

Hiss memorial remembers man behind the name

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NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

NEW YORK — Hundreds of friends and admirers of Alger Hiss gathered yesterday in a church in lower Manhattan, to remember him not as a cause or a symbol but as a man of generosity and wisdom who loved poetry, books, wine and, above all, his many friends.

They came from the seemingly contradictory chapters of his life: the 1930s, when he was a young New Dealer; the mid-1940s, when he was a rising star in the foreign policy establishment and a founder of the United Nations, and the late 1940s, when he was accused of having been a communist spy.

Others met him later, after he had spent 44 months in prison for perjury, had been disbarred, and was selling stationery for a living.

"Each of us carries with him or her a set of beliefs about Alger," said Harvey Spear, a lawyer who was one of six people who spoke during the 90-minute memorial service at St. George's Episcopal Church. "Everyone knew his name. Unfortunately, too few knew his qualities."

Hiss, whose case became a flash point for debate during the Cold War and brought Richard M. Nixon to national attention, died in New York on Nov. 15 at 92. He had spent nearly 50 years insisting he was innocent. Followers of the case remain deeply divided over the question of his guilt.