

LGBT History Project of the LGBT Center of Central PA

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Title: *York Area Lambda Calendar Flyer*

Date: March 1993

Location: LGBT-080 Peg & Delma Welch Collection

Contact:

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YOU'RE INVITED...

MARCH

7, 14 & 28- Sun. Get-together at Ponderosa Restaurant, Rt. 30 & N. George St., N. York, 6 pm

- 13 - - Sat. YAL Progressive Dinner. Appies at 6 pm at Lee & Dan's, just N of York, Entree downtown. Adm. \$10, benefit YAL. Call in reservations by 3/9-- Reservations and info: Renee (846-3271) or Lee (852-8433, before 10 pm)
- 14- Sun. Women's Tea Dance, Altland's Ranch, 2-6 pm. Call 848-9142 for info.
- 20 - - Sat. Game Night at Peg and Delma's (downtown) from 7 pm. Bring munchies. Call 846-2089 for directions & info.
- 21-Sun. St. Pat's Day Tea Dance, Baron Stiegel, Manheim, 2-6. 299-4705 for info.
- 21 - - Sun. YAL Potluck/General Meeting. YW, 320 E. Market St., York. Eat at 6, meeting at 7:15. Discussion of York anti-discrimination ordinance.
- 26 - - Fri. Women's Night Out, Altland's Ranch. Call 225-4479 for info. or check the board at the Ranch
- 27 - - Sat. Country-Western dance lessons, 7:30-10:30 pm, Jefferson Co. Comm. Center, Rt. 9, Bardane, WV. Adm. \$5 benefits AIDS Network of Tri-State. Call 304-728-8477 for details.

APRIL

- 4 - - Sun Brunch at Isaac's, Meadowbrook, E of York on Rt. 30, 12:30 pm
- 18 - - Sun YAL Potluck/General Meeting. YW, 320 E. Market St., York. Eat at 6, meeting at 7:15.
- 24 - - Sat AAAOK Show, Altland's Ranch, to benefit York House Hospice. Watch the board at the Ranch for details, or call 225-4479.
- 25 - - Sun March on Washington. Bus leaves George & Phila. Sts, 7:30 am, charge is \$20. Reservations by March 15- forms available soon in the bars or through YAL.
- Late April - Donate items for garage sale benefitting York House. Call Ruth for details (764-8264)

MAY 1- York House Hospice yard sale, at 2594 Turnberry Ct. (across from Outdoor C.C. 9-6. Rain date, May 2.

JUNE 27 - 2nd Annual York Gay/Lesbian Film Festival. Watch for details.



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Date _____ New _____ May we
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"Uniting gay men and lesbian women and those supportive of us, to promote a sense of community among ourselves and better understanding and acceptance in the greater community in which we live, through social, educational, political and charitable activities."

_____ \$6 dues (1 year) _____ Donation = Total enclosed _____

Please make check payable to York Area Lambda, Inc., and mail to P. O. Box 2425, York, PA 17405-2425. (All information provided will remain confidential.)

Fifteen Centuries of Gay Marriages

by Fred Hillman

The Christian church had a sacramental marriage ceremony for gay men and women for several centuries before it had a ritual for heterosexual weddings!! This

astonishing statement is the gist of a lecture given by historian John Boswell, which is recorded on a video which is available in Anchorage. This historical fact is all the more astonishing in light of the anti-gay agitation that has come out of the Christian church during the past seven centuries from both its Roman Catholic and Protestant divisions. As Boswell has shown elsewhere, Christian doctrine has often been created in response to secular socioeconomic forces, but paradoxically, civil authorities have then used religious dogma to justify secular laws. Within the past month Anchorage has witnessed Protestant opposition to an anti-discrimination ordinance and civil leaders using religious arguments to justify discriminatory legislation. How ironic these anti-gay attitudes are in the light of history is an underlying theme of Professor Boswell's address.

Some background is in order. John Boswell is Professor of History at Yale University. In 1980 he published an exhaustive and exactly-documented analysis of attitudes within the early Christian church toward homosexuality (*Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*). He found that "The early Christian church does not appear to have opposed homosexual behavior per se. The most influential Christian literature was moot on the issue; no prominent writers seem to have considered homosexual attraction 'unnatural', and those who objected to physical expression of homosexual feelings generally did so on the basis of considerations unrelated to the teachings of Jesus or his early followers" (p. 333).

Following publication of his book in 1980, Boswell received a call from an Arabic-speaking priest who volunteered that if Boswell would look into such-and-such ancient document, he "would find something interesting". What he found was a reference to an ancient ritual for marriage between two men or two women. After a three-year search through scores of libraries throughout Europe, eventually even in the Vatican, Boswell found in ancient manuals of church rituals not one, but many, versions of a ceremony that was clearly designed to unite two men or two women in marriage and that was to be performed as a sacrament within a church by a priest. An eighth century liturgical manuscript includes it, and there are

references to it in legal manuscripts from the 6th century A.D. Further investigation led to the discovery that the ceremony continued to be performed even into modern times, and indeed it has taken place within certain Slavic-speaking villages during the present century. This has occurred despite the official papal rejection of homosexuality since the 13th century.

In contrast, the marriage ceremony for heterosexual couples was originally a civil ceremony, not a church ritual, was prescribed by Roman civil law, and was traditionally performed in the town square. In the 9th century newly-wedded couples began to come to the church door to have their union blessed by a priest. The next step in this tradition was to move the ceremony into the church edifice. Finally, in 1215 A.D. the marriage ceremony for heterosexual couples was made an official sacrament of the church and included in the church manual of rituals. The marriage ceremony for gay people had never been a civil ceremony, but from the beginning it had been a sacrament that was conducted by a priest.

While the early church paid little heed to homosexuality, by the 12th century it was responding to multiple complex non-ecclesiastical pressures, which included a rising tide of intolerance to many minorities. The Third Lateran Council of 1179 A.D. became the first general council to rule on homosexual acts (and negatively), along with Jews and money-lenders. A century later St. Thomas Aquinas wrote the *Summa Theologica*, a codification of church doctrine, which Boswell states became "the standard of orthodox opinion on every point of Catholic dogma for nearly a millennium" (p. 318). Reflecting popular hostility to gay behavior, Aquinas labeled it "unnatural"; this opinion became part of Catholic orthodoxy and has remained so till the present. The homosexual marriage ceremony was deleted from the manuals.

Boswell emphasizes that the study of marriage from an historical point of view involves very complex moral, theological and legal issues. Traditions and attitudes toward marriage have varied widely over the ages. It is clear that permanent monogamous marriage is an ancient tradition, that same-gender marriage is an ancient tradition within the Christian church, and that the ceremony for heterosexual weddings has been a by-product of historical accident. Boswell believes that the ancient homosexual ceremony comes closer to modern sensibilities in that it accommodated different types of relationships, it was based on mutual affection and not on the need for progeny, and it anticipated the importance of the roles of love and faithfulness in relationships.

I would note also the irony of the discrepancy between the histories of these two ceremonies, which mirrors the discrepancy between early attitudes and current attitudes within the Christian church toward homosexuality. The irony is best appreciated by first reading the sections on marriage in Boswell's treatise and then viewing the video tape of Boswell's lecture.