

Mapping LGBTQ St. Louis Additional Information Sheet

Location:

Entire Forest Park complex, with areas of specific significance:

- Muny Opera / Theater and parking lots
- Steinberg Skating Rink / Restrooms and parking lot
- "The Beach" near Steinberg Skating Rink
- Confederate Circle / The Circle, The Cannon, The Fruit Loop
- John F. Kennedy Memorial Forest
- Sports Fields / Athletic Field House
- World's Fair Pavilion and other picnic shelters
- Restrooms at Carr Lane, Government Ave. and Wells Drive outside / near the Art Museum
- Lagoon Drive
- Aviation field

In addition to serving as a popular greenspace enjoyed by all, Forest Park is the location of numerous historically significant events for LGBTQ people:

LGBTQ organizations found the park's space convenient for holding **group events and activities**. In 1973 a group of drag queens and their friends held an impromptu parade from bars in East St. Louis and ended at Forest Park. The 1979 women's march, Take Back the Night, met on Lagoon Drive and then marched to the nearby Central West End (CWE) neighborhood. Similarly Forest Park was the site of a community picnic April 13, 1980 as part of the city's first multi-organization pride event (St. Louis Celebration of Lesbian and Gay Pride). Yearly June pride events through the mid-1990s were also organized and held at the park. These included picnics, games, and 1987 – 1991 an organized road rally. "From All Walks of AIDS" (including groups BABAA, Delta, Doorways, Food Outreach, EFA, Northside AIDS Outreach, Care & Counseling Inc.) held an AIDS-awareness event in the park May 5, 1991.

Organized recreation in various years included the Frontrunners, a gay and lesbian walking group, which met in weekly 1985 – 1992 at the fieldhouse. The Women's Sports Connection Soccer Clinic held in 1987, and both GLASS softball and SLAVE volleyball tournaments were in the park in 1992. And in 1992 the St. Louis Gay & Lesbian Outdoor Club organized kite flying events near the aviation fields.

Since at least the 1950s park restrooms were popular **cruising** areas for men to meet other men for sex. In 1968 Robert Laud Humphreys, sociology student at Washington University, completed his thesis, *The Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex In Public Places* after conducting observational studies with men using park restrooms (including in Forest Park) for sex. This marked the first academic study ever completed in the United States of such "trade" sexual practices.

By the 1960s the heavily wooded area known as Kennedy Forest, "the beach," and the secluded area near the confederate monument and Spanish-American war cannons, were regularly listed in gay publications as popular hangout and cruising locations. The circle road (Confederate Dr.) near Lindell was nicknamed "fruit loop" by the men who cruised the area. This roadway was removed by the City of St. Louis shortly after the monument was dismantled in June 2017.

Mapping LGBTQ St. Louis is an interdisciplinary humanities project examining the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class & society in the metropolitan area of St. Louis, Missouri. We welcome questions, comments, and feedback. [Please contact the project team using this online form.](#)

City of St. Louis vice police frequently conducted undercover operations in the restrooms targeting those suspected of cruising. In 1977 *PrimeTime* described this area as "in the southwest corner of the park, in the John F. Kennedy Memorial Forest - This is a series of trails and bike paths through a thickly wooded area that has become a popular meeting place for gay men. Extreme caution is advised here, for the police occasionally use entrapment methods." Between 1976 and 1978 alone over 158 men were arrested in Forest Park restrooms. On November 28, 1988, as police try to arrest Coleman Hiller outside a Forest Park bathroom, Hiller yells he can't be arrested, pushes past the officer and runs to his car. Hiller is shot, then arrested "What's Wrong with this Scene?" asks Jim Thomas, editor of the *The Lesbian and Gay News Telegraph*, "There are many questions arising ... and they aren't about whether it's right or wrong for men to go to the park for sex..." The division between police and the people they allegedly protect was at the heart of Thomas' concerns: "When there is abuse of power, or even an unresolved suspicion of abuse, the result is a loss of faith. ... The grief of betrayal is bitter, and tragically, is more often replaced by a cynicism far more damaging than any activity in a park will ever be."

D.D., one of three plaintiffs who work with the ACLU to challenge the legality of St. Louis City's cross-dressing ordinance, did so after an arrest for wearing women's clothing while driving through Forest Park in his car in 1983.

Tragically at least three gay men were **murdered in the park**, and some of their deaths remain unsolved. Jerry (Gerald) Kruse was found shot in his car in Forest Park (1978). In 1982 Bob Rogers, a volunteer with the Gay Hotline, was cruising in Forest Park when he was stabbed outside the St. Louis Art Museum. Rogers later died of his wounds. And Myrod Jackson was killed by a man he met in the park, August 27, 1991.

For additional history see:

Brawley, Steven et al. *Images of America: Gay and Lesbian St. Louis* (Arcadia, 2016) 54.

Bell, Kim and Celeste Bott. "Confederate monument will be gone from Forest Park by Friday under new agreement." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. June 27, 2017. http://www.stltoday.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/confederate-monument-will-be-gone-from-forest-park-by-friday/article_f5ffd027-64fe-5483-8f71-871c517b4f9f.html

Jim Thomas. "What's Wrong with this Scene" *The Gay News Telegraph*, 1988

"Moran Says He Disobeyed Illegal Order," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 18, 1978, 3.

Laud Humphreys, *Out of The Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation*, (N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972). <http://catalog.wustl.edu:80/record=b1511123~S2>

See Also:

St. Louis Community College - Forest Park

Tower Grove Park

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