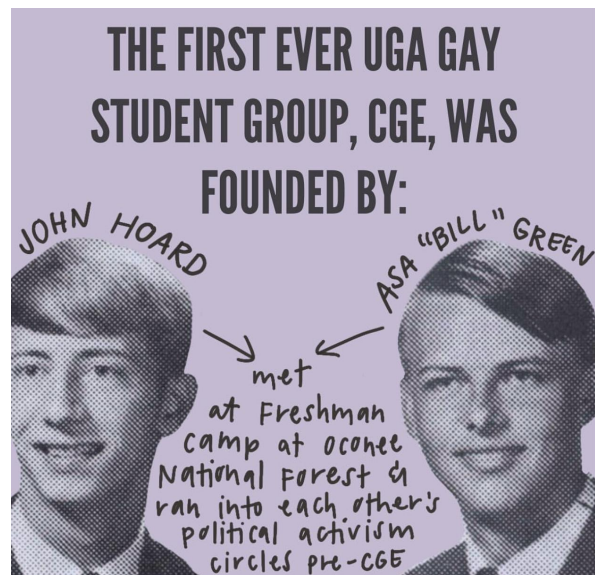
Two gay students named Asa "Bill" Green and John Hoard created the first gay student group on campus called CGE: the Committee on Gay Education.



When John Hoard moved to Athens from Savannah, GA in 1968, he wasn't quite sure what to expect. Quite shy in high school, he'd get lost in words about homosexuality to try to put words to the feelings he'd been experiencing but was unable to speak about. After graduating high school, he became bold, driving to South Carolina on the weekends with his gay friends to hit the nightclubs that admitted 17-year-olds. How would he express himself in college? What would be appropriate? Would he even meet other gay people? It all was up in the air.

The town and school were a lot different than they had been 7 years before Charlayne Hunter-Gault and Hamilton Holmes integrated the university, braving harassment and threats. Despite this, openly being gay at the time had been an unthinkable prospect - it was something under wraps. The Ku Klux Klan was a prevalent force in the 60s and 70s, especially in the Athens area.

The gay social scene in Athens existed despite the pressure of living in the bible belt during a high-risk time. It was pretty underground, and by the late 60s, the members were growing bolder and more open, hanging out in groups in public like in front of the original Varsity downtown which is now the Chick-Fil-A. Many private parties were held at the time, providing safety to socialize and dress in drag without threat.



All of it would have stayed underground had it not been for the Stonewall Riots in 1969, empowering LGBTQ people around the country to stand up. Both Hoard and Green were interested in the post-Stonewall organizing. They were in different friendship circles freshman year but ran into each other often at political events. They began to



throw around the idea of forming a student group that would provide a space for gay people to talk about and educate the general public about their issues.

On November 9th, Bill Green and John Hoard proposed the creation of the Committee to Dr. Karl King, asking if he'd be their adviser. Dr.

King was a familiar sociologist who taught sex ed courses in the Home Economics department. He was progressive, sex-positive, and the go-to source for all sexual issues for the Red and Black. He believed that sex should be openly discussed between parents and children and that ignorance about sexuality resulted in unhealthy attitudes and relationships, so he agreed to be their advisor with the premise that the educational dimension would be valuable, asking Hoard and Green to be guest lecturers for his popular "Family Relations" class, speaking on the topic of homosexuality in front of lecture halls of as many as 200 students.

A common question students would ask at these lectures: Do you wear dresses all the time? They were confused by the distinction between gender and sexuality.

Another question someone had: Does speaking so publicly about your sexual orientation make you afraid?

Hoard replied, "Yes. But we have faith in society. We think it has the potential to change, and we think it will."

On Wednesday, November 10, 1971, fliers stating “COME OUT! ALL PEOPLE-GAY-STRAIGHT-AND BI- ARE INVITED TO COME AND LIBERATE THEMSELVES!” on the 11th for the first-ever CGE meeting.

The first meeting was a success with around 67 attendees. Jim Kinney, the associate to the UGA provost, was particularly upset about angry phone calls made to the homes of UGA administration members the evening of the meeting asking that CGE not be recognized as a UGA group.

The administration, specifically Dean Sims, refused even after many emotional meetings to recognize the Committee on Gay Education as a student organization. The CGE carried on with their meetings, booking rooms through “Intersect,” a student group that helped facilitate events on campus for students who weren’t a part of the formal groups.

After a few months of CGE meetings, Hoard and Green ached for a dance. If straight people could do it, why couldn’t they? LGBT activists around the country planned dances and drag balls to embrace their identities and live in peace with their lovers. Other universities up north like Ithaca and Cornell held dances for gay people, but down South, it was unheard of, LGBT history remained buried and news traveled very slowly.

Quietly, in early February of 1972, the CGE went through Intersect to book Memorial Hall for March 10th. Once booked, Bill Green proclaimed that the dance would be the “first public gay function in the Southeast” to the Red and Black. It was not the first



public gay function, but rather, the first gay dance at a Southeastern university.

The reaction to the Red and Black article was bombastic. Calls and letters condemning the dance poured in from students and parents. It even caused John Cox, the director of student activities, to cancel the ballroom reservation.

CGE's advisor, Dr. Karl King, resigned from the group, quitting after the announcement of the dance, not out of homophobia or thinking that the dance would encourage sodomy, but because he was education-focused, not activism focused. He did not want to be involved in "confrontation" and wrote, "I sincerely hope that this action is not construed by the Directors or the membership as being a rejection of individuals or individual lifestyles."

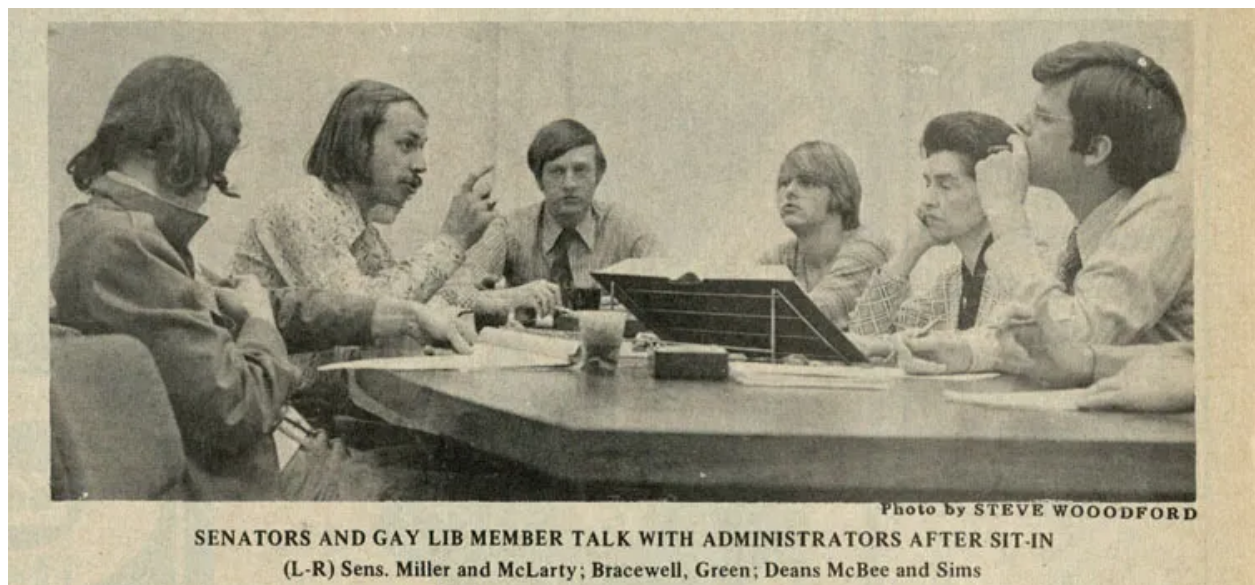


Photo: Bill Green and student senators meet with the administration about dance (Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library / University of Georgia Libraries)

Bill Green argued that the dance did have educational value: "Our purpose in holding this dance is to have a large number of gays turn out, have a nice evening, and leave; and for the world to look at it and realize the world hasn't come to an end," he told the Red and Black.

After protesting against the administration's cancellation of their event in Memorial Hall, the dean of student affairs appeared after two hours and told them that the university could be held liable for promoting sodomy which was against the state's sodomy laws at the time. The only way the dance could happen was through a court case.

The ACLU refused to take on CGE's case, and even local lawyers backed out of it. On Thursday, March 9th, CGE members filed an equity complaint requesting a temporary restraining order preventing the defendants (the administration) from stopping the dance. The hearing was scheduled for 3 pm on Friday, March 10th, the night the dance occurred.

Judge James Barrow presided over the case, and it was only cleared by him hours before the dance occurred. At 6:15 pm, less than 2 hours before the dance began, Barrow cited the 1st and 14th Amendments allowing the dance to take place because the university did not have sufficient evidence that the dance would lead to criminal activity (sodomy) like they were trying to prove.

A band and performer was set: Ravenstone opening up for Atlanta drag queen Diamond Lil. Around 500 people showed up to the dance, including B-52's stars Ricky Wilson and Keith Strickland. This was before their fame. For many students, the fear of being outed to their families on the news or in the paper was large enough to keep some from attending. *Photo: Diamond Lil's Personal Collection, Flickr.*



The dance brought other dangerous visitors to campus as well. One of the members of Ravenstone, Michael Simpson, went to the stairs outside of the building to go over the setlist. Then, a member of the KKK appeared, asking, “is this where the queers are holding the dance? You’re one of the faggy boys playing at the queer dance, ain’t you,” and Simpson asked, “Why do you care? You’re not a student.” The man said that the Klan was not happy about the dance. Simpson scoffed, and in response, the KKK member commented that it wouldn’t be hard to find out where Simpson and the other bandmates lived and left. [Hear Simpson talk more about this night here.](#)

The dance started later than 8 pm due to the 6 pm court decision, and Ravenstone broke out with their original song, Watercolor, and the crowd began to dance. There were onlookers above the crowd because, inside Memorial Hall, the ballroom had balconies that floated above where the main dance floor is located. Many were not there for the performance or to have a good time, and they stared with hatred into the audience.



After Ravenstone rocked with some Bowie covers, Diamond Lil in her sequined attire brought down the house. She was a legend in Atlanta and Savannah. At this event, she lip-synced the words to Tammy Wynette’s Stand by Your Man, performed a comedy

routine, and lip-synced again to Aretha Franklin. People on the floor were glossy-eyed and excited, while those on the balcony gasped in horror.

Closing out the night, Green returned to the stage and exclaimed “This is not a climax. This is a beginning. And it’s going to go on and on.”

Ravenstone left the hall, and returned to their car where they found a small printed card on their windshield that said “You have been patronized by the Ku Klux Klan.” They did not let it ruin their night but it shook them a bit.

The 60 dollars collected at the dance were not enough to cover legal fees from their court hearing, so individual donors paid the rest of CGE’s expenses. In the Red and Black, they ran a letter from famous gay rights activist, Frank Kameny, who commented on the audacity of Dean Sims’ reasoning that the dance would lead to sodomy. He commented on heterosexual people engaging in sodomy in books and marriage manuals and called for UGA to ban the books of those if it truly was a problem. The letter ended with “of course, bigots and cowards and the politically corrupt are rarely consistent -- are they Dean Sims?”

After the dance, Bill Green unfortunately received death threats from people for organizing it. He received calls nightly at his part-time job from one man threatening to come and shoot him. An older man stalked Green, taking photos of him in town. That year was a hard one for him, as he crashed on people’s couches, afraid to sleep in his own bed.

More recently, in 2005, the LGBT Resource Center now called the Pride Center, housed in Memorial Hall, honored him at the first Lavender Graduation and created a “Founder’s Award” in his name. He passed away in 2013 in his Panama City home with his family.

As for John Hoard, in 1987, he was diagnosed with AIDS. His T-cell counts began to drop in the early 90s, but he still stayed positive. After an initial depression, he returned to himself and said “I thought, you can either die when you die, or you can die when you’re still alive.” Against all odds, he lived to receive drugs that allowed him to manage his illness in 1995. In 2015, he married his husband Donald Taylor-Farmer. He passed away in March 2018 to liver failure.

The dance had a positive effect on the University of Georgia, and later that same year of the dance, in 1972, CGE won another lawsuit against UGA in federal court which allowed it to be recognized as a student group and host a conference and dance each year. The ripple effect was in action. In 1975, an openly gay law student, Jodie O’Connell, a former director of CGE, was elected student body president of UGA.

On March 1st, 2022, Historic Athens held their Mardi Gras event at Terrapin Brewery in collaboration with APQC with the theme of Historic Pride to honor the 50th anniversary of the CGE dance. Congressman John Barrow (left), the son of Judge James Barrow, attended the event and spoke about what he remembered his dad telling him about the case in 1972. A Diamond Lil drag hour was held afterward with 9 performers.



Former Georgia congressman John Barrow speaks during the Athens Pride and Queer Collective Diamond Lil Drag Hour at the 4th Annual Historic Athens Mardi Gras Masquerade and Block Party at Terrapin Brewery in Athens, Ga., on Tuesday, March 1, 2022. In 1971, two UGA students, John Hoard and Bill Green, started the Committee on Gay Education at UGA and organized the first gay dance at UGA. UGA staff canceled the dance and CGE filed an equality complaint. Rep. Barrow's father Judge James Barrow presided over the case. Judge Barrow issued a temporary restraining order against UGA stating that "under the Constitution of the United States. I think these people have the right to assemble on campus tonight."

JOSHUA L. JONES, ATHENS BANNER-HERALD USA TODAY NETWORK

Also in 2022, a history tour was held on March 10th, the 50th anniversary, by Caro Caden. Michael Simpson from Ravenstone attended the event all the way from Los Angeles and 25 people gathered in the Ballroom to honor the history.

[Listen to Michael Simpson's account he gave of the historic night here.](#)

On March 31st, the UGA Pride Center threw its Pride Prom in honor of the 50th anniversary with a successful turnout.

Fine Arts Building

255 Baldwin Street

[Listen along to this tour stop at this link.](#)

The gay history of this building stands out because of the time period. We'll take a trip to the 1930s and 40s for this stop.

First, let's get some quick building history: Fine Arts used to house all of the arts on campus, and you can see it in the mural and engravings on the front of the building. They say "MUSIC - ART - DRAMA", and the mural outside has artists on the left, sculpting, musicians on the right, playing, and actors in the middle, complete with comedy/tragedy masks. The mural, completed in 1942, was painted by Jean Charlot who was an artist in residence for 4 years through the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration. Charlot was one of Diego Rivera's assistants. There's a lot of Mexican influence as Charlot was born of French, Spanish, and Mexican Indian descent.



The Fine Arts Theatre inside of the building was built in 1941 by the Works Progress Administration. It was the last WPA project at UGA and the most expensive at the time, costing 450,000 dollars to create. Thank you, FDR! After completion, it was a training location for WWII pilots, and then the department began to use it to put on productions.

Theatre had been going on long before the building was made. In 1893, UGA students created the “Thalian Dramatic Club,” one of the oldest college theatre clubs in the U.S. Later, in 1926, the Blackfriars, a rival group of Thalias was formed.

The rivalry could only go on for five years before Journalism Professor, Edward C. Crouse stepped in to merge the groups and create the “Thalian-Blackfriars,” the official theatre group of UGA that rehearsed and performed at the Seney Stovall Chapel which is next to the Varsity about to get torn down on Broad Street and Milledge Ave. They moved to the Fine Arts Building in 1941 once it was completed.

Edward C. Crouse, the founder of the Department of Dramatic Art (now Department of Theatre and Film Studies) started the first drama courses in 1939 after staging three productions a year as a journalism professor, receiving promotions. After continuously producing shows and increasing community interest in theatre, the department officially began. He took the job as the drama director, finally being in a field that excited him. His history in theatre dates back to when he was ten years old: building sets, making costumes, and performing in front of his sisters, uncle, and aunt. He hated journalism and only turned to it because opportunities were not popping up magically with theatre after graduating from school, and he wasn't much of an opportunity seeker.



Long before Edward Crouse came to UGA, he met another man of the same name: Edward Wormley. They met in school in Rochelle, Illinois when they were teenagers, going camping and hiking together in their free time.



Both were creative and artistic souls, with Wormley's passion being interior design and Crouse's in theatre. The Eds had grown up with traumatic and nontraditional family lives. Ed Wormley, the interior designer, felt as if his dad was "embarrassed" by him and his parents were divorced. Ed Crouse, the theatre director, lost his mother at a young age and grew up with an alcoholic dad trying to make ends meet, but was raised ultimately by an aunt and uncle. *Photos: Edward J Wormley and Edward Crouse papers, #7684. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.*

By age 18, in 1925, they became lovers. Both had come out to their families this year and did not face much hardship about it from their families due to the fact they already were "othered" by their identities as atheists and men having artistic endeavors. Here are dramatized letters from 1925:

Crouse: Ed, what would the world think, could they but glance at our letters? If our neighbors talk about us, let them talk. Of course I believe we could be freer and happier if we lived in a city. I will give up my rose-covered cottage dreams for you.

Wormley: I feel no shame for anything we have done, and I want to live in the city with you. Just imagine what all we could do.

Applause of a production.

Crouse: I enjoy it frankly when it goes well. When the applause occurs and everything comes together, I feel downright euphoric. Ever since I've been done with the Romance production I have felt stuck in the sticks. The audience loved that live monkey in the show. Where do I go from here? The people aren't right here, things are dry and most Southerners are vapid. I'm sitting here drinking at Hugh Hodgson's and have never felt so alone. The people are different here than in the city when I'm with you. I suppose I'll make friends with the bartender. What if I moved to Chicago and lived with you? I'd forget about everything here. It seems so pointless now.

Wormley/Buster: Chicago is lively, you and I talked of living in a city together and I have a feeling we will soon. I feel as if I may move from here soon, New York City is calling and my designs are taking off. You are special, dear, and you have made many friends so far. Do not let your loneliness get the best of you. We will see each other soon. I attended a Halloween ball with a friend last week but found it the most disgusting and pathetic spectacle I hope to ever witness. There were about a thousand present, including a sprinkling of soldiers, sailors, and policemen. Fully half the number were in drag. Nobody looks happy or gay, and the painted faces too sad to describe. I miss you. Write soon.

Narration: Come 1934, Crouse sat down and read through all of Wormley's letters to him, reflecting on them in a sentimental way. He referred to Wormley as "Buster" in many letters.

Crouse: Buster, your letters were so damned good, and so sincere. Mine, by comparison, must be a sorry lot. I know a lot of them have been pretentious -- I mean pretending. Despite all our ordeals and self-searching, we've had pretty happy lives, and made immeasurably more

so by each other's companionship. I often think how utterly empty the world would be without you, if you were to die. I've realized so definitely and strongly this year that you are essential to my existence. I tried to be with a woman. I felt pliable as putty, passionless as can be.

Narration: Their letters were many, as Buster lived far away in Chicago, later in New York, and Crouse in Athens. There arose one conflict in 1938 when Crouse decided he'd fallen in love with a former student who starred in theatre productions before. Crouse seduced him and persuaded him that "swinging both ways" was acceptable. He even sent photos of the new lover to Buster in addition to all the details of his love affair. Ed Wormley was okay with Crouse having sexual relations with other men, but falling in love was a different story. He responded in June of 1938:

Buster/Wormley: He sounds like a nice boy, and his pictures are appealing. But poor, sweet, confused, darling, why do you feel disgusted? Why does it all seem so cheap to you? I don't feel those things, EVER, about my relation with you. Our kind of physical pleasure and love is just as "natural" because it is so widespread as the "regular" kind. The one thing I fear and dread, my sweet, about the possibility of you forming a happy alliance sometime with some charming boy who loves your attention is that such a relationship may upset the schedule of visits and vacations we have come to spend together. They are my real life. I couldn't give them up without enormous loss of happiness. Would a threesome work? I hate to think of it... now please don't pine, and remember I shall love you always and want to help you. If I only could. Call it love, call it damn-foolishness, I think about you to the exclusion of my work.

Crouse: I am so unhappy here. I drink myself to sleep. You've always been sure of what you wanted and you've always got it. You are the luckiest and

I guess the happiest person I know. As for me, I no longer have any confidence. I've just started being pedestrian I guess. I've got to bestir myself. The old charm has worn thin. I don't like to stay in my room alone at night. The more I think about my present work, the less confident I am that I'm not just marking time waiting for something I don't know what. I have no desire to make a real career out of my work or anything else I can think of. I just want to have plenty of money and not work except putter about the house and go away when I want to in a nice car with you. Let me join you in New York.

Narration: and so he did. Crouse moved in with Wormley in New York, taking extensive trips to Mexico, the Caribbean, Europe, and Southeast Asia as well. Wormley hired him to work for his firm, having him install displays for furniture. In the 1950s, Wormley's work had taken off but he still made sure that despite his busy life he would leave it behind for these extended vacations with Crouse. Later on in 1968, Crouse and Wormley retired permanently to Weston, Connecticut, and adopted pet corgis, fulfilling the rose cottage country house dreams.



I love these letters because it works against the idea that all gay relationships were secretive and despairing before the Stonewall era. These two men did not see each other as if they were doing something wrong. This union withstood the test of time and distance as both encouraged each other's independence and identities. *Photo of Edward Wormley (left) and Crouse (right) with their corgi in CT, 1970.*

George Contini, a gay theatre professor, notes that the theatre department can be a queer space by producing stories by queer playwrights and focusing on new works. In 2003, the theatre department put on a production of the Laramie Project, collecting 220 interviews at the Tate Student Center to mimic the work of the original production. Last year, Fall of 2022, the department produced Torch Song, a gay theatre piece written by Harvey Fierstein.

With queer people being more in the mainstream, how do we examine texts? & how do we work to center marginalized voices as well as non-straight ones?

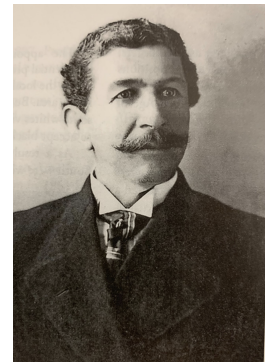
The media we consume, including theatre, challenges our ideas and outlook. This is why we must center new works to even be challenged. While it is important to learn of our past and watch older media, it is of the same importance to imagine our future and challenge the present.

The Hobbit Habit

146 E Clayton St

Here we are at 146 E Clayton St, nearly central downtown. Check out the design of this building for a second. What's different about it from the rest of downtown? It's made out of beautiful marble, unlike its wooden neighbors. It was built and owned by Monroe "Pink" Morton. You can see the year it was built which was carefully carved in the marble on the top. Welcome to the Morton Building.

Photo: "Georgia Backroads" magazine, Summer 2017 volume.

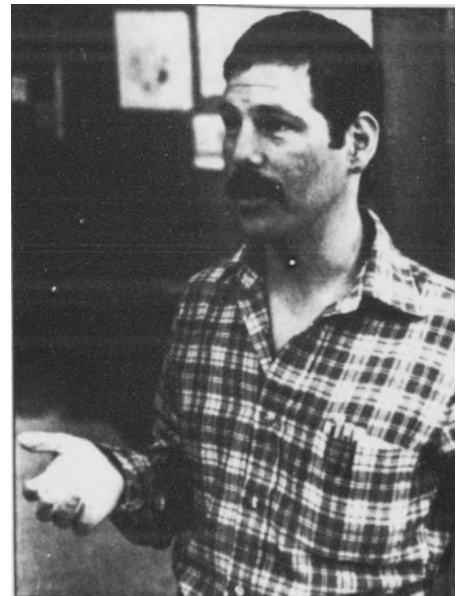


Monroe "Pink" Morton was born a slave in 1856 but by 1914 owned around 30 buildings in Athens. He paved the way for Black-owned businesses and was the first Black person to build, own, and operate a Vaudeville theater in America. Most Athenians are familiar with the Morton Theatre as a gem of Athens history, past and present: Louis Armstrong and Ma Rainey even played there!

The building you're standing in front of was built in 1907 and was home to *The Progressive Era*, the third oldest African-American-owned newspaper in Athens, Georgia. Pink Morton was the editor and publisher when he bought the publication in 1914. Only a single issue of *The Progressive Era* has survived to this day which [you can read here](#).

After the newspaper years, this building was home to a diamonds and silverware business (1958)... that is until roughly 1969 when another hidden gem moved in: a queer-owned and operated bookstore called "The Hobbit Habit."

The value of this queer space came from the lack of queerness on the shelves of the UGA Library. One man complained that after doing a search of "gay" and "homosexual" in the UGA Library there was only one book to be found: *The H Persuasion*: "a book that 'cures gays' by aversion therapy" published in 1971 by a New York-based cult named the Aesthetic Realism Society. Bruce Hamerslough, Julia Penelope, and Frances Smith listened to the complaints and took the matter into their own hands, ensuring The Hobbit Habit was complete with a section about homosexuality. *Photo: Red and Black, 1985. Bruce Hamerslough.*

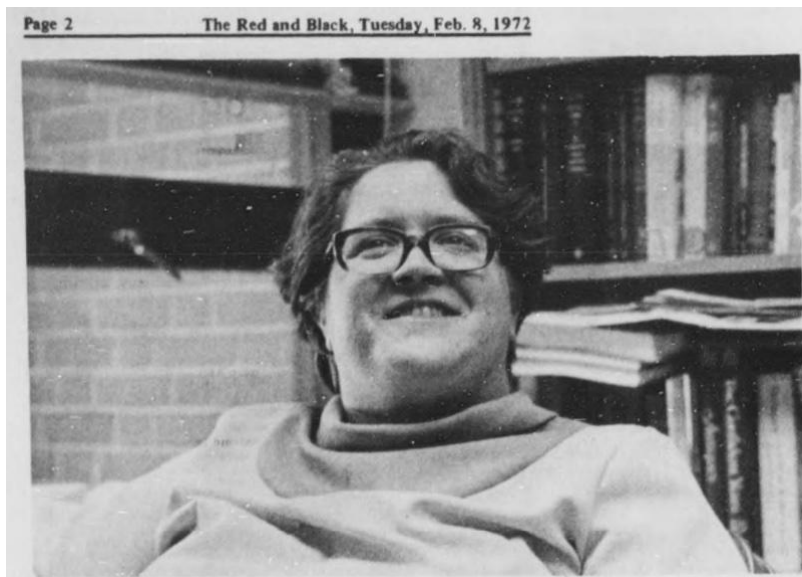


Bruce and Frances were tied to the queer community in different ways, with Bruce being a gay astrologer and Frances being the mother of a local hellraiser, lesbian linguist, and UGA professor Julia Penelope, another co-owner of the Hobbit Habit.

Bruce Hamerslough, an experienced out and proud gay astrologer went on from the Hobbit Habit to his Astro-articles being published nationally and internationally. He

wrote two books on astrology and co-founded a Metaphysical Center where he taught astrology through counseling, forecasting, and relationship analysis.

One astrologer remembers Bruce for always being open about his partners, mentioning his boyfriend in conversations in a casual way which many wouldn't do in the 70s and 80s. Bruce was the first astrologer to discuss his HIV-positive status at a national astrology conference in the late 1980s. I am thankful for Bruce's boldness and desire to be visible in queer history, as he wrote lengthy Athens Gay Lesbian Alliance Newsletters all about the history we're talking about here. I was moved to tears when I learned we lost Bruce to AIDS in 1995, but it made me want to tell his story even more.



Julia Penelope taught as a professor at many universities besides UGA and made her mark everywhere she stepped foot. A theorist at heart, Julia's works demanded discussion. One of my favorite quotes of hers is from her book *Call Me Lesbian*:
There is no single, narrow, one-sentence definition of

"The Lesbian." The sexologists may have been the ones to name us, but we can, and do, create ourselves. *Photo: Red and Black, 1972. Julia Penelope.*

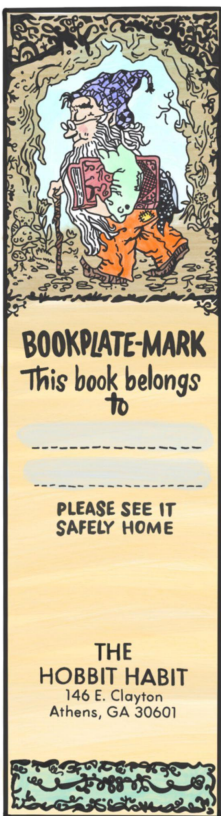
She encouraged people to write, read, and create Lesbian works. Julia was a co-founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in NYC and had a clear understanding that Lesbian history was disappearing as quickly as it was being made. Annette Hatton remembers dropping off her ex-husband at Park Hall and noticing a car with the bumper sticker

“Softball Dyke.” This was Julia Penelope Stanley’s car. Another UGA professor, Fran Teague, said she was chiefly known for riding her motorcycle onto campus. When Julia left UGA, the faculty was sad about her absence on campus.

[Check out an audio soundscape play here to imagine you’re walking into the Hobbit Habit and overhearing a conversation between Julia, Bruce, and Frances.](#)

Julia Penelope passed away in January 2013, leaving a large lesbian legacy that we all can look back on and read about thanks to the archives she founded.

The end of this queer space on E Clayton came from the building owner’s decision to increase rent. The bookstore moved to 298 E Washington St in 198 before the ultimate closure. The rent was significantly lowered after the rise of the Georgia Square Mall and then increased greatly in the following five years. Remember how malls were such a moment in the 80s? Funny to think about how the mall is a ghost town now, about to be torn down for new development. *Left photo: a recreation of the original bookmark, digital drawing by Caro Caden.*



The rent rising is a common reality, even now as nearby buildings like the Varsity are being torn down to make way for developers creating student apartments. The Georgia Heights apartments surrounding this building run for about \$2,000 monthly for a one-bedroom. (2023 pricing)

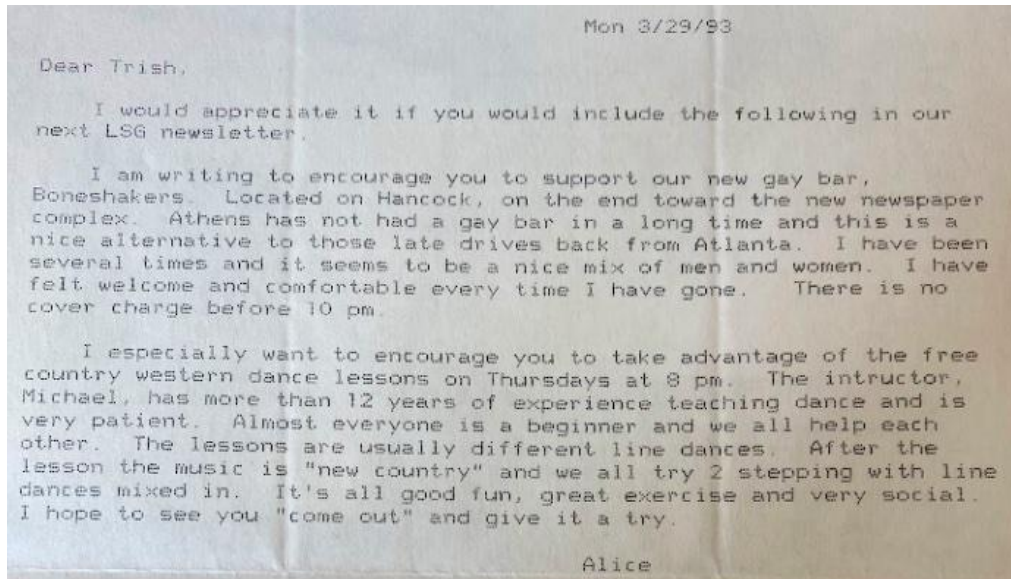
This building is a part of the Downtown historic district. The Morton Building now houses two boutique stores aimed towards a typical sorority/fraternity style, Onward Reserve and Fab’rik, with upstairs housing that in the past has been rented out by fraternity brothers.

The people who can hold space here now look different from their prior owners and builders - they are the ones with the economic wealth and privilege to use it.

Boneshakers

433 E Hancock Ave

A letter from the Annette Hatton papers (Hargrett Library) March 29th, 1993



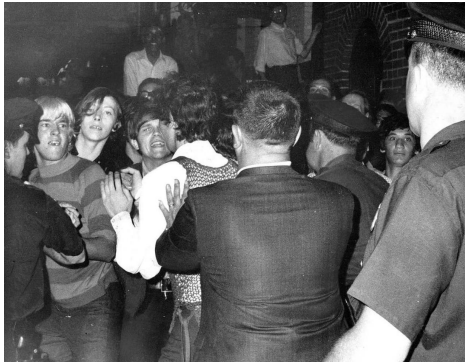
Dear Trish,

I would appreciate it if you would include the following in our next LSG newsletter.

I am writing to encourage you to support our new gay bar, Boneshakers. Located on Hancock! Athens has not had a gay bar in a long time and this is a nice alternative to those late drives back from Atlanta. I have been several times and it seems to be a nice mix of men and women. I have felt welcome and comfortable every time I have gone. There is no cover charge before 10 pm.

I especially want to encourage you to take advantage of the free country western dance lessons on Thursdays at 8 pm. The instructor Michael has more than 12 years of experience teaching dance and is very patient. Almost everyone is a beginner and we all help each other. After the lesson, we all listen to "new country" and try two-stepping with line dancing added in. I hope to see you come out and give it a try.

Alice



Boneshakers, one of Athens' longest-running gay bars, opened in 1993. The bar was owned by Greg Martin, a gay man with strong ties to the community. He was present at the Stonewall Riots in New York City in 1969. Boneshakers was claimed as a gay bar and located on the outer fringe of downtown. The scene of the club? Disco and dance.

Photo: Greg Martin at Stonewall Riots, 1969. He is pictured in the striped shirt on the left. Credit: Greg Martin, Facebook.

The location used to house The Rockfish Palace, a place known for having Widespread Panic concerts. After Martin bought it, much work was needed on the building. He completed the renovations and opened Boneshakers.

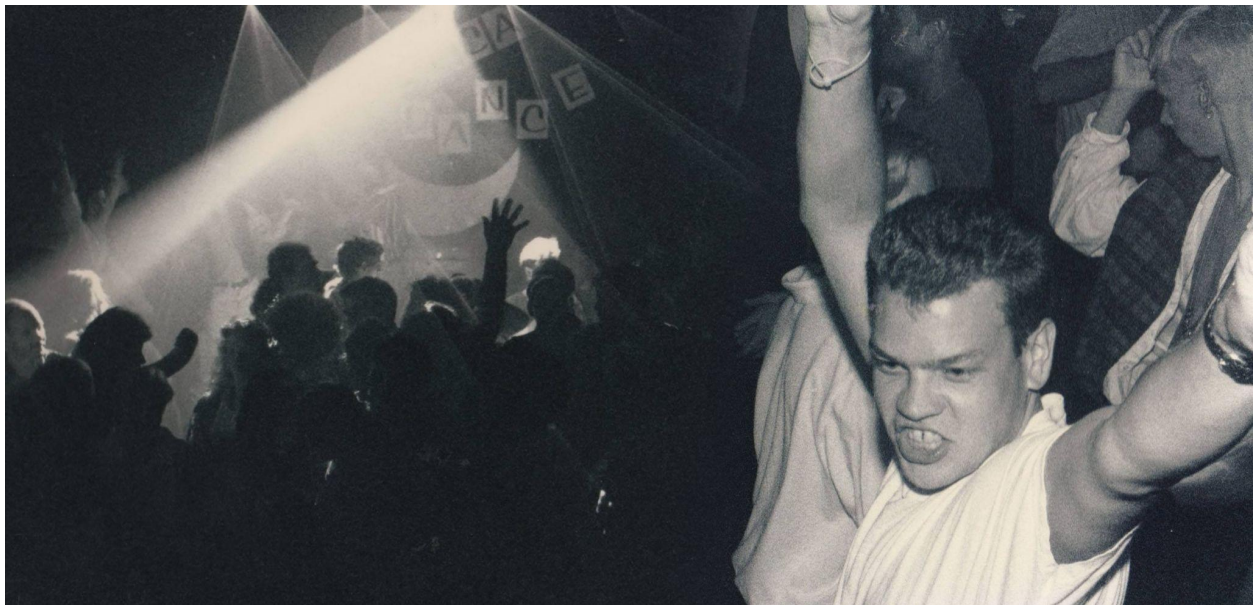
Talking to members of the community, I heard of two other queer bars in town: one of them was called Club Rendezvous/Cloud 9 which was located at 215 Tallassee Road, a large building off the Tallassee Road exit that has a sign now that says “The Island Nightclub.” It’s painted with different colors but has been abandoned for a while. Club Rendezvous was poppin’ but short-lived. It was the first bar in town that didn’t have just a “one-night-a-week” gay night. *Photo: Athens Gay Lesbian Alliance Newsletter, Feb 1985.*



The most documentation I could find of a gay bar in existence was Boneshakers. They hosted drag shows, dance classes, and nights where gay people could come and dance their asses off.

Typically, most gays would make the haul to Atlanta, driving a mere 3 hours round trip to get a fun night out. People would rent rooms for a weekend to go out in Atlanta to avoid having to make the rough drive back to Athens late in the night or early in the morning hungover. It was quite an ordeal.

For Athens to have their own place for gay people was progress! The location of it really played to it being more private in nature as a gay bar. Being off the main route of bars, a little too far east, helped there be a semblance of separation between it and the other typical fraternity bars. *Photo: The Boneshakers Foundation, Facebook.*



Boneshakers of course wasn't as liberal and loose as a Miami bar, George Contini notes. He said that when he walked in, it felt like he was going "back 10 years" and it was depressing.

But for others, Boneshakers was a step towards being more like Miami in a town that feels like you're stepping into a place 20 years behind everywhere else. Mike Musgrove remembers dancing late nights at Boneshakers for hours on end.

Another highlight of Boneshakers - on the 10th anniversary of Ricky Wilson's death, the B-52's invited their fans and threw a huge "Party out of Bounds" that happened annually to raise money for the AIDS Coalition of Northeast Georgia, now known as the organization Live Forward. Live Forward raised more money for AIDS support by throwing the DECA-Dance in 2000 with Boneshakers as well!

Boneshakers lived on from 1993 to 2005. A change in ownership occurred in 2001, from Greg Martin to Mark Bell, the current owner of 9D's. This brought on plenty of change.

A former Boneshakers bar regular, Lamar Bowen, said that he believed the lack of interest in the bar amounted to Mark Bell wanting to reduce the days that Boneshakers would be a "gay bar" - this was not taken well by the community.

Greg Martin felt as if the 90's hip hop scene was booming and his disco/dance theme of Boneshakers contradicted that popular trend, so he credits that for some of the lack of interest in the bar.

[Listen to interview clips about Boneshakers here, with the voices of Greg Martin, Mark Bell, Mike Musgrove, and more.](#)

The 40 Watt Club

285 W Washington Street

The 40 Watt Club takes its origins from a 40 Watt lightbulb, the only source of light, in Curtis Crowe's 171 College Avenue loft above where The Grill currently stands now. Curtis Crowe, who you may know as a band member of Athens band Pylon, held the first concert at the 40 Watt on October 31st, 1978. A legendary venue, it is known for jumpstarting famous punk bands like Pylon, R.E.M., and Love Tractor.

The 40 Watt has had 5 different locations in its time, with its third location at 256 W Clayton Street where the Caledonia Lounge used to be located, now owned by Church

Bar. The venue used to be more lowkey and small scale until Uptown Lounge closed and 40 Watt made the move from East Downtown to its current West Downtown location on Washington Street. The 40 Watt's connection to Queer History comes with its openness to booking queer musicians like the B-52's, drag troupes like the Kourtesans, and benefits like the annual Boybutante Ball event that raises money for HIV and AIDS organizations in Northeast Georgia. The intersection between queerness and punk is large. The 40 Watt also used to have "gay-friendly Monday nights" for the community.



Photo: Kaley Lefevre, Red and Black. The Kourtesans perform their 99th show at the 40 Watt. Miss He is pictured.



Photo: Felix Scheyer, Red & Black. Boybutante Ball 2023. L to R: Karmella Macchiato, Santana Sins Noir, Christina Bang, and Eros Etoile.

The Boybutante Ball is a staple annual event in Athens that occurs at the 40 Watt and was started by a group of friends (Mark Cline, Alan McArthur, Michael Del Giudice, Jason Shadix, and the late Duane Garrett) who dreamed up a party on a road trip back to Athens from Charleston. They got into a conversation about Debutante balls and

thought, “Why don’t we have a Debutante ball, but for gays in drag - a Boybutante Ball!” They decided on raising money for a cause that was close to home, helping their friends out with HIV/AIDS. Alan McArthur remembered not being super fond of the idea as he was not a huge partier. His friends assured him it would be a great time and that he could help with organizing and planning. After finding Boybutante’s first venue location, the Rockfish Palace, Alan got on board and helped with the tech side of things in 1992. The Rockfish Palace space later was home to gay bar Boneshakers. After Boybutante’s first successful year, they moved from Rockfish Palace to the 40 Watt.



The Athens gay community was hit by the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Many incredible people in the community were taken by the disease, one being Duane Garrett, one of the founders of Boybutante. Another notable loss was guitarist Ricky Wilson of the B-52’s. In response to his passing in 1985, his family made a \$30,000 donation towards



AIDS recovery and research. This donation was what jumpstarted the organization Live Forward, formerly known as AIDS Athens and the AIDS Coalition of Northeast Georgia. The B-52’s also threw several benefits to raise money for the AIDS Coalition, including one at Boneshakers bar. The final B-52’s farewell concert in 2023 at the Classic Center raised money for charities, and a large donation was made to Athens Pride and Queer Collective. Ricky Wilson is buried at Oconee Hill Cemetery and you can visit his grave today to pay respects. *Photo: Cynthia Jennings, To Die For Images.*



Photo: [AIDS Memorial Quilt](#), one of Ricky Wilson's quilt sections.

To support HIV/AIDS organizations like Live Forward now, check out the Boybutante AIDS Foundation. They have raised over a million dollars for AIDS research and hold fundraisers and Balls throughout the year. You can get involved with Boybutante as a volunteer, board member, or event attendee! [Learn more here on their website!](#)

Atomic/The Caledonia Lounge/Church Bar/LuQi Nights - the Future of Queer Nightlife?

[Listen to the podcast here.](#)