**Herb Selwyn**

Out of all the noteworthy LGBT allies and pioneers who have made up gay history over the years, one who stands out is without a doubt, Herb Selwyn. Mr Selwyn was a criminal defence lawyer based in California, USA.

Perhaps the most notable fact about Herb is that he was straight. Today we have no shortage of straight allies across all industries – music, sport, politics, and of course, in the legal world. Whilst back in the 50s there were well known allies in the entertainment industry (Judy Garland, for example), to have a gay ally in the *legal* *sector* was unheard of. In addition, in stark contrast to today, there were very few, if any, openly gay lawyers.

Herb’s support of gay people began during his service in WW2, where he served in the Army Air Corps. Following this, Herb made his mark in gay history through his involvement in numerous initiatives which played a large role in establishing gay rights.

Herb’s involvement with the Mattachine society is particularly noteworthy. Founded in 1950 in Los Angeles, the Mattachine society was one of the earliest gay rights organisations in the United States; the aim being to advocate for equal civil rights for gay people. Herb not only became a regular speaker at the Mattachine’s events, but also used his influence as a lawyer to further his cause. For example, he prepared and distributed a leaflet entitled ‘Know your Legal Rights’, the purpose of which was to inform gay that they were under no obligation to speak to the police and answer questions about their (at the time, illegal) activities.

Herb’s legal influence extended beyond the Mattachine society. He also acted as counsel for the Amercian Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Through his involvement with the ACLU, Herb not only helped develop its policy on LGBTQ rights, he played a large role in helping the ACLU secure a permit for LA’s very first gay pride parade, which took place in June 1970 on Hollywood Boulevard.

In addition to the above, Herb set about defending men who were caught kissing other men, and relied on the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution (which deals with equal protection under the law) to try and establish equal rights for gay people. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court refused to hear the case. Nevertheless, however, Herb’s attempt to bring this matter to trial was, at the time, unprecedented.

Herb Selwyn was without a doubt, a pioneer of LGBTQ rights and an unlikely gay ally. Without his influence, there is a strong chance that we may not have as many of the LGBTQ rights which we enjoy and take for granted today.

Will Brownlee

