

CASSIUS WILSON
I [of 4] --Digest--Retyped
April 5, 1962

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Also present: Richard B. Allen, Marjorie
T. Zander

Cassius Wilson was born March 8, 1891 in Baton Rouge [Louisiana], but has lived in New Orleans ever since he was a small baby.

CW is the president of the Jolly Bunch Social and Pleasure Club, which was organized January 5, 1941 and incorporated March 22, 1947; CW is a charter member of the club, which was formed from a faction of the Tulane [Club], which had split up. CW has the constitution and bylaws of the club [original or copy?]. The Jolly Bunch grew larger as the years passed, so their activities also grew. They have had an annual parade for several years, except for last year. CW doesn't participate in the parades anymore; as he is an official of the club, he can ride in an automobile, but he doesn't like the "second line," as they won't stay on the sidewalks and they get in the way of the paraders. CW was sixteen or seventeen years old when he began "second lining;" now he sees children as young as under two years at parades, dancing just like their elders, who have taught them. In CW's younger days, there were many bands, perhaps as many as fifty [or perhaps fifty different leaders with much overlapping of the "jump up" bands personnel. RBA]; some bands were Kid Howard's, Kid Rena's, the Original Tuxedo [led by Oscar "Papa"] Celestin, Punch [Miller]'s, Sam Morgan's. The Eureka Brass Band is an old band still in existence. Men such as Rena, Punch, and Sam Morgan would hire extra men to add to their night club bands to make up brass bands when they got brass band jobs. CW says the Young Tuxedo [Brass Band] doesn't have all regular personnel, either. CW says there is only one band in the city with all regular personnel, and that is

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the one which played for the club the past Sunday [the Eureka]. A band of young musicians, the Young Excelsior [Brass Band], led by John Henry McNeil, has played for the Jolly Bunch; CW says they play well. He thinks young musicians will continue playing for parades. He says the Jolly Bunch and the Tulane Club are obliged to furnish music for a member [at his funeral] if the family wants it, and that ninety-five percent of the families want it. Parades require permits, but funerals do not. CW says his club likes to parade for eight hours, although some of the members asked for only six hours; he says eight hours is too long for musicians to have to parade. The Eureka Brass Band played for the Jolly Bunch [annual?] parade one time, then swore they would never play for it again, as it was too long. The Young Tuxedo Brass Band will play for the Jolly Bunch parade, but the leader of the band, John Casimir, will not, as he says its too much walking for him. The club has two marshals, the grand marshal and the second marshal; each has his assistant, picked for the parade, to lead the band for each division, of which there are two. People come to the parades from all over town; some even come from places as far away as Chicago and California when they hear that the Jolly Bunch is going to parade. CW discusses their dress. The Jolly Bunch parades as far downtown as St. Philip Street, and uptown as far as Washington [Avenue]; they weave in and out between those limits, following a set route. CW says the Jolly Bunch turned down a stop offered by the Caldonia [a bar?]; they make a stop at Gussie's Place and one at the Midway; the latter

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is owned by one of the director's of the Jolly Bunch. CW says they are trying to have the people operating the stops have the drinks and food set up outside their places, as it is too difficult and takes too much time for the paraders to go inside a place. The purpose of providing stops for the paraders [i.e., the members of the club and the bands] is to sell drinks to the people following the parade or waiting for the parade to make its stop; refreshments are provided to the paraders free of charge.

Although there is a group called the Ladies Jolly Bunch, the privilege of selecting the queen for the Jolly Bunch parade has always belonged to the men, who pick a queen from the ladies affiliate, or from anywhere else. There has occasionally been some confusion in the past, as the ladies have proposed their own candidate without first consulting the men.

The Jolly Bunch annual parade is to be held the third Sunday in August this year. The reason Sunday was chosen is that most of the members do not work that day; August was chosen because the chance of rain is less likely than most other times of the year; the parade used to be held in May, but bad weather caused the date to be moved through succeeding months until August was chosen as the [more or less permanent] time.

CW tells how the uniforms, including shoes, are chosen for each division of the paraders.

There are a couple of musicians who belong to the Jolly Bunch; CW

says there have been others, they come and go, in and out of the club. Abby Williams, drummer, was a member for a while; he and his band played for the parade year before last, at the last parade the Jolly Bunch had; CW says, "My boys [i.e., the members] like him." A member musician may be more likely to get the contract for the parade if he asks a reasonable price. CW says they [almost] always hire John Casimir, sometimes having him provide two bands, because Casimir always plays plenty of music. The Jolly Bunch used George Williams one year. They like bands which play plenty of music for them. Abby Williams played so much they asked to rest a little while. The second division [marshal?], Hicks, wanted Abby Williams to play the parade. The band[s] chosen to play are chosen because the members want them, because the leader may belong to the club; Abby Williams got out of the club because his band wasn't hired again.

CW repeats that the majority of the members voted to have an eight hour parade, although some (including CW) recommended a six hour one.

CW belongs to only two clubs now, the Jolly Bunch and the Tulane. In past years he has belonged to others, including some Carnival clubs.

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Also Present: Richard B. Allen, Marjorie
T. Zander

People had a better time in the old days; there were more places to go; twenty-one was the minimum age a person had to be to enter a barroom; young girls of a better class could go to places such as Cooperators Hall and Economy Hall only in company of older relatives; they would leave about 11:30 PM; later, the sporting people would come to the same place; they didn't mix the [social?] classes as they do now. Youth didn't mix so much with age then, either. CW talks about Milnburg and Spanish Fort, and the lake front of old. When big bands would come to town, they would play at the Fairgrounds. Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythian, Masons, Elks, Young Men's Olympians and others used to have annual parades, but now the Jolly Bunch is the only club which has an annual parade. [Cf. notes in archive files. RBA] The Bulls, the Tanamies [Tammany?] and the Hobgoblins were other clubs, now defunct, who had parades. There were parades every week in the old times.

Paraders with the Jolly Bunch must be members of the club; there are numerous people who rejoin the club every year before the parade so they can be in it; they remain a couple of months and drop out; there are about forty-five to seventy-five "standard", or year in, year out members of the Jolly Bunch. There is an annual banquet for the club, too. They used to have an annual picnic; the club [treasury] provided transportation, beer and soft drinks; the members and their families brought their own lunches; the club also hired a band for the picnic; CW hopes to have the picnic across the lake this year. [Fred] "H.E."

[Minor, Jr.]'s band played a lot of the picnics; his father, Fred Minor, Sr. was president of the club at one time; "H.E.'s" band played good music. John Casimir's band was also hired for picnics. The club would hire anyone who played good music and was available. When the club had some affair [open to the public and with admission charges?], they would try to get a good band, because a good band would attract people. Some liked [Kid] Rena, who played loud music; others liked Sam Morgan, who played soft, beautiful music; some preferred others. RBA says Punch [Miller] is making a comeback, and is playing strong, although he had been sick. Some musicians don't want to play for the Jolly Bunch parade because it is too long; John Casimir would play for six hours, but not for eight hours, which is what the members of the club want. The Eureka [Brass Band] is mentioned.

Persons of good character and personality may join the Jolly Bunch if the members vote them in; if they are not known to the membership, they are investigated. Dues are paid every month; meetings are held the first and fourth Sundays. The Tulane [Club] has meetings the second and fourth Sundays. Most Jolly Bunch members send their dues, rather than attend meetings; dues are \$1.10 per month. Members may join from ages eighteen to sixty-five. Children younger than eighteen, but having parents who are members, are permitted to parade with the club, which doesn't charge them anything for the privilege.

The purpose of the Jolly Bunch is to eat and drink; the members like sport. The club gives no aid, being strictly for pleasure; the

Tulane Club is an aid club. The Jolly Bunch used to have four "enterprises" a year; they spent \$75 every three months on the enterprises, which consisted of eating and drinking; the money for the affairs came from the treasury. The Jolly Bunch does have a death fund; they have separate accounts for the death fund and for the pleasure fund; the death fund may be used only when a person dies, but the pleasure fund may be used for anything. The recent big affairs, such as a picnic year before last, was paid for by taxing [i.e., assessing? fining?] the membership. Thirty-five cents of the \$1.10 dues goes into the death fund. There are two treasurers, one for each fund. The club is trying to build up each fund so they won't have to assess the membership for the pleasure outings or the death benefit. Jolly Bunch members are assessed one dollar each for each death in the club; all the clubs, with the exception of some women's club, have an assessment of one dollar for the death of members. The Sons and Daughters assess a charge of ~~sixty~~ sixty-five cents per death; that club is "like a benevolent [society]!" [Other benevolent societies of the same type?] are the Lady Tanamies [Tammany?], Lady Tulanes and the Lady One Hundreds; they all meet at the Tulane Club. CW belongs to ladies clubs, as they can have men in them. There is a Ladies Jolly Bunch, but they and the Jolly Bunch have nothing to do with the business of each other. There are no lady members of the men's clubs. Some of the ladies clubs have male officers; the president of the Ladies Tulane is a man; his name is [Maxon?]. Some of the clubs sing at meetings, although the Jolly Bunch and the Tulane

don't.

CW mentions the Wonder[ful] Boys club, at 1600 block of [North] Miro; he says "Mice" [a member of the Jolly Bunch] is something [i.e., an official?] in that club; CW thought about joining one time, but the Wonderful Boys have no benefits and no pleasure outings; they use the \$2.50 per month dues for buying a building. CW says the Jolly Bunch is the best; they have more pleasure than any of the other clubs.

The Jolly Bunch members used to parade in dark suits; now they spend a lot of money for uniforms, decorated umbrellas, baskets and fans. CW, as an officer, rode in a car on parades; the car would take them to the various stops, where they would wait for the foot paraders. CW mentions the Caldonia [Club]; he agrees with MTZ that they are a rough bunch. CW hasn't paraded in five years (six counting this year); he checks arrangements at the beginning of the parade and leaves, appearing at the dance held that night. "Mice" is chairman of the dance and assistant chairman of the parade. A committee is appointed each year to take care of all details of the parade and of the dance; CW says, "they're very dutiful; they likes to help their club out."

The president of the Jolly Bunch is elected every March; he takes office in April (or May, as he says later?). CW took over from David Glenn [sp?], who was put out of office because he didn't do right. Other officers are vice-president, recording secretary, financial secretary and chairman of finance.

End of Reel II

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Also Present: Richard B. Allen, Marjorie T. Zander

Talk of the decorated fans and the badges carried or worn by the members of the Jolly Bunch when parading. Any number of people decorate fans, but one man makes all the badges. CW says Josephine, wife of Jim, who runs Jim's Place, decorated a fan he shows. Decorated baskets the paraders carry are mentioned; the grand marshal always has the biggest fan and basket. A man named Lee has been grand marshal for several years; no one runs against him; he is good because he is tall, so that he can be seen above the "second line." Two of the other marshals are good, too; they are Willie Hicks and "K.S." The reason two outside marshals, "Fats" Houston and "Slow Drag" [Pavageau] were leading the [special] parade Sunday is that Allan Jaffe [proprietor of Preservation Hall], who signed the contract [for hiring the band and the Jolly Bunch?], asked that they be used as such; CW says that if the Jolly Bunch had hired the band, their own marshals would have led, but inasmuch as they were paid to make the parade, the employer could have it as he preferred. [the documentary film The Music of Southern Negroes? RBA.] CW has known "Slow Drag" for years. CW mentions that "Pork Chops" once was a member of the Jolly Bunch and made a parade with them. CW says there is a fellow named Rankin who hangs around Jim's who "can run 'Pork Chop' in dancing;" Rankin doesn't like to dance except in bar rooms. RBA and CW talk about a man who does the "Alligator;" CW says the man attends many [public, outdoor] such affairs.

CW talks about the funeral of "Papoose", son of Walter [Nelson], guitarist; "Papoose" played with "Fats" Domino. CW says Walter, "Noon" [Johnson] and Sam [Rankin?] made a business of touring French Quarter bars

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[playing for whatever money was given them by the bar customers.]
All of Walter's family, including his wife and daughters, play guitar;
"Papoose" was the best. "Papoose" died in California of an overdose
of dope. The habitués of the Caldonia got up the money to hire the
band for the funeral of "Papoose".

The Jolly Bunch has hired and does hire rock and roll bands for its
dances; they have had Dooky Chase [Jr.] and his band, and some other
band of youngsters. John Casimir and [Fred] "H.E." [Minor] are men-
tioned. [see Reel II]

In the older times, [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin led a brass band. Louis
[Armstrong] played his share of funerals and parades. Joe Oliver had a
band which played for funerals, dances and parades. Colored bands used
to play for all the Carnival parades in the old times; school bands were
not used then.

There was only one Carnival club in the Irish Channel section when
CW was small; there were several in the back-of-town area; some were the
Zulus, the Tamanies [Tammany], the Bulls and the Hobgoblins. The club
in the Irish Channel operated around 1917 and 1918, when it broke up;
CW went into the army in 1917 and when he came home he moved from the
Irish Channel to his present neighborhood. There were few "tunks"
[i.e., Honky tonks] in the Irish Channel, gambling being the main re-
creational activity; the "tunks" were located beyond Rampart Street,
toward the lake, in the "back-of-town" section; the "tunks" would have a
piano, drums and perhaps a horn providing music. Good piano players,
including those in more recent years, were Bernell [Santiago], "Little

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Willie", and "Red" Cayou [sp?]. Dope killed Bernell and "Little
Willie"/ RESTRICT "if they would use the right stuff, it would be different, but
they'd get that junk, and that junk just knocks them out." [End of restriction]
The piano players would have impromptu contest in playing, sometimes five
or six in one contest. Bands advertising dances would sometimes have the
same kind of contest, or "buck", as the term is. Chris Kelly, Kid Rena,
Sam Morgan and Punch [Miller] were bands which bucked. They rode on
trucks to do the advertising for the dances. RBA mentions piano player
"Game Kid", who is supposed to have played in the "front-of-town"
section. CW knew "Drive 'Em Down", another good, barrel house piano
player. [Cf. Champion Jack Dupree (?) LP notes.] Another of the
same was Thomas. Two good guitar players were "Rabbit" [Brown?] and
Walter [Nelson]. Walter, "Noon" [Johnson] and Sam are mentioned again;
Sam could sing.

CW heard "Drive 'Em Down" play piano at places like Spano's [check
sp], and the Red Onion [but not necessarily those particular places].
CW says music boxes [i.e., coin-operated automatic phonographs] have
ruined the piano playing business in bars.

Talk of the changes in attitudes since CW's youth. Talk of dope
addiction.

End of Reel III

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RESTRICT

"[End of restriction]

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End of Reel III

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Also present: Richard B. Allen, Marjorie T. Zander

CW mentions working as bartender for parties given by various people, including Johnny Lagattuta; CW hasn't done that work for years.

The first club CW joined was the Lambeth Swells, located at Gaienne and Annunciation; CW joined about 1914. That club had parades, as almost all the other clubs of the time did. CW says the Ku Klux Klan came from the Hobgoblins [i.e., the Hogoblins inspired the KKK in some of their attire, etc.?]; the Hobgoblins wore white, including white hoods, and paraded at night. [Cf. dates of KKK and Hobgoblins.RBA]. CW also belonged to the San Jacinto [Club]; they also paraded at night. The Lambeth Swells were a club on the order of the Jolly Bunch. [Oscar "Papa"] "Sonny" Celestin, fresh from the country, got his start in music at the Lambeth Swells club house; he and his band, the first Tuxedo, rehearsed at the club house twice a week; CW says Celestin was just beginning to learn music then. CW mentions Celestin's drummer, [Abbey] "Chinee" [Foster]; CW and RBA have both seen him recently. RBA says "Chinee" is making a comeback, and has been playing with Punch [Miller]. "Chinee" was one of the best drummers in the city at one time. "Red Happy" [Bolton] was a top drummer, too. CW says he heard that [Kid] Howard is making a comeback; RBA says he has already made it.

A favorite contemporary band of CW is the [Original Young ?] Tuxedo. His favorites of the older times have all gone away; two of them were Joe Oliver and Louis Armstrong. CW knew John Robichaux, who played at the Lyric Theater, and Buddy Bolden, who used to jump out of a balloon at Lincoln Park [CW is referring to Buddy Bottley-PRC. Cf. other interviews.]

CW says violins are not played in bands anymore; RBA says Peter

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Bocage is making a comeback on violin.

CW says the old musicians still alive have a lot more music remaining in them, but there is nowhere for them to play. Young people are hiring mostly white bands. Night clubs once used colored bands almost exclusively, but not now. CW says Abbey [Williams] plays for whites a lot. RBA says three new places in the French Quarter use colored musicians almost exclusively [Preservation, Icon, and Dixieland Halls. RBA], and because a different band is hired almost every night, a lot of the old musicians are being given a chance to play again. CW says a lot of young musicians are coming up, and they have surprised him. [by being good?].

Joe Oliver played mostly uptown, except for funerals and parades in the downtown section sometimes. CW knew Jack Carey; RBA says he was from uptown. RBA mentions the Imperial Band, the Eagle Band, and Kid Ory. CW says he doesn't remember a lot of bands by name, but he would recognize the names of the musicians. He says "we" [i.e., the Jolly Bunch] will get bid about six or eight bands for one job; he won't know some of the bands by name; bids will come from George Williams, Abby [check sp] Williams, the Young Tuxedo [Brass Band], led by John [Casimir], and others. They don't count John Casimir's bid, as he is considered "Number One" [i.e., his band is the first to be hired anyway]. The Jolly Bunch always calls John Casimir for funerals. [In a conversation in early 1966 Harold Dejan discussed the hiring of one band to play funerals on a yearly basis by the Y.M.O.B.A. Do the other B.A. and clubs do likewise?.RBA]

For funerals without music, officers are usually the only members

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of the club who are notified; all members are notified when a member is to be buried with music. The body is usually kept until Saturday or Sunday if music is to be used, so that more members can attend. Members are notified of deaths by [post] card. CW says the Tulane Club "messed up" when their members weren't notified of the death of old member Yancy [sp?]. The Tulane Aid and Pleasure Club was located on Tulane[Avenue] when it was formed, so the club name may have derived from that; the Tulane is an old club; they own their club building; they used to own the building next to it; the club is in sound financial condition; they have no debts, have money in the treasury. CW was chairman of a beautifying committee, which bought all new furniture for the club house. CW mentions clubs which have gone out of existence in the neighborhood of the Tulane; the Tamanies [Tammany]; the Bulls and the Hobgoblins no longer exist; the Zulus are just about gone, although they have a world-famous parade, according to RBA. CW says the Zulus don't have to pay for their parade, as the merchants take care of the cost, for the advertising benefits. CW says "we" [i.e., the Jolly Bunch] accept financial aid from merchants, also. RBA mentions Nathan King, representing Old Crow [whiskey]; CW says King has helped them, too. CW mentions a manufacturer's representative named Hunter. CW mentions Al Barnes, owner of the Midway [bar], and a director [of the Jolly Bunch]. CW says last year some of the Jolly Bunch, while on parade, were hired to come to the French Quarter to participate in making a movie, or something; he doesn't know much about it. CW says the club hires outsiders to carry their flags and their banner on parades or funerals. RBA comments that other clubs sometimes use members.

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CW talks about Jolly Bunch buttons, with JB on them, and future badges; they are for identification. Other clubs require new members to buy a constitution and a badge immediately; the Tulane charges \$5 to join, and one must have a doctor's certification of good health, because of the death benefit insurance.

Sam Morgan, Joe Watson and Buddy Petit are mentioned. CW liked a clarinetist who played with Morgan, but it wasn't Watson. CW liked Morgan's band which played soft and sweet.

End of Reel IV

