

# The Philanthropic Activism of Reed Erickson

Moving Trans History Forward Conference

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Yearbook photo from  
Louisiana State University,  
1946

# Who is Reed Erickson? (1917-1992)

Founded Erickson  
Educational  
Foundation in 1964,  
funded countless  
initiatives to support  
gender diverse  
individuals and trans  
healthcare

Approximate wealth:  
\$40 million dollars



# An Introduction and Guiding Question:

I visited UVIC in July 2022 on a Visiting Faculty Fellowship. This opportunity allowed for a deep dive into Reed Erickson's papers.

The guiding question informing my work continues to be:

**Why do more people not know more about Reed Erickson?**

Given the widespread impact of his work, he should be a household name.

Is this a case of transmasculine historical invisibility?



## **Philanthropy in Context: LGBTQ Issues in 20th Century**

After a 2023 Fellowship at the Rockefeller Center Archives, I got a sense of how major foundations (Ford, Rockefeller) were operating in relationship to queer causes in the late 20th Century.

An understanding of how these two worlds collided - private, traditional large-scale philanthropy and grassroots queer activism - is crucial to LGBTQ activist history then and now, and its future today.

## Where do we even start with the EEF?

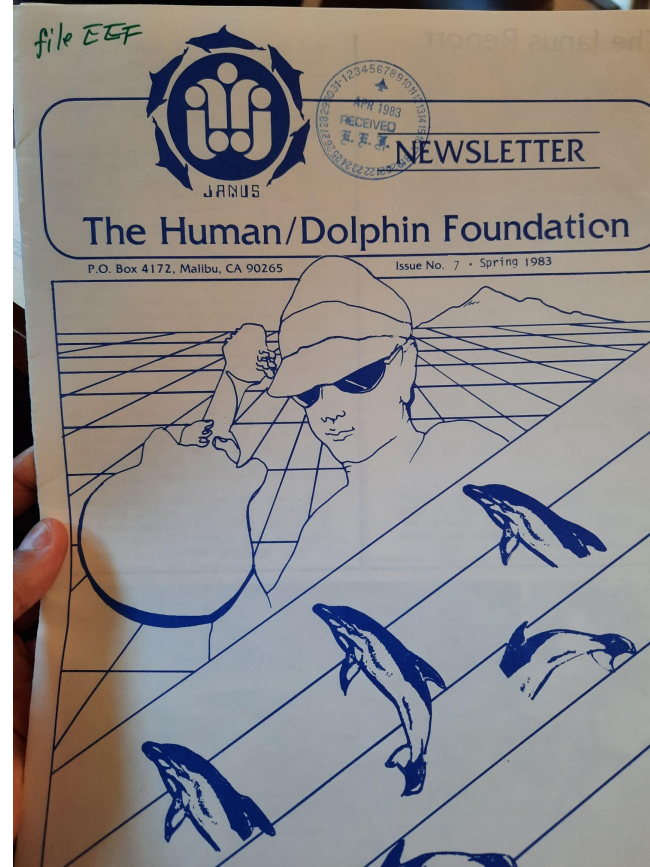
Extremely transformative!

EEF Newsletter distributed to almost 4,000 individuals, as well as supportive pamphlets about trans people

“During the years 1964–1970 and 1972–1975 alone, the EEF donated approximately US \$250,000 to the support of projects about transsexualism. In particular, the Harry Benjamin Foundation received over US \$60,000 during 1964–1968 and the Johns Hopkins Gender Identity Clinic received approximately US \$72,000 during the formative years of 1967–1973. [\[1\]](#)”

“The EEF also organized and funded the first series of international conferences on gender dysphoria held in London in 1969, in Copenhagen in 1971, in Dubrovnik in 1973, and in Stanford in 1975. The conferences set the groundwork for the formation of the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association in San Diego in 1977. “

In 1976 EEF funded the first hardback publication of the three-volume “Course in Miracles,” a spiritually inspired study utilized in the field of reorienting human perception, thought and relationships. (EEF Project No. 2500).” (Spring 1983, p. 5)



Millbank Estate purchased for ONE, Inc., later embroiled in legal dispute...

# Major Estate Given For One Campus

by Paul Nash

LOS ANGELES CITY EDITOR

**LOS ANGELES**—Gay men and women have been given a gift that is perhaps the largest and most important building the community has ever had in the United States.

The Erickson Foundation has purchased three and one-half acres of property containing three buildings that once belonged to the Millbank and Morgan families at 3340 Country Club Drive.

On May 1, Reed Erickson, who established the foundation that bears his name, will formally present the keys and deed to ONE, Inc. and the ONE Institute Graduate School of Homophile Studies.

The Erickson Foundation, which has offices throughout the world and has funded medical and psychological research and conventions worldwide, has been a supporter of ONE, Inc. since 1964.

It is expected that the Foundation will also have headquarters on the property, according to Dorr Legg, a ONE founder.

Announcement of the gift was

made during ONE's annual meeting, its 31st, in January. Escrow on the property closed early this month and a property variance is being sought to operate the graduate school on the land.

A slide presentation and pictures of the inside and outside of the buildings was presented to the public during ONE's February meeting.

There is a main building with four floors that is expected to house the graduate school and Blance M. Baker Memorial Library, Legg said.

What is to be done with the additional buildings will be a decision the Board of Trustees will make in the near future, Legg added.

There is also a four-car garage and parking spaces for 30 cars. The buildings are surrounded by formal gardens, terraces, arbors and a variety of trees.

The main structure was built in 1914 and is a replica of the

Tournament of Roses House in Pasadena.

The move from ONE's current address on Venice Boulevard, where the corporation has been for 21 years, has already begun under the supervision of David Moore, ONE librarian and graduate school acting dean of students. More than 7,000 books, as well as periodicals and magazines that ONE has been accumulating during its 31 years of existence, must be moved.

The formal opening on May Day, the traditional Spring festival celebrated by dancing and crowning of a May queen, is expected to bring out a star-studded cast of Los Angeles citizens, Legg said.

Rev. Dwain Houser, graduate school chancellor, said seven students are currently working on master's and doctor's degrees. He expressed the desire that one of the first official functions at the new address be a graduation.

How can we contextualize the work of the EEF in the world of philanthropy?

Erickson Educational Foundation:

Active primarily between 1964-1977

In 1964, when Reed founded the EEF - there was **no** federal, philanthropic, or Human Rights-related international funding for LGBTQ causes.

In 1990, the Ford Foundation gave its first grant for LGBTQ international causes.

**The funding landscape changes dramatically in late 1990's, and it offers clues to why queer people were ignored previously. Let's take a look...**

**Historically, philanthropy does not see LGBTQ people as part of their “affirmative action” initiatives.** (Ford Foundation memo below, 1974).

only within its own staff... which it supports. That interest assumed new significance in 1974 when the Foundation adopted a more explicit policy on "external affirmative action." That policy read, in part:

In deciding on grants, the Foundation now considers, among other factors, the opportunities the applicants provide to minorities and women, the scope of their efforts to correct inequities, and any constraints that may affect their conduct in this sensitive and complex area of human relations.

**Through the 1960's, 70's, 80's -- LGBTQ people are NOT considered a minority group** or even a distinct population with a singular set of concerns.

**Without recognition as a minority group, they are invisible** in the grantmaking/funding world.

## From Hayner memo (1997)

From 1993-1995, LGBTQ issues receive \$2.8 million per year from 64 foundations, but 40% came from just 1 entity (Joyce Mertz-Gilmore Foundation)...

- Over these three years, a total of \$8,432,283 was given to organizations dealing with gay and lesbian issues by US foundations (equivalent to \$2.8 million per year).<sup>2</sup>

- If these top five funders are not included, the average given in this area by the remaining 59 foundations was \$60,000 total over three years time.

Astrea pointedly noted in their 2002 proposal that “Despite a dismal .3 percent of philanthropic dollars awarded to lesbian and gay organizations in 1997, there have been incremental, but encouraging strides in recent years.”

## A second Memo by Hayner in 1998 | “Conflicting understandings”

- “Based on interviews or email exchanges with close to 50” individuals at various levels of Ford in 1998
- “**No one can remember** any gay or lesbian oriented grants before 1990”
- “**There appear to be conflicting understandings** among foundation staff about how much programming around gay and lesbian concerns may be supported.”

“**Many** other officers...have understood that a grant to a gay or lesbian organization...would not be supported.”

“This perceived bar to funding **has lead to frustration**...as otherwise eligible grant proposals have been declined...solely because the proposals were focused on gay or lesbian concerns.” (Bold emphasis mine)

Even into the late 1990's, the philanthropic world entirely ignored queer causes, as this memo from the Ford Foundation in 1997 shows:

FROM: Priscilla Hayner, Consultant *PH*

DATE: December 16, 1997

RE: Funding for Gay and Lesbian Concerns

I. Support from the Philanthropic Community

The level of support for organizations focused on concerns of the gay and lesbian community is very low. Gay and lesbian projects receive .1% of philanthropic dollars, making the gay and lesbian community the second lowest recipient of funding of any population group, after migrant farmworkers.<sup>1</sup> Funding to this community has increased in recent years, but because overall philanthropy has increased, its percentage of total philanthropy dollars has not changed.

And for a few recent looks back - still slow progress, in the hands of a few.  
Philanthropy & LGBTQ Rights: Slow to Develop, Mostly Focused on AIDS/HIV

Ten years ago (2014):

**“For every \$100** awarded by foundations working on human rights generally, **only 13¢ of that specifically benefited LGBTI communities** (p. 117, Hammond).

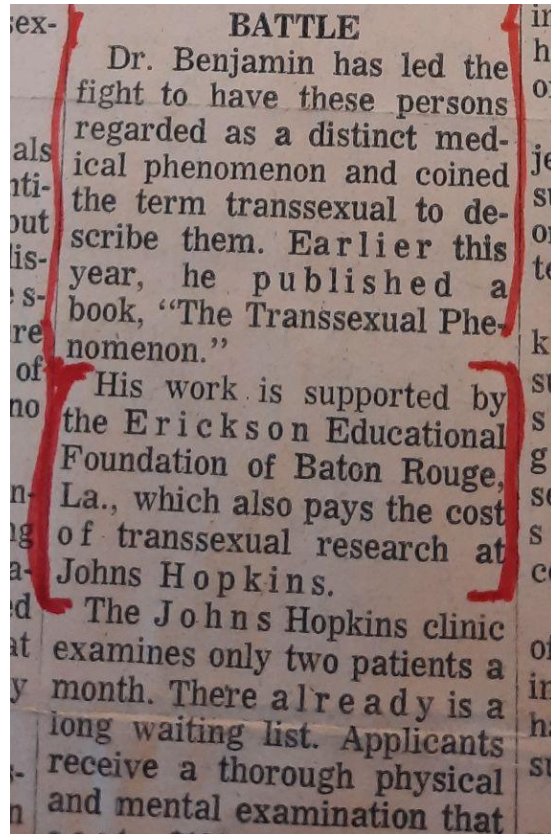
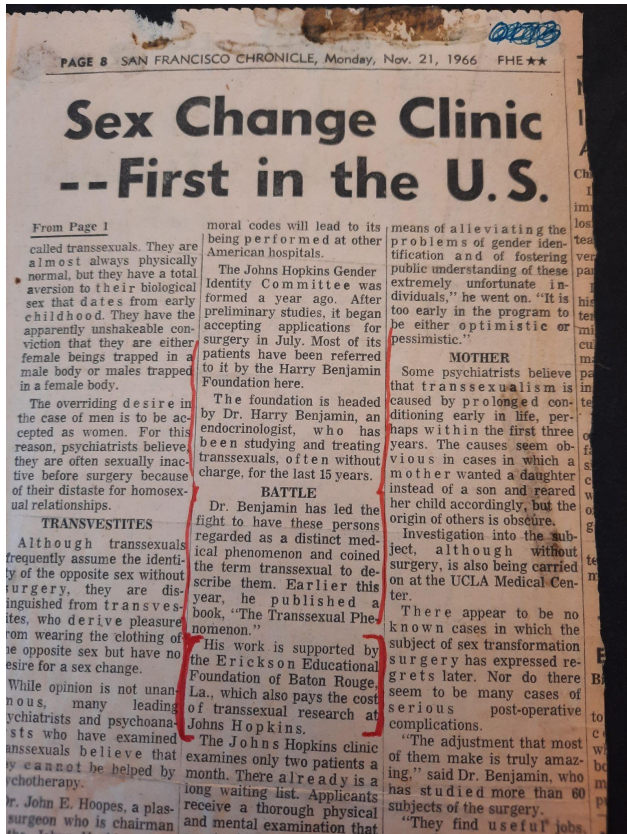
Seven years ago (2017):

“54 percent of global LGBTI grantmaking...done by just 16 government and multilateral agencies” (p. 53, Herman).

**Still true today on a global scale:**

Mostly the funds have historically gone to HIV/AIDS related topics, leading to “the marginalization of lesbians, bisexuals, and trans\* people.”

1966: Johns Hopkins Gender Clinic opens, “examines only two patients a month.” Article cites Erickson Educational Foundation.



1966 article from NEWS, Washington DC, below.  
1971 Pamphlet from EEF at right.

From NOV 23 1966  
NEWS  
Washington, D.C.  
E-212,455

ONE 'TRANSEXUAL' IS MARRIED NOW! (0671) 0186

## Clergy Doesn't Object to Sex Change

Thirteen Baltimore clergymen said they didn't object on moral grounds to the operations changing sex in the case of "transsexuals" — persons with the body of one sex but the mind of another.

Ten sex-changing operations have been performed so far by a team of Johns Hopkins surgeons, and there is a waiting list of 100 made up of both men and women. Of the five men who have been changed, one has since married, and two are engaged to marry "normal" men.

Only one clergyman, an official of the Catholic Archdiocese declined to comment, and the reaction of the Rev. Eldor A. Cassens of the Immanuel Lutheran Church in Baltimore was fairly representative of the clergymen interviewed.

**MISTAKE**

"Obviously it is a mistake of nature," he said. "We correct other mistakes of nature, and this should be allowed."

At a press conference in Baltimore yesterday, Dr. John E. Hoopes, a plastic surgeon, explained the operation and the need for it.

He said transsexuals "are not

for roughhousing "tomboy" girls and boys who like to play with dolls are normal in nearly every case. There is no way, he emphasized, to tell whether a child is transsexual until late adolescence.


Altho all of the patients accepted so far, have been over 21, to avoid possible legal objections, Dr. Knorr said the best age for the operation would be during late adolescence. In this way, the years of

male is more complex, Dr. Milton T. Edgerton said.

A hysterectomy is performed, and the breasts are removed. He said a flap of skin is taken from the abdomen to form a penis. However, altho the penis will function biologically, it cannot function sexually, and the men cannot, therefore, have sexual relations.

In both cases, the patients are given hormones of the sex they have surgically become, and in the case of women, the male body hair is removed thru electrolysis.

Psychotherapy is also a part of the post-surgical procedure. In many cases, the hormones also caused changes "in voice and body contour."



Dr. Knorr, Dr. Hoopes, and Dr. Edgerton —UPI Photo

# RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF TRANSEXUALISM

Erickson  
Educational  
Foundation  
A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

## Moving back to Reed Erickson - why don't we know more about his work? A few notes:

- He kept a low profile at the time, not credited by name often
- EEF was the public facing organization, BUT there was additional funding being sent out with no recognition, or under another title as with ONE Inc., via ISHR.
- EEF's public face was NOT Reed Erickson himself, but instead Zelda Suplee
- EEF was "larger than life" - claimed offices in multiple different cities, hosted international conferences, with thousands of recipients of the newsletter.
- Reed Erickson, by contrast: elusive, jet-setting, corresponded at times infrequently with those who worked for him.

Questions for future consideration, in today's climate:  
Is this level of philanthropic intervention/activism a public good, or bad?

Public Good:

- Erickson utilized his wealth to serve thousands of gender diverse people across the US and through international conferences, newsletters, healthcare.

Negative Impacts:

- Funded eccentric figures who did not have oversight for their projects (John C. Lilly, John Money, various psychedelic psychiatric studies)
- Pulled funding away from ONE Institute at a critical moment via the Millbank Estate debacle: fickle nature of individual philanthropy.

Thank you for listening!

Please be in touch: I would love to talk with folks who knew Reed Erickson or Zelda Suplee personally, or anyone interested in connecting about this project.

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