



Greenwich
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Preservation

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January 14, 2016

Hon. Meenakshi Srinivasan
Chair, New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
One Centre Street, 9th floor
New York, NY 10007

**Re: Request for Designation Julius' Bar/159 West 10th Street
(aka 188 Waverly Place), Manhattan**

Dear Chair Srinivasan:

We are approaching a significant milestone in American history this spring: April 21, 2016 will mark the fifty years since the first planned act of civil disobedience for LGBT rights, which took place at Julius' Bar at [159 West 10th Street](#). In light of this upcoming anniversary, I again urge you to consider individual landmark designation of this site, which also houses what is by many accounts the oldest gay bar in New York City, and one of the oldest continuously-operating bars in New York City.

Though Julius' Bar is located within the Greenwich Village Historic District, the designation report makes no note of its significance to cultural and civil rights history. As a result, this singularly important place currently enjoys no formal recognition or protection from the LPC on the basis of its LGBT history, and thus could be unsympathetically altered or demolished if its architectural or other features alone were not deemed worthy of preservation.

Located at the corner of West 10th Street and Waverly Place in Greenwich Village, the building at 159 West 10th Street is best known as the home to Julius' Bar since 1864. By the 1950s, the bar had begun to attract gay customers even though State Liquor Authority (SLA) rules at the time prohibited bars from serving them. Many bar owners went so far as to post signs that read, "If you are gay, please go away." The owner of Julius' was no different despite the growing gay clientele at the bar.

On April 21, 1966, three gay men from the New York City Mattachine Society organized a "Sip-In" in which they visited four bars to challenge the SLA discriminatory regulations. Formed in 1950, the Mattachine Society was one of the earliest organizations dedicated to promoting gay rights.

Their last stop was Julius' where the bartender refused to serve them after learning they were homosexual. The event marked a critical moment in LGBT history, pre-dating the Stonewall riots at the nearby Stonewall Inn in 1969. Dick Leitsch, then chairman of the Mattachine Society and one of the "Sip-In" participants, notes in a 2008 interview, "the importance of this [event], I think,

was that until this time gay people had never really fought back. We just sort of take in everything passively, didn't do anything about it. And this time we did it, and we won." They chose Julius' because it had been raided days before and was under observation. They were joined by the press who photographed powerful images of the peaceful protest. Leitsch goes on to describe the events of the day:

"...when we walked in, the bartender put glasses in front of us, and we told him that we were gay and we intended to remain orderly, we just wanted service. And he said, hey, you're gay, I can't serve you, and he put his hands over the top of the glass, which made [wonderful photographs](#). The whole thing ended up in court, and the court decided, well, yes, the Constitution says that people have the right to peacefully assemble and the state can't take that right away from you. And so the Liquor Authority can't prevent gay people from congregating in bars." – *Remembering a 1966 'Sip-In' for Gay Rights, Scott Simon, [NPR interview](#), June 28, 2008*

The next day *The New York Times* covered the incident; the headline of [the article](#) referred to the three participants as "sexual deviates," illustrating the widespread perception of homosexuality at that time. However, as Leitsch states above, the event marked a rare yet monumental moment when the gay community chose to speak out against discrimination they had faced for generations. After they were refused service, the three men filed a complaint with the city's Commission on Human Rights. This led to a 1967 state court ruling that declared the SLA needed "substantial evidence" of indecent behavior to close a bar and not just same-sex kissing or touching. The decision was a landmark case that reversed years of discrimination and became a key catalyst in the eventual gay rights movement beginning in 1969.

The building itself remains intact and in substantially the same condition from this period. Constructed as a residence in 1826, the building was originally two-and-one-half stories tall. It was raised to three stories in 1874. At some point in the first half of the 20th century, the façade was finished in stucco. Located at a prominent corner in the Village, the [ground floor bar](#) serves as a reminder of a key moment in the history of gay rights. Still operating as Julius', the bar holds an annual "Sip-In" to commemorate the 1966 event.

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation deemed Julius' Bar as [eligible](#) for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places on the basis of its place in LGBT and civil rights history. As seen in the attached letters, the designation of this site as a New York City landmark enjoys broad [support](#) by elected officials, the LGBT community, the Preservation League of New York State and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and GVSHP has requested that the LPC consider such a designation for over two years. As we approach this momentous 50th anniversary, which will spark celebrations and recognition across the city and beyond, I urge you to move ahead with landmark designation of this site.

Sincerely,



Andrew Berman
Executive Director

cc: Mayor Bill de Blasio
Public Advocate Letitia James
Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer
Congressman Jerrold Nadler
State Senator Brad Hoylman
State Senator Daniel Squadron
State Assembly Member Deborah Glick
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