

# DALE JENNINGS

b. October 17, 1917

d. May 11, 2000

# GAY PIONEER

*“I was one of the founders of the first homosexual organizations in U.S. history. ... Our basic argument was that changes in sex laws would not benefit us alone but everyone.”*

**He cofounded the Mattachine Society, one of the first gay civil liberties organizations in the U.S.**

William Dale Jennings was a gay pioneer who cofounded two early gay organizations and one of the first gay magazines in America. He was dubbed the Rosa Parks of the gay rights movement when he successfully challenged his arrest on homosexuality charges.

Jennings grew up in Denver, Colorado, where he studied piano and dance. He was performing by the age of 12 and traveled with the Lester Horton Dance Group. He moved to Los Angeles in his early 20s, after training in theater direction. Jennings established his own theater company and wrote and produced more than 50 short plays.

Jennings served in World War II and received several military honors, including a Victory Medal. After an honorable discharge in 1946, he studied cinema for two years at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

In 1950 the U.S. Senate declared homosexuals a national threat. That year, Harry Hay, Jennings and four other gay activists cofounded the Mattachine Society—an underground gay community network and one of the first gay civil liberties organizations in the United States.

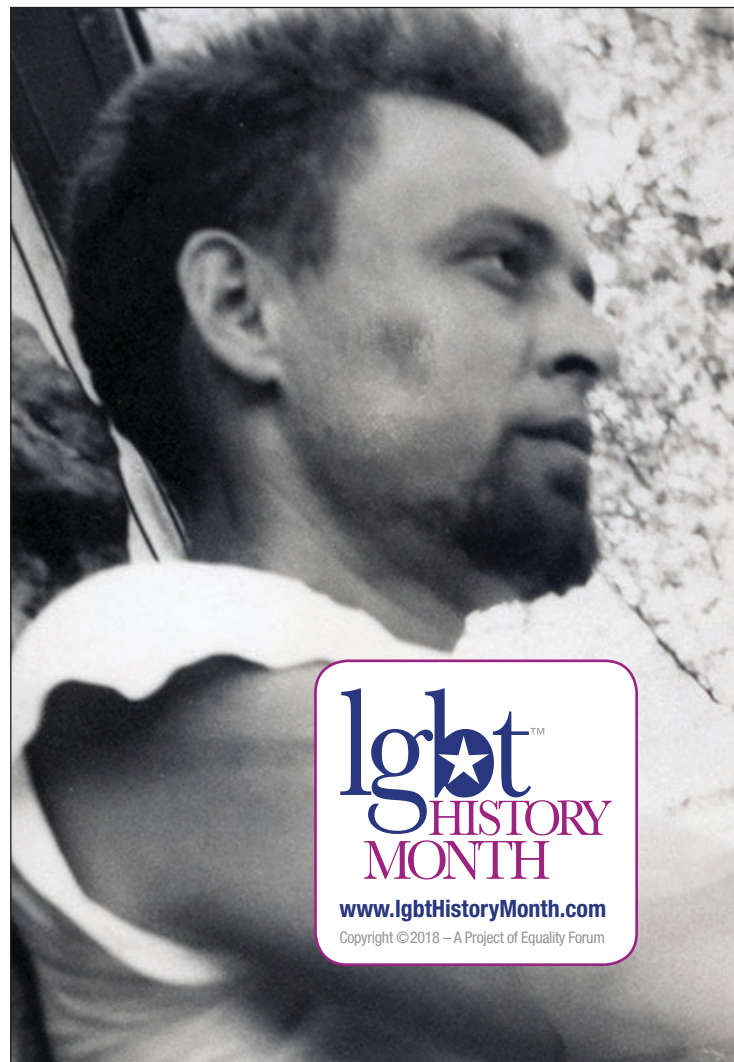
During this time, vice detectives posing as homosexuals commonly entrapped gay men and charged them with solicitation. Most men pled guilty for fear of public exposure. When Jennings was arrested for soliciting in 1950, he fought back. He was the first openly gay man known to have done so. During his 10-day trial in 1952, Jennings disclosed his homosexuality but denied the charge. The jury deadlocked one vote shy of acquittal, and the judge dismissed the case. Publicity surrounding the trial exposed the issue of entrapment and made Jennings an gay hero.

Later the same year, with a group Mattachine members, Jennings cofounded ONE, Inc., to develop a publication specifically for homosexuals. With Jennings as its editor, the first issue of ONE Magazine was published in 1953. It became the first widely distributed gay magazine in the United States.

In 1954 the Los Angeles postmaster cited the publication for obscenity and refused to deliver it. A legal battle ensued, and after several lower court rulings in favor of the post office, the United States Supreme Court ruled for the magazine. A first-of-its-kind victory, the decision in ONE vs. Olesen is celebrated as a legal landmark, making the mail circulation of gay periodicals possible.

In addition to ONE Magazine, Jennings wrote for other publications and published three novels. His California gold-rush-era coming-of-age story, “The Cowboys,” was made into a movie, starring the Academy Award-winning actor John Wayne. Jennings co-wrote the screenplay.

Jennings died in Los Angeles at the age of 82. The New York Times published his obituary.



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