

DAPPLE GREY CAFE

Location 10024 102 Street NW



www.EdmontonQueerHistoryProject.ca



Cruising can be a dangerous activity. Too often, the intention to have a fun sexual encounter can have a violent end. Tragic examples of a date gone wrong include the 1998 murder of Edmontonian James Miles and the 2002 killing of Fort McMurray teen Richard Sneath.¹ Unfortunately, there are always more assaults than reported to the police, often due to the shame or fear of victims coming forward.²

In the past, one of the ways gay and bisexual men have sought to minimize the risks associated with hooking up was to meet first in a well-lit public place rather than heading directly to someone's home, car, or other space. In the 1990s, this meeting may have been at an openly gay coffee shop like Boystown Café and Gallery, or the Second Cup (dubbed the "Gay Cup") on Jasper and 112 Street. Before the invention of smartphones, cyber cafés such as Naked, or the Sugarbowl on 124 Street, provided opportunities to chat on sites like #mIRC or gay.com and then meet in the safety of the internet café.

In the early 1980s, Dapple Grey Café was one of these safe spaces. Not only did the Dapple Grey provide a great place for a legendary blueberry milkshake or an eggs benny that introduced Edmonton to the "farm-to-table" experience, but the café was also open twenty-four hours a day.³ When the gay clubs closed, the Dapple Grey was the place to go. The café was located at the end of "The Hill," an infamous downtown cruising strip. The Dapple Grey was known for providing a safe space for people cruising The Hill to take their prospective dates for a quick coffee before heading off to the main event. For many, the café was both a beacon and a refuge.

Although signage along The Hill often warned about the increased possibility of anti-gay violence, that didn't seem to affect its popularity as a cruising area. Beatings, robberies, and stabbings in the area were attributed not just to "dates that went wrong" but to the pervasive anti-gay attitudes and violence of the time. Male sex workers on The Hill threatened to arm themselves if nothing was done to curb the violent swell.⁴ Far too often, the LGBTQ2 community had to take care of themselves, as illustrated by the story of John DiCarlo.



The original location of the Dapple Grey Cafe.

John DiCarlo, known in the Edmonton drag scene as Lori St. John, was a waiter at Cheddars, which was a new business that opened after the closure of the Dapple Grey Café. On August 6, 1986, local blackjack dealer Louis Versegny left Flashback nightclub with Richard Hall. Versegny was found stabbed to death the next day. The following Saturday, DiCarlo recognized Hall cruising on The Hill and, under the pretence of hiring him for the night, John took him to Cheddars. There, DiCarlo was able to call the police and Hall was arrested. DiCarlo was applauded as a hero by the LGBTQ2 community.^{5,6}

In more recent years, Edmonton's LGBTQ2 community kept their eyes open for another killer. In 2014, Demetrious Karahalios, a well-known cook at Woodys pub, was found murdered in his Oliver home. The police investigation soon linked the murder to Richard LaCarte, a drifter who often frequented Woodys. Staff at the venue kept LaCarte's photograph prominently displayed as a silent reminder to always be vigilant. LaCarte was eventually arrested years later, finally bringing some closure to Karahalios' friends and family.⁷

1 Jodie Sinnema, "Edmonton Leads Way Tracking Gay Bashing," *Edmonton Journal*, October 14, 2005, B1

2 Sinnema, "Edmonton Leads," B1.


3 Darrin Hagen, "10024-102 Street: Rony's / Dapple Gray Cafe / Appleby / Cheddars / Cafe Elite," *Edmonton City as Museum*, July 9, 2020, <https://citymuseumedmonton.ca/2020/07/09/10024-102-street-ronys-dapple-gray-cafe-appleby-cheddars-cafe-elite/>.

4 Vince Coady, "Gays Reject Weapons for Self-Defence," *Edmonton Journal*, August 12, 1980, B1.

5 Ross Henderson, "Court Told Gay Broke Bate," *Edmonton Journal*, May 2, 1987, B8.

6 Hagen, "10024-102 Street: Rony's / Dapple Gray Cafe / Appleby / Cheddars / Cafe Elite."

7 Dylan Short, "Man Arrested for Throwing Rocks at Cars Charged in 2014 Edmonton Slaying," *Edmonton Journal*, February 28, 2020, A9.



A 1996 exhibit by Spencer Harrison explored the impacts of gay bashing in Edmonton. Harrison interviewed thirty local men who had been survivors of anti-gay attacks. The exhibit, which was displayed at Latitude 53, featured a massive, central painting designed to duplicate the isolation a victim can experience before, during, and after an attack. The installation also included powerful quotes from the victims. Harrison noted a common theme in the attacks, where the gay bashers would stake out a local gay club to target their victims. At a time when the provincial government, under the leadership of Premier Ralph Klein, was actively fighting against equal rights for LGBTQ2 people, the exhibit was a timely and powerful reminder of the consequences of hate and prejudice.⁸

Harrison also had an art installation displayed at the Edmonton Police Service (EPS) downtown headquarters, which included a black banner featuring three gay men with an ominous figure threatening them from the shadows. This provocative installation was created as a visible reminder to police of the ongoing violence against LGBTQ2 people and its consequences.

The EPS Gay and Lesbian Liaison Committee, established in 1992, was a way to help connect the community with law enforcement. Projects created by the liaison committee included a 1999 campaign bringing attention to gay bashing.⁹ A special unit dedicated to investigating hate and bias crimes, which began tracking instances of gay bashing, was created in 2003.¹⁰ In 2004, a new training activity was instituted to help police recruits understand what it was like to be an LGBTQ2 person in Edmonton; this involved primarily male police recruits walking down Whyte Avenue holding each other's hands. Recruits were debriefed after the training activity and often reported feeling

uncomfortable and unsafe.¹¹ This activity was deemed so dangerous that an undercover unit had to be present in case the recruits were assaulted.

While working with the police to ensure the safety of LGBTQ2 citizens is a constantly evolving and ongoing project, there is certainly much to celebrate in how far we have come as a community. As an example, the 2012 attack on Chevi Rabbit, a Two Spirit youth, was not only immediately investigated by the EPS Hate Crimes Unit; it was also met with a massive outpouring of community support. Chevi and supporters turned this incident into the Hate to Hope March and Rally, which became an ongoing community educational event.¹²

Today Edmonton is a very different world than it was in the days of The Hill and the Dapple Grey Café, but violence against LGBTQ2 Canadians is still rampant. A recent Statistics Canada report highlighted how "gay, lesbian, bisexual and other sexual minority people in Canada were almost three times more likely than heterosexual Canadians to report that they had been physically or sexually assaulted in the previous 12 months" as well as being "more than twice as likely to report having been violently victimized since the age of 15."¹³

No one is born with hate in their heart. Homo/bi/transphobia are learned behaviours. The hope is these prejudices can also be unlearned through education, empathy, and love

8 David Staples, "Exhibit Condemns Rage, Violence Against City Gays," *Edmonton Journal*, February 7, 1996, B1.

9 Lisa Gregoire, "Police Use Bus Posters to Tackle Crime of Gay Bashing," *Edmonton Journal*, June 10, 1999, B3.

10 Jodie Sinnema, "Edmonton Leads Way Tracking Gay Bashing," *Edmonton Journal*, October 14, 2005, A6.

11 David Howell, "Gay Stroll Eye-Opener for Recruits," *Edmonton Journal*, January 2, 2004, B7

12 Andrea Sands, "Hundreds March to Support Gay Beating Victim," *Edmonton Journal*, August 3, 2012, A6.

13 Terry Haig, "Shocking Statistics Released About Assaults Against LGBTQ People in Canada," *Radio Canada*, September 10, 2020, <https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2020/09/10/shocking-statistics-released-about-assaults-against-lgbtq-people-in-canada/>.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Read more about the Dapple Grey Café as part of the Edmonton City as Museum Project: <https://citymuseumedmonton.ca/2020/07/09/10024-102-street-ronys-dapple-gray-cafe-appleby-cheddars-cafe-elite/>.