

MATTACHINE: A SERIALIZED STORY IN GAY HISTORY
EPISODE 1: "STRANGE SEX CULT EXPOSED"



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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1920s Berlin was a city littered with gay and lesbian magazines. It was a city that gay novelist Christopher Isherwood would soon romanticize in his novels. 1920 Berlin was full of gay bars. There was one decorated with photos of cyclists and boxers and heated by a big old-fashioned iron stove. The room heated up and the boys took off their leather jackets and their sweaters. They'd unbutton their shirts and roll up their sleeves. This is technically illegal, according to Paragraph 175 in the German Imperial Penal Code. But before the rise of the Third Reich, 175 is very loosely enforced. 175 outlawed "lewd and unnatural" conduct between men, but bars aren't raided very often, and few homosexuals are ever punished, though it does happen. This law is challenged by Magnus Hirschfeld and Adolf Brand, among others, but we'll put a pin in that story for another time. The point is, before Hitler's reign, Germany was pretty queer. Even someone who has seen *Cabaret* or read their share of Isherwood might not have thought about this: a country oblivious to, or even widely welcoming to queer identity that is turned to hunt down and stigmatize the queer community. Anyway, I came to learn about this German bar with the iron stove when I read about a man who frequented the bar during his time in Berlin in 1920. The feeling of this bar would not leave his mind when he returned to America and he had an idea. And his idea spread across the country in whispers. And that secret was written down on six pages and hidden in a desk drawer. It was strategized on a hillside in the bushes. By then, it was 1950 as it grew into a secret organization. Soon it was a threat to the American government, then we would be a threat to the American family. When I began researching these activists, I only had a vague idea of the secret society of gay people who have often gone without credit for their hand in the early gay liberation movement. Though before their identities were exposed, many of them wanted to remain anonymous.

Welcome to *Mattachine*.

A few years ago, my mentor, Albert Williams, and I were discussing gay history as we often do. He teaches me quite a bit about gay history, in that necessary way young queer people like myself learn our history from older queer mentors: through stories he lived, and books he recommends. We used to sit in his office as he'd toss out book titles I should look up, such as *The Persian Boy* and *Dancing the Gay Lib Blues*. Albert – he goes by Bill – Bill told me about pre-Stonewall gay history, something I didn't know much about, as it's an often-overlooked portion of our past. The night at Stonewall in 1969, in which gay and trans people fought back against police raiding their bar, has been spoken of with such passion and detail that the imagery entices us more so than other stories in our history. Stories like the people who tried to remain anonymous in their effort to begin the gay rights movement decades before Stonewall. Bill told me about the Mattachine Society, which met in speakeasy fashion in their living rooms with curtains drawn and discreet meeting strategies, planning political moves and methods of bringing together an organized gay community, which didn't exist yet. The community that fought back at Stonewall in '69 was nonexistent in the 1940s, at least to "normal" society. Most heterosexual people didn't know homosexual and transgender people were right there – among them – every day. But the queer people of the early 20th century noticed each other,

the same way we see each other now. Across the room, you make eye contact. Walking down the street, you notice his gait. And you see each other. In one of the books Bill recommended to me, *The City and the Pillar*, Gore Vidal wrote in 1948, "Occasionally two homosexuals might meet in the great world. When they did, by a quick glance they acknowledged one another and, like amused conspirators, observed the effect each was having. It was a form of freemasonry." Some folks talk about "gaydar" now, but this instinctual skill wasn't discussed then, it was something only homosexuals really knew existed in public society, and so, they already were a secret society. I began researching this society out of curiosity, assuming the group to be a trivial fun fact in gay history, but the story of the Mattachine grew into something so great and sprawling, it became difficult for me to interpret my anger at our greater society for not educating students about this extensive event in gay history – in American history. Our history helped shape the country, its politics, and then our families. And as I began to reevaluate our queer community's influence on our country's history, I would come to reevaluate my own relationships and ideals in regard to the modern queer community. I knew about Stonewall and Harvey Milk, Oscar Wilde and every John Waters movie, the Gay Liberation Front, *Angels in America*... But some names get redacted and some files are kept sealed for far too long.

Our history began centuries ago, though our American liberation began in the 20th century. That secret society – the Mattachine – was created by a factory worker named Harry Hay in 1948. But the structure of this organization was based on anonymity for the protection of their members. Anonymity is a crucial piece to the story, and so today I'll tell you why **Harry Hay** put pen on paper to create his society, but signed his name *Eann MacDonald*.

And why anonymity? How does that work? Could a viable movement be started by pseudonyms? Did they have enough pride in being part of the community they were fighting for to put their own names on the line? Why take any social action at all if not committing your name to it? Well, Harry Hay was inspired. Because when two homosexuals met in the great world in 1929, like amused conspirators one man whispered to Harry Hay a secret about an attempt to begin a society for homosexuals and just how badly things went.

This week, we'll uncover that secret. We'll trace the roots of American gay liberation and the Mattachine Society back to **Henry Gerber, a postal worker in 1920s Chicago...**

Henry Gerber compared what he did to notorious bandits joining a thieves' union. There were no organizations, no bars designated for the queer, or role models such as RuPaul or Ellen DeGeneres or whomever you might look up to. Millions of homosexuals were living against the law, and no one wanted their name printed on a list for an organization of people living against the law. Henry gets his idea after

going out and discovering queer culture on his own and decides to bring it back with him to America.

Henry had moved to the U.S. from Bavaria in 1913. He had no idea he was a homosexual. Hitchhiking through Kansas, he met a young farmer boy, and the boy offered Henry a ride and a job stacking wheat. When Henry arrived on the farm, he met the boy's friend, and all three of them slept together in the bunkhouse. "The boys did not hesitate to invite me into their beds," Henry later wrote. It's an awakening experience for the young immigrant. A few years later, Henry is briefly institutionalized for his homosexuality, though records are unclear how this happened, or for how long.

He serves in the Army of Occupation in Germany after the First World War and visits Berlin often. It's there, in Berlin, that he frequents the gay bar with the iron stove and reads gay magazines.

In the Rhineland, he's a printer and a proofreader, and a publication called *Bund Fur Menschenrecht* hires him to write in his free time. Their name translates to "Society for Human Rights." He writes a few articles for them, the translated titles of a couple being, "English Hypocrisy," and "Two Dollars or Fifteen Years in Prison." But eventually, he must return to the United States and he's once again restricted to the closet.

"What could be done about it, I thought," Henry will later write. "Unlike Germany, where the homosexual was partially organized and where sex legislation was uniform for the whole country, the United States was in a condition of chaos and misunderstanding concerning its sex laws, and no one was trying to unravel the tangled and bring relief to the abused..."

In the early 1920s, he moves to Chicago and takes a job at the post office. Henry finds a thriving gay subculture. It's hidden in the bohemian area of the near northside nicknamed Towertown, around the old Chicago water tower, which still stands on Michigan Avenue today. That's where Henry meets Frank Spirk and Al Meininger, and the trio becomes good friends.

He finds a glimpse of liberation again in this subculture, like in Berlin.

"The beginning of all movements is necessarily small," he'll one day write. Henry hears a call for action, to bring *Bund Fur Menschenrecht* to the United States. His boss at the post office helps him write up a Declaration of Purpose for Chicago's own **Society for Human Rights**.

The hardest part is finding the right people to support him.

"The average homosexual, I found, was ignorant concerning himself," Henry will later write in 1962. "Others were fearful. Still others were frantic or depraved. Some were blasé. Many homosexuals told me that their search for forbidden fruit was the real spice of life. With this argument they rejected our aims. We wondered how we could accomplish anything with such resistance from our own people."

But this doesn't slow him down. He has Al, his gay friend in Towertown, and Reverend John T. Graves, a man of color and preacher who supports Henry's ideas. The plan is to get members to join the society, start a series of lectures to educate homosexuals and the public, then start a publication to keep the community in touch with progress. Then, hopefully, they can win legal aide and legislators to eventually become open homosexuals in society. Henry writes the entire first publication, named *Friendship & Freedom* after the German publication. He pays for the printing himself and mails it out to their small number of members. It's completely clean and free of obscenity, but many people didn't want to receive it in their mail, some of them fearing their wives might see it. Though Henry and Al want exclusively homosexuals to join anyway, not bisexuals, or, in many cases at this time, homosexual men married to women, hiding his secret from his wife and children. Henry wants to create discussion, make some noise, educate the authorities that closet the community of Towertown and greater Chicago. They don't want closeted, married men tarnishing the society's reputation.

On December 10, 1924, Henry spends 10 dollars to file an application to issue a nonprofit corporation charter in Illinois. The society forms to "promote the interests of people who by reasons of mental and physical abnormalities are abused and hindered in the legal pursuit of happiness which is guaranteed them by the Declaration of Independence..." The reverend John Graves signs his true name as President, Al signs his name as vice president, and Henry Gerber signed as secretary. The charter was issued on Christmas Eve, 1924. Yes, they sign their real names. No one seems to investigate the group's purpose. Henry intentionally doesn't write about sexuality on the application. The word "homosexual" isn't even widely used yet. But still, this was the earliest documented homosexual emancipation organization in the U.S.

And with no one noticing, they get to work. Printing *Friendship & Freedom*, seeking new members, contacting doctors. Every medical professional refuses to wager their reputation on endorsing the Society or the publication. Only poor homosexuals want to join because they have nothing to lose. And Henry would pay for it all. It's an uphill fight, and at the end of long days of work and looking for members, the three of them each go their separate ways: Henry to his apartment, John to his home, and Al, to his wife and children.

One Sunday morning at about 2 AM, Henry Gerber returns home from a trip downtown. He goes to his room, and he hears a knock at the door. Must be the landlady. He opens the front door and two men shove their way in. One says he's a detective for the city, the other a newspaper reporter, from the Hearst paper, the *Examiner*. The detective looks around and asks Henry, "Where is the boy?" Henry asks, "What boy?" The detective explains he has orders from his captain to bring Henry down to the station. He takes Henry's typewriter, his notary public diploma, bookkeeping accounts, the literature for Henry's Society for Human Rights, and his personal diaries. There is no warrant for arrest. No charges made against Henry. But

they came in the night and took him away. "The police, I supposed had hoped or expected to find us in bed. They could not imagine homosexuals in any other way."

Henry comes to find out that during step one of creating this organization – the search for members – Al's wife discovered his secret. Henry and John didn't know their Society's vice president had a wife, or two children. Like I said, they didn't gay men married to women to join – or bisexuals, which is frustrating. When she discovered the publications and the Society for Human Rights, she phoned a social worker about this organization of 'degenerates.' The social worker contacted the police to report these "strange doings." And the police contacted a reporter.

When morning comes, Henry is allowed to call his boss at the post office, who kindly declares him "absent on leave," so he doesn't get in trouble for the arrest. The police takes him down to the Chicago Avenue Police Court in a car full of strangers. When he walks in, he finds Al Meininger and John Graves, and a young man found in Al's room during the arrest.

None of them know exactly what's going to happen. They wait. Henry chats with a friendly cop, who shows him the morning paper. Henry takes the *Examiner* in his hands and reads the headline: "Strange Sex Cult Exposed"

He reads through the article, which details how Al Meininger "brought his male friends home and had, in full view of his wife and children, practiced 'strange sex acts' with them." The reporter explained the pamphlet he found for this cult, which "urged men to leave their wives and children." It goes on to tell the story as if the preacher and postal worker were arrested along with Al in his bedroom last night. Henry feels betrayed, later referring to Al as "an indignant laundry queen."

Monday, the day after the arrest, Henry goes to court. The detective presents a powder puff as evidence, claiming to have found it in Henry's room. The social worker reads from Henry's diary, a single line, out of context: "I love Karl." The judge shudders. This is their case against Henry Gerber. The state attorney turns to Henry and asks, "Does Society for Human Rights stand for the right of you swine to fuck boys in the ass?"

"To the already prejudiced court we were obviously guilty," Henry will later write, "We were guilty just by being homosexual."

The judge barely speaks to them, closing with a comment that they had violated the Federal law for sending their obscene newsletter through the mail, and they are dismissed to Cook County Jail.

John is separated from Henry and Al while they waited for a second trial set for that Thursday. Al breaks down crying in jail, feeling guilty for getting them into this. A prisoner who takes notice connects Henry with a "shyster" lawyer that takes on criminal cases. The case looks serious, according to the lawyer, but he says he can

get them out on bail for \$200. Henry could have just paid the maximum fine of \$200, but he takes up the lawyer's offer instead.

On Thursday, Henry walks in to court to see two post office inspectors. They're prepared to have the federal commissioner take the case from the obscenity angle, for sending *Friendship & Freedom* through the United States Postal Service. The attorney argues that they should be released, that a powder puff was not evidence. The judge gets angry and threatens the attorney with contempt, ultimately adjourning the trial until Monday. Henry's attorney makes one more request for bail, the judge thinks about it, and sets bail for \$1000 each. So the lawyer agrees to that, and collects his fees.

Henry is broke, but free. The next day, he shows up for work at the post office to find he has been suspended by the postal inspectors. He calls the *Examiner*, the newspaper that reported on his arrest, and they assure him corrections will be made. But of course, nothing happens. Henry has to look into a new lawyer, which again will cost him \$200. This lawyer arranges for Henry's case to be put on the docket of another judge, who is rumored to be queer.

There is a third trial. There's the new judge, arresting detective, prosecuting attorney, the two postal inspectors, and even the first lawyer is there to watch after developing an interest in Henry's case. The new judge is upset by the arrests made without a warrant, calling it "an outrage." He dismisses the case. Al pleads guilty to disorderly conduct and is fined \$10. The judge orders Henry's things to be returned, but he only gets his typewriter back. The postal inspectors never return his diaries.

Henry spent more than his life savings on the case. His lawyer says he can get him his job back, but Henry is out of money to pursue it. Shortly after, he receives a letter in the mail from Washington telling him he is dismissed for "conduct unbecoming a postal worker." Henry will later write, "That definitely meant the end of the Society for Human Rights."

He's bitter that no affluent homosexual came to help him. He'll write, "Most bitches are only interested in sex contacts." Henry wanted to free homosexuals for their own good, and for his. He'll write that he wanted to become the Moses of our community. But by signing his name on the application to take on this role, he had welcomed his society's own undoing. Henry packs up and moves to New York City.

New York City, 1925 is full of speakeasies, subway t-rooms, nightclubs, and Turkish baths. There are masquerade balls of homosexuals, and a lesbian tearoom run by Eve Addams, known as the "Queen of the Third Sex." She has a sign on the door stating, "Men are admitted but not welcome." Henry lives in Greenwich Village on East 11th Street. Meanwhile, across the country in Los Angeles, word of Henry's failed organization is spreading, planting the seeds of a movement.

In the early 1930s, one might thumb through the *Saturday Review of Literature*, as many people do. You might see an ad for a service called *Contacts*. *Contacts* proclaims itself “The Only Correspondence Club for the Mentally Marooned,” and it lists descriptions of people seeking pen pals, heterosexual or otherwise. It doesn’t specify who should write in. Anyone can. And **Manuel boyFrank** does, as this was a modern way of connecting with people. The letters go in, and someone assigns a number to each Contactor and matches them with someone they think would likely be friends. Manuel’s letter goes to the creator of the service, who is listed as “Merlin Wand.” Of course, it’s a pseudonym. Manuel’s letter arrives in the mailbox of Henry Gerber. Henry understands Manuel’s loneliness. And they both knew what this service is really for: Lonely gay men looking to connect, and perhaps sometimes, it’s a cruising tactic. And Henry, anonymously running *Contacts*, doesn’t connect Manuel with someone else, because he feels like making contact with Manuel himself. So he writes him back. Henry is connecting other lonely gay men, though, even if their letters don’t explicitly state their sexuality. They can read between the lines to understand what is truly being said, what this service is truly for. It’s tactics like these that teach homosexuals a secret language of subtext.

For example, here’s some of what Henry Gerber’s profile said:

Contactor #10

NYC Male, 44, proofreader, single. Favored by nature with immunity to female “charms,” but does not “hate” women; considers them necessary in the scheme of nature. Amused by screwy antics of Homo Sapiens. Introvert, enjoying a quiet evening with classical music or non-fiction book. Looking at life, I understand why monkeys protested Darwin’s theory.

A couple paragraphs down, while discussing his opinions on sexual morality, he says, “Birth control makes slow headway, but is considered legal, although natural forms of birth control which do not depend on artificial goods sold in drugstores are still considered grave moral misdemeanors.” Any reader just scanning through his bio might not detect that these “natural forms of birth control” means homosexuals. He goes on to write the usual interests you might find in a personal “about me” page, but put quite simply, he’s looking for someone intelligent who forms opinions about the world on their own without being led by religion or society. And perhaps he finds that in Manuel boyFrank.

Henry and Manuel have no way of knowing for sure what sort of fellow they might be contacting. #10 could have been anyone on the receiving end, essentially catfishing #1344, but Manuel trusts the letters. Henry dedicates his time to the dating service until it flourishes to nearly 1500 members. This is a way of doing the Society for Human Rights over again, safely, anonymously, and getting something real for himself: contact.

Approximately 200 letters are exchanged between these two men. They discuss Henry’s Society for Human Rights, many books Henry is writing, pseudonyms, and

groundwork for organizing homosexuals. Manuel tells Henry stories of growing up part Cherokee in turn-of-the-century Oklahoma Territory, where he became a cowboy the same year Henry was moving to America. He writes to Henry about how, with little opportunity for sexual adventure that existed in cities like Chicago, some cowboys "paired off" and became close. Manuel recalls that this didn't have to be seen between the two men as a homosexual issue or something to feel guilty about. It's later out on these farmlands and prairies that Alfred Kinsey will record the highest occurrences of homosexual behavior compared to the rest of the country. But let's put a pin in that until next week.

Henry connects Manuel with another contactor, #1744, Frank McCourt, a 36-year-old man, and the three of them develop a conversation. Frank collects a huge sexology library of books and photographs in his home, some bought through German magazine mail orders and similar channels. He teaches Manuel about homosexual literature: Whitman, Wilde, Greek ethics, and so on. The trio continues to talk about the future of the homosexual, how to organize safely, with Henry already well experienced in just how quickly an organization could go south.

There is a lot of start and stop on several ideas, not just with these three men. Questionnaires and letters and pamphlets and photos and sex groups, all sorts of correspondence is written, presumably all over the world, in the same way Henry and his friends are trying to bring about gay liberation. There are many disconnected homosexuals seeking the same organization that will never know of each other and are never recorded. Letter chains, clubs disguised as science fiction, chess, or book clubs – all unaware of each other. Just a reason to gather and talk. It's likely that evidence of their existence is intentionally destroyed in order to hide their secret. With many men being shipped off, Frank McCourt presumes that growing a viable movement will have to be a postwar effort.

Nine years of Henry Gerber's dating service called *Contacts* goes by. He becomes tired of being used as a hookup service. He's still in the Army and knows it's risky to continue. So in **1939**, he ends the service. The discussions these three men in particular have foreshadow the discussions that will be held by the Mattachine – discussions held behind closed curtains and locked doors in the living rooms of men using pseudonyms with a group of gay strangers. Manuel writes to Henry about the need for propaganda to make their case. They discuss seeking the support of medical authorities to fight the agreed diagnosis of homosexuality as a psychological disorder, and they talk about contacting the press with educational literature – all things that *will* come in time. Henry pitches the idea of a club created by gay men by listing their past lovers, using real sex to grassroots the movement in order to find members easily. Frank offers up his photo collection to share within the group. Manuel perseveres with ideas for organization, but Henry ultimately still feels uncomfortable forming what he calls a "society of queers." So Frank pulls back and spends his time on his collection and hosting weekend orgies in his home.

On August 5, 1944, Henry writes to Manuel and Frank:

"I want to work from the top-down and you want to work from the bottom-up. I can never agree to that. In other words, you want to enlighten the people as to sex, while I want to enlighten the authorities that persecution of homosexuals is anti-social and unjust and hypocritical as long as the perversions of the heterosexuals are not punished. The only difference is that my plan can bring some results, while your plan can only put you in jail."

The three men write for years, never quite settling on an agreement, another harbinger of the movement to come.

Outside of the letters, Henry continues to work for the cause. He writes to periodicals such as *The Modern Thinker*, defending homosexuality against doctors and psychoanalysts. In one instance of this, his reply to an essay – which is published by the periodical – argues back that if homosexuals *are* disturbed by insecurity, antisocial behavior, or criminal tendencies then the homosexual has been made so by societal oppression.

"After all," Henry writes, refuting the essay, "it is highly futile for Dr. Wolfe to worry about neurotic homosexuals when the world itself, led and ruled by the strong heterosexual 'normal' men is in such chaotic condition, and knows not where to turn."

He also serves as circulation manager for a magazine called *Chanticleer*, writing under the pseudonym Parisex. Henry writes about homosexual literature, his eloquently argued position against monogamy as a construct created by priests and politicians, and he writes about Hitler's murder of homosexuals such as Ernst Röhm and other SA officers. But we'll put a pin in that story for another day as well. Henry has a knack for wise-cracking reviews of what he calls "anti-homosexual propaganda." Here are a couple clips from his book reviews:

"TWILIGHT MEN, by Andre Tellier, deals with a young Frenchman, who comes to America, introduced into homosexual society in New York, becomes a drug addict for no obvious reason, finally kills his father and commits suicide. It is again excellent anti-homosexual propaganda, although the plot is too silly to convince anyone who has known homosexual people at all.

"STRANGE BROTHER, by Blair Niles, is the story of a sensitive young man. The author causes him to go through as many mental sufferings as she can, then puts a pistol in his hand and lets him shoot himself and end the book. Again an ideal anti-homosexual propaganda, but no more logical than the book mentioned before."

Henry, Manuel, and Frank's correspondence begins to fizzle out because of differing opinions. Frank wants a sort of sex-obsessed "Hedonic Church," Henry wants to organize a "secret underground" legal assistance group, and Manuel truly wants to revive *Contacts*. They disagree on everything down the name of their group, which Manuel pushes to be something like "Dorian Society." "Dorian" or "Doric" being a Greek word sometimes used in the gay community to mean "gay" at the time.

Manuel knows the group's name has to be a word that takes on meaning, not just an acronym or official group title. It has to represent the movement...

Across the country in Los Angeles, a young man named Harry Hay crosses a downtown street into Pershing Square, a park of overgrown trees and a common place for homosexual men to cruise for anonymous sex. There are few other options for men to meet each other. Harry locks eyes with a man he later learns is named Champ Simmons. Champ is a little older, and the two began meeting indoors. He's surprised to learn Harry is only 17, and, as Harry will later put it, "jail bait," for two reasons. Champ teaches Harry a great deal about being a homosexual. He tells Harry that he had been brought out by a man involved in a secret society in Chicago, called the Society for Human Rights.

Harry will later recall, "Champ passed it on to me as if it were too dangerous. The failure of the Chicago group should be a direct warning to anybody trying to do anything like that again." But Harry hears the warning as inspiration.

Frank McCourt goes on to create the US Rocket Society, a "science fiction" club where homosexuals can discreetly gather.

The letters between Henry and Manuel are considered by historian Jonathan Katz as "no doubt one of the most valuable collections of original Gay American history manuscripts that will ever be found." Those letters will be preserved by a man who will soon watch the Mattachine closely, gathering pamphlets, clippings, and correspondence all over Los Angeles that would become the foundation of recorded gay history that we have today. But we'll talk more about Jim Kepner in the weeks to come.

These stories of what happened to Henry Gerber after his arrest don't just to explain how difficult it was for a gay person to make contact with another gay person before organizations and explicitly gay bars are established. (Though I did read the book reviews only because I think they're hilarious.) But these stories say so much more about Henry, because with all the drive he had to continue helping his community, he never did anything as bold as the Society for Human Rights ever again. How are the people connecting through his *Contacts* service meeting? Anonymously. Everyday people longing for contact with someone like them, but needing to remain a citizen in good standing with jobs and homes and parents and friends. By putting his name on the line, losing all of his money, his job, and even needing to move to a new city to start fresh, Henry was understandably changed. If you read about Henry, many historians refer to him in his time after arrest as "grumpy" and "crotchety." Earlier I asked "Why anonymity?" Anonymity will become the key piece to putting together action and keeping your job, your savings, your family, your home. Anonymity makes it possible to take action and keep your life – when trying to live your life is the whole point of taking action.

Many other stories follow the legacy of Henry Gerber. He was once mugged in New York City, and Henry tracked down his mugger and pressed charges. His lawyer had the trial postponed five times, thinking Henry wouldn't show up. But the jury convicted for assault in the third degree. And then Henry wrote to Manuel, "I wanted to prove to myself the truth that it does not pay to rob a Doric because he is such... They take it for granted that we are too cowardly to fight for our rights."

Homosexuals of the time are not only beaten, robbed, and blackmailed, but they are still harassed by postal monitors who report them to the police. In February 1942, Henry's living space is searched by the US Army's investigative unit. They find no evidence – not even a powder puff. But he is still forced to spend weeks in the guardhouse until he's put before a Section VIII board in their attempt to kick him out of the Army. Henry will later write, "When I told the president of the board I only practiced mutual masturbation with men over 21, the psychiatrist told me 'You are not a homosexual.' I nearly fell out of my chair! Imagine me fighting all my life for our cause and then be told I was not a homosexual!"

He spends the rest of his time at the US Soldier's Home in Washington, DC, writing his never-published book *Moral Delusions*. Manuel continues to attempt to organize the homosexual in North Hollywood. In a letter that Frank writes to Henry about Manuel, saying he "has so many grand ideas and somehow nothing comes of them." Frank manages the Rocketeers sci-fi club as his health declines. The letters and photographs slow. Gerber no longer wants Frank's photos because he gets "no more joy at looking at pictures than does a squirrel from looking on an advertisement of Planter's Nuts." Frank, of course, will later experience some trouble with postal inspectors, too.

It wasn't long after Henry Gerber left Germany that the National Socialist Party became bent on exterminating homosexuals there. Gays were just one small part of their agenda, of course. Hitler was appointed Chancellor, and the Reichstag German parliament building was burned – allegedly by a communist. Citing the arson at the Reichstag as proof that communists were scheming against the German government, Hitler used the fire as reason to urge the President to have his communist political opponents arrested. Their seats vacated, the Nazi Party rose to power. The Nazi Party enforced the arrests of homosexuals by cracking down on the relatively overlooked Paragraph 175, a law already on the books. *Der Eigene*, the leading gay magazine, stopped publishing. Its editor had tried to challenge Paragraph 175 with Magnus Hirschfeld, whose Institute that inspired Henry Gerber while living in Germany was now raided and torn apart. Four days later in Opera Square, Hirschfeld's books, case reports, charts and files and photographs, all his research was burned publicly. A bust of Magnus Hirschfeld was carried by torchlight and tossed to the flames by Nazi supporters. The crowd cheered. The country and the culture that inspired Henry Gerber to take action in America was dismantled by the Nazi party after they rose to power by using a communist as a scapegoat. This is how the liberation of queer German people was stopped dead in its tracks. Henry

Gerber and his organization in America were also stopped in their tracks. But because Henry heard the call to action, another leading activist will soon hear the call, too.

Magnus Hirschfeld had written years before, in 1927: "All efforts aimed at creating a 'mass organization' of homosexuals have, in the end, failed.... Aside from a few minor cliques, homosexuals are in reality almost totally lacking in feelings of solidarity; in fact, it would be difficult to find another class of mankind which has proved so incapable of organizing to secure its basic legal and human rights."

Henry grows cold to the Movement. He's been hurt too many times, and rarely finds anyone besides Manuel with whom he can agree. As a homosexual, he isn't even able to write in his own diary without having it used against him in court. "I have few delusions left," he writes. "I no longer believe in martyrdom for the sake of others." Henry writes to Manuel in 1944, "Jesus is said to have died for mankind, but look at them now, 2000 years later! Worse than ever. Jesus could have had a good time with his twelve boyfriends in the garden of Gethsemane, instead, the dopey bitch wanted to save others."

Interestingly, the state in which Henry first tried to organize homosexuals, Illinois, will later become the first state to decriminalize sodomy. But that doesn't happen until 1962. When my mentor Bill told me about this law, I was shocked to learn that it was actually illegal to have gay sex. As I previously mentioned, they didn't teach us gay history in school. In comparison, having human rights today feels like a privilege. To put in perspective how great it can be to live a gay life now, and to understand the problems that we still struggle with, it's important for queer people to have mentors like Bill. For instance, when I was in high school, before I knew Bill, after my friend and I saw *Brokeback Mountain* and her family found out, her grandpa confronted me while he and I were surrounded by the men of their family in his driveway. He was asking me why we would see such a movie. He said, "Cowboys didn't do that shit." I couldn't find the words to defend myself. When Bill told me about Henry Gerber, I read the stories that Manuel wrote to Henry about growing up in early 20th century Oklahoma Territory. I felt empowered by the education. Not only were Manuel's true stories 50 years older than the story in *Brokeback*, but it was finally confirmation that cowboys did do that shit.

So why don't we know more about these pieces of our history? What happened between Mattachine and the Stonewall Riots in 1969, or between Stonewall and now? Historian John D'Emilio writes that our ignorance of this time in queer history is an example of queer oppression. It means that gay oppression stayed intact for decades. The silence and invisibility forced upon us spread back into our history. Queer history isn't even taught in school, except for schools in California that started last year. These stories are not known because they have not been often told. That same historian stresses that queer people have been deprived of their gay ancestors.

We have no sense of our roots, as we're raised in heterosexual families, but Henry Gerber is our family.

Knowledge of history is what strengthens us today.

The day after Donald Trump was elected, I messaged Bill distraught about what to do, how vulnerable our human rights suddenly felt, especially after I had been reading about what the Mattachine had been through. Bill replied simply, "The study of history is never wasted. It's preparation for the work ahead."

This is a serialized story in gay history. For our ancestors before us, and the queer descendants after us, I hope we can learn about our history and carry on the fight. And although Henry Gerber took a step back from the gay liberation movement, this won't quite be the last we'll hear from him...

Because, as I mentioned, Henry's story quietly spread across the country to Los Angeles, where a young man named Harry Hay hears about his history from a stranger in a park. And nearly 20 years after meeting that man in the park, in the Los Angeles neighborhood of Silverlake, 38-year-old Harry Hay arrives home from his manufacturing job to his wife and two daughters. He opens the *New York Times* to find that the State Department is weeding out homosexuals from government work. He knows that soon factories contracted by the government, like the one he works in, will start to weed out homosexuals, too. And with the story of Henry Gerber remaining clear in his mind, Harry Hay hears *The Call*... next week on *Mattachine*.

A NOTE TO TEACHERS:

I mention during this episode that 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. 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 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.