

# The Legacy Wall: Our Illinois Connection

## **JANE ADDAMS**

Lesbian U.S. Social Justice Pioneer and Author  
**(1860-1935)**

**2012 Legacy Walk Inductee**

In 1889 she co-founded Hull House in Chicago, one of the first settlement houses in the United States. A leading feminist and suffragette, she called attention to poverty, child labor, public health reform, race relations, adverse working conditions, and prostitution among poor urban women. Addams, a life-long pacifist, was elected president of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in 1915. In 1920 she was instrumental in establishing the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). In recognition of a lifetime dedicated to advancing social justice, Jane Addams was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. The love of her life, Mary Rozet Smith, arrived at Hull House in 1889 and supported Addams life and work through a relationship that endured more than 40 years.

## **ALBERT D. J. CASHIER**

Transgender Civil War Soldier  
**(1843 - 1915)**

**Legacy Project Nominee**

Jennie Rodgers was born in Ireland and immigrated to the U.S. alone as a teenager. Upon arriving she adopted the male persona Albert Cashier. In 1862 the 5'-3" 19 year old Belvidere man enlisted in the 95<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry, Company G. Cashier fought in approximately 40 battles during The Civil War including Nashville, Vicksburg, and the Red River Campaign. After the war he worked as a farmhand, a janitor, a cemetery worker, and a lamplighter, eventually settling in 1869 in Saunemin, Illinois. There Cashier's biological gender was discovered by his employers but they kept his secret. In 1914, with his mental health in decline, Cashier was sent to the Watertown State Hospital for the Insane where he was forced to identify as a woman and wear a dress. He died in 1915 and was buried in Saunemin wearing his Union uniform.

## **PATRICK DENNIS**

Bisexual U.S. Author  
**(1921 – 1976)**

**Legacy Project Nominee**

Born Edward Everett Tanner III in Evanston, IL, he was nicknamed Pat and eventually preferred it to Edward. After service as an ambulance driver during World War II, Dennis returned to the U.S. and married socialite Louise Stickney with whom he had two children. He wrote two novels under the pseudonym "Virginia Rowans" before exploding onto the literary scene with *Auntie Mame: an Irreverent Escapade in 1955*. The comic masterpiece spent 112 weeks on the bestseller list, prompting Dennis to be declared "the first American writer to popularize High Camp." The book spawned a sequel as well as reincarnations on stage, film, and as a musical. Throughout his life, Dennis struggled with his bisexuality and Midwestern Presbyterian background. Eventually he became a fixture in the Greenwich Village gay scene where he squandered millions in royalties with lavish living.

## **RUTH ELLIS**

Senior Lesbian Activist  
**(1899 – 2000)**

**2013 Legacy Walk Inductee**

Ruth Ellis was born in Springfield, Illinois, and her life spanned moments of great turmoil and upheaval from the Springfield Riot of 1908 to the Detroit Riots of 1967. She came out as a lesbian at the age of 16 and received a high school diploma at a time when fewer than seven percent of African Americans graduated from secondary school. In 1936 she met her partner of 34 years, Ceciline "Babe" Franklin, with whom she

moved to Detroit, Michigan in 1937. Ellis became the first African American woman to own an off-set printing business in that city. The couple turned the home they shared into the “Gay Spot,” a place where young gays and lesbians who were denied access to both white gay clubs and black straight clubs could congregate. Ellis became a fierce advocate for African Americans, senior citizens, and the gay and lesbian communities. The Ruth Ellis Center, founded in 1999, continues to provide shelter and aid for LGBTQ youth in Detroit.

**HENRY GERBER**

*Early U.S. LGBT Rights Pioneer*  
**(1892 – 1972)**

**Legacy Project Nominee**

Gerber founded the Society for Human Rights in Chicago in 1924. Despite its brief existence and small size, the Society for Human Rights is recognized as the first homosexual rights organization in the United States – a precursor to the modern gay liberation movement. Gerber, whose name graces LGBT Chicago’s Gerber/Hart Library and Archives, is widely regarded as a visionary. His home has been declared National Historic Site.

**BARBARA GITTINGS**

*Pioneering Lesbian Activist*  
**(1932 – 2007)**

**2012 Legacy Walk Inductee**

In high school and Northwestern University, Gittings was confronted with rumors that she was a lesbian. Gittings could accept the label but questioned the prevailing view that homosexuality was “sick,” “sinful,” and “perverted.” In 1956 she joined the Daughters of Bilitis, the first female homophile group in the U.S. dedicated to improving the lives of lesbians. She marched in the first gay picket lines in 1965 outside the White House, the Pentagon, and Independence Hall, carrying a sign reading “Sexual Preference is Irrelevant to Federal Employment.” From 1970 to 1973 Gittings helped successfully lobby the American Psychiatric Association (APA) to remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. She also successfully crusaded to promote gay literature and eliminate discrimination in the nation’s libraries. The American Library Association presented her with lifetime honorary membership in 2003.

**LORRAINE HANSBERRY**

*Lesbian U.S. Feminist, Activist and Author*  
**(1930 – 1965)**

**2013 Legacy Walk Inductee**

Born the daughter of a middle class Chicago businessman, her play, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) was the first play written by an African American to be produced on Broadway. It would go on to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award – an honor which Hansberry was both the first African American – and the youngest person – to receive. The play, which dealt in human terms with the serious and comic problems of a black family in modern America, was a major stimulus to the 1960s African-American Theater movement. A civil rights activist her entire life, Hansberry began identifying herself as a feminist and lesbian in the 1950s. She applauded the growing West Coast homophile movement and was one of the first members of the New York chapter of the groundbreaking lesbian organization, the Daughters of Bilitis. She died from cancer in 1965 at the age of 34. Her ex-husband assembled posthumous collections of her unfinished works, letters, and diary entries most notably *To Be Young Gifted and Black* (1969).

**PEARL M. HART**

*Lesbian U.S. Legal and Social Justice Advocate*  
**(1890 – 1975)**

**Legacy Project Nominee**

Hart moved to Chicago with her family as a child. She attended John Marshall Law School and became a civil rights champion dedicated to defending the oppressed especially women, children, homosexuals, and

immigrants. A staunch defender of gay rights, Hart fought for anti-entrapment laws and the right to privacy. She appeared on behalf of many victims of entrapment and police harassment, often waiving or minimizing her fee. In addition to gay rights, Hart was also a staunch defender of immigrant rights.

**ALBERTA HUNTER**

**Legacy Project Nominee**

Lesbian African American Blues Singer  
(1895 – 1984)

Hunter fled poverty in Memphis to become a blues singer in Chicago. When she had saved enough money, she moved her mother north and cared for her the rest of her life. Though married briefly, Hunter never consummated the union, saying she could not sleep with a man with her mother so close. In truth, she was a lesbian, and her real love was Lottie Taylor, her partner of many years. Though she had great success at Chicago venues such as the famed Deluxe Café and Dreamland Café, Hunter headed to New York in 1921 to begin a recording career. She wrote much of her own material, including the famous “Down Hearted Blues” and became the first African-American singer to be backed by a white band. She appeared as Queenie in the London production of “Show Boat” and replaced Josephine Baker at the Casino de Paris.

**TONY JACKSON**

**Legacy Project Nominee**

Gay African American Pianist and Composer  
(1876 – 1921)

Ragtime legend Tony Jackson was born into poverty in New Orleans. By 15 he was considered one of the best musicians in town. Seeking greater freedom as an openly gay black man, he went to Chicago in 1912, playing venues like the De Luxe and Pekin cafés. He could sing ballads, blues, and even opera from soprano to baritone. Some well-known Tin Pan Alley pop tunes of the era were actually written by Jackson. His songs include “Michigan Water Blues” and “The Naked Dance.” One of the few songs published under his name was “Pretty Baby,” which was written for his gay lover. Jackson’s musical virtuosity was never recorded, but his influence can be heard in the recordings of the younger musicians he inspired such as Jelly Roll Morton, Clarence Williams, and Steve Lewis.

**FRANCES KELLOR**

**Legacy Project Nominee**

Lesbian U.S. Social Reformer  
(1873 – 1952)

Kellor received her law degree from Cornell in 1897 and then attended the University of Chicago to study criminal sociology. As part of her studies in Chicago, Kellor began field work on southern prison institutions and their treatment of prisoners, particularly black prisoners. The subsequent book, *Experimental Sociology* (1901), helped launch the modern concept that environmental factors such as disadvantaged childhoods and poor education play a determining role in criminal behavior and should thus be considered important in the of reform social policy. Kellor was instrumental in organizing the National League for the Protection of Colored Women, which worked to find jobs and housing for African American women migrating north. She also was instrumental in shaping Theodore Roosevelt’s campaign agenda. In 1926 she launched the American Arbitration Association and wrote *Arbitration in the New Industrial Society* (1934).

**GREER LANKTON**

**Legacy Project Nominee**

Transgender U.S. Artist  
(1958 - 1996)

Born to a Presbyterian minister, Greg Lankton was fascinated by dolls. He began to fashion his own from a variety of non-traditional materials including flowers and pipe cleaners. Years of being teased and physically

harassed for being a “sissy boy” led him to seek sex-reassignment surgery at the age of 21. Greer Lankton headed to New York after completing her studies at the Art Institute of Chicago. Gender and sexuality were recurring themes in her doll art, and her figures captured a distressing glamour that was both grim and seductive. Lankton’s final exhibit, “It’s All About Me, Not You,” has since become a permanent installation at Andy Warhol’s Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh. After her 1987 marriage to artist Paul Monroe collapsed, Lankton struggled for years with addiction and anorexia.

**J.C. LEYENDECKER**  
Gay German Illustrator  
**(1874 - 1951)**

**Legacy Project Nominee**

Leyendecker emigrated from Germany to Chicago at the age of 8. He attended the Art Institute of Chicago. His close association with *Colliers* magazine (48 covers) and the *Saturday Evening Post* (322 covers) helped establish the modern magazine cover as an art form. Leyendecker illustrated the wholesome Americans on the Kellogg’s Corn Flakes box as well as recruitment posters, war bonds, and other home front efforts during World War II. He also created the popular images most people associate with Santa Claus and the New Year’s Baby.

**FRANCES PERKINS**  
U.S. Secretary of Labor  
**(1880 – 1965)**

**Legacy Project Nominee**

Perkins embraced the cause of women’s suffrage and the challenges facing working people. While teaching at Lake Forest Academy near Chicago, her passion for social justice led to volunteer work at Hull House in one of the city’s poorest neighborhoods. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) tapped Perkins to be U.S. Secretary of Labor, the first woman to hold a Cabinet position. Perkins became the architect of FDR’s “New Deal.” She is credited with passage of the Social Security Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established unemployment benefits, pensions, welfare, workplace safety regulations, child labor laws, the first minimum wage, overtime restrictions, and the standard forty-hour work week. Perkins was romantically involved with railroad heiress Mary Harriman Rumsey, who chaired FDR’s Consumer Advisory Board. Because of the closeted nature of their relationship, Perkins was forced to grieve in silence over Rumsey’s untimely death in 1934.

**GRANT WOOD**  
Iconic U.S. Artist  
**(1891 – 1942)**

**Legacy Project Nominee**

Determined to become an artist since placing third in a national crayon-drawing contest at age 14, Grant Wood’s art education included evening classes at the Art Institute of Chicago. When “American Gothic” (1930) was exhibited there, he became a national figure in the art world. A touchstone of American culture, the painting has since become one of the world’s most popular and beloved (as well as one of the most satirized) works of art in history. Two weeks after the initial unveiling of the painting, a man threatened to reveal that Wood was a homosexual. In an attempt to conceal his sexuality, Wood married and quickly divorced an older woman. From then on he lived in constant fear of being outed.