

For Gay History Month: Celebrating a rich and triumphant past

Part 2 in a series of 2

by Jason Villemez

Motivated by the lack of gay and lesbian history in textbooks, in 1994 Missouri high school teacher Rodney Wilson and other leaders and educators started a campaign to raise awareness in the general public about the history of the LGBT community. Since then, many prominent groups and state and city governments have endorsed October as Gay and Lesbian History Month to celebrate and honor those who fought for all the rights and privileges we enjoy today.

In this issue we'll introduce you to some of the historic individuals who paved the way.

Martina Navratilova

The world's sports landscape has seen few openly gay or lesbian athletes. Martina Navratilova is among this minority. Her road to coming out began in 1981 when she disclosed her then-ongoing relationship with author Rita Mae Brown to a reporter. For the next 10 years, though, tennis would play the greater role in Martina's life, with her sexuality taking a backseat.



A tennis phenom in her native Czechoslovakia, Martina defected to the U.S. in 1975. She proudly took the risk of listing herself as bisexual on her application for asylum. After her defection, she flourished into one of the most successful tennis stars in history.

Her championship victories include nine Wimbledon titles, four U.S. Open titles, three Australian Open titles, two French Open singles titles and 41 Grand Slam doubles titles. She holds the world record of 167 singles titles for her career.

Although her success made her a celebrity, the 49-year-old remained somewhat secretive about her private life to the press — portraying herself as bisexual throughout the 1980s and in her 1985 autobiography, "Martina."

In 1991, her breakup with partner Judy Nelson attracted a great deal of media attention, virtually forcing Navratilova completely out of the closet. This turn of events worked in the LGBT community's favor; she fully embraced her sexuality and began to publicly support LGBT causes.

One such cause is the Rainbow Card, which she helped create with Visa in 1993 to raise money for LGBT non-profit groups. The card has raised over \$2 million since its inception.

Navratilova retired from major competition in 1995 then made a successful comeback from 2003 to 2006, which culminated in win-

ning the 2006 U.S. Open Championship in mixed doubles.

Harry Hay

Born in 1912, Harry Hay was the precursor to the radical activists who proliferated within the LGBT rights movement in the 1960s.

He founded the Mattachine Society in 1950 to educate and inform the then-underground gay population, encouraging community consciousness and support.

The group's first meeting was held in November with five people participating, including Hay and his then-lover, fashion designer Rudi Gernreich.

When one of Hay's original members was arrested on grounds of soliciting a police officer for sex, Hay and the society came to his defense, establishing the Citizens' Committee to Outlaw Entrapment. The case was eventually dropped after all but one juror voted for acquittal.

News of the case swelled Mattachine membership (and furthered anti-gay resistance to the group). In 1953, the McCarthy era, new members demanded a change in ideology away from Hay's left-wing politics. He left his creation and drifted around in the latter 1950s, often excluded from organizations because of his outlandish opinions.

Ten years after his break from Mattachine, Hay was introduced to his future life partner, John Burnside. The two joined the civil rights struggle. Hay — now leading the Gay Liberation Front in Southern California — and Burnside were staples on the picket lines. In mid-1970, the two left California for New Mexico, where Hay studied Native American culture.

Hay later formed the Radical Faeries, a group that injected spirituality into the gay rights struggle and encouraged gay men to find their inner self. He continued with the Faeries until developing lung cancer in 1999. His adoring partner brought him to San Francisco, where he died in 2002. Today Hay is recognized as one of the architects of the modern LGBT rights movement.

Larry Kramer

A talented screenwriter, playwright and staunch AIDS activist, Larry Kramer has made contributions to the fight against AIDS that transcend mere words on paper. Born in 1935, he was already an established writer when the first infections appeared in America.

His screenplay adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's "Women in Love" received an Academy Award nomination in 1970, and his 1978 novel "Faggots" became a best-seller,



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