

Celebrating 2SLGBTQ+ History Month with The Edmonton Queer History Project



2023 marks the 25th anniversary of the Supreme Court of Canada's landmark ruling in *Vriend v. Alberta*, which read sexual orientation into the Alberta Human Rights Act. This historic legal decision paved the way for Canada, and many other countries, to eventually legalize same-sex marriage. Many people, even those within the 2SLGBTQ+¹ community, are unaware of the circumstances that led up to the *Vriend* decision. Even fewer are aware that it all started right here in Edmonton after Delwin *Vriend* was fired from King's College² in 1991 for being gay.³



That 1998 ruling wasn't the first time Edmonton has played a significant role in 2SLGBTQ+ history, and it certainly wasn't the last. Even before Edmonton existed, 2SLGBTQ+ people have been living here and building community. However, in a heteronormative society that has tried to erase queer existence, many of these people and their stories have been lost. Sharing

stories like these is the purpose of celebrating 2SLGBTQ+ History Month each October. This month, which includes National Coming Out Day on October 11th, is dedicated to ensuring that 2SLGBTQ+ history is shared, taught, and celebrated.⁴

If you are a subscriber to the EDHS newsletter, you may already be familiar with some of the queer history stories we have previously published. This month, we would like to introduce you to some of the great history work happening in our community.

¹ 2SLGBTQ+ stands for Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other identities that are not heterosexual or cisgender, such as asexual or aromantic.

² Now King's University

³ Check out the podcast EQHP produced with the Edmonton Community Foundation to learn more about the historic *Vriend Versus Alberta* case here: <https://www.edmontonqueerhistoryproject.ca/vriend-versus-alberta>

⁴ Learn more about International LGBTQ+History Month here: <https://www.internationallgbtqhm.com/>

What is the Edmonton Queer History Project?

The Edmonton Queer History Project originally began in 2015 with the creation of a public art exhibition, "We Are Here," at the Art Gallery of Alberta, which showcased Edmonton's 2SLGBTQ+ histories through archival documents, photographs, memorabilia, and life history video installations. In 2022, EQHP launched a downtown queer history map of Edmonton,⁵ highlighting 27 locations that all have played an important role in building the 2SLGBTQ+ community. During the spring and summer, EQHP hosts a series of free guided walking tours throughout the downtown, visiting many of these locations of interest.

More recently, EQHP launched a new digital map project called EQHPStories.⁶ This interactive map of Edmonton is a community-centred tool designed to support Edmontonians to share their own histories, stories, and experiences of 2SLGBTQ+ history throughout the city. The digital map now contains over 200+ sites of 2SLGBTQ+ history! Check out the map, and you will really see how queer history can be found everywhere!



What's next for EQHP?

Currently, EQHP team members are working with the Old Strathcona Business Association to identify and research 2SLGBTQ+ sites of historical interest in the Whyte Avenue area. Plans are also underway to create a queer history exhibition at Fort Edmonton Park, and our team is working on a coffee table book celebrating our city's rich and diverse 2SLGBTQ+ history. To help celebrate 2SLGBTQ+ history month, we invite you to join us on October 25th as we partner with the Edmonton Rainbow Story Hub and the City of Edmonton Archives to explore and help us identify the people, places and moments found in a new photographic archive, which features hundreds of photographs from the Times .10 magazine collection. Who knows, maybe you'll even see yourself in the photos! Come out and help us identify and preserve an important part of Edmonton's queer history.

To stay up to date with what the Edmonton Queer History Project is up to, check out the website,⁷ or follow them on Facebook (@EdmontonQueerHistoryProject), Instagram (@edmqueerhistory) and, coming soon, TikTok!

⁵ View the EQHP Downtown map and read all about every location here: <https://www.edmontonqueerhistoryproject.ca/the-map>

⁶ Check out the EQHPStories map here: <https://eqhpstories.ca/>

⁷ <https://www.edmontonqueerhistoryproject.ca/>