Jack Tieszen
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The First Raid at Stonewall: The Archivers Perspective

Abstract:

The initial raid of the Stonewall Inn, a club serving primarily homosexual patrons in New York's Greenwich Village, is an inconsistently represented event in American history. From police reports and heterosexual news outlets that narrate a story of illegal alcohol sales and violent patrons, to the oral histories of queer American's who provide stories about state violence and targeted harassment, it is clear that the events surrounding the raid, and the raid itself are highly contested. An archivist must be careful in order to not push forward the many myths attributed to the event. They must also look at the necessary contextualization surrounding it. Utilizing the existing stories and records, along with the histories of New York City law, the homosexual community, and the imagined, an archivist with the help of the LBGT+ community can represent this contested event.

Introduction: The Makings of a Riot

In the early hours of June 28th, 1969, a police raid occurred at a nightclub in Greenwich Village. The response to this raid was a violent retaliation by the homosexual patrons against the authorities that had come into its space. While this wasn't the first event related to LGBT+ reaction towards police officers in the United States (Cooper's Do-nuts in 1959 and Compton's Cafeteria in 1966), the raids at the Stonewall Inn are perhaps the most recognizable as a significant catalyst for the modern LGBT+ liberation movement (Gilliland and Caswell 2016, 64). However, recognizability doesn't equate to archived information, especially considering the group in question. Queer history has mostly been an oral tradition as a method against perceived wrongdoings by homophobic/transphobic figures of authority. Compared to other communities within the United States there are relatively few written records from the queer perspective. The byproduct of the oral method regarding record keeping is that the event that kick-started a major civil rights movement is overflowing with mythology and falsely contextualized information amongst the oral truth. Furthermore, non-homosexual published works such as records from police officers and news outlets lack similar contextualization while maintaining a perceived truth which one can use to produce a narrative about the event in opposition to the homosexual one. In short, Stonewall is more contested as a moment in history than one would initially believe, and problems come when attempting to archive and document it as a whole. What exactly does one do with conflicting material not only from multiple sides of a story (authority

figures/newspapers/patrons) but from within a singular community (the differing accounts of the patrons)? Furthermore, how should the text from outside of the LGBT+ community such as newspaper articles and police records be represented in an archive that deals with this event?

The question that I am proposing is this: how can one archive materials related to an event that is contested by multiple angles, and how should these materials relate to each other within the context of an archive. In this essay, I intend to answer these questions by detailing the existing information in the context of the groups that they came from. I will first express the general understandings of the raid along with the cultural surroundings that led to it. After that is provided, my next process involves detailing the records from three particular groups: first the police, then newspapers, then the patrons of the club. From that point, I will compare all three of the accounts through the use of two valuable narratives and lastly suggest ways in which these materials and histories can be approached by an archivist.

Stonewall: As We Currently See It

The raid at Stonewall as currently represented by historical based websites such as the History Channel tend to exhibit a basic level of information about the events. The differences in how these websites describe these facts are of note in how they similarly follow the dichotomy between the three viewpoints. For instance, the connection between the Stonewall Inn and the Genovese mafia family or the fact that the police had a warrant for their activities are sometimes left out of the description which further removes important contextual information and adds to the mythologized aspect of the riot. But on a basic level what happened at the Stonewall Inn on that early summer morning?

The accounts of these websites detail a similar story with differing embellishments depending on the source. At 1:20 A.M. on the Saturday, police arrived at the doors of the Stonewall Inn, a club and a known hangout for the Greenwich homosexual community. They announced that they were "taking the place," or inspecting the club for alcohol due to a lack of liquor license (Carter 2010, 137). This was the second time that the bar had been raided within that week. From this point, the patrons were told to evacuate the bar. Instead of leaving the scene they decided to stay outside the building as individual workers were being arrested by police for the illegal sale of alcohol. The tense atmosphere of this police intrusion prompted the patrons to fight back, throwing items like coins and bottles at the officers. Eventually, the officers

barricaded themselves in the club and the patrons continued the attack by smashing through the barricade and attempting to set a fire within the building. Reinforcements were called in along with firemen to calm the situation. In the end, thirteen people were arrested and four police officers were injured to the point where they were sent to the hospital. What followed was six days of rioting near the club as the event was publicized and the community rallied around the initial raid response.

From the paragraph above it is easy to determine that there are many details missing from the event itself, but also the causes leading up to that fateful morning. The 1960s was a transitional period for the greater queer community within New York City. The early years of that decade were rife with Mayor Robert Wagner's homophobic policies, many of which affected institutions like Stonewall that served primarily gay and lesbian patrons. The most relevant aspect would be the laws enforced by the state liquor authority, which while not explicit in their discrimination essentially forced the sale of alcohol to homosexuals underground due to the authorities' ability to revoke liquor licenses to places that may become "disorderly" (2010, 48). This, in effect, prevented safe zones for the homosexual community to congregate without harassment. Because of these laws, members of the mafia began to invest in and run illegal clubs to sell alcohol to this community without a license. These businesses also functioned as a plot for extorting wealthy closeted individuals (Nianias 2015). Furthermore, police efforts to entrap homosexuals utilizing laws against solicitation were commonplace and often provoked by the police (2010, 46). Once the mid-1960s hit and a new mayor was elected (John Lindsay) things started to change slightly. The Mattachine Society, a gay rights organization in New York, mobilized and confronted Lindsay about the entrapment practices along with the liquor laws, and in 1966 many of the previously established ordinances were overturned. Of course, other targeted laws, such as ones against wearing clothing attributed to the opposite sex, were still in place and enforced by police. Three years passed and certain businesses, like Stonewall, weren't able to procure licenses and continued to operate illegally.

These are the legal conditions that led to the raid and through these laws one can determine the hardships of the greater queer community in Greenwich Village at the time. Being gay or trans in New York in the 1960s meant that you were constantly bombarded by the possibility of being arrested. It meant that the spaces that were supposedly safe were open to constant raids. Even when thing started to change it was a slow shift against discrimination. This

oppressive environment, when lived in for an extended period of time is conducive to violence and retaliation, which is exactly what occurred on the morning of the raid. But that is just a general perspective of the patrons and LGBT+ individuals involved in the riots. A perspective that is often times placed into a monolithic grouping rather than separated into individual stories. This can be attributed to the lack of written testimony as expressed earlier and that lack leads to certain problems when trying to represent this event as a historical moment. What is currently written about the event from the perspective of this community is scattered with bits and pieces of connecting information. This is where the perspective of the authority records comes into play. The police reports and newspaper articles can be used to further understand what happened as well as provide documented evidence to claims made about the riots.

Heterosexual Society and Stonewall

As expressed before there are three points of view to this story, two of which are classified mainly as the heterosexual viewpoint. One of these is a voice of authority and state power, while the other is an ostensibly neutral source. Both provide the important documentation from that night that is lacking within the third point of view. The police records and arrest reports from that event, not all of which have been released to the public, are perhaps the best documents to start with as they bureaucratically detail the efforts of the officers that morning. The records, nine in all, were published on the queer history website OutHistory.org by historian Jonathan Ned Katz in 2009 (Katz 2009). In these records are the names of police officers at the event, officers that responded to calls later, arrestees, and doctors at Saint Vincent's medical center located near the bar. The transcripts also include a summary of events. The main label of this infraction as denoted by the officers was under "unusual occ" or unusual occurrence, a vague description for the riots. Reading deeper into the records pieces of information such as timestamps and injuries are found. From this, it can be determined that the events started at around 1:20 A.M. when the police officers raided the bar with a warrant signed two days earlier and arrested a total of five people for "ABC violations" (Sibilla 2015). When attempting to leave the premises, the officers were confronted by a "large crowd" which became disorderly and tried to prevent the police from arresting the five. Four officers were injured in this altercation due to objects being thrown at them as well as other close combat attacks. At 2:50 A.M. a 10-41 signal was sent out for the Tactical Patrol Force, a highly trained, riot-control unit of the New York

City Police Department (2010, 173). The signal was canceled at 3:35. The records of individual participants in the riots indicate that they were arrested mainly for striking officers, throwing unknown objects, attempting to stop a lawful arrest, and resisting arrest. In the end, a total of 29 officers, 6 arrestees, and 2 doctors are named in these records. Four officers were injured enough to be sent to the hospital for lacerations, bites, general abrasions, and a bone fracture. All of the officers' names are censored, redacted by black ink in their presentation. The final bout of information is that a summons for "unlicensed cabaret, overcrowding, and unlicensed exhibition" was issued, most likely to the bar itself and its owners. The story of the event presented by the police was that this was a routine raid that turned violent due entirely to disorderly patrons.

Most of this information is verifiable through other documents, but as expressed earlier, there is little context within these authority records. For instance, there is no documentation of police retaliation for those who resisted arrest. In addition, the hour and thirty-minute interval between the initial raid and the call for riot police doesn't have much information beyond a written "disorderly conduct" note against the crowd outside. There is no writing detailing the police efforts whatsoever which brings into question what the records serve. The concept of purpose has been discussed by Ciaran Trace in her article *What is Recorded is Never Simply 'What Happened': Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture.* In her writing, Trace examines the "notion that records are more than purely technical facts," and that there are social elements and conditions that produce records like the Stonewall police citations (Trace 2002, 152). The records here produce a sense of validity for the raid, but they also show oversight in their lack of descriptive detail on anything except for the injuries sustained by the officers. In short, it's a one-sided story that if taken at face value makes the patrons of the Stonewall look as if they were attacking the police with deadly force unprovoked. What must be made clear is that documented records are not always a simple story of "what happened," and that there are more sides and contexts that should be added to untangle the chaos (2002, 152). This lack of information is generally where newspaper articles become particularly vital in the documentation, however newspapers don't always provide access to the other side of a conflict.

Reporters and Newspapers

Nationally this event had little news impact, so the surviving newspaper articles about Stonewall are all local to New York City. Most of these articles functioned as a way to further

detail the information from the police reports. The New York Times, for instance, wrote a series of articles about the event expositing additional information such as the fact that the officers who were in charge of the initial arrests were in plain clothes rather than having on uniforms. They also provided the number of participants in the riots, which was around 500 or so people initially, later downgraded to 200. Another article by Dennis Eskow in the New York Daily News adds more information stating the police began clearing the bar "after 28 cases of beer and 19 bottles of liquor were confiscated" (Eastmond 2017). The officer reports' available don't mention the number of rioters nor do they mention confiscating materials from the building. None of these articles provide much description on the patrons beyond stating their rowdiness in the melee with the cops. Homosexuality is only briefly mentioned when the articles discuss the type of bar that Stonewall was, putting the narrative on the side of this event being a standard raid rather than a targeted act of discrimination. However, not every article followed this pattern of looking at the event that way.

Different articles went out of their way to establish the narrative of homosexuals versus the police. The ways in which they achieved this were different. Some determined the act of aggression by the patrons as unprovoked, like the Village Voice, which in one article used extremely homophobic slurs in their description of the events (Eastmond 2017). Others attempted to see the conflict from the other side. An article in the New York Daily News, written a week after the events by journalist Jerry Lisker, gave a small amount of credence to the gay patrons by explaining their fear when the police initially raided the bar. The article also addressed the idea that the homosexuals who frequented the bar never caused violence in the past according to those who lived in the area (Villarreal 2017). However, while this article examined that side of the conflict, it still maintained the police narrative of events as well as stating that the tactical force called in later were the rescuers of the situation, putting them in a generally positive light (Villarreal 2017). Regardless of the differences in writing all of the articles provide information that the police reports did not have. However, like the police reports, the written information is still lacking. The articles in essence are, a raid happened and then a riot occurred, giving more details to the violence itself than the individual events between the raid and the call for a tactical unit. In this absence, two distinct groups of voices are a necessity. The voices of the patrons and the voices of the reporters who were actually at the riot as it happened.

The LGBT+ Side

The story as told by police and by news reporters is an aggregation of records which is one-sided in its presentation of the event. The differences between what the police recorded and what the reporters wrote are minimal, which would prevent any debate regarding what happened if the patron viewpoint wasn't accessible. Fortunately, it is available, but unfortunately, the events of the first raid and retaliation weren't immediately put into writing by the patrons. Furthermore, the subsequent riots and growth of the LGBT+ rights movement caused the memory to become fractured, housing narratives that are difficult to verify and essentially mythologizing the history. Certain names and points have been attributed to different people/things. There are accounts that say that a brick thrown by Marsha P. Johnson, or a Molotov cocktail by Sylvia Rivera started the riot. Even more say that an altercation between Stormé DeLarverie and an officer was the catalyst for the riots. Further confusing the history, there are accounts that say that some of these figures weren't even in attendance during the first raid and showed up in the later protests. From what can be discovered in the patron records it is difficult to tell who was actually there, who exactly started the fighting, and what happened during that hour and a half time period. Regardless, the accounts presented by the patrons argue that while this raid was a standard (if targeted) operation, the riot itself was caused by police brutality and the patrons desire to fight back against the systems of oppression that led to this raid. First-hand accounts of people that have been confirmed patrons are perhaps the best way to fully understand what occurred, but even those aren't consistent and somewhat build on the idealized version of that morning.

Michael Levine was a patron of the bar when it was raided. His story mentions that the people who were most defiant towards the cops were the drag performers in that they attempted to enter into the bar after being kicked out, contradicting the reports of the bar being completely evacuated after the raid (Simon 2010). He also said in his interview that when he left the bar he saw "what look like 100 police cars facing the entrance and crowds of people." This also contradicts the records related to the amount of police present by the time the patrons were evacuated from the bar. Titus Montalvo, another person in attendance described the scene inside the club. In his memory, this was the second raid that evening, contradicting other histories stating that it was just the second raid that week (Musto 2015). Another account by patron Scott Brown specifically detailed violence, mentioning the throwing of objects like coins and shoes

started right after a drag performer nudged a police officer, contradicting any of the other catalysts mentioned (Brown 2012). These contradictions make it difficult to tell what actually occurred, obfuscating the reasons behind the riots. In addition, many accounts and stories have been passed orally through time rather than being written down, which assigns them to memory. Memory, especially related to important historical events is often difficult to verify, and in a riot atmosphere that extended beyond the first night to a week of protesting, the veracity becomes even harder to determine. There is a quote within an interview of David Carter, author of *Stonewall: The Riots that Sparked the Gay Revolution,* where he says Marsha P. Johnson's involvement was a "story that Robin Souza told me, that Morty Manford told him" (Musto 2012). Hearsay, especially through a line of multiple people, is difficult to fully verify. In his article *To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture,* Kenneth Foote writes that "in real life, people do sometimes choose to keep secrets, to lie, and to distort information to control others (Foote 1990, 384). It is possible that the impact of the event caused many narratives to change slightly, and even more so when the stories are passed down through generations. This can also be true for the police and reporters in their records, as absences can change the narrative just as much as embellishments. This necessitates that another voice is used as a base for all of these accounts, that is where Howard Smith and Dick Leitsch can be placed.

On Both Sides: Voices Beyond Authority

Smith and Leitsch are important figures in Stonewall given that they were both reporters who were in attendance of the event, but on opposite sides. The former covered the police and the latter was a member of the Mattachine Society. An archivist can use their stories as a base to confirm the series of events that occurred. While these accounts must not be viewed as more or less infallible than the others, both of them provide the immediacy that the newspapers and individual accounts don't have, and the perspective that the police reports lack, making them good bases. Smith's story, published as a column in the Village Voice, is entirely from the perspective of the police. Smith was with the police as a journalist and was in the building as the officers barricaded themselves in it. Much like the other stories of the night, Smith's account was similar in that it referenced the main turning point as when a lesbian (most likely Stormé DeLarverie) was forced into a patrol car before it was ordered to leave. After the caravan containing the arrested individuals left, coins began flying at the police officers as they entered

back into the bar and barricaded themselves within. This act was met with heavier items being thrown outside as the door was forced open by the patrons. An officer got hit with an object and received injuries, causing three cops to run outside in an attempt to "scare the mob from the door" (Stuart 2015). The leader of the police unit, whom Smith refers to as Deputy Inspector Pine, then proceeded to grab a person from the crowd and dragged him inside before shutting the door again. The man, who in both the article and police reports expose as David Van Ronk, was beaten to the point of unconsciousness by the group of officers and handcuffed. The story ends with an account of a fire being set and put out within the club before the riot police showed up.

On the outside, Dick Leitsch, the only gay reporter to cover the story at the time, showed up when he heard that there was trouble brewing at the bar. His account, written immediately after he returned to the Mattachine society office verifies much of Smith's story. The coins, the police officers trapped in the building, and the fire are all within his account. A difference to the Smith article is that Leitsch describes the police conduct before the rioting as violent and with "bad grace," which he notes was the usual treatment for homosexuals by police officers (Garcia 2012). From all of the information given in the viewpoints, a few things are abundantly clear from the night. There was a raid with a warrant, a crowd gathered outside the bar after, items were thrown at the police proceeding a particularly difficult arrest, the police barricaded themselves in the bar, reinforcements were called, and the crowd eventually dispersed after a confrontation. These events are referenced in every single story on all sides of the narrative. Archiving the base truth is necessary to present what happened historically, however just inputting those truths risks diluting the event to core elements, removing contextual details. This returns us towards the question posited in the introduction: how can all of these conflicting narratives fit into an archive?

The Archives and Stonewall

Archivists should seek to balance these stories, sifting through the contradictions in order to represent the full history of an event (Kaplan 2000, 148). Approaching this particular piece of history brings up many difficulties regarding the classification of information as well as how it is represented to those who will use it in the future. As Eric Ketelaar writes in his article *Archives, Memories, and Identities,* "an archive is not just a place for storage, but a process, a mediated social and cultural practice…Any archive is a site of trauma and of contestation where battles

about the politics of memory are fought" (Ketelaar 2013, 157). Essentially, archives as institutions of historical knowledge are continuously acting, reacting and analyzing the knowledge that they have in order to engage with individual or collective memory. Emily Drabinski, while discussing queer theory in her essay *Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction,* recognizes this sentiment stating that "knowledge organization structures are productive, not merely representative. They do not smoothly represent reality, but discursively produce it, constituting the field of potential identities users can either claim as true and authentic representations of themselves or resist as not quite correct" (Drabinski 2013, 102). We can't approach the archiving of a contested event as if it is a static narrative. Stonewall, like many historic LGBT+ events, was deeply entrenched in the power dynamics and laws of the time which affect both the written record and memories of the riot. The varying stories within both the homosexual community and outside of it bring forth different narratives to the ordeal, therefore the groups must be separated into distinct classification and context added to the documentation.

Angela DiVeglia, in her article *Accessibility, Accountability, and Activism: Models for LGBT Archives,* presents a few elements that LGBT+ archives should follow. Seeing how Stonewall is an LGBT+ event, transitive reasoning applies here. She explains that the archive as an institution is a place of influence and that the archivist "bears significant power over how and why materials will be used by researchers" (DiVeglia 2012, 71). This power is often a cause of mistrust between communities and institutions, so an archivist must keep that tense relationship in mind when they document this particular event. The article refers to concepts of visibility, self-determination, accessibility, privacy, accountability, and trust; and in approaching the documentation of a contested history these individual concepts prove valuable in representing Stonewall. Visibility and accessibility would help push against Stonewall's surrounding inconsistencies by allowing interaction with existing materials as well as continuous input by the LGBT+ community. Privacy and trust can help allow community members to provide new narratives without fear of unmasking or future retaliation. Accountability puts an archivist into an advocacy position, which when dealing with the historical dynamic of authority versus oppressed, is an imperative attitude in how one should represent the latter's history (2012, 84). While all of them have importance with regards to an LGBT+ archive, self-determination is perhaps the most significant relating to Stonewall as it would allow the community impacted by these events to be the ones in control of their representation. This means that queer stories and

narratives are placed at the forefront with regards to accessibility and classified in a manner that refutes traditional homophobic/transphobic classifications of memory. This doesn't mean that the archivist should neglect to add police records or other such oppressive written texts into the archive. In fact, an archivist must also keep in mind the systems and records of oppression and how they were used in the past in order to represent and distort an event in the public eye. How an archivist classifies and catalogs these records has more value in this representation than just the record itself. So the inclusion of all records related to Stonewall becomes paramount in detailing what occurred on that morning. However, this just pertains to records that exist from the time period. As explained in the previous paragraphs, the LGBT+ community has a history of unintentional "counter-archivalization" and despite the initially recorded accounts, there are just as many that were written long after the events or weren't written at all (Gilliland and Caswell 2016, 56). What Anne Gilliland and Michelle Caswell refer to in their article *Records and their Imaginaries: Imagining the Impossible, Making Possible the Imagined* as the "imagined," must also play a role within an archive representing Stonewall (2016, 55).

In the article, Gilliland and Caswell argue that the imagined records "offer important affective counterbalances and sometimes resistance to dominant legal, bureaucratic, historical and forensic notions of evidence that so often fall short in explaining the capacity of records and archives to motivate, inspire, anger and traumatize" (2016, 55–56). This relates heavily to the non-corroborated narratives of the patrons. While many of these narratives were eventually recorded, they were done so years after the event, sometimes decades after and that prompts a discussion of veracity. This was mentioned earlier under the concept of memory and unintentional distortion but the important thing to understand from this is that these imaginings, though uncorroborated by the records, can and should be used as a way to push against the dominant narrative of the police. Representing the stories of Michael Levine or Titus Montalvo alongside Dick Leitsch would be a false comparison considering when they wrote these accounts. However, representing the former two's narratives as an imagined set of records to bolster the latter account would allow for the archive to document the history that is closest to reality. A history that shares a community perspective but allows for the individual voices to become heard. An archivist should use the narratives to reinforce or fight against the existing records from that evening. They should allow the researchers and users to view the history of Stonewall from beyond the "structures of power" that raided the bar (2016, 60). Through the

help of the LGBT+ community to put in these narratives and classify them, this can be accomplished.

Conclusion

The history of the first raid at the Stonewall Inn is a difficult one to view objectively from a distance considering the various sides. Its contestation between the police records with news reports and the patrons with eyewitnesses is further pushed by a lack of context and narrative inconsistencies. The police and news records are directly recorded evidence but fail to report the cultural and legal conditions which led to this event. In opposition, the patron narratives include the context but are under-documented and represented mainly by retrospective analysis leading these records to be, essentially, imagined when compared to the evidence of the officers. From the few immediately documented eyewitness accounts that there are, it is possible to conceive of a more direct narrative that utilizes these contested accounts. For an archivist, the documentation of this event requires these specific records to balance out and contextualize the entire spectrum of perspectives before the process of classification can be addressed. Utilizing the elements of LGBT+ archives, as well as including the imagined records, an archivist can fully approach Stonewall for documentation.

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