



John Fryer National 50th Anniversary Celebration

Who:

Spearheaded by Equality Forum, a national LGBTQ civil rights organization with an educational focus, and a consortium of organizations collaborating on the John Fryer 50th Anniversary.

Collaborating organizations include City of Philadelphia, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, U.S. Congressional LGBTQ+ Equality Caucus, American Psychiatric Association (APA), Association of Gay and Lesbian Psychiatrists, "CURED," Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Historical Commission, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia and William Way Community Center.

What:

On May 2, 1972, John Fryer, M.D., a psychiatrist, participated on the Homosexuality Panel at the American Psychiatric Association (APA) Annual Meeting, appearing under the pseudonym Dr. Henry Anonymous, disguised in a mask and using a voice modulator.

Since 1952 the APA had listed homosexuality as a mental disorder in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM).

Treatments for homosexuality included chemical castration, electric shock therapy, mental institutionalization and lobotomies.

Fryer's testimony in a packed room was so powerful that the APA set up a blue-ribbon committee to determine whether the classification was based on science or prejudice.

In 1973 the APA membership voted to declassify homosexuality as a mental illness.

The 50th Anniversary Celebration includes John Fryer Day proclamations by the City of Philadelphia and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and companion resolutions in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate.

The Philadelphia Historical Commission has listed the John Fryer Residence on its Registry of Historic Places.

There will be a John Fryer 50th Anniversary Tribute on Monday, May 2, 2022, in front of the John Fryer Historic Marker in Center City Philadelphia. Expected participants include Mayor Jim Kenney of Philadelphia, Congressman Dwight Evans, and Saul Levin, Medical Director and CEO, APA.

A reception will follow at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP). The HSP houses the John Fryer archives. The HSP will feature a John Fryer display including his handwritten notes for the Homosexuality Panel at the 1972 APA Annual Meeting.

"CURED," a documentary about Fryer will be screened free online on Monday evening, May 2.

Why:

The Celebration provides a teachable moment.

From the perspective of 50 years, Fryer's testimony marked a pioneering moment for LGBTQ civil rights. A successful movement could not have been launched as long as gays and lesbians were defined as mentally ill. The classification was used to buttress homophobic statutes and regulations. Fryer's testimony and the subsequent declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder helped effectuate the change in public perceptions of homosexuals as deranged and threatening. In 1972, when John Fryer appeared before the APA in disguise, most states would not issue professional licenses to homosexuals (e.g., doctors, lawyers, etc.). If a licensee was identified as gay, their license could be revoked. In 1978, also catalyzed by Fryer's courage, the Association of Gay and Lesbian Psychiatrists was founded. It was the first national association of LGBTQ professionals.