

Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse

99 Wooster Street, Manhattan
Tax Map Block 501, Lot 30

Built: 1881-82

Architect: Napoleon Le Brun

Style: Neo-Grec with Queen Anne elements

Action: Proposed for Commission's Calendar May 14, 2019



99 Wooster Street, NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project

Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) was founded in December 1969 “to secure basic human rights, dignity, and freedom for all gay people.” It was most active in 1971-74, when the former firehouse at 99 Wooster Street served as the organization’s headquarters. GAA lobbied for passage of LGBT civil rights legislation through sit-ins and picket lines. It also planned “zaps,” to confront politicians and celebrities about their positions on LGBT issues and gain media attention.

99 Wooster Street has been described as New York City’s “first gay community center.” In addition to containing alliance offices on the second and third floors, it was an important gathering place, where numerous meetings, Saturday night dance parties, and cultural activities were held. GAA produced weekly programs that were broadcast on cable television and published “Gay Activist,” a newsheet. Many LGBT groups met in the building, such as Lesbian Feminist Liberation, Gay Youth, the Gay Men’s Health Project, and the Catholic group Dignity. The interiors were partly destroyed by arson in October 1974. In subsequent years, the GAA became less active and disbanded in 1981.

Gay Activists Alliance Firehouse stands on the west side of Wooster Street, between Spring and Prince Streets. A firehouse was built on the site in the early 1850s. This building was substantially redesigned by the prolific fire department architect Napoleon LeBrun in 1881-82. Three stories tall, the painted cast-iron base incorporates a single apparatus bay and rusticated pillars. The second and third stories are red brick with stone trim and terra-cotta details. When the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District was designated in August 1973, the GAA was leasing the building. The exterior is identical to (former) Engine Company No. 27 at 173 Franklin Street (1881-82) in the Tribeca West Historic District.

Gay Activists Alliance was the first group to adopt the lambda, a symbol of the organization and LGBT rights. A 1973 photograph taken for the Landmarks Preservation Commission’s designation report shows a large round shield incorporating this international symbol.



99 Wooster Street, 1973
LPC

