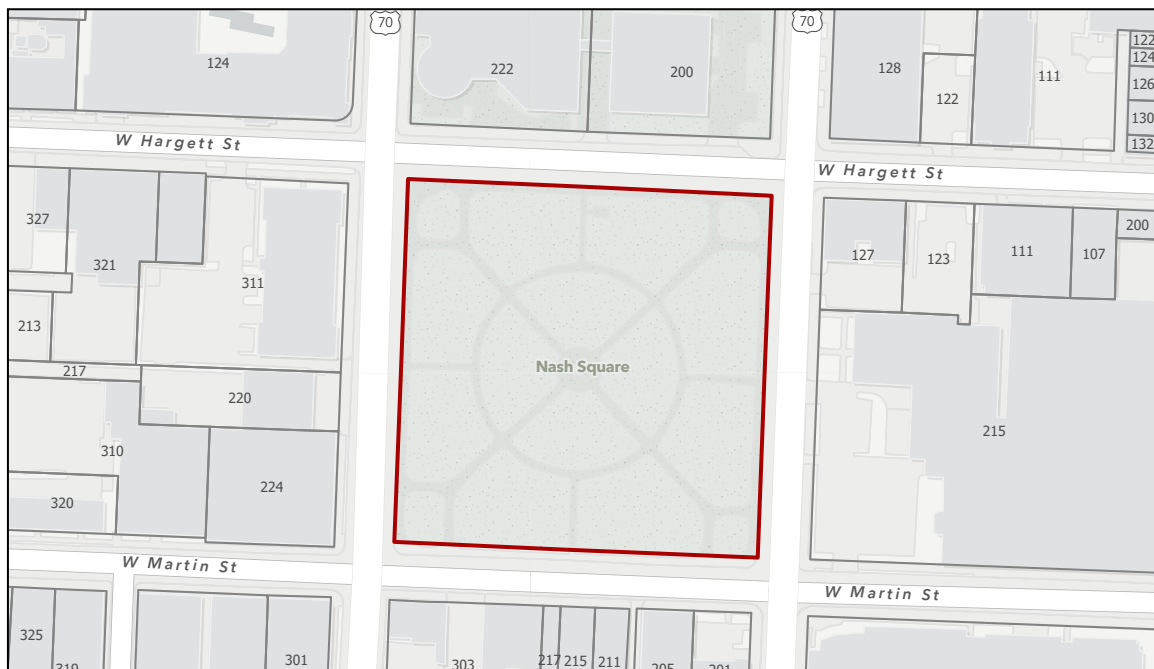


SITE NAME	Nash Square
LOCATION	200 S. McDowell St. [Entire block bounded by E. Hargett, S. McDowell, E. Martin, & S. Dawson Streets.; Completely within Depot Historic District]
BUILT/ALTERED	1792: Indicated in William Christmas plan for City of Raleigh 1913: Landscaped according to a Beaux Arts-style plan 1939-1940: Alterations by civil engineer Arnold Peterson
LGBTQIA+ ASSOCIATED YEARS	Documented in the 1960s through the 1980s, but likely earlier
EVALUATION DATE & EVALUATOR	September 28, 2024 Cynthia de Miranda, MdM Historical Consultants, Durham



*Location of Nash Square (at map center),
in the Depot Historic District (shaded blue and extending to the south and west from the square).*

LGBTQIA+ Historic Significance: Nash Square was a popular cruising spot (a place for gay or bisexual men to meet other men for trysts) in the 20th century prior to and throughout gay liberation.

Several places have been identified as cruising spots in the middle of the 20th century, including certain stretches of Hillsborough, Fayetteville, and W. Hargett Streets. Cruising also took place in public restrooms in the Sir Walter Hotel (400 Fayetteville St.), the Hotel Carolina (demolished), the Museum of Natural History (Annex to 2 W. Edenton St.), North Hills Mall (demolished), Crabtree Valley Mall (altered), and Harrelson Hall (demolished) at North Carolina State University. Nash Square retains the most integrity of all these places and is the most publicly accessible.



*View of Nash Square, 200 S. McDowell St.
showing lawn, trees, circular path and lampposts (camera facing S toward W. Martin St.)*

Physical Description: Nash Square occupies an entire city block immediately south of the Raleigh Municipal Building and a few blocks southwest of the State Capitol. Landscaping includes planting beds, shrubs, mature shade trees, and younger understory trees. Park hardscaping includes concrete paths and low brick walls that create planting beds at the block's corners. Straight paths run diagonally from each corner to the center. A firefighters' monument stands at the intersection, surrounded by low curved walls. Another path forms a wide circle around the monument and through the middle of the park. At each cardinal point on the circle, a straight path extends to each street bounding the park. Benches of iron and artificial wood are at intermittent locations along the paths. Wrought-iron lampposts likewise are placed around the park near the paths. Other small monuments and works of public art dot the park. In the 1800s, the city blocks surrounding Nash Square had single-family dwellings, large gardens, and outbuildings. Later, industrial buildings, warehouses, hotels, and commercial, office, and government buildings replaced the houses. The buildings that surround the square today date to the second and third wave of development. None of the first wave remains, and most of the second wave has been demolished as well.

Brief Historical Sketch: The park has existed since the late 1700s and has changed significantly in appearance over time. It is included on the 1792 William Christmas plan for the city and was originally open space with intentional landscaping. By 1872, the park consisted of a lawn with a tree-lined path running diagonally between its northeast to southwest corners. Two large trees dotted the lawn on the east side. Diagonal and circular

paths cut through the square by 1879. A ca. 1913 redesign appears to have slightly revamped the circulation pattern. The wrought-iron lampposts may date to that year as well. Additional hardscaping in 1939-1940 added brick walls at the corners to draw attention to park entrances and to provide new planting beds. The paths were refined again and paved with concrete. Concrete benches installed in that period have been removed. Benches, memorials, and public art in the park now generally appear to date to the early 21st century.

In the 1800s and roughly the first half of the 1900s, the park had many uses. These included recreation, education, military, and civic activities. Groups of people, both Black and white (but not mixed), lounged, picnicked, and walked in the park. Some played organized sports, including baseball and tennis, and the late-1800s Raleigh Bicycle Club departed from the park on group rides. A school building stood in Nash Square from 1858-1872 and was used by a number of different schools. Local militias and Confederate troops drilled in Nash Square. Community and civic celebrations often occurred in the park. Traveling circuses and entertainment troupes also performed here. The surrounding residential blocks were considered fashionable during much of this period. Additional history and development information about the park and the surrounding area can be found in the 2002 Depot Historic District National Register of Historic Places Nomination and the 2018 Study of the Historic Context and Physical Evolution of Nash Square.

The LGBTQIA+ association with Nash Square dates from at least the middle of the 20th century, according to community tradition. At midcentury, the blocks surrounding Nash Square were decidedly less residential than they had been. Fewer dwellings and more warehouses and light-industrial buildings surrounded the 19th century Union Station (heavily altered) and the 1940 Raleigh Bus Station (demolished). As the neighborhood changed, the hotels fronting the square lost cachet. The establishment business, political, and social community in Raleigh stopped patronizing the area. Consequently, Nash Square and surrounding blocks became more available to people not part of the establishment. Some engaged in illicit activities. Others were LGBTQIA+ people who still needed to hide their sexual and gender identities. Due to community attitudes and "crime against nature" (CAN) laws, there was overlap between the groups. The 2018 historic context of Nash Square briefly mentions that members of the LGBTQIA+ community met at the Hotel Carolina (demolished) at the northeast corner of W. Hargett and S. Dawson Streets. There was a tearoom in the basement of that hotel (a public bathroom where men met for sex), and the bar at the first floor was mentioned in the 1977 issue of *Bob Dameron's Address Book*. Newspaper reports from the 1970s refer to "prostitutes," "homosexuals," "transvestites," "winos," and men visiting an "adult bookstore," to convey the seediness of the area. The manager of the Hotel Carolina attempted to cut down on sex work occurring in the building by charging extra to rooms hosting non-registered hotel guests overnight.

Community tradition holds that men frequently cruised in Nash Square as early as the middle decades of the 20th century. The travel-related buildings that stood nearby contributed to this popularity because of the anonymity they offered. This was an important

element to gay or bisexual men in the middle of the 20th century, who generally kept their sexuality very private. In addition to the Hotel Carolina, the 1893 Park Central Hotel overlooked Nash Square from the southeast corner of W. Martin and S. McDowell Streets. The 1940 Raleigh Bus Station stood on the block north of Nash Square.

Reinforced or burgeoned by this informal use of the park, gay bars and bars friendly to LGBTQIA+ people also operated nearby in at least the 1960s and 1970s. Most of the bars occupied hotel buildings that are no longer standing: the Queen Bee once located in the Park Central Hotel; the Executive Lounge occupied space in the Hotel Carolina; and the Teddy Bear Lounge was in the Andrew Johnson Hotel that once stood at the corner of S. Salisbury and W. Martin Streets. One surviving building from this time period that housed gay bars in the area is 313 W. Hargett St. It was briefly the last location of the Queen Bee before reopening as the long-running Capital Corral. Such bars, as well as the café in the Raleigh Bus Station, offered places for LGBTQIA+ people to meet and socialize. (The former Capital Corral building at 313 W. Hargett St. is also evaluated in this project.)

In at least the 1960s through the 1980s, the Raleigh police made arrests in and around Nash Square. Men suspected of cruising faced felony and misdemeanor charges under the state's CAN statute. The police and the State Bureau of Investigation worked undercover in the nearby bars and around Nash Square, or hid in public restrooms, to identify people to arrest. As early as the 1920s and 1940s, police "raided" Nash Square and cited people under vagrancy and public nuisance ordinances and for possession of liquor in public.

Historic Integrity Evaluation: The property retains all seven aspects of integrity in connection with its LGBTQIA+ significance, as indicated by the check marks and explanations below.

- ✓ **Location:** The park remains in its original location with its original boundaries.
- ✓ **Design:** Nash Square retains circulation patterns, shade trees, understory vegetation, planting beds, paved paths, hardscaping, streetlights, and benches that were all part of the park's appearance during the period of significance associated with Raleigh's LGBTQIA+ history. Additions made to the park include monuments and public art but do not diminish or overwhelm the historic design that dates to two periods in the early 20th century.
- ✓ **Setting:** The park is surrounded by dense urban development, as it was in the period of significance. While many building in the vicinity have been demolished and others built, the downtown setting remains consistent.
- ✓ **Materials:** A good deal of historic material remains, including concrete paths; wrought iron streetlamps; low brick walls defining corner entrances; and concrete-paved walkways. While much of the vegetation present today may have been planted more recently, the trees, shrubs, and flowers all follow the early 20th century plan and contribute to the intact integrity of materials.

- ✓ **Workmanship:** The built features, including concrete paths and low brick walls, still display the workmanship of their period of construction.
- ✓ **Feeling:** The park remains a natural oasis in the midst of the city, preserving the integrity of feeling that existed in the period of significance.
- ✓ **Association:** Nash Square is the place that gay men used for cruising before and in the early years of gay liberation and therefore retains integrity of association under this area of significance.

RHL Eligibility Assessment: Nash Square appears eligible for RHL designation due to its significance within the Raleigh LGBTQIA+ Context and its excellent integrity. The park was a popular cruising spot for decades before and in the early years of gay liberation, due to its proximity to gay and gay-friendly bars, hotels, and the bus and train stations. Several other cruising spots have either not been definitely determined or were in buildings that have been demolished.

Sources:

Depot District National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Nomination Form, 2002.

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