

# QUEERING THE CAMPUS

A significant place for queer history in Prince George's County is the University of Maryland in College Park (UMD). The UMD Student Homophile Association (later the Gay Student Alliance) was formed at the Stamp Student Union in 1970. It was one of the earliest gay college student organizations in the U.S. Students sued the Board of Regents to remain a recognized student organization and to get sexual orientation added to the University's new Human Relations Code.

UMD began offering courses with significant LGBTQ content in the mid-1970s, with courses such as "Homosexuality and Morality." After decades of work, the LGBTQ Studies program was officially created in 2002. As of 2022, there are at least 12 LGBTQ+ student groups, two peer support groups, and one gender neutral "Frarority."



▲ Yearbook photo  
Gay Student Alliance, University of Maryland, 1972  
UPUB S36.002; Special Collections & University Archives,  
University of Maryland Libraries



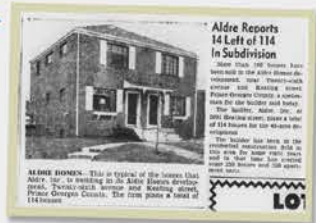
▲ Robert Alfandre with singer Dionne Warwick, 1988  
Washington Blade photo  
by Doug Hinckle

## ROBERT ALFANDRE

Robert Alfandre (1927-2014) was born in New York City and raised in Washington, DC. After serving in World War II, he worked briefly for the Central Intelligence Agency but left out of fear that his sexual orientation would limit his career prospects. In 1951, he married Priscilla Buck, who was aware and supportive of his sexual identity. Later that year, Robert and his brother Jack inherited the family construction business, Aldre, Inc. The company constructed thousands of homes and apartments in Montgomery and Prince George's counties, many of them in Hillcrest Heights.

### An Aldre, Inc. house ► in Hillcrest Heights

*The Evening Star,*  
May 12, 1956  
*Chronicling America,*  
Library of Congress



Mr. Alfandre met his partner, Carroll Sledz, in 1968. Sledz died in 1986. In his honor, Alfandre opened the Carroll Sledz House to provide a home for HIV/AIDS patients. A prolific fundraiser for AIDS-related causes, he later donated the Sledz House to the Whitman-Walker Clinic.

# SISTERFIRE

"We want to proclaim that women will not let this or any administration strip us of our rights or our humanity." – Sisterfire event program, 1985



▲ Sisterfire, 1985

Courtesy Myra L. Cones and Yvonne G. Harris  
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Collection,  
National Museum of American History, Archives Center,  
NMAH-AC1146-0000455

Sisterfire began in 1982 as a fundraiser for community arts organization Roadwork, Inc., in reponse to President Reagan's cuts to arts funding. Staged on the grounds of Takoma Park Junior High from 1982 to 1985 and the Equestrian Center in Upper Marlboro in 1987 and 1988, the women's cultural festival sought to bring together all races and social classes and build coalitions for social change. At its height in 1987, about 8,000 people attended. That year saw readings by novelist Alice Walker and a standout performance by a young Tracy Chapman.

Sisterfire was a signature gathering for lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. In 1984, folk singer Holly Near implored the crowd, "That's for all you girls who are out...so stand up and identify yourselves." News reports suggest that about half the crowd did just that.



## PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Search **PGParks.com** and **MontgomeryParks.org** to find events that center LGBTQ+ communities and/or topics. Examples include queer ecology hikes, wilderness skills trainings, comedy nights, and history talks.

## FOR MORE HISTORY

**Maryland's LGBTQ+ Historic Context Study (2018)**

[presmd.org/lgbtq/](https://presmd.org/lgbtq/)

**Historypin: an open-source digital map**  
[historypin.org/en/lgbtq-america/lgbtq-maryland/](https://historypin.org/en/lgbtq-america/lgbtq-maryland/)

**Montgomery County Historic Preservation**  
(301) 563-3400  
[mcp-historic@mncppc-mc.org](mailto:mcp-historic@mncppc-mc.org)

**Prince George's County Historic Preservation**  
(301) 952-3520  
[HistoricPreservation@ppd.mncppc.org](mailto:HistoricPreservation@ppd.mncppc.org)

 THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL  
Park and Planning Commission

PROTESTS SPUR  
GOVERNMENT  
ACTION  
SUMNER WELLES  
PRIDE IN THE  
PARKS

# LGBTQ+ HISTORY

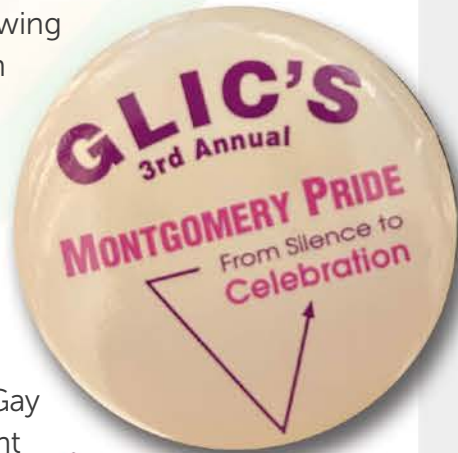
MONTGOMERY & PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTIES,  
MARYLAND

FIGHT  
AGAINST  
HIV+  
AIDS  
QUEERING  
THE CAMPUS  
SISTERFIRE



## PRIDE IN THE PARKS

On May 24, 1994, the Montgomery County Council removed a provision allowing discrimination against gay and bisexual people who worked with children. The victory made the county's second LesBiGay Pride Day event more celebratory as about 400 gathered at Hillandale Local Park on June 11.



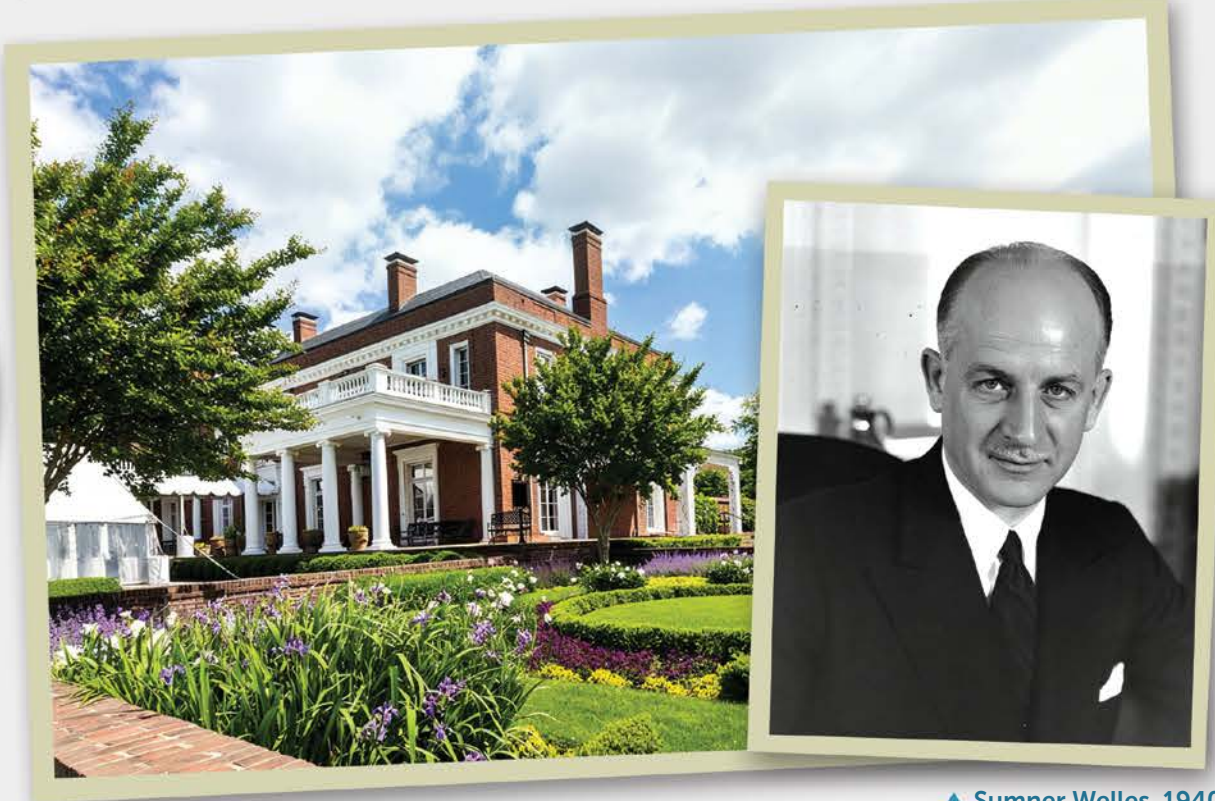
▲  
Button from Montgomery  
Pride held at Valley Mill  
Special Park, 1995

Photo by Nancy Craighead

Attendees enjoyed performances, vendors, info tables, and a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere.

Pride organizer Gay and Lesbian Interest Consortium gave service awards to advocates who helped secure sexual orientation protections in 1984 — Robert Coggin (former co-chair of the Suburban Maryland Lesbian and Gay Alliance), Stuart Harvey (activist), Peri Jude Radecic (former Lesbian rights coordinator for the county's National Organization for Women), and Susan Silber (Takoma Park attorney).

▼ Oxon Hill Manor, 2019 | Photo by M-NCPPC



▲ Sumner Welles, 1940

Photo by Beth Gore  
Courtesy Harris & Ewing,  
Harry S. Truman Library & Museum

## SUMNER WELLES

Built in 1928, Oxon Hill Manor was the estate of Sumner Welles and his second wife, Mathilde Townsend. They hosted high society events at the 49-room mansion perched above the Potomac River. Welles' career was shaped by close political ties, including his friendship with Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. He served as the U.S. Ambassador to Cuba, Assistant Secretary of State, and Undersecretary of State.

Welles' close relationships with men, including rumored romantic entanglements, were widely speculated about in political and social circles. He skillfully maintained discretion until tensions with Secretary of State Cordell Hull and a scandal involving soliciting sex from two Pullman porters forced him from public service. He was a complex queer individual whose struggles left an indelible mark on the nation's diplomatic legacy.

## AIDS PROTESTS

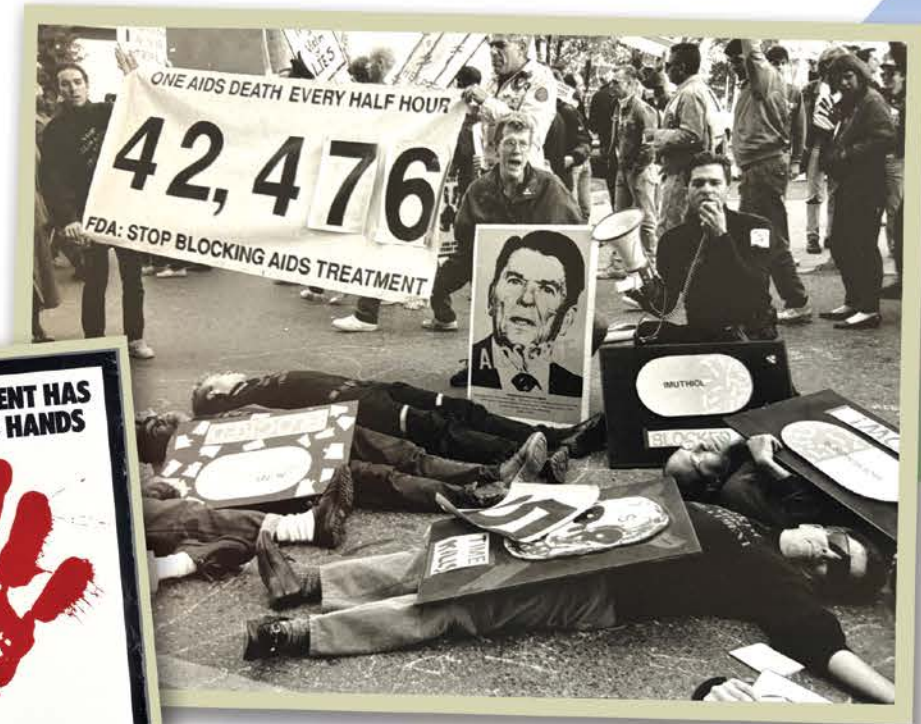
AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) led the way in demanding a government response and fighting the homophobia compounding the epidemic. ACT UP national actions in Montgomery County spurred changes in the government's approach to health emergencies.

On October 11, 1988, nearly 1,500 protestors shut down the Food and Drug Administration in Rockville. Picket signs reading "Time isn't the only thing the FDA is killing," called for faster access to experimental drugs. On May 21, 1990, more than 1,000 protestors from around the country, marched into the Bethesda campus of the National Institute of Health chanting "Act Up. Fight back. Fight AIDS."

The protocols for emergency drug testing developed as a result of ACT UP's efforts improved AIDS outcomes, and were used in 2020 to find treatments and vaccines for COVID-19.

ACT UP poster  
1988

New York  
Public Library  
Digital Collections,  
id 1577320



Seize Control of the FDA, 1988 ▲

Photo by Tom McKitterick