Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer (LGBTQ) History

LGBTQ identified people have struggled for acceptance and equality for centuries now. They have been discriminated against, mistreated, misunderstood, oppressed, persecuted, and sometimes killed due to prejudice, intolerance and indifference. The timeline below highlights some of our long struggle for equality in Canada while highlighting some of our victories. The Pride flag, or “freedom flag” was promoted by an artist named Gilbert Baker in 1978, and is now an internationally recognized symbol of strength and unity. The colours exemplify our connectedness.

1841 – The Canadian Criminal Code imposes the death penalty or life imprisonment for persons having same-sex sexual relationships.

1930’s to 1940’s – Thousands of homosexuals are sent to concentration camps and labelled with an upside down pink triangle, which signified their “sexual deviance.” This has since been reclaimed and inverted upright as a symbol of remembrance of this time.

1948 and 1957 – The Kinsey Report recognizes that approximately 10% of the male population is homosexual, and 2-6% women are homosexual.

1964 – Canada’s first Gay positive organization and publication called “ASK” is formed in Vancouver, and “GAY” in Toronto.

1967 – Justice Minister Pierre Trudeau proposes amendments to the Criminal Code saying “There’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation.”

1969 – New York City police raid Stonewall Inn, sparking the gay civil rights movement in the US which trickled down to Canada.

Trudeau’s amendments to the Criminal Code pass, decriminalizing homosexuality in Canada. Political groups start forming in Canada.

1971 – Canada’s first Gay rights march takes place in Ottawa. “The Body Politic” in Toronto, was the first gay liberation magazine. “Coming Out”, is a short documentary series was Canada’s first LGBT television series.

1973 – Homosexuality in Canada is decriminalized under the Canadian Criminal Code.

Homosexuality is removed as a “disorder” from the Diagnostics and Statistics Manual of mental disorders.

1977 – Quebec becomes first province to include sexual orientation in its Human Rights Code.


1980 – The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) is the first public sector bargaining unit to negotiate benefits for their lesbian and gay members.

1982 – Equal Rights in the Canadian Charter of Rights comes into effect. Section 15 of the Charter guarantees equality “before and under the law” and “the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination.”


1989 – The Canadian Human Rights Commission ruled that same-sex couples and their children should be considered a “family”.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission recommends that “sexual orientation” be added to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

1992 – Canada allows lesbians and gays to serve in the military.

1994 – Canada grants refugee status to homosexuals.

1995 – Ontario becomes the first province to make it legal for same-sex couples to adopt.

The phase ‘sexual orientation’ is added to hate sentencing law.

1996 – The federal government passes Bill C-33 which added “sexual orientation” to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

The Supreme Court of Canada rules that same-sex couples should have the same rights and access as opposite-sex common-law couples.


Matthew Shepard’s death starts activism around hate crimes.

1999 – The Supreme Court rules that the Ontario Family Law Act’s definition of “spouse” is unconstitutional, as well as any law that denies equal benefits to same-sex couples.

2000 – The City of Toronto becomes Canada’s first city to seek guidance from the courts on whether Canada’s ban on same-sex marriages is constitutional.

The Federal Government introduces Bill C-23, to give same-sex couples who have lived together for more than a year the same rights and access as other common-law couples.

Ontario’s first same-sex couples are married by the MCC church in Toronto. The Ontario government insists that the marriages will not be legally recognized.

Ontario Human Rights Commission releases a policy on harassment and discrimination, stipulating that transgender individuals are protected by the Ontario Human Rights Code under “sex”.

2002 – Ontario Superior Court rules that Marc Hall has the right to take his boyfriend to the prom.
Ontario Superior Court rules in favour of recognizing same-sex marriages under the law – Federal government appeals the ruling.

Canada changes its immigration policy to include same-sex couples.

2003 – United Church of Canada votes overwhelmingly to endorse same-sex marriages.

Federal government introduces legislation to make same-sex marriages legal.

Ontario court rules that the Federal government discriminated against same-sex couples regarding death benefits for those who had lost a partner prior to 1998. The court rules that the benefits should be awarded.

2004 – The Canadian Parliament adopts Svend Robinson’s private member’s bill giving gays and lesbians protection in Canada’s Hate Crimes legislation.

2005 – The Government of Canada passes Bill C-38 giving gays and lesbians the right to marry.

Ontario’s birth registry is challenged, enabling the names of 2 same-sex parents to appear on a child’s birth certificate.

2006 – The “Dyke March” and Trans Awareness is added at Toronto Pride.

2008 – Egale completes country-wide safe schools survey of students in grades 8 - 12. Survey reveals that harassment of LGBT students is almost double that of heterosexual peers.

2008 – A “trans stage” is added to Toronto Pride events and will be included annually.

Sexual Reassignment Surgery is covered again by OHIP in Ontario.

2009 – Obama administration endorses U.N. declaration calling for decriminalization of homosexuality.

Canadian labour and human rights activists protest Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Bill.

2011 – The 39th Synod of the Lutheran Church of Canada gives permission to its ministers to officiate at same-sex marriages.

2012 – Government of Canada discusses how to make same-sex divorce legal for couples who have come to Canada to marry and have been married under 1 year.

Advocacy groups and the NDP continue to fight for the inclusion and protection of gender identity and gender expression for trans and gender-variant identified.

Toby’s Act, a private member’s bill to amend the Ontario Human Rights Code to include gender identity and gender expression was passed and is currently in senate.

The Ontario Legislature passes “Bill 13” – a bill indicating that students are allowed to form Gay-Straight Alliances in public and Catholic schools.