

CLUB 70

Original Location **10593 101 Street NW**

Final Location **10242 106 Street NW**

www.EdmontonQueerHistoryProject.ca



After years of community interest, on December 21, 1969, a group of twelve people, including Edmontonians Wayne Gordon, Judith Jerace, Stanley Hawkins, Roy Wilson, Janet Wilkinson, and Paul Chisolm, came together to discuss opening a dedicated gay club, intending to find funding for it and navigating the legalities of successfully organizing such a private member's club dedicated to Edmonton's gay and lesbian community. On January 4, 1970, an expanded group of 53 people met to continue these community discussions, elect a Board of Directors, adopt by-laws and decided upon a name. Club 70 was originally going to be called Club 69, but that name was thought to be too risqué for the times. Club 70 would become Edmonton's first formally established gay bar and was officially registered on February 2, 1970¹.

Before Club 70, members of Edmonton's LGBTQ2 community often gathered together clandestinely in houses, apartments, parks, tea rooms (public bathrooms), and other fugitive spaces to find friends, relationships, and spaces of safety. Some places like the King Edward Hotel, as well as the Corona, Mayfair, Hotel Macdonald, and Royal George hotels, tolerated same-sex patrons so long as they were quiet and unsuspecting.

Club 70 was initially located in the basement of a Greek restaurant on the southeast corner of 101 Street and 106 Avenue, but the club's presence there was short-lived after the owner discovered what "type of club" it was and demanded Club 70 vacate the premises.² Since membership information, including the names and addresses of club patrons, was stored in the basement, a few dedicated club members broke in through a window to retrieve the club records and ensure none of the private membership information would be misused or exposed.³ Having club member names made public could have meant losing a person's job, family, reputation, or worse.

Upon finding a new, more permanent home, Club 70 relocated to 10242 106 Street.⁴ To help maintain regular operations over the years, the club relied heavily on its members for much-needed support. For example, those members with experience in renovations were asked to help paint the club, and those who knew something about music helped with sound technology.⁵ It truly was a community venue that needed everyone to pitch in to help it not only survive but thrive.



At the time, obtaining a liquor license was a complicated process. Club 70 was required to apply for permits monthly, with police routinely entering the club on "dry nights" to ensure no liquor was being served.⁶ In addition to their regular open nights on Wednesdays and the weekends, Club 70 hosted several special community events open to members and non-members, such as a Hawaiian Night in September 1971⁷ and annual Halloween and New Year's

¹ "Club 70's Second Anniversary," Club 70 News 3, no. 1, 2 February, 1972, 2, MS-595, GALA, Series 11, Box 28, File 10, City of Edmonton Archives, Prince of Wales Armouries Heritage Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

² Valerie J. Korinek, *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930-1985* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 226-230.

³ Billy Bob Bumbalo, "#Nightlife," produced by Edmonton Queer History Project, June 9, 2015, YouTube video, 8:04, https://youtu.be/3FO_rgG7jmL. The rescue of the membership list is contested by some Club 70 members who suggest it was never at risk.

⁴ Korinek, *Prairie Fairies*, 226-230.

⁵ Club 70 News 3, no. 7, 13 September, 1972, MS-595, GALA Series 11, Box 28, File 10, City of Edmonton Archives, Prince of Wales Armouries Heritage Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

⁶ Korinek, *Prairie Fairies*, 227.

⁷ Club 70 News 2, no. 7, 15 September, 1971, 1, MS-595, GALA, Series 11, Box 28, File 10, Edmonton City Archives, Prince of Wales Armouries Heritage Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Eve celebrations.⁸ Club 70 also organized and hosted many different shows and performances, with casting calls frequently advertised in their Club 70 newsletter.⁹ The club permitted entry only to gays and lesbians, with those members who brought straight guests being subject to a 30-day suspension of their membership and a fine.¹⁰

Barb Plaumann, who was Assistant Editor of the *Carousel Capers* in Calgary, lamented that many gay clubs at the time were often segregated by gender. In an article she wrote, which was later reprinted in *Club '70 News*, Plaumann argued that it was unwise for clubs to “split into even smaller groups” as they were already an “unwanted minority.” Clubs that included both men and women were richer in their entertainment offerings and could provide a more diverse perspective on issues affecting the community.¹¹ Given Club 70’s membership, which ranged between 300 and 400 people,¹² the club’s openness to having both gay and lesbian members and their guests speaks to the importance of the club for Edmonton’s growing gay and lesbian community and allies.

In July 1971, the Montreal-based magazine *Long Time Coming* ran an article called “Two Dykes on a Bike,” in which two lesbians travelled by motorcycle (and later train) across Canada, reporting on their experiences in gay bars.



In Edmonton, they found the back of the Mayfair Tavern to be “very swishy queen and hard-drinking butch,” while Club 70 was “all gay and very private.”¹³ Historian Liz Millward has written how “judgmental statements reveal more about the authors than the people they encountered” and “one can only speculate that the ‘two dykes on a bike’ were young, anti-corporate, and

distanced themselves from the ‘hard drinking butch’ category.”¹⁴ While the “two dykes” assessment of gay bars across Canada was far from unbiased, it did provide “information for other women who might travel to the same location, or even for those who lived locally but had not visited a particular venue.”¹⁵ From the past to the present, LGBTQ2 Edmontonians are used to being misjudged and overlooked by people and pundits from larger cities like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. Queer life on the prairies was often different from and harder than in the big city metropolises, and that is reflected in how social spaces were created and how the community organized amidst active resistance.

Club 70’s focus was always meant to serve as a safe and social gathering space for Edmonton’s gay and lesbian community. However, they acknowledged that some members wanted to be more involved in the burgeoning gay and lesbian liberation movement. It was a time of growing change and demand in Canada, and the prairies were no exception. The arrest for “gross indecency” and the indefinite imprisonment of Everett Klippert as an “incurable homosexual” and “dangerous sexual offender” caused much shock and outrage.¹⁶ Klippert’s case was a catalyst for then Justice Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau to famously quote “there is no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation”¹⁷ in support of efforts to partially decriminalize (or as the historian Tom Hooper has said, “recriminalize”) homosexuality by amending the Criminal Code of Canada. Bill C-150 was far from perfect as it only allowed consenting adults aged twenty-one years and older (or any married persons) to engage in anal intercourse in “private” with no more than two persons present.¹⁸ These legal changes came about during the period of the infamous Stonewall Riots in New York City and growing public calls for rights and recognition across North America. These events and legal changes would help to incite the rise of an emerging gay consciousness and demands for equality as more communities began to organize and agitate for change.

In Edmonton, calls to become more politically active were often published in the *Club 70 News*, associated with the belief that political activity and proactive education of those outside of the gay and lesbian community were crucial in encouraging public understanding and fighting for gay rights.¹⁹ To this end, Club 70 often directed members who wanted to become more politically involved to join GATE.²⁰ In the late 1970s, Club 70 permitted GATE (Gay Alliance Towards Equality) to use the club as a drop-in centre as GATE had recently lost the use of its premises on the south side of the city.²¹ Club 70 also supported GATE by hosting special nights to help raise funds for its new location. Once GATE found a new, more permanent home, Club 70 encouraged

8 Club 70 News 1, no. 12, 25 November, 1970, 2, MS-595, GALA, Series 11, Box 28, File 10, Edmonton City Archives, Prince of Wales Armouries Heritage Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

9 Club 70 News 1, no. 12, 4.

10 Ron Beyers and Rob Browatzke, “History of Edmonton’s Gay Bars, Part 1: The Beginning,” Edmonton City as Museum Project, September 23, 2020, <https://citymuseumedmonton.ca/2020/09/23/history-of-edmontons-gay-bars-part-1-the-beginning>.

11 Barb C. Plaumann, “Viewpoint,” *Carousel Capers*, August 1972, Reprinted in *Club 70 News* 3, no. 7, 13 September, 1972, 1, MS-595, GALA, Series 11, Box 28, File 10, City of Edmonton Archives, Prince of Wales Armouries Heritage Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

12 Korinek, *Prairie Fairies*, 226.

13 Liz Millward, “Making a Scene: Struggles Over Lesbian Place-Making in Anglophone Canada, 1964-1984,” *Women’s History Review*, 21, no. 4 (2012): 563.

14 Millward, “Making a Scene,” 563-4.

15 Millward, “Making a Scene,” 564.

16 Kevin Allen, “Why I’m Celebrating 1969 and Calgary’s Anti-Gay Rights Hero: Everett Klippert Changed Canadian Society,” *The Sprawl*, <https://www.sprawlcalgary.com/why-im-celebrating-calgary-gay-rights-anti-hero>.

17 “Trudeau: ‘There’s No Place For the State in the Bedrooms of the Nation,’” *CBC Digital Archives*, <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/omnibus-bill-theres-no-place-for-the-state-in-the-bedrooms-of-the-nation>.

18 Tom Hooper, “Queering ‘69: The Recriminalization of Homosexuality in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 100, no. 2 (2019): 257-273.

19 “Roy: Guest Article,” *Club 70 News* 2, no. 5, July 1971, 2, MS-595, GALA Series 11, Box 28, File 10, City of Edmonton Archives, Prince of Wales Armouries Heritage Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

20 Club 70 News 3, no. 7, 13 September, 1972, 5, MS-595, GALA, Series 11, Box 28, File 10, City of Edmonton Archive, Prince of Wales Armouries Heritage Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

21 “Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting of Club ‘70 Held at the Club – Edmonton,” 24 January, 1977, MS-595 GALA, Series 11, Box 28, File 7, City of Edmonton Archives, Prince of Wales Armouries Heritage Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

its members to continue to seek out and support political efforts outside of regular club activities.²²

After eight years, Club 70 was forced to close its doors due to financial issues and competition from the emergence of new queer bars and clubs like the legendary Flashback and The Roost. In 1978, Club 70 sold their premises, and the former club became the new location of the shortly lived Cha Cha Palace, which focused on serving the lesbian community.²³ The Cha Cha Palace closed soon after, and Boots N' Saddle, a members-only club owned by Conrad Dragu, opened in its place and became a well-known LGBTQ2 community gathering space for the next 30+ years. After Boots closed in 2010, not long after the death of its co-owner Jim Schafer, a new bar named Junction Bar & Eatery opened in its place. Junction was open for two more years before the location was sold and became an art gallery, ending the building's long-standing run as one of Edmonton's premier LGBTQ2 entertainment venues. Over the years, many other LGBTQ2-focused bars, pubs, and nightclubs served Edmonton's community with pride, such as Flashback, The Roost, Buddys and Woodys, The Option Room, Secrets, Prism, and Evolution Wonderlounge



22 "Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting of Club '70 Held at the Club - Edmonton," 12 December, 1977, MS-595, GALA, Series 11, Box 28, File 7, City of Edmonton Archives, Prince of Wales Armouries Heritage Centre, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. See also: MS-GALA, Series 11, Box 28, File 8 for more information on the Club 70-GATE joint venture.

23 Korinek, *Prairie Fairies*, 233; Chris Bearchell, "Edmonton: Taking Chances, Facing Changes," *Body Politic*, October 1984, 13.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Read more about Club 70, a first in Alberta's LGBT history: <https://albertahistoricplaces.com/2019/02/20/club-70-a-first-for-albertas-lgbt-community/>.

Learn more about the history of Edmonton's LGBTQ2 bars and clubs with this 5-part series published by the Edmonton City as Museum Project: <https://citymuseumedmonton.ca/2020/09/23/history-of-edmontons-gay-bars-part-1-the-beginning/>.