

2016 Governor's Historic Preservation Awards

Project: **Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco**

On November 18, 2015, the San Francisco Historic Preservation Commission adopted the *Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco*, the most comprehensive research yet conducted on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) historic sites in an American city. Coauthored by public historian Donna Graves and architectural historian Shayne Watson, the LGBTQ Context Statement is the culmination of two years of research, writing, and community outreach and engagement.

The project was a grassroots effort that sought to fill a gap in the City of San Francisco's documentation of social and cultural histories. Graves and Watson, with the GLBT Historical Society as fiscal sponsor and enthusiastic project partner, applied for and received a \$76,400 grant from the San Francisco Historic Preservation Fund Committee (HPFC) to write the context. Additional donations were received from leading individuals and organizations in the preservation community both in and outside of California. Graves and Watson provided their time, work, and expertise to the project pro-bono.

Community outreach and engagement were critical to the development and success of the project. From the beginning, the project leaders understood that the LGBTQ Historic Context Statement couldn't be written without the people who lived this history. Prior to the completion of the report, historic preservation in San Francisco had not yet linked LGBTQ history to the built environment; bridging this gap required engaging with community members whose place-based memories helped put the pieces together. Some had been researching LGBTQ history themselves and graciously shared the fruits of their research. Many more contributed by sharing memories and stories about places important to their history. These stories are woven throughout the LGBTQ Historic Context narrative. The result is a historical context that reflects the diverse voices of LGBTQ communities in San Francisco, taking special care to focus on places associated with the underrepresented and underdocumented groups: LGBTQ people of color, lesbians, and bisexual and transgender/transsexual individuals.

LGBTQ history has become more widely recognized as an important component of the larger American story. The LGBTQ Historic Context Statement, which documents more than 300 properties, not only presents a more diverse and inclusive history of San Francisco, but also provides community members, city planners, and elected officials a framework through which to make better-informed decisions regarding the protection and interpretation of physical and intangible LGBTQ cultural resources. Furthermore, this project, through outreach efforts such as the "Preserving LGBT Historic Sites in California" Facebook page, and the HistoryPin project "California Pride: Mapping LGBTQ Histories," has created a robust network of people dedicated to documenting and protecting LGBTQ properties across California and beyond.