JUDGE JOHN MINOR WISDOM COLLECTION

(Mss 197)

Inventory

Earl K. Long Library
University of New Orleans

May 2000

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Contents

Summary

Biographical Note

List of Series and Subseries

Container List

Index Terms

Summary

Size: 3 linear feet

Geographic locations: New Orleans, La.; Houston, Tex.

Inclusive dates: 1870-1987

Summary: Principally Carnival ball invitations, admit cards, dance cards, and programs; newspaper editions illustrating carnival parades; souvenir booklets; memorabilia of the Young Men’s Gymnastic Club and other non-carnival miscellany.
Biographical Note

John Minor Wisdom (1905-1999) was hailed as “a giant among federal judges during the tumultuous years that saw official segregation end in the South and civil rights at last extended to black Americans.” Born in New Orleans, he attended Isidore Newman School and graduated from Washington and Lee University. In 1925 Wisdom went to Harvard University to study English literature, but a year later he returned to New Orleans and entered Tulane University Law School. He graduated first in his class in 1929 and was admitted to the bar. Later he and a former classmate, Saul Stone, founded the law firm which eventually became Stone, Pigman, Walther, Wittman and Hutchinson. While in private practice, he distinguished himself as an expert on trusts and was largely responsible for the adoption of Louisiana’s new trust code.

During World War II, Wisdom served as a captain in the Army and later as lieutenant colonel in the Office of Legal Procurement. President Harry Truman rewarded his war service with the Legion of Merit. An active member of the Republican Party, he was instrumental in securing Dwight D. Eisenhower’s nomination for the presidency in 1952. In 1957 Eisenhower appointed him to the 5th Circuit, which then included Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, as well as Louisiana. Wisdom aligned himself with three other 5th Circuit judges to form “The Four,” a coalition that pressed consistently for black rights.

In 1977 Wisdom changed his status from active judge to senior judge, which relieved him of administrative duties but allowed him to continue to hear cases and write opinions. From 1975 until his death, he was a judge for the special court created under the Regional Rail Reorganization Act of 1973. He received many accolades, including
honorary degrees from Tulane, Harvard, and San Diego universities and Oberlin and Middlebury colleges. Despite his support for civil rights, Wisdom maintained his memberships in the all-white Boston Club and Louisiana Club, explaining, “I can’t change their minds, and they can’t change my mind. They respect me, and I probably help the situation a little by not getting out of those clubs.”

Wisdom’s association with those organizations may have stimulated his interest in the New Orleans Mardi Gras memorabilia found in the Judge John Minor Wisdom Collection. Mardi Gras has been commemorated in Louisiana at least since 1699. In the 1850s the celebration fell into disrepute, but on February 24, 1857, the Mistick Krewe of Comus staged its first street parade, giving rise to the New Orleans carnival that we know today. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, carnival organizations vied with each other to produce colorful, elaborately illustrated invitations to their balls and other ephemera.


List of Series and Subseries

Series I. Carnival Material

Subseries I.1 Ball invitations, admit cards, dance cards, and programs

Subseries I.2 Newspaper editions illustrating Carnival parades.

Subseries I.3 Souvenir Booklets.

Series II. Non-Carnival Material

Container List

Series I. Carnival Material

Subseries I.1 Ball invitations, admit cards, dance cards, and programs (organized alphabetically by krewe).

197-1 Apollo. Program, 1956.
Argonauts.
Invitation, 1909.

Atlanteans.
Ribbon, 1940.

Comus. See also 197-9; 197-11.
Dance cards, 1891, 1902, 1903, 1910.
Souvenir booklets, 1897, 1898, 1931. See also 197-10.

Consus.
Dance card, 1906.
Invitation, 1898.

197-2
Elves of Oberon.
Admit cards, 1911, 1932.
Invitations, n.d., 1896, 1897, 1898 (includes admit cards), 1899, 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905 (includes admit cards), 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914.

197-2
Empyreans.
Invitation, 1904.

197-3
Falstaffians.
Dance cards, 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1912, 1913, 1914 (includes admit cards), 1915.

197-4
High Priests of Mithras.
Dance cards, 1899, 1901, 1903, 1904, 1906, 1908, 1912.
Invitations, 1903, 1906.

Knights of Momus.
Dance cards, 1884, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1896, 1908, 1909, 1910.

Louisiana Literary and Debating Society and Louisiana Club Ball and Parade Instructions. February 18, 1949.

The Mystic Club.
   Invitations, 1929, 1935, 1941.

197-5

Nereus. See also 197-9.
   Admit cards, n.d.
   Dance cards, 1896, 1897, 1900, 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1910, 1913, 1914.

No-Tsu-Oh (Houston, Texas, Carnival Organization)
   Invitations, 1902.

197-6

Olympians.
   Invitations, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908 (includes admit card), 1909, 1910, 1911 (includes admit card), 1912 (includes admit card), 1913, 1914 (includes admit card), 1915, 1916.

Phunny Phorty Phellows. See also 197-9.
   Invitations, 1883, 1896.

197-7

Proteus. See also 197-9.
   Admit cards, 1928, 1931.
   Invitations, n.d., 1884, 1886, 1887, 1888, 1890, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1895, 1896, 1899, 1900 (includes admit cards), 1901, 1902, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1908, 1909, 1910,

197-8
Rex.
Program, 1986.
Queen’s At Home Invitation, n.d.

Twelfth Night Revelers.
Invitations, 1884, 1949.

197-11
Invitation from Mayor Martin Behrman for viewing Comus parade from City Hall, n.d. See also 197-1.

Subseries II. Newspaper editions illustrating Carnival parades.

197-9
Comus. See also 197-1; 197-11.
Comus Edition The Times-Democrat, February 26, 1884.
Comus Edition The Daily Picayune, February 6, 1894.
Comus Edition The Daily Picayune, February 26, 1895.
Comus Edition The Daily Picayune, March 2, 1897.
Comus Edition The Daily Picayune, February 27, 1900.

Knights of Hermes. See also 197-10.

197-9

Nereus. See also 197-5.

Phunny Phorty Phellows. See also 197-6.

Proteus. See also 197-7.
Proteus Edition The Daily Picayune, March 1, 1897.
Proteus Edition The Daily Picayune, March 6, 1905.

Rex. See also 197-8.
Rex Edition The Daily Picayune, March 2, 1897.
Subseries I.3. Souvenir Booklets. See also 197-1.

197-10
Knights of Babylon, 1940, 1941.
Knights of Hermes, 1940. See also 197-9.
Krewe of Mid-City, 1941.
Krewe of Venus, 1941.

Series II. Non-Carnival Material

197-12
Special Officer Badge
Arbitration Committee.
Provenance unknown. n.d.

197-13
Young Men’s Gymnastic Association material. Includes Ladies Entertainment dance card and a gymnastic meet program. November 5, 1903; February 14, 1905.

Index Terms

Balls—Louisiana—New Orleans
Carnival—Louisiana—New Orleans
Wisdom, John Minor