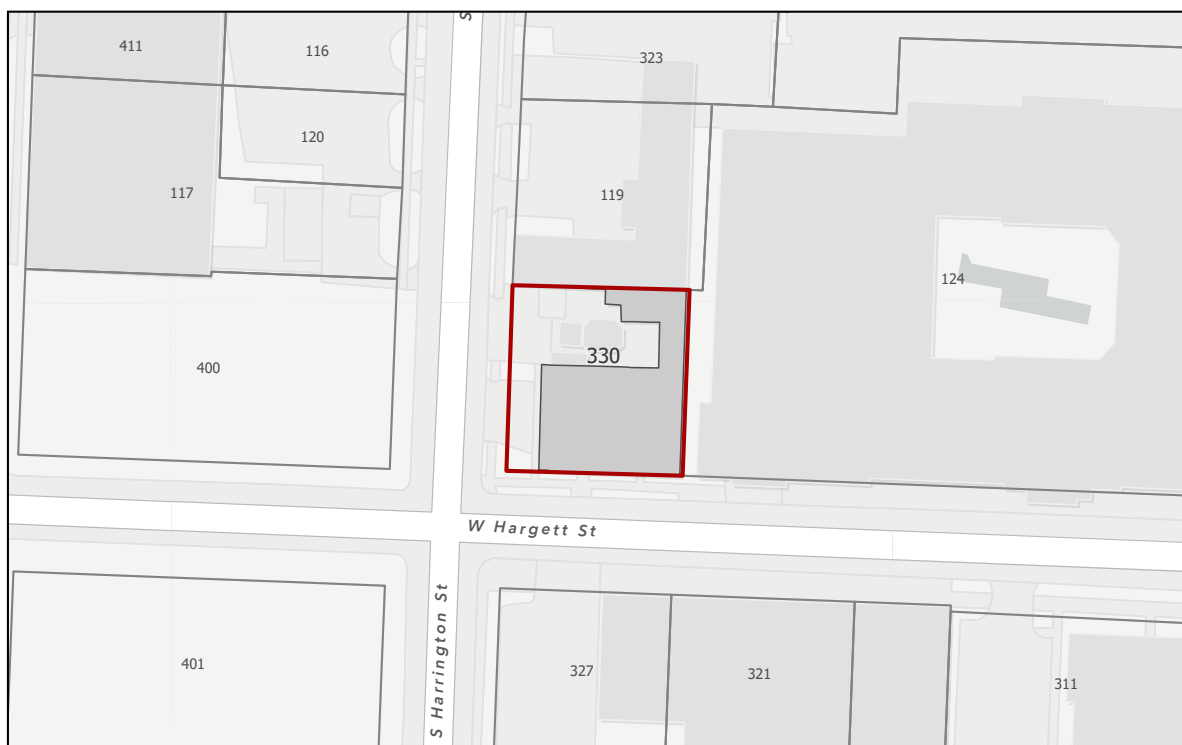


SITE NAME	Legends Nightclub
LOCATION	330 W. Hargett St., 119 S. Harrington St.
BUILT/ALTERED	1958, ca. 1991, ca. 2012 (for 119 S. Harrington St. building)
LGBTQIA+ ASSOCIATED YEARS	1991-present
EVALUATION DATE & EVALUATOR	September 28, 2024 Cynthia de Miranda, MdM Historical Consultants, Durham



Location of Legends Nightclub., 330 W. Hargett St.

LGBTQIA+ Historic Significance: Legends Nightclub is a long-running and much-loved Raleigh LGBTQIA+ club. Legends and another nightclub, FLEX, are the two most commonly cited by survey respondents as significant social spaces associated with the LGBTQIA+ community, in part due to the longevity of both bars. (The original location of FLEX has also been evaluated as part of this project.) Legends Nightclub also has a significant connection to the history of drag performance in Raleigh.



Legends Nightclub, 330 W. Hargett St., view NE toward W elevation and facade.

Physical Description: Legends Nightclub is a small complex of former commercial buildings at the northeast corner of W. Hargett St. and S. Harrington St. A pair of single-story, brick-clad 1958 commercial buildings that share a party wall front W. Hargett St. The two buildings now function as a single structure. They both feature brick cladding laid in five-course English bond with Roman brick. Continuous, full-height windows across the façade of the larger structure on the west wrap around the west elevation. The smaller building, on the east, has a rear wing that extends to the back of the nearly quarter-acre, square parcel. At both sections, façade storefront windows are covered by sheet metal, providing privacy. Doors are fully glazed in extruded aluminum frames, suggesting the same fabrication for the windows behind the sheet metal. Some alterations have been made to the brick above the window, suggesting an alteration to the window openings from original construction. Metal I-beams cantilever out from the façade over the windows. The concrete stoop at the façade entrance is painted in rainbow colors. A painted sign reading "LEGENDS" in white serif lettering on black background is at the west elevation. Before Legends occupied the building, the small parking lot at the west edge of the parcel continued behind the building, forming an L-shaped parking area. Much of this space, however, was enclosed by the business with a privacy fence to provide an outdoor area for the club. A pavilion appears to have been installed around 2016 in the space.

The 1964 concrete-block, L-plan, commercial building on the similarly sized square parcel at 119 S. Harrington St. immediately north is also part of the complex; it was formerly

an automotive tire store. Much of this parcel is a parking area, and the long west-facing elevation of the wing that extends to the north holds three garage bays; the building originally had six. The original storefront faced north to the parking area. That elevation now holds a two-leaf entry of fully glazed doors in extruded aluminum frames and a solid metal door in another opening. The glass on the glazed doors has been painted, and the original shop windows have been infilled with concrete block since 1996. As at the front entry to the building, the sidewalk leading to the entry doors have been painted rainbow colors.

Brief Historical Sketch: Legends opened in 1991 and by the 2010s claimed to be the "leader in LGBT nightlife in the Triangle for over 25 years," according to a bar roundup in the *News & Observer* from 2022. In its history, the club has offered themed dance nights, drag performances, and the annual Miss Legends Pageant, and hosted events for NC Pride weekends. Along with other gay bars and businesses in the area, Legends contributed to the revitalization and redevelopment of the area that became known as both the "Gayborhood" and the "Warehouse District."

In 1996, the City of Raleigh cited Legends for operating as an adult establishment without a license because Legends hosted drag shows. Legends sued the city, pointing out that the drag shows were not adult entertainment as defined by state law. Additionally, Legends noted that, in citing the bar, the city did not apply this standard consistently. The club had drag shows on Sunday and Tuesday nights in that period, which *The Front Page* called "popular" events. In November 1996, Wake County Superior Court Judge Howard Manning ruled that drag shows are not adult entertainment and could proceed at Legends. Strip shows, as Legends had hosted in the past, would be categorized as "adult entertainment." In 2002, drag performers associated with "Trailer Park Nights" at FLEX released an independent movie called "Camp: The Movie," a satirized version of the conflict between Legends and the city, particularly then-Mayor Tom Fetzner who often spoke critically of the drag performances.

Also in 2002, Legends staged Raleigh Ensemble Players' (REP) production of *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, a rock musical about a genderqueer singer. The Legends/REP production occurred a year after a film version was released nationally. The *News & Observer* noted that "HEDheads are coming out in force, traveling from near and far for Raleigh Ensemble Players' *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*."

In 2020, during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, Legends closed completely, reopening in the late summer. In December 2020, the owners sold the property to a local commercial real estate company. Despite plans for total redevelopment of the parcels, at the time of the survey, Legends was still open and operating in this original location.

Historic Integrity Evaluation: The Legends Nightclub complex retains all seven aspects of historic integrity in connection with its association with Raleigh's LGBTQIA+ history, as indicated by the check marks and explanations below.

- ✓ **Location:** The buildings are in their original locations.

- ✓ **Design:** The buildings retain the design elements that reflect their use as adaptively reused, mid-20th century commercial buildings—boxy massing, flat roofs, masonry exteriors, and altered window and door openings. Additionally, the privacy accommodations characteristic of gay clubs in the period—the window coverings and tall fencing to enclose the patio area—remain intact. However rainbow-colored murals on the sidewalk and the west elevation of one building are more characteristic of the 2020s than the 1990s.
- ✓ **Setting:** The complex remains surrounded by a mixture of commercial, office, and institutional buildings, as well as some surface parking lots and a city park at Nash Square. Larger mixed-use buildings and mid-sized apartment and condo buildings have been built since the initial decades of Legends' operation, creating some change in terms of the low-slung buildings' appearance in the streetscape relative to other buildings.
- ✓ **Materials:** The original cladding materials of all the buildings—brick and concrete block—remain exposed. The sheet metal covering the windows at the façade of the W. Hargett St. buildings also remains.
- ✓ **Workmanship:** Workmanship is expressed in the brickwork of the W. Hargett St. building, the concrete-block of the S. Harrington St. building, and the application of the sheet metal to the windows.
- ✓ **Feeling:** The complex retains the appearance of adaptively reused, mid-20th-century commercial buildings to an entertainment function, and the privacy accommodations express a consideration of many gay bars and clubs in the period.
- ✓ **Association:** The complex is the actual location where Legends Nightclub has operated since its opening in 1991.

RHL Eligibility Evaluation: This complex houses Legends Nightclub, an important social space in the period when LGBTQ bars and nightclubs no longer needed to operate secretly but still remained important places for creating and finding community for LGBTQIA+ people in Raleigh. The club was involved in a notable conflict with the Mayor and City Council over the nature of drag performance, effectively resulting in acknowledgement that drag shows are not lewd performances. The complex retains integrity and appears eligible for designation as a Raleigh Historic Landmark for its association with LGBTQIA+ nightlife and drag performance.

However, since the building is slated for redevelopment and Legends is planning to relocate the club, alternative forms of recognition should be considered. Another notable bar documented in this project, FLEX, has already moved from its original location due to pending redevelopment. Legends and FLEX are both connected to the history of drag performance in Raleigh. The history of drag performance and culture in Raleigh should be

the subject of research with the goal of identifying ways to recognize the important spaces, people, and communities that comprise that history. If the City of Raleigh establishes a Legacy Business Program, Legends would be an excellent candidate.

Sources:

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