

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Same-sex marriages the latest in a long history of unions



Some 300 antique marriage certificates, wedding photos and artifacts from around the U.S. dating to the 1700s are displayed at the office of Weber Gallagher in Norristown, PA on Aug. 30, 2013. (AKIRA SUWA / Staff Photographer)

Jessica Parks, Inquirer Staff Writer POSTED: Thursday, September 5, 2013, 1:08 AM Adorning the Norristown offices of divorce lawyer Lynne Z. Gold-Bikin is a labyrinth of matrimonial officialdom dating back to the 1700s.

The collection of about 300 antique marriage certificates, she says, is a testament to the enduring importance of marriage and the diverse traditions that go along with it. "We don't value marriage the way we used to," said Gold-Bikin, 75. "If you look at what we have today, it's just words on a piece of paper. But the old ones are gorgeous."

Arranged in a mosaic of shapes to cover nearly every wall of her firm, the documents date from 1737 to 2013.

Many are ornate, with gilded letters and Biblical-scene paintings. One is nearly three feet tall, while others are less than half a sheet. A certificate marrying two slaves is handwritten in pencil on lined paper. Several from the 1800s in Talbot County, Ga., certify that both man and woman are "colored."

One of the rarest acquisitions is an Amish certificate, hand-painted with bright floral designs. "They usually buried the Amish licenses with the bride when she died. So I lucked out to get one of those," Gold-Bikin said.

Some certificates are accompanied by photographs of the bride and groom in top hats, floppy hats, lacy veils, or floral crowns.

The Pennsylvania Dutch certificates are easily distinguished - large, monochromatic, with every guest's signature as witness to the union.

She has a wedding announcement and photograph of tiny Tom Thumb, the famed P.T. Barnum circus performer, and his equally tiny bride, Lavinia.

Affixed to one yellowing marriage certificate is a swatch of silk the bride was dressed in after being born aboard a ship crossing the Atlantic in 1737.

Gold-Bikin's latest acquisition, "the piece de resistance," was unveiled last Friday, displayed in a place of honor in the lobby of her firm, Weber Gallagher Simpson Stapleton Fires & Newby. For once, the couple was present to celebrate.

"I, Craig Andrussier, hereby certify that on the 24th day of July two thousand 13 at North Wales, Montgomery, Loreen M. Bloodgood and Alicia A. Terrizzi were by me united in marriage, in accordance with license issued by the Clerk of Orphans' Court of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania."

It was a certificate of the first same-sex wedding performed in Pennsylvania.

On the morning of July 24 - a day after Montgomery County Register of Wills and Clerk of Orphans' Court D. Bruce Hanes had announced that he would issue marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples - Bloodgood and Terrizzi were waiting in line before the doors opened.

The two women were heading out of town on a vacation, so they obtained a waiver on the typical three-day waiting period and said their vows that morning, in a park in North Wales.

"It was short and sweet, just to get it on the record," Andrussier said that day, having rushed back to Norristown to get the paperwork finalized "before anything was hastily thrown out."

But their paperwork was - and so it remains today - in a legal gray area.

Pennsylvania law restricts marriage to one man and one woman. The state Department of Health filed a lawsuit against Hanes and argues that all of the licenses issued are invalid.

At a hearing in Commonwealth Court on Wednesday, a judge listened to arguments for about an hour, but deferred a decision.

It's unclear how a decision would affect the "marriage" of Bloodgood and Terrizzi, and the 164 other same-sex couples who came after them.

Gold-Bikin - divorce attorney, document collector, paradoxical romantic - believes this ruling will come down to politics: "If they're brought up to believe that gay marriage is wrong, they're going to find a reason to justify it."

But just as the certificates on her wall show an evolution with interreligious and interracial marriages, she said, it's just a matter of time until gay marriage is accepted.

"The younger generation doesn't really care," she said. "It seems to be the old white men that care, and right now they're running the country."