



The Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club
Over Forty Years of Dancing History
Huntsville, Alabama

The Evolution of the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club

The Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club of Huntsville, Alabama traces its beginnings back to the late 1960s when a few friends, including the Commandant of the Missile Command, officers, supervisors, and important CEOs in the Huntsville area, started gathering at the Queensbury Apartment Recreation Center for a social hour to avoid the smoky nightclub atmosphere. Volunteer hostesses prepared hors d'oeuvres to enjoy with cocktails. As time went by, this group of friends grew in number and a decision was made to start a private club which was called the Cotillion Club. While meeting at the Queensbury Apartment Recreation Center, the Cotillion Club provided the booze. When the liquor laws changed that made the Club responsible for any accidents, the group moved to a rented room at the Elks Club. Soon it was realized that all members of this group had an immense interest in dancing. Following the social hour at the Elks Club, a hired band provided dance music for the Members to enjoy. In 1974, the Membership decided to have only ballroom dance music and changed the Club's name to the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club.

During 1990, the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club moved from the Elks Club to other venues that afforded both dancing and catering. These venues included the Huntsville Country Club, Knights of Columbus, Carriage Inn, Hilton Inn, Willowbrook (now Valley Hill) Country Club, and eventually the Von Braun Civic Center (now the Von Braun Center, VBC). It was important in the selection of each venue that there was a dance floor with capacity to accommodate the attendees. With these facility changes, hors d'oeuvres were then catered by the venue staff. Later an occasional catered dinner dance took place. The Club records indicate that the earliest dinner dances were held in August 1990 at the Hilton Inn Ballroom, September 1991 at the Knights of Columbus, and November 1992 at the University Inn. By 1995, interest in holding dinner dances increased so the schedule for the four dances that year included two regular dances at the Knights of Columbus and two dinner dances in the West Hall of the VBC. Records indicated that by June 2001, all four annual dances became dinner dances at the West Hall of the VBC where the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club remained through November 2009. Due to increasing prices at the VBC and renovations that eliminated suitable dance flooring, the 2010 Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club Committee made a decision to search for a new location for the Club dinner dances. Throughout the history of the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club, it has been difficult to find venues with an adequate dance floor and catering for dinner dances. After thoroughly evaluating alternative facilities, the Committee decided that the University Center Exhibit Hall at the University of Alabama in Huntsville was the most acceptable. The first dinner dance at the Exhibit Hall was held March 13, 2010, with music by the Edd Jones Orchestra.

At the outset, the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club membership was limited to 55 couples with each assessed annual membership dues. Some years later the membership limit was decreased to 50 due to existing venue limitations. In 1990, the limit was restored to 55 members in order to have adequate membership to support the financial requirements of the Club. In 1997, the membership limit was raised to 60 and several years later to 65 at which it has remained. The original Membership of the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club decided that, with well-selected Members, it would remain as a private club, which would be a step above public clubs in the Huntsville area. Then as now, Members were allowed to invite guests to Club events and the guests were accompanied by the inviting Members. Event costs were covered by the fees paid by Members and their guests, and partially by the dues. Guests of course paid a larger fee to attend than Members in

consideration of the contribution of Members' dues. Although originally only married couples were Members, in time it became evident that some Members would be single. Consequently, the Club decided that all couple Members and single Members would pay the same dues and fees. A single Member has always been able to include a dance partner at Club events, but a dance partner has never been considered as a Member of the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club.

The earliest remaining Members in the Club are Bill and Francis Lundy who have been instrumental in the continued success of the Club. Their first tour of service to the Club was as Committee Chairpersons in 1989-1990. Dances were held at the Huntsville Country Club, Knights of Columbus, and the Carriage Inn. The Carriage Inn, which was located at the corner of Jordan Lane and University Dr., had a nice ballroom on the second floor; it has since been torn down and replaced by a Walgreens®. During 1995, 1996 and 2005, Bill and Francis Lundy again volunteered to serve as Committee Chairpersons and served on the Committee in 2004. A few of the early-era past Members include Col. and Mrs. Norman L. "Dutch" Holland, Mr. and Mrs. (Tweak) Harvey, Bill and Lynn May, John and Marian McIntyre, and Babs Roper. While holding dances at the Huntsville Country Club, Babs Roper contributed beautiful and gigantic floral arrangements for the center piece, which at the end of the dance a lucky recipient, determined by random draw, received the lovely arrangement to take home. Later at the Knights of Columbus and the West Hall of the VBC, she furnished smaller table arrangements asking only that the hosts tell her the colors for the theme of the dance. She furnished the flowers and the Cotillion furnished the containers. Babs Roper graciously shared her time, flowers, and talent with the Members through June 2006 when her health no longer allowed her to participate.

The Necessity – Quality Ballroom Music

During the early years of the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club, it was rather difficult to find bands that could provide quality ballroom dance music. A lot of work went into the selection of the bands because not every band could play the correct tempos needed for ballroom dance. Francis and Bill Lundy, as well as a few others, spent many hours training various bands for suitable dance music. The Club's contracts with the chosen bands included the names of dance songs, tempos, and lengths that were to be played.

In the early phase of the Club, the Charlie Lyle Combo was always the group of choice. Charlie Lyle started his group in 1946 and is still playing today. By 1989 bands included the Charlie Lyle Combo, The Night Owls, Carol Kaye and Touch of Class, and Omni. The Charlie Lyle Combo was voted the best orchestra by the Club Membership. Among favorite bands in 1991 were the Charlie Lyle Combo, and Mike Sheehy and the Moon Lighters. In 1993, bands included the Barry Orth Combo, and Buddy Chambers. In 1994, The Night Owls, Buddy Chambers, and Barry Orth Combo were among those who played for the dances. The Little Big Band made their debut with the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club on November 12, 1994 at the West Hall of the VBC. In 1995, the Serenaders Orchestra, Barry Orth Combo, The Little Big Band, and The Directors were engaged to perform for the Club, and in 1996, the Paul Chambers Combo was added to the contracted music groups.

Edd Jones' The Little Big Band played at the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club events once a year in 1994, 1995, and 1996. By 1997, they had earned the contract for all four dances held that year. The Little Big Band started in Florence, Alabama in the early 1980s and was a spin-off of The Big Band of the Shoals. When they started playing at The Club in Birmingham in the early 1990s, the booking agent suggested renaming the band the Edd Jones Orchestra. The booking agent believed that having a person's name associated with the band helped when people tried to contact them. For a while they "answered" to both names, but gradually started using the Edd Jones Orchestra although there was never an official changeover date. The Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club was the first ballroom dance

for which the Edd Jones Orchestra played. Ballroom dance music is now their specialty. Until 2006, the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club Dance Programs listed the band as The Little Big Band and subsequently as the Edd Jones Orchestra. One feature of their performances for the Club, which was suggested by Bill and Francis Lundy, was the implementation of the Program containing the evening's dance schedule, which quickly became very popular with the dancers. Indeed, the Edd Jones Orchestra has earned an enviable reputation and is recognized as "The Most Popular Dance Band in the Southeast." Since the Edd Jones Orchestra has been and remains so popular with the Membership, the Committee continues to annually extend his contract to assure that the Club will have the best ballroom dance musical selections and sound for years to come.

Dance Themes

One of the exciting aspects of being the host of a Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club event is being able to select the theme of the dance. The Membership and their guests have enthusiastically enjoyed the thematic nature of the dances and the opportunity to dress accordingly. The following is a sampling of past themes and those for this year.

- Jewels of the Night
- Mardi Gras
- Summer Fun
- Stars Fell on Alabama
- Fall Harvest
- St. Patrick's Day
- City Lights and Moonlit Nights
- Garden Party
- Flying High
- Luck of the Irish
- Alive with Color
- All that Sparkles
- Irish Eyes are Smiling
- Autumn Leaves
- Red, White, and Blue
- Patriotic
- Peppermint Ball
- Red and White Gala
- Puttin' on the Ritz
- Dancing Cheek to Cheek
in Black and White
- This is a Lovely Way to Spend an Evening
- Steppin' Out – A Golden Twenties Gala
- Summer Blues
- Swing into Spring
- Caribbean Nights
- Spring is in the Air
- Moonlight and Roses
- Mardi Gras Masquerade
- Starry, Starry Night
- Somewhere Over the Rainbow
- Sparkle! Glamour! and Razzle-Dazzle!

The Committee Makes It Happen

By the mid 1970s, the Membership determined that a committee of three couples would plan and host the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club activities. After a few years, another couple was added to the Committee and the four couples decided among themselves who would serve in the roles of Chairpersons, Membership, Treasurer, and Newsletter (renamed Corresponding Secretary in 2010). This allowed each couple to plan and host one of the four dances to be held each year. It was also decided that each couple would serve for two years with the two first-year couples remaining to allow for continuity and the two second-year couples would rotate off the Committee. Although the two continuity couples select the new Committee Members, the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club expects each Member to volunteer and serve at some time as a Committee Member.

In the early period of the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club, each committee would make its own rules which varied somewhat from year to year. With the growth and development of the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club, a cohesive set of rules and regulations was necessary to ensure that the purpose and quality of the Club are appropriately maintained. Specifically, the principal purpose of

the Club was and remains for ballroom dance with semi-formal or formal attire to be worn for the events. In 1989, when Bill and Francis Lundy became Committee Chairpersons, Francis took on the challenge of preparing a comprehensive written set of rules and regulations for the Club. The 1989 Committee approved this document which has been only slightly revised over the years since each Committee has the right to revise the Rules and Regulations for the Club. These Rules and Regulations are kept by the Committee in official notebook binders with additional copies provided to each new Member and to all Members when revised. There is a “Red Notebook Binder” for the Chairpersons and a “Blue Notebook Binder” which is to be held by the host couple for the upcoming dance. The Red Notebook Binder was originated by Francis Lundy and contains information necessary for the operation of the Club such as contracts with the band and event venues. The Blue Notebook Binder, created by Jeri Helton (daughter of Francis Lundy), has information necessary and useful for planning and executing the events. Although the Club doesn’t have an official emblem, the elegant silhouette of the dance couple, which appears on this history and most announcements, has been used by the Club for over 20 years.

Membership has been restricted to maintain the highest-quality membership for the Club. Early on it was decided that once a year a Member may nominate a potential member (couple) who had attended several functions of the Club and were friends of the Member. As was clarified for the 1994 Committee by the 1993 Committee, the sponsoring Member should be able to vouch for the nominee’s “sterling” character and suitability as a Member. A Member and potential member can be dropped from the Club if their attitude and behavior are determined by the Committee to be disruptive for maintaining the purpose and high standards of the Club. A list of potential members is compiled throughout the year by the Membership Chair and a current copy of the list is provided to and kept by all Committee Members. Generally, membership vacancies occur in January of each year, resulting from Members deciding not to renew their membership, and new Members are selected from the list of nominees in the order of nomination date. When vacancies occur during the year, the Committee may elect to fill the vacancy at that time rather than waiting until January. The Membership Chairpersons are responsible to provide each new Member a copy of the Club Rules and Regulations. It is very important that all Members of the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club are familiar with the Rules and Regulations, especially the Committee Members so as to maintain the high standards and purpose of the Club.

The Future

The popularity of ballroom dance has been rapidly growing in recent years and has provided the prospect for the Cotillion Ballroom Dance Club to maintain stability by having a larger collection of potential members from which to select as vacancies arise. Continuation of the high standards of the Club is the responsibility of every Member and each Member’s willingness to serve on the Committee.

*Dedicated to
Bill and Francis Lundy
Huntsville, Alabama*

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Marianne and Barry Johnson
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