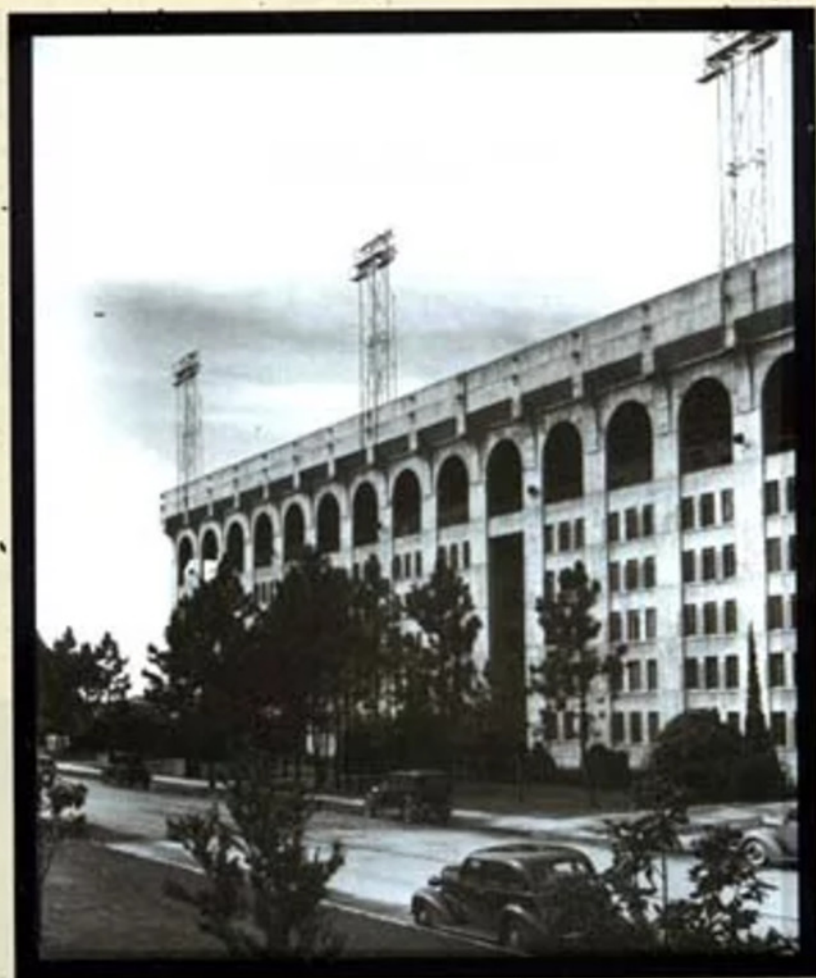


Fonville's



More than half a century has passed since Fonville Winans arrived on campus in the midst of the Great Depression, But his memories of those days are as sharp as his photographs.

By RUTH LANEY

I don't know how this way of existing will affect me...I strangely suspect I shall become restless, dreaming of boats and adventures and exciting places where the humdrum of civilization is just a faint memory. However, as things are, this going to school is just a new adventure, the end of which I cannot fathom. Life is such a gamble, and I have nothing to lose. So, I'll gamble!

When he confided those sentiments to his diary shortly after registering for classes at LSU, in September of 1934, Fonville Winans was 23 years old. He had graduated from high school four years earlier, but the combination of the Depression and a strong streak of adventure had led him on the road and into a few byways before he scraped together funds for college.

In a self-portrait made that year, Fonville's insouciant face stares straight into the camera lens from under a round-brimmed straw hat. A white, open-necked shirt sets off his tan; dark eyebrows, heavily lidded eyes, and a pencil moustache give him a rakish look. But his expression is dreamy, almost sad.

"I was really fey," says Fonville from the vantage point of 76 years. "I must have had a guardian angel. I was just taken care of. Nothing I did was intentional. Everything came about by chance—like which way the wind blows. I was a leaf that falls off the tree. If it was directed, my life was directed by divine providence."

For four years, he had led a life short on money but long on experience. Enterprising and creative, Fonville was the quintessential man who never met a stranger. He made friends easily, enjoyed the moment and floated from one venture to another with nothing remotely resembling a blueprint to guide him. "Did I have a plan?" he asks rhetorically. "No. I was strictly a soldier of fortune. I didn't even know how to spell 'future.' All my life had been an adventure."

But adventure is where you find it, and Fonville soon seized upon those opportunities LSU offered—and a few he himself created—to patch together a colorful existence as a student photographer, dance-band musician and general putterer. Though he spent only two years at LSU, his alliance with the University has lasted all his life. At first as a student, and later as a professional photographer, Fonville was the documentor of campus life for nearly 50 years. (He photographed his last homecoming queen in 1983.)

Born in Mexico, Mo., on Aug. 22, 1911, Theodore Fonville Winans was the oldest of four children and the only son of Lawrence Lewis Winans and Ruth Fonville. He was named for his paternal grandfather

Dr. Theodore Hildebrand Winans, a homeopathic physician. At first he was known by his first name. "Open the door, Theodore," his classmates taunted. But in the seventh or eighth grade, he shifted to his middle name. "It fits in down here because it's a French name," he says. Indeed, Fonville has become his signature, his trademark—no one, it seems, ever uses his last name.

His maternal grandfather, Col. W.D. Fonville, owned the Missouri Military Academy in the town of Mexico. Ruth Fonville grew up blowing the bugle for the cadets. Later, she would call her children home by playing "Retreat" on the trumpet.

When Fonville and his sisters—Lelia, Laddie Ruth and Dorothy—were young, the family moved to Fort Worth, where their father, a civil engineer and contractor, built everything from bridges to sewage-disposal plants. Their mother played piano and trumpet with the Fort Worth Symphony, gave music lessons and ran the orchestra at the Travis Avenue Baptist Church. "She could teach anybody to play any instrument," her son recalls fondly. "She could play trumpet with one hand and piano with the other." Fonville inherited his father's mechanical aptitude (he later patented several inventions) and his mother's musicianship. He played saxophone and cornet in the school band at Fort Worth's Central High School. He was also an athlete, vaulting 11 feet 6 inches in the days of bamboo poles and sand landing pits. "I used to beat my teammate Earle Meadows (later co-holder of the world



FONVILLE (SEATED, FRONT ROW, FAR RIGHT) PLAYED SAXOPHONE AND CLARINET FOR \$1 AN HOUR IN THE LOUISIANA KINGS STUDENT DANCE BAND. A SKILLED CARPENTER, HE ALSO BUILT THE MUSIC STANDS.



A SELF-
PORTRAIT
MADE ON
GRAND ISLE
IN 1934,
SHORTLY
BEFORE
FONVILLE
ENROLLED
AT LSU

record), just like I once beat Tex Beneke in a saxophone contest," he remembers. When he was a senior in high school, the sight of a Kodak 3A camera in a shop window inspired Fonville to return a newly purchased watch and buy the camera that yielded large, postcard-sized negatives. "That took all of my money, and I had to open up an account so I could charge my film," he says. Shortly thereafter, Fonville won a \$15 prize for his photograph of a Fort Worth intersection, which was published in the Star Telegram. Music was soon playing second fiddle to photography, and Fonville began shooting pictures for his high school yearbook.

During the Depression, Lawrence Winans was building a bridge across a dry creek bed in Marble Falls, Texas, when a flash flood wiped out the practically finished bridge and all of his machinery. "He rebuilt the bridge, and that cost him all of his operating capital," says Fonville. For a while, both father and son were reduced to distributing handbills door to door for 50 cents a day.

Winans slowly rebuilt his construction business, and Fonville, with no money for college, worked a variety of jobs, including surveyor and carpenter. Fonville first came to Louisiana with one of his father's bridge building crews in Leesville, and he later worked on a crew in Morgan City. The state fascinated him.

"Louisiana was my Africa, my South America," he has said. When not working in construction, he explored the moss-hung bayous of South Louisiana.

He made dozens of photographs, often processing and printing under primitive conditions. He eventually acquired a beat-up old boat for \$25, which he scraped, rebuilt, painted and named the Pintail.

Outfitted with an old Star automobile engine, the Pintail had no clutch and no reverse. Spending as much time in the water as in the boat, Fonville motored through the swamps with a 16mm camera, filming the flora and fauna of this exciting new landscape. He made three extended trips aboard the Pintail, in 1931, '32 and '33, traveling back and forth between Morgan City and Fort Worth via the Intracoastal Waterway, the Sabine and Neches rivers and the Gulf of Mexico. During the trips, he developed a facility for calling alligators (one he happily demonstrates even now) and caught several small ones. Back home, he edited his footage into a 90-minute film *The Cruise of the Pintail* and traveled all over Fort Worth and Dallas showing it to school children for a dime apiece. (He split the proceeds with the schools.) As an added lure he took along live alligators and handled them before the awed children. But when agitated school superintendents discovered boys and girls spending their lunch money on movie going and alligator-ogling, Fonville's profit-making scheme was scrapped.

In 1934, inspired by Lyle Saxon's book *Lafitte, the Pirate*, Fonville fetched up in Grand Isle, shooting pictures and making

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RIGHT: FONVILLE, LEFT, WITH STANLEY REYES IN HIS DARKROOM IN THE BASEMENT OF THE MUSIC AND DRAMATIC ARTS BUILDING. AN OPERA STUDENT, REYES ALSO SANG WITH THE LOUISIANA KINGS.

LEFT: FONVILLE, LEFT, SPLICES FOOT AGE FOR THE CAMPUS NEWS REEL WITH HIS FRIEND HUGH ROBINSON. AT RIGHT IS FONVILLE'S HOMEMADE ENLARGER, CONSTRUCTED FROM SCRAP LUMBER, A 5-GALLON OIL CAN AND A VIEW CAMERA.



friends with the island's habitués. One of them was Alfred Danziger, a prominent New Orleans businessman with political connections. Danziger leased a house on Grand Isle in which he allowed Fonville to build a darkroom; he even sent Fonville's photos to the New York Times, which published several.

To make ends meet, Fonville shot postcards of Grand Isle scenes and sold them to tourists.

LSU students vacationing on the island gave Fonville the idea of going to school at the University. Dwayne Norman was a sophomore at LSU who would later gain fame for his role in the Reveille Seven incident (which Fonville refers to as "that Reveille mess"). "He said I could go to LSU because Huey Long made it possible for someone to go there without any money," Fonville recalls. (During his term as governor from 1928-32, and later as state senator acting through puppet governor O.K. Allen, Long brought LSU from cow college to university status. His stated goal was to make LSU a school that any poor boy or girl could attend.) Fonville detoured to New Orleans to request a letter of recommendation to LSU president James Monroe Smith from Alfred Danziger. The harried businessman was willing but busy and instructed Fonville to compose his own letter for a secretary to type. Fonville penned a glowing testimonial to his many talents. The secretary typed it on Danziger's distinguished-looking linen stationery, and the would-be student hopped a bus for Baton Rouge armed with the letter, "a little capital and a lot of nerve."

Wednesday, Sept. 12th

...Arrived in Baton Rouge at 10:30 a.m. and boarded a streetcar for the University. Arrived there in a daze, a total stranger in a strange place. And a few moments later ran into David Bell, a fellow I had met on Grand Isle last summer. We had great times together. He piloted me over the campus and named a few of the impressive buildings. The huge tan edifices and spacious lawns bewildered me.



TOP: BATHING BEAUTIES AT THE HUEY P. LONG FIELDHOUSE POOL.



SECOND FROM TOP: THE REFLECTING POOL BEHIND THE GREEK THEATER WAS A FAVORITE GATHERING PLACE FOR STUDENTS WHEN FONVILLE SHOT IT CIRCA 1935. IT WAS FILLED IN 1960. THE STATUE IS OF SPANISH EXPLORER HERNANDO DESOTO



THIRD FROM TOP: THE JOHN M. PARKER AGRICULTURAL CENTER (NOW PARKER COLISEUM) WAS FINISHED IN 1937 AND DEDICATED IN APRIL 1938. THE SITE OF POLITICAL RALLIES, GRADUATION CEREMONIES AND CATTLE AUCTIONS, IT WAS NICKNAMED THE COWPALACE



BOTTOM: CASTRO CARAZO, LEFT, DIRECTS THE LSU MARCHING BAND CIRCA 1935. CARAZO WAS BROUGHT TO LSU BY HUEY LONG IN 1934 AND SERVED AS BAND DIRECTOR UNTIL 1940.

"When I started LSU I had no money," Fonville relates. "For room and board, I waited on tables at a Mrs. Gianelloni's boarding house, a two-story house on Chimes Street, about a half block east off Highland Road. I worked in the yard, and I hauled hay from their plantation on the River Road. I also lived on Penalt Street, and when they were building the [football] stadium, I lived there. They had finished the west wing, and they had rooms for students—very primitive. I lived in the LSU military barracks by the Greek Theater. Later, I moved to Royal Street downtown. I moved around a lot, but I never gave it a thought. I was used to roughing it."

Responding to Danziger's recommendation, President James Monroe Smith gave Fonville a working scholarship for the 1934-35 school session. His first job was in the LSU marching band, which outfitted him with a uniform and gave him a room in the Pentagon Barracks. "I got wind of a sax that hadn't been issued," he wrote in his diary. And as my sax is in very bad condition, I



FONVILLE WAS LICENSED PILOT WORKING AS AN AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHER FOR THE STATE HIGHWAY COMMISSION WHEN HE MADE THIS 1940 SHOT OF A RARE SNOWFALL BLANKETING THE CAMPUS. BUT IT WAS TOO COLD THAT DAY TO BOTH FLY AND SHOOT, SO HE HAD ANOTHER PILOT TAKE HIM UP.

signed for the school sax and took it home. Practiced on it a bit to ascertain its perfect condition. It had just undergone an overhaul job and looks like new." Two days later, he wrote: "Huey didn't make any undue impression on me," Fonville says today. "I was from Texas. He was just somebody I'd heard of. Later, I remember when he'd come to the campus and the students would follow him around like the Pied Piper. He'd walk into the Fieldhouse and buy you cokes, candy, whatever you wanted."

Saturday, Sept. 15th
 Drilled without instruments from 9:00 till 12:00. Was dog tired from marching in the hot sun and was nursing a headache, to boot. In the afternoon we drilled from 3:00 till 5:00 and tonight had band practice from 7:00 to 9:00. I left in time to meet Max Marx downtown in front of the Istrouma Hotel. We played for a dance from 10:00 to 2:00. Got home at 2:30. Made \$3.50.



ACTRESS ELIZABETH ASHLEY WAS AN 18-YEAR-OLD LIZ COLE, READY TO FLEE LSU FOR NEW YORK AND STARDOM, WHEN FONVILLE PHOTOGRAPHED HER IN 1958.



TOP: FONVILLE ALWAYS HAD AN EYE FOR PRETTY WOMEN. HE SHOT THESE COWGIRLS IN FRONT OF THE COW PALACE DURING THE LSU RODEO, CIRCA 1941.



FRATERNITY BOYS CAMP IT UP, CIRCA 1939.

Sunday, Sept. 16th
 ...At 3:00 reported to band practice. As we were all getting tuned I noticed a large fidgety man pacing the floor. Once in a while he would wink at somebody and laugh. A lot of visitors were watching him. He looked very important. presently Alfred Wickboldt introduced him. "Boys," he said, "I want you to meet a man who is quite influential around here. Huey long!" Huey jumped upon [sic] the rostrum, waving his arms. "Influential, hell!" he retorted, then grinned slyly. "I'm the boss of this outfit." From then on he was the show. Every eye was glued on him, and his little antics and witticisms handed us many a laugh. He did not remain long, however.

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JOANNE WOODWARD WAS A CAMPUS BEAUTY WHEN FONVILLE MADE THIS PORTRAIT IN 1948. SHE WENT ON TO HOLLYWOOD, WINNING THE 1957 ACADEMY AWARD FOR "THE THREE FACES OF EVE."

Monday, Sept. 17th
 Drilled with instruments today, both morning and afternoon. Got a room in the barracks. Fellows wanted to cut my hair, but I put them off. All freshmen are running around with their heads like billiard balls.

Perhaps as a reaction to wearing a uniform, drilling in the hot sun, and anticipating having his head shaved, Fonville quickly grew disenchanted with his marching band job.

While waiting to pay his registration fee, he ran into A.M. Culpepper, head of LSU's Brass Choir. Members of the choir also made up the cafeteria orchestra; for being in the choir they got a \$100 scholarship, and for playing in the cafeteria orchestra they got free meals. "I had already discussed my joining the choir with Culpepper," Fonville told his diary, "but he hadn't given me any encouragement. Now he talked business. He needed more musicians, and besides, the cafeteria orchestra needed a sax man. So we talked on that score, and I decided to resign from the marching band and sign up in the choir. That would end my worries. And I wouldn't have to take military either."

Fonville played tenor horn in the brass choir and sax and clarinet in the Louisiana Kings dance band, both run by Culpepper. "We played highbrow and lowbrow music, popular and symphonic music," he says. "In North Louisiana, we couldn't play popular music. 'Bells of St. Mary's' was okay. I also played in the LSU cafeteria for my meals. We played two hours a day while the students ate; then the band ate. The cafeteria was across the street from the music building. The hand and the faahall players ate upstairs. Once the food got so lousy I took a plate, covered it with a napkin, and carried it over to the business manager's (E.N. Jackson) office. I was carrying the plate of food across campus, and Al Brimfield came along in his Ford and gave me a ride to the Administration Building. I took the napkin off and said, 'Smell this.' The cafeteria manager got fired."

Because he had resigned from the marching band, Fonville had to give up his room in the Pentagon barracks. For the third time in nine days, he moved, this time to a room on Royal Street downtown, where he hoarded with the Cobb family, whose daughter Carlotta he had met on Grand Isle. The Farquhar family, another set of Grand Isle acquaintances, helped him move. Evidently young Fonville's enterprising ways struck a chord in older businessmen, for they pressed money on him.

Registered as a journalism major, Fonville also signed up for English, Spanish and

Saturday, Sept. 22nd
... Ran across Mr. Farquhar after dinner and we drove around discussing the advantages of my working my way through. During the course of our drive we parked and smoked cigarettes. He reached in his pocket and, extracting a checkbook, wrote me a check for \$25 in spite of my protests. He said he didn't want to see me have difficulties getting started in school. I really did need the money and thanked him best could ... Tonight I played a dance from 9:30 to 11:30. Made \$2.00.

speech classes. Daniel S. Wogan, the brother of the famed printmaker Caroline Durieux, was his Spanish professor. Lizzie Carter McVoy was his English teacher, and Claude M. Wise was his speech professor. "He is best remembered for saying chewing gum was sexy; so nobody chewed gum in his class," Fonville recalls. Journalism teacher Marjorie Arbour allowed no smoking in class in those days when everyone puffed unfiltered cigarettes. (Fonville affected a pipe.) "About all remembered from that class was who, what, when, where and why," he says. "I wrote a story, called 'The Sea Compensates,' which made me eligible for a writer's club called The Scribblers. It was a short story about a tornado wiping out an oyster farm on the coast. Some bankers got involved, and the farmer came out ahead at the end. I entered the story in a competition and was invited to be in the club. I became a member and probably went to one meeting."



RIGHT: FONVILLE'S SON BOB (FONVILLE, SEATED; BOB, STANDING) NOW MANAGES HIS FATHER'S STUDIO ON LAUREL STREET IN DOWNTOWN BATON ROUGE.

Fonville got a job at the LSU Portrait Studio, making portraits for about \$15 per month. His pictures appeared regularly in the *Reveille* and he shot stills for the yearbook, the *Gumbo*. He took photographs of the drama and opera productions held in the Music and Dramatic Arts building, where he set up a darkroom in the basement. By 1935, he had hatched an idea for something he called the Campus News Reel, which was okayed by President Smith. Smith gave Fonville a \$200 expense account to buy a 16mm camera and film and Fonville's old friend Alfred Danziger chipped in a projector. Fonville would shoot campus activities, edit the film and show it to students each month in the University Theater of the Music and Dramatic Arts building.

Years later, he donated the film footage to LSU, but school officials now say it is lost. Rummaging through his attic, Fonville discovered the outtakes, which he spliced into a jerky montage of 1935 campus life. Huey Long struts before rapt students in the Creek Theater. LSU opera stars emote, and an LSU swing band sways. The Campanile looms. At Smith Hall, three elegantly dressed girls in long gowns drift down the steps. Over in the zoology department, a nest of white mice writhes and someone milks a water moccasin. (Fonville attached a pair of binoculars to the camera for closeups.) Cadets march resignedly through ROTC drills. Runners in wrinkled shorts and singlets compete in track meets and road races, and tennis players in long white pants swat balls over a net. Patient fans watch a football game in Athens, Ga., in the pouring rain. "This was a real wild game," says Fonville viewing the footage 50 years later. "We beat them, and then we had fights afterwards." Spectators to the melee hold newspapers over their heads in the downpour.

One day Fonville photographed a girl named Rose. "I was assigned to take some casual pictures of her," he remembers. We went up on the Indian Mounds, and she said, 'Oh, you've got my Daddy's building in the background.' It was the Fieldhouse, and that's how I found out her daddy was Huey Long." In one of the photos, Rose Long posed with Oscar K. Allen Jr., the son of Senator Long's puppet governor. As a gag, Fonville gave Rose a paddle and set up a shot