



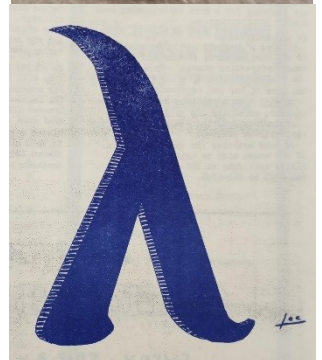
## CREATING A COMMUNITY: CHICAGO'S LGBTQIA+ RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

Chicago's LGBTQIA+ community has long been an active one stretching back to 1924 and the creation of the Society for Human Rights. However, some early members of the gay community were afraid to share their identities with other people. If they spoke out, they could lose their jobs or face harassment. Inspired by the 1969 [Stonewall Uprising](#) in New York City, members of Chicago's LGBTQIA+ community began to speak up. The early Gay Rights Movement centered on the needs of gay men and lesbians. It often left out people now recognized as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

### SYMBOLS OF THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Symbols of the movement appeared on flags, buttons, printed materials, and even clothing. One symbol featured interlocking male ( $\sigma$ ) and female ( $\rho$ ) symbols to represent same sex love. Various versions exist. One separated the male and female symbols. The Black Power fist is a symbol of pride and [resilience](#). Sometimes, it was added to represent solidarity with the Black Power Movement. Others used it to mean gay pride.

Other symbols for the Gay Rights Movement have deeper meanings. The Gay Activist Alliance of New York used the Greek letter lambda ( $\lambda$ ). In science it means a "complete exchange of energy." During the 1972 Democratic National Convention this symbol was seen on national television. The pink triangle symbol was also used. This symbol was used by Nazi Germany during WWII to identify and target gay men. The movement reclaimed the symbol and used it in a positive way.



Buttons from the collection of Gary Chichester, Close up of Chicago Gay Alliance newsletter (middle), Designed by Les, August 1972, CHM, ICHI-182538

These symbols appeared on flags, buttons, and clothing during the first Gay Liberation March in Chicago on June 27, 1970. This march marked the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall Uprising. Activist Gary Chichester carried a homemade flag during that march. He has carried it in every march since 1970!

That same year, Chichester co-founded the Chicago Gay Alliance (CGA). It set out to “[improve] the ghetto (whether physical or spiritual) conditions of homosexuals.” The CGA created a support system for members and established a community center. It also advocated to change laws and end police harassment. Its newsletter connected members and updated them about events and meetings.



Chicago's First gay liberation march, June 27, 1970, from the Chicago Sun-Times collection, CHM, ST-70001326-0010

## **MOUNTAIN MOVING COFFEEHOUSE FOR WOMYN\* AND CHILDREN**

Mountain Moving Coffeehouse was established in 1975 to provide a safe space for lesbians. The coffeehouse was alcohol- and drug-free. Only **cisgender** women and their young children could enter. The space kept them safe from police raids or public harassment. The coffeehouse offered meals, reading material, films, and live performances featuring lesbian entertainers.

Mountain Moving Coffeehouse was part of a larger community of lesbians in Chicago. They supported several newspapers including *Lavender Woman* and *Blazing Star*. The newspapers' articles and drawings raised awareness of the discrimination that women, and especially lesbian women, faced.

\*"Womyn" is spelled with a "y" instead of an "e" to remove the word "men" from the word "women."



The coffeehouse's name was based on a poem by Yosano Akiko of Japan. It implies that women and lesbians must "move mountains" to achieve equality. In the 1970s, an unknown artist designed a banner for Mountain Moving Coffeehouse. Ann Arkin turned the artwork into a quilt in the 1990s.



\*"Womyn" is spelled with a "y" instead of an "e" to remove the word "men" from the word "women."

Quilted banner for Mountain Moving Coffeehouse, made by Ann Arkin, c. 1990, from the collection of Kathy Munzer

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## CONTINUING TO RISE UP

The early gay liberation movement raised awareness and formed communities of support. Marches and wearable symbols made the groups more publicly visible. Art and symbols have remained a key part of this movement. The most recognizable symbol today is the rainbow gay pride flag. It was designed in 1978 by artist Gilbert Baker in San Francisco. Even this flag has been adapted over time to be more inclusive.

Groups like the CGA and Mountain Moving Coffeehouse provided support systems for members. While some of these organizations no longer exist, new ones have taken their place to fulfil those roles today.



## VOCABULARY IN “CREATING A COMMUNITY: CHICAGO’S LGBTQIA+ RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS”

**Cisgender-** A person whose gender identity corresponds with the biological sex they were identified as at birth.

**Resilience-** An ability to adjust to changes.

**Stonewall Uprising-** A series of clashes between police and gay rights activists outside the Stonewall Inn in New York City during June and July of 1969.

