

Robert S. Basker



Born September 30, 1918 in New York City, Robert S. Basker was a resident of Chicago for 14 years, between 1952 and 1966. During the early 1960s, he organized Mattachine Midwest, the first modern Midwestern gay organization, years before Stonewall, encouraging pride and self-esteem in our community. This was the pioneering first in Chicago [other than Henry Gerber's short lived 1920s' group], paving the way for dozens of subsequent gay committees, clubs, and coalitions.

Basker established the Mattachine Midwest telephone hotline for social service [e.g., legal, medical, psychological and pastoral counseling, and housing referrals] and other community needs of gays and lesbians. And, in what he calls the famous "harvest of the fruits" case, centering on a police roundup at Clark and Diversey, Basker and Mattachine Midwest colleagues put a stop to arbitrary police mass swoops and arrests of people on the street who were perceived to be gay.

He traveled the length and width of Illinois in public forums, speaking on the matter of freedom of residence in behalf primarily of African Americans, and he took a leading role in bringing racially integrated housing to Skokie, Illinois.

Basker maintained contact with other lesbian and gay organizations around the country for mutual support and the exchange of ideas — including participation in the 1965 New York Conference of the East Coast Homophile Organizations, at which plans were made for convening the National [later North American] Conference of Homophile Organizations.

After leaving Chicago, Basker moved to Miami, Florida, where he helped to organize that city's first Metropolitan Community Church, the Miami Gay Activist Alliance, and Gay Community Seniors of South Florida. In 1976, he convened 11 gay and lesbian groups to create the Dade County Coalition for the Humanistic Rights of Gays; he lobbied for and got passed an ordinance forbidding discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Basker later moved to San Francisco where he continued as an activist in gay organizations, as well as those involved in women's rights, African American issues, peace, and civil liberties until his death in 2001.

[This biographical sketch was taken from the Facebook page of the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame.]