

Tom Chorlton, gay rights leader, author dies at 67

By [Lou Chibbaro Jr.](#) on January 6, 2014



Tom Chorlton, a longtime advocate of LGBT rights, died Jan. 5 from complications associated with leukemia. (Washington Blade archive photo by Doug Hinckle)

Tom Chorlton, a longtime advocate of LGBT rights and former D.C. resident who taught political science at the College of Charleston in South Carolina, died Jan. 5 from complications associated with leukemia. He was 67.

Chorlton has been credited with playing a key role in the early 1980s in organizing support for gay rights within the Democratic Party. Among other endeavors, he helped found the National Association of Gay and Lesbian Democratic Clubs in 1982 and served as its first executive director from 1982 to 1987.

While living in D.C. from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, Chorlton advocated for LGBT rights on a local and national level. He served as president of D.C.'s Gertrude Stein Democratic Club from 1981 to 1982 and ran as a candidate for an at-large seat on the D.C. City Council in 1988 under the banner of the D.C. Statehood Party.

Although he lost his Council race, his role as the first serious openly gay candidate for a seat on the Council opened the way for the election in subsequent years of gay D.C. Council members David Catania (I-At-large) and Jim Graham (D-Ward 1).

Friends and associates say Chorlton had a dual passion for LGBT rights and political science, with a strong interest in American history during the period just before and after the Revolutionary War.

As an assistant professor at the College of Charleston, Chorlton taught courses on the American Presidency and Politics of the American Revolution up until October 2013, when he was diagnosed with leukemia.

In 2012, after years of research and writing that Chorlton called a labor of love, he completed and published his book, "The First American Republic: 1774-1789." The book consists of profiles of the 14 little-known leaders of the American Revolution who served as president of the Continental Congress from the time it was formed in 1774 to 1789, when George Washington took office as the nation's first elected president under the new U.S. Constitution.

"What few Americans realize is that there had been a fully functioning national government prior to 1789," Chorlton wrote in his book. "It was called the Continental Congress and it was, in every respect, the First American Republic (1774-1789)."

Deacon Maccubbin, former owner of D.C.'s Lambda Rising bookstore and a longtime friend of Chorlton's, said Chorlton was born in Illinois, where his parents adopted him and raised him in the City of Belleville.

Chorlton received a bachelor's in political science in 1968 from St. Louis University. Upon graduation, he served as a teacher in the Peace Corps in Kenya before returning to the U.S., where he worked in Washington in 1975 on the staff of U.S. Rep. Melvin Price (D-Ill.).

He earned his master's degree in government administration in 1977 at Webster University in Missouri. During his time of studies there he was employed as a local government specialist with the St. Louis Area Council of Governments.

Shortly after leaving Washington in the early 1990s, Chorlton taught history and government at Columbia College's Lake Campus in central Missouri. He began his post as an assistant professor at the College of Charleston in 2003, according to Erin Blevins, administrative coordinator for the college's Department of Political Science.

Blevins said among the courses Chorlton taught were LGBT Politics, American Government, Contemporary Political Issues, Politics of the American Revolution, and the U.S. Presidency.

Kurt Vorndran, who served as president of the Gertrude Stein Democratic Club in D.C. several years after Chorlton held that post, credits Chorlton with being among the first to organize a political fundraising dinner for a gay rights cause in 1981 on behalf of the Stein Club.

Vorndran said the Stein Club's 1981 dinner, held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, drew hundreds of people, including members of Congress, then-D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, and many other D.C. elected officials and straight allies, such as labor union and civil rights leaders.

"At the time, very few, if any, national or local LGBT groups put on this type of political banquet that attracted big name politicians and media coverage," Vorndran said. "This was something Tom started."

Maccubbin and his husband Jim Bennett, who are serving as executors of Chorlton's estate, said in a statement that plans for a memorial service would be announced shortly. The statement says a portion of Chorlton's ashes would be interred at St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Charleston and at a family plot in Belleville, Ill.

"Another small portion of his ashes will be scattered in Antarctica, the only continent Tom had not yet visited," the statement says. "He has travelled extensively all his life, beginning with his Peace Corps service, and has been to more than 50 countries, including regions as diverse as Mongolia and Easter Island, Fiji and Kenya, Moscow, Beijing and Iran," the Maccubbin-Bennett statement says.

"Those who believe in heaven know that Tom is there now with his mom and his canine friends who went before," Maccubbin and Bennett said in a separate statement. "Those who don't believe in the afterlife know that Tom created a heaven right here on earth, and shared it with all of us. He will live in all of our hearts forever."

Original source:

<http://www.washingtonblade.com/2014/01/06/tom-chorlton-gay-rights-leader-author-dies-67/>