

# HENRY GERBER

b. June 29, 1892

d. December 31, 1972

## ACTIVIST

**In 1992, he was inducted posthumously into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame.**

*“Nobody believes we can do it—reporters, opponents—except ourselves.”*

Henry Gerber was among the earliest gay rights activists in America. He founded the nation’s first gay organization and gay publication.

Born Joseph Henry Dittmer in Bavaria, Germany, Gerber moved to Chicago in 1913. From 1920 to 1923, he served in the U.S. Army during the occupation of Germany.

While in Germany, he was exposed to the homosexual emancipation movement. Gerber subscribed to gay publications and was inspired by Magnus Hirschfeld, founder of a German homosexual and science advocacy organization.

After returning to Chicago, Gerber founded the Society for Human Rights, which advocated for gays and lesbians. He published the organization’s newsletter, “Friends and Freedom.”

Gerber limited membership in the Society for Human Rights to gay men. Unknown to him, the vice president, Al Weininger, was married with children. In 1925, Weininger’s wife reported the organization’s activities and it was shut down for moral turpitude. The Chicago police arrested Gerber and tried him three times. Although Gerber was found not guilty, the legal fees cost him his life savings and his job.

Gerber moved to New York City and reenlisted in the Army, where he served for 18 years. He led a correspondence club called Connections, which became a national network for gay men. Under a pen name, he wrote articles for various publications, arguing the case for gay rights.

At 80, Gerber died in the U.S. Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Home in Washington, D.C. In 1992, he was inducted posthumously into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame. In 2001, the Henry Gerber House was designated a Chicago landmark.



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