

The New York Times

Police Records Document Start of Stonewall Uprising

By SEWELL CHAN

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The owner of a 1968 Volkswagen showed up at the Sixth Precinct station house with a complaint. Her car, parked across the street from the Stonewall Inn, at 53 Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, had been “stomped on,” causing damage to the roof, hood and rear engine cover.

The stomping occurred around 3 a.m. on June 28, 1969, at the start of what would later be known as the Stonewall uprising, the six-day series of disturbances that began as a protest by gays against police harassment and became a defining moment in the gay-rights movement.

The police report documenting the assault on the automobile is part of a small set of documents — nine pages in total — posted online last week at OutHistory.org, a gay-history Web site run by the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at the City University of New York Graduate Center.

Seven pages of records were released by the city’s Police Department in response to a Freedom of Information Law request. They were obtained last month by Jonathan Ned Katz, an independent scholar and director of OutHistory.org, with help from David Carter, the author of “Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution” (St. Martin’s Press, 2004).

Two of the pages posted online were obtained in 1988 by Michael

Scherker, a writer who sued the city to obtain some police records from the time of the uprising, and who has since died. None of the nine pages of reports have been published previously, Mr. Katz said.

Despite the later historical significance assigned to the Stonewall rebellion, many of the details associated with the events have have been poorly or incompletely documented, said Mr. Carter, whose book has been cited as an authoritative account of the uprising. (Indeed, photographs taken by The New York Times from the final night of the riots, and not published at the time, have resurfaced only in recent years.)

Mr. Katz highlighted several ways in which the documents cast new light on the Stonewall uprising:

- One report cites three people — Raymond Castro, Marilyn Fowler and Vincent DePaul — as having acted together to “shove and kick the officer.” Ms. Fowler and Mr. DePaul had not been previously documented as participants in the riot, and indeed, no woman’s arrest had previously been documented, though several eyewitnesses had long stated that resistance to the police intensified after a lesbian woman, whose identity was not known, was arrested.
- A police officer, Charles Holmes, was treated at St. Vincent’s Hospital after being bitten on the right wrist by a rioter. Biting had not been documented as a tactic of the rioters. The documents also cited other rioters, Wolfgang Podolski and Thomas Staton, whose involvement in the disturbances had not been documented before.
- One document provides additional detail about the previously known arrest of David Van Ronk, a heterosexual folk singer (who was incorrectly described as an actor) who was accused of assaulting an officer “with an unknown object.” Mr. Van Ronk eventually pleaded guilty to harassment, a violation. He was later sued by the police officer, Gilbert Weisman, for assault, and had to

pay a fine.

In an interview, Mr. Carter said of the documents, “There’s potential there for learning a lot more.”

In particular, he cited the naming of Ms. Fowler as significant because some writers had questioned the extent or even existence of women’s involvement at the inception of the uprising.

Mr. Carter also said the documents corroborated information that had been provided to him by Seymour Pine, the police inspector who led the raid on the Stonewall Inn (and later expressed regret about the nature and manner of the way the police conducted themselves.)

“Pine has been vilified by a number of gay writers, but from all my interactions with him I believe his account was truthful and accurate,” Mr. Carter said. “I believe he’s an honorable man, and this is further reason to believe that.”

Little is known about the four people cited in the documents — Vincent DePaul, Marilyn Fowler, Wolfgang Podolski and Thomas Staton — whose involvement was not previously documented. Mr. Katz urged anyone familiar with those individuals to e-mail OutHistory.org.

OutHistory.org has scheduled a fund-raiser, titled “Stonewall Was a Riot! Queer Riffs on Life Since 1969,” for 7:30 p.m. Monday at the current Stonewall Inn. (The original inn closed soon after the riots, and the new bar, which occupies only part of the original space, has no other connection to the original establishment.) The Stonewall Inn site was declared a National Historic Landmark in 2000.

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