

Photo by Fonville

For five decades, Fonville Winans was Baton Rouge's premier wedding photographer.
By Ruth Laney • Contemporary portraits by Wes Kroninger



One of Fonville Winans' wedding photography signatures was to include himself in the mirror as he posed the bride making her final preparations.

Fonville Winans, known professionally by first name only, was the wedding photographer in Baton Rouge from the 1940s through the 1980s. He photographed some brides in their wedding gowns, portrait style. Others hired him to photograph the entire wedding—from the bride getting dressed to the newlyweds' departure in a car marked "Just Married."

"He was the first one who did not do a stilted portrait of the bride and groom," says Ursula Bogan Carnera, who hired Fonville to shoot her 1960 wedding to Jack Carnera. "He did the story of the wedding."

"Fonville came to the house and started taking pictures when I still had my hair in rollers," recalls Betty

Freeman Smith, who married William Duncan Smith in Zachary in 1964. "He liked to take the whole day and tell a story with pictures. He didn't use a flash during the ceremony. He didn't want to take away from the vows."

Fonville (1911-1992) was the

most in-demand photographer classics and sell for major in Baton Rouge, and his dollars. After a brief stint at portraits made everybody look LSU, he married Helen Collins just a little better. A native of (they would have three children) and set out to earn Missouri who grew up in Fort Worth, he first came to his living as a photographer. He operated out of a tiny rental house in North Baton Rouge, shooting pictures on Grand Isle, then opened a studio at the corner of Laurel and Seventh streets in 1941.

"He was just starting out when I announced my engagement," says Nona Reddy McInnis, who married A. K. McInnis in 1946. "His equipment was a box camera, an orange crate, and an umbrella. I sat on the orange crate. The umbrella was black—for casting shadows, I guess. I had makeup on and he took it off with a glob of the gooiest cold cream. He took the picture with the grease still on my

*"You called Fonville first...
Then you called the church
and the minister. If Fonville
was booked, you changed
the date."*

—Mary Manship Gladney

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church, accompanied by Opal Ligon, bridal consultant at Goudchaux's department store. "She would come to the house and dress you, and then she came to the church with you," recalls Carmena. "She had her

Fonville's photograph of Ursula Carmena (right) entering St. Joseph Catholic Church captures every detail in perfect focus, including the bridal consultant from Goudchaux's trailing behind, and the Gordon Theater marquee in the background.



instructions pinned to her dress. She carried an emergency kit with a little bit of brandy, a needle and thread, and chalk, in case you got a spot on your dress." Fonville's camera caught Carmena entering the church as Mrs. Ligon, note fastened to her dark dress, fusses with the cathedral train. Beyond them a car passes on North Street and the marquee of the Gordon Theater advertises Walt Disney's *Pollyanna*—all in perfect focus.

Fonville shot most wedding pictures in black and white, giving them a timeless quality. "He insisted on not doing color," says Carmena. "He said, 'You'll open up the album on your twenty-fifth anniversary and it'll be blank.'"

Fonville pioneered shooting inside the church. "He could be so flamboyant, but he was very unobtrusive at the wedding," recalls Carmena.

Peggy Castagnos Hannaman, who married Clifford Hannaman at St. Joseph's in 1948, remembers, "He got up in the choir loft and took pictures of us coming down the aisle." Says J. L. Mallett, who married Sylvia Mitchell in a Catholic church in Denham Springs in 1956, "Like the Holy Ghost, Fonville was everywhere."

When shooting weddings he used

a 35mm Leica with a hand-held light meter. Recalls his daughter Meniget Winans Turner, "He liked the rangefinder Leica because it was silent when you took the picture, and this was considered proper for a church ceremony." For formal, in-studio portraits of the bride, Fonville preferred a Speed Graphic camera that used 4 x 5" film, with flash.

Brides often used the dress of a friend or relative. Mary Gladney wore a blush-pink satin gown with a sweetheart neckline and a long circular train. She borrowed it from Jane Manship, who had married Mary's first cousin Douglas Manship several years earlier. "When I walked up the aisle, you could hear people saying, 'Oh! It's pink!'" recalls Gladney. "But it was a very pale pink. My mother used to say, 'There's pink and there's park.' She exaggerates the pronunciation of the latter, adding, 'Pink is fine, but park is not.'"

The Manship family owned both newspapers, so the Gladney wedding at St. James Episcopal was well covered. (The wedding party included Mary's cousins Charles and Douglas Manship and their wives Paula and Jane Manship.) The State-Times rhapsodized over the bridesmaids' attire



Fonville captured Mary Gladney afloat in a sea of taffeta as she shows off her wedding garter.

of "sheer sleeveless starched orchid Marquisette worn over evening frocks of pink faille taffeta." The bridesmaids carried "peach colored gladioli bordered with split asters in orchid and purple," while the bride's bouquet

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was "stephanotis and fleurs d'amour centered with a single white orchid tinged with pink." (The groom and his men wore white linen suits for the August wedding.)

While some brides planned their weddings around Fonville's availability, others lucked out and hired him on short notice. That was the case in June 1945 when Sgt. Verl Hite arrived in Baton Rouge on a thirty-day furlow between wartime duty in Europe and a seven-month stint in the Pacific theater. "We decided at two in the morning to get married and got married that same night at 8 o'clock," recalls Hite, who now lives in Hammond with his wife of 61 years, the former Peggy Richardson. Peggy turned over the details to her mother, who enlisted Fonville to shoot the nuptials at the First Methodist Church. Peggy borrowed the gown of her sister Ruth, who had married a few months earlier. Ruth in turn, wore the bridesmaid's dress that Peggy had worn in her wedding. Ruth's husband John Willard was best man.

Orene Muse, arbiter of the social scene, not only did the write-up for the State-Times but also delivered a radio address on her program "The News with Orene Muse" on WJBO. No one, marveled Muse, "ever arranged a wedding in less time than Mrs. John Rodger Richardson... Mrs. Richardson never gets in a hurry, so she only got in a medium hurry, was unflustered, and planned all the details just right. The wedding was lovely." (In 1949, Muse would start the popular magazine *The Register*, which chronicled the movers and shakers of Baton Rouge for thirty years—including their weddings.)

While no one recollects exactly what Fonville charged, several note that he was not cheap. "It was a



Fonville was credited by many as the first local photographer to tell the whole "wedding story." (Credit: Fonville Winans Photographs, Mss 4605, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.)

wonderful performance, but I tell you what, he charged enough," recalls Mallett. "My sisters thought I was crazy for paying money for a photographer," says Smith. "But I was so proud that I hired Fonville. He did a fantastic job." Recalls Carmena, "I told my mother, 'I'm willing to cut costs somewhere else if I can just have Fonville shoot my wedding.'"

"When he told me the price, Mother said we couldn't afford it," says Janice Terrell Copenhaver, who married Harris Copenhaver in 1955. "But I was determined to have Fonville do my wedding. I made \$168 a month as a teacher, and it took me a year to pay for the pictures."

A lucky few got Fonville's services gratis. One was Mary Gay Nilson, who lived next door to the Winans family and was named for Fonville's daughter Menget. "My father and Fonville both worked for the Highway Department in the 1930s and bought lots next to each other on Lobdell Avenue," recalls Nilson, who married Ed Landry in 1970. (They are now divorced.) "Fonville did my entire wedding and reception, and my engagement picture, as a gift."

Dixie Smith Guitreau, who married Ray Guitreau, had Fonville shoot her engagement picture in 1958. "Oh, my goodness, he was kind of eccentric," she says. "I remember those dark eyes behind that tremendous camera. And he always had a beret on his head. When I made the appointment, he told me not to wear much makeup, especially lipstick. Lipsticks were thick and pasty then. He wanted me to wear a white blouse. The pose he used—you put your hands up under your chin so your engagement ring showed. It was really a glamorous picture. I look at it now and I think, 'Movie star!'" ^

Ruth Laney knew Fonville for many years and treasures family photographs made by him, especially her mother's wedding portrait. She can be reached at ruthhlaney@cs.com.