

**MATTACHINE: A SERIALIZED STORY IN GAY HISTORY**  
**EPISODE 2: "THE CALL"**



A podcast dedicated to exploring the overlooked, forgotten,  
or often-untold stories in gay history.

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Dedicated to Albert Williams

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The original Mattachine Society jester logo is courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

*“Suddenly my world was transformed into a whole wonderful, different place because my night-dream and day-dream fantasies from then on would always include HIM—the one who was going to be everything to me, as I naturally would be to him.”*

*-Harry Hay*

**Harry Hay's** father worries he's "spawned" a sissy. He sends Harry to Nevada to work a hay field and toughen up after his first year of high school. Harry, now 14, has been 6' 2" since 12 years old. Harry looks old enough to get into a union, so when he returns from the fields, he works a tramp steamer from San Francisco to Los Angeles. He boards the ship, and before it even leaves the dock, Harry has his first sexual experience with a man. Laying in a lifeboat, the 25-year-old man he's just met is surprised to learn Harry's real age, 14. The man tells Harry about his experiences traveling to other countries on ships like this. He says that they're part of a "silent brotherhood" that exists all over the world – a hidden society of people who can recognize each other.

That experience in 1926 doesn't bring Harry out of the closet, except to himself. Harry knows the danger of openly being a minority. As a kid, he and his father were once forced to the roadside by local Ku Klux Klan members to watch a cross burning, even though they were Caucasian. He understands even at 14 that it's dangerous to be considered different. Harry remains a silent member of the homosexual brotherhood, off and on, for more than 20 years.

**22 years later. 1948.** Harry's working at Leahy Manufacturing where an old friend takes him aside quietly. FBI agents have been asking around about you, he tells Harry. They "knew all about you," he says.

Or at least, the FBI believes they know all about Harry Hay. Harry's co-worker doesn't know is that the FBI only knows the half of it: the communist half.

Communists structured their party in a clandestine cell system, keeping levels of their party's membership separate in order to keep everyone anonymous to each other and safe from infiltration. And much like that strategy, Harry has safely separated his political life and his gay life to keep both parts of himself safe. The FBI has no idea this communist they're tracking – Harry Hay – is the leader of the gay organization causing trouble in a completely separate case file at the bureau labeled "MATTACHINE FOUNDATION, aka Mattachine Society."

Welcome to *Mattachine*.

**Harry Hay** was born in Worthing, England and moved to Los Angeles with his parents in 1917. As a young man he reads Edward Carpenter's 'The Intermediate Sex' in the library and realizes that same-sex love isn't just his private fantasy. [Recording: "I'm aware of the fact that I'm living one life in San Francisco on the weekends and I'm living another life at Stanford."] I should tell you that while I will have some voice actors on this show, the quotes you'll read of Harry Hay's today are really Harry's recollections, from recordings courtesy of the ONE Archives at USC Library. Harry starts at Stanford University, shortly after hearing about Henry

Gerber's society from the man in the park, which we talked about in the previous episode.

*[Recording: "I begin to discover that making contact with people was not as hard as I thought it was. Almost immediately, you learn the eye language. There were a lot of wild tales floating around in the '30s, which by this time Champ had told me about the business of wearing a red tie, which is one of them. And of course the usual cruising techniques: asking for a match, asking for the time. Then I found that the eye language was marvelous, so I used that. At 17 I was looking for love, and finding tricks. I did find that at Stanford it was not difficult. And I was also learning about the fickleness, what heartbreaking meant..."]*

For instance, it's confusing for Harry when a young man he's seeing romantically doesn't return to school one fall.

*[Recording: "And then I got a feeling that he didn't come back because of our relationship. And I didn't understand that at all... I thought it's because I can't be honest, because we have to keep pretending, we have to keep lying. If only I could come out of the box and he could come out of the box, and everything would be just fine. So I thought, 'Well at least I can come out of the box. I don't know what it means, I have no idea, but I intend to be a homosexual and I intend to find out exactly what this life is going to be like. So the best thing to do is to say who I am.'"]*

So he tells his closest friends.

*[Recording: "I told them on a Wednesday... simply said, 'Okay, does that mean we can't see you?' And I said no. And they said, 'Well, when you wanna go away to San Francisco you just tell us in advance and we won't plan anything for that weekend.'"]*

And, just to go the extra mile, he tells all of his clubs.

*[Recording: "The eating club said well, 'If you want to go on eating here it's alright, but the people in the club got the place where there would be an empty space on either side of where I happened to be sitting to eat, because apparently it rubbed off, you know. They were afraid it might. A lot of guys who I knew for many, many years here in Los Angeles said, 'It doesn't make any difference to us, but people we know might ask some embarrassing questions, so you don't mind if we don't come around quite so often?' And I said, 'Sure, whatever you have to do.'"]*

And just to be sure everyone knows, he tells his teachers.

*[Recording: "The head of the drama department told me 'Well, what'd ya tell me that for, did you want to play Juliet?"]*

Harry leaves Stanford early to return to LA, though not because of issues being openly gay. In Los Angeles, he meets famous closeted gay men, many of whom find him too flamboyant for their anonymity. An actor outed in the 1930s, can you imagine? But Harry cruises around and makes some friends through Will Geer, a well-known actor who would become Harry's lover. Will teaches Harry about the **Communist Party** and radical activism, and together they support labor strikes, such as the 83-day West Coast Waterfront Strike of 1934. Harry soon joins an agitation/propaganda group of players who perform agitprop on the streets at protests. This is a type of political theatre meant to inspire activism, and Harry is

nearly arrested multiple times. He's attending communist meetings and getting along with the people, and he finally joins the party.

It's ironic that Harry's sexuality brought him to the Communist Party, because the party opposes homosexuality. Not knowing that he's gay, fellow communist Anita Platky becomes close with Harry, and in 1938, they marry. It's not uncommon at the time, spending time openly homosexual and settling down in a heterosexual relationship. Harry and Anita adopt two girls and move to a hillside house overlooking the water of Silverlake in Los Angeles. And a decade goes by. Harry works manufacturing jobs and teaches folk music history at the People's Education Center, where many communists are studying in the 1940s.

[**Recording:** *"I had isolated myself from gay social life. I did have occasional contact from gay people. And I did some cruising."*]

**Meanwhile, an informant for the FBI finds a letter.** This letter was originally sent to the Los Angeles Communist Party Membership Committee. It's from a member requesting readmission into the party under a new pseudonym – a pseudonym quite similar to the one Harry would continue to use in his own organization: Eann MacDonald. The FBI seeks out the letter's author, Harry Hay. They take photos of him, look into his wife, and even discover that he had been treated for syphilis, which really confirms to them that he must be subversive. To them, syphilis shows weak moral character. Harry's name and the letter are placed on FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's **Custodial Detention Index**. That index is a list of people of Italian, German, and Communist sympathies. According to the FBI, these people should be detained in event of war. But because the FBI can't legally detain anyone, the attorney general had ordered Hoover to close down the index. Hoover simply renames it the **Security Index**, and Harry's name remains on that list for years to come. The bureau intends to watch his every move. They place a mail cover on his house, watching all of the incoming and outgoing letters. A member of Hay's own family in Wisconsin writes to the FBI that Harry and his wife are holding communist meetings in their home. Hoover replies with contact info for the Milwaukee special-agent-in-charge if she should have any future information.

Harry spends his free time creating his folk music history class that teaches his students how music creates social change. [**Recording:** *"...how it develops out of the social context and social struggles of people, how it relates to change... I find out that I've taken on quite a bite... I was concerned with historical change, moving towards revolutionary change."*] And his ties to the Communist Party and his teachings can't keep him away from homosexuals. He inevitably sees them wherever he goes. [**Recording:** *"I was dealing artists and writers, new young musicians... And I'm aware of the fact that I'm dealing with gay people again. And all of a sudden I recognize how comfortable it is, and what a relief it is. And yet we don't have a language and we're not communicating as gay people, but we are communicating as sort of people who*

*understand each other because we are in the party... And we sort of sense that there is something...with...each other.”]*

Harry’s gay co-worker Bill has a friend who worked as a secretary in the **State Department**. One day in the late ‘40s, Bill’s friend comes to town and visits Bill and Harry for lunch at the factory. He tells them all about what’s happening in Washington, what Harry had seen on TV and read in the New York Times. He tells Harry, everybody is terrified. This man has been watching all the homosexual men in his department disappear, and he finally figured out that many people who were fired had slept with Andrew, a beautiful new employee who was reassigned to DC from another city. It weighs on Harry’s mind, his silent brotherhood now discovered by the US government. That’s not to say heterosexuals didn’t know homosexuals existed before, but now the government is recognizing them, and doing something about them.

**[Recording:** *“I begin to recognize that somehow or other, my time as a pseudo-heterosexual was coming to an end.”]*

But Harry’s still committed to the party, and committed to teaching his music class. All the while, his search for music recordings keep him constantly networking with other closeted men. **[Recording:** *“One of the guys had this party one night. He said, ‘Come on over, one of the guys is a priest and he knows quite a lot about French folk music.’ So I go to this party and they’re all gay people, about 15 gay people there.”]*

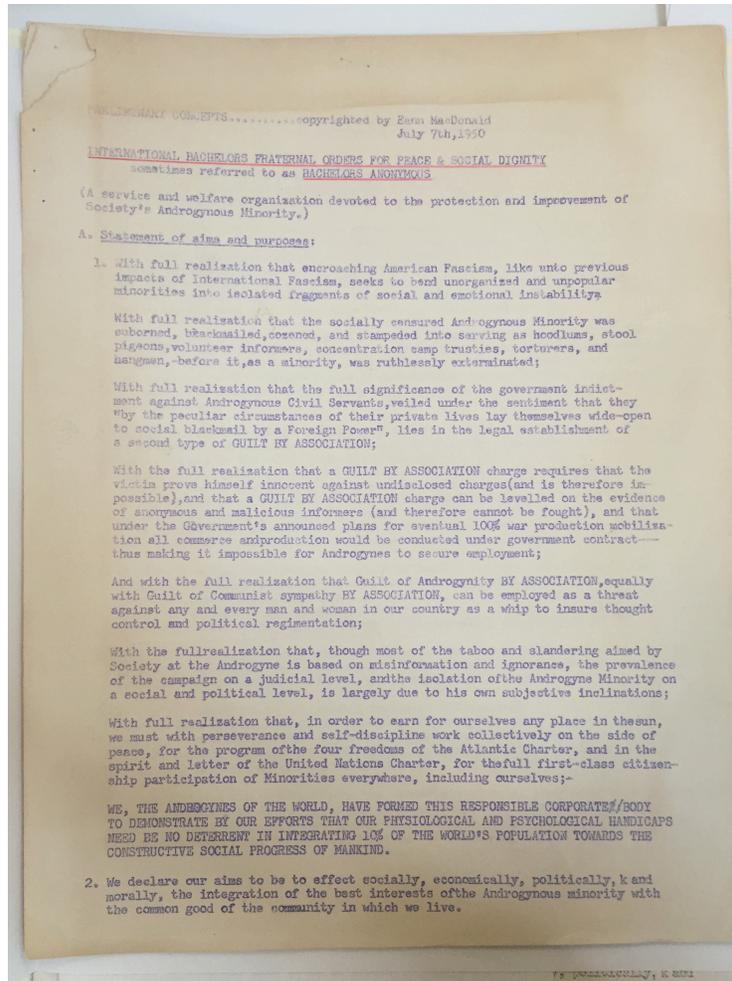
They drink and he stays around chatting, and conversation slowly drifts to the recent Kinsey statistic released that 37% of men had had a homosexual experience. It’s breaking news that Dr. Alfred Kinsey had found 1 out of 10 men are homosexual, which fascinates the crowd at this party. Harry believes this means there is a possibility these men can be determined a minority, capable of organizing. And with Henry Wallace running for President that year on a campaign promising an end to racial segregation, Harry thinks they might even be able to be represented at the Democratic Convention. This is a time of great change for the Democratic Party, shifting to a party of social change and identity politics. *[“Maybe we can get these guys to stop hounding the guys in the State Department, simply let people be what they want to be.”]*

Harry and the boys are still drinking, pitching names for their group: **[Recording:** *“We were trying to see how we could possibly present it to the American public, and we figured the only thing we can do is call ourselves ‘bachelors.’ It might be a way of reaching other gay people, it might be a signal.”]*

They land on “Bachelors for Wallace,” in order to get Henry Wallace’s attention. **[Recording:** *“I don’t think I ever got a chance to talk to that priest about French folk music.”]*

Harry goes home excited about the possibilities. He stays up late writing a five-page prospectus for the Bachelors for Wallace. It's titled "Preliminary Concepts" for "International Bachelors Fraternal Orders for Peace and Social Dignity," but, more simply, he nicknames the essay "The Call."

[Recording: "I ended up writing what amounted to a call for a permanent organization."] He later wrote, "I realized that we had been contributive in various ways over the millennia, and I felt we could return to being contributive again. Then we could be respected for our differences not for our samenesses to heterosexuals."



Read the full document at [mattachinepod.com](http://mattachinepod.com) or request at [ourhistorypod@gmail.com](mailto:ourhistorypod@gmail.com).

The next day, he contacts the host of last night's party for everyone's phone numbers. He makes calls saying, [Recording: "Look, I've got this wonderful idea and it's not only Bachelors for Wallace, but an incorporation for a whole larger idea, and let's get together and work on it." But he finds that no one seems to remember this conversation about Bachelors for Wallace. Or if they do, they pretty much tell him the idea is nuts. [Recording: "They couldn't be caught dead in the thing. It was a lot of fun last night to talk about, you're out of your mind, it's absolutely impossible, don't bother to call me again."] He responds that they can try to get ministers and

psychologists to approve their work and then they wouldn't look crazy. Upon contacting these types of professionals, they tell Harry they might consider such a group if he starts one first. Professionals want a group first, potential group members want professionals to endorse the group before they join it. Harry's ideas remain nothing but ideas on paper. But just up the road, in Burbank, a secretary writing under the name Lisa Ben is distributing her underground lesbian magazine *Vice Versa*. In Los Angeles, Merton Bird is forming Knights of the Clock, a group for interracial gay couples. Harry isn't alone, he just doesn't know that yet.

### *Let's talk about Kinsey.*

Alfred Kinsey was a zoologist at Indiana University and founded the Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction. In 1948, he and Wardell Pomeroy released the book *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. This, and his 1953 *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* together are referred to as the Kinsey Reports.

The first book includes the Kinsey Scale, which ranges from 0 to 6. On one end, subjects could be found exclusively heterosexual, and the other, exclusively homosexual, with a separate category labeled X for asexuals. Kinsey determined that sexuality is a spectrum, as many people had had both same-sex and opposite-sex experiences. Over a series of thousands of interviews, Kinsey found that about 10% of people were exclusively homosexual, and that 37% of his subjects had had at least one gay experience. Though these reports have faced some criticism, they remained bestsellers for several months, and together sold three quarters of a million copies with worldwide attention from the press. People were talking about sex for erotic pleasure, not just procreating! Birth control was becoming popular and the taboo of sex outside of marriage was beginning to lift. When the first Kinsey Report was released in 1948, Henry Gerber wrote in a letter, "The great value of the Kinsey Report is to show that the people in the United States do not pay the slightest attention to such taboos and sumptuary laws. They can no more be enforced than the late-lamented Prohibition laws."

**Gay Los Angeles of the early 1950s** has cruising spots well known in gay circles. The Long Beach Navy Yard, crystal baths near the Santa Monica pavilion, Pershing Square. North of Hollywood Boulevard there are neighborhoods known for many lesbian tenants. Gay culture is privately thriving, and Harry is privately enjoying it. But soon the outside government influence will crack down, and Harry's two worlds will have to collide.

What Harry doesn't know yet is that in the late 1940s, about a hundred homosexuals per year are fired from federal jobs. This is because of the McCarran Rider, which allows the Secretary of State to fire any employee at his "absolute discretion" for national security. **The McCarran Rider** is to be used for homosexuals and communists alike. But we'll put a pin in that story for another day. For people in general, gays and reds are similar because they both keep secret identities, they both have an underworld culture, they seem loyal to their group, and they both have, or would have, publications and meeting places. The paranoia would

grow until the government firings increased from 100 per year to about 1 a day in the mid-50s. It's hard to trace exactly how many there were because most dismissals were recorded as volunteer resignations – or the employee faced being outed.

**In February 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy** gives a now-famous speech. It's about why the nation is seemingly “losing” the Cold War. He announces that 205 card-carrying communists are working in the State Department. During this time, the Red Scare, it isn't a new thing to say that communists are working in the government, but it is a new thing to announce that there is *a list*. Eleven days later on the Senate floor, McCarthy names two cases, in which he blurs the lines between homosexuality and communism, as people often do.

Harry Hay believes McCarthy is looking for a new **scapegoat**. He believes that because the black community has already organized, and Jewish people were too recently persecuted in the Holocaust, that McCarthy is looking to get away with placing blame on homosexuals. Harry later said, “It was obvious McCarthy was setting up the pattern for a new scapegoat, and it was going to be us – Gays. We had to organize, we had to move, we had to get started.” Harry's right. The Red Scare of communism brings paranoia, because the American government demands patriotism, which, for them, means unconditional loyalty. When the government needs to weed out communists, they have everyone on the watch for anything atypical of the husband/wife/2.5 kids/a pet/and a white picket fence. The government justifies the firing of homosexuals by pushing the idea that gays are at risk for blackmail. The government believes that the enemy, Russia, can hold a gay person's sexuality against them for American secrets from their government jobs. And perhaps it's unintentional, but by blurring the lines between communism and homosexuality, Joseph McCarthy boosts the witch-hunt for gays in government jobs, catalyzing what will become labeled “the Lavender Scare,” which will run long past the lifetime of the McCarthyist hunt for communists.

### **BREAKING NEWS**

*March 1, 1950. The New York Times reports that since 1947, 91 people have resigned from the State Department while under investigation as security risks. And I quote, “Most of these were homosexuals.” The Times will continue reporting through the month on Senator McCarthy's work to weed out homosexuals in government jobs. He's called them “perverts” and says they are security risks because they are “subject to blackmail.” Senator Kenneth Wherry also believes this to be a moral and security issue. He says, “You can't hardly separate homosexuals from subversives. Mind you, I don't say every homosexual is a subversive, and I don't say every subversive is a homosexual. But a man of low morality is a menace in the government, whatever he is, and they are all tied up together.” Now, back to you!*

Harry is angry. He's angry that no political power, even in his familiar liberal circles, have taken a stand against the witch-hunt. It seems to be a true reflection of the hostility surrounding the minority Harry finds himself in.

**Summer. July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1950.** Harry attends his daughter's rehearsal at the Lester Horton Dance Theater, where performances often have themes of political injustice. He sits down to watch her dance, [**Recording:** "...and in the audience is one of the most beautiful, charismatic people I will ever meet."] Harry immediately falls for **Rudi Gernreich**, an Austrian refugee who, at 16, escaped his country with his mother after Nazi Germany annexed Austria. [**Recording:** "I know immediately this is somebody I have to show my prospectus to. And I do."] Now 28, Rudi agrees to meet Harry for dinner at a restaurant near the Sunset Strip called The Chuckwagon. [**Recording:** "I can't believe my good fortune that such a beautiful creature would ever fasten to my life, and I'm just speechless and helpless and full of fire...inarticulate."]

Before the dinner, Harry rewrites his prospectus, "The Call," which he had redrafted occasionally over the past couple years. He arrives at The Chuckwagon and takes a table with Rudi. He slides his document over for Rudi to read. "Preliminary Concepts...copyrighted By Eann MacDonald," it says. Harry's pseudonym.

Rudi skims through The Call to "Society's Androgynous Minority." Harry wrote about homosexuals "ruthlessly exterminated" in the Holocaust. He warned of "encroaching American fascism" which "seeks to bend unorganized and unpopular minorities into isolated fragments." He wrote "government indictments against Androgynous Civil Servants lies in the legal establishment of a type of guilt by association," which the accused cannot disprove. Which means that if the government succeeds at attacking homosexuals, it has a weapon that "can be employed as a threat against any and every man and woman in our country to insure thought control and political regimentation." According to historian John D'Emilio, what Harry wrote '...made it imperative for homosexuals to organize.' Harry also stresses caution moving forward, a system of membership by recommendation only, in which members are sworn to secrecy and remain anonymous to the community and to each other for their own protection. It becomes clear to Rudi that Harry prophesied something many homosexuals didn't: That the "guilt by association" strategies the government is using through information from "anonymous and malicious informers" could spread into the private enterprise. Harry and many of his co-workers are employed by aircraft manufacturers with government contracts. Southern California is full of these government jobs in the 1940s and '50s. Harry sees a future where homosexuals will find it impossible to get work because so many jobs are government funded. Like Henry Gerber, fired from the post office. If this McCarthyist scapegoating thrives, homosexuals will be unable to survive. [**Recording:** *It behooved us to begin drawing ourselves together at this point to find out who we were, what we were for, begin to educate ourselves and develop methods of communication of these ideas. We would then negotiate with our*

*parent society as a group.*"] The document goes on for six pages, finally saying, "We the androgynes of the world, have formed this responsible corporate body to demonstrate by our efforts that our physiological and psychological handicaps need be no deterrent in integrating 10% of the world's population towards the constructive social progress of mankind."

Rudi looks up at Harry. And he says, "It's the most dangerous thing I've ever seen and I'm with you one hundred percent." He takes it home to read it thoroughly.

[**Recording:** "*He gives me a call the next day and he said, 'It's wonderful, when do we begin? I have a whole flock of prospects we should go and try.'*" Harry sighs deeply. "*That probably was the most important day of Mattachine for me because all of a sudden someone says, 'Yeah.'*" ]

They're planning within a week. [**Recording:** "*I might also add that within a week I am hopelessly in love. Utterly, totally, hopelessly in love. I am ready to throw all caution to the wind.*" ] But they do begin organizing slowly. Rudi knows of Magnus Hirschfeld's attempts to educate society, which were stamped out by the Nazis, and Harry knows of Henry Gerber. Rudi asks Harry for several copies of The Call. He figures that since progressives are trying to get signatures for the Stockholm Peace Petition against the Korean War, they could go out with the same agenda. And they could use this as a way to feel the person out and, if it seems safe to ask, Harry and Rudi would present the idea of a gay organization. So from August to October 1950, the men go to the gay beaches in Santa Monica for signatures. They approach people and bring up the war, and then get into the US government firing homosexuals from work. They say, "Isn't it high time we all got together to do something about it?" Everyone at the gay beaches agree, but, no one wants to put their name on a list and commit their life to it – just like Henry Gerber dealt with 25 years ago, in our episode last week.

Harry and Rudi lay out their ideas for an organization that would establish homosexuals as a minority in the majority. They dream of an amendment to the US Constitution, and it would begin with their organization's underground guilds fighting for it. Some of the people on the beach give Harry their name and address if an organization for this ever comes about, and Harry will likely one day contact them.

Harry and Rudi are unable to give up. They're working constantly through 1950. Harry finally feels like he's begun moving back to his true self. They look for opportunities everywhere to bring in members to start their organization. [**Recording:** "*Finally Rudi said, 'We're getting absolutely nowhere. Are you sure there aren't any gay guys in any of your classes?'*" ]

**In November**, while he's teaching music history at the California Labor School, someone catches Harry's attention. He isn't sure if his student, **Bob Hull**, is a homosexual. But he feels pretty certain. [**Recording:** "*So I take in a couple copies, one for him and one for Chuck.*"] **Chuck Rowland** is Bob's roommate and former lover. Chuck had campaigned for Henry Wallace, the candidate Harry had tried to rally his gay friends around after that party two years ago. Harry swallows hard and clenches his fists, approaching Bob and his friend with two envelopes. After class, Bob and Chuck open the envelopes and they read *The Call*.

**On November 11, 1950**, Harry's phone rings. Discreetly, he takes the call. It's Bob Hull, sounding distant, asking if he can come over. Of course Harry says yes. [**Recording:** "*And I call Rudi and say, 'Bob has called me and you better be here.'*"] Soon Bob, Chuck, and another man are running up the Cove Avenue hillside off Silverlake Boulevard up to Harry's house. [**Recording:** "*And I remember this afternoon, too, it was a very windy afternoon. It's Chuck who comes running through my driveway, and he's waving the prospectus in his hand like a flag and he said 'I could have written it myself! When do we begin?'*" Harry cries. "*So we sat down and we began. The five of us.*" ]

Harry is introduced to Bob's boyfriend **Dale Jennings**, a playwright and veteran who campaigned for the civil rights of Japanese Americans. Harry brings Bob, Chuck, Dale, and Rudi to the hillside [**Recording:** "*...we sat out on the hillside overlooking Burbank, sat out in the weeds*" ], and they talk for hours, swearing each other to secrecy. The five men decide to work with the communist structure they're familiar with, and Harry presents the idea of working from the idea that they are an "oppressed cultural minority." They all agree, and officially form what they call *The Society of Fools*, which they would soon rename. The group meets several more times to perfect their ideas. [**Recording:** "*...Figure what we could do to begin... How many other gay guys do we know? ...If we got a discussion group going, how would we approach this? ...Getting wild dreams going... Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could have groups all across the country...? It was too wonderful we'd all found each other...*" ]



Cove Avenue hilltop in Silverlake, Los Angeles. Now named [\*"The Mattachine Steps."\*](#)

We heard Harry talk a bit about teaching cultural developments through music history in his class. In one of his many lessons, he teaches Bob, Chuck, and his other students about a French group of medieval Renaissance performers [**Recording:** *"who were known as the Société Mattachine. These were groups of masked men, we don't anything about who they were or their names. We only know that they always appeared in masks and their leader was called Mother Pig, always appeared in woman's dress on stage. They would go out into the countryside and they would perform rituals of protest against oppression in the name of the peasantry. These people were expendable, not the peasantry, because these were bachelors. They set themselves up as the fools who could speak out against oppression. They offered themselves, if somebody has to be killed, kill me. This is where we got our name. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were able to do this again?"*] Harry presents this name to the men of his new organization, and they all agree they will be called The Mattachine Foundation.

**In late November**, the Mattachine Foundation is ready to host their first discussion group. A few people are invited discreetly. [Recording: "...there was a woman who was a friend of Rudi's...and a pianist who was a friend of Bob's. The pianist. The one who did Bette Davis imitations. And a young black man. We had invited about 12 people and these three showed.]" Chuck draws the curtains and puts a pillow over the phone to keep possible wiretappers from hearing the discussions. Arriving guests are scheduled to come to the door at different times, and departures are scattered as well, in order to keep from drawing attention. The groups begin as invitation-only gatherings, then those invited are allowed to invite friends. Many people come once or twice and never return. Very few women come, but after noticing the lack of lesbians people are encouraged to invite more women, which they do, including well-known photographer Ruth Bernhard.

The discussions are the first opportunity many of these homosexuals have to get on the same page with each other. Many of them live with problems they've never discussed openly with anyone before. They exchange stories about coming out to friends or family. The talk about cruising spots, safe bars, and years of living alone. Harry writes down notes, such as "Homosexuals are 'lone wolves' through fear" of heterosexual people, and they "understandably retreat more within themselves." He goes on, "A homosexual has no one to whom he must account, and in the end...he must decide everything for himself." People who attend these meetings ask questions like how does one become a homosexual? And are we as sick as medical professionals say we are? Harry notes that their sexual energy isn't for procreating, so they have to channel it into creativity. Perhaps society would attack them less if people realize a homosexual's "potential ability to offer a worth-while contribution." Harry continues to listen to their concerns. The guests are understandably concerned about where this organization will go. Is it possible to overcome our status and isolation and come together? Are we even a minority group, or are we just a bunch of people with nothing in common but how we have sex? Harry writes in his notes, "Those in greatest need are sometimes the most reluctant to help each other or themselves, tending to think of personal experiences as things apart from the mutual effort towards betterment."

Harry and the Foundation are persistent. They come to realize, as Harry's notes recorded, that homosexuals in general seem unaware that their problems adjusting to society creates "a culture in itself." Harry sees that many homosexuals don't see that they are already a social minority, a secret society, living among the "dominant culture." Harry writes, "Some glad day there shall be a body of knowledge which would...show that homosexuals...have much in common." Harry is determined to bring that body knowledge together. But meanwhile at the FBI, unbeknownst to Harry, his Security Index card is tabbed for COMSAB – communist sabotage – because he works for a company with a government contract. Just the sort of government monitoring Harry Hay feared.

The groups continue to meet. Harry and the Mattachine discreetly vet attendees for membership. Attending a discussion group doesn't make someone a member. Harry and his friends lead conversations in a casual way that make discussions feel informal and spontaneous, so that people can't necessarily figure out who is running the show, thus protecting the Mattachine's creators. When someone continues to show up to discussions and participate with passion, one of the Foundation members would approach them in confidence and reveal the Mattachine Foundation and the purpose of these discussion groups. [**Recording:** "We've got to set up all sorts of safeguards on ourselves, to see to it that we don't make a mistake in terms of other people and hurt the movement. If we slip now, we could set everything back 20 or 30 years."] They would invite this person that they took aside into the First Order guild as a member. This is how the Mattachine is inspired by the communist cell structure. No guild knows who the other members are, for the safety of everyone. The five men of the Foundation – Harry, Rudi, Bob, Chuck, and Dale – are the Fifth Order, the top. New members are the First Order. As the organization grows, Harry would fill in levels of leadership between the First and Fifth Orders, so that people in other cells won't know where information comes from and everyone operates on a safe level of anonymity in case the government infiltrates and begins seeking names of homosexual leaders.

Two lovers named **Konrad Stevens** and **James Gruber** soon join Mattachine. They are a photographer and an aspiring teacher. Chuck feels that "it was like magic when they joined." Their passion brings action to the discussions, despite the fact that Gruber said he was "terrified by it all." The communist language scares him, but the mission of the organization is irresistible to the couple that becomes known simply as Stim. The Mattachine is becoming a group of lovers and former lovers, much like Henry Gerber imagined. In the spring, they spend months writing a document stating their missions and purposes in order to catalyze Harry's call to action:

**TO UNIFY** homosexuals isolated from their own kind, to provide something all of our people can derive a feeling of belonging.

**TO EDUCATE** both homo and heterosexual people through new information on homosexuality through further research, and develop an ethical homosexual culture, paralleling the emerging cultures of other minorities.

**TO LEAD** socially conscious homosexuals to achieve unification.

confidential confidential confidential confidential confidential

MISSIONS AND PURPOSES

of the

Mattachine Society

**TO UNIFY:** While there are undoubtedly individual homosexuals who lumber many of their own people among their friends, thousands of homosexuals live out their lives bewildered, unhappy, alone, isolated from their own kind and unable to adjust to the dominant culture. Even those who have many homosexual friends are still cut off from the deep satisfactions man's gregarious nature can achieve only when he is consciously part of a large, unified whole. A major purpose of the Mattachine Society is to provide a consensus of principle around which all of our people can rally and from which they can derive a feeling of "belonging."

**TO EDUCATE:** The total of information available on the subject of homosexuality is woefully meagre and utterly inconclusive. The Society organizes all available material and conducts extensive researches itself -- psychological, physiological, anthropological and sociological -- for the purpose of informing all interested homosexuals and for the purpose of informing and enlightening the public at large.

The Mattachine Society holds it as possible and desirable that a highly ethical, homosexual culture emerge as a consequence of its work, paralleling the emerging cultures of our fellow-minorities -- the Negro, Mexican and Jewish peoples. The Society believes homosexuals can lead well-adjusted, wholesome and socially productive lives once ignorance and prejudice against them is successfully combated and once homosexuals themselves feel they have a dignified and useful role to play in society. The Society, to these ends, is in the process of developing a homosexual ethic--disciplined, moral and socially responsible.

**TO LEAD:** It is not sufficient for an oppressed minority like the homosexuals merely to be conscious of belonging to a minority collective when, as is the situation at the present time, that collective is neither socially organic nor objective in its directions and activities--although this minimum is, in itself, a great step forward. It is necessary that the more far-seeing and socially conscious homosexuals provide leadership to the whole mass of social deviants if the first two missions (the unification and the education of the homosexual minority) are to be accomplished. Further, once unification and education have progressed it becomes imperative (to consolidate these gains) for the Society to push forward into the realm of political action to erase from our law books the discriminatory and oppressive legislation presently directed against the homosexual minority.

The Society, founded upon the highest ethical and social principles, serves as an example for homosexuals to follow and provides a dignified standard upon which the rest of society can base a more intelligent and accurate picture of the nature of homosexuality than currently obtains in the public mind. The Society provides the instrument necessary to work with civic-minded and socially valuable organizations and supplies the means for the assistance of our people who are victimized daily as a result of our oppression. Only homosexuals--one of the largest minorities in America today--to take the actions necessary to elevate themselves from the social ostracism an unympathetic culture has perpetrated upon them.

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Members stand in a circle and take hands, swearing in an oath to work together for equality. Their focus is on the "imperative" for "political action" to fight "discriminatory and oppressive legislation."

*"...conduct myself in a way that will reflect credit upon myself and the organization...to respect the rights of all racial, religion and national minorities...To observe the generally accepted social rules of dignity and propriety at all times-in my conduct, attire, and speech; to strive in every possible way to interest other responsible people...to participate actively and seriously in the work...to unconditionally guard the anonymity of all members of the Mattachine..."*

*Our interlocking, sustaining and protecting hands guarantee a reborn social force of immense and simple purpose. We are resolved that our people shall find equality of security and production in tomorrow's world. We are sworn that no boy or girl, approaching the maelstrom of deviation, need make that crossing alone, afraid and in the dark ever again. In these moments we dedicate ourselves once again to each other in the immense significance of such allegiance, with dignity and respect, proud and free."*

Bob's boyfriend, Dale Jennings, will later remember this, saying, "To many a homosexual who may have lived out years of loneliness or bitterness, believing that his lot in society was a miserable one and without hope, the whole proceedings, the sense of group fellowship, the joining of hands in solemn oath, bespoke something so new, and of such dazzling implication as to be well-nigh unbelievable."

**Geraldine Jackson:** "You felt like you had a mission in the world. You felt that you were doing something terribly worthwhile for our people.

Chuck Rowland will later recall, "No one felt that our rituals were empty, frivolous or lugubrious."

**[Recording:** *"In the meantime, we were beginning to develop a team. The five of us were beginning to become a family, as we would call it now. At Christmas they all – this was a difficult thing – On Christmas Eve they all come to my house. My wife was a little uneasy about all this... There seems to be a closeness in those five that she didn't know about that seems strange. And the minister at First Unitarian is there, and he's very embarrassed, very embarrassed because I had been to see him two years before and gotten nowhere. Anyway, we're all having ball and singing Christmas carols and all kinds of songs, and a couple of us are doing two-piano stuff, and Bob is at one end and I'm at the other and we're doing choruses and corals and it's very lively and it's very good and it's very pleasant and we don't have words for it..."*]



**The groups grow as summer goes on.** When more than about 20 people show up, the Foundation splits off the discussion groups to expand the First Order. A public meeting sometimes draws in 150 attendees, where the Foundation seeks out new Mattachine leaders. They make up a small guidebook explaining how to lead discussions and what topics to cover. Some groups even have same-sex dancing,

which isn't allowed by police, but can happen in the privacy of someone's home. The Foundation makes a questionnaire for groups, which is several pages long. Few of the people have ever been questioned about their sexual or social lives and there is endless discussion following. They talk about how things can be changed, how a gay subculture could grow, how to change social attitudes, and the strengths they have learned by surviving in this world. [Recording: "We're talking about a possibility, and the whole concept of a dream takes shape... We come together and we get this sense of a brotherhood. This sense of a belonging, which is so different from cruising."]

There are mass arrests and bar raids out there. Loss of jobs, and an impossibility to protest these things publicly. People are terrified that the government would get a list of names and the cops would come banging down the door of the discussion groups and arrest everyone. Almost all attendees use pseudonyms, no matter how comfortable these discussions become. But there are never raids on the meetings. They become a safe space for gays who fear bar raids and unsafe places in gay subculture. One woman in the First Order later recalled, "people were able to bloom and be themselves. It was something we didn't know before. At last there was the opportunity to say what you wanted to say and feel accepted."

Gruber later said, "All of us had known a whole lifetime of not talking, of repression. Just the freedom to open up, that's what it was all about. We had found a sense of belonging, of camaraderie, of openness in an atmosphere of tension and distrust. A family feeling came out of it, a nonsexual emphasis. It was a brand new idea. Just that is what kept the organization going."

And that new family feeling is what will keep the organization fighting when society begins to take notice of them. Before these growing groups can really take off, an unnamed informant contacts the FBI. This informant tells the Bureau that Chuck and Bob are homosexuals and are living together. The informant claims to know this because he is also a homosexual and he, too, is a dissociated communist, brought into the party by Bob. Now Chuck and Bob are also out of the party, likely expelled for their sexuality. The FBI takes note of Bob Hull and Chuck Rowland, marking their sexuality down in their files under "Health."

Bob and Chuck don't know the FBI is watching. Luckily, the organization is moving slow and keeping private. The Foundation finds a lawyer that had helped a gay friend on a charge. This lawyer helps the Foundation get a preliminary charter to start a nonprofit corporation.

**Within a year**, Harry felt "that organizing the Mattachine was a call to me deeper than the innermost reaches of the spirit, a vision-quest more important than life." So he goes to his Communist Party leadership and explains his call, and recommends his own expulsion. [Recording: "I said, 'I must come out for what I am and for who I am, and you must appreciate this.' It's the same thing as when I came out at Stanford, I can't live this lie."] Because he's been dedicated to them for 18 years and taught for

them, they only drop him as “a security risk but as a lifelong friend of the people.” [Recording: “I begin to think, ‘But I have had all this magnificent experience and training in organization and in struggle, and I think my own people are going to need this and how wonderful that I have gotten it, because now I can pass it on.’”] Next, Harry tells his family. [Recording: “It’s in September of 1951 when I tell my wife what was happening and the type of group that I’m organizing. She immediately says, ‘Oh, this could grow and it could certainly hit the newspapers, and the children will be in danger and you have to go.’”] Anita tells Harry, [Recording: “You know, you never married me—you married the Communist Party.’ Which was probably true.”]

[Recording: “I felt that they should be left intact...I would leave the family with these people for comfort. All the people I knew over those years, I never went back to, I never saw any of them again. I let my wife use whatever explanation she wanted, I let my children use whatever explanation they wanted. I didn’t even see my brother for 15 years.”] Harry gives his life over to the Mattachine, for the good of the movement. [Recording: “Because of my teaching, because the conspiracy trials were happening in New York, I could very well be called into the conspiracy trials. I didn’t know what the FBI knew, and they could call me in for the Mattachine, too. It would make a lovely, juicy story.”] When he isn’t working at the factory, his life is consumed by the work with the Foundation. It’s time to allow the First Order discussion groups to thrive on their own and turn the Fifth Order toward the call to action. When brutal LA police harassment of the Chicano community begins getting attention in the press, the city of Los Angeles holds hearings due to pressure for investigation into police practices. The Mattachine Foundation attends the hearing to speak in favor of disciplinary action, in support of minorities fighting police brutality.

Harry moves out of his home in Silverlake, down the road to Hollywood. [Recording: “I don’t know that that’s necessarily courage, it simply was a situation, a bridge I had crossed, a new commitment that was necessary. I wasn’t being unfaithful to an old commitment. I had made a commitment, I had now made a change. I now recognized something that I hadn’t before. This was something that the people I loved and worked with had to know.”] But it was on that hillside by his home with Anita, sitting in the bushes, that five homosexuals started a movement. Today, outside Harry Hay’s former home, a set of concrete stairs leads up from Cove Avenue through the bushes to the top of the hill, beginning with a sign that says “The Mattachine Steps. Harry Hay founded the Mattachine Society on this hillside on November 11, 1950.” He spends the next year actively meeting his people, addressing problems within the community, and strategizing how to help us all. He writes down in those discussion meeting notes, “Homosexuals do not understand themselves and thus it is not surprising that heterosexuals do not understand them either.” The Mattachine Foundation becomes determined to fix that, even within the splintering of their personal relationships.

**By spring 1952, Dale and Bob break up.** Dale's feeling down and goes out to see a movie. He passes on a couple films showing that he doesn't care to see, and around 9 PM he stops off in Westlake Park, now called **MacArthur Park**, near downtown LA, to use the toilet. In the restroom, a man puts his hand on Dale's crotch. But Dale isn't interested in cruising. He leaves the restroom and heads home. The big, rough guy follows behind him. Dale speeds up, trying to lose him at each corner. When he gets home, the man pushes his way inside Dale's apartment, insisting on sleeping with Dale. Dale continues to resist, until the man pulls out his badge and handcuffs him. "Maybe you'll talk better with my partner outside," the cop says. Dale Jennings is arrested and hauled to the police station, and the Mattachine Foundation finds itself at a time for action. Next week on *Mattachine*.

### **A NOTE TO TEACHERS:**

I talk during this series about how schools don't teach us gay history. If you learned anything about gay history in your school, you're one of the lucky few. This is changing because of programs like HISTORY UNERASED. Check out [www.unerased.org](http://www.unerased.org). Not only is bullying still an issue, but nearly half of homeless youth are queer. 1 in 5 queer kids of color attempt suicide. Young queer kids are even more likely to drop out of school. This is why I'm talking about HISTORY UNERASED, not because this is a paid ad - it's not. This program is doing important work, and they're bringing educators in K-12 classrooms proper training and resources to include LGBTQ history and queer inquiry in Social Science classes, Fine Arts, and Health courses, among others. And language is always expanding for the queer community with new terms and complexities that educators want to understand and apply in their classrooms. For instance, how do I use the word "trans" properly? What does "nonbinary" mean? Teachers want to help students feel safe and understood by using the proper terminology, so the people at History Unerased are helping with that, too. If all kids in school learn about our history, then we can get rid of misperceptions about queer people and fix the real problems those misperceptions create: queer kids quitting school because they don't feel safe, homelessness, suicide. If you're an educator that wants to help your classroom be a safer space for your LGBTQ students, check out [www.unerased.org](http://www.unerased.org) for more information. You could save your student's life. You could improve the safety of your community. And you could teach your kids some fascinating history.