

## Excerpt from Oral History Interview with W. Dorr Legg

W. Dorr Legg was interviewed by Vern L. Bullough in 1993. He trained as a landscape architect at the University of Michigan. Legg moved to Los Angeles in 1949 with his partner Merton Bird and became one of the founders of the gay rights movement. In this clip he talks about his membership in the Mattachine Society and his co-founders of the Knights of the Clock and ONE, Inc.

### Transcript:

DL: Now, I think I should mention, because I don't want anybody to get the idea that I'm claiming to be any Columbus discovering anything. I think I need to say a little bit about the people who were formative. Dale Jennings you know, quite a bit about him. Dale Jennings was one of the incorporators of the Mattachine.

VLB: He was the one that brought the court case about the court case with the [inaudible].

DL: Exactly, but I can't swear to it. But my impression was that by the time One came over the horizon he was beginning to get out of sorts with Mattachine people, particularly, Harry. Martin Block was a typical New York literati quasi-political, the cocktail party sort of conversations, which I'd become so bored with in New York. But Martin was very bright. And what and the meeting of incorporating, of incorporation was held in Martin's studio, bookshop. And there were seven of us. Seven incorporators. Now a Chuck Rowland, did you ever of him?

VLB: I don't think so.

DL: Yeah. Well, Chuck Rowland was a very different type of person. Chuck Rowland was a— really a typical, charismatic, organizing kind of person who drew people into him and could bring large groups together and some— very impressive, physically. And also very intelligent, but also one of the Mattachine Incorporators. Now, whether he was falling off the bandwagon at that time, or not, I don't know. See, the Mattachine—and that story has never been told, really—was having it be going so fast. It has many strings and with— already— went away. And so where he stood in that I don't know. But I do know that even up to when he died last year, he still was bemoaning the demise of leftist politics because [inaudible] just before he died. Don Slater you've met. [inaudible] Don Slater and I never had a fight as far as I know. We [inaudible] constantly, because he was a very quick thinker. He held a BA from SC [University of Southern California] in English Literature. Well read, he had done library work. And his home background however... Pasadena, I don't know just what his father did... But his father was a total agnostic atheist. The mother was a woman. And if you could imagine this whole situation, Don was living with these facts and Don was a twin. Now, I can't swear on it because I don't really recall whether he was an identical twin or not. But the other one sure looked like him. But the other one was totally heterosexual, married and had several children, and was a very nice guy. And then Don pulled his stunt, or whatever his name was and then came and conferred with us about what we could do to solve that. Bailey—

VLB: Do you remember I was in the middle of that.

DL: Yeah.

VLB: 'Cause we were meeting on the ACLU, we're supposed to meet with you. And Don called and said to go to his place 'cause the headquarters had moved. And then I called you and you said no. And so we met downtown.

DL: Bailey Whitaker was a charming Black fellow, right but of indeterminate age and you look back even then, you had no hair whatever— absolutely bald head. But he was working his way through college. Under desperately poor circumstances. We had several of these organizational meetings at his house. Out in El Sereno in a little cottage. As he went to school, all day and studied all night, and got up at dawn. I never saw anybody sacrifice so for an education. And a little bit later down the line, we learned that he had moved to Berkeley. Well up there he got his PhD, and became a highly successful therapist, for children with speech problems. Which is quite remarkable, I think.

And then, we were still this is a little over 10 years, had to be. We were still over there on Venice. And he called and wanted to know about our foundation, the legal situation and so on. To make a long story short, he soon after he died of cancer and left us twenty thousand dollars. Which was, showed you the attachment. Tony [Reyes], who I have mentioned, who was just Catholic, beautiful and that was all. Now Bird [Merton] was a, the founder of the Knights of the Clock was an enigmatic person if I ever saw one. Nice looking, black, personable businessman type, an accountant, but [inaudible] closed-mouth about himself. And other than the Knights or One he had only one other interest in the world, apparently, and that was getting organizations off the ground. The minute they sign you'd never see him again. He was through. He was he was president of the Knights for its first year. I was secretary treasurer. [inaudible]. He came to the meetings conducted them very businesslike. And then just didn't come. So here he came offered us a charter, we said, thank you. I don't even recall that he came back a lot then. Well in there, it says that, that the Knights—and it gives the figures for the number of meetings over the years. However, in 1966, that's quite a while afterwards. Ten years after this book came out, we had a video location shoot. And he was there we had organizations all together. And I spoke to him and I said, "[inaudible] I'm glad to see you. Would you say a little bit about the Knights?" He didn't say a single word, but when the time came [inaudible]. That's the last I ever saw of him. So. Then, in the 10th week Geraldine Jackson, showed up, who didn't become a corporation member. She was another school teacher scared to death for her job who's about three or four [inaudible]. But she was an active person in many ways. And she personally with her own muscle chopped the cutter which strings the pages of the first issue.