

2SLGBTQIA+ Timeline in Canada

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Here you will find not only important events that were tipping points, important steps on the road to rights and representation, but also a sense of how long ago and how recently some of the events that have shaped our community have happened.

We often lose the memory of how recent some of these battles have been fought, once we have gained a measure of peace. It is important we never forget these points in our history that have shaped the world we are in today.

**Our history is expansive and this is not, by any means, a comprehensive list.*

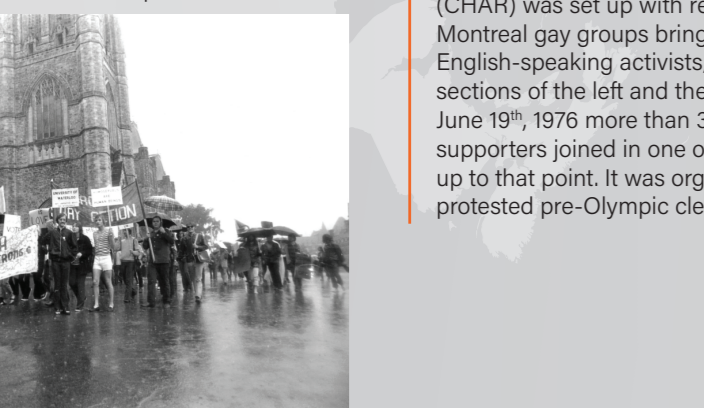
1970

1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City

The Stonewall riots were a series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations by members of the gay, lesbian and transgender communities against a police raid that began in the early morning hours of June 28th, 1969, at the Stonewall Inn in the Manhattan neighbourhood of Greenwich Village, New York City. They are widely considered constituting the most important event leading to the gay liberation movement and the modern fight for 2SLGBTQIA+ rights in across the world.

1971 First Gay Rights Protest

On August 28th, 1971, roughly 100 people from Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto and the surrounding areas gathered in the pouring rain at Parliament Hill for Canada's First Gay Liberation Protest and March. They presented a petition to the government with a list of ten demands for equal rights and protections. Simultaneously, another much smaller group of roughly twenty gay activists demonstrated at Robson Square in Vancouver.



Credit: Ottawa Journal

1976 Resisting the Olympic 'Cleanup'

Police crackdowns against gay bars ramped up in Montreal in the lead up to the 1976 Summer Olympics. It was widely perceived as mayor Jean Drapeau's attempts to "clean up" the city in advance of the 1976 Summer Olympics.

An organization called the Comité homosexuel antirépresseion/Gay Coalition against Repression (CHAR) was set up with representatives from various Montreal gay groups bringing together French and English-speaking activists, lesbians and gay men, with sections of the left and the feminist movements. On June 19th, 1976 more than 300 gays, lesbians and supporters joined in one of the largest demonstrations up to that point. It was organized by CHAR and protested pre-Olympic cleanup raids.

The Act was positively regarded as a progressive piece of legislation and received broad support from the parliamentary parties.

1977 Quebec adds Sexual Orientation to the Human Rights Code

Signed in law on December 16th, 1977, Quebec became the first province to add sexual orientation to its Charter of human rights to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground for discrimination.

1978 New Immigration Act no longer prohibits 'homosexuals'

On April 1st, 1978, this new amended Act lifted a ban prohibiting homosexuals from immigration. There was a shift in language in this particular legislative act, this was created to state who was welcome in Canada instead of who should be prevented from immigrating.

The Act was positively regarded as a progressive piece of legislation and received broad support from the parliamentary parties.

1981 Pisces Raids in Edmonton

On May 30th, 1981, forty members of the Edmonton Police Service, six RCMP officers, and two crown attorneys stormed the Pisces Health Spa, a bathhouse used by gay men. In the raid, 56 men were arrested and charged while an additional six men, owners and employees, were charged with being keepers of a common bawdy house. A local TV station ran the names of those found at Pisces out to the men publicly.

In response to the raid, over 100 people rallied at city hall on June 3rd to condemn the raid as a violation of civil rights, as well as a waste of money.

The raid drew groups within Edmonton's gay community together and made it more vocal and public. It was also noted that the Edmonton police consulted with Toronto police on how to execute the raids. The outrage that Edmontonians felt after the raids led to a more accepted and public 2SLGBTQIA+ community and the lack of tolerance towards infringements of civil liberties in Edmonton.

1981 First Lesbian Pride March in Canada

While most historical accounts has the first official Lesbian Pride March in Canada taking place in 1993, the first documented lesbian march took place in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, in May 1981. Approximately 200 lesbians attending the fifth Bi-National Lesbian Conference marched through downtown streets chanting "Look over here, look over there, lesbians are everywhere!"

Later, on October 17th, 1981, the now-defunct organization Lesbians Against the Right held a "Dykes in the Streets" march in Toronto, Ontario, with lesbian power, pride, and visibility as its theme. 350 women participated in this demonstration. It would not be until 15 years later that another similar demonstration would be held in Toronto.

1990 Two Spirit (niizh manidoowag) is coined

At the third annual intertribal Native American/First Nations Gay and Lesbian Festival in Winnipeg, the term Two Spirit (niizh manidoowag) was coined.

The term Two Spirit allows Indigenous folks to talk about their identity in the context of their cultural identity, and to reject the colonial definitions of sexuality and gender.

In a ruling regarding an unrelated 2SLGBTQIA+ case, the Supreme Court of Canada, in a landmark (and precedent-setting) decision, declared that sexual orientation should be seen as a "social group" within the context of determining convention refugee status. This ruling opened up the way for 2SLGBTQIA+ refugees to seek protection in Canada.

[Canada (AG) v Ward, [1993] 2 S.C.R. 699]

1996 Sexual Orientation included in Canadian Human Rights Act (C-33)

Receiving royal assent on June 20th, 1996, the federal government passed Bill C-33, adding "sexual orientation" to the Canadian Human Rights Act, an anti-discrimination law that applies to federally regulated activities throughout Canada.

1998 Blockorama: First Black Queer Space at Toronto Pride

Curated and organized by the community collective Blackness Yes!, Blockorama made its appearance as the very first black queer space in the Toronto pride festival. Blockorama showcases black queer and trans history, creativity and resistance.

1993 Supreme Court rules that refugees can apply based on sexual orientation

On June 30th, 1993 the Supreme Court ruled that gays and lesbians could apply for refugee status on the basis of facing persecution in their countries of origin. In a ruling regarding an unrelated 2SLGBTQIA+ case, the Supreme Court of Canada, in a landmark (and precedent-setting) decision, declared that sexual orientation should be seen as a "social group" within the context of determining convention refugee status. This ruling opened up the way for 2SLGBTQIA+ refugees to seek protection in Canada.

[Canada (AG) v Ward, [1993] 2 S.C.R. 699]

1999 Toronto's first Trans March

The Trans March, originally started by Karah Mathiason for the Trans Community.

The march, which was not recognized by Pride Toronto as an officially programmed event, was a short route from Church & Bloor Streets to Church & Wellesley Streets.

When the march reached the Church and Wellesley Streets, they were met with large metal barricades lined up across the street. The marchers, disappointed and frustrated, pushed through the barricades, and finished the first ever Trans March inside the Village.

James has been a dominant force in promoting and inspiring women and young girls in sports, each year the CWHL awards the highest scoring player the Angela James Bowl. In 2009 the city of Toronto renamed her hometown hockey arena the Angela James Arena to honour her contributions and work within the local community.

Following the ruling, other provinces and territories legalized same-sex marriage, including: (2003) British Columbia, (2004) Quebec, Yukon, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland and Labrador, and (2005) New Brunswick.

2000 Little Sister's Bookstore in Vancouver launched a constitutional challenge over its treatment at the hands of Canada Customs, which had been delaying and holding shipments from the US. The Book and Art Emporium claimed Customs was purposefully targeting them.

The Supreme Court agreed in a ruling on December 15th, 2000 that the actions by Canada Customs were targeting Little Sisters and Justice Ian Binnie stated "when Customs officials prohibit and thereby censor lawful gay and lesbian erotica, they are making a statement about gay and lesbian culture, and the statement was reasonably interpreted by the appellants as demeaning gay and lesbian values".

[Little Sisters Book and Art Emporium v Canada (Minister of Justice) [2000] 2 S.C.R. 1120, 2000 SCC 69]

2000 The Sex Garage Raids On July 15th, 1990, Police raid The Sex Garage's After Party. The violence ignited 36 hours of clashes between Montreal's 2SLGBTQIA+ community and the police force, which was accused at the time of harbouring a culture of homophobia.

Sex Garage politicized a generation of 2SLGBTQIA+ activists who would change the Quebec political landscape, uniting gays and lesbians, and francophones and anglophones, in a common front. These activists would establish the Divers/Cité Pride March and political-action groups like La Table de concertation des gais et lesbiennes du grand Montréal to successfully fight for 2SLGBTQIA+ civil rights and improve gay life in Montreal.

Later that day, the Chief of Defence Staff issued a statement that "Canadians, regardless of their sexual orientation, will now be able to serve their country without restriction".

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