



---

### National Coming Out Day is Tomorrow, 11<sup>th</sup> October 2018

National Coming Out Day (NCOD) is an annual GLBTQ awareness day observed on 11<sup>th</sup> October. It was founded in the United States in 1988. The initial idea was grounded in gay liberation spirit of the personal being political and the emphasis on the most basic form of activism being coming out to family, friends and colleagues, and living life as an openly gay or lesbian person.

The foundational belief is that homophobia thrives in an atmosphere of silence and ignorance and that once people know that they have loved ones who are lesbian or gay, they are far less likely to maintain homophobic or oppressive views.

In more recent years, the idea of the "gay and lesbian community" has been largely subsumed into the idea of the GLBT community, and the idea of "coming out" expanded to not only include the voluntary self-disclosure of a gay, lesbian or bisexual sexual orientation, but also transgender, 'genderqueer' or other non-mainstream gender identity.



---

### Trump Is Making America Great Again...

...Just not the way he thinks.

It's nearly impossible to find a silver lining bright enough to penetrate the dark heart and chaos of our current administration, but gosh dang-it, we're going to try! I argue that Donald Trump is in fact making America great again — by driving us to engage in our democracy as few presidents have. The shock of his election and his chaotic governance has mobilized progressives to run for office — women in record numbers — and to march for causes like women's rights and gun control.

But their job is not done yet. According to a June poll from Pew Research Center, both Democrats and Republicans are more fired up about the midterms than they have been in a while. If you want a hand in shaping the future of this country, and protecting women's rights and immigrants' rights and human rights, you need to get out and vote in November.

So, if you're not already registered, do it now!



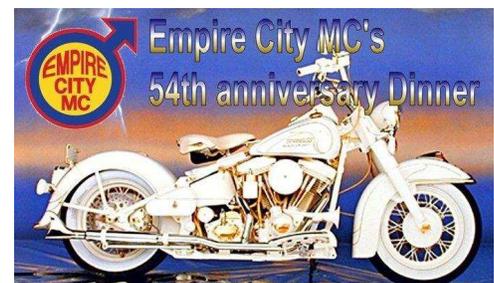
[Written by Taige Jensen, Published in the New York Times on 17 Sept 2018](#)

---

### Empire City MC's 54th Anniversary Dinner

Please join us this Sunday, 14<sup>th</sup> October for Empire City MC's 54th Anniversary Dinner! We'll be at Caliente Cab, 61 7th Ave S, New York, NY 10014. Cash bar cocktail hour at 7pm and dinner will be served at 8pm!

It's only \$33 per person and includes non-alcoholic beverages, dinner, coffee/tea and dessert. Please RSVP at <http://bit.ly/ECMC54th> or by e-mail at [ecmc@EmpireCityMC.com](mailto:ecmc@EmpireCityMC.com) — pay at the door, not in advance!



## The Distinguished Gentleman's Ride – Erik R (pledge)

On Sunday the 30th of September, I took part in The Distinguished Gentleman's Ride to raise awareness for prostate cancer and men's mental health. One feature of the ride is that we all got dressed to ride in our suits.



There were over 800 motorcycles that took part in the ride. Since it was a police-escorted ride, we all were able to ignore the traffic signals and all ride together. Our travels took us from our starting and ending point at Peck Slip Plaza at the South Street Seaport, through Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens, with highlights including the Williamsburg Bridge, Bedford Ave and McCarren Park, the Queensboro Bridge, Grand Army Plaza, Columbus Circle, Central Park, Park Ave and the FDR under Manhattan Bridge, with a mid-point rally stop at The American Museum of Natural History.

It was a terrific ride for a good cause. The New York Ride raised \$191,068.

---

## Looking back at 2018 in photos – by Gary P (associate member)



## Why is the gay leather scene dying?

Not long ago, many clubs catered to enthusiastic leathermen. But predatory property developers, changing attitudes to gender and the rise of rubber threaten the scene's existence

*Photo: The men in black - leathermen taking part in the annual Pride London Parade in 2016.*

*Photograph: Neil Hall/Reuters*



In a dimly lit side street in London's East End there is a black box of a building scrawled with graffiti. A CCTV camera perched above the door signals it probably isn't a squat, but there is no signage. Inside, past three sets of doors and a changing room cordoned off with an old tarpaulin, is a shadowy warren of alcoves, cages and dark corners. Knee-high leather boots hang from iron chains looped through ceiling hooks like fetish bunting. Men kitted out in chaps and overcoats prowl the corridors, while others sip Foster's, waiting for a nod and a wink. A gregarious barman greets regulars while hairy-chested musclemen appear on a small screen next to an ice bucket.

This is the Backstreet, London's only remaining gay leather bar. But after a 33-year run serving London's kinksters, its days might be numbered. "The developers have been sniffing around us for years," says Aaron the barman. "They want to build another high-rise." Opposition from Tower Hamlets council and community activists has granted the club a brief reprieve, according to the staff, who all work under the assumption that any day could be the venue's last.

A string of closures has caused concern for those interested in a variety of fetishes, but the leather scene seems to have been hardest hit, particularly in London. Bars such as the Coleherne, the Anvil, Bloc, Substation and, most recently, the Hoist, have all disappeared into the annals of gay history, replaced with gastropubs, luxe apartments and identikit offices. Rising rents, competitor fetishes and competition from online dating apps have all been a turn of the screw. Aficionados fear its decline is another milestone in the gay scene's slow descent into homogeneity.

"If some people want to have their matching knitwear and a cocker spaniel, then I'm happy for them," says Nigel Whitfield, director of the Breeches and Leather Uniform Fanclub, "but some of us don't. For lots of kinky people, we knew we were kinky before we knew we were gay. Losing these spaces is a tragedy."

On today's gay scene, leather denotes an aesthetic and, sometimes, a set of sexual practices. An entry-level leather fetish might just look like getting your rocks off in a well-cut bomber. But for the more committed, it's a full look: boots, trousers or chaps, belts, shirts, jackets, overcoats, captain hats, all in premium, black leather. The sex tends towards BDSM, from rough horseplay to sadomasochism.

"For me, it's all about the sensory experience," says Eder, a 34-year-old leatherman who moved to London from Mexico nine years ago. "It's the look, the feel, the smell – combine it with sex and it just feels amazing." He discovered leather five years ago and estimates he has spent "a few thousand pounds" on the gear to date. Leather matters to Eder: he ended a long-term relationship because his ex was "vanilla" – a term for people not into kink or fetish – and has since explored his tastes more extensively on Recon, the world's largest fetish app for gay men. "It doesn't define me, but it makes me feel so much more confident," he says. "It's not just the sex, there's a community, a social element that provides you with a sense of belonging."

Eder's story of stumbling upon leather online, exploring in real life, and discovering some form of community was common to the leathermen I spoke to, but it's only the latest incarnation of a famed subculture that stretches back to the post-war boom of America's coastal metropolises.

Leather as a gay subculture traces its roots back to the appearance of US biker gangs in the 1940s and 50s. Leathers were practical, but the rugged masculinity of biker culture imbued the material with an allure that spoke to men interested in men. Among gay men, leather was also a rejection of the tropes of effeminacy and passivity that homosexuality had accrued since the mid-19th century, a disavowal of the "sweater queens" – well-to-do, preppy gay men – of the time. "Leather was everything that the self-consciously effeminate homosexuals weren't. They were some of the first gay men to reclaim masculinity," says Eric Chaline, author and historian of gay sadomasochism.

International travel – at least for the wealthy – helped the US leather scene percolate across the Atlantic, notably to Amsterdam, Berlin and London.

In the UK, leather subcultures first seem to have taken root in London in the late 50s, though the history of those years has largely been lost. Networks of wealthy and closeted gay leather fans hosted invitation-only private parties to avoid the glare of the authorities. (Homosexuality for those over the age of 21 was not decriminalised in England and Wales until 1967, and some S&M practices remain illegal to this day.) The scene was necessarily limited to the middle classes: hosting orgies isn't easy when you are crammed into a two-bed terrace with a wife and kids, and leather gear is rarely cheap.

A gay man in leather

*Photo: Increased rents, police attention, the Aids crisis and prejudice have all had an impact on the gay leather scene - Matt Spike*

From the 70s onwards, fan clubs for leathermen popped up in London, Brighton, Manchester, Birmingham, Bournemouth and elsewhere under the guise of Motor Sport Clubs, disguising the gay fetish as a passion for biking. Around the same time, permanent venues rose to the fore. The Coleherne, a bohemian pub in Earl's Court, became a lodestar for the leather scene. The horseshoe-shaped bar separated regular punters and a morass of leathermen. At the same time, Tom of Finland sketches of burly men in leathers and denim spread through nascent fetish communities pushing life to imitate art.

The gay leather scene had reached its peak. Thousands of leathermen congregated in multiple micro scenes across London, while thousands more revelled at club nights and events further afield.

Then came a crisis. In 1981, the New York Times reported a "rare cancer spotted in 40 homosexuals". In San Francisco, one of the first Aids-related deaths was Tony Tavarossi, founder of the city's first leather bar. Entire communities were eliminated. Bars closed. Hospitals swelled. The leathermen were some of the first to go.

Kellan Farshea, a veteran sadomasochist and campaigner for sexual liberty, recalls the early years of the crisis in the UK. "The Aids crisis was very much based in the leather community because that's where a lot of the sex clubs were. A lot of the people involved in Earl's Court were wiped out completely."

But the virus wasn't the only threat. "Every single leather S&M club in London was raided by the police at least once, but they couldn't get any convictions because juries wouldn't convict us," says Farshea. The high-profile conviction of gay sadomasochists arrested in Manchester in 1987, known as the Spanner case, drew lurid headlines and stoked public prejudice. A campaign to appeal the conviction, spearheaded by Farshea and others, went through the high court and House of Lords before being referred to the European high court. The ruling on the case holds to this day and it is still not possible to legally consent to a range of "extreme" S&M practices.



Decades of stigma, epidemic and state persecution haven't killed leather, but the feeling that the scene – or at least its physical spaces – is in decline is widespread.

"The internet changed everything," says Farshea. Apps such as Grindr and Recon mean getting off doesn't necessitate going to a club; online hook-ups don't come with a £15 cover charge; and they are not limited to a venue's opening hours.

But the internet has also fractured, and democratised, fetish. Retailers and club owners were often guided by their particular tastes – leather boots, in the case of the Backstreet's owner – that dictated what people had to be into in order to get access to the kinds of sex they were chasing. "Leather was the dominant practice and discourse of gay BDSM from the 1950s to the 80s," says Chaline. If you wanted to get tied up of a Saturday afternoon, chances are you had to do so in leather.

*Photo: A gay couple at an S&M Pride march in London, 1995 - Steve Eason/Getty Images*

According to Farshea, leather's hegemony in gay BDSM scenes was as much about its commercial saleability as some mysterious gravitation



towards processed cow skin. When the full look can cost north of three grand, it's perhaps not surprising that younger generations are opting for PVC or rubber, a scene that has "exploded" in the past 10 years according to Sandy Pianim, brand director at Recon. "The leather scene hasn't modernised, it hasn't evolved," he says. Many leather nights still exclude women. Lesbian BDSM nights existed separate from the gay men's scene, but no clubs have lasted. The scene also remains glaringly white, according to Pianim. And in a time when queer cultures are shifting to conversations around gender rather than sex, leather's celebration of unfettered masculinity feels out of joint, he argues. "Leather is based on this archetype of hyper-masculinity that doesn't resonate in the way that it once did. Our cultural archetypes have changed."

For all the speculation on the reasons for the leather scene's decline, however, there is a much more mundane truth. Venues in London that cater to specialist audiences, from leather fetishes to the queer communities more broadly, have been buffeted by spiralling costs, predatory developers and councils turning a quick buck to survive swingeing budget cuts. People in other cities in the UK, where venues were sparse due to the difficulty of maintaining premises catering to a much smaller scene, now rely on one-off nights or travelling to fetish events abroad.

For the leathermen who spoke to me, old-school bars can't be replaced with Grindr-fuelled hookups or occasional events such as Folsom Europe, a continent-wide fetish and leather festival held annually in Berlin. Farshea fears the death of physical venues will make it harder for him to meet with fellow campaigners. Whitfield is concerned that the unique atmosphere of a leather bar will be lost to history. And Eder, who has accrued a "leather family" in his five years on the scene, fears that community bonds are weakened when that community has nowhere to meet.

"It's always been the freaks who have been the canary in the coal mine," says Whitfield, whether in the fight for basic rights or in the ongoing closures of minority spaces.

For now, the Backstreet lives on, throwing specialist parties for rubberists and occasional gigs to keep afloat. For how long, though, nobody quite knows.

Originally printed in The Guardian and [online here](#)

---

## From the closet... a vintage article from 1999

### Kings of the road

Not ones to idle, Empire City Motorcycle Club members rev up for 35th anniversary – by Paul Harris

For the past 34 years, members of the Empire City Motorcycle Club have gathered on the Friday evening that kicks off Memorial Day weekend for a unique ceremony they refer to as the "christening and blessing of the bikes."

This year's ceremony was conducted by club member Mark Wind, an ordained minister of the Interfaith Fellowship who rides a Harley-Davidson Road King. About 100 people gathered at the Lure, a gay bar in the Meatpacking District, to watch Wind christen 11 new motorcycles and bless 24 others for the riding season ahead.

The club, one of the oldest gay groups in the city, has quite a season planned. Members have organized some special events, including a ride through the Adirondacks to celebrate the club's 35 anniversary.

Many gay New Yorkers recognize the Empire Motorcycle Club as the group that follows closely behind the Sirens, the women's motorcycle club that has historically led off New York City's Heritage of Pride parade. This year 20 members of the Empire Motorcycle Group will participate, with ages ranging from the mid-20s to 75 years of age.

The group, which bills itself as the "oldest ongoing gay organization east of the Rockies," began in 1964 when 12 men decided to launch a gay motorcycling club after a group ride to Washington, D.C. for Columbus Day weekend.

Every motorcycle club has different criteria for membership. The Empire City Motorcycling Club's only requirement is that a prospective member must be a gay man who owns of a bike with a capacity of 500cc or more. Men interested in membership must also be sponsored by two members in good standing.

The club sponsors several group rides throughout the year but many members are also prone to take advantage of good riding days whenever they appear and gather on short notice to take to the highways. Social events are held to both bring the members of the organization closer together and to help others get to know the membership.



Jeff Arnold, a 52-year-old wine and spirits wholesaler who is the club's current president, says the group has become "my family and brotherhood for me."

"They are my support group," Arnold says. "We probably spend more time with each other than anyone else in our non-working lives."

Like many long-standing gay men's organizations, the club has endured its share of deaths to AIDS.

"We've experienced the deaths of members of the club, as well as being there for each other when members lose parents and family members," Arnold adds.

Ten members of the club have succumbed to AIDS. Club members have created 10 panels that are a part of the Names Project's AIDS Memorial Quilt. Members recently donated \$1,000 to the Names Project when they handed over the latest panel in memory of former member and officer Jim Newhard.

The club also involves itself in the wider gay community in two ways. For over 15 years members of the organization have organized "Toys For Tots" drive in which they donate literally carloads of children's gifts to the Leake and Watts Specialized Foster Care Program for children with AIDS.

In addition, the club has organized the "Bikers' Picnic," held each year since 1969 over Memorial Day weekend, which is open to all motorcyclists and their buddy riders free of charge. This year the club spent the weekend to Bucks County. The event attracted 73 bikers from as far afield as Michigan, Vermont, and Florida.

To celebrate the club's 35th anniversary, members have arranged a trip beginning July 16, which will take them cruising around the Finger Lakes and then through the Adirondacks. Arnold describes the trip as "the highlight of the year."

We've been planning it now for over a year," said Arnold, "and needless to say we're looking forward to it."

---

## UPCOMING EVENTS & RIDES

**Sun 14<sup>th</sup> October 18:30 – 20:30:** EVENT: Empire City MC's 54<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner – see [online calendar](#) for details.

**Sat 20<sup>th</sup> October 19:00 – 23:59:** RIDE: ECMC Fall Foliage Ride – see [online calendar](#) for details.

**Fri-Sun 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> November:** EVENT: C.O.M.M.A.N.D. MC Run / Maryland Leather Weekend

**Wed 7<sup>th</sup> November 20:00 – 21:00:** Empire City MC's Open General Meeting, held 8pm-9pm on the first Wednesday of each month at "The Centre" 208 W 13th St, New York, NY 10011. All interested men and prospective members are welcome to attend. Always check with the front desk/schedule to see which room we're booked into.

**Sat 8<sup>th</sup> December 18:00 – 21:00:** EVENT: ECMC's 55<sup>th</sup> Annual Holiday Party & Toy Drive

**REMEMBER:** There are plenty of other events and rides added to our official calendar on a regular basis, especially day rides! Bookmark our official calendar at [calendar.EmpireCityMC.com](http://calendar.EmpireCityMC.com) and come along with us on some great rides!

---

Our physical mailing address is:

**Empire City MC**  
10 W 15<sup>th</sup> St, Suite 609  
New York, NY 10011-6821



Empire City MC is a proud member of the Atlantic Motorcycle Coordinating Council. For more information about membership with Empire City MC, [click here](#) to view/download our constitution, bylaws and membership application.



We're on facebook at <http://facebook.EmpireCityMC.com>  
All material copyright ©MMXVII Empire City MC, Inc., All rights reserved

Send any articles, photos or letters to the editor at [news@EmpireCityMC.com](mailto:news@EmpireCityMC.com)