

Henry "Harry" Hay, known as the founder of the modern gay movement in the United States, has died at age 90.

He had been diagnosed weeks earlier with lung cancer. Despite his illness, he remained lucid and died peacefully in his sleep in the early hours of Oct. 24.

Hay is listed in histories of the U.S. gay movement as first in applying the term "minority" to homosexuals. An uncompromising radical, he easily dismissed "the heteros" and never rested from challenging the status quo, including within the gay community.

Because of the pervasive homophobia of his times—it was illegal for more than two homosexuals to congregate in California during the 1950s—he and his colleagues took an oath of anonymity that lasted a quarter-century until Jonathan Ned Katz interviewed him for the groundbreaking book *Gay American History*. Countless researchers subsequently sought him out; in recent years, Hay became the subject of a biography, an anthology of his own writings and the documentary *Hope Along the Wind* by Portland filmmaker Eric Slade.

Previous attempts to create gay groups in the United States had fizzled—or been stamped out. Hay's first organizational conception was Bachelors Anonymous, formed to both support and leverage the 1948 presidential candidacy of Progressive Party leader Henry Wallace.

He wrote and discreetly circulated a prospectus calling for "the androgynous minority" to organize as a political entity. His call for an "international bachelor's fraternal order for peace and social dignity" did not bear results until 1950.

That year, his love affair with Viennese immigrant Rudi Gernreich—whose fashion

FATHER FIGURE

Harry Hay paved the way for modern gay activism

by Stuart Timmons, Martin Duberman, Joey Cain and Sally Hay



Harry Hay (left) brushes the cheek of his partner of 39 years, John Burnside, with his hand July 19 at their home in San Francisco

designs eventually made him a *Time* cover man—brought Hay into gay circles where a critical mass of daring souls could be found to begin sustained meetings. On Nov. 11, 1950, at Hay's home in the Silver Lake district of Los Angeles, a group of gay men founded the Mattachine Society.

Though some criticized the movement as insular, it grew to include thousands of members in chapters from Berkeley, Calif., to Buffalo, N.Y., and created a lasting national framework for gay organizing. Mattachine laid the ground for rapid

civil rights gains after 1969's Stonewall riots in New York City.

Hay was born in England in 1912, the day the Titanic sank. His father worked as a mining engineer in South Africa and Chile, but the family settled in Southern California.

After graduating from Los Angeles High School, Hay briefly attended Stanford but dropped out and returned to the City of Angels. He understood from childhood that he was a sissy—different in behavior from boys or girls—and that he was attracted to men. His same-sex affairs began when he was a teenager, not long after he began reading 19th century scholar Edward Carpenter, whose essays on "homogenic love" strongly influenced his thinking.

A tall and muscular young man, Hay worked as both an extra and ghostwriter in 1930s Hollywood. He developed a passion for theater and performed on Los Angeles stages with Anthony Quinn in the 1930s and with Will Geer, who became his lover.

Geer took Hay to the San Francisco General Strike of 1935 and indoctrinated him into the American Communist Party. Hay became an

active trade unionist. A blend of Marxist analysis and stagecraft strongly influenced Hay's later gay organizing.

Despite a decade of gay life, in 1938 Hay married the late Anita Platky, also a Communist Party member. The couple were stalwarts of the Los Angeles left; Hay taught at the California Labor School and campaigned for Ed Roybal, the first Latino elected in Los Angeles.

When he felt compelled to go public with the Mattachine Society in 1951, the Hays divorced. After a burst of activity lasting three years, the growing Mattachine rejected Hay as a liability because of his Communist beliefs.

In 1955, when he was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee, he had trouble finding a progressive attorney to represent him, he felt, because of homophobia on the left. (He ultimately was dismissed after his curt testimony.) Hay felt exiled from the left for nearly 50 years, until he received the life achievement award of a Los Angeles library preserving progressive movements.

A second wind of activism came in 1979 when Hay founded, with Don Kilhefner, the Radical Faeries, a movement affirming gayness as a form of spiritual calling. This pagan-inspired group continues internationally based on the principle that the consciousness of gays differs from that of heterosexuals.

Hay's occasional exhortations that gays should "maximize the differences" between themselves and heterosexuals remained controversial. Academics tended to reject his ideas as much as they respected his historic stature.

Despite his often combative nature, Hay became an increasingly beloved figure to younger generations of gay activists. He often was referred to as the "Father of Gay Liberation." □

WE LOVE OUR VET!

LASER SURGERY NOW AVAILABLE!

Companion Pet Clinics Portland \ Salem \ Vancouver

M-FRI 8am • 6pm
SAT 8am • 5pm
WEST LINN Sun 11am-4pm

WEST LINN 19343 Willamette Drive • (503) 635-3115
CLACKAMAS 16317 SE 82nd Drive • (503) 657-9225
TIGARD 13500 SW Pacific Hwy • (503) 670-9707
82ND AVE NE 3150 NE 82nd Ave • (503) 546-1044

Sawvie Island Retreat

17133 NW Lucy Reeder Road
Portland • \$634,900

Step away from the hectic pace into this serene, contemporary, Sawvie Island retreat. Recently remodeled, this property has many desirable features including an adjacent structure for a possible studio—all surrounded by trees & orchards and lovely dahlia beds.

ML# 328514

Jan Stranski
Associate Broker

(503) 284-7755
vm: (503) 497-5255

Windermere
Cronin & Caplan Realty Group, Inc.

stranski@windermere.com
www.windermere.com

Anti-Aging

"From the Outside In & Inside Out"

Skin Care, Color & Nutrition
Sazanami Co. 503-869-4329

I had 8 days to the meeting.

I had brochures to print.

I had an ulcer.

I called PIP.

PIP PRINTING
The Right Printer. The Right People.
www.pip.com

237 NE Broadway • Portland, OR 97232
503.281.8666 • Fax 503.249.1440
sales@pipdx.com • www.pipdx.com

Protect Your Assets Through Estate Planning

Call the Law Office of James D. McVittie
503-224-6611

James D. McVittie
Attorney at Law
2310 NW Everett
Suite 200
Portland, Oregon
97210
503.224.6611

- To Receive Your FREE Booklet & *Practical Guide to Estate Planning*.
- Schedule a FREE 30 minute consultation to discuss your personal estate plan.