

JACK BAKER & MICHAEL MCCONNELL

b. Both 1942

MARRIAGE EQUALITY PIONEERS

Jack Baker and Michael McConnell are the first couple in the U.S. to file a state lawsuit for marriage equality.

“I am convinced that same-sex marriage will be legalized in the United States.” Jack Baker

Jack Baker and Michael McConnell are pioneering marriage equality advocates. In 1970 they became the first same-sex couple in the United States to apply for a marriage license. Later, in *Baker v. Nelson*, they became the first to file a state lawsuit for marriage equality. Baker and McConnell attended the University of Minnesota. In 1969 Baker and other campus activists founded Fight Repression of Erotic Expression (FREE). FREE was the second gay-student-run organization in the United States. It is credited with creating what would become Gay Pride.

FREE's initiatives included reporting on gay rights in Minneapolis and surveying major Twin Cities companies in an effort to expose discrimination against homosexuals. They discovered that Honeywell “would not employ a known homosexual.” FREE pushed the university to adopt gay-friendly initiatives, which included banning campus recruitment by employers that discriminate. The prohibition motivated Honeywell to end discrimination based on sexual orientation.

In 1971, campaigning on a pro-gay platform, Baker became the first openly gay president of the Minnesota Students Association. He was also the first to be reelected president in the school's then 121-year history.

Baker and McConnell became a couple. They believed Minnesota law did not specifically ban marriage between same-sex adults. They applied for a marriage license, and Baker, a law student, insisted that under the rule of law, “what's not forbidden is permitted.” Their application was denied. After losing a district court battle, the couple took the suit to the Minnesota Supreme Court. The high court also ruled against them. With marriage disallowed, McConnell legally unsuccessful, laid the foundation for future marriage equality challenges.

In 1972 Baker led the Democratic Farmer Labor Party (DFL) Gay Rights Caucus at the party's Minnesota State Convention. The DFL was the first significant U.S. political party to support marriage equality. In 2015 when *Obergefell v. Hodges* made same-sex marriage legal nationwide, McConnell told Minnesota Public Radio, “We were right. We had been right.”

In 2016 Baker and McConnell published a memoir, “The Wedding Heard ‘Round the World: America's First Gay Marriage.” They donated their legal documents to the Jean-Nickolaus Tretter Collection in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Studies at the University of Minnesota.



lgbtTM
HISTORY
MONTH

www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com

Copyright © 2017 – A Project of Equality Forum