

Before Stonewall

The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community

Newly Restored in Conjunction with the 50th Anniversary of the Stonewall Riots

Executive Producer: John Scagliotti • Director: Greta Schiller • Co-Director: Robert Rosenberg

Produced by Robert Rosenberg, John Scagliotti & Greta Schiller

87 minutes, color, 1984, Documentary

{ Official Selection – Sundance Film Festival }

{ Best Historical Cultural Program – Emmy Award }

{ Best Documentary Feature – Los Angeles Filmex }



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Synopsis:

In 1969 the police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City's Greenwich Village, leading to three nights of rioting by the city's gay community. With this outpouring of courage and unity the gay liberation movement had begun.

Before Stonewall pries open the closet door, setting free the dramatic story of the sometimes horrifying public and private existences experienced by LGBT Americans since the early 1900's. Revealing and often humorous, this widely acclaimed film relives the emotionally-charged sparking of the contemporary Lesbian and Gay rights movements, from the events that led to the fevered 1969 riots to many other milestones in the brave fight for acceptance.

Experience the fascinating and unforgettable, decade-by-decade history of homosexuality in America through eye-opening historical footage and amazing interviews with those who lived through an often brutal closeted history.

Narrated by

Rita Mae Brown

Groundbreaking interviews with

Ann Bannon, Martin Duberman, Allen Ginsberg, Barbara Gittings, Harry Hay, Mabel Hampton, Dr. Evelyn Hooker, Frank Kameny, Audre Lorde, Richard Bruce Nugent, Jose Sarria and many more.

About the restoration:

The 16mm negative was scanned and digitized at Periscope Films in Los Angeles. The file was then color corrected at Edition Salzgeber in Berlin, who created the ProRes and DCP. Director Greta Schiller supervised the process and approved the new ProRes and DCP.

Selected quotes:

"Entertaining and enlightening."

- Los Angeles Times

"Funny, sad, courageous and touching."

- Seattle Times

"Intelligent and moving.

Adroitly mixes old newsreel and film footage, interviews and even home movies."

- The New York Times

"You owe it to yourself to see it."

- Judith Crist, WOR-TV

"While not necessarily on the order of finding Atlantis or the original cut of Magnificent Ambersons, the task filmmakers Greta Schiller, Robert Rosenberg, and John Scagliotti undertook in creating Before Stonewall was still pretty daunting: to play social archaeologists, uncovering the hidden, repressed, and oftentimes denied history of gay America in the days before the famous Stonewall riots, and once and for all break the gag order polite society had placed on the third sex.

Released in 1985, it helped put a halt on the notion that homosexuality was a product of societal moral decay, a tactical assertion gay rights opponents would sometimes try to insinuate based on a supposed lack of overwhelming historical evidence to the contrary.

Obviously, these people weren't looking, as the groundbreaking Before Stonewall offers a kaleidoscopic array of photographs, films, and songs that offer testimony to the presence of a thriving gay subculture. What's perhaps most intriguing about watching Before Stonewall now, some 35 years after Stonewall itself, is that it ends on a moment of uplift: a documentary that can tell the sometimes bitter truth and still conclude with an unambiguously heartening flourish."

- Eric Henderson, Slant Magazine

The Filmmakers:

Greta Schiller – Director/Producer

Greta Schiller is an acclaimed documentary director whose career was launched in 1984 with the Emmy Award-winning *Before Stonewall*. Since then she has produced a wide range of other notable documentaries through her nonprofit production company, Jezebel Productions, which she founded with Andrea Weiss, the Archival Research Director on *Before Stonewall*. Her international co-productions include *International Sweethearts of Rhythm*, *Tiny & Ruby: Hell Divin' Women*, and *Escape to Life*. Her film *The Man Who Drove With Mandela* is being showcased in a retrospective screening at the 2019 Berlin Film Festival where it premiered twenty years ago and won the Teddy Award for Best Documentary. Schiller's feature documentary *Paris Was a Woman* premiered in the London and Berlin Film Festivals and was broadcast around the world. About it *The New York Times* wrote that "Time travel to golden ages doesn't exist but *Paris Was a Woman* is the next best thing."

Schiller holds a BFA in Film/Video and an MA in Education from the City College of New York, which awarded her the Townsend Harris Medal for Outstanding Contributions to her Field. She was awarded a Rachel Carson Fellowship that took her to Munich and Zurich for 2015-16. She was the first ever recipient of the UK/US Fulbright Arts Fellowship in Film and is currently the recipient of a Global Fulbright Award, enabling her to produce her next feature documentary series, *Earth Repair*, on three continents (Asia, Europe, Australia). The first in that series, *The Bells Of Azaba*, filmed over four years on a vast nature reserve in Spain, will be released in 2019. For more on Greta Schiller visit www.jezebelproductions.org.

"This was my first foray into feature filmmaking. As the first film on an LGBT topic to receive funding from Public Television, we had an enormous responsibility to get it right – and a lot of peer pressure from people around the country who wanted to tell their stories. Weaving these stories into the social and political tenor of each decade, with my point of view emerging from the material, and the mix of humor and pathos, music and archive footage, has shaped my directorial style ever since. It also honed my focus as a young woman documentarian on making films that map the journeys of ordinary people, whose lives both impacted and were impacted by historical forces. When we set out to make this film, I had no inkling of the meaning it would have around the world."

Robert Rosenberg – Co-Director/ Producer

Robert Rosenberg has been working as an independent filmmaker, curator, film exhibitor and distributor, and non-profit arts leader for more than three decades, at the intersection between the cultural and social arenas. His own film work has focused on such topics as gender and sexuality, AIDS, the workplace, and Latino/a issues. In addition to the Emmy Award-winning *Before Stonewall*, his other documentaries include *Women of Hope: Latinas Abriendo Camino*, an innovative half-hour piece about groundbreaking US. Latina women which aired on major-market public television stations in 1996; *Facing AIDS*, which premiered at the Film Society of Lincoln Center's Walter Reade Theater in 1993 and was distributed widely in the educational market; *Crossing Borders*, a half-hour documentary about Central America; and a series of shorts about labor and union history, a selection of which have aired on cable television.

Rosenberg was the Founding Director in 1998 of the acclaimed Miami Gay & Lesbian Film Festival, as well as the Founding Director of the Coral Gables Art Cinema in the Miami metropolitan area, where, from 2010 through 2014, under his leadership, it became a recognized leading first-run U.S. art house venue. In the past, he also was the Program Director of the widely respected annual New York Global Village Documentary Festival at The Public Theater. Rosenberg currently continues his work in programming, distributing, acquiring and producing of art house films for the U.S. market, with a specialty in award-winning Iberoamerican and LGBTQ titles, and consults with a wide variety of film and arts organizations on fundraising, marketing and event management. For more on Robert Rosenberg visit www.linkedin.com/in/RobertRosenbergFilmAndArts.

“It was a big, sprawling, challenging film to make, and it really was a sort of a ‘Gay History 101’ in terms of any onscreen approach. No one had dared to or really been able to do this before, though we were of course building on the work of pioneering scholars and community activists who were already documenting LGBT stories and digging into the past. Making ‘Before Stonewall’ for me was also such an incredible and life-changing experience as a younger gay man. I got to hear, face-to-face, the stories of so many older men and women, in a way I would not have without our film project, their tales of heroism, resistance, love and struggle in very different times.”

John Scagliotti – Executive Producer/Producer

Dr. John Scagliotti has been producing and directing LGBT radio, TV and film since the time of the Stonewall Riots themselves. Starting his work as News Director of WBCN, Scagliotti and his partner, journalist Andrew Kopkind, produced the first gay show on commercial radio in 1973 called *The Lavender Hour*. In addition to the Emmy Award-winning *Before Stonewall*, he has produced a number of other of award-winning films for PBS including *After Stonewall*,

Dangerous Living: Coming Out in the Developing World, and Oliver Button is a Star. In 1991 Scagliotti created the first major public television series on Gay and Lesbian life with his groundbreaking program *In the Life*, which ran for 21 seasons on 290 public TV stations across the United States and Canada. All episodes are now available on-line to the public at the UCLA Archives (www.cinema.ucla.edu/collections/inthelife). His most recent film, *Before Homosexuals: From Ancient Times to Victorian Crimes*, is now available for educational institutions and will be released to the public by First Run Features in June 2019.

In recognition of his service to the LGBT community, he received an honorary doctorate from Marlboro College, in Vermont, where he resides with his husband of 21 years, David Hall. At his farm in Vermont, Scagliotti conducts film workshops and journalist seminars under the auspices of the Kopkind Colony and programs and directs two LGBT film festivals, CineSLAM and Pride of the Ocean. For more on John Scagliotti visit his website www.afterstonewall.com.

“We started this project 35 years ago in the depths of an epidemic that was literally wiping out thousands of gay men. And America was in no mood to hear from gay folk. To come up with a positive historical presentation during this time was amazing and difficult. Public TV took the risk of providing major funding and in eventually presenting ‘Before Stonewall’ on national television, and we worked hard to finish the film in those trying times. Later when I did ‘In the Life’ on PBS the ground had already been broken and times had really changed – the gay 90s revolution had happened and America was more receptive to hearing from the LGBT community.”

Additional Bios

Bill Daughton – Editor

Bill Daughton was an award-winning editor for *Sesame Street* and *Nova*. He edited *No Apparent Motive*, which was broadcast as an HBO special, and also directed two films, the short *Halloweenie* and the early queer drama *Corner of the Circle*. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from NYU, where he also received his MFA in Film and subsequently taught film editing. In 1987, he passed away of AIDS-related illness at the age of 37. He brought a keen eye for story telling, an ability to creatively make use of disparate sources of interviews and archival materials and his passion for the LGBT community, to his work on *Before Stonewall*.

Andrea Weiss – Archival Research Director

Andrea Weiss is a documentary filmmaker and author with a Ph.D. in American History. She was awarded the first ever Emmy Award for Research for her groundbreaking work on *Before Stonewall*. Her most recent film, *Bones of Contention*, premiered in the 2016 Berlin International

Film Festival. Her many other film credits include the award-winning documentaries *Escape to Life*, *Seed of Sarah*, *Paris Was a Woman*, *A Bit of Scarlet* and *International Sweethearts of Rhythm*, among others. A nonfiction author as well, her books include *Paris Was a Woman*, which won a Lambda Literary Award and *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film*. A Fulbright scholar, Weiss is a Professor of Film at the City College of New York, where she co-directs the MFA Program in Film.

Rita Mae Brown – Narrator

Rita Mae Brown is an iconic America author, poet, mystery writer, Emmy-nominated screenwriter, and feminist and lesbian activist. She indeed came out “before Stonewall” herself in the 1960s. Brown is best known for her first novel, 1973’s *Rubyfruit Jungle*, which was a groundbreaking, comic and for the time shockingly sexual lesbian *roman a clef*. She is also the bestselling author of many other books including the Sneaky Pie Brown series, the Sister Jane series; and the Runnymede novels. In 2015, she received the Pioneer Award at the Lambda Literary Awards. Brown holds two Ph.D. degrees, in English and in Political Science.

Interviewees in order of appearance:

RICHARD BRUCE NUGENT, New York. Born 1906, died 1987. An artist and writer during the Harlem Renaissance, his short stories appeared in Langston Hughes’ *Fire*.

HARRY OTIS, Los Angeles. Born 1896, deceased circa late 1980s. A dancer born in Colorado in the gay '90s, he had a different angle on the Wild West.

DONNA SMITH, Los Angeles. Born 1919, died 1992. In retirement, she freelanced as a bookkeeper and served as Treasurer of the International Gay & Lesbian Archives and the Society of Senior Gay & Lesbian Citizens’ Project Rainbow.

HARRY HAY, Los Angeles. Born 1912, died 2002. Political activist and pioneering co-founder of America’s first gay rights organization, The Mattachine Society, in the 1950s, and co-founded the Radical Faeries in the 1970s.

MABEL HAMPTON, New York. Born 1902, died 1986. A former domestic worker and dancer, she donated her extensive collection of 1950s lesbian paperbacks to the Lesbian Herstory Archives where she volunteered until her death.

TED “RIFF RAFF” ROLFS, San Francisco. Born 1918, died 2011. A retired Merchant Marine, he helped organize the National Maritime Union and roamed ILWU Local 10 in roller skates.

ALLEN GINSBERG, New York. Born 1926, died 1997. Poet, philosopher and writer considered to be one of the leading figures of both the Beat Generation during the 1950s and the counterculture that followed, and was a pioneer of living life as an openly gay man.

BARBARA GRIER, Tallahassee. Born 1933, died 2011. Publisher, former editor of *The Ladder* (1960-1967), America's first lesbian journal; and founder of Naiad Press (*Breaking Silence: Lesbian Nuns*), the largest publisher of lesbian literature.

CHUCK ROWLANDS, Los Angeles. Born 1917, died 1990. He was a stage producer and a founding member of the first gay rights group, The Mattachine Society.

GEORGE BUSE, Chicago. Born 1924, died 2000. He was a newspaper reporter and WWII Army Chaplain.

HANK VILAS, Berkeley, CA. Born 1925, died 1985. He was a beloved counselor, therapist and social worker.

NELL "JOHNNIE" PHELPS, Washington, D.C. Born 1922, died 1997. A Women's Army Corps (WAC) soldier, she claimed to have convinced General [Dwight D. Eisenhower](#) not to eject any lesbian members of the WAC, as was ordered by President Truman.

RIKKI STREICHER, San Francisco. Born 1926, died 1994. A leader in San Francisco's gay rights movement and a creator of the Federation of Gay Games, she was the proprietor of two local lesbian bars, Maud's and Amanda's.

JIM KEPNER, Los Angeles. Born 1923, died 1997. He was a journalist, author, historian, archivist and gay rights leader. His work contributed to the formation of early gay publisher ONE, ultimately the National Gay & Lesbian Archives.

CARROLL DAVIS, Los Angeles. Born circa 1920, now deceased. Entertainer in many well-known clubs on the west coast.

DR. EVELYN HOOKER, Los Angeles. Born 1907, died 1996. A UCLA psychologist; her groundbreaking studies were the first published that studied gay men who were not in psychiatric treatment.

BARBARA GITTINGS, Philadelphia. Born 1932, died 2007. She was the East Coast co-founder of Daughters of Bilitis, one of the first publically visible lesbian activists, and the founder of the lesbian and gay caucus of The American Library Association.

PAUL H. CLARKE, Washington, DC. Born 1915, died 1997. Retired State Department Security Officer who estimated 900-1000 homosexuals had been separated from the military between 1947 and 1967.

FRANK KAMENY, Washington, DC. Born 1925, died 2011. A former U.S. government scientist who was the first to legally challenge Sen. Joe McCarthy's purge of gay government employees, and an outspoken leader of the pre-Stonewall gay rights movement.

RED JORDAN AROBATEAU, Oakland. Born 1943, still living. A trans male writer, his work celebrates the sex lives of poor, queer people.

MARTIN DUBERMAN, New York. Born 1930, still living. Historian and playwright, he is the authorized biographer of Paul Robeson, and writer of numerous books on gay culture.

DOROTHY "SMILIE" HILLAIRE, Seattle. Born 1925, died 2002. Native American activist.

TEDDY BOUTTE, Seattle. Born circa 1930. Drag performer and Southern Belle.

JACKIE CACHERO, Seattle. Born 1943, still living. Committed to a psychiatric ward as a youth, she became pregnant but the hospital would not release her baby until she married. "I'm probably the only bull dagger in town that's got a husband, a wife and seven kids."

AUDRE LORDE, New York. Born 1934, died 1992. A poet and university professor, she was an activist in the 1960s black civil rights movement. Her bio-mythography, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, is widely acclaimed.

MARGE SUMMIT, Chicago. Born 1935, still living. A bar owner, community organizer and activist, she is still active in Chicago's LGBT community.

LISA BEN, Los Angeles. Born 1921, died 2015. Edythe D. Eyde, a former secretary who published America's first lesbian covertly newsletter, *Vice Versa*, using Lisa Ben as her pen name, and wrote striking folk songs about gay life.

MAUA ADELE AJANAKU, New York. Born circa 1920, deceased. An activist, teacher and friend of Audre Lorde.

JHERI, San Francisco. Clothing designer, died of complications from AIDS, circa 1990.

NANCY "BUNNY" MACCULLOCH, Los Angeles. Born 1928, died 1989. A film editor and

film collector.

ANN BANNON, Sacramento. Born 1932, still living. A university professor and an American author, she wrote six lesbian pulp fiction novels known as *The Beebo Brinker Chronicles*, a bestselling series about 1950s life in Greenwich Village.

CRAIG RODWELL, New York. Born 1940, died 1993. Founder of the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop, the first gay bookstore devoted not to porn, but to gay and lesbian authors. He is credited as the prime mover for the creation of the New York City pride marches.

JOSE SARRIA, San Francisco. Born 1922, died 2013. The Nightingale of Montgomery Street, his drag operas at the Black Cat bar drew people from around the world. The first openly gay candidate in the U.S., he ran for city office in San Francisco on a pro-gay rights platform in 1959.

GRANT GALLUP, Chicago. Born 1932, died 2009. Minister. One of the first openly gay priests in the U.S., he was a charter member of Integrity USA, a nonprofit working toward full LGBT inclusion and rites in the Episcopal Church. He started the first Chicago chapter and was known affectionately by his close friends as Sister Mary Rattle Beads.

IVY BOTTINI, New York/Los Angeles. Born 1926, still living. Former housewife and entertainer who helped found the New York chapter of the National Organization for Women in 1966.

Principal Credits:

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