

CONSERVATION 'ON THE NATCH': MAINTENANCE AND REMEMBRANCE AT THE
ALCOHOLISM CENTER FOR WOMEN

by

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A Thesis Presented to the
FACULTY OF THE USC SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degrees
MASTER OF HERITAGE CONSERVATION
and
MASTER OF URBAN PLANNING

May 2022

Dedication

Conservation and recovery are lifelong pursuits. This work is dedicated to the women, men, folks that have and continue to cultivate at ACW a home, a place of safety, and strength.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Ken Breisch – your support of a paper only tenuously connected to architectural history I wrote my first semester has blossomed into this thesis. Meredith Drake Reitan’s enthusiasm for the ways history takes shape in our environment, fortifies our present and connects us to each other has been a steady undercurrent in my writing and thinking. Thank you to Shayne Watson for living a path I didn’t know existed. You led me directly to this program and ushered me out the other side. To Trudi— if you are my rock, you are the most precious stone. Thank you for your unwavering guidance, support, and affirmation. To Christy McAvoy for being a fearless advocate, patient mentor, and endless repository of Los Angeles’ history. This thesis would not have been possible without the extensive collections of ONE Archives, where I spent delightful days pouring through papers about love triangles, astrology, and social change.

Endless thanks to Lorette Herman for (literally) opening the doors of ACW to me. Your patience with my unending streams of questions and connection to the ACW community has allowed me to document ACW’s legacy. To the eloquent, passionate, and sage former participants and staff who took the time to speak with me. Carolyn Weathers, Carol G., Nadia Bruce-Rawlings, Wendy G., and Elizabeth Savage brought this the story to life and into my heart. Special thanks to Carolyn Weathers for the extensive use of her archives and tour of Long Beach, and Elizabeth Savage’s sharp eye for the inner workings of ACW. To the clients and staff who shared with me a small piece of their lived realities.

Thanks to my classmates – Ani, Xiaoling, Raphael, Jackson, and Erik – for their moral support as we weathered grad school and a pandemic. To my own home – Emily, Seema, Noelle, Shireen, Hailey, Hannah, and Emma – for teaching me about queer community and challenging me to create the world I want to live in. It begins inside our walls, our most intimate unit. To Laura for her love. To Mom, Dad, and Lucas, and my entire blood family: my foundation, my heart’s home.

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Abstract

As the gay liberation wave crested across Los Angeles in the 1970s, queer people flooded into the streets and institutions to permanently alter the city’s landscape. This thesis locates the

Alcoholism Center for Women (ACW), a rehabilitation clinic established in 1974 for and by lesbian alcoholics, within the physical and social geography of gay Los Angeles. Against the backdrop of the growing medicalization of substance use disorders in the latter decades of the twentieth century, ACW is a tangible manifestation of the ways lesbians and racially and economically marginalized women became agents of their own healing. Within two Tudor-Revival buildings, the women asserted their existence in the public realm and forged semi-private networks of care based in mutuality and self-determination.

This thesis explores how the buildings' physical characteristics influenced ACW staff and participants' experiences, and how ACW's ethos of healing through community shaped the buildings themselves. Examining a range of preservation techniques from quotidian acts of maintenance to formal designation, it frames preservation as an ongoing and reciprocal relationship of care between the buildings and the women they shelter. This process, as much as the result, strengthens and transfigures the ACW community.

Lastly, this thesis details the author's contribution to the preservation of ACW's legacy through an ongoing public history project. It explores the potential of collaborative workshops to create multimodal content that draws connections between past and present efforts to claim space and maintain sobriety. Bringing tactile archival materials into conversation with members' voices and memories, this project encourages intergenerational ties among ACW's community and the creation of new knowledge about ACW's history and contemporary relevance.

Introduction

Walk up to the front steps of the house at 1147 S. Alvarado Street. Its storybook roof is larger than life, its deep porch yawns, drawing you closer. Women rest in plastic chairs under the dappled light of shade trees in the front lawn and the murmur of voices drifts out from under the porch of 1135 S. Alvarado next door. If it's a Friday, you will see them tending to raised beds or weeding around the rose bushes that line the concrete pathway (Figure i.1).

In 1907, the porch at 1147 S. Alvarado was newly minted with its first coat of paint. Five-year-old Regina Winstel may have clamored up the steps under the careful eye of domestic workers Bridget Hennewsy and Bertha Glander or run through the lawn to 1135 S. Alvarado, owned by the Potter family.¹ The Winstel family commissioned an impressive three-story, picturesque Tudor Revival house occupying a prominent corner lot on Alvarado and 12th Street. Then, Pico Union was a nascent suburb just southeast from downtown Los Angeles. Undeveloped lots between the stately homes on the 1100 block of Alvarado Street signaled the not-so distant past when the Tongva people stewarded the land before they were violently dispossessed by Spanish colonizers and subsequent white settler colonists. Over the first decade of the twentieth century the Winstel family, and the neighborhood, grew. The great swell of migration and money to Los Angeles in the 1920s saw families like the Winstels move west to new suburbs, and tall brick apartment buildings rose up in Pico Union's formerly vacant lots to house the growing population. By 1941, the homes at 1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado were no longer filled with families and children but elderly and infirm patients. Catherine Craddock, a nurse, and her husband converted the properties into sanitariums where they outfitted the numerous bedrooms with hospital-style beds and tended lush gardens that encircled the buildings.² Over the next three decades, eastern Europe immigrants, displaced elderly, low-income and queer residents from Bunker Hill, then Central American and Mexican immigrants and refugees filled the surrounding houses, now subdivided, that lined the block.

¹ 1147 S. Alvarado Street Historic Cultural Monument Declaration, April 13, 1987, Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; "U.S. Federal Census, 1910-1940," digital image s.v. "August Winstel" (born 1866), *Ancestry.com*.

² "1147 S. Alvarado St., March 10, 1938" Certificate of Occupancy, Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety; "1135 S. Alvarado St., October 10, 1942," Alteration Permit, Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety.



In 1964, Brenda Weathers traveled 1,600 miles from Brownsville, Texas to Los Angeles in search of self-expression and community.³ After being expelled from college for being an out-lesbian, she packed up her VW bug and went West. Weathers soon found herself walking down Alvarado Street with new friends and peers who had been pulled into the magnetic energy of the Gay Liberation Front and other street-based activism.⁴ The explosion of direct action that began in the 1960s morphed over the following decades into the ongoing work of providing basic services to fortify the bodies, and social spaces for the hearts and minds, of those they sought to organize. The formation of the Gay Community Services Center (GCSC) in 1971, the first queer drop-in health center in the United States, marked a momentous step towards queer visibility, and social services, in public space.⁵ However, gaps remained. Weathers' search for queer community, largely organized around bars and clubs, exacerbated her growing dependence on alcohol. Her journey to sobriety illuminated gaping holes in a system of care designed for straight white men. When the male dominated GCSC, too, failed to uplift the unique needs of women and lesbian alcoholics, Weathers and others forged a new path on Alvarado Street.⁶

In the fall of 1974, Weathers and a cadre of lesbian activists and service providers from the Gay Community Services Center walked up the sagging porch of 1147 S. Alvarado St.

³ Brenda Weathers Celebration of Life, July 30, 2005, ONE Subject File Collection: Weathers, Brenda, Coll2009-004, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

⁴ Carolyn Weathers, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

⁵ Moira Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.: the Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

⁶ Carolyn Weathers, "An early history of the ACW," Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 3, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

Animated by their recent success – Weathers had just received the largest grant ever awarded to a women and lesbian rehabilitation program – the group was in search of a home base. Weathers may have known then of the building’s history as a sanitarium, or just been enticed by its cheap rent and proximity to other LGBTQ+ services and friends. Soon, plants hung from macrame rope enlivened 1147’s parlors and bedrooms, now community rooms and offices in the headquarters they rented from the Craddock family. Next door at 1135 S. Alvarado, staff scrubbed grease off the kitchen floor and rearranged furniture for the thirteen-bed recovery home. In 1975, the Alcoholism Center for Women opened as one of the first women-specific treatment centers on the West Coast.⁷

The Alcoholism Center for Women (ACW) was part of an early cohort of rehabilitation programs that centered participants as agents of their own recovery process. Advocacy from public health professionals and self-identified alcoholics helped reframe alcoholism from a psychological weakness to a medical condition throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century. The physiological component was key to treatment, but for many with substance use disorders, particularly queer people, alcoholism was also strongly influenced by psychological and sociological forces like homophobia. ACW was part of a vanguard of early queer-led peer support and residential programs of the 1970s that built self-worth, raised political consciousness, and fostered community building ‘on the natch’ (slang for sober). ACW’s staff, an interracial majority-lesbian group that included many recovering alcoholics, understood firsthand the need to center women’s intersectional identities – sexuality, race, class, as well as survivors of domestic violence and incest – to get to the root of substance use. ACW also advocated for women’s economic opportunities and prison reform, drawing on relationships with women’s health and queer community organizations beyond the center’s walls to knit together a network of solidarity across the city. The first chapter of this thesis situates the formation of ACW within the burgeoning movements for women and queer liberation in Los Angeles, examining how tactics to claim space and self-determine shaped public health institutions. It argues that ACW looked outward to confront the larger social and political forces that shaped women’s addiction and turned inward to cultivate new practices of recovery.

⁷ In 1974, it was called the Alcoholism Program for Women, a division of the Gay Community Services Center. By 1975 when Weathers and the organization split from GCSC they changed the name to the Alcoholism Center for Women. Ibid.; Who We Are,” Alcoholism Center for Women, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://alcoholismcenterforwomen.org/who-we-are/>.

The two Tudor Revival mansions that house ACW served to reaffirm and amplify the organization's underlying principles. The buildings' warmth and intimacy helped convey a sense of belonging, a marked contrast to the institutional or carceral settings many participants had been previously relegated to. In 1986, one developer threatened the survival of the entire organization with a plan to bulldoze the properties to make way for a mini mall. This catalyzed a citywide campaign to save the buildings and assert the value of the work that transpired within them. This conservation battle, while in some ways the apex of the story, is better understood within a longer lineage of ACW's grassroots efforts to care for the buildings. The second chapter of this thesis explores ACW's range of conservation techniques from quotidian acts of maintenance to formal designation to understand how their ethos of healing and self-determination shaped the buildings themselves. It frames conservation as an ongoing and reciprocal relationship between the buildings and the women they shelter. Conservation 'on the natch' of ACW's buildings is both a direct product of participants' recovery and emblematic of the program's praxis of care.

Conservation is not merely physical, but relational. Through commemorative events that bring together alumni and current members, ACW continues today to maintain a network of women invested in the organization's longevity. The third and final chapter of this thesis documents my ongoing public history project that seeks to continue ACW's work of political consciousness raising and community connection. This collaborative effort uses archival materials and oral histories to create multimodal content that links past and present efforts to claim space and maintain sobriety. Guided by ACW's principles of self-determination, it encourages intergenerational ties among ACW's community and the generation of new knowledge about ACW's history and contemporary relevance.

This thesis is about the power of home for belonging. It is about physical rehabilitation that peels back layers of history and paint, about transformation through sisterhood and queer kinship. Situating ACW within a larger political, cultural, and spatial framework reveals women's and LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, and others) people's growing footprint in Los Angeles' physical environment from the 1960s to 1980s and emphasizes how these actors forged shared bonds through health care, political campaigns, and acts of celebration. By putting ACW's establishment in 1974 into conversation with the fight to preserve it in 1986, I demonstrate how the women of ACW fostered an intimate recovery community based in

mutuality and self-determination while simultaneously leveraging broader political mechanisms to defend their public claim to space. My public history project attempts to build on ACW's history of participant-centered programming and support the organization's current work to foster community and women's empowerment. The conservation efforts, past and present, led by the women of ACW are extensions of the ways they care for one another. ACW's ethos of care offers guidance to conservationists for methodologies that acknowledge the work of ongoing maintenance, and that frame rehabilitation and interpretation around their resonance with current community members, that view conservation as a transformative act that shapes both people and places.

Terminology

Language is a powerful tool to make the marginalized tangible, to offer people the power to self-define. It is intimate, personal, and constantly shifting across social and physical contexts and eras. There are, therefore, inherent limitations to ascribing labels to historic individuals. My intent in this thesis is to be as specific with my terminology as I have the information to be, and as broad as possible when I do not. The founders of ACW identified themselves and the women they served sometimes as 'gay women,' but more often as 'lesbians.'⁸ The emergence of the term 'lesbians' in the 1970s was a conscious political choice women made to differentiate themselves from gay men. When referring to larger movements or groups of people that transgress heterosexual and cisgender norms, I rely on 'LGBTQ+' (Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, and others) and 'queer.' Queer studies developed in the early 1990s where activists and academics reclaimed queer, previously a slur, and began to "challenge[] a binary system that emphasizes the performative aspects of gender."⁹ The Alcoholism Center for Women, as the name implies, offers gender-informed treatment for women. One oral history I conducted illuminated the existence of a transgender participant who transitioned after graduating from ACW.¹⁰ He is likely not the only one who would fit under Susan Stryker's definition of trans as those who "cross over (*trans*-)...a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting

⁸ Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: a History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 203-4.

⁹ Thomas Piontek, *Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 5.

¹⁰ Nadia Bruce-Rawlins, interview by author, May 28, 2021.

place."¹¹ While the thesis often refers to participants in ACW's program as women, it is important to note that some participants' gender identities may have shifted over time, or not been fully recognized at ACW.

Language to describe substance use and people with substance use disorders, too, is morally coded and continually evolving. 'Substance use disorder,' defined in the latest Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), "involves patterns of symptoms caused by using a substance [both alcohol and drugs] that an individual continues taking despite its negative effects."¹² Alcoholism, while no longer a medical definition, continues to be used colloquially by laypeople and practitioners alike.¹³ The Alcoholism Center for Women has retained its original name despite this, and despite the fact that most women in the program today seek to treat drug or polydrug use, rather than alcohol. This thesis will rely on person-centered language to describe people with substance use disorders. Research demonstrates that such language connotes less stigma than labels that subsume the individual to the disorder such as 'substance abusers' or 'addicts.'¹⁴ Occasionally, I will use the word alcoholic for individuals who in their time self-described as such. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) defines 'recovery,' used as 'people in recovery' or 'recovery program' as a holistic "process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential."¹⁵ 'Treatment' for substance use disorders is used over 'rehabilitation' to describe programs like ACW.¹⁶

In its early years, ACW referred to the women in its recovery treatment program as 'program participants' to reflect their ethos of self-help and peer support. Today, ACW uses the word 'client,' reflecting larger trends towards the medicalization and professionalization of the

¹¹ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 1.

¹² <https://www.gatewayfoundation.org/addiction-blog/dsm-5-substance-use-disorder/>.

¹³ G. L. Fisher, & Roget, N. A. (2009), Alcoholism, In *Encyclopedia of substance abuse prevention, treatment, & recovery* (Vol. 1, pp. 45-50). SAGE Publications, Inc., <https://www-doi-org.libproxy1.usc.edu/10.4135/9781412964500.n16>.

¹⁴ John F. Kelly, Richard Saitz, and Sarah Wakeman, "Language, Substance Use Disorders, and Policy: The Need to Reach Consensus on an 'Addiction-Ary,'" *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly* 34, No. 1 (2016): 119.

¹⁵ "SAMSHA's Working Definition of Recovery," Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA), first printed 2012, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/pep12-recdef.pdf>.

¹⁶ Karen Chan Osilla and Stefanie A. Stern, "Treatment of alcohol and drug use disorders," in *Encyclopedia of Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment, & Recovery* ed. G. L., Fisher and N. A. Roget (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008), 951-955.

field.¹⁷ I have elected to use the word ‘participant’ for all people who have, or currently are going through ACW’s program. This is to avoid the confusion of switching terms, and because most of the women currently in ACW’s program that I refer to were also ‘participants’ in the workshop I led.

While ‘historic preservation’ continues to be the dominant name for the field, the U.S. is moving towards embracing ‘heritage conservation,’ the preferred term in many other parts of the world. While historic preservation, the term and the field’s legacy, connotes maintenance of the status quo, heritage conservation can be defined as “the art of navigating the linkages between our present and past, requir[ing] simultaneous engagement and negotiation with the forces of policy, community, urban planning, and design.”¹⁸ This thesis argues that ACW’s methods and underlying ethos of caring for their historic buildings are resonant with this definition of conservation. ‘Rehabilitation,’ as used in this thesis, refers to the conservation of the physical structures either under the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards or more colloquially to describe the process to make the buildings habitable and useful for ACW.

Methodologies and Ethics

It is a privilege to draw on, and interpret, the voices of former and current ACW participants and staff. Their words were gathered in archives, newspapers, and secondary sources. They also spoke directly to me: I conducted five oral histories with ACW community members and four workshops with current ACW staff and participants. Privacy and consent are major for any subject of academic study, but particularly when dealing with medical institutions and people with substance use disorders. Former staff and participants have been named, in whole or in part or with aliases, with their verbal and written permission. Interviewees had the opportunity to read their words in the context that I present them here and edit in ways they saw fit. Current staff, except for Executive Director Lorette Herman, and all current participants who I spoke to are quoted anonymously. Chapter 3 describes my methodology and positionality in further detail.

¹⁷ Lorette Herman, interview by author, November 5, 2021.

¹⁸ Vinayak Bharne and Trudi Sandmeier, “Introduction” *Routledge Companion to Global Heritage Conservation*, (London: Routledge, 2019), 1.

Part 1: Claiming Space: Community Building Through Healing

Claiming Space

In 1971, Del Whan, the founder of Los Angeles' first lesbian service organization, fervently declared, "We must start 'coming out' on TV, on the radio, in newspapers, in public...everywhere."¹⁹ The 1970s were an explosive decade for the gay liberation movement that brought the existence, and needs, of gay and lesbian people into greater public consciousness than ever before. However, as Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter cautioned in their 1997 anthology *Queers in Space*, "'coming-out' on an individual basis and increasing visibility...have little diminished the disparities in access to public resources for queer people and networks."²⁰ Significantly, the 1970s, as Moira Kenney argued in *Mapping Gay L.A.*, were also an era where grassroots networks of gay liberation activists began to establish political and physical institutions across the city.²¹ From 1970 to 1975 alone, at least eleven sites claimed by and for lesbian women, six of which were service organizations, 'came out' into Los Angeles' public realm.²² Tracing the emergence of these groups reveals a city-wide networks based in intimate relationships and political solidarity. The fragmentation and dissolution of many of these groups by the 1980s marked the growing pains of a movement still reckoning with the intersections of race, gender, and class. ACW's endurance testifies to the

¹⁹ Speech at Bovard Auditorium, March 15, 1971, Coll2012.001, ONE Subject File Collection: Whan, Del, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

²⁰ Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, "Queer Space," in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), 6.

²¹ Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.*, 6.

²² This includes: Crenshaw Women's Center established 1970 at 1027 S Crenshaw Blvd; Westside Women's Center established in 1972 at 219 S. Venice Boulevard; Gay Women's Service Center established in 1971 at 1542 Glendale Blvd; Gay Community Service Center established in 1972 on W Olympic Blvd and Union St; Women's Building established in 1973 at 442 San Pedro St; Alcoholism Center for Women established in 1974 at 1147 S Alvarado Blvd; Daughters of Bilitus Center, established in 1971 at 1910 S Vermont Ave; Sister's Liberation House established in 1971/2 on South Oxford St. near downtown; Sisterhood Bookstore established in 1972 in Westwood; Califia established in 1975, holding weekend campouts and retreats discussing issues of race and class; 237 Hill St was the site of the L.A. Women's Center in 1974, and also used by the Radical Therapy Collective, Fat Underground, and *Sister Newspaper*. Not all of these spaces were exclusively lesbian-centric: Crenshaw Women's Center, Westside Women's Center, Women's Building, and Califia were run by gay and straight women. ACW too, many interviewees point out, was always open to straight women but it wasn't until the late 1990s that there was a significant percentage of straight women in the program. Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 170; Daphne Spain, *Constructive Feminism: Women's Spaces and Women's Rights in the American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 52-65; Yolanda Retter, "Lesbian Activism in Los Angeles, 1970-1979," in *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders, and Generations* ed. Joseph Allen Boone (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 199-207.

overlooked needs of women and lesbians with substance use disorders, strong leaders, and a committed cadre of staff who leveraged community partners for funding and political support.

For many scholars, ‘queer’ works in opposition to and “dissent from the hegemonic, structural relations and meanings of sexuality and gender.”²³ These hegemonic constructions begin with European colonization of the American continent. Scholars such as Joanne Barker argue that violent subjugation of gender and sexual identity has, and continues to be, fundamental in the campaigns for colonization and assimilation.²⁴ Archival evidence and present-day voices assert the expansive expressions of gender identity and sexual orientation of indigenous peoples across Southern California including the Gabrielino, Luiseno, Quechan, Chumash, Yokuts, Kamia, and Mohave.²⁵ LGBTQ+ people have always existed, despite the ways their bodies have been policed and their histories denied from the archives. They undermined gender norms on stages and in the streets; male impersonator Ella Wesner’s 1870 California tour sold out across the state. They congregated; 1920s and 1930s Hollywood bubbled with bars, nightclubs, and private residences that offered small pockets of sexual freedom and gender expression.²⁶ During the 1940s, the sudden population influx streaming from Los Angeles’ wartime ports led to an explosion of LGBTQ+ nightlife and beach activity across Venice, Santa Monica, Long Beach, Hollywood, Silverlake, and North Hollywood.²⁷

Queer living and loving in the middle decades of the twentieth century was inherently political, but in the 1950s gays and lesbians began to convene spaces to craft and promote explicitly political agendas. Formed as a response to nationwide institutionalized homophobia and harassment, the homophile organizations the Mattachine Society, Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), and ONE, Inc. saw chapters open across the world as gays and lesbians began organizing for social change. Their priorities were as shaped by their sexuality as other facets of their identity – the homophile movement was largely composed of white, middle to upper class, cisgender people. Despite the radical roots of the Mattachine Society under Harry Hay, the

²³ Erin J. Rand, *Reclaiming Queer: Activist & Academic Rhetorics of Resistance* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014), 4.

²⁴ Joanne Barker, *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2017).

²⁵ Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 9-14; “About Us,” Indigenous Pride L.A., accessed November 17, 2021, <https://indigenouspridel.a.org/about-us>.

²⁶ Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 19, 41-44.

²⁷ Shayne Elizabeth Watson, “Preserving the Tangible Remains of San Francisco’s Lesbian Community in North Beach, 1933 to 1960” (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2009) 35-70; Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 72-74.

rhetorical strategies advanced by homophiles largely emphasized commonalities between gay and straight people to gain acceptance in heterosexual society.²⁸ DOB, described as a proto-lesbian feminist organization, was formed in San Francisco in 1955 by a group of lesbian couples, including Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon. Los Angeles was a stronghold of the homophile movement; The Mattachine Society and ONE were formed in Silverlake, and DOB opened an L.A. chapter in 1958.²⁹ Some of the most significant properties associated with early homophile organizing in California are private residences. Being nonheteronormative in the 1950s posed a genuine threat to peoples' careers and lives. Women, especially, needed safe and private settings to congregate. Gay printing presses founded in the 1950s, including ONE in Los Angeles and Pan-Graphic Press in San Francisco built community, shaped public perception, and advocated less through physical imprint but through ink and paper that proliferated through the country.³⁰

In contrast, the gay liberation movement of the late 1960s and 1970s was intent on disrupting public space and the prevailing social order. Activated by the Civil Rights movement, younger gay and lesbian Angelenos formed groups like PRIDE (Personal Rights in Defense and Education) and the GLF (Gay Liberation Front) that were eager to assert their difference from heterosexual society.³¹ The GLF's formation in the immediate wake of the Stonewall uprising in 1969 contributed to the mythology of Stonewall as the singular watershed moment in queer history. However, subsequent scholars have re-examined the history of this era by making connections between 1950s homophile organizing and radical activist efforts of the 1970s.³² Stonewall was not the first queer public uprising; Compton's Cafeteria, Cooper's Donuts, and the Black Cat marked several pre-Stonewall sites where queer people, notably gender

²⁸ Two years in, Hay and other communist members were pushed out by a more centrist leadership under Hal Call. Joseph Allen Boone, "Unmasking the Homophile in 1950s Los Angeles: An Archival Record," in *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders, and Generations*, ed. Joseph Allen Boone (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 174-5.

²⁹ Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 130.

³⁰ Edythe Eydge (known as Lisa Ben) published the first lesbian magazine *Vice Versa* in 1947 and ONE Magazine, a product of ONE Incorporated, an offshoot of the Mattachine Society, began in 1952. In 1960, transwoman Virginia Prince started the magazine *Transvestia*. Strkyer, *Transgender History*, 24, 78; Joseph Allen Boone, "Unmasking the Homophile in 1950s Los Angeles," 168; Teresa Grimes, "LGBT Historic Context Statement," Historic Context Statement, Survey LA (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Department of City Planning, September 2014), 16.

³¹ Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 169.

³² Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Piontek, *Queering Gay and Lesbian Studies*, 12-20; Joseph Allen Boone, "Unmasking the Homophile in 1950s Los Angeles: An Archival Record," in *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders, and Generations*, ed. Joseph Allen Boone (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 174.

nonconforming and trans people of color, fought back against police brutality.³³ This history helps frame the emboldened attitudes of queer people in the 1970s to claim physical space within a longer, though not always linear, trajectory. In Los Angeles, acts from Kiss In's at parks to guerilla theater on the streets delivered powerful messages about queer oppression and celebrated queer sexuality.³⁴

The early 1970s saw a growing desire of activists to support the material and psychological welfare of their community. Morris Kight, Don Kilhefner, and John Planatia of GLS soon formed the Gay Survival Committee. The organization was headquartered at Kight's house in Westlake, which also served as the gay crisis call center. North on Vermont Ave, they operated a storefront where people could drop in for legal advice, personal and job counseling, and drug and alcohol support. In 1971, the Gay Survival Committee formalized as the Gay Services Center (later the Gay Community Services Center, GCSC) within Kight's vernacular Victorian home.³⁵ The same year, Del Whan founded the Gay Women's Services Center in Echo Park as the first ever service center specifically for lesbian gathering and organizing and the DOB opened a storefront on Vermont that served as the headquarters of the *Lesbian Tide* magazine.³⁶ GCSC, the first queer drop-in health center in the United States, soon occupied several buildings throughout Westlake and Hollywood which they transformed into six "Liberation Houses," for unhoused queer youth and adults and the Van Ness Recovery House, a

³³ These acts of resistance occurred at Cooper's Donuts in Los Angeles in 1959, Compton's Cafeteria Riot in San Francisco in 1966, and the Black Cat Tavern in Los Angeles in 1967. Stryker, *Transgender History*, 60-65; "LGBTQ History in Los Angeles: Cooper Do-Nuts and Black Cat Tavern," Los Angeles Almanac, March 31, 2021.

³⁴ Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 2, 158.

³⁵ Kight lived at the house located at 1882 West 4th Street from 1967 to 1974 (extant, now a designated Historic-Cultural Monument). The "Survival Committee" was located at 577 ½ N. Vermont Ave (not extant). In 1972, the Gay Services Center moved half a mile away into two worn-down Victorians on Wilshire Boulevard and Union in Westlake. Kate Eggert and Krisy Gosney, "Morris Kight Residence," in Los Angeles Department of City Planning Recommendation Report Case No. CHC-2020-3322-HCM (September 30, 2021), 5; GLF Survival Committee, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 2, Folder 4, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 192; "577 N Vermont Ave Permit for Building Alteration and Repair," Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, June 6, 1964; "577 N Vermont Ave Permit for Building Demolition," Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, February 20, 1973.

³⁶ Spain, *Constructive Feminism: Women's Spaces and Women's Rights in the American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 64-65.

joint project with Alcoholics Together to offer housing and recovery services for queer people.³⁷ Claiming the infrastructure needed to provide services and build community marked, as Moira Kenney argues, a “key shift from gathering at temporal or private locations to public permanence” in the physical landscape.³⁸

Space claiming did not develop evenly across all segments of the LGBTQ+ population – it was often segregated along gender, class, and racial lines. Gay liberation organizations, as the homophiles before them, were largely led by mostly white, middle class, cisgender men. A combination of location, class issues, and environment made places anywhere from uncomfortable to actively hostile to people of color and women. Within the GLF, Brenda Weathers and other women felt undervalued and overlooked by their gay male counterparts.³⁹ Knowing she was not the only one “fighting the double swords of misogyny and homophobia,” Weathers started holding a separate women’s night to build lesbian community.⁴⁰ An advertisement for one night declared, “Male chauvinists beware!”⁴¹ The GCSC attempted to provide spaces for women through specific programming and rap groups, but it wasn’t until 1984 that the organization created a specific program for women, Lesbian Central, and renamed as the Gay & Lesbian Community Services Center.⁴² Lesbians’ aspirations and desire for belonging, however, had already led many to break out of the confines of male-led organizations.

Many lesbians found community within the women’s liberation movement, which blossomed in parallel and in tandem with gay liberation. Grassroots organizing and legislative victories in the 1960s and 1970s gave women firmer ground from which to assert control over

³⁷ In 1971, Gay Services Center member and former L.A. Community Development Agency employee John Planatia spearheaded the first of six “Liberation Houses” at 1168 N. Edgemont St. in East Hollywood. The houses were some of the first of their kind to provide both economic security and community connection to queer youth and adults. In 1972, the Sister’s Liberation House was dubbed “the first home for wayward lesbians ever to exist in Los Angeles.” It housed twenty women and several lesbian organizing fronts and was managed by Yolanda Retter. Alcoholics Together and the Van Ness Recovery House will be described in further detail in the following section. *The Lesbian Tide*, Vol. 1 No. 9 (April 1972): 3, 6, 10, 16. “1168 North Edgemont St, Los Angeles, CA 90029,” Queer Maps, accessed November 30, 2021, <https://queermaps.org/place/liberation-house>. Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 192.

³⁸ Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.*, 81.

³⁹ Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 181.

⁴⁰ Carolyn Weathers, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

⁴¹ Gay Liberation Front- LA Women’s Liberation 1970, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 2, Folder 4, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

⁴² Just a year later in 1985, Lesbian Central staff broke away to found Connexus, a lesbian services center. The immediate catalyst was the organization’s snub of Del Martinez, a well-qualified and highly admired older Latina lesbian, as Executive Director. Lesbian rap posters and Lesbian Resource Program schedule of events, ONE Subject File Collection: Lesbian raps and meetings, Coll2009-004, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.*, 132-134.

their bodies, their finances, and public space. These space-claiming and institution building efforts can be traced back to Progressive Era-women's organizations that constructed settlement houses, public baths, kindergartens, women's lodging, and housekeeping cooperatives.⁴³ Building projects of the women's liberation movement created enclaves intended foster community, self-expression, and physical wellbeing including health and abortion services, bookstores, and art spaces.⁴⁴ The critiques of both first and second wave feminism's narrow framing around the needs and ideology of straight, middle class white women have been well documented.⁴⁵ The National Organization for Women (NOW), for instance, was notable for distancing themselves from lesbians.⁴⁶

However, many women-centered spaces proved generative for both gay and straight feminists. The Crenshaw Women's Center, established in 1970 at 1027 Crenshaw Boulevard, was one of the first women-led health clinics and community centers in L.A. With its non-hierarchical structure and emphasis on women's empowerment, it soon became a gathering place for lesbian women.⁴⁷ Sharon Lilly and Brenda Weathers, both discontented with the GLF, found a home at the Crenshaw Women's Center where they founded Lesbian Feminists in 1970.⁴⁸ Lesbian activist Yolanda Retter depicted the Lesbian Feminists as a cross-class group that centered sexism more fully in their ideology than other gay organizations and dedicated their efforts to consciousness raising practices and supporting political campaigns.⁴⁹ Carolyn

⁴³ In 1878, the Los Angeles Women's Club became the first local organization exclusively for women's advancement. The Progressive Era saw a flourishing of segregated groups, namely the white Friday Morning Club and the Ebell Club and the black Sojourner Truth Industrial Club which advocated for social, political, and public health reform. Daphne Spain and Dolores Hayden's scholarship illuminate the ways these women shaped public space and private life. Spain excavates the women-led volunteer organizations that generated "redemptive spaces" that sought to create healthier, cleaner, and more Americanized cities. Hayden uplifts the "material feminists," who often had a more overtly political mission for building settlement houses and cooperatives. Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981); Sian Winship, "Women's Rights in Los Angeles 1850-1980 Historic Context Statement," Historic Context Statement Survey LA (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Department of City Planning, October 2018), 19-24.

⁴⁴ Spain, *Constructive Feminism*, 1-15.

⁴⁵ Winship, "Women's Rights in Los Angeles 1850-1980 Historic Context Statement," 59-66.

⁴⁶ Los Angeles' NOW chapter, however, was one of the more progressive. Lesbian Feminists helped the L.A. chapter draft a resolution to address homophobia within the movement which passed in 1971. Retter, "Lesbian Activism in Los Angeles, 1970-1979," in *Queer Frontiers*, 200.

⁴⁷ Spain, *Constructive Feminism*, 57.

⁴⁸ Brenda Weathers Celebration of Life, July 30, 2005, ONE Subject File Collection: Weathers, Brenda, Coll2009-004, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

⁴⁹ Retter was a powerful activist for lesbian, particularly Latinas and lesbians of color in Los Angeles. She played instrumental roles in the development of the Lesbian Feminists, Gay and Lesbian Center, Connexus, and Sisters

Weathers described how the Crenshaw Women's Center was divided with straight organizing on one side and lesbian organizing on the other. "I remember," she chuckled, "how many straight women crossed over to the gay side."⁵⁰ The Women's Building, which opened downtown in 1973, was another example of a women-centered space that actively welcomed lesbians and provided a safe space for community building and self-expression.⁵¹

Many white lesbians fell, however, into the same pitfalls as white gay men and straight women when it came to recognizing multiple "swords of oppression" beyond the ones they themselves experienced. Retter described the 1973 West Coast Lesbian Conference as a "catalytic event" that highlighted both the latent and blatant racism and transphobia of many white lesbians.⁵² Soon, lesbians of color were building their own spaces. The 1970s saw the rise of Lesbianas Latinamericanas in 1974, Debreta's in 1974, Lesbians of Color in 1978, and the first national Lesbians of Color conference held in Malibu in 1983. This momentum gained steam in the 1980s with groups such as Connexus in 1983, Lesbianas Unidas in 1984, Asian Pacific Lesbians and Friends in 1985, Bienestar Health Services in 1988 and United Lesbians of African Heritage in 1990.⁵³ These groups also occupied different spatial locations. Connexus had an outreach center in East L.A., while Jewel's Catch One in 1973 in Midcity served as an anchor for the queer Black community.⁵⁴ Gender essentialism, too, plagued the lesbian community. Trans activists who moved outside of cisgender gay organizing included Virginia Price, who started peer support group Hose and Heels Club in 1961, and Angela K. Douglas who broke from the Los Angeles GLF chapter to form the Transsexual Activist Organization in 1970.⁵⁵

Despite her activist work with GLF and Lesbian Feminists, Weathers herself was struggling. During the day, she ran a second-hand thrift store on Griffith Park Avenue, and at

Liberation House. She was a volunteer and advocate against the carceral system and was an archivist and librarian for the UCLA Chicano Studies Resource Center. Retter, "Lesbian Activism in Los Angeles, 1970-1979," in *Queer Frontiers*, 200. "Yolanda Retter Interview," LAMBDA Archives of San Diego, March 25, 1997; "Herstory," *The Lesbian Tide*, Vol. 1 No. 9 (April 1972): 9.

⁵⁰ Carolyn Weathers, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

⁵¹ Spain, *Constructive Feminism*, 66.

⁵² Retter, "Lesbian Spaces in Los Angeles, 1970-1990," in *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), 332.

⁵³ Yolanda Retter, "Los Angeles, California," in *Encyclopedia of Lesbian and Gay Histories and Cultures*, ed. Bonnie Zimmerman and George Haggerty (Taylor and Francis, 2016), 479-480.

⁵⁴ Retter, "Lesbian Spaces in Los Angeles 1970-1990," in *Queers in Space*, 327-335; Bonnie Zimmerman and George Haggerty, *Encyclopedia of Lesbian and Gay Histories and Cultures* (Taylor and Francis, 2016).

⁵⁵ Stryker, *Transgender History*, 75-78; Grimes, "LGBT Historic Context Statement," 18.

night would self-soothe with a jug of wine.⁵⁶ “I was filled with self-loathing,” she later told an *L.A. Times* reporter, “I’d wish and wish someone would call me and no one did.”⁵⁷ In 1973, her depression and dependence on alcohol – and a growing string of DUIs – reached a breaking point and she showed up at the doorstep of a local self-help clinic.⁵⁸ She was not the only one; the waitlist for the Van Ness Recovery House revealed the overwhelming number of gay people struggling with substance use. The same year Weathers gave up drinking, she was tapped for an opportunity to create more opportunities for women like herself. Lillene Fifield, a lesbian, social worker, and community organizer with GCSC asked Weathers to co-write a grant to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) for a new alcohol treatment program for gay women.⁵⁹ Before receiving the grant, they began to scope out locations for the program. They didn’t have to go far. Less than a mile away from GCSC’s office at 1614 Wilshire Blvd, Weathers came across 1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado St., described as “two rambling wood houses...leftovers from a more affluent residential era.”⁶⁰ In 1974, the NIAAA granted them just over a million dollars to implement a three-year program. “It was the largest grant ever made to a new program, to a women's program, and to a lesbian program,” Fifield declared.⁶¹ Staff immediately got to work –Brenda’s sister Carolyn, an early staff member, recalled holding their first staff meeting October 1974 where they “cleaned and painted the house, and while still painting and arranging furniture, received our first outpatient.”⁶²

The program had a rocky start. Shortly after they received funding, simmering tensions around labor and gender equity at GCSC boiled over. In February 1975, five months after the program had begun, twelve staff members sent a letter to GCSC leadership team demanding they

⁵⁶ Shirl Buss, “From the Bottle to the Barricade,” *The Lesbian Tide* vol. 6 no. 2 (n.d.), ONE Subject File Collection: Weathers, Brenda, Coll2009-004, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

⁵⁷ Elaine Woo, “Brenda Weathers,” March 30, 2005, ONE Subject File Collection: Weathers, Brenda, Coll2009-004, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

⁵⁸ Buss, “From the Bottle to the Barricade.”

⁵⁹ Fifield worked at the University of Southern California and served as Vice President of the Gay Community Service Center Board of Directors circa 1974. She experienced her own recovery process as a self-described adult child of alcoholics. “Organizational Structure of GCSC,” L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 9, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; Audrey Borden, *The History of Gay People in Alcoholics Anonymous : From the Beginning* (New York: Haworth Press, 2007), 204.

⁶⁰ Kathleen Hendrix, “Lesbian Alcoholics: Climbing Up from Nowhere,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1975, in L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 18, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; Kenney, *Gay L.A.*, 85.

⁶¹ Borden, *The History of Gay People in Alcoholics Anonymous*, 198.

⁶² Carolyn Weathers, “An early history of the ACW,” Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 3, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

receive the benefits like health insurance that they were promised.⁶³ That wasn't all: shortly after, Weathers learned that Executive Director Don Kilhefner and other male leadership at the Center were attempting to appropriate the NIAAA funds for other programs. An article in *The Lesbian Tide* reported that Weathers "locked horns with the male power structure at GCSC," adamant that the funds serve the women they were intended for.⁶⁴ In April 1975, Weathers reported the Center's "financial mismanagement and misappropriation of NIAAA (and other) funds" to the NIAAA.⁶⁵ Kilhefner quickly responded to the impending audit by designating the Alcoholism Center for Women as a separate entity. With Weathers at the helm, ACW soon had a staff of twenty-three women, several who had come over from GCSC.⁶⁶ Faderman and Timmons argue that this outcome "emboldened those in charge of other programs to articulate their own growing dissent over issues of money and power."⁶⁷ The ACW's genesis as a split from the GCSC revealed fissures within the queer community and the desire of lesbians to make physical and ideological distinctions from predominately male gay spaces.

Situating 1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado within the Pico Union neighborhood provides another dimension to the ways the women of ACW claimed space. The development of Pico Union began in the 1880s as an early suburb for wealthy, white Angelinos that was connected to downtown by the streetcar. In the 1920s the wealthiest developers and investors began to shift their attention west. Pico Union saw the rise of new brick apartment buildings and the subdivision of older houses to make room for the influx of new immigrants, mostly white Midwesterners and Europeans.⁶⁸ By 1950, the widening of Olympic and Wilshire and a new freeway system marked a shift in Pico Union as a desired residential neighborhood and the

⁶³ "RE: Health Insurance" correspondence between Alcoholism Program for Women and GCSC Management Team, February 18, 1975, L. A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 12, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

⁶⁴ Buss, "From the Bottle to the Barricade."

⁶⁵ Correspondence from Brenda Weathers to NIAAA staff 1975, L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records: Correspondence, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 12, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

⁶⁶ "Alcoholism Program for Women (APW), Funding Proposal 1974 (with additions through June 1977)," L. A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 9, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

⁶⁷ Charges of elitism and patriarchy in this incident and others precipitated a strike on GCSC in 1975. "Lesbian Activism in Los Angeles, 1980-1979," in *Queer Frontiers*, 208.

⁶⁸ Historic Resources Group, "Westlake Community Plan Area," Historic Resources Survey Report, SurveyLA (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles, Department of City Planning, April 2014), 10; Robert Peterson, "How a Neighborhood Disappears: The Life and Death of Pico Heights," *L.A. As Subject*, published on KCET January 10, 2017, <https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/how-a-neighborhood-disappears-the-life-and-death-of-pico-heights>.

beginning of its economic downturn.⁶⁹ When Bunker Hill was bulldozed in the 1950s, many of the displaced queer, immigrant, and elderly residents migrated west. Westlake and Pico Union soon became a bustling queer community with several interracial working-class lesbian bars.⁷⁰ In the 1970s the neighborhood began to absorb a wave of Mexican and Central American immigrants escaping violence in their home countries and Macarthur Park became known as a gathering point for political protests, and for cruising.⁷¹ Morris Kight, who moved to Westlake, just north of ACW, in 1967 described a neighborhood where “the rich had fled,” and had become “the headquarters of the artists, it was gentle and loving and there were great houses.”⁷² This interracial working-class neighborhood within the larger network of gay neighborhoods of Echo Park and Silverlake offered spacious, affordable, and relatively safe gathering places for ACW to make a home.

A Place of Healing – (Health) Care

The creation of ACW and other women and queer-led health care institutions were more than just symbolic assertions of visibility, but tangible efforts to improve the health and survival of women and LGBTQ+ people. Examining the evolution of the diagnoses and treatment of substance use disorders in tandem with the architectural trends of Southern California’s public health institutions contextualizes ACW’s significance within women and queer peoples’ historic efforts to advocate for their rights to their bodies and public space.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, “the institution of the gay bar,” as Weathers called it, was the primary place where queer people congregated and built platonic and romantic

⁶⁹ Historic Resources Group, “Westlake Community Plan Area,” 12.

⁷⁰ Pico Union and Westlake are sometimes used interchangeably. The Alvarado buildings are in the Westlake Community Plan area as defined by SurveyLA, but also the Pico Union redevelopment zone and the Pico Union Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ). Kenney also notes that Westlake/ Pico Union stands in contrast to other gayborhoods that led to gentrification. Historic Resources Group, “Westlake Community Plan Area,” 13; The Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, “Redevelopment Plan for the Pico-Union Redevelopment Project Area no. 2,” adopted November 24, 1976; “Pico Union Preservation Plan” (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles Planning Department, October 2006), Appendix B; Teresa Grimes, “LGBT Historic Context Statement,” Historic Context Statement, Survey LA (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Department of City Planning, September 2014), 58-59; Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.*, 84.

⁷¹ Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.*, 84-85; Kate Eggert and Krisy Gosney, “Morris Kight Residence”, 51; Teresa Grimes, “LGBT Historic Context Statement,” Historic Context Statement, Survey LA (Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles Department of City Planning, September 2014), 59.

⁷² Quoted in Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.*, 85.

relationships.⁷³ Lillene Fifield agreed: “There was nowhere else to go.”⁷⁴ Drinking establishments as the solution to “the oppression, alienation, despair and isolation that most gay women experience on a day to day basis in a heterosexually oriented society” proved dangerous, even deadly.⁷⁵ In 1975, Fifield published a groundbreaking study entitled, *On My Way to Nowhere: Alienated, Isolated, and Drunk, an Analysis of Alcoholism in the Gay and Lesbian Community*. It revealed that while alcoholism impacted between seven and ten percent of the general population, “one-third of the (gay and lesbian) community drank to problem-drinking proportions, and 24 percent were, by definition, alcoholics.”⁷⁶ In their grant to the NIAAA, Fifield and Weathers posited three “theoretical causation factors” to explain these high numbers. The first cause was sociological, referring to queer peoples’ reliance on gay bars and lack of job opportunities that restricted them to menial and unfulfilling work. The second cause was psychological, internalized traits learned from a homophobic society that led to, “low self-esteem, sense of inadequacy, feelings of isolation, feelings of alienation, insecurity and high anxiety in interpersonal relationships, inability to express emotions, and feelings of rejection.” The third element, physiological, represented relatively a new “disease concept of alcoholism” where alcoholism was seen as “progressive and destructive to the abuser” and necessitated medical intervention.⁷⁷

This three-pronged understanding of substance use was a product of a century’s worth of contested definitions of substance use and assumptions about gender and sexuality. Michelle McClellan’s *Lady Lushes: Gender, Alcoholism, and Medicine in Modern America* and Audrey Borden’s *The History of Gay People in Alcoholics Anonymous* provide insight to the culturally imbued social, psychological, and biological assumptions about women and queer people that shaped their diagnoses and treatment. McClellan describes the relative sympathy for (largely white, middle class) women who drank to “cope with the pain and discomfort of being female” in the Temperance Era that dissipated in the Progressive Era, when the flouting of Prohibition

⁷³ Brenda Weathers, interview by Althea Scott, *Ad Lib*, 1975, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgXq12oyRcg>.

⁷⁴ Borden, *The History of Gay People in Alcoholics Anonymous*, 197.

⁷⁵ Alcoholism Program for Women (APW), Funding Proposal 1974, L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records: Correspondence, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

⁷⁶ Borden, *The History of Gay People in Alcoholics Anonymous*, 201; Kathleen Hendrix, “Lesbian Alcoholics: Climbing Up from Nowhere,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1975, in L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 18, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

⁷⁷ “Grant additions 1977,” L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 9, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

became a social threat signifying women who rejected patriarchal gender norms.⁷⁸ Borden highlights how psychoanalysts attributed queer people's (mostly focused on cisgender gay men) drinking as both the symptom and manifestation of their "sexual deviations" from as early as the 1880s through the 1970s.⁷⁹

The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 was the harbinger of the modern alcoholism movement, which would begin to describe substance use in medical terms.⁸⁰ One central figure in this movement was Margaret "Marty" Mann, the first documented woman and lesbian (although not publicly out) who joined Alcoholics Anonymous in 1939 and founded the National Council on Alcoholism in 1944. Mann was a charismatic leader who used her personal experience to build a nation-wide coalition that advocated for alcoholism as a public health issue.⁸¹ In 1960, psychologist E.M. Jellinek first presented the "disease model" which established alcoholism as physiological, and sometimes hereditary, progressive disease rather than the result of a psychological condition or weakness. In 1965 the American Psychiatric Association adopted the model and the American Medical Association followed suit the following year. While researchers have complicated and expanded the disease concept over the following decades, it continues to be foundational to today's understanding and treatment of substance use disorders.⁸² The era of medicalization also saw two peer support models that, while acknowledging the physiological element of substance use, created treatment outside of medical institutions. This includes the support group model which began with Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935 and the therapeutic community model, popularized by Synanon in Santa Monica in 1958, and subsequent residential treatment programs.⁸³

While the disease model helped reduce stigma associated with substance use disorders, medicalization also served to reify existing power structures and police ways of being. Through the early twentieth century, women who acted in non-normative ways or resisted patriarchal

⁷⁸ Michelle L. McClellan, *Lady Lushes: Gender, Alcoholism, and Medicine in Modern America* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 5.

⁷⁹ Borden, *The History of Gay People in Alcoholics Anonymous*, 27.

⁸⁰ McClellan, *Lady Lushes*, 26-27.

⁸¹ McClellan, *Lady Lushes*, 14.

⁸² Joyce Hartje, "Disease concept," in *Encyclopedia of Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment, & Recovery* ed. G. L., Fisher and N. A. Roget (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008), 293-295.

⁸³ G. L., Fisher and N. A. Roget, "Synanon," in *Encyclopedia of Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment, & Recovery* ed. G. L., Fisher and N. A. Roget (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008), 895-895), in *Encyclopedia of Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment, & Recovery* ed. G. L., Fisher, and N. A. Roget, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008), 951-955.

assumptions were frequently labeled as hysterical and could be relegated to psychiatric or medical facilities by male guardians.⁸⁴ Homosexuality, too, has long been viewed by Western medicine as a disorder to be “cured,” or annihilated through drugs, psychoanalysis, to most violently lobotomies and sterilization, which persisted into the early 1960s.⁸⁵ It wasn’t until 1973 that homosexuality was finally removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. “For the first time in history,” Borden stressed, “alcoholism was an illness and homosexuality was not.”⁸⁶

Medicalization is also bound up in criminalization. Natalie Molina, Nayan Shah, and other scholars make important interventions into California’s public health historiography by articulating how “cleanliness” and “health” were morally-coded words weaponized against people of color and immigrants.⁸⁷ Examining Los Angeles and San Francisco respectively, they illuminate the violent ways public officials and health leaders sought to segregate and police Latinx and Chinese American communities through zoning, public infrastructure, and medical institutions.⁸⁸ Laws and public rhetoric that pathologized Chinese opium dens but not white opium users at the turn of the century, or Black users of crack cocaine versus white users of powder cocaine in the 1980s reveal the racialized punishment for substance use.⁸⁹ Moreover, medical institutions were closely tied to, and often resembled, carceral institutions. McClellan documented how medical professionals wielded the powers to diagnose alcoholism in order to strip low-income and women of color of their rights.⁹⁰

As Weathers and others knew too well, even if women and lesbians worked up the courage to seek help for their substance use, treatment programs could alienate them at an extremely vulnerable point in their recovery process. In 1975, Weathers declared, “agencies are

⁸⁴ Lazzaretto, Winship, LoCasio “Rockhaven Sanitarium Historic District,” 17-18.

⁸⁵ Borden, *The History of Gay People in Alcoholics Anonymous*, 27-34.

⁸⁶ Borden, *The History of Gay People in Alcoholics Anonymous*, 36.

⁸⁷ Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Emily K. Abel, *Tuberculosis and the Politics of Exclusion: a History of Public Health and Migration to Los Angeles* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

⁸⁸ Latinx is used as the gender-neutral form of Latino/Latina. Deena J. González and Ellie D. Hernández, “Chapter 12: Latina/o Gender and Sexuality” (National Park Foundation, October 31, 2016), 23.

⁸⁹ Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 93-95; Cindy Brooks Dollar, “Criminalization and Drug ‘Wars’ or Medicalization and Health ‘Epidemics’: How Race, Class, and Neoliberal Politics Influence Drug Laws,” *Critical Criminology* vol. 27, no. 2 (2018): 305.

⁹⁰ McClellan, *Lady Lushes*, 142-144, 155-158.

liable to treat our gayness before they treat our alcoholism.”⁹¹ Treatment centers largely lacked women or queer role models and used alienating language about partnership. Some even isolated or punished queer people for actions such as hugging other participants.⁹² Treatment models and staff that were latently or blatantly homophobic “huge contradiction[s],” Fifield explained, by creating environments “dependent on brutal honesty” yet “forced many gay people to lie about their most basic identity.”⁹³

In response to these obstacles, queer groups used the support group and therapeutic community models to create their own programs. In 1969, gay alcoholics founded a corollary to Alcoholics Anonymous called Alcoholics Together.⁹⁴ Word began to filter through the queer community, and the organization grew. Members soon realized that many people seeking recovery needed more than just a group to meet with once a week, but a home, connection to employment, and a larger community. Following in the footsteps of Synanon, Alcoholics Together and GCSC co-founded the Van Ness Recovery House, a twenty-bed recovery center in 1971.⁹⁵ Van Ness employed what Mike K., a member of former Alcoholics Together and director of the Van Ness Recovery House, called the “social model” of recovery which he summarized as, “That which appears least therapeutic is most therapeutic.” He elaborated:

Like the interaction between the two people who are assigned to cook dinner for twenty others, the need to have somebody assist you, learning that you cannot be so self-sufficient that you can run your life on your own terms. You learn cooperation. You learn to make your bed. Really simple things come together, and make it a healing environment.⁹⁶

ACW’s outpatient and inpatient models would draw both from medical treatment (the inpatient program included a detox program) and peer support models. Their peer counselor

⁹¹ Brenda Weathers, interview by Althea Scott, *Ad Lib*, 1975, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgXq12oyRcg>.

⁹² Brenda Underhill, *Creating Visibility: Providing Lesbian-Sensitive and Lesbian-Specific Alcoholism Recovery Services*, ed. Terry Wolverton (Los Angeles: Alcoholism Center for Women, 1993), 20-27.

⁹³ Borden, *The History of Gay People in Alcoholics Anonymous*, 199.

⁹⁴ They tried to name the organization Gay Alcoholics, but it was rejected by the director. Borden, *The History of Gay People in Alcoholics Anonymous*, 213.

⁹⁵ In its early years, the Van Ness Recovery House, located at 1158 Beachwood Dr. charged residents on a sliding day, offered employment at the GCSC thrift store, and shared chores and cooking duties. The 20-bed recovery house continues to operate today. Alcoholism Program for Women (APW), Funding Proposal 1974, L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records: Correspondence, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; “About Us,” The Van Ness Recovery House, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://vannessrecoveryhouse.com/>; Hadley Meares, “Calm and Comfort: ‘Liberation Houses’ of the 1970s Gave Homeless LGBTQ in L.A. Refuge,” *Lost L.A.* published on KCET, June 10, 2020.

⁹⁶ Borden, *The History of Gay People in Alcoholics Anonymous*, 222.

program for outpatients followed in the footsteps of AA and Alcoholics Together, while the inpatient program followed the framework outlined by the social and therapeutic community model. The 1970s saw the growth of a range of social service organizations that connected health and housing.⁹⁷ In San Francisco, Hank Wilson, a member of ACT UP, steered one of the earliest supportive housing programs at the Ambassador Hotel in 1978 largely for and by people living with HIV/AIDS.⁹⁸ In 1989, activist Rue Thai-Williams opened Rue's House in Los Angeles, an early housing project for women and their children living with HIV/AIDS.⁹⁹

Women had sought respite in 1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado St. long before the arrival of Brenda Weathers. In 1938, the ten-bedroom Tudor Revival style home at 1147 S. Alvarado was converted into a "rest home" and by 1942 it was known as the Chappell Sanitarium (Figure 1.1). For the next three decades, the sanitarium was run by nurse Catherine Craddock, whose maiden name was Chappell.¹⁰⁰ In a 1940 advertisement, the facility was described as: "aged & convalescent, complete 24-hour nursing service, beautiful gardens, Ethical & refined atmosphere."¹⁰¹ 1135 S. Alvarado had an even longer medical history, first as a physician's house in 1933, a rest house in 1942, and a sanitarium in 1944. By 1948, Craddock operated both sanitariums. The Fairvue Sanitarium at 1135 S. Alvarado disappeared from the city directories in 1957, while the Chappell Sanitarium endured until 1973.¹⁰² Excavating the history of sanitariums offers a spatial dimension to the development of public health over the twentieth century and contextualizes the way gender and sexuality led to differing forms, and locations, of treatment.

⁹⁷ Stephen Vider, *The Queerness of Home: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Domesticity after World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 14.

⁹⁸ Ben Ostertag, "The City of Saint Francis Loses Its Own Saint Henry," *HuffPost*, November 11, 2008.

⁹⁹ Rue is married to Jewel Thai-Williams, founder of Jewel's Catch One. "Jewel's Catch One," *Los Angeles Conservancy*, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/jewels-catch-one>.

¹⁰⁰ "Obituaries," *Los Angeles Times*, November 28, 1987.

¹⁰¹ "Sanitariums," *Los Angeles Times*, September 29, 1940.

¹⁰² "Alvarado," *Los Angeles Street Address Directory* (Los Angeles: Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company, May 1956), 23; "Alvarado," *Los Angeles Street Address Directory* (Los Angeles: Pacific Bell, July 1973), 13.

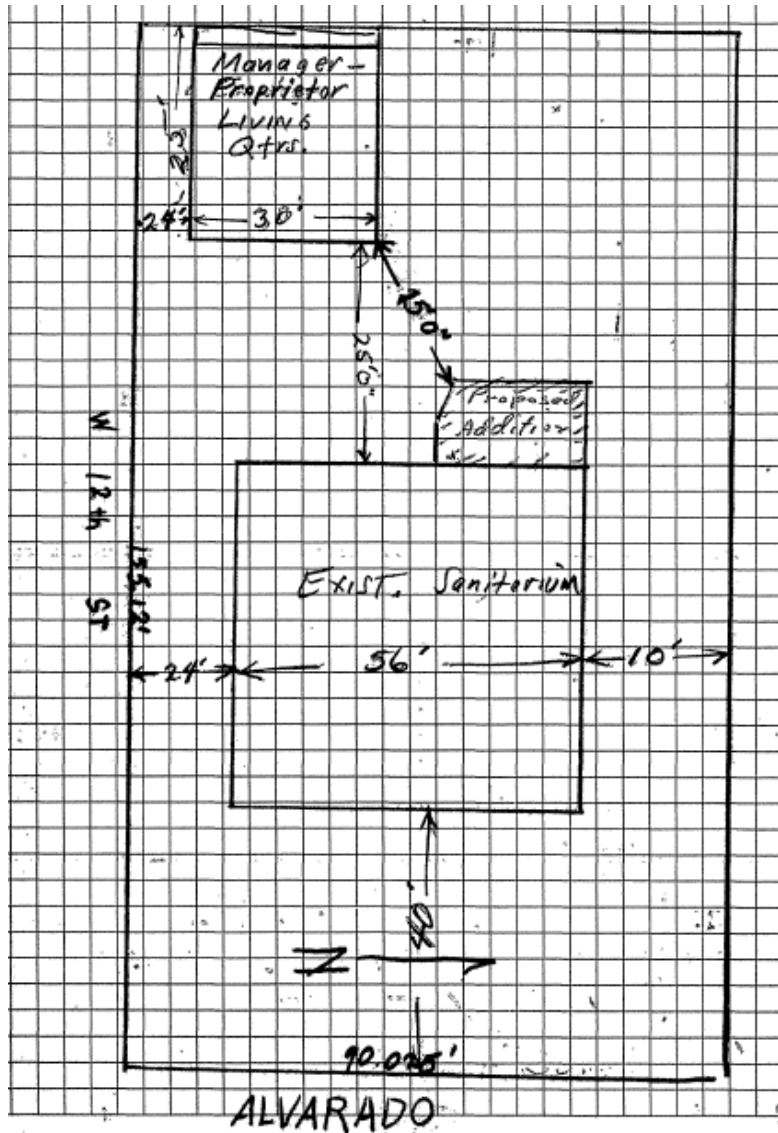


Figure 1.1: Plot Plan of 1147 S. Alvarado St., 1951. “1147 S. Alvarado St Permit for Building Alteration and Repair,” Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, June 16, 1951.

Los Angeles’ history and mythology as a health haven stretches back to the 1870s when boosters fashioned the region’s temperate climate, lush vegetation, and refined accommodations as the antidote to the trials of city life. As early institutions in present-day La Crescenta and Glendale gained popularity, “health-seekers” of all kinds boarded trains to Southern California, leading to a flurry of new and repurposed public health infrastructure. More and more private facilities emerged in the 1910s and 1920s in response to revelations of the inhumane conditions of state-run asylums, but also bolstered by the Progressive Era’s faith in science and

institutionalization.¹⁰³ By 1933, Charles Maurice Grimes's survey for the American Medical Association identified 156 licensed sanitariums across the United States, thirty of which were in California. However, Grimes distinguished these from the seventy-six "rest homes" across the country which he described as "custodial not therapeutic."¹⁰⁴ The distinction, however, was not always clear; scholars note that sanitariums and rest homes alike lacked clarity about what and how they treated various maladies or disorders. Sometimes run by non-medical professionals, they served people suffering from "nerves and exhaustion," to wide a ranging mix of psychiatric, neurological, medical, and psychiatric needs.¹⁰⁵

Since the nineteenth century, physicians, planners, and public health advocates have been lured by the promise of new environments to fix old ailments. The Progressive Era's environmental determinist ideology convinced physicians and politicians alike to treat individual's mental and physical ailments by transforming their surroundings. Sanitariums, often located in pastoral, semi-rural areas were positioned as a contrast to, and respite from, the dense, dirty, and morally loose city.¹⁰⁶ David Sloane and Annmarie Adams both note that despite the modern technology often found within these buildings, sanitariums constructed "homelike environments," either by repurposing old homes or contracting architects to fashion new buildings after homes or hotels. Adams argued that architects "clothed modern plans in historic dress in order to smooth the effects of social change."¹⁰⁷ Though in the heart of the city, the expansive gardens, deep porches, and domestic setting at 1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado were meant to instill a sense of domestic peace and tranquility in their elderly patients.

"By women for women," the feminist slogan that defined the Crenshaw Women's Center and countless health abortion clinics in the 1970s, aptly described the Rockhaven Sanitarium which opened in Glendale in 1923. Nurse Agnes Richards founded Rockhaven after witnessing

¹⁰³ David Sloane, "Landscapes of Health and Rejuvenation," in *A Companion to Los Angeles*, ed. William Deverell and Greg Hise (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 438–460; Christine Lazzaretto, Sian Winship, John LoCasio, "Rockhaven Sanitarium Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, June 9, 2016), 15-19.

¹⁰⁴ Lazzaretto, Winship, LoCasio "Rockhaven Sanitarium Historic District," 26.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Carla Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1; Lazzaretto, Winship, LoCasio "Rockhaven Sanitarium Historic District," 16-21.

¹⁰⁷ Annmarie Adams, "Modernism and Medicine: The Hospitals of Stevens and Lee, 1916–1932," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* vol. 58, no. 1 (1999): 42–61. Quoted in Sloane, "Landscapes of Health and Rejuvenation," 441.

the conditions and treatment options available to women at her job at Patton State Hospital.¹⁰⁸ With its private Craftsman and Spanish Colonial bungalows and lush gardens, she positioned Rockhaven as the “answer to a demand for private hospital care for nervous and mental cases under more individual supervision and privacy, and more homelike surroundings than is usual in other available institutions public or private.”¹⁰⁹ Run by Richards until her death in 1967, Rockhaven was one of Los Angeles’ earliest women-led health facilities.¹¹⁰ Upper-class white women in Western society have had a long history of using private spaces to shape ideas about wellbeing. The book *Florence Nightingale at Home* argues that public officials in Victorian England saw the home as the first space to shape citizens’ engagement in the public sphere, and medical institutions by extension became a way to enforce social order. This doctrine influenced settlement houses, sites of social services with an aim on Americanizing immigrants and uplifting low-income women, like Jane Adam’s Hull House in Chicago. In *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, Dolores Hayden contextualizes Adams within a network of material feminists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century who, she argued, created alternative domestic realities that sought to recast women’s role in society at-large.¹¹¹

Weathers, too, took an inward approach to address the societal issues that led to substance use. “Since we can’t change the communities,” riddled with homophobia and sexism, she stated, “we create[d] an alternative environment” at ACW. This “alternative environment” had a concrete location in the overlooked urban landscape of Pico Union. Architectural historian Helen Bronston identifies common traits in the form and function of the queer-led or queer-friendly clinics in San Francisco that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s period including the Haight Ashbury Clinic, Lyons Martin Clinic, and St. James Infirmary. Generally located in discreet buildings on busy streets in low-income neighborhoods, she argues that these sites physically occupy the “gaps in the system” that they seek to fill. Bronston notes the ways these places signal safety and welcoming through iconography and social networks.¹¹² While the Tudor Revival mansions housing ACW harken back to early twentieth century health trends that emphasized the healing power of domesticity, the disinvestment in the houses and Pico Union by

¹⁰⁸ Lazzaretto, Winship, LoCasio “Rockhaven Sanitarium Historic District,” 19.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹¹¹ Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*.

¹¹² Helen Bronston, “Taking Care of Our Own,” (Spaces of Sickness and Wellbeing: Alternative Spaces panel for Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, online, April 26, 2021).

the 1970s exemplifies how queer people appropriated spaces abandoned by those in power to take care of each other. Faced with the stigma of gender and sexual ‘transgression’ in the medical world, queer advocates led their own interventions that addressed material needs and fostered a sense of belonging.

Sisterhood and Self-Help

The founding of ACW, wrote the *Lesbian Tide*, was the realization of a dream for “an autonomous center run by and for women” that provided an alternative to alcohol as “the unquestioned strategy for survival.”¹¹³ The program was divided into three components: prevention measures, including outreach and education; early intervention services such as the 24 hour hotline and support services; and rehabilitation services, which included the recovery house, detoxification, employment training, and reentry services.¹¹⁴ Brenda Weathers, in her customary blazer and tousled brown hair, could be found darting in and out of group therapy at 1147 S. Alvarado and the residential program next door at 1135 S. Alvarado (Figure 1.2). It was also a place of community gathering and connection (Figure 1.3). In 1975, reporter Kathleen Hendrix visited ACW. She described the house:

It is an informal, active place – remnants of a yard sale piled on the porch, the screen door constantly banging, a bowl of fruit near the entrance with a sign, ‘Please take one.’ Priscilla, possibly the world’s ugliest dog, serves as hostess and bouncer. There is a lot of hugging.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Buss, “From the Bottle to the Barricade,” *The Lesbian Tide* vol. 6 no. 2 (n.d.), ONE Subject File Collection: Weathers, Brenda, Coll2009-004, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Kathleen Hendrix, “Lesbian Alcoholics: Climbing Up from Nowhere,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1975, in L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 18, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; Kenney, *Gay L.A.*, 85.



Figures 1.2-1.3: Portrait of Brenda Weathers with a picture of her bulldog Priscilla (Prissy), 1974. Carolyn Weathers private collection (left). Women outside 1135 S. Alvarado, circa 1976. Carolyn Weathers private collection (right).

For ACW, “self-help” meant that participants were actively engaged in, and directed, their recovery process. More than just “serve” marginalized populations as was the model of many service organizations, staff believed the work to build ACW was a collaboration where participants helped create the conditions for their recovery. A 1974 flyer for a community planning meeting at the house invited women to “break bread with us” over a potluck supper and “plan the future of ACW.”¹¹⁶ Brenda Underhill, who became ACW’s Executive Director in 1980, argued that women needed ownership over their recovery. Describing a program called Lapis for Black and Latina she stated, “it is of paramount importance that lesbians of color be involved at every stage of program design, outreach and implementation.”¹¹⁷ Participants’ inclusion in program development not only created a more attuned recovery process but was also integral to ACW’s mission of demonstrating to women their value and agency over their lives.

Peer support was a foundational pillar of ACW’s approach. Weathers, the first director, was herself a lesbian alcoholic who found sobriety through a self-help program. The twenty-

¹¹⁶ Community Planning Poster, ACW Organizational Models 1976, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 6, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹¹⁷ Underhill, *Creating Visibility*, 31-32.

three initial staff members were all women, mostly lesbians, and about half self-identified recovering alcoholics.¹¹⁸ Founding members included Travis Foote, who would become ACW's second director, Sharon Lilly, a founding member of Lesbian Feminists, and Roslyn Allen, a Black and gay community organizer who served for several years as the Peace and Freedom Party governor.¹¹⁹ In ACW's early years, staff published advertisements seeking women to help fulfill "a new and exciting need: women helping women."¹²⁰ ACW recognized that some of the best people to help women seeking recovery were those who had themselves been through that process. With funds from the NIAAA grant, they trained women with at least one year of sobriety as peer counselors.¹²¹ An advertisement from 1977 described the program as "a growing experience for participants and staff together."¹²² For participants, having role models that looked like them, that had experienced the same struggles as them, was paramount. Wendy G., who participated in the outpatient program in 1983, declared, "I refused to get help elsewhere—they wouldn't have understood [me]." At ACW, she stated, "they were us."¹²³

Participants didn't just resemble staff—in some instances, they became them. Both Laurie Drabble and Elizabeth Savage first came to ACW as participants. Years later, they returned to guide others through the same process: Drabble as a Prevention Specialist, and Savage as Director of Finance.¹²⁴ Hiring former participants began to fracture patterns of wealth and power that historically excluded women and lesbians. Savage, who participated in the outpatient program in 1984, recalled the dilemma of finding a job in the 1970s and 1980s. "I felt like I had a choice," she said, "either to have a job or be out of the closet." ACW not only provided employment but also helped open pathways to other career opportunities. Savage

¹¹⁸ Kathleen Hendrix, "Lesbian Alcoholics: Climbing Up from Nowhere," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1975, in L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 18, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹¹⁹ Carolyn Weathers, "An early history of the AWC," Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 3, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; Organizational structure of GCSC, circa 1974, Box 9, Folder 9, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; Carolyn Weathers, email to author, August 18, 2020.

¹²⁰ "Miscellaneous 1974-1975," L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 18, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹²¹ "Alcoholism Program for Women Grant Additions 1977," L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 9, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹²² *The Lesbian Tide* Vol. 6 No. 6 (Los Angeles: May/June 1977), 26.

¹²³ The weight of the work could be quite draining for peer counselors, however. Elizabeth Savage explained that at ACW, and many treatment programs, staff in recovery would relapse. Wendy G., interview by author, May 14, 2021; Elizabeth Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021.

¹²⁴ Asland Brooke, "A Sign of the Times," *Los Angeles Times*, March 20, 1987, in ACW 1987-92, Johnnie Phelps papers; Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021.

worked at ACW for five years before going on to direct a human services department in a nearby city.¹²⁵ After working at ACW in the early 1980s, Laurie Drabble obtained a series of degrees in Social Work before becoming a professor specializing in recovery for women and LGBTQ+ substance users.¹²⁶ Women like Drabble and Savage, in turn, opened doors for others. Wendy G.'s path also builds upon ACW's work. She attributes her ability as a "poor kid from Texas" to earn a Master's in Social Work program to Drabble's support. She is now a psychotherapist and professor studying substance use and frequently brings her students to ACW.¹²⁷

The physical permanence of institutions like ACW was crucial to attend to queer peoples' basic needs, but also to create a sense of community that could combat social isolation and marginalization from their families and larger society. Lesbians looking to avoid bars could gather at ACW's coffee house, open until midnight on weeknights and one am on Saturdays (Figure 1.4).¹²⁸ Holiday events and potlucks 'on the natch' (slang for sober) were advertised in outlets like *The Lesbian News* (Figure 1.5).¹²⁹ One fondly-remembered concert hosted by ACW in the early 1980s featured the lesbian singer Vicki Randle.¹³⁰ The results from an ACW survey from the late 1970s revealed potlucks and socials were the most popular recreation activity, with almost seventy percent participation, followed by dances with sixty percent participation. For Wendy G., the chance to gather with other women was irresistible. She recalled standing outside of ACW one night after attending group therapy:

I came out of the group and I was in a parking lot. It was summer evening, and I was by myself. And I looked into that...living room that was packed with women...you could just see all the women...practically falling out of the window, because there were so many. I'm in the parking lot myself, right. So the next week, I was in that meeting. And that's where my life changed.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021.

¹²⁶ "Laurie Drabble," *San Jose State University College of Health and Human Sciences*, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://www.sjsu.edu/chhs/about-us/dean-staff-contact/laurie-drabble.php>.

¹²⁷ Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021.

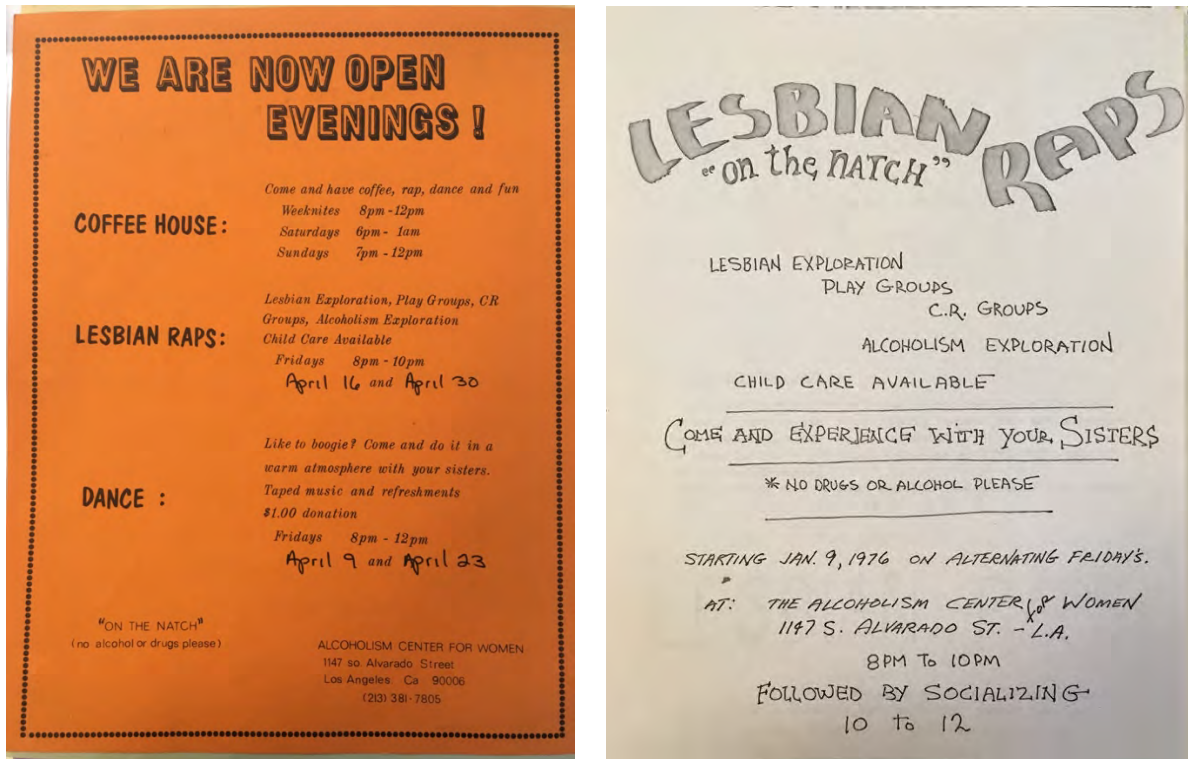
¹²⁸ The coffee house appears to have been short-lived, but events and outreach remained crucial to ACW's mission through the 1980s. ACW flyers and pamphlets, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box, 1, Folder 2, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹²⁹ Rap group poster, ONE Subject File Collection: Lesbian raps and meetings, Coll2009-004, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹³⁰ Wendy G., interview by author, May 14, 2021; Weathers, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

¹³¹ Ibid.

ACW understood that community and belonging were core ingredients for sobriety. For Wendy, the connections she built at ACW made sobriety not only available, but desirable.



Figures 1.4-1.5: ACW programming poster, circa 1976. ACW flyers and pamphlets, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box, 1, Folder 2, ONE Archives at the USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California (left). ACW lesbian rap group poster, 1976. ONE Subject File Collection: Lesbian raps and meetings, Coll2009-004, ONE Archives at the USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California (left).

Woven into each program, Weathers said, were two key ingredients: “a lot of love and helping to instill in the women a feeling of self-love and self-worth.”¹³² Self-worth was conveyed through the self-help model, therapeutic intervention, consciousness raising, and community events (Figures 1.6 and 1.7). ACW, like other feminist and queer organizations of the era, held rap groups like “Class & Feminism” and “Trashing vs. Political Disagreement” to foster dialogue and develop political consciousness.¹³³ A participant from 1975 articulated the personal

¹³² Brenda Weathers, interview by Althea Scott, *Ad Lib*, 1975, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgXq12oyRcg>.

¹³³ “Rap” groups were a popular consciousness raising practices that emerged from the women’s liberation movement. Nancy Whittier attributed their emergence to a workshop about consciousness raising presented at the 1968 National Women’s Liberation Conference by Kathy Sarachild, a member of the group New York Radical Women. By the 1970s, rap groups had emerged across the country. Nancy Whittier, “Identity Politics, Consciousness Raising, and Visibility Politics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Women’s Social Movement Activism*, ed. Holly J. McCammon, Verta Taylor, Jo Reger, and Rachel L. Einwohne (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3; “Alcohol Center Sponsors Party,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1982; “A Clean and Sober Place to Watch Bowl,”

and political breakthrough she made at ACW. Since “my consciousness has been raised... I do not intend to hide,” she stated. “That’s part of my sobriety – not hiding who I am.”¹³⁴



Figures 1.6-1.7: Participants play on staircase at 1147 S. Alvarado St., circa late 1970s (left). Holiday party at 1135 S. Alvarado, circa late 1970s (right). Carolyn Weathers private collection.

In their 1974 grant, Fifield and Weathers argued that it was not enough for ACW to just provide services, but that it “must be interrelated as a system operating in a community environment.”¹³⁵ Wendy stated that ACW “had a presence everywhere” in the lesbian community, and even remembered seeing ACW bumper stickers.¹³⁶ Carol G. learned about

Los Angeles Times, January 29, 1995; ACW flyers and pamphlets, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box, 1, Folder 2, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

The Lesbian Tide Vol. 6 No. 6 (Los Angeles: May/June 1977), 33.

¹³⁴ Kathleen Hendrix, “Lesbian Alcoholics: Climbing Up from Nowhere,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1975, in L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 18, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹³⁵ “Alcoholism Program for Women (APW), Funding Proposal 1974 (with additions through June 1977),” L. A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 9, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹³⁶ Wendy G., interview by author, May 14, 2021.

ACW from advertisements in the *Lesbian News Magazine*, while Nadia Bruce-Rawlins learned about them from a friend at GCSC (by then the LGBT Center).¹³⁷ While Fifield and Weathers envisioned ACW as a community that stood outside of the societal pressures facing women and queer people, it did not intend to isolate them from the world. They clarified that “every effort is made not to create dependency upon the house or the individuals involved in the women’s alcoholism program.” Employment training and other reentry services were crucial to support women in building new skills and coping strategies for life outside of ACW.

ACW staff also worked to address the problematic relationship between substance use and incarceration. Embedded into the initial grant was funding to divert women from the criminal justice system and decouple punishment from recovery. ACW, they argued, could serve as an alternative sentence program and support women in prison, on probation, and parole by providing counseling and basic needs. An early brochure for ACW reads, “Too often a woman becomes involved in a criminal justice system which hinders rather than helps her, particularly where her underlying conflicts relate to the abuse of alcohol.”¹³⁸ ACW’s model of self-empowerment and community connection stood in direct contrast to the punitive and isolating nature of the carceral system. ACW also worked in coalitions advocating for prison reform, such as hosting a screening of a film produced by inmates at the California Institution for Women entitled “We’re Alive” and a 1977 effort to end the segregation of lesbians in women’s prisons.¹³⁹

Over the years, ACW became more comprehensive about addressing other lived experiences women and lesbian alcoholics brought into recovery programs. In its first years, ACW was multiracial but predominately comprised of white, middle-class lesbians in their twenties and thirties.¹⁴⁰ A 1976 map reveals women came to the program from all over the city,

¹³⁷ Carol G., interview by author, February 22, 2021; Nadia Bruce-Rawlins, interview by author, May 24, 2021.

¹³⁸ “Miscellaneous 1974-5,” L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 18, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹³⁹ Previously, lesbians were separated in prisons from the rest of women in what was known as “the Daddy Tank.” Jeanne Cordova, *The Lesbian Tide* Vol. 6 No. 6 (Los Angeles: May/June 1977), 15.

¹⁴⁰ When reporter Kathleen Hendrix visit in 1975, she spoke with a group of seven participants. Three were women of color, one from Skid Row. When the Center opened in 1974, Roslyn Allen was one of the only staff of color. It was not until the late 1990s that ACW had its first Black director. Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021; Kathleen Hendrix, “Lesbian Alcoholics: Climbing Up from Nowhere,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1975, in L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 18, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

but the highest populations came from the gay, majority white neighborhoods of Silverlake and Hollywood, followed by Santa Monica, Wilshire, and West L.A (Figure 1.8).¹⁴¹

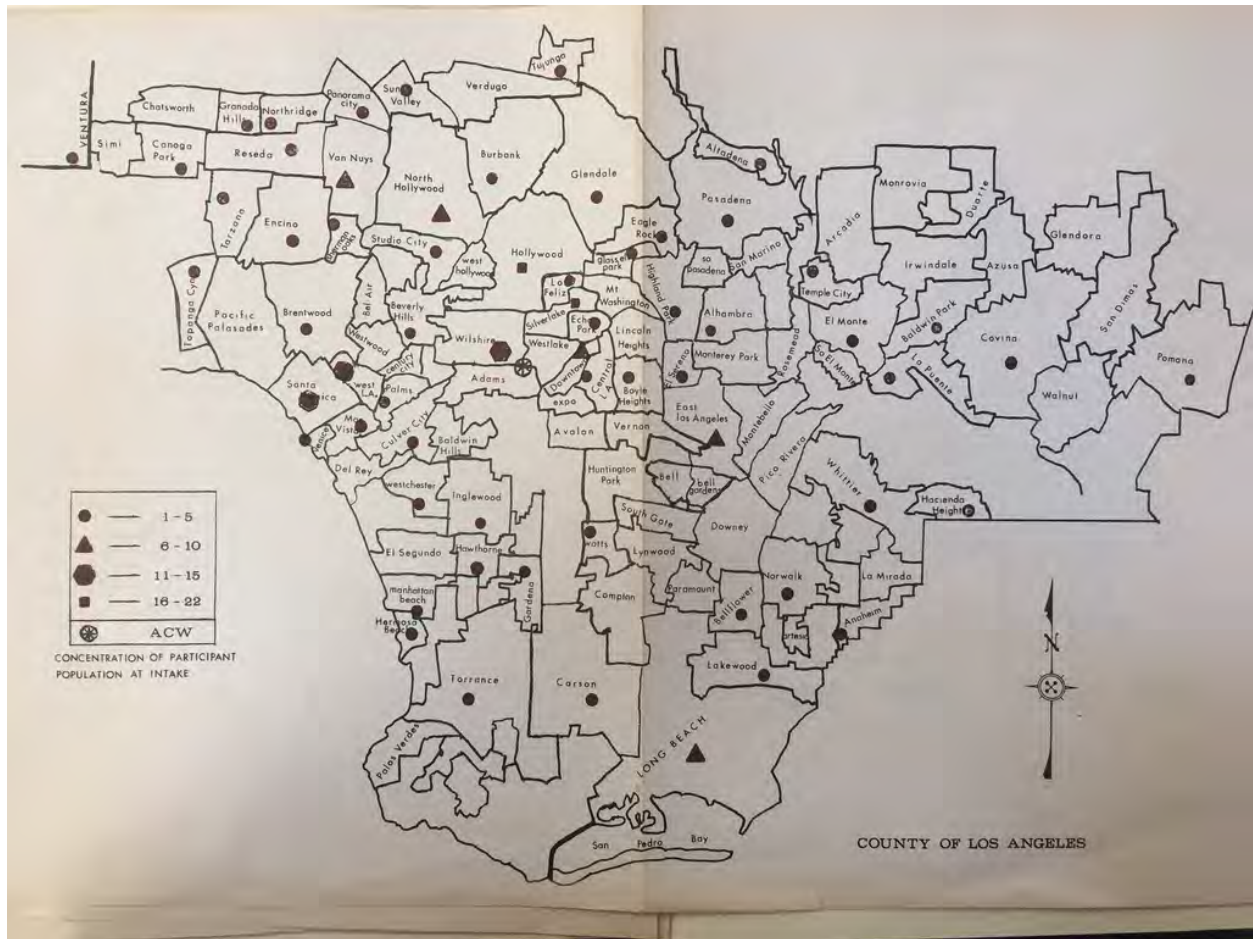


Figure 1.8: Map of participant residence at intake, 1976. ACW organizational models 1976, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 6, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

By 1977, the program advertised “no discrimination as to race, religion, sexual preference.”¹⁴² Fees were charged on a sliding scale, assuring that “no one is turned away for lack of funds” and meetings offered childcare.¹⁴³ Into the 1980s, ACW turned more specifically to address the specific intersections of poverty and trauma that led women to substance use. In 1986, ACW partnered with Haven House to begin a joint program that addressed the intersection of alcoholism and domestic violence.¹⁴⁴ According to organizational materials from 1987, staff

¹⁴¹ ACW organizational models 1976, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 6, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁴² *The Lesbian Tide* Vol. 6 No. 6 (Los Angeles: May/June 1977), 26.

¹⁴³ “ACW Prevention and Community Services Newsletter” June 1988, Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

outreached in some of the most underserved communities: “adult daughters of alcoholics, incest and bettering survivors, lesbians, low income and homeless women.”¹⁴⁵ By the mid 1980s, ACW’s programming evolved from consciousness raising groups to workshops designed for survivors of incest and (specifically lesbian) domestic violence, adult daughters of alcoholics and those impacted by the AIDS epidemic, and money management support.

Director Underhill advocated for programming that specifically catered to the needs of lesbians of color. In 1985, Underhill obtained funding for a program called Lapis, run by Latina and African American women for Black and Brown participants.¹⁴⁶ This was necessary, Underhill argued, for a woman to “feel free to bring every part of herself- the woman, the lesbian, the member of her race or ethnic background – into an environment in which each of those parts will be honored, respected and accepted.”¹⁴⁷ Obtaining funding for this program wasn’t easy. Savage explains, “the State of California had set-aside funds which would be able to support the following sequence of words: Lesbian, Latina, African American Recovery Program, whereas the County, at the time, did not have those mechanisms.”¹⁴⁸ Underhill superseded the County, which at the time funded the majority of ACW’s programs, to work with a California State Assembly member to secure State funding for a pilot program.¹⁴⁹ It was a success; Lapis continued for over a decade and became a model for other programs. In a 2014 interview, Clarissa Chandler, ACW’s Director of Prevention and Community services in the late 1980s, described the significance of bringing Black women together:

...often we’re dealing with profound levels of grief because we have been doing so much without the wisdom and knowledge of each other because we don’t really have time to share that wisdom and knowledge because we’re each busy doing five things that other women don’t have to do...Black women felt so deprived of access to each other, they would come to the connection with anger, grief and joy...All of that stuff is in the room.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ ACW 1987-92 summary of services overview, Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; Brenda Underhill, testimony at “Cases and Consequences of Alcohol Abuse,” Hearings Before the Committee on Governmental Affairs (U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C.: 1989), 47.

¹⁴⁶ “Overview,” 1987, Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁴⁷ Underhill, *Creating Visibility*, 33-34.

¹⁴⁸ Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Clarissa Chandler, interview by Amanda Perris, “You Don’t Get to Say How I Love,” *The Ride of Die Project*, December 15, 2014, <https://therideordieproject.com/2014/12/15/you-dont-get-to-say-how-i-love-an-interview-with-clarissa-chandler-by-amanda-parris/>.

Underhill outlined several crucial aspects for the program's success. One was the intentional outreach to Black and Latinx communities that was "not only geared to lesbians of color, but also welcome an extended community that may include families of origin and male friends."¹⁵¹ Another was providing role models and ensuring language justice by having Spanish-speaking staff. The 1998 publication *Alcohol Use/ Abuse Among Latinos* cited it as a rare "comprehensive approach" for supporting lesbian Latina alcohol users.¹⁵²

Locating the partnerships ACW built makes visible the social and physical web of gay and feminist organizations across the city, and the reciprocal relationship between them. The Feminist Women's Health Center, a women's health and abortion clinic that evolved from the Crenshaw Women's Center was an early supporter of ACW. They wrote a statement of affiliation for the initial NAIAA grant, stating that they had "already established procedures for referrals" and offered their services as consultants in health education.¹⁵³ When ACW needed funds for a hotline, they held a fundraiser at the Women's Building.¹⁵⁴ ACW worked in political coalitions for prison reform and collaborated to throw social gatherings like a joint "clean & sober Halloween" party with the lesbian organization Connexus.¹⁵⁵ Despite ACW's initial dispute with the GCSC, the organizations developed a relationship of "peaceful coexistence."¹⁵⁶ ACW also served as a convening place for other intersectional feminist and lesbian organizations, such as housing the group Lesbians of Color in their community room.¹⁵⁷ This citywide network strengthened both the organizations and the individuals that flowed between them.

¹⁵¹ This is particularly important because many lesbians of color were deterred by women separatist settings, which were often dominated by white women, and preferred to remain within their larger mixed gender ethnic/ racial community. Underhill, *Creating Visibility*, 31, 33; Lisa Albrecht "Coalition Politics," in *Encyclopedia of Lesbian and Gay Histories and Cultures*, ed. Bonnie Zimmerman and George Haggerty (Taylor and Francis, 2016), 177-178.

¹⁵² Migdalia Reyes, "Latina Lesbians and Alcohol and Other Drugs: Social Work Implications," in *Alcohol Use/Abuse Among Latinos: Issues and Examples of Culturally Competent Services* ed. Melvin Delgado (New York: Haworth Press, 1998), 180.

¹⁵³ Carol Downer and Frances Hornstein, "Feminist Women's Health Center Statement of Affiliation," February 19, 1974, L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records: Correspondence, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 11, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁵⁴ Weathers, interview by author, February 17, 2021; "Concert-on-the-Natch," 1976, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 2, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁵⁵ "Clippings," Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 12, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁵⁶ Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021; Kenney, *Gay L.A.*, 132.

¹⁵⁷ Retter, "Lesbian Spaces in Los Angeles 1970-1990," in *Queers in Space*, 329.

ACW's location in Pico Union was intimately tied to their mission to support marginalized women. Politicians viewed the neighborhood as a "deteriorating, inner-city, low-income residential area." 80% of property owners were absentee landlords, which combined with high poverty rates and overcrowding led to substandard housing conditions and high levels of crime.¹⁵⁸ In 1968, the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles (CRA/LA) established Pico Union as a redevelopment area and in 1975, the GCSC left Pico Union for Hollywood. Morris Kight explained the move: "we stayed until [the neighborhood] became a dance of death...it had served us well and its use had passed."¹⁵⁹ For ACW, though, Pico Union's "use" had only become stronger. Literature from the late 1980s recognized the relevance of their services, and the location of "uniquely charming and permanent home" as "most accessible to the women we serve."¹⁶⁰ Staff Evelyn Barnes described Pico Union "as a bridge from Skid Row (where many of the center's patients come from) to the rest of the world."¹⁶¹ Laurie Drabble made a jab at the clustering of services in Hollywood and West Hollywood when she reminded a reporter, "After all... a lot of us weren't in West Hollywood when we were drinking."¹⁶² While ACW's location provided a crucial service to the neighborhood it also made it difficult for participants to maintain sobriety. Bruce-Rawlings remembers "my dealer was right around the corner" from ACW. She would watch from her window inside the recovery house "this girl that I used to run around with...going into the motel across the street and stuff and scoring."¹⁶³ Staff knew that an "area that's triggering [participants'] use...is not the area where they can necessarily get recovery" and in those instances would work to help women find treatment elsewhere.¹⁶⁴

Part of ACW's work to support program participants and to save the buildings depended on ACW's active involvement in the neighborhood. Staff served on the Redevelopment Project

¹⁵⁸ Haas and Heskin, "Community Struggles in Los Angeles," 550.

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.*, 85.

¹⁶⁰ "Help Us Save Our Home!," 1987, Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; "ACW Still Like Family Event," 2004, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers.

¹⁶¹ Brian Lewis, "Eminent Domain Rescues Homes from a Minimall," *Los Angeles Independent*, August 24, 1988 in ACW 1987-92, Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁶² Brooke, "A Sign of the Times," *Los Angeles Times*.

¹⁶³ Bruce-Rawlings, interview by author, May 24, 2021.

¹⁶⁴ Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021.

Area Committee to interface with the city, coordinate services, and use rehabilitation monies.¹⁶⁵ On April 29th, 1992, the city erupted in protest of the acquittal of the Los Angeles police officers who brutally attacked Rodney King. “Things were getting bad” according to Savage, and the buildings were evacuated. Underhill had hired a security guard, who watched from the street as the strip mall at the corner of Alvarado and Olympic burned. A man on the street ran by, Savage recounted, and told him “go back in, this place is going to be ok.” “That’s the ACW myth,” she stated matter of factly, “that’s the ACW reality.”¹⁶⁶ Four months after the uprisings, a local environmental group contacted ACW and offered to landscape the front yard, planting trees in the lawn and a trellis of yellow roses along the exterior gate.¹⁶⁷

Scholars like Martin Mulligan point to the way the concept of “community” can be both fossilized and weaponized to flatten different identities and perspectives.¹⁶⁸ The inconsistencies and shortcomings of feminist and gay liberation politics from which ACW was born demonstrate the tensions within the lesbian community – from sexual preferences to gender expression to organizational styles to pervasive racism. Mulligan’s statement is something ACW’s leaders intimately understood. Weathers spoke publicly about the “bubbling mass of inconsistencies” within the women’s movement. Specifically, she pushed back against one of the major pressure points that stoked the “lesbian civil wars” of the 1970s: discord over organizational models to replace the “boss/ worker” dynamic.¹⁶⁹ While ACW had a strong peer support model, it also had a clear hierarchy and division of responsibility that for many lesbian feminists reeked of patriarchy. Rather than declare “open season” on women who “take one’s power,” Weathers argued, “we need to respect and honor each other’s differences” and styles of organizing.¹⁷⁰ Underhill built up ACW’s programs to not only acknowledge but affirm the experiences of lesbians at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression. Referring to ACW’s programming

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Only staff were evacuated; there were no residents at the time. Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021; Retter, “Lesbian Spaces in Los Angeles 1970-1990,” in *Queers in Space*, 328.

¹⁶⁷ Kathleen Hendrix, “Steady Growth: A Fledgling Environmentalist Learns It’s a Battle to Beautify City Spaces,” Los Angeles Times, August 13, 1992; Jake Doherty, “Getting to the Root of Alcohol Recovery,” Los Angeles Times, October 24, 1993.

¹⁶⁸ Martin Mulligan, “On the Need for a Nuanced Understanding of ‘Community’ in Heritage Policy and Practice,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Public Heritage Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁶⁹ Another example is of Del Whan, who after renting a storefront for the Gay Women’s Services Center, was ostracized by other Lesbian Feminists for being “elitist.” Retter, *Lesbian Spaces in Los Angeles, 1970-1990*, “*Queers in Space*, 198.

¹⁷⁰ Buss, “From the Bottle to the Barricade.”

efforts, Underhill bluntly wrote, “One would be mistaken to assume that, having created a program for Euro-American lesbians, one has therefore automatically addressed the needs of lesbians of color.” She further acknowledged, “lesbians of color are not a monolithic population with identical needs” and that “such groupings have often been created for the purpose of easy categorizing by the dominant culture.”¹⁷¹ These formative leaders of ACW employed what Mulligan calls a “multilayered understanding of community” that involved an “open ended system of communication about belonging.”¹⁷² As this section and the following argue, ACW’s formation and evolution is due to negotiations around intersecting identities of gender, race, and class and more.

Unlike many gay and feminist organizations that emerged in the 1970s, ACW grew tremendously in the following decades.¹⁷³ The organization physically expanded: additions to the recovery house at 1135 S. Alvarado increased the number of beds from thirteen to thirty-two, and they temporarily operated a sober living house in Highland Park.¹⁷⁴ By 1988, ACW was the “largest comprehensive publicly funded nonprofit women’s alcoholism recovery and prevention services program in the Nation.”¹⁷⁵ This “uncharacteristic longevity,” Retter argued, was due to its “fundable mission” and ability to withstand the lesbian civil war.¹⁷⁶ ACW proved, too, that “programs that have in their conception and design a plan for serving unserved and underserved populations also work for ‘mainstream’ populations,” or what Underhill referred to as “trickle-up.”¹⁷⁷ ACW’s success demonstrated to the world what many women believed all along – that they were capable of healing, themselves, and each other.

Conclusion

The term “queerscape,” architect Jean-Ulrick Désert, argues, is more than the presence of queer people, but a “cumulative kind of spatial unit.... which involve multiple alliances... and

¹⁷¹ Underhill, *Creating Visibility*, 32.

¹⁷² Mulligan, “On the Need for a Nuanced Understanding of ‘Community’ in Heritage Policy and Practice,” 6.

¹⁷³ Other examples include the GCSC, Van Ness Recovery House, and Women’s Building.

¹⁷⁴ The sober living house, which opened in the 1990s, did not prove to be financially feasible and ACW sold the property. Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021.

¹⁷⁵ Brenda Underhill, testimony at “Cases and Consequences of Alcohol Abuse,” Hearings Before the Committee on Governmental Affairs (U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C.: 1989), 47.

¹⁷⁶ Retter, “Lesbian Activism in Los Angeles, 1980-1979,” in *Queer Frontiers*, 205.

¹⁷⁷ Underhill, *Creating Visibility*, 34; Underhill, testimony at “Cases and Consequences of Alcohol Abuse,” Hearings Before the Committee on Governmental Affairs (U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C.: 1989), 47.

which support a variety of activities, transactions, and functions.”¹⁷⁸ Tracing the origins and growth of ACW reveals an interconnected web that, although not without conflict, fortified a larger movement. The Alcoholism Center for Women marked an important shift in Los Angeles’ gay liberation movement, as the rise of street-based activist groups in the 1960s gave way to an institutionalization of quasi-public spaces in the 1970s that forged community as part of a larger mission of improving material and metaphysical wellbeing. This chapter looks at the relationships that formed within ACW’s building to understand how the ideology of space-claiming translated to ways of fostering community. Situating this within Southern California’s twentieth century public health trends juxtaposes environmental determinism’s emphasis on domesticity and verdant landscapes with the guerrilla style of space claiming employed by queer people to reveal the dynamic ways women and queer people advocated for their physical and mental health.

¹⁷⁸ Désert, “Marginality and the landscapes of erotic alien(n)ations,” 41.

Part 2: Conservation, Maintenance, and Care

Power of Place

Decades after exiting ACW's program, former participants' memories of arriving at the buildings remain crystalline. Bruce-Rawlings, who had been incarcerated and unhoused before landing at ACW, recalls, "it was my first look at beauty in a long time."¹⁷⁹ Words like "grand," "warm," and "safe," frequently arose from past participants' mental images of the buildings. 1147 commands the corner of 12th and Alvarado St. (Figures 2.1 and 2.2). The building is positioned in the center of a lot larger than most on the block; in 1906, August Winstel commissioned architect John Paul Krempel to design a staggering family home across two previously separate parcels.¹⁸⁰ The building, built by Albert J. Daniels in 1907, cost almost \$20,000.¹⁸¹ The rusticated stone first story conveys solidity and permanence, while the half-timbering on the second story and steeply pitched roof with dentil and bargeboard-lined gables elicit a sense of the grandiose, fantastical. 1147 was ACW's headquarters and the first point of entry for women seeking treatment. The front façade is asymmetrical and three bays wide. The roof features a prominent front facing gable and two dormers, also with front facing gables. Women seeking treatment would access the main entrance via a set of concrete stairs to a deep front porch partially enclosed with a rusticated stone and bolstered by stone columns. Through the heavy wooden door, they enter a long central hall towards a reception desk. The hall is framed on either side by two parlors turned community rooms. Behind the office chairs and plush couches, the original workmanship shines: hand-molded plasterwork ornaments the walls and carved mahogany mantels frame the fireplaces. Visitors might continue up the stairs, hands trailing along the mahogany rail, past the saturated stained-glass window to the second floor. This level boasts another large room with a fireplace next to the master bedroom which leads out to a sleeping porch; these rooms have been converted into the board room and director's office, respectively. As Director Lorette Herman sits at her desk, her back is warmed by the sunlight

¹⁷⁹ Bruce-Rawlings, interview by author, May 24, 2021.

¹⁸⁰ Sanborn Map Company, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California*, Vol. 1, (Teaneck, N.J.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1906), 82.

¹⁸¹ Krempel was a German architect who arrived in Los Angeles in 1887. He led a number of practices where he designed residential as well as institutional buildings until his death in 1933. The nomination states that "The Winstel residence is a notable example of Krempel's residential work, and illustrates his attention to craftsmanship, proportion, and detail." Christy McAvoy, "Significance: August Winstel Residence, 1147 S. Alvarado St." Request for Historic-Cultural Monument Declaration, April 13, 1987.

that pours in from the large bay windows. From her office she often walks outside onto the sleeping porch facing east towards Alvarado St. to observe the ACW grounds from behind the balcony's wooden railing. Tucked down a hallway off the director's office, women slip in and out of therapy offices. The small rooms, adjacent to a narrow staircase that leads to the side yard, were likely converted from old domestic workers' bedrooms. The twelve-bedroom, three story place is sprawling, palatial. Besides the ADA accessible ramp covertly located on the north side of the porch, few alterations have been made over the last century. At the rear of the lot stands the original 1907 carriage house. Despite several fundraising attempts, it sits vacant, revealing the passage of time the main house has evaded (Figure 2.3).¹⁸²



Figure 2.1: 1147 S. Alvarado, view facing north, 2021. Photo by author.

¹⁸² Efforts to raise money to repair the carriage house go back to at least 2004. "ACW Still Like Family Event," 2004, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.



Figure 2.2: 1147 S. Alvarado, view facing southwest, 2021. Photo by author.



Figure 2.3: Carriage house at 1147 S. Alvarado, view facing west (left) and east (right), 2021. Google maps.

Next door, the two and a half story, ten-bedroom 1135 S. Alvarado appears modest only in comparison (Figures 2.4 and 2.5). Thomas Potter commissioned the building, designed by the Hudson and Munsell firm, for just under \$10,000. It was constructed by Albert J. Daniels in

1906, the same man who a year later would build 1147.¹⁸³ Like its neighbor to the south, 1135 S. Alvarado features a prominent front facing gable on the south end of the roof and a second story balcony over a recessed front porch. The combination of red brick on the first floor and half timbering on the second brings warmth and a sense of the picturesque. At the “miracle house,” as it is nicknamed, women live in dormitory rooms and participate in recovery programs from anywhere between six weeks to six months. They sleep in shared rooms on the second floor and rear of the building and mingle through the house across the open floor plan. The women eat together under high beamed ceilings and attend group therapy in the common rooms detailed with ornate molding, fireplaces, and tripartite picture windows. The irregular shaped building was expanded on the southwest corner in 1933 when it was repurposed as a physician’s office and dwelling (Figures 2.6 and 2.7). In 1990, ACW added a dormitory on the northwest side of the building to make space for up to thirty-two in-patient participants (Figure 2.8).

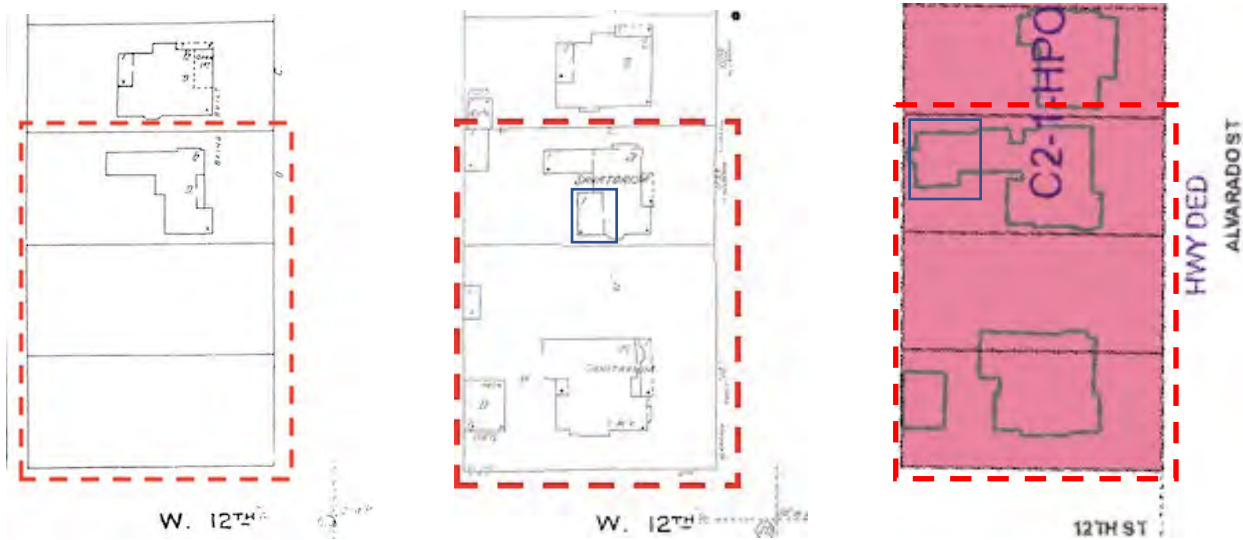


Figure 2.4: 1135 S. Alvarado, view facing north, 2021. Photo by author.

¹⁸³ The nomination described Hudson and Marshall as “one of the most prolific and professional firms active at the turn of the century... [that] produced both public and private buildings of exceptional merit.” Daniels, who built both 1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado, was a resident of Pico Union. Christy McAvoy, “Significance: Thomas Potter Residence, 1135 S. Alvarado St.” Request for Historic-Cultural Monument Declaration, April 13, 1987.



Figure 2.5: 1135 S. Alvarado, view facing west, 2021. Photo by author.



Figures 2.6-2.8: Sanborn map, 1906 (left). Sanborn map, circa 1941 (center). ZIMAS map, 2021 (right). The additions to 1135 S. Alvarado over the years are noted in blue.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Sanborn Map Company, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California*, Vol. 1, (Teaneck, N.J.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1906), 82; Sanborn Map Company, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California*, Vol. 1, (Teaneck, N.J.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1941), 82; ZIMAS, City of Los Angeles, 2021.

1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado are separated from the busy sidewalk by a ten-foot-tall metal gate that encircles both properties. Palm trees and shade bearing trees dot the grounds, while shrubs, flowers, and succulents are planted in front of both porches. Women sit on the porch and in Adirondack chairs under the tree canopy and talk, nap, or watch the street life go by. The two buildings are connected by a concrete walkway that cuts across the lawn. South of the street, grass is replaced by asphalt for ACW's larger parking lot and loading dock. Staff, outpatient participants, visiting service providers, and delivery services enter through the sliding gate into the parking lot that divides the two buildings (Figures 2.9 and 2.10). Two small structures located at the back of the property line in the 1941 Sanborn map have since been removed.

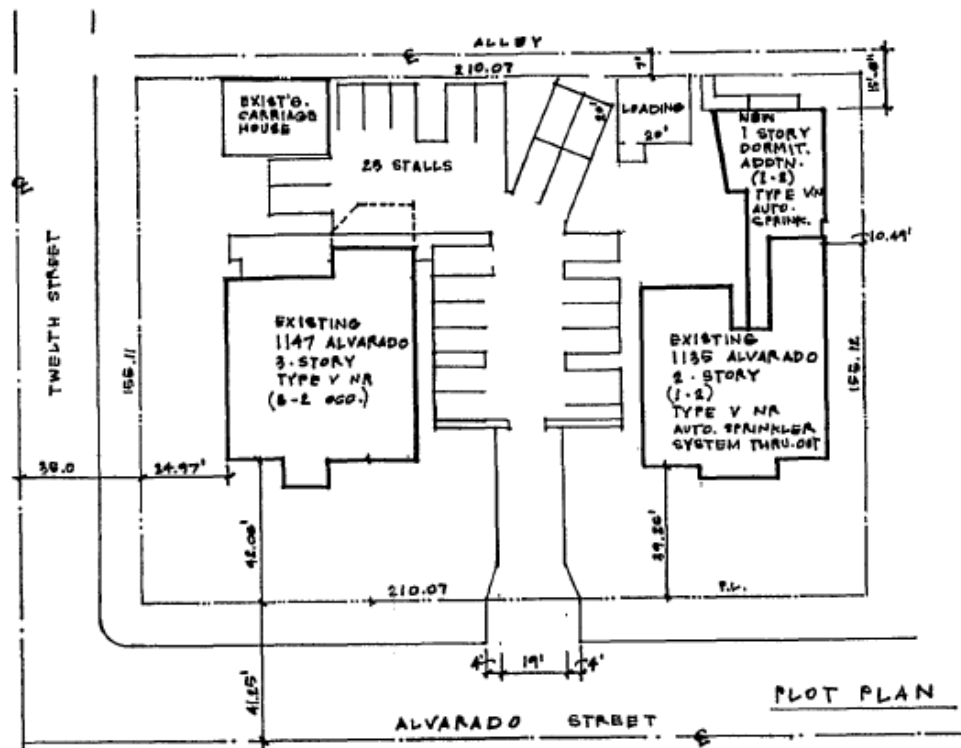


Figure 2.9: Plot plan of 1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado St., 1990. "1135 S. Alvarado St. Permit for Building Alteration and Repair," June 1, 1990, Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety.



Figure 2.10: 1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado Street, 2021. Google Maps.

When Brenda Weathers and other ACW founding members approached the buildings in 1974, their splendor was caked in decades of dust and dirt. Brenda’s sister Carolyn reflected, “I remember the day we first went through it, how grand it was, how appallingly filthy the kitchen was.” She described how the staff “cleaned and painted the house, and while still painting and arranging furniture, received our first outpatient,” linking the transformation of the physical space to its use as a place of healing (Figure 2.11).¹⁸⁵ In ACW’s first year of operation, the organization dedicated almost eight thousand dollars of their grant funds to hire a contractor to alter and renovate the buildings. Weathers and her staff were not professional conservationists. However, their physical labor and economic resources to reinvent the abandoned nursing homes as a dynamic treatment and community center constituted the building’s first rehabilitation. This major intervention initiated a new chapter for the buildings and set the stage for future acts of conservation.

¹⁸⁵ Carolyn Weathers, “An early history of the AWC,” Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 3, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.



Figure 2.11: Carolyn Weathers cleaning window, circa late 1970s. Carolyn Weathers private collection.

ACW's staff also transformed the buildings' internal use and circulation from private, highly segregated rooms that reified class hierarchy to a welcoming, integrated space that encouraged connection. Formal living and sitting rooms were filled with comfortable couches and chairs that hosted workshops during the day and dances in the evening. The small domestic workers' room are well-suited for individual therapy: away from the bustle of groups, they allow participants additional privacy. The back staircase, originally intended to hide the workers' labor and existence, is now Director Herman's shortcut to her office (Figure 2.12).

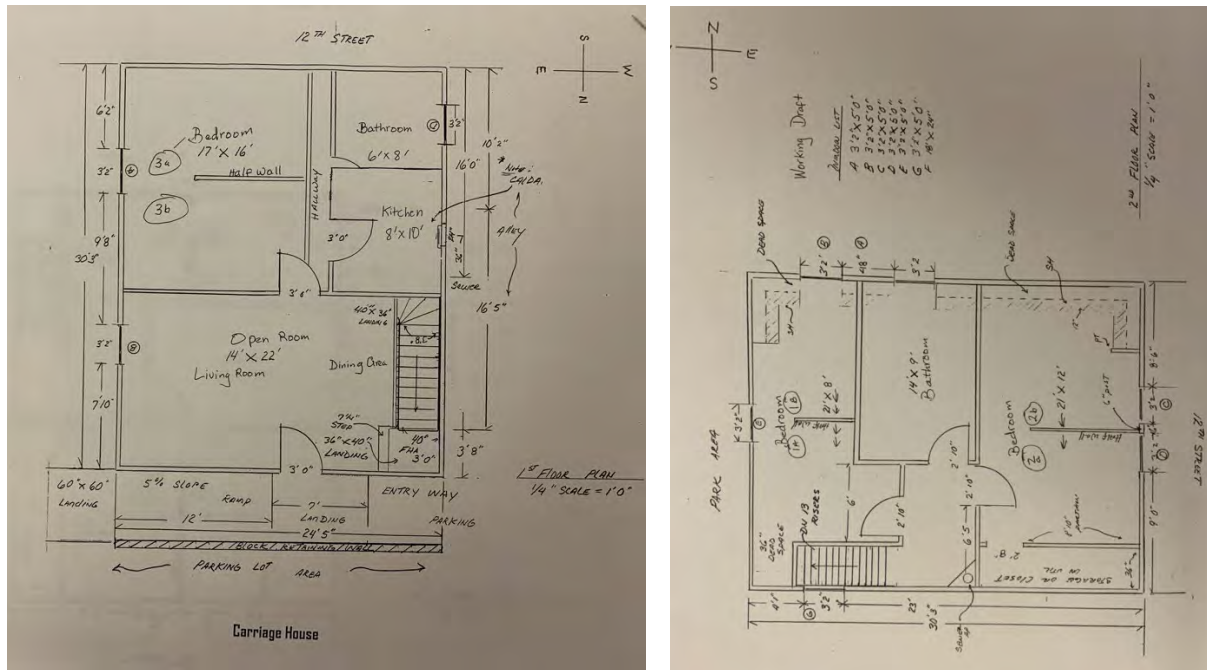


Figure 2.12: 1147 S. Alvarado Plot Plan, circa 2004. “ACW Still Like Family Event,” 2004, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 7, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado stood as a powerful symbol for queer women, many of whom had had a tenuous relationship with the idea of home.¹⁸⁶ “Home,” Stephen Vider argues, plays “a crucial yet contradictory space in LGBTQ+ life and politics – a site of constraint and a site of self-expression, a site of isolation and deep community, a site of secrecy and a site of recognition.”¹⁸⁷ The domestic setting was symbolically powerful. Wendy eagerly described the details of 1147 S. Alvarado, from the oak board and batten moldings to the fireplaces, that made it feel “like Grandma’s house” (Figures 2.13 through 2.15).¹⁸⁸ 1135 S. Alvarado, which housed the inpatient program, had an even more tangible impression on participants. By 1987, over half of the women who came to the program were unhoused.¹⁸⁹ In a 1987 memo, Underhill described the buildings as an “integral part of ACW’s social model program, creating a warm-homelike

¹⁸⁶ According to organizational materials from 1987, staff outreached most the underserved communities: “adult daughters of alcoholics, incest and battering survivors, lesbians, low income and homeless women.” ACW 1987-92 summary of services, Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁸⁷ Stephen Vider, *The Queerness of Home: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Domesticity after World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 7.

¹⁸⁸ Wendy G., interview by author, May 14, 2021.

¹⁸⁹ ACW 1987-92 summary of services, Johnnie Phelps papers, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

residential environment in which to welcome women in need of services.”¹⁹⁰ ACW was not only a site of recovery, but an environment where participants could, as one woman said, “get back to a normal life.”¹⁹¹



Figure 2.13: 1147 S. Alvarado St. downstairs group room with a portrait of Brenda Weathers, 2021. Photo by author.



Figures 2.14-2.15: Staircase leading up to second floor of 1147 S. Alvarado St (right). Bulletin board with notes from former participants between board room and Director’s office on the second floor (right). Photos by author.

¹⁹⁰ “Help Us Save Our Home!,” 1987, Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; “ACW Still Like Family Event,” 2004, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁹¹ Richard Nordwind, “Victorian Home Could Lose Out to Mini-Mall,” *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, February 15 1981 in ACW 1987-92, Johnnie Phelps papers, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

The physical house was tightly intertwined with the identity of the organization. Former participants described the buildings' physical characteristics in relation to the community they cultivated within it. For Carol G., it wasn't just that the "chairs were always comfortable," but that they were filled with "smiling faces."¹⁹² Laurie Drabble, a former participant then staff member noted the holistic impact of the setting: "the kinds of programs, the staff and the atmosphere for women going through the program- the way the building felt- all worked to give me a foundation of sobriety."¹⁹³ The front yard and the living rooms were the backdrops not only for recovery groups but for community potlucks and concerts. The homes became the symbol for the organization and were prominently featured on informational brochures, fundraising and promotional materials (Figures 2.16 and 2.17). The 30th Anniversary event "Still Like Family" in 2004 proudly welcomed visitors to "the beautiful and historic ACW location."¹⁹⁴



Figure 2.16-2.17: Community Planning Poster, ACW Organizational Models 1976, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 6, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California (left). ACW Calendar 1984, ACW documents and ephemera, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 1, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California (right).

¹⁹² Carol G., interview by author, February 22, 2021.

¹⁹³ Asland Brooke, "A Sign of the Times," *Los Angeles Times*, March 20, 1987, in ACW 1987-92, Johnnie Phelps papers.

¹⁹⁴ "ACW Still Like Family Event," 2004, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 7, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

The houses served as sites of self-determination, a microcosm of the world they wished to build. The warmth and beauty of the homes were intended to remind participants their lives were worthy of love and respect; a direct alternative to the carceral and medical institutions queer people and women with substance use disorders were often subject to. When ACW first rented the homes from the Craddock family in 1974, assistant director Travis Foote explained, “we would like to use furniture such as night-tables, beds(non-hospital)...which would be suitable for an ordinary home” and asked the Craddocks to dispose of the rest that would remind participants of the buildings’ history as a nursing home.¹⁹⁵

The frequency in which staff and participants described the buildings as homes and residents as family speaks to this kinship not of blood but of choice. In this way, relationships built at ACW can be situated within scholarship that analyzes the different ways queer people have formed chosen families or horizontal networks of care response to exclusion from their given families and larger society.¹⁹⁶ Vider’s scholarship about queer forms of homemaking contextualizes the type of “home” ACW provided. In the 1970s, he writes, “LGBTQ activists increasingly questioned the gender, sexual, and spatial conventions of the American house and family: they experimented with novel forms of household formation; they questioned architectural practices; they worked to disentangle domesticity from capitalist consumption; and they developed new forms of community care and support, centered in home and housing.”¹⁹⁷ These relationships extended beyond ACW’s walls. Savage states that many past participants are still friends today. “They’re staying sober and thriving,” she says, “a group of them just...went on an Olivia Cruise!”¹⁹⁸ The radical social implication of ACW’s setting was not evident to outsiders. A 1987 *LA Times* article reduced the buildings to “a metaphor for the permanency and warmth so needed in [the women’s] lives.”¹⁹⁹ The ACW homes did not recreate the gender roles and dynamics of a traditional domestic setting. Rather, it subverted these assumptions by

¹⁹⁵ “Facilities 1974-1975,” L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center records, Coll2007-010, Box 9, Folder 16, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁹⁶ Marlon M. Bailey, “Engendering Space: Ballroom Culture and the Spatial Practice of Possibility in Detroit,” *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* vol. 21, no. 4 (2014): 489–507; Pavithra Prasad, “In a Minor Key: Queer Kinship in Times of Grief,” *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking* vol. 7, no. 1 (2020): 113-119. muse.jhu.edu/article/754461.

¹⁹⁷ Vider, *The Queerness of Home*, 4.

¹⁹⁸ Olivia Cruises cater specifically to lesbians. Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021.

¹⁹⁹ Brooke, “A Sign of the Times,” *Los Angeles Times*.

cultivating a space of autonomy and empowerment that transformed women's relationship to themselves and to each other.

The Big Conservation Battle

On December 24, 1986, music and laughter emanated from 1147 S. Alvarado as staff members prepared for their big Christmas party the following day. When the properties' new owner Masoud Mansouri appeared at the doorstep, the festivities ground to a halt. It would be ACW's last Christmas at 1147 S. Alvarado, he informed staff. New plans, and income streams awaited him: he would be razing the two homes to develop a mini mall on the parcel.²⁰⁰

Executive Director Brenda Underhill had decades of experience treating substance use, but not organizing conservation fights. Any attempt to negotiate with Mansouri hit a standstill, so she turned to the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles (CRA/LA). Because the properties were located within the Pico Union redevelopment zone, the CRA was empowered to acquire them through eminent domain. As both sides gathered their forces, the CRA held the buildings in escrow, declaring they would step in to stop the project if the buildings were determined to be historically significant.²⁰¹

By 1987, the CRA had been influencing land use in Pico Union for over two decades. The neighborhood's reputation as a blighted area combined with the potential economic gains from the newly opened Convention Center led the Los Angeles City Council to approve the CRA's adoption of Pico Union as a redevelopment area in 1968. Pico I, the first phase, aimed to turn the neighborhood into a service district for downtown by demolishing residential areas and rezoning them for manufacturing and light industrial. The successful efforts of the grassroots coalition Pico Union Neighborhood Council to center resident voices in decision-making have been well documented and serve as a notable counterexample to other CRA redevelopment projects such as Bunker Hill. However, by 1970 PUNC's base had dwindled, and its remaining leaders were closely aligned with CRA staff. When the second phase, Pico II, was adopted in 1976 there was no longer a united community front to keep the CRA accountable to residents.²⁰²

The objectives of Pico II focused on retention of "as many buildings as possible" through rehabilitation, "elimination and prevention of the spread of blight... provision of land for needed

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ "Victorian Home Could Lose Out to Mini-Mall," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*.

²⁰² Haas and Heskin, "Community Struggles in Los Angeles," 552.

public services, [and] achievement of an environment reflecting a high level of concern for architectural and design principles.”²⁰³ Despite these stated goals of building rehabilitation and stabilization for community-serving institutions, Ellen Ong, CRA’s Pico Union project manager, dismissively referred to ACW’s value to the community and contempt for the mini mall as “emotional issues.”²⁰⁴

The CRA was adamant that historic significance was the only avenue to save ACW. While Mansouri’s consultant downplayed the significance of the buildings, Underhill seized this lifeline and began to organize a campaign. Through the Los Angeles Conservancy, Underhill contracted Christy McAvoy, the co-principal of a private consulting firm, to write Historic Cultural Monument nominations for the properties. McAvoy’s expertise as an architectural historian and her track record of defending threatened neighborhoods and sites of women’s heritage made her a fitting choice.²⁰⁵ Underhill mobilized an extensive network of supporters to voice their concern. Over sixty organizations and individuals – including Representative Maxine Waters and Mayor Tom Bradley – sent letters of support to the CRA, and a string of sympathetic news articles were published between February and August of 1987.²⁰⁶ Underhill was optimistic, and strategic about their success. Before the properties had even been nominated, she formed a capital campaign advisory board to raise the 1.25 million they would need to purchase the homes from the CRA. High-profile Angelenas, including several lesbians, such as activist Los Angeles City Councilmember Rosalind Wyman, activist and *Lesbian Tide* founder Jeanne Cordova, Los Angeles School Board member Jackie Goldberg, former California Democratic Party chairwoman Elizabeth Snyder, Assemblywoman Maxine Waters, actress Lily Tomlin, and advocate and Connexus co-founder Adel Martinez sat on ACW’s capital campaign advisory

²⁰³ The Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, “Redevelopment Plan for the Pico-Union Redevelopment Project Area no. 2,” adopted November 24, 1976, http://www.crala.org/internet-site/Projects/Pico_Union_2/upload/PicoUnion21976.pdf.

²⁰⁴ “Victorian Home Could Lose Out to Mini-Mall,” *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*.

²⁰⁵ In 1980 McAvoy co-founded the local advocacy group Hollywood Heritage, and in 1989 founded Historic Resources Group, for which she served as principal until her retirement in 2015. Over four decades, she completed over 150 projects and provided informal support to countless others. She has served as President of the Los Angeles Conservancy and California Preservation Foundation and as an Advisor to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “Children of the 1970s: Preservation on the Rise,” Los Angeles Conservancy, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.laconservancy.org/events/children-70s-preservation-rise>; “Christy McAvoy receives Governors Historic Preservation Award for lifetime achievement,” Historic Resources Group, accessed November 17, <http://www.historicresourcesgroup.com/news/christy-mcavoy-receives-governors-historic-preservation-award-lifetime-achievement/>.

²⁰⁶ ACW 1987-1992, Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

board.²⁰⁷ Snyder, the first woman in California and the county to be elected party chair at the state level in 1953, dedicated her 75th birthday to the cause, raising \$50,000 for ACW.²⁰⁸

Publicly, ACW advocates appealed to the buildings' architectural and social significance. Los Angeles Conservancy President Ruthann Lehrer stated that the buildings "speak of our history and the development of our first neighborhood."²⁰⁹ Underhill echoed this significance in her comment: "we're talking about pieces of history that can never be replaced if demolished." She implored, "we just want the opportunity to return (the buildings) to their turn-of-the-century splendor."²¹⁰ In her letter to Ong and the CRA, school board member Goldberg asked the CRA to first "acquaint yourself with these wonderful buildings with their high ceilings [and] ornate fireplaces." After extolling the architectural details, however, she adds, "and I am sure that you are sensitive to how important this center is for the women."²¹¹ The vast majority of letters written to the CRA focus more on the loss of the ACW's services, crediting the buildings' programs and proximity to downtown as a vital resource for unhoused and underserved women. Senator David Roberts urged "consideration of the effect a demolition of these buildings would have on the people being helped by this program."²¹² While most letters to the CRA came from public figures, ACW graduate Jennifer Earle gave a much more personal perspective. In her letter to Ong, she shared, "I owe my life to ACW. In the two buildings located on So. Alvarado Street, a miracle happened. I am not the only miracle." Speaking to the buildings' intangible significance, she professed, "Even more important than the program is the love retained in these buildings."²¹³

The push to save the buildings transcended the peoples' emotional connections to the place to a matter of pure economic feasibility. "Moving," Underhill told reporters, would cause "a complete disruption of our services." Underhill, however, positioned the physical structures as

²⁰⁷ Rosalind Wyman was one of the co-chairs, along with Claudia Black and Patty Duke. "Help Us Save Our Home!," 1987, Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California; Brian Lewis, "Eminent Domain Rescues Homes from a Minimall," *Los Angeles Independent*, August 24, 1988 in ACW 1987-92, Johnnie Phelps papers.

²⁰⁸ Marylouise Oats, "A Milestone Gala with a 'Glitch'," *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 1988.

²⁰⁹ "Victorian Home Could Lose Out to Mini-Mall," *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*.

²¹⁰ Sam Schiffer, "Mini-Malls vs. History," *Los Angeles Weekly*, August 21, 1987, in ACW 1987-92, Johnnie Phelps papers.

²¹¹ "Help us save our home" ACW 1987-92, Johnnie Phelps papers.

²¹² Correspondence from David Roberts to James Wood 1987, ACW 1987-92, Johnnie Phelps papers.

²¹³ Correspondence from Jennifer Earl to Ellen Ong 1987, ACW 1987-92, Johnnie Phelps papers.

part of ACW's services when she stated, "It would be virtually impossible to find buildings with the space and home atmosphere we have here that we could afford."²¹⁴

The letter writing campaign and media coverage brought ACW's plight into the public eye. The CRA, though, would only be swayed by a vote from the Cultural Heritage Board. In her nominations McAvoy highlighted the buildings architectural significance, calling 1147 Alvarado as "highly picturesque... [and] notable example of Krempel's residential work, [that] illustrates his attention to craftsmanship, proportion, and detail." The two buildings reflected the "original character" of the early suburb. Together, she argued, the buildings "make a strong visual statement at the intersection of twelfth and Alvarado streets" which "continue to exemplify the lifestyle of the middle class" at the turn of the century.²¹⁵

On April 13th, 1987, McAvoy and Underhill submitted the Historic Cultural Monument Declarations to the Cultural Heritage Board, kicking off a flurry of bureaucratic maneuvers. The Cultural Heritage Board supported the nomination and responded to Mansouri's demolition permit with a 180-day delay.²¹⁶ The CRA began eminent domain proceedings in August, and in November the Los Angeles City Council approved the two buildings as Historic Cultural Monuments.²¹⁷ With funds from the capital campaign and an affordable housing loan from the CRA, ACW purchased the properties and began rehabilitation of the buildings in 1988.²¹⁸

The conclusion of this fight demonstrates several points of tension, as well as partnership, between the redevelopment agency, conservationists, and social services. The CRA's most infamous redevelopment project in Bunker Hill, which began in 1959, exemplified the "familiar practice of using federal funds to demolish stable neighborhoods, uproot minority families, and replace them with public buildings, office complexes, and expensive apartment dwellings."²¹⁹ News coverage of the ACW's fight noted this precedent, acknowledging that "while the CRA's

²¹⁴ Brooke, "A Sign of the Times," *Los Angeles Times*.

²¹⁵ 1147 S. Alvarado Street Historic Cultural Monument Declaration, April 13, 1987, in Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

²¹⁶ Brian Lewis, "Eminent Domain Rescues Homes from a Minimall," *Los Angeles Independent*, August 24, 1988, in ACW 1987-92, Johnnie Phelps papers.

²¹⁷ Ibid.; Con Keyes, "Historic Cultural Monuments," *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1987.

²¹⁸ Hendrix, "Steady Growth," *Los Angeles Times*; "ACW Still Like Family Event," 2004, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

²¹⁹ Bunker Hill was home to a substantial LGBTQ+ community. Like Pico-Union, the draw of cheap rents and relative anonymity facilitated a bustling queer community that was displaced by redevelopment. Martin J. Schiesl, "City Planning and the Federal Government in World War II: The Los Angeles Experience," *California History* 59, no. 2 (July 1, 1980): 140; Kenney, *Gay L.A.*, 84-5.

use of eminent domain has caused controversy in some places, including Pico-Union, community members present at last week's CRA board meeting applauded the move."²²⁰ Andrew Goodrich's study of the CRA's involvement in conservation over its sixty year tenure reveals that their support for ACW's buildings was not an anomaly, but emblematic of the organization's development over the two decades since Bunker Hill. "By the 1980s," Goodrich argues, "the agency had emerged as a key player in the conservation and rehabilitation of historically and culturally significant sites."²²¹ The CRA provided direct investment in historic properties, such as in the case of ACW, as well as technical and "behind the scenes" support by connecting owners with contractors and conservators to ensure rehabilitation conforming to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.²²² McAvoy affirmed that the CRA was "a problem-solving institution in the 1980s" and noted a key new tool at their disposal: the Federal Historic Tax Credit program, which, bolstered by the 1986 Tax Reform Act, offered greater financial incentives "to make old buildings work."²²³

However, conservation of structures did not imply conservation of community services. As Francesca Russello Ammon documents in Philadelphia's Society Hill neighborhood, redevelopment could work with conservationists to "turn back the architectural clock" by restoring buildings to an earlier era "while also erasing much history" of the buildings' evolution and the people who inhabited it in the present.²²⁴ Goodrich posits that the CRA saw historic buildings "in terms of their economic potential" to "stimulate additional investment and development within its Project Areas."²²⁵ While two restored turn-of-the-century Tudor Revival homes could lure in investment into struggling Pico Union, an alcohol rehabilitation clinic for low-income women was less of a selling point. McAvoy points to another key trend that helps explain the ACW's success. Conservation in the mid 1980s, she asserted, "was all about

²²⁰ "Eminent Domain Rescues Homes from a Mini Mall," *Los Angeles Independent*.

²²¹ CRA was formed in 1948 and dissolved in 2012. Andrew Robert Goodrich, "Heritage Conservation in Post-Redevelopment Los Angeles: Evaluating the Impact of the Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles (CRA/LA) on the Historic Built Environment" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2013), 120.

²²² Goodrich, "Heritage Conservation in Post-Redevelopment Los Angeles," 121.

²²³ The first Federal tax credit for historic building was passed as part of the 1976 Tax Reform Act, the 1986 Act increased available credit for project to 20%. Christy McAvoy, interview by author, November 11, 2021; "35th Anniversary Federal Tax Incentives for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings," National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior Technical Preservation Services (Washington D.C.; March 2013), 5.

²²⁴ Francesca Russello Ammon, Picturing Preservation and Renewal: Photographs as Planning Knowledge in Society Hill, Philadelphia, *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (December 5, 2018): 10-11.

²²⁵ Goodrich, "Heritage Conservation in Post-Redevelopment Los Angeles," 120.

neighborhoods.” The creation of the City’s Historic Preservation Overlay Zone in 1979 and emergence of West Adams Heritage Association, Highland Park Heritage Trust, and Hollywood Heritage neighborhood advocacy groups in the early 1980s demonstrated a shift in formal conservationists’ focus from isolated, exemplar sites to forming districts at the neighborhood level.²²⁶ While still guided by architectural significance, these groups “married preservation and social services,” McAvoy argued, and “all found projects with that niche pretty quickly.”²²⁷ Just south of Pico Union, the West Adams Heritage Association has been a longtime supporter of Casa de Rosas, a 1893 era school that was converted to a shelter for unhoused women in 1950.²²⁸ She speculates that the West Adams Heritage Association, just south of Pico Union, likely offered ACW assistance.

On the Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument list, 1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado bear the names of their original residents, August Winstel and Thomas Potter. ACW has given the buildings’ other names that are more meaningful to the organizations’ history: 1147 is the Elizabeth and Nathan Snyder House, and 1135 is the Miracle House. More important than the names on the plaques, however, are the walls that remain standing. The ability of Underhill and ACW’s supporters to leverage conservation’s language and tools, while publicly demonstrating the importance of their services for marginalized women, proved an effective combination.

Not-So Accidental Conservationists

The 1987 fight save the buildings was dramatic: the stakes high, the dueling sides obvious, the consequences immediate. However, it is one moment in a history of conservation efforts that span ACW’s entire existence, most of which have had less obvious adversaries than a

²²⁶ Angelino Heights became the first HPOZ in 1983. Hollywood Heritage was formed in 1980, Highland Park Heritage Trust formalized in 1982, West Adams Heritage Association was founded in 1983. “About Us,” Hollywood Heritage, accessed November 11, 2021, <https://www.hollywoodheritage.org/about-us>; “Preservation,” Highland Park Heritage Trust, accessed November 11, 2021, <http://highlandparkheritagetrust.org/preservation/>; “About Us,” West Adams Heritage Association, accessed November 11, 2021, <https://www.westadamsheritage.org/about-us>; “Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ),” *Los Angeles Conservancy*, accessed November 21, 2021, <https://www.laconservancy.org/historic-preservation-overlay-zone-hpoz>.

²²⁷ McAvoy, interview by author, November 11, 2021.

²²⁸ It was added to the National Register in 2004. Thomas Michali, an architect and supporter of West Adams Heritage Association and major figure in the University Park HPOZ, was involved in the project for decades. “WAHA Brunch and Election,” *West Adams Matters* (April 2011 No. 273, 1); Daniel Hamh, “A ‘House of Roses,’ long withered, blooms again on Hoover Street,” *Daily Trojan*, October 31, 2018, <https://dailytrojan.com/2018/10/31/casa-de-rosas-how-a-deteriorating-housing-complex-is-being-repurposed-to-provide-housing-for-homeless-veterans-and-their-families/>; McAvoy, interview by author, November 11, 2021.

nefarious developer. When Carolyn Weathers recounted the “elbow grease” used to clean off layers of grime out of the kitchen and give a dilapidated building a new life, she was describing rehabilitation and adaptive reuse. This first act of care and conservation for the buildings set off a chain of future acts that continue into the present.

McAvoy was quick to point out that the 1987 designation “was not a slam dunk.” Shortly after ACW gained ownership of the properties, the buildings were closed and the program ground to a halt. “Walls were falling apart,” McAvoy recalled, “and plumbing systems were failing.”²²⁹ The women of ACW had just defended the buildings from outside development, and now they were fighting against time and gravity. Underhill continued to leverage her political connections and ACW’s grassroots popularity to fund the major rehabilitation.²³⁰ The buildings were closed for years to conduct the work and reopened again in 1992.²³¹ McAvoy states that the CRA, now invested in the project, would have connected them to contractors who would retain the buildings’ integrity.²³² Today, black and white photos depicting the house covered in scaffolding line the walls of 1147’s waiting room, reminding staff, participants, and visitors of the labor behind the building’s endurance (Figure 2.18).

²²⁹ McAvoy, interview by author, November 11, 2021.

²³⁰ Brian Lewis, “Eminent Domain Rescues Homes from a Minimall,” *Los Angeles Independent*, August 24, 1988 in ACW 1987-92, Johnnie Phelps papers and memorabilia, Coll2008-068, Box 1, Folder 8, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

²³¹ Savage described Underhill’s “brilliant political move” where she convinced the County to continue to pay ACW the same amount they did when like they had full occupancy while they were close to could continue to support staff. Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021; “ACW flyers, pamphlets, and programs c. 1976-1995,” Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 2, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

²³² McAvoy, interview by author, November 11, 2021.



Figure 2.18: Framed photos of 1990s rehabilitation effort in lobby of 1147 S. Alvarado St., 2021. Photos by author.

In 2006, Lorette Herman stepped into the role of Executive Director of ACW. Like her predecessors, she was not prepared to become a conservationist but quickly slipped into the role. The next round of rehabilitation was spurred by a visit from the health department in 2008, who issued a violation for flaking paint in several bedrooms. The program lacked the money to hire a painter, so staff and participants came together to repaint the rooms themselves. The buildings' exterior, too, was again showing its age. In 2014, Herman received a grant from the McMillen Foundation, a family who themselves had been shaped by alcoholism, to fund a complete repaint of both exteriors. Through a board member, Herman contacted an architectural historian to suggest period-appropriate colors for the building. He was dismayed by the baby blue trim that accented 1135 S. Alvarado St. Herman recalls, laughing, "he said there's no way that's the original color!"²³³ The buildings needed more than a new coat of paint, though. Over the next several years, Herman led the replacement of the entire plumbing system in both buildings and installation of sister foundations (Figure 2.19).²³⁴ Beyond these necessary rehabilitations,

²³³ Lorette Herman, interview by author, November 5, 2021.

²³⁴ Ibid.

Herman, like her predecessors, has altered the buildings to better serve the women inside. Five years ago, they remodeled a room to serve specifically as a Domestic Violence and trauma therapy room, and just this last year created a family therapy office at 1147 S. Alvarado.



Figure 2.19: Rehabilitation of 1135 S. Alvarado St., circa 2015. Lorette Herman, private collection.

The days and years between these major rehabilitation efforts are filled with the quiet sweeping of floors, scrubbing of counters, and weeding of flower beds (Figure 2.20). From ACW's first days, maintenance of the buildings was a ritual for staff and participants. These

daily acts do not freeze the buildings in time or return them to an earlier era. Rather, they are a vehicle for an ever-evolving cast of women to connect with and contribute to the endurance of ACW. Bruce-Rawlings stated the “double scrub” chores not only instilled in her respect for the homes and their history but taught her “how to care for things.”²³⁵ Roberta Koregay-Davis director of ACW programs in 1993 described an effort to plant trees in the front yard as an opportunity for women to actively “participate in their recovery” and “to take care of something else.”²³⁶ It is also a way for women to assert their agency. In the 2014 rehabilitation, the architectural historian offered Herman several historically appropriate color palettes for the buildings. Herman took those options to the participants: staff put swatches on large boards and led a vote, first for the main color and then accent colors.²³⁷ The act of caring for the buildings was a reciprocal process of transformation of material and mind.



Figure 2.20: Participants doing chores, facing north on Alvarado St., circa late 1970s. Carolyn Weathers private collection.

²³⁵ Bruce -Rawlings, interview by author, May 24, 2021.

²³⁶ Doherty, “Getting to the Root of Alcohol Recovery,” *Los Angeles Times*.

²³⁷ Herman, interview by author, November 5, 2021.

In “Maintenance and Care,” Shannon Mattern makes visible the labor that sustains systems of infrastructure, ranging from water pipes to homes to datasets. Mattern acknowledges but does not romanticize the centrality of women’s domestic labor, particularly for low-income women of color, in “maintaining life.”²³⁸ Women have long led movements to conserve historic sites and cultural landscapes. However, preservation efforts in the nineteenth and early twentieth century often reinforced white supremacy and gender binaries valorizing the “cult of domesticity.”²³⁹ Scholarship over the last two decades has begun to highlight the transgressive ways women shaped space, and the intangible practices and traditions they cultivated within it.²⁴⁰ Women’s efforts to conserve ACW must be understood within the lineage of domestic work. The significance of their work, though, sharply contrasts normative women’s roles because of how they divided labor and the way it supported ACW’s larger goals of personal and collective self-determination.

The way ACW community members maintained the building reflected ACW’s declaration that, “against entrenched conventional wisdom, that programs for women were good ideas and worthy of support.”²⁴¹ In the 1970s, feminists exposed the physical and relational work of “care” that women were expected to perform. In recent years, scholars and activists have critiqued and expanded the definition of care to describe practices of solidarity and repair that seek to redress the violence of an imperialist and capitalist framework. Mattern thinks about these implications on a macro level, musing, “If we apply ‘care’ as a framework of analysis and imagination for the practitioners who design our material world, the policymakers who regulate it, and the citizens who participate in its democratic platforms, we might succeed in building more equitable and responsible systems.”²⁴² In the case of ACW, the care community members took to conserve the buildings is an extension of how they treat one another. The collective efforts, from designating the buildings to carrying out daily chores, demonstrates an ethos of

²³⁸ Shannon Mattern, “Maintenance and Care,” *Places Journal* (November 2018), <https://placesjournal.org/article/maintenance-and-care/>.

²³⁹ Gail Lee Dubrow, *Restoring Women’s History through Historic Preservation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 4.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁴¹ Carolyn Weathers, “ACW 30th Anniversary Speech,” Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 3, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

²⁴² Mattern, “Maintenance and Care,” *Places Journal* (November 2018).

mutual aid and reciprocity. The homes provided marginalized women a refuge and place of community; in turn, the women served as stewards of the buildings.

ACW's conservationists can also be described as "sustainers," as defined by Catherine Fleming Bruce. Analyzing Black activists' efforts to protect significant Civil Rights Era sites, Bruce adds her voice to the discourse shifting credit of preservation from paid professionals to activists who work for the longevity and continuance of sites of community gathering, racial reckoning, and public memory.²⁴³ McAvoy reminds us that women like Weathers, Underhill, and Herman were "social service providers first who came to preservation later because they saw the utility of the buildings."²⁴⁴ Their orientation shaped not only their desire of which buildings to protect, but *how* to conserve them. ACW's leaders and participants alike imbued their values of community commitment and healing into the fabric of the buildings.

If Weathers had established ACW in one of the thousands of stucco boxes that proliferate through Los Angeles, the end of this story would likely be quite different. While this chapter describes how the physical dimension of ACW's buildings shaped women's recovery experiences, it argues that those architectural features are laden with the space's significance in fostering community and health among lesbian alcoholics. Therefore, ACW makes a compelling case for diminishing the importance of architectural significance and integrity when designating buildings connected to social and cultural phenomenon. This argument has gained traction in the past decade as scholars and activists have critiqued the Eurocentric standards of architectural significance or integrity that deny the systemic economic and spatial marginalization of low-income people, of women, people of color, queer people, and other oppressed populations.²⁴⁵ Legitimizing these "sustainers" as conservationists is crucial for them to begin to rewrite conservation policy and encourage new forms of practice.

Conclusion

1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado are unique products of Los Angeles' land use patterns from the earliest suburban development of Pico Union at the turn of the century to redevelopment in the 1980s. They are also specific to the ways the women of ACW fostered belonging, and mental

²⁴³ Catherine Fleming Bruce, *The Sustainers: Being, Building and Doing Good Through Activism in the Sacred Spaces of Civil Rights, Human Rights and Social Movements* (Tnovs: Columbia, SC, 2016).

²⁴⁴ McAvoy, interview by author, November 11, 2021.

²⁴⁵ Erica Avrami, "Introduction: Preservation's Reckoning," in *Issues in Preservation Policy: Preservation and Social Inclusion*, ed. Erica Avrami (Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2020).

and physical health. The physical characteristics of the two buildings are tightly connected to women's experiences at ACW and the identity of the organization. Conservation has always been part of ACW's mission, both implicitly and explicitly. However, efforts to protect the building have always centered around the women inside. As Chapter 1 demonstrated, ACW's ethos of care and mutual aid transformed participants' sense of self and community. Chapter 2 argues that these same underlying values shaped their relationship to the physical buildings they inhabited. It uplifts the efforts of "sustainers," or non-professional activists engaged in conservation and rehabilitation.

What McAvoy was most moved by, she said, was Underhill and her staff's "tireless[ness] in the perseverance" to save the buildings and continue to care for the people within it. "It's a perseverance that preservation has in general," she muses, "these are long stories... and the people that stay with them are a certain kind of person."²⁴⁶ Grounding ACW's efforts within significant developments in the field of conservation and the CRA that emerged in the 1980s demonstrates the potential for community development to conserve people and places. This chapter reminds us that sustaining ACW relies not just on professionals, but in the women who cleaned layers of grease from kitchen floors, who fought for a place of belonging when few existed, and who continue a legacy of healing and repair.

²⁴⁶ McAvoy, interview by author, November 11, 2021.

Part 3: Resonant Histories: Public History at ACW

“Joyful Commitment”

Who am I, to embark on a project to tell ACW’s story? I first came across ACW at ONE Archives in 2019. While looking for information about the 1970s magazine *Lesbian Tide*, I opened folder after folder of ephemera from Carolyn Weathers with letters, photos, and flyers that laid out a road map for the genesis of ACW. Rich as the materials were, I could not just rely on archival evidence – I needed to speak to, and hear from, the women of ACW themselves. I tracked down Carolyn Weathers on Facebook. Over the phone, Zoom, and at her apartment in Long Beach she helped me stitch together her records, shared personal photos and memories that brought the women (and the dogs!) of ACW to life. My relationship with Executive Director Lorette Herman began as follows: I sent a blind email to ACW one night at 7:24 p.m. asking to speak with someone about ACW’s history. At 7:40 p.m., I received an abrupt reply from Herman with a date and a time to call her. After we spoke on the phone, she invited me to visit. A week later, I stood on Alvarado’s busy sidewalk gazing up at the buildings. Through the ten-foot metal gate, I could make out Herman popping onto the second story balcony of 1147 and waving at me. There was a buzz and the electric gate inched back to admit me. Herman was there to greet me on the porch and invited me upstairs. With my hand on the burnished wood railing, I ascended into the sunlight that poured through a stained-glass window. That day, Herman made sure I didn’t just talk to her, but to women in the program. On the second floor in Herman’s office, the former master bedroom, I spoke to two women who gave voice to what I had heard in the archives: ACW as a place of healing, a home for women who didn’t have one, a place that inspired safety and hope. This thesis is my attempt to bring together the voices of Weathers, Herman, and countless women who have passed through ACW’s doors.

In *Reclaiming Queer: Activist & Academic Rhetorics of Resistance*, Erin Rand turns the magnifying glass onto the academy to examine the relation between the development of queer theory and activism. She argues that furthering theory must be done through practice, encouraging academics to engage in the movements they study in “joyful commitment” to their cause.²⁴⁷ Other scholars and advocates propose a fundamental shift in power between researcher and community member, arguing that researchers’ work should be directed by the needs and

²⁴⁷ Rand, *Reclaiming Queer*, 7-11.

goals of those they are studying.²⁴⁸ My research is intertwined with the activities of ACW, not only to better my research, but to combat the extractive nature of academia.

Over the last year, I have gone from an outsider at ACW to a collaborator. The workshops I have conducted with in-patient participants are logged as group hours. My academic work, including a published article and podcast about ACW, has become marketing material to raise their visibility.²⁴⁹ I have also dedicated personal resources to the cause, donating a brick to a recent fundraising campaign. This is to say, I am not a neutral party. While my interest in ACW emerged in response to a research question, my investment in the women who form this program is now personal.

My positionality and identity shape my work in both conscious and subconscious ways. I am a white, cisgender, able-bodied queer woman. When looking at the young staff laughing on the steps of ACW, it's not hard to imagine myself sitting alongside them. When Carolyn Weathers tells me, "You are part of something...that's still continuing" I see that she, too, sees a piece of herself in me. I am one in ten children who grew up with a family member who has a substance use disorder.²⁵⁰ My personal relationship with self-identified alcoholics helps me build empathy with ACW participants, a crucial element to deepen understanding between researcher and subject. It also requires me to be vigilant in my self-awareness: to not valorize the organization or prioritize the people in this story who look like me. My personal connections to this work do not equate to a sweeping endorsement of ACW. Rather, this transparency is meant to acknowledge my starting point as I analyze this organization and its members in an attempt to address broader questions about queer feminism, recovery, and claims to space.

²⁴⁸ Gabriel Arboleda, "Beyond Participation: Rethinking Social Design," *Journal of Architectural Education* (1984) 74, no. 1 (2020): 15–25; Chicago Beyond, "Why Am I Always Being Researched? A Guidebook for Community Organizations, Researchers, and Funders to Help Us Get from Insufficient Understanding to More Authentic Truth," *Chicago Beyond Equity Fund* 1 (2019); Barbara B. Wilson, *Resilience for All: Striving for Equity through Community-Driven Design* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2018).

²⁴⁹ See Lindsay Mulcahy, "Preservation on the 'Natch'," *Places Journal* (September 2020) and Trudi Sandemeier and Cindy Olnick hosts, "Sisterhood is Beautiful," *SaveAs* (podcast), January 21, 2021, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/sisterhood-is-beautiful/id1538043798?i=1000506112258>.

²⁵⁰ A study conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration from 2009 to 2014 found that 10.5% of children aged 17 or younger lived with at least one parent with a past year alcohol use disorder. R.N. Lipari, and S.L. Van Horn, "Children living with parents who have a substance use disorder," *The CBHSQ Report* (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Rockville, MD, August 24, 2017).

Thick Traditions of Public History

ACW has long and multifaceted practices of remembering that can be considered forms of public history. *The Oxford Handbook of Public History* acknowledges the porous and dynamic nature of public history that include a variety of participatory, publicly oriented practices that apply historic content to civic engagement and memory work in the present.²⁵¹ The conservation efforts described in the previous chapter constitute a tangible form of public history. The extant buildings, and the daily acts of care to maintain them, perform both a symbolic and experienced connection to the past. More subtle reminders of ACW's history also exist in and around the buildings. A portrait of founder Brenda Weathers hangs in the living room of 1147 S. Alvarado and upstairs is a corkboard filled with photos and ephemera from over the years.

ACW's history is inscribed into the buildings, but it is interpreted through people. Founding member Carolyn Weathers is one of ACW's major culture keepers; her papers, held at ONE Archive, and our personal interviews form the basis of this thesis. She is a frequent presence at ACW. At ACW's 30th anniversary in 2004, she gave a heartfelt speech positioning ACW as "instrumental in establishing the importance, against entrenched conventional wisdom, that programs for women were good ideas and worthy of support."²⁵² Alumna Carol G. is also invested in ACW's place in queer history, serving on ONE Archives' Board of Directors for several years. The houses serve as a convening place for ACW's intergenerational community. Every year at the winter holiday event, alumni spanning years and decades return to 1147 S. Alvarado. They mingle in the living room, sharing stories and congratulating recent graduates. Some alumni support year-round as mentors to current participants.

ACW's most recent fundraising effort project exemplifies how the physical location holds and connects ACW's community. As of summer 2021, the path leading to 1135 S. Alvarado, the Miracle House, is lined with bricks purchased and inscribed by alumni and community members (Figure 3.1). This fundraising strategy – where an individual donates money to a cause in exchange for their name concretized in brick or stone – is not new. What is unique about these bricks are the words. Many speak directly to the women who walk through

²⁵¹ James B. Gardner and Paula Hamilton, "The Past and Future of Public History: Development and Challenges," in *The Oxford Handbook of Public History*, ed. Paula Hamilton and James B. Gardner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²⁵² Carolyn Weathers, "An early history of the AWC," Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 3, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.

the doors to the recovery house. “Welcome Home” one reads. Another: “She believed she could so she did! You got this!!!” Others commemorate past participants and staff, alive and passed. One hints at a love story: “Our life started here June 1992 Amelia & Debbie.” Every day when women step out the doors, they quite literally walk on those who came before them.



Figure 3.1: Compilation of memorial bricks, 2021. Photo by author.

Despite these efforts, Executive Director Lorette Herman admitted that most staff and participants know little of how ACW came to be. What they needed, she told me one afternoon in her office, was tangible history that chronicled the 115 years of the buildings, and almost fifty years of ACW’s existence. ACW’s physical history can “inspire hope in the women,” Herman believes. “We have these two old buildings, and they’re still here...if they can survive, then we can survive.”²⁵³ Herman’s mandate has initiated another act of public history and conservation at ACW. Initially, Herman requested that I create a wall exhibit. To do so, I designed experiential

²⁵³ Herman, interview by author, November 5, 2021.

learning workshops and a workbook to allow current participants and staff to shape the content and form of the exhibit. Since then, ACW's priorities have shifted from a physical exhibit to a digital presentation on their website. The voices and knowledge elicited through the participatory processes (detailed in the following section) will form the base of this future digital exposition.

The third chapter of this thesis details my efforts to evoke memories of ACW's history from the women who lived it and generate dialogue with current participants and staff to interpret its significance in today's context. Emphasizing process over the product, this public history project continues ACW's legacy of 1) centering the knowledge and needs of participants in support of their self-determination 2) fostering dialogue among current and past ACW community members 3) using the built environment as a vehicle for understanding ACW's social and political significance.

Resonant Histories: Methodology

Engaged Scholarship and Co-Creation

The authors of *Urban Humanities: New Practices for Reimagining the City* contextualize the "scholarship of engagement" articulated by Ernest Boyer in 1996 within the pedagogical frameworks assembled by theorists Paolo Freire, Jacques Rancière, and bell hooks.²⁵⁴ These foundational theorists dismantle the hierarchy between student and teacher, recognizing the inherent knowledge of the student and presenting the opportunity for transformation and emancipation of both parties through "dialogue and mutual investigation."²⁵⁵ In the past decades, the field of public history, heritage conservation, and other related fields have used these principles to develop new methodologies to create bottom-up participant directed and owned projects.²⁵⁶

Public historians also look to anthropologists, sociologists, and ethnographers for ethical methods of community engagement and collaboration. Fieldwork and long-term community integration are particularly useful techniques for practitioners seeking to understand how people connect to, move through, and shape physical space. In *Spatializing Culture*, Setha Low presents

²⁵⁴ Dana Cuff, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, Todd Presner, Maite Zubiaurre, and Jonathan Jae-an Crisman, *Urban Humanities: New Practices for Reimagining the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020), 205-228.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 227.

²⁵⁶ Labrador and Silverman, "Introduction: Public Heritage as Social Practice," in *The Oxford Handbook of Public Heritage Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018); Bonacini, "Engaging Communities Digital Storytelling: Using Digital Storytelling in Sicily (Italy)," *The International information & library review* 51, no. 1 (2019): 42-50.

case studies that illustrate a variety of approaches – site visit and observation, maps, participant interviews – to illuminate subaltern actors’ agency within physical environments largely shaped by neoliberal and police forces.²⁵⁷ Angela Garcia employs a narrower scope and deeper engagement in her book *The Pastoral Clinic* by working at a methamphetamine rehabilitation clinic in New Mexico. Through interviews and observations over the course of years, she articulates deeply intertwined connections between Hispanos’ historic loss of land and the fragmentation of community and identity for methamphetamine users today.²⁵⁸

The ACW public history project utilizes methodologies based in empathy, mutual curiosity, and self-determination and deploys them within the limitations of the project. The project emerged from a direct need from Herman to share ACW’s history with current participants. Herman is one of many important voices that inform the shape of this project. The former participants and staff who agreed to be interviewed by me shared crucial information about ACW’s history that allowed me to construct a larger narrative. They also provided interpretive analysis about the ways ACW has changed or stayed the same, and its significance today. While current staff and participants had less historic context, it is in conversation with each other and the historic materials that they articulate the relevance of ACW’s history and spatiality. My role in these workshops was as a facilitator and an observer: holding up pieces of ACW’s history, listening to what and how people responded, and putting these perspectives into conversation. Herman has reviewed the content I created to ensure it is accessible to participants and aligned with the organization’s goals. The heavy influence of myself and Herman tilt the balance away from a purely bottom-up project towards one that is co-created. Through a reciprocal process of sharing knowledge and learning, staff, participants, and myself articulate and expand our understanding of ACW’s significance.

Co-creation does not deny my role in telling the story. As Linda Shopes warns in a recent publication for the *Oral History Review*, elevating historic voices without critical analysis can be dangerous.²⁵⁹ Public historians have a responsibility to contextualize and question the histories

²⁵⁷ Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

²⁵⁸ Garcia, *The Pastoral Clinic*, 1-11.

²⁵⁹ Mary Rizzo, “Is Sharing Authority a Cop Out?,” *Oral History Association*, September 17, 2021, <https://oralhistoryreview.org/ohr-authors/sharing-authority-cop-out/>.

they give a platform to. In my project, this looks like recognizing the messy work of recovery and raising questions about ACW's limitations and inconsistencies.

Methods and Materials of Engagement

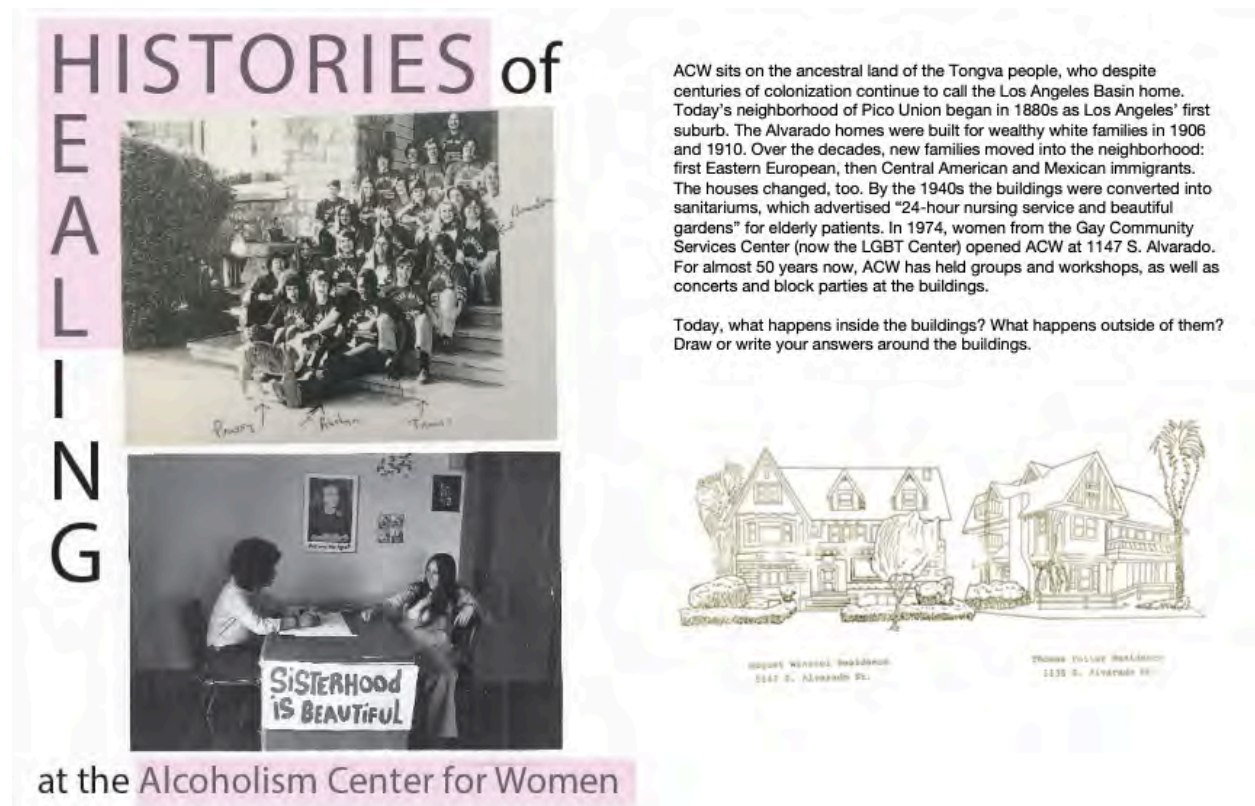
"Thick collaborations" develop slowly.²⁶⁰ I contacted Herman in July of 2020 and consulted with her over the course of several months before my first workshop in March 2021. During this interim period before the workshop, I met with the Board of Directors to present my plan for engagement with participants, intended outcomes, and solicit their ideas about ACW's historic significance and the direction of future public history materials. With the Board's feedback and organizational approval, as well as a grant from the University of Southern California, I officially began the project. The institutional support from ACW and personal relationships with Herman and Weathers have been crucial to the success of the project. It was Herman who introduced me to many of the former participants who I conducted oral histories with. From there, I was initiated into the web of ACW alumni. Several interviewees connected me to other women from ACW who are still in their personal networks. I had less time to build relationships with staff and participants at the workshops. Participants stay at the residential program for six weeks to six months, so each workshop was with an entirely new group of women. I sought to build rapport and trust by beginning each workshop by introducing myself and my intentions for the workshop, my connection to ACW, and my experience with a loved one's recovery process.

Engagement with ACW community members took several forms. Oral histories were conducted over video calls for convenience and pandemic safety measures from August 2020 through May 2021. With some women, our interactions were limited to one interview while others, like Weathers, I had upwards of five conversations, including one in-person meeting. The Board of Directors presentation and staff workshop were singular events, conducted on Zoom in the first months of 2021. Post-meeting and workshop, a written survey was sent out to provide participants more time and a different method of communication. I conducted the three participant workshops in February, May, and November of 2021 with twenty to twenty-eight women from in the inpatient program at 1135 S. Alvarado. Each time, the workshop was

²⁶⁰ "Thick collaborations," is a term borrowed from Dana Cuff et al. to describe how researchers and academics can "establish long term research bonds...leading to collective knowledge creation." Dana Cuff et al., *Urban Humanities*, 227.

composed of different participants from the previous, owing to the limited time (six weeks to six months) participants spend in the program. The workshops were held in-person on ACW's front lawn with social distancing and masks.

The participant workshop sought to appeal to a variety of learning and communicating styles by employing group discussion, visualizations, writing, and drawing (Figure 3.2). The workshops were loosely structured around my narration of ACW's history using visuals from the archives and light facilitation where participants engaged in discussion with me and each other. The workshop concluded with the workbook, to create another opportunity for participants to reflect and engage with the historic content. With short narratives, archival images, and a series of prompts, the workbook invites participants to engage with the history through words or images. Workshop participants had the option of keeping the workbook to provide additional time, privacy, and autonomy to reflect on their experience at ACW and the organization's place in history.



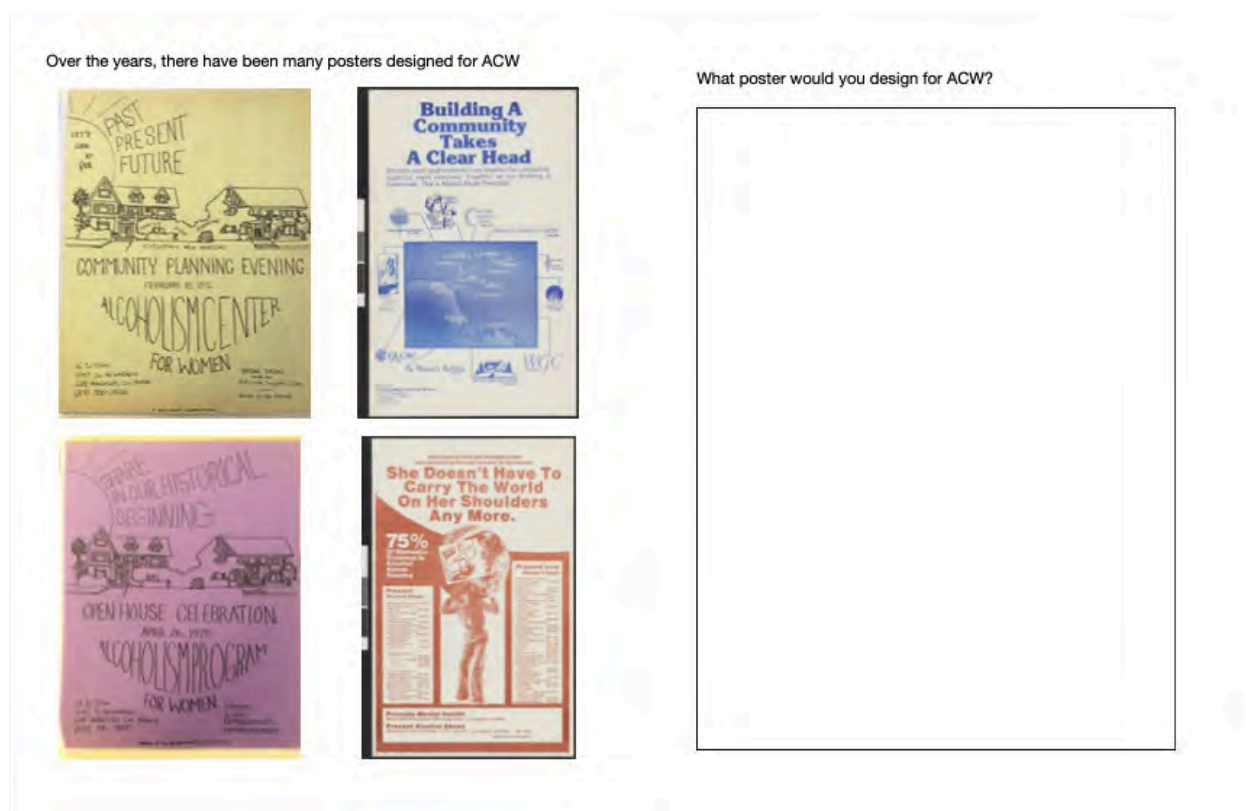


Figure 3.2: ACW Workbook, 2021. Designed by author, images courtesy of ONE Archives at USC Libraries. See Appendix A for full workbook and citation.

Workshops for participants and staff and oral histories revolved around a set of overarching questions. The specific questions varied depending on the direction our conversation took, but generally included:

- What brought you to ACW? Why did you stay?
- What stands out to you about ACW's history? What similarities or differences do you see between the 1970s and now?
- What words would you use to describe the buildings? How does the environment shape your experience at ACW?
- What memories stand out to you from your time at ACW?
- How do you want to see your history represented?

Through the oral histories, I learned about ACW's relationship to other community groups and the networks of community within the organization. I asked staff about ACW's treatment philosophy and their perspective on participants' experience at ACW. One of the writing prompts for current participants was, "What would you want others to know about ACW and your recovery process?"

A main objective was to bring archival history into the public realm. Ephemera from ONE Archive and Carolyn Weathers' personal collection including posters, letters, and photographs are embedded in the workbook and passed around during workshops. These images viscerally evoke ACW's history and allow participants to see themselves in the historical record. It also democratizes access; workshop participants absorb the primary sources directly rather than filtered through my interpretation.

Defining privacy and ownership are key for an ethically engaged scholarship. Oral history participants signed a consent to be recorded and included in this thesis and future ACW material, with the option to be named or anonymous. Participant workshops at ACW followed their standing privacy guidelines, which restrict names, photos, or any personally identifying information, and are overseen by staff. At the beginning of each workshop, I explain to participants that their comments may be incorporated into my thesis and that participation is optional. Quotes in this thesis are based on field notes I wrote directly after each workshop. The research and oral histories collected throughout my thesis process will be shared freely with ACW for use on their website or other public-facing materials.

Workshop on October 14, 2021

Friday morning, 10am. Women trickle out of 1135 S. Alvarado. They scatter across the porch and lawn on chairs and benches coated in dappled light. Some have bright, alert eyes, one or two appear to be in a daze. I mill around, talking to anyone who will make eye contact with me and passing out the workbooks. One woman has only been there two days. "Yesterday my roommate walked out," she tells me, brushing hair out of her eyes with long pink acrylic nails that perfectly complement her pink velour sweatsuit. "I feel guilty, like, it's my fault." The woman across the table comforts her. "You have to focus on your own journey. Not everyone is ready." She tells me she was in jail until she came to ACW almost two weeks ago. "I remind myself of that every day, where I came from. That's what keeps me here." The woman in the pink sweatsuit asks what prison she was in. She knew it well. "Yeah I was there seven months," she nods, and they share a look. Latecomers wander around looking for the sign-in sheet. They know how these groups work. "We were just in group," a woman tells me, not trying to mask her irritation. She keeps looking past the metal bars that gate ACW off from the street. She's waiting for a car to take her to the DMV, but I can tell her mind is further away than that. Most of the women are Black and Latina, ages ranging from their early twenties to their sixties.

The women are getting restless, so I turn to the staff member hoping she will get us started. In the past, some staff have recognized me from the workshop I led for them, but this one has other things on her mind. She catches the group's attention with a languid wave, announces, "we have a presenter who is going to give a lecture, pay attention" and disappears into the house. "I'm not here to lecture..." I clarify. I tell them I'm a student that has been studying ACW for almost two years. I explain that I'm here to share some history with them and get their help in figuring out what it means. Today we're running behind, so I ask them if all twenty-eight of them want to go around and introduce themselves. They say, in no less words, to get on with it. I ask another question: "who's land are we on?" "Indian land!" Someone behind me shouts. Together, we acknowledge the Tongva as the stewards of the land, who, despite centuries of colonization, continue to occupy and shape contemporary Los Angeles. A white woman with short, spikey hair asks how to spell Tongva. "It's in the workbook," someone tells her, but I spell it out for her anyway.

My second question: "what do you know about the history of these houses, of ACW?" The responses are sparse. "It's old..." someone ventures. This is my excuse to begin. I tell them about the first owners of the homes, raising their children in bedrooms they now know as offices. I describe the demographics of the changing neighborhood and the new owners who converted the homes to sanitariums. People pepper me with questions. "What was that house used for?" someone pointed next door to a home that used to be a convalescent home. "Was this a slave house?" a Black woman shouts from the back. In one workshop, an older Black woman who grew up in Pico Union helped me narrate the neighborhood's evolution through the buildings that remain, or have been replaced, on the streets she grew up on.

I see some people's eyebrows raise approvingly when I tell them ACW was founded by lesbians. However, no participant actively expressed interest in the break from the men at the GCSC. The threat of demolition for the mini-mall, though, caught women off guard. "Wait – they were gonna tear these buildings down?" someone asks, incredulous. As I narrate, I pass around archival photos of early Pico Union, Rockhaven sanitarium, Weathers' personal photos from parties from the 1970s. Pictures from ACW's early years cause people to whisper, chatter to another. Different things catch their eyes than mine. Images with women laughing or talking, cigarettes lightly held in their fingertips, cause a stir – smoking was banned a few years ago (Figure 3.3).



Figure 3.3: Founding staff member Roslyn Allen and participant at holiday party at 1135 S. Alvarado, circa late 1970s. Carolyn Weathers private collection.

I am clear that I am asking them for help, that my thesis depends on their knowledge of ACW and its significance for them. “What surprised you? What does this mean for you?” are my leading questions. During one workshop, the group was painfully silent, save for one or two women. Today, though, many people have thoughts. The woman reluctantly sitting through the workshop to wait for her DMV appointment is one of the first to speak. “I was surprised about the history,” she said, rattling off the different people and institutions that these buildings have held. For others, the workshop recalls their early memories here. “I knew that this place was special,” one woman said, describing how she often imagined who walked these halls before her. “Maybe,” she continued, “I do like history after all.”

Resonant Histories

Together, the workshops, oral histories, and archival materials make a compelling case: ACW’s continual use transcends a finite “period of significance,” to reveal “stubbornly

simultaneous” themes of women’s empowerment and healing.²⁶¹ Carolyn Weathers was the first person who affirmed to me the continuity from ACW’s early years through today: “the spirit,” she contends, “still lives on at ACW.”²⁶² *Spirit* is less amorphous than it may sound. Resonance in the ways ACW community members spanning almost fifty years describe their experiences at the houses give weight and shape to the feelings of “sisterhood and comradery” that Weathers describes.

One phrase arises more than all others: “ACW saved my life.” I first heard these words in an interview with Nadia Bruce-Rawlings, but I had seen them before. In appealing to the CRA to stop the demolition of ACW in 1987, former ACW participant Jennifer Earl wrote, “I owe my life to ACW.” The phrase is in letters pinned to the corkboard within 1147 Alvarado and inscribed into the brick steps in front of 1135 Alvarado. *Life* is, of course, multifaceted, encompassing relationships, sense of self, and purpose. It is literal, physical. It is also, for these women, not a given. Bruce-Rawlings confided to me that two of the three friends she stayed in touch with after ACW have since died from overdoses. As Garcia describes in *The Pastoral Clinic*, recovery tends to be circular rather than linear, and those cycles are hard to break.²⁶³ It is common for participants at ACW to walk-out early or return to the program several times over. ACW has not been a cure for all the women who walked through its doors, but for Wendy and others, “it provided a foundation” for her to “transform” her life.²⁶⁴

Current participants, immersed in the process of recovery, do not yet speak of transformation. They do, however, describe a process of *healing* and *love*. A curly haired, wide-smiled participant described the moment she walked into ACW: “I felt this healing energy,” she exclaimed, gesturing around her. The phrases “a place of healing” and “a place of love” emerge from several participants. ACW’s groups and therapy work to address the trauma that underlies addiction and build new habits and healthy sense of self, an approach several participants described as “holistic healing.” Over the last two decades, ACW has moved away from identity-oriented groups like Lapis or lesbian-oriented programming.²⁶⁵ They have, though, begun to

²⁶¹ I have borrowed Edward Soja’s language to describe multidimensional and nonlinear ways of understanding history and space. Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 2010), 2.

²⁶² Weathers, interview by author, February 17, 2021.

²⁶³ Garcia, *The Pastoral Clinic*, 70-73.

²⁶⁴ Wendy G., interview by author, May 14, 2021.

²⁶⁵ ACW Still Like Family Event,” 2004, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers.

emphasize nutrition as part of integrating mental and physical wellbeing. After one workshop, I eat lunch with the participants and get to experience the highly acclaimed meals prepared by ACW's chef. It's something many participants point out – the food they eat is healthy, “it makes you feel good.” I'm served by the chef herself, a short Black woman who calls me and the women “honey.” I eat a generous helping of whole wheat pasta with cheese and broccoli and contentedly listen to women talk and laugh amongst themselves.

Current participants also highlight ACW's unique legacy of a community by and for underrepresented women. Almost fifty years since its founding, ACW remains one of the only woman-specific treatment facilities in California. “Ms. Lorette said yes to me when no one else would,” said a woman with a particular criminal charge from northern California. Before and during the workshops, I listen to women talk with each other about their children, their experiences in prison, their dreams, and aspirations for the future. “We share about ourselves in group,” one woman explains to me, reifying the sense of solidarity and understanding I witness in snippets. Notably, most of the participants today are Black and Brown. While participants rarely discussed race in the workshops, my whiteness and lack of rapport with them may have contributed to this absence. Women did identify a major shift in ACW's history: it is no longer majority- lesbian or queer identified. Savage explained that this transition occurred in the early 1990s when ACW was closed for renovations.²⁶⁶ The demographic changes at ACW will be discussed further in the following section.

The physical atmosphere is as intertwined with participants' healing today as it was forty years ago. “I've never been to a rehab that looks like this before,” a blonde woman tells me. Women are eager to talk about their favorite features – the porches, fireplaces, stained glass, and the warmth it gives the buildings. A woman who was living on Skid Row before coming to ACW directly links ACW's setting, a “home” and to the relationships, “like family” she has built with other women. Herman has intentionally carried this forward. She stated, “lot of our women either come from prison or jail or homeless or hospitals. And I just felt the walls are so white at those places.” With the help of an interior designer, Herman individualized each room with different colored walls, artwork, bedding, and arrangements to “liven up the space.”²⁶⁷ The domestic setting is a stark contrast to medical or carceral institutions where many substance users

²⁶⁶ Savage, interview by author, May 28, 2021.

²⁶⁷ Herman, interview by author, November 5, 2021.

are sentenced. “It’s very different than sleeping in a hospital bed,” another woman says, her shoulders involuntarily shuddering.

Participants illustrate the power of place in the workbook exercises. One woman delineates the activities that occur in different spaces – 1147 versus 1135, inside versus outside – to illuminate how she occupies and circulates through the site. Another woman chose to represent the inside of 1135 Alvarado in her poster design. She illustrates her in her bedroom, the hallways connecting her to other rooms, and the downstairs where people eat around a communal table (Figure 3.4).

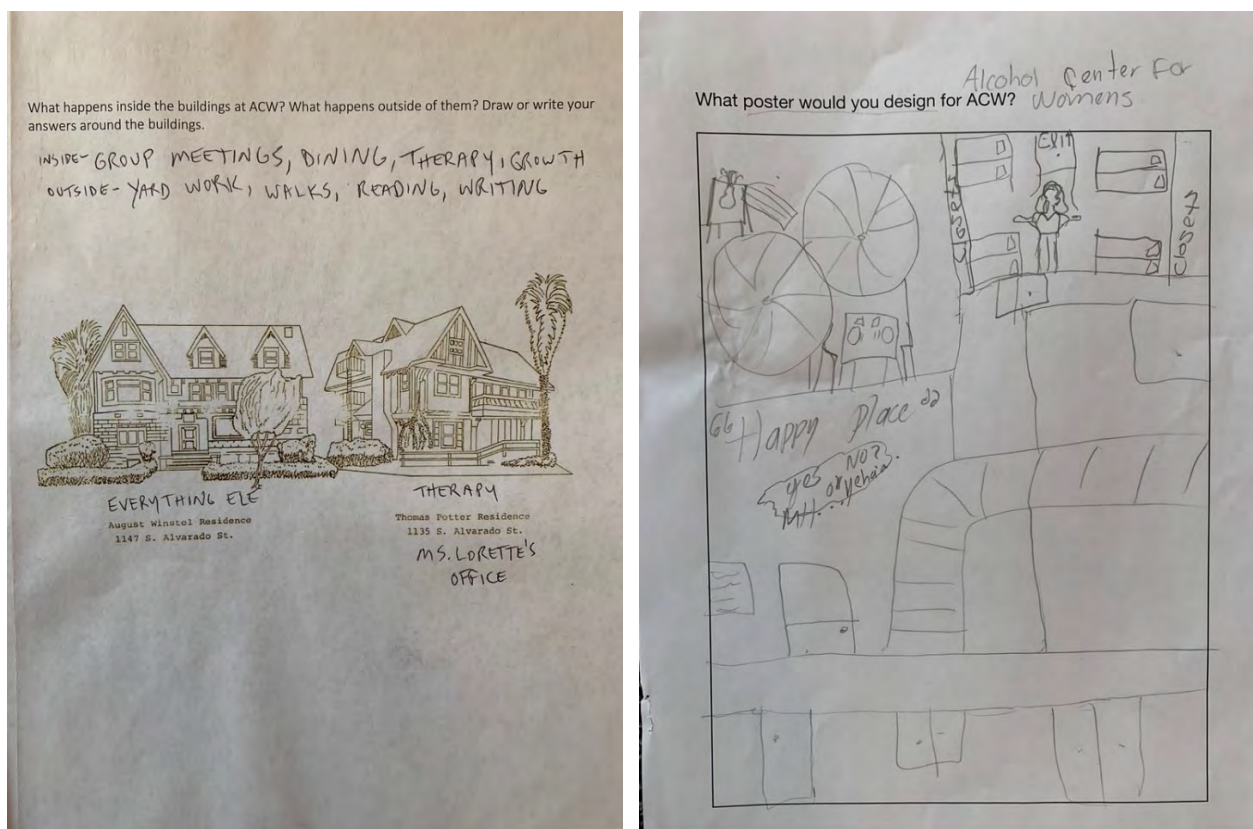


Figure 3.4: Workshop pages, 2021. Photo by author. Note: The participant confused the two buildings – therapy and Lorette’s office are in 1147, while “everything else” occurs in 1135.

As I stand on the porch, looking around at the carefully manicured lawn, the roses and other plants sprouting from damp earth, I ask the women seated before me, “who takes care of this place, makes it look like this?” “We do!” is the resounding reply. Another through-line in ACW’s history is women’s investment in the physical space. Taking care of the building and grounds “makes me feel proud” one woman tells me, “like I’m part of something bigger.” In

2015, participants voted on what colors to repaint the houses based on a selection of historically appropriate color palates.²⁶⁸ Their autonomy and agency over their environments is both an opportunity to, as Bruce-Rawlings put it, “practice caring for something” and an affirmation of their inherent self-worth.

Participants often describe their experience not just in the physical house but its location in the larger Pico Union neighborhood. Today, ACW is the only substance use program exclusively for underserved women in the entire Los Angeles Metro Area.²⁶⁹ It is a central and convenient place for women who use the outpatient services. Promotional brochures from ACW today list several bus stops that service the area.²⁷⁰ As in past years, this is both a positive and negative. There is an underlying tension between their efforts to obtain and maintain sobriety and seeing people “in their addiction,” as one participant put it, just outside the gates.

In the staff workshop, I hear staff, largely women of color, reaffirm many of participants’ comments about the continuity of ACW’s impact. In the workshop I show a letter from a participant in 1987 stating, “ACW saved my life,” causing one staff member to exclaim, “We hear this all the time.” “It’s a place of healing,” agreed another. While far more women today identify as straight than in ACW’s early years, staff tell me that sexual orientation is an integral part of many participants’ identities and struggles. One staff member asserts that feeling seen, supported, and in community with other people like themselves helps women “to live their true self.” They also speak to the importance of having bilingual services to support participants whose first language is Spanish.

The houses are significant not only to participants’ recovery processes, but also to staff’s experience working at ACW. Staff describe similar significant features of the homes, as well as its affect. Several vividly recall their first impression entering ACW. One described walking through the doors and feeling “a powerful presence of love.” She interprets the feeling she had in the context of ACW’s history: “it was started,” she explains, “for love.” The buildings also represent ACW’s endurance and continuity of service. From almost every decade of ACW’s

²⁶⁸ Herman, interview by author, November 5, 2021.

²⁶⁹ LA County Service Planning Area (SPA) 4 encompasses all of Metro Los Angeles. As of 2014, the population was 1,140,742. “Supplement to Community Health Assessment Service Planning Area 4: METRO,” County of Los Angeles Public Health, Office of Planning, revised December 22, 2014, <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/plan/docs/SPA4Supplement.pdf>; “Who We Are,” Alcoholism Center for Women, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://alcoholismcenterforwomen.org/who-we-are/>.

²⁷⁰ “Alcoholism Center for Women - Outpatient Services,” Alcoholism Center for Women, accessed November 11, 2021, <https://alcoholismcenterforwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Outpatient-Flyer-1.pdf>

existence, there is a photo of staff sitting on the front porch of 1147 S. Alvarado St., a symbolic site that links people and place (Figures 3.5 through 3.8).



Figure 3.5: Staff on front steps of 1147 S. Alvarado, 1975. ACW documents and ephemera, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 1, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California.



Figure 3.6-3.7: Staff on front steps of 1147 S. Alvarado in 1984 and 2008. ACW documents and ephemeral, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 1, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California (left). ACW flyers, pamphlets and programs, Carolyn Weathers photographs and papers, Coll2014-008, Box 1, Folder 2, ONE Archives at USC Libraries, Los Angeles, California (right).



Figure 3.8: Staff on front steps of 1147 S. Alvarado, 2021. ACW Facebook page.

Staff identify unity and comradery within themselves. One archival photo from Carolyn Weathers Collection that reads, “sisterhood is beautiful” resonated with one woman because, as she said, “the staff is also a sisterhood” (Figure 3.9). Others affirmed the staff as a “team” all driven by the same mission. The staff workshop takes place on one woman’s last day. Describing her experience part of the ACW community and working under Herman, she is brought to tears, and I see many other bleary eyes through my computer screen.



Figure 3.9: “Sisterhood is Beautiful” at 1147 S. Alvarado St., circa late 1970s. Carolyn Weathers private collection.

“Sometimes we don’t know the significance of the work we do or the history behind it,” one staff announces at the end of the workshop. ACW’s history has the potential to shape current actions. “It gives me pride to work here knowing the history,” said one staff, echoing the same sentiment that came from participants. Another woman shared that she was moved by the community events integral to ACW in its early years. The mountains of reporting and billing she is now required to complete crowds out room to plan regular events. Still, she mused, “maybe that’s something we can work towards.”

Evaluation and Conclusion

The workshop as a public history practice allowed current participants to engage directly with historic evidence and put it into context with their own lived experiences at ACW. One staff said the first time she walked into ACW she “felt the powerful presence of love.” Now, knowing the history, she said, “makes sense why I felt that.” A participant also contextualized her first impression of ACW as a “place of healing” as an extension of the building’s chapter as a

sanitarium. Participants and staff develop a material analysis of the buildings, noting the physical features that distinguish ACW's environment from carceral or medical institutions. The structure is positioned in service of the healing and repair that occurs among ACW participants. At the end of one workshop, one woman connects the different conservation efforts spanning ACW's history; they are "all about the women inside," she asserted.

The workshop also provided an opportunity for women to connect to each other and the women who occupied these homes before them. With heads bent over on of Carolyn Weathers' photographs of women in the 1970s cleaning the house, I see two women point and exclaim, "that's us!" (Figure 3.10).



Figure 3.10: Participants doing chores, facing north on Alvarado St., circa late 1970s. Carolyn Weathers private collection.

"I'm excited to drive by the house when I'm done here," another woman declared. I tell her that a graduate from the 1990s (Bruce-Rawlings) does that very thing. "Wow," she says, looking out to the street. I follow her gaze and see a composite vision: her and Bruce-Rawlings, looking back at where they came from. It also reminds both staff and participants of the importance of their work and the line of women that came before them. "It gives me pride working here knowing the

history,” said one staff at the end of the workshop. “I feel part of something bigger than myself,” reported a participant. I remind them that they, too, are part of this history.

The workbook offered writing prompts and activities for participants to continue to reflect on ACW’s history after the workshop. Most women chose to keep their workbooks; while some women had little interest in completing the activities, I witnessed some women quietly working on them as I left. The visualizations of the space in the poster activity offer another pathway for women to engage with the site and its history.

Several factors limited the success of the workshops. The time I had with each group of participants – one hour – was insufficient to build deep trust and rapport. Meetings followed necessary safety precautions: outside, with participants (about twenty-five each time) masked and sitting far apart from myself and one another. This spatial arrangement and street noise made it sometimes difficult to hear and facilitate an organic dialogue. It also prevented me from sharing audio from the oral histories that would have more directly put past and present ACW members into conversation. Women had different levels of engagement in the workshops. Some groups were dominated by a few speakers whose views did not necessarily represent the entire group. Lastly, the workshop may have been less effective for the several women who speak English as a second language.

While the themes of empowerment, mutual support, and self-love demonstrate the unity in ACW’s mission and purpose over the decades, much has also changed. Since the 1990s, the program has gone through several iterations of leadership. Several interviewees pointed to a string of directors in the late 1990s and early 2000s where the organization was mismanaged and rules were, as Bruce Rawlings put, “draconian.”²⁷¹ The growing medicalization and professionalization of the substance use field, and related funding requirements, have significantly altered ACW’s program. Herman states that today’s rigorous accreditation system, and heavy emphasis on documentation of services has shifted ACW’s model from a more casual, peer support model to a uniform and regulated program. She also notes that ACW had shifted from addressing alcoholism to drug use and often poly-drug use. While ACW still connects participants with mentors, staff in the workshop did not describe a “peer” relationship with participants as in earlier years.

²⁷¹ All interviewees express their gratitude for Herman as a trustworthy, empathetic, and strategic director. Bruce-Rawlings, interview by author, May 24, 2021.

ACW's early on political consciousness and community connection has also shifted. As one staff member noted, the number of community-facing events has dwindled. Gone, too, are the consciousness-raising groups or groups like Lapis explicitly focused on certain aspects of women's identities. ACW today continues to highlight their decades-long tradition of serving marginalized women with groups about parenting, domestic violence counseling, and HIV/AIDS awareness. One exception is ACW's exclusion of transwomen from the inpatient program, demonstrating the continued tension in women's spaces to accept women, regardless of their biological characteristics.²⁷²

These changes demonstrate the continual evolution and negotiation of ACW in response to new policy and personnel. Policy changes and new schools of thought guiding substance use treatment have shaped ACW's funding and programming priorities over the last fifty years and will continue to do so. The through lines of care and self-determination are not meant to obscure these tangible changes, but rather demonstrate how peoples' sense of self, place, and community can be shaped or fortified through history. Making visible the women who created and maintained ACW over the years reaffirms the importance of current staff and participants' work today to claim space and care for one another. By stitching together historic images and stories, staff and participants situate themselves within a larger historical narrative and create new knowledge about ACW's significance.

Thus far, the public history project has been an inward facing process of collecting and creating connections between past and present ACW community members. The result of these workshops and conversations is the process itself to generate dialogue, curiosity, and comradery. An example of engaged scholarship, this model could potentially be shared with other conservation practitioners at conferences or round tables. The ideas and raw materials – recordings, quotes, and visualizations – that emerged from the workshops and oral histories are ripe to be shared and built upon in the future. They can be used to create community-facing content: presentations for local historical societies or gatherings about the history of Pico Union, women's and queer history, or public health history in Los Angeles. Ultimately, this content belongs to ACW. While beyond the scope of this thesis, I will continue to collaborate with Herman to incorporate my research into ACW's revised website. Digitally compiling and sharing

²⁷² Herman states that this is for the "safety" of transwomen. ACW does not have a history of actively welcoming trans women.

the voices and reflections from past and present staff and participants will hopefully be the next iteration of intergenerational dialogue and meaning making with a wider audience of ACW community members.

Conclusion

The formation of ACW in 1974 and preceding decades of rehabilitation and maintenance reveal the complex social, political, and spatial dimensions of visibility and wellness for (queer) women in the latter half of the twentieth century. In response to their isolation and estrangement from heteropatriarchal society and substance use programs, Brenda Weathers and her fellow organizers forged a space where they could be themselves and direct their futures. Within 1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado, new ways of being themselves and one another blossomed and were enacted in the living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens, and porches. While ACW built community around its members' shared identity as women with substance use disorders, they acknowledged divergent experiences shaped by race, class, and sexual orientation.

"Self-help" was not just ACW's philosophy of addiction recovery, but the conservation praxis for the buildings that held them. Reframing ACW's founding as an act of conservation highlights staff members' manual labor to make the houses not only habitable, but warm, safe, and familiar for women previously subject to hostile, carceral, or medical environments. This initial restoration repositions the formal designation as a continuation of the conservation efforts led by non-professionals. It highlights the contrasting priorities of the CRA and the Cultural Heritage Commission with the women who relied on ACW's services. The legacy of ACW participants in maintaining the properties reinforces ACW as a place where women not only are healed, but themselves are agents of healing. Its example contributes to conversations that shift conservation from a professional, materially, and aesthetically oriented discipline to one that prioritizes sites' value as understood and fortified by its users.

Iterative processes of maintenance, care, and remembrance propel ACW forward today. Oral histories with ACW alumni and workshops with current staff and participants demonstrate the continuation of ACW's founding principles of care and healing as rooted in the physical space. Moreover, putting archival materials and alumni's words into direct conversation with current ACW members generates space for women to see themselves in relation to larger social movements and intimate journeys of recovery. The archival materials, workbook, and voices captured in workshops and oral histories will be incorporated into ACW's website. The next phase of the public history project, led by ACW, will lead to a new interpretation of these archival and contemporary sources. A digital format can engage a larger audience of past and

present ACW staff, participants, and supporters and proliferate the ways community members engage with each other and their history.

This thesis argues that the 1987 Historic Cultural Monument nominations were written in a political context and era of conservation that prioritized architectural significance over people. 1147 and 1135 S. Alvarado are two of countless monuments whose meaning for, and contributions by, women, queer people, and people of color have been elided in the historical record. ACW's significance to women, queer people, and substance users should be incorporated in an updated Historic Cultural Monument designation. This information should also form the basis of a National Register nomination that situates ACW in the 1970s gay liberation and women's liberation movements and confluence of medical and peer support-based treatment programs for alcoholism, particularly for queer people. In this way, this thesis can tangibly advance representation of women and queer peoples' history at the local and national level. The narrative centered around, and bolstered by, the actual voices of ACW's community members further emphasizes the agency of ACW's sustainers, the non-professional conservationists who are the primary stewards of the organization's buildings and legacy.

This thesis illuminates a small piece of Los Angeles' still opaque LGBTQ+ and women's history. ACW's history is dense, thickly interwoven with a myriad of movements and contexts that could not be fully fleshed out in this work. The economic and policy context of substance use and treatment since the 1980s would help contextualize the shifts in ACW's program over the last few decades. Details about ACW's treatment ideology are limited in this work but are worthy of study from the perspective of social work or psychology.

At the staff workshop, I asked for guidance in how to represent ACW's history. "This is what I tell clients," one therapist advised: "Just start at the beginning and tell your story. Tell our story," she instructs me. There are many stories within ACW, as many stories as women who have walked through their doors. This thesis is an offering, an attempt to weave together voices across decades and identity groups to construct a multifaceted, ever-evolving understanding of the ways ACW's programs and physical space facilitate sobriety and self-determination for women.

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Appendix A: ACW Workbook

HISTORIES of

E A L I N G



at the Alcoholism Center for Women

ACW sits on the ancestral land of the Tongva people, who despite centuries of colonization continue to call the Los Angeles Basin home. Today's neighborhood of Pico Union began in 1880s as Los Angeles' first suburb. The Alvarado homes were built for wealthy white families in 1906 and 1910. Over the decades, new families moved into the neighborhood: first Eastern European, then Central American and Mexican immigrants. The houses changed, too. By the 1940s the buildings were converted into sanitariums, which advertised "24-hour nursing service and beautiful gardens" for elderly patients. In 1974, women from the Gay Community Services Center (now the LGBT Center) opened ACW at 1147 S. Alvarado. For almost 50 years now, ACW has held groups and workshops, as well as concerts and block parties at the buildings.

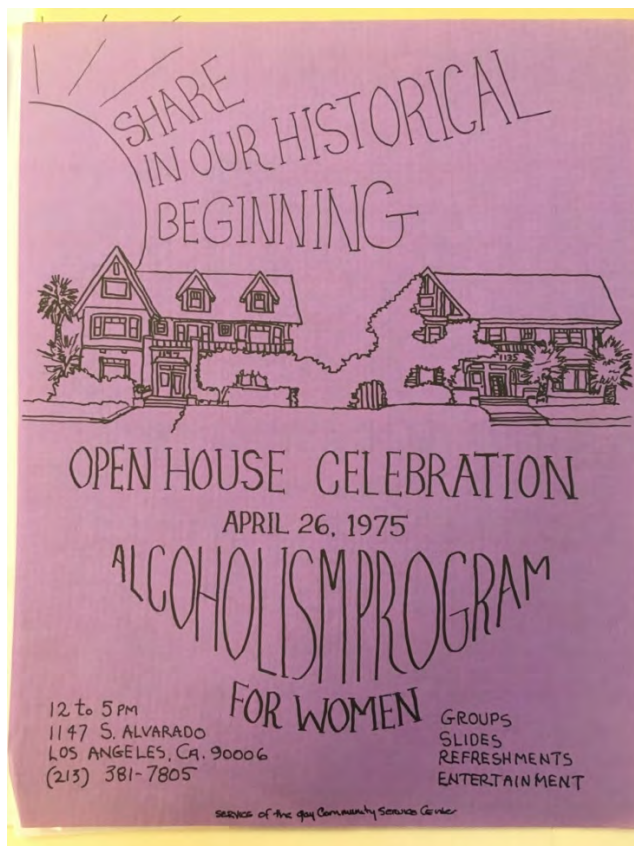
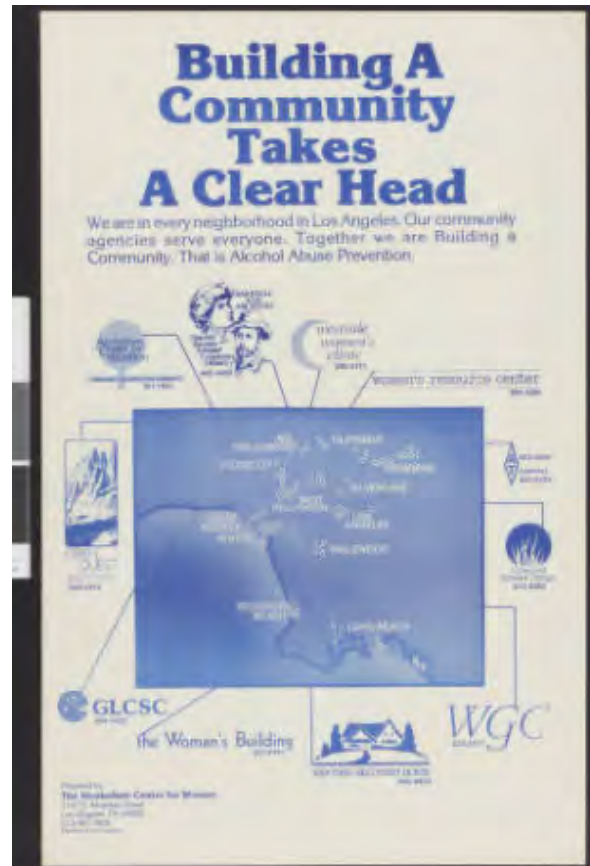
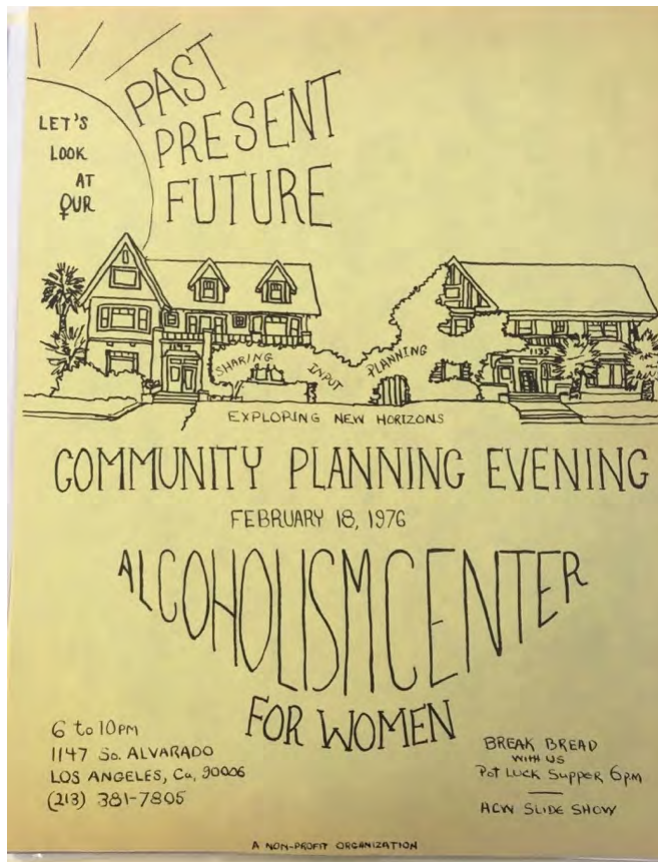
Today, what happens inside the buildings? What happens outside of them? Draw or write your answers around the buildings.



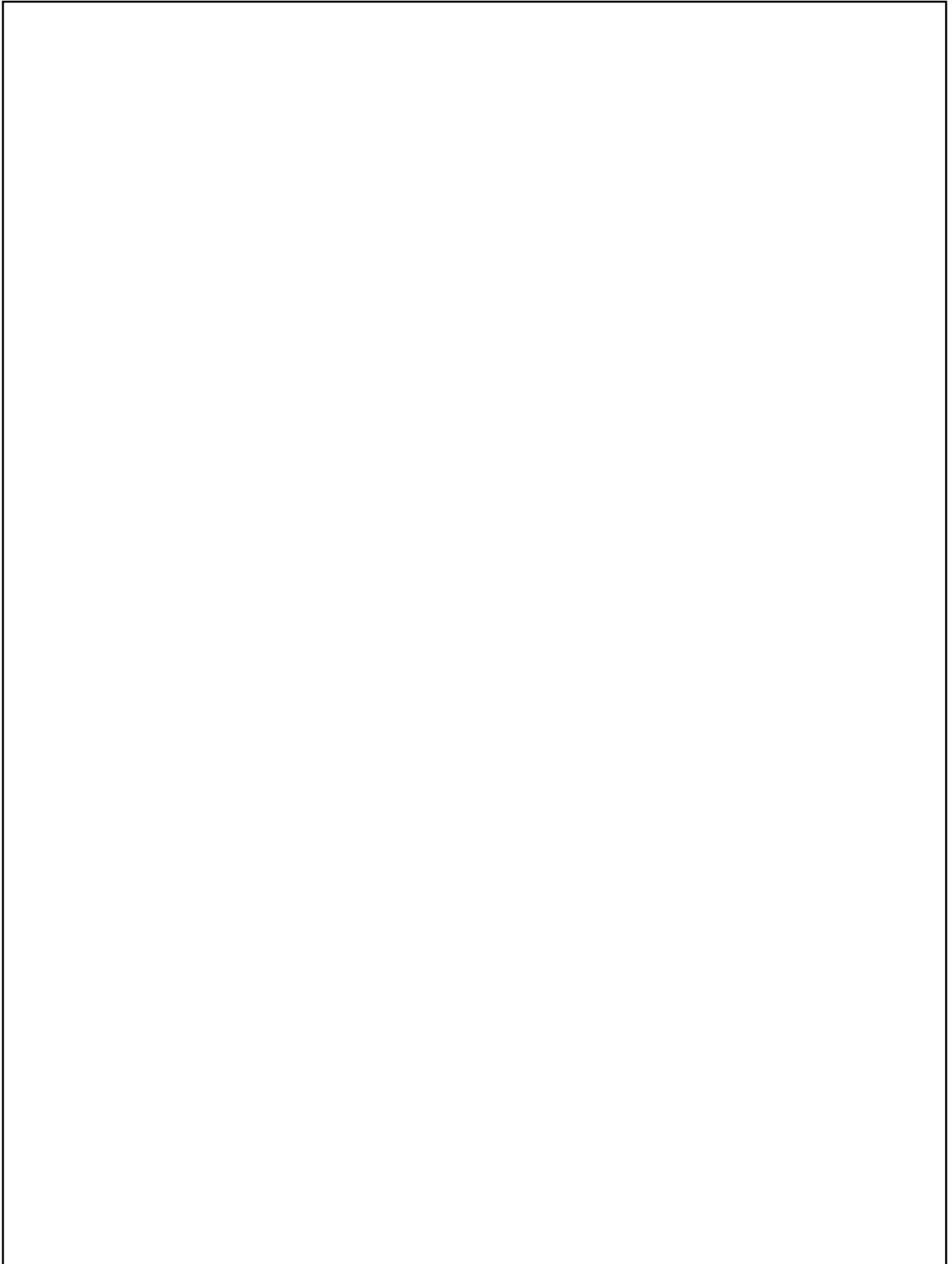
August Winstel Residence
1147 S. Alvarado St.

Thomas Potter Residence
1135 S. Alvarado St.

Over the years, there have been many posters designed for ACW



What poster would you design for ACW?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a poster design. It occupies the majority of the page below the question.

Writing Prompts:

What stands out to you about ACW's history? What similarities or differences do you see between the 1970s and now?

What words would you use to describe the buildings? How does the environment shape your experience at ACW?

What would you want others to know about ACW and your recovery process?

What's a memory you have of ACW?