



GLBT  
Historical  
Society  
*museum & archives*

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## Restaurant and Bar The Paper Doll Designated San Francisco's First Landmark Recognizing Pre-1965 LGBTQ History

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**San Francisco** — In recognition of the important role it played in the city's history and its association with the development of LGBTQ communities, the Paper Doll, a restaurant formerly located at 524 Union Street, was unanimously declared a landmark by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors on Tuesday afternoon, June 18.

Located at the corner of a private alley in the heart of the city's bohemian North Beach neighborhood, the building at 524 Union Street was a pre-Castro cornerstone of LGBTQ life for 30 years as the Paper Doll and subsequently as Cadell Place and The 524. Distinctive for serving as a restaurant and not merely as a bar, the Paper Doll boasted a who's who list of alumni and had formative ties to longstanding LGBTQ restaurants, nightlife establishments and organizations integral to building San Francisco's celebrated LGBTQ communities.

In a hearing before the City's Board of Supervisors' Land Use Committee, architectural historian Shayne Watson, founding chair of the GLBT Historical Society's Historic Places Working Group, stated, "The Paper Doll afforded sexual minority communities a place to live somewhat openly and love somewhat openly, in a place that was relatively safe ... during a time when it was illegal to just be themselves."

The Paper Doll opened at 524 Union Street in 1944, becoming what likely was the first restaurant catering to a predominantly LGBTQ clientele in San Francisco. In 1947 Mona Sargent, credited as the owner of the city's first lesbian club, Mona's, joined the Paper Doll and helped re-launch its jazz supper club to a mixed but largely lesbian crowd. Known for dirt-cheap, top-notch food, the Paper Doll became a gathering space for LGBTQ people but was subject to numerous vice squad raids over the years.

One of the establishment's proprietors, Dante Benedetti, was honored as historically significant to achieving landmark status. Benedetti faced legal action by the city in the late 1950s after openly stating that he served and

employed gays. His legal battles caused him ultimately to lose all his businesses except his family-style Italian restaurant New Pisa.

As The 524, under the ownership of Bob Ross, a president of the Tavern Guild, the restaurant was unique in hosting pioneering events by every local homophile and LGBTQ rights organization of the era. Continuing the Paper Doll's role as a cultural crossroads, The 524 was the site of *The Bay Area Reporter's* founding and also hosted early gay voter organization efforts, playing an unheralded role in shaping LGBTQ activism and politics.

The Paper Doll's cultural importance was identified in the 2015 Citywide Historic Context Statement for LGBTQ History in San Francisco, co-authored by Watson. Her advocacy was joined by the GLBT Historical Society and the building's owners. Barak Smucha of the 524 Union Street Partnership has worked to compile a revelatory history of the building.

"It's exciting to have this historic treasure landmarked during Pride month in San Francisco," said Terry Beswick, executive director of the GLBT Historical Society. "We're proud to have played a role in the preservation of the Paper Doll. Given that it was the target of anti-gay police raids for much of its existence, I would consider it an example of restorative justice for it to reopen a LGBTQ-friendly restaurant and bar."

524 Union Street retains its original, historic Paper Doll configuration, and is available for lease.

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### **About the GLBT Historical Society**

Based in San Francisco, **the GLBT Historical Society** is internationally recognized as a leader in the field of LGBTQ public history. Its mission includes transmitting the history of LGBTQ places and ensuring the preservation of meaningful LGBTQ historic sites.

Founded in 1985, the society collects, preserves and exhibits materials documenting the LGBTQ past. By supporting researchers and welcoming the general public, the society promotes understanding of LGBTQ history, culture and arts in all their diversity.

At its Mid-Market archives and research center, the society maintains one of the nation's largest collections of primary LGBTQ historical materials. Since January 2011, the society also has operated the GLBT Historical Society Museum, the first stand-alone museum of its kind in the United States.

Located in the heart of the Castro District, the museum showcases the depth and breadth of the society's archives, demonstrates the value of queer history to the public, and mounts wide-ranging exhibitions and programs with an emphasis on diversity and social justice.

For more information, visit [www.glbthistory.org](http://www.glbthistory.org).

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