

# 40 Year Dedicated Activist Dorr Legg Dies at 89

In *ONE-ILGA Bulletin*, No. 1 (Spring, 1995).

As Administrative Director of ONE, Inc. from its start in 1952, W. Dorr Legg was a giant of the Gay and Lesbian movement. No one can equal his history of continuous and active involvement from his founding of the multi-ethnic group The Knights of the Clock in 1950 to his years of devotion to ONE until his death on July 27, 1994 at age 89. At his memorial USC Professor Walter Williams observed that Dorr had left peacefully having just published his book *Homophile Studies In Theory and Practice* which represented a major part of his life's work.

Williams first met Legg in 1979 while researching for his book *The Spirit and The Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*. To assist him, Dorr dug up an article published in *ONE Magazine* twenty years earlier on the subject. Williams says it remains a classic in the field today.

Dorr's advice to younger people was to never give in to homophobia. He was noted for being a fighter with a sharp tongue. Although some were offended by Dorr's style and withdrew, Williams notes how he and others developed great admiration. "In a world where so many people will say nice things to your face, and then viciously attack you behind your back, Dorr was a refreshing change," said Williams. "He did just the opposite. And that applied to no one more so than his devoted partner John Nojima." He loved Johnny devotedly, and was always concerned about Johnny's overworking himself. Johnny, on the other hand, rendered incredible care to Dorr's personal needs and support of his life's work especially in the zeal of videotaping Dorr's many lectures.

Dorr was an active member of the Mattachine Society, the pioneering homosexual rights organization founded in 1950 by Harry Hay and others. Then, in 1952 Dorr was part of a small group from within Mattachine to publish *ONE magazine*, America's first magazine to advocate a pro homosexual stance. In 1953 it was available by subscription and appeared on news-stands across the country. Then in October of '54 it was confiscated by the U.S. Post Office declaring it obscene. Obviously they didn't know about Dorr's determination to fight back. Against all odds ONE sued the Post Office taking the case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1958 they won a landmark decision guaranteeing the freedom of Gay and Lesbian publications to be distributed through the mails.

This happened long before the ACLU would touch a court case relating to homosexuality. The ONE victory was the forerunner of Gay and legal groups such as the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund. ONE also had the initial goal of establishing a scholarly library on homosexuality. Prior to that time only strident homophobic literature was available in heterosexual run libraries. Dorr Legg and ONE changed all that in bringing together information from worldwide sources, especially in collecting the remnants of data left over from the Nazi destruction of Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin. In addition to its own steady growth, ONE library inspired the start of several other Gay and Lesbian collections.

In 1954 Mattachine and ONE members including Dorr arranged for a number of Gay men to participate as subjects in a path breaking study on the mental health of Gay men. It was conducted by UCLA Professor Evelyn Hooker and has been cited many times by other researchers following in her footsteps.

After Mattachine broke apart Dorr Legg led ONE into other innovative programs. He established both a peer counseling service and a lawyer referral service for those who were

entrapped by police vice squads. Later these types of services were taken over by H.E.L.P. and others including the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center.

Under Dorr's leadership ONE established the first Gay travel service organizing guided tours to many countries around the world. Today his ideas have been expanded on by many others including Gay cruises on Gay owned tour ships.

Beginning in 1956 ONE offered classes in Homophile Studies which continue to the present day. The papers, audio and videotapes from these study programs represent some of the more valued materials in ONE's library. Following ONE's lead, countless other organizations and universities now conduct Gay and Lesbian Studies programs.

In 1958 ONE began publishing ONE Institute Quarterly, the first scholarly journal devoted to homosexuality. That pioneering effort was later taken up by Haworth Press, which publishes The Journal of Homosexuality.

In 1981 ONE began offering graduate level seminars, taught by many internationally famous scholars. None conducted more classes, however, than Dorr Legg himself. Today leading research programs at Harvard, Yale, the University of Chicago and others are offering such programs. Some have utilized Dorr Legg's original syllabus as inspiration.

In summing up his accomplishments Dr. Williams said "Dorr Legg may not have achieved all he set out to do, but he got the movement started in many directions, inspiring others to continue on with the work and showing us all it could be done."

Even prior to its current merger with the IGLA, the ONE library of books, periodicals and archival files was one of the largest research collections on homosexuality anywhere in the world. As a writer himself, Dorr Legg has made a significant impact on Gay study. In addition to his many essays in *ONE Magazine* and *ONE Quarterly*, he published several books including *Homosexuals Today* (1956): *A Manual for Peer Counseling of Homosexuals*; his co-edited *Bibliographies of Homosexuality* and his most recent *Homophile Studies in Theory and Practice*.

Dorr Legg was a sage advisor to researchers and scholars from around the globe. They all credit him with having planted ideas in their brains. His intellectual legacy will live on, far beyond his years.