

DAILY NEWS

'Stonewall' documents Gay Liberation

By PATRICIA O'HAIRE

BEFORE STONEWALL. Documentary. Produced by John Scagliotti. Directed by Greta Schiller; co-directed by Robert Rosenberg. Edited by Bill Daughton. Archival research, Andree Weiss. Narrated by Rita Mae Brown. Released through David Whitten Productions. Running time: 1 hour, 27 minutes. At the Waverly.

JUNE 27, 1969. To those who keep tabs on such facts, that was the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement, the day New York police staged a raid on the Stonewall, a homosexual hangout in Greenwich Village. They were met with surprising violence, beginning with two days of riots and culminating in the founding of the movement.

How homosexuals, male and female, lived with themselves, with each other and with (and within) the world at large is the subject of "Before

Stonewall," a documentary that opens with a movie excerpt showing actor Ronald Reagan ordering a sergeant (Alan Hale) to participate in a drag chorus for an Army show, and ends with "We Shall Overcome," sung by proud members of the once-underground society.

The film intersperses old and new footage—clips from some early silents ("Lavender Cowboy"), interviews, the McCarthy hearings about suspected homosexuals in the State Department, and conflicts between gay men and gay women.

Narrated by author Rita Mae Brown, it describes a wide spectrum of gays—blacks, whites, professional people, blue collar workers—and intertwines the stories of men and women. Directed with firm pace, it takes its subject seriously—and maintains a sense of humor.



San Francisco drag party, circa 1959