

HARRY HAY

b. April 7, 1912

d. October 24, 2002

In 1950, Harry Hay founded the Mattachine Society, the first American gay organization.

“In order to earn for ourselves any place in the sun, we must work collectively ... for the first-class citizenship of minorities everywhere.”

In 1950, Harry Hay founded the Mattachine Society, an underground network for homosexuals. It was the first American gay organization.

Hay was born to American parents in England. His mother nurtured his creative side, teaching him piano and dance. Hay's father physically abused his “sissified” son.

In 1919, the family moved to Los Angeles. As Hay grew up, he became outraged by intolerance toward gays—especially from police who regularly entrapped, arrested and blackmailed homosexuals.

In the 1930's, Hay began working in Hollywood as an extra and a ghostwriter. He performed on stage with Will Geer, who became his lover and introduced him to the Communist Party.

Hay confided his homosexuality to fellow Party members, who encouraged him to get married. In 1938, Hay married Anita Platky, another Communist Party member. They adopted two daughters. In 1951, when Hay felt compelled to go public about his involvement with the Mattachine Society, the couple divorced.

Due to pervasive homophobia, Hay and his Mattachine Society colleagues took an oath of anonymity not to reveal member names. In 1953, the Mattachine Society rejected Hay for his communist beliefs. The Communist Party later expelled him as a “security risk.”

Following his Mattachine Society ouster, Hay withdrew from organized activism for more than a decade. In 1963, Hay met John Burnside, an inventor and activist. They became partners for nearly 40 years.

In 1966, Hay and Burnside helped to establish the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations. After the Stonewall riots, the couple helped to organize a Gay Liberation Front chapter in Los Angeles. Hay was elected its first chairman.

In the 1970's, Hay and Burnside founded the Radical Faeries, a spiritual movement based on the concept of “gay consciousness.” Hay believed that “variant thinking” was the gay community's unique contribution to society.

Hay researched and wrote extensively about gay references in history, which are included in his collection of essays “Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of its Founder” (1996).

Harry Hay died in 2002 at age 90 with Burnside by his side. The same year, Hay was the subject of the award-winning PBS documentary “Hope Along the Wind: The Life of Harry Hay.”

