

## Decipherment of the James Odell Estes story (Carousel Club, June-Aug 1963)

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In September 1977 James Odell Estes, 45 years old and in poor health, walked into the Texarkana, Arkansas FBI office. He said he had firsthand information relevant to the JFK assassination that he had never divulged earlier. He told the FBI agents he had been told by doctors he was going to die in the next year or two, and he wanted to disclose his story before he died.

Estes said he had been a musician in earlier years who had found employment doing janitorial duties in Jack Ruby's Carousel Club, Dallas, from late June to early September 1963. Estes described characters at the Carousel Club, none of whom have been identified with the exceptions of Jack Ruby and Governor Connally. One of the characters with whom Estes claimed to have interactions was Lee Harvey Oswald, which is not possible since Oswald is known to have been in New Orleans in the summer of 1963.

Odell Estes made no attempt at publicity, nor did he go to a newspaper, only the FBI, that was it. His claimed reason for telling his story, that he shortly was to leave this life, was true. Estes died just four months later, in January 1978. Here is his gravestone: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/86059847/james-odell-estes>.

Odell Estes's story has been entirely disregarded in secondary literature, regarded as a curiosity and given no attention, even though it was known to the House Select Committee on Assassinations of the late 1970s and has long been publicly available on the Mary Ferrell Foundation website. I am not aware of a single mention of the

Odell Estes story in a book or magazine article, whether in the 2600-plus pages of Bugliosi's *Reclaiming History*, or in the indexes of any of the hundreds of other JFK assassination books. James Odell Estes's story, typed for him by FBI agents and read back to him and each page signed by him, is only 11 pages, double-spaced, and it is here:

<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=10020#relPageId=49>.

### **About Odell Estes**

Odell Estes was born Oct 25, 1932 in Pulaski, Tennessee. He served in the US Army in the Korean War. After his military service Odell Estes was a drifter. His string of petty offenses crime record basically shows the criminalization of being poor, dealing mostly with inability to pay his bills. He had health issues that did not help matters. Nothing in his story or record comes through that he was a nasty or bad person. Apart from his struggles over money and health issues at the low end of the economic ladder, survival issues (along with millions of others in America), from the little in his story he comes across as decent-hearted who meant no harm to anyone, who by accident got caught up in Dallas, during his time working as a low-level flunky at the Carousel Club a few months before the assassination, in maybe seeing a little too much that he was not supposed to see.

Estes tells of serving beverages to persons in two strange meetings held in Jack Ruby's office at the Carousel Club, meetings at which were present Ruby, "Nick", a mob-type from Louisiana (the word "mob" is mine, not in the Estes statement), "Chuck", "Lee", and in the second meeting, an arrival of Texas Governor John Connally with one other, possibly an off-duty police officer. According to Estes, while serving drinks in this second meeting, he saw an open briefcase of cash. In early Sept 1963 Estes quit his job at the Carousel Club and left Dallas.

After the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas two months later on Nov 22, 1963, Estes believed his "Lee" character had been Lee Harvey Oswald. Obviously and clearly, Estes was mistaken in that identification, but that does not mean he made up the person. It may have been simply a mistaken identification in his memory, as was the case with other witnesses.

I quietly puzzled over the Odell Estes story for a long time. My hunch was that underneath the named characters who seemed to defy identification might be a story

if those names could be deciphered. I kept at it, and I believe I have deciphered his story in identifying some of the names as recognizable persons.

The cast of characters:

- *James Odell Estes* -- musician, drifter, string of low-level petty offenses crime record, nothing violent, found a job at the Carousel Club doing general cleanup and miscellaneous duties.
- *“Barbara Gene ‘Bobbie’ Kelly”* -- waitress at the Carousel, said she was from West Allis, Wisconsin, lived in a trailer park in Irving. Odell Estes lived with her.
- *“Chuck”* -- Estes’s boss at the Carousel Club who hired him. 6’4”, red hair, mid-30s.
- *Jack Ruby* -- top person at the Carousel Club
- *“Lee”* -- 5’9” or 5’10”, 165-170 lbs, brown hair cut short and sort of curly, 30s. Not an employee of the Carousel Club but visited and knew Ruby. Odell Estes went fishing with him twice at a cabin at Possum Kingdom Lake west of Fort Worth. After the assassination Estes believed he was Oswald.
- *“Nick”* -- well-dressed, flashy jewelry, “mob” type visiting from Louisiana, New Orleans accent, unspecified business with Ruby, age 30s-40s, 6’2”, 200-plus lbs, big-sized man, moustache, black hair cut short, drove a maroon Cadillac with Louisiana plates.
- *“Mike”* -- bartender at the Carousel Club
- *Governor John Connally*--showed up once with another man with him, a closed-door meeting in Ruby’s office, with Chuck, Nick, Ruby, and a briefcase of cash.

### **“Barbara Kelly” ... Bonnie Kellough**

*“Barbara Gene Kelly”*. At first this was exasperating: I tried and tried but could not identify this woman, not in West Allis, Wisconsin and not by that name in any known reference to Carousel Club employees or dancers.

Finally I realized: I was looking for the wrong name. The waitress girlfriend of Estes was a known waitress at the Carousel Club named Bonnie Louise Kellough. That was

the correct spelling of her last name, though in Dallas Police and FBI documents her name is commonly misspelled “Kelly” just as Estes (or the FBI agents or secretaries taking down his story) spelled it (e.g.

<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=1136#relPageId=111>). In the transcription of the Warren Commission testimony of Andrew Armstrong a still third spelling of the name is seen, “Kelley”, showing the confusion.

And yet there seem to be contradictions. In the book *Jack Ruby's Girls* (1970) by Diana Hunter, Bonnie is described as from Alabama with a southern accent

(<https://archive.org/details/jackrubysgirls00hunt/page/105/mode/2up>). Also, in Estes's story he says his Barbara Kelly told him she was going to quit the Carousel Club and move back to West Allis, Wisconsin, the first week of Sept 1963. But Bonnie Kellough was still employed at the Carousel Club on Nov 22, 1963. Here is an FBI interview of Bonnie Kellough:

<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=10516#relPageId=211>. And here is a Jan 23, 1964 Dallas Police Special Services Bureau memorandum telling what became of Bonnie: <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht191022/>.

That Jan 23, 1964 memo says that before the assassination, Kellough lived in a rented room. When the Carousel Club closed she had been unable to find other work and had moved in with another woman in Oak Cliff. In late Dec 1963 her former landlady at the rented room told police she had inquired what became of Bonnie and was told the other women coworkers at the Carousel had taken up a collection for her, and with that help Kellough had taken a bus to Los Angeles. That is the last information on Bonnie Kellough in the records available on the Mary Ferrell Foundation site (the premier researchers' documents archive for JFK assassination records).

What became of Bonnie after that? Here is what I have found from further research. Bonnie's maiden name was Bonnie Louise Hethcoat. She was born April 1939 in Alabama. Her name when she was employed at the Carousel Club in 1963 was Bonnie Louise Kellough. After the report that she had gone to Los Angeles in Dec 1963 she apparently either returned to Dallas not too long after (or possibly never left Dallas at all) and lived most of the rest of her life quietly in Dallas. She passed away Dec 2020 in Dallas at age 81. Her name at death was Bonnie Louise Patton. A Vickie L. Gamboa of Denton, Texas, born 1972, identifies herself as Bonnie's daughter. In Odell Estes's narrative Odell remembers “Barbara” (Bonnie) as “about 23 years old”. That is about right; Bonnie had just turned 24 in April 1963 when Estes met her. Here is Bonnie's obituary page and a photo of her in her later years (<https://everloved.com/life-of/bonnie-patton/obituary/>).

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My first thought was that Bonnie only *told* Estes she was quitting and going back to Wisconsin. She urged him to get out of Dallas as she was going to do. When Estes told her he did not have enough money to quit his job and leave Dallas, she gave him money to buy a used car to remove that impediment. Bonnie may have moved out of her rented trailer in Irving at that time forcing the issue. Estes drove the car he had bought to Nevada and never heard from “Barbara Kelly” again in his life. His itinerary compiled by the FBI shows he made a trip to West Allis, Wisconsin in Dec 1963 trying to find her, but it was fruitless. That is because she wasn’t there. She was at work in the Carousel Club in Dallas, where she was all along! Remember the Paul Simon song, “Fifty ways to leave your lover”? This looked like method #51! However there may be another way to look at this.

I told a friend locally about Estes’s story and how Bonnie had told him to get out of town the first week of Sept 1963 and had given him money for a car to do so, and the strange detail told by Estes that after the meeting which included Connally in Ruby’s office, Estes said the wine bottles and all the glassware used by everyone in that meeting were gathered up and broken. Not washed. Smashed and broken and disposed of. Estes told of this strange breaking of glassware after meetings, twice, both meetings involving “Nick” the mob-type from Louisiana, the second one the Connally meeting. Estes does not say why the glassware was broken afterward and disposed of. (Was it wanting no fingerprints to survive?) My friend suggested that in a situation like that, Estes, the low-level help who if it was thought he had seen too much, nobody would miss him if he was whacked, he was expendable, indeed could have been at risk of his life. Bonnie, one working-class person to another, may have seen he was a good-hearted man and saved his life by getting him out of town and giving her own money so he could get a car to do so.

Maybe she knew something was at risk of happening to him, maybe she overheard something, who knows. But she got him out of town and Estes said he feared thereafter, kept moving out of that fear especially after the assassination. It may be if Bonnie had not gotten him that car and gotten him out of town, Odell could have ended up dead and forgotten, nobody would know or care, but that did not happen because he disappeared. In this light it might not have been the ploy by Bonnie to get rid of a “sticky” man out of a relationship that I had at first surmised. Estes never refers to problems or fights with Bonnie. He speaks well of her, was grateful for her kindness regarding the car.

### Identity of Odell Estes's "Lee"

That Estes was mistaken in the identity of the man he remembered as "Lee" does not mean "Lee" did not exist. Since it is certain Estes's "Lee" was *not* Oswald, the true question becomes: who *was* he?

I began to consider that Odell Estes's "Lee" may have been Curtis LaVerne "Larry" Craford—at the time he was spelling it "Crafard"—an employee of Ruby at the Carousel Club a few months later in Nov 1963, who has a known track record of having been mistakenly identified by sincere witnesses after the assassination as Oswald.

According to Odell Estes's account, he started work full-time at the Carousel Club about the last week of June 1963. Estes did cleanup and other miscellaneous duties as requested, paid daily in cash. Estes says it was in the first or second week of July, wk #1 or #2, that he first saw the man he remembers as "Lee" come into the Carousel Club. The man came in by himself and ordered a beer.

About a week later, this would be wk #2 or #3 of July, the same man came in a second time and this time went to Ruby's office and was there for about an hour. It was unknown to Estes what that was about.

About a week after that, this would be wk #3 or #4 of July, the same man came in again, alone as before and again ordered a beer. This time he invited Estes to sit down and get acquainted. They exchanged names. Estes told the man he went by "Whitey". Estes—telling this fourteen years later—says the man said his name was "Lee". Curtis Craford in the fall of 1963 went by the name "Larry". Perhaps "Larry" was misremembered by Estes with the passage of years as "Lee" comparable to Estes misremembering Bonnie's name as "Barbara" or "Bobbie" Kelly.

As with other of his characters, Estes gives a physical description. Estes said "Lee" was 5'9" or 5'10", 165-170 lbs, medium build (not skinny), brown hair cut short. "Lee"'s hair "was sort of curly". He "walked real straight" (military background?), was in his 30s.

The "medium build" agrees with Craford. (Oswald was lean or skinny rather than Craford's "medium" in build. Craford was both a little shorter than and a few pounds heavier than the lean Oswald.) The "sort of curly" in hair "cut short" agrees with Craford. (Oswald's hair in no way was "curly".) Craford was a little shorter than Estes's description by ca. 2 inches, and Craford in 1963 was age 22, not in his 30s.

About a week later, which would be about wk #4 of July or wk #1 of August, according to the Estes narrative, “Lee” came in again and went to Ruby’s office, where also were Ruby and Estes’s boss “Chuck”. This time “Lee” was carrying a black briefcase. Chuck gave Estes the keys to a white Cadillac and had Estes drive “Lee” to the airport. On the way “Lee” told Estes he was taking care of an “errand” for Ruby and hoped to make enough money on the deal to be able to live in Switzerland. The nature of the “errand” of “Lee” was unknown to Estes.

### **Paid in cash at the Carousel Club**

There are parallels between the kind of job Odell Estes had at the Carousel Club and that carried out by Curtis Craford himself at the Carousel for a three-week period starting from ca. Nov 1 through Nov 23, cleaning up and whatever other miscellaneous tasks were requested. The Estes description sheds light on how that worked: Estes describes being paid in cash for his work, no taxes taken out. In other words, it was off the books.

Compare Craford, in his Warren Commission testimony, claiming he never was paid by Ruby other than in cigarettes and that he was able to take out \$5 at a time as needed from the cash register with Ruby’s permission whenever he needed to eat. But otherwise (so Craford claimed) he was not paid wages for his work, just allowed to sleep there at the Carousel Club. And Craford claimed he left Dallas hitchhiking to Michigan on Nov 23 starting out with only \$7 in his pocket. That sounds like baloney. Craford may have been only saying that in order not to open himself up to being asked questions about unreported income and sources of cash. Craford knew better than to put on the record cash he’d received that had not been reported.

### **Witness misidentifications of Craford as Oswald**

The record shows there was a phenomenon of witness confusions between Craford and Oswald that came forth after the assassination. Witnesses who had seen Craford before the assassination mistakenly reported after the assassination that they had seen Oswald. These Craford misidentifications form a subset of a larger number of cases of ordinary, everyday citizens after the assassination, upon seeing news and pictures of Oswald on television and in the newspapers, mistakenly believing someone they had seen before the assassination had been Oswald, when it was someone else. Here are

some cases in which witnesses who thought they had seen Oswald had actually seen Craford.

- Staff at the Contract Electronics store in Dallas dealt with Ruby and Craford on a day in early November, then after seeing Oswald's picture on TV following the assassination, thought they had seen or might have seen Oswald with Ruby; one witness was certain of it (<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=56999#relPageId=47>). In fact, as Craford himself confirmed, that was Craford.
- Ruby and Craford were at the Lucas B & B restaurant at 2-3 am in the early morning hours of Nov 22, 1963. Mary Lawrence, a waitress there, identified a man she saw meeting Ruby as Oswald. But it wasn't; it was Craford (<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=10626#relPageId=399>). Craford independently confirmed he was with Ruby at that restaurant that time. Mary Lawrence was not hallucinating nor was she fabricating her sighting of "Oswald". She just mistook an identity of one person for another, not knowing better.
- A report came in that Oswald had regularly patronized a diner at 315 South Ervay in downtown Dallas and he would come in and order French Fries. It is unlikely that was Oswald due to its distance from Oswald's workplace and Oswald being on foot during his lunch hours. It very possibly was Craford walking from the Carousel Club which was close by (<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=10516#relPageId=119>).
- "Robert J. Sparks ... advised that shortly after former President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, he was in the Colony Club, Dallas, Texas, entertaining out-of-town customers. He overheard a conversation at the next table to the effect that Oswald was in and out of Jack's place during the day in early November, 1963 ... He assumed that when they mentioned Jack's place, they were talking about Jack Ruby's Carousel Club" (FBI interview of 12/16/63, report of 12/16/63, <https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=10516#relPageId=169>). That probably was a reference to Craford.
- "[Mr. Wahrmond] explained [his son] Karl serviced the pianos in the two night clubs owned by Ruby ... Wahrmond remarked that his son, Karl, was in the Carousel Club ... approximately two weeks ago [before 11/27/63] and observed Lee Harvey Oswald in the club. Karl assumed that Oswald worked



there, but did not speak to Oswald ... this information came from the elder Wahrmond”

(<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=56999#relPageId=36>).

That can hardly have been other than Craford.

- “Last Sunday [Nov 24, 1963] my husband ... walked over to this man who was sitting on the stone wall with a radio to hear the later developments. This man with the radio said ... he was surprised Jack Ruby shot Oswald, for six or eight days ago, Oswald was in the ‘Carousel Night Club’ talking to Ruby and they appeared real friendly. He said Oswald went there often” (letter to the FBI from Mrs. Tilton, 11/27/63). “Mrs. Tilton reiterated the information furnished in her letter of November 27, 1963. She stated both she and her husband had talked to the man who had stated he had seen Oswald talking to Ruby in the Carousel Club” (CE 2827, n.d., unidentified author, <https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=1142#relPageId=303>). It is unclear whether this mistaken identification of “Oswald” was Craford or some other Carousel Club patron, but it certainly was not Oswald.

### **Frances Hise and “Ossie” in the Carousel Club**

In late October 1963, a young woman, Frances Hise, applied for a job with Jack Ruby at the Carousel Club and reported this:

“According to the aforementioned [San Francisco] police department report, Frances Hise ... indicated that on October 23, 1963 she was in Jack Ruby’s place in Dallas, Texas. She described his place as being across the street from the Dolphus Hotel on Commerce Street and next to the Colony Club in Dallas. She indicated she was talking to Ruby about employment as a cocktail waitress when a person she described as white, male, American, five feet five inches, dark hair and approximately thirty years of age came on to the premises. Continuing, Frances Hise advised Inspector Gino Marionetti that Ruby referred to this man as ‘Ossie’ and told him to go into the back room. He then joined this man immediately and Miss Frances Hise left the premises. Finally in the aforementioned police report, Inspector Marionetti stated that Miss Hise advised him that there was no doubt in her mind that ‘Ossie’ and Lee Harvey Oswald were one and the same person.” (FBI, 11/28/66, <https://maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=60403#relPageId=108>)

This was not Oswald. There is no good reason to suppose Oswald ever was in the Carousel Club in his life.

The 5'5" height is shorter than either Oswald (5'9") or Craford (ca. 5'7"), but is closer to the shorter height of Craford. When Miss Hise saw Ruby greet the man and direct him to "the back room", that would be Ruby's office at the end of an adjoining hallway, exactly where Estes's "Lee" would go when coming in to the Carousel Club, to Ruby's office to meet there. This sighting of "Oswald" by Miss Hise occurred a few days before Craford started living at the Carousel Club around Nov 1, but Craford could have been in and out of the Carousel Club to see Jack Ruby in the days leading up to that.

As for Frances Hise telling of Ruby greeting the man as "*Ossie*", in some books and articles I have noticed it is misspelled "*Ozzie*". But the document does not say "*Ozzie*". She said Ruby called him "*Ossie*". Craford told the FBI he sometimes went by the initials of his name ("aliases ... Larry, C.L., Smoky", FBI interview of 11/28/63, report of 11/29/63, <https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=57001#relPageId=200>). Ruby may have addressed Larry Craford by his initials, "L.C.", and Frances Hise may have misheard that as "Ossie". (To show how names can be misremembered in pronunciation, Dan Rather, the famous newsman, told the FBI that he spoke to a Mr. "Dollar" at the locked front entrance of the Carousel Club. Rather kept telling the FBI about "Mr. Dollar". It was William DeMar, the memory-act entertainer.) In addition to the interview of Frances Hise herself, a man told what she told him:

"Hise was quite drunk and informed him that she had been working in Ruby's bar in Dallas, Texas. He noted that she informed him that Lee Harvey Oswald came into the bar and asked her if he could buy her, Hise, a drink. Later Ruby took Oswald into his office in the back of the bar." (FBI, 11/28/66, <https://maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=60403#relPageId=111>)

This description agrees with Craford, who chatted up women, drank alcohol, knew Ruby, and was around the Carousel Club in late October 1963. None of these behaviors is known of Oswald.

Like Odell Estes, after the assassination Frances Hise too believed the man she had seen with Ruby had been Oswald when it was not, it was Craford.

Also note that Frances Hise estimated the age of her "Oswald" (Craford) as "approximately thirty years of age", compare Odell Estes saying of his "Oswald"

(Craford), “he was in his 30s”, even though Craford of both of these witnesses was actually only 22.

### **Craford itinerary issues**

The identification of Odell Estes’s “Lee” as Craford seems to conflict with Craford’s representation of his whereabouts in the summer of 1963 in Craford’s Warren Commission testimony. That same testimony has Craford giving a timeline of his job history in 1961 that included no presence in California, until Warren Commission staff counsels (armed with background research carried out prior to his testimony) asked Craford about *months of employment involving a series of jobs in California* in 1961. Without missing a beat Craford agreed he had those jobs in those months in California in 1961, and described them, after he had just got through moments earlier telling an entire timeline for 1961 with no gaps and no presence in California.

If Craford had not been called on it, his *original* version of his 1961 timeline, told to the Warren Commission, would have omitted his time and presence and employment in California entirely. That was a period in which Craford later told Peter Whitney he had worked for an organized crime figure in the Bay area as a hitman (<https://www.jfk-assassination.net/creatingapatsy.htm>). Mark Groubert and Greg Parker have suggested some of Craford’s employment in California involved covert government-project work (<https://gregrparker.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Who-Was-Curtis-Laverne-Craford.pdf?595453&595453>). Craford’s evasiveness in telling of 1961 could be a parallel to Craford’s telling of 1963 which may similarly give a misleading picture of his movements.

Skepticism of Craford’s detailing of his movements in 1963 was expressed in research notes of Mrs. Jackie Dolan, date unknown but some time prior to a JFK Records Act release of 1997

([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nFZXRIIdQ\\_zaCdVk6YCWOWKyEH0i-LToy/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nFZXRIIdQ_zaCdVk6YCWOWKyEH0i-LToy/view), with thanks to Bart Kamp for the find):

“Craford and his wife and the two children, upon reconciliation at Dallas, Texas in March 1963, lived with her parents at the Letot Trailer Park, Lombardy Lane, Dallas, Tex. Then her parents moved; the Crafards ... remained at this residence along with the wife’s brother and family (who later seem to have disappeared with address unknown). At this time Craford worked

at the Ablon Poultry Company, Porter Building Co, Henry Heinz Circle; and Valley Office and School Equipment Company, all in Dallas.

“He then seems to have hitchhiked with his wife and two infants from Dallas, Texas to Port Angeles, Washington. Again the wife left him, and another reconciliation took place in Dallas, Oregon, in August, 1963 ... Starting in mid-September 1963, Craford’s activities are rather vague. Note the time sequence. ‘Went to California... down on the coast and I worked for a Chinese man down there raising strawberries... about one week; went to Long Beach, worked on the new Playland for about a month... then I went to Barstow, California where I went to work for produce, don’t remember name of outfit... was with him about 3 or 4 weeks, I believe... went to Fife Lake, Michigan overnite and stayed with sister and brother-in-law, Ingersol... Worked next “Happyland Amusements” in southern Michigan for “Bob”; we traveled from Michigan to Memphis, Tenn., worked there two weeks... then drove to Dallas (Texas) with friend Mickey Corday and joined “How Hollywood Makes Movies” on first day of Dallas State Fair.’

“The above narration by Mr. Craford, beginning mid-September 1963 covers approximately 13 weeks, which would keep him busy through mid-December 1963. How could he possibly have been so busy with all these activities when the State Fair in Dallas opened October 2? Query: Is it possible Larry Craford never left Dallas in June 1963?”

Mrs. Dolan asked that ending question with no awareness that Craford may show up in the Odell Estes story with appearances of Craford in visits to the Carousel Club in Dallas in late July through late August 1963, putting Craford in Dallas in that time frame.

### **“Lee” invites Estes to visit a cabin at Possum Kingdom Lake**

Odell Estes said about a week after the time of the meeting with Governor Connally, which would make it now maybe wk #2 or #3 of August—Estes estimated about the middle of August—“Lee” invited Estes to go fishing on a weekend at a cabin on Possum Kingdom Lake near Mineral Wells, Texas, west of Dallas and Fort Worth. “Lee” invited Estes on a Friday. They went on a Sunday and stayed overnight through Monday. “Lee” picked Estes up at the trailer park in Irving where Estes was living with Bonnie. “Lee” was driving a green 1961 Chevrolet Impala, a car Estes never saw

again. “Lee” told Estes the cabin belonged to a friend. Because “Lee” never otherwise has a car in Estes’s account but travels by cab, bus, or is driven by others, that may have been a loaner car.

Could that friend loaning a cabin to Craford at Possum Kingdom Lake relate to Craford’s Warren Commission testimony telling of his first hitchhiking pickup on Nov 23, 1963, the day Craford left Dallas to hitchhike to Michigan? Note the references to a “cabin”, “on the lake”, “west” of Carrollton, and the man was known to Craford. (Emphasis is added; also, note that despite Craford’s denial this first ride of Craford may have been prearranged.)

Mr. HUBERT. Did you leave any verbal message that you were leaving?

Mr. CRAFTARD. I think I told him to tell Jack I said goodbye.

Mr. HUBERT. Don’t you think you owed him more than that?

Mr. CRAFTARD. I never stopped to give it a thought.

Mr. HUBERT. Why didn’t you call him and tell him that you wanted to go and see your sister?

Mr. CRAFTARD. I don’t know. I haven’t got any idea.

Mr. HUBERT. Why didn’t you wait until he came in and tell him?

Mr. CRAFTARD. I made up my mind to go, and that was it.

Mr. HUBERT. How did you propose to travel that distance with \$7?

Mr. CRAFTARD. Hitchhike.

Mr. HUBERT. Have you done that before in your life?

Mr. CRAFTARD. That’s right.

Mr. HUBERT. You told absolutely nobody but the garageman that you were leaving; is that right?

Mr. CRAFTARD. That’s right. He is the only one I spoke to. I gave him the key and told him to tell Jack I said goodbye.

Mr. HUBERT. You did not tell him where you were going?

Mr. CRAFTARD. No.

Mr. HUBERT. Where did you in fact go? What route did you take?

Mr. CRAFTARD. I went out and took, I think it is 77, I believe it is—right outside of Dallas.

Mr. HUBERT. Did you walk there?

Mr. CRAFTARD. I walked out about 15 or 18 blocks, I think it is, and *a guy I had met out at the fair picked me up. He saw me.*

Mr. HUBERT. Did you arrange for him to pick you up?

Mr. CRAFTARD. No; he was going by, he saw me, and he recognized me.

Mr. HUBERT. What is his name?

Mr. CRAFTARD. How's that?

Mr. HUBERT. What is his name?

Mr. CRAFTARD. I don't remember what his name is. He worked out there for a while. I never did know his name. I don't think he knew my name. He recognized me as having worked out there.

Mr. HUBERT. You were on the highway hitchhiking at that time?

Mr. CRAFTARD. That's right.

(. . .)

Mr. HUBERT. How far did you go with him?

Mr. CRAFTARD. *He took me about 20 or 25 or 30 miles out. It wasn't in Dallas.*

Mr. HUBERT. Did you tell him where you were heading?

Mr. CRAFTARD. Yes; I told him I was going up to Michigan.

(. . .)

Mr. CRAFTARD. I knew that 77 would carry me right into 66, and 66 would carry me almost in to Chicago.

Mr. HUBERT. You didn't have to consult a map then?

Mr. CRAFTARD. That's right.

Mr. HUBERT. Is that what you are telling us?

Mr. CRAFTARD. That's right.

Mr. HUBERT. All right. This boy picked you up then *and carried you about 30 miles, you say?*

Mr. CRAFTARD. *That's right.*

Mr. HUBERT. To what place?

Mr. CRAFTARD. *Out the other side of Carrollton a little ways.*

Mr. HUBERT. What state?

Mr. CRAFTARD. Texas.

Mr. HUBERT. Did he live there?

Mr. CRAFTARD. He had *a place there on the lake he was working on, he was going out there.*

Mr. HUBERT. What lake was that?

Mr. CRAFTARD. I don't remember the name of the lake.

Mr. HUBERT. But it was at Carrollton?

Mr. CRAFTARD. *Out the other side of Carrollton.*

Mr. HUBERT. *How far beyond Carrollton?*

Mr. CRAFTARD. *I don't know.* He went out and turned off on a country road.

Mr. HUBERT. But he left you on the highway?

Mr. CRAFTARD. Yes.

Mr. HUBERT. Was it a country road that went east or west of the highway you were on?

Mr. CRAFT. I believe he went *to the west*, I am not sure.

Mr. HUBERT. Did he tell you how far he had to go up the road?

Mr. CRAFT. No.

Mr. HUBERT. He was going to work, is that it?

Mr. CRAFT. How's that?

Mr. HUBERT. He was going to work?

Mr. CRAFT. *He was going to go up and do some work on his cabin.*

Mr. HUBERT. *On his cabin on the lake?*

Mr. CRAFT. *Yes.*

Mr. HUBERT. Did this man know Ruby?

Mr. CRAFT. Not that I know of.

At the Warren Commission's request, that driver was found and interviewed by the FBI; he was Clarence Aubrey Summers (FBI, 6/6/64, <https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=11488#relPageId=3>). (Trivia note: he was a brother of Dealey Plaza witness Malcom Summers.)

But there were oddities in comparing the two stories of that hitchhiker pickup, of Clarence Summers and Craft. Craft claimed the driver took him to Carrollton and beyond; Summers said he told Craft he was headed to Carrollton but changed his mind and did not do so, and dropped Craft off just a little further down the road on Harry Hines Boulevard, *which was only about a mile farther on the road, while still in Dallas*. Craft said the driver's reason for going to Carrollton was he was on his way to work on a cabin by the lake; Summers says nothing about a cabin on a lake and claims the Carrollton destination was to visit his brother. (This would be a different brother than Malcom Summers, who lived in Oak Cliff and was at the sheriff's office that day, Nov 23, giving a witness deposition.)

It is possible Craft arranged for a ride from Summers from downtown Dallas and both agreed on a hitchhiking pickup story in which Summers would say he was on his way to Carrollton and happened to pick up Craft by accident. But being questioned separately, they did not have their stories straight which is why the discrepancies.

With that in mind, it could be Clarence Summers was just sufficiently intimidated by the FBI that he gave the truthful true dropoff location of Craft from his car—which was nowhere near Carrollton, but may have been where Craft had actually asked to be dropped off after a ride from downtown Dallas, and from there Craft

was subsequently picked up by his real ride straight through to Chicago. Clarence Summers to the FBI:

“[Clarence Aubrey] Summers related that ... [he] decided to go to Carrollton, Texas, to visit his brother. He said he drove alone in a green-colored four door 1952 Dodge automobile, left his home, as he now recalls, about 12:30 or 1:00 p.m. and traveled on Harry Hines Boulevard, also known as Highway 77, in the direction of Carrollton. At about the 9000 block of Harry Hines Boulevard ... he stopped and picked up a hitchhiker. Summers said he immediately recognized the hitchhiker as Larry and reminded Larry he had met him at the fairgrounds, and that his, Summer’s name, was Aubry. Larry asked Summers how far it was to Oklahoma and stated he was going there ... He said he told Larry he was going to visit his brother near Carrollton, Texas. Summers said that upon reaching Field Circle, a short distance away, and after he had traveled at a speed of approximately 30 m.p.h. for a few minutes, he decided against going on to Carrollton and told Larry he was changing his mind. He said he let Larry out of the car at a point near the Tower Hotel Courts, a short distance from Field Circle, still on Highway 77 ... He said he definitely did not carry Larry to the vicinity of Carrollton but does recall discussing going to Carrollton.”

Summers’ stated pickup location of Craford in the 9000 block of Harry Hines Boulevard makes no sense as Craford’s first ride. That is about 8 miles from the Carousel Club’s location in downtown Dallas, yet Craford claimed he walked to the location of his first hitchhiking ride pickup with his friend who recognized him. No way Craford walked 8 miles.

A better reconstruction is that Summers may have been Craford’s ride *from* downtown Dallas *to* the dropoff point told by Summers, where Craford’s *real* ride from Dallas to Chicago would pick him up.

Summers’ stated dropoff point of Craford, after he supposedly changed his mind and decided not to go to Carrollton after all, was “a point near the Tower Hotel Courts, a short distance from Field Circle, still on Highway 77”. Tower Hotel Courts was at 10108 Harry Hines Blvd. There is a curious thing about that address—it is practically right around the corner from the Letot Trailer Court at 2665 Lombardy Lane, where Craford lived with his wife Wilma up to June 1963 and may or may not have continued to live there after Wilma left for Port Angeles, Washington. Of course on Nov 23, 1963 Craford was not living there, but he could easily have picked a suitable meeting place in the vicinity of his old location (perhaps the famous Tower Hotel Courts itself?) as a pickup location for his real ride to Chicago.



Summers' stated pickup and dropoff of Craford (according to Summers' account), *only about a mile apart and still within the city limits of Dallas*, makes no sense for a claimed first hitchhiking pickup, nor does it sound right that Craford told such very different particulars than Summers about that ride, only five months later. It makes *no* sense that Craford could have gotten to the pickup point stated by Summers by walking there.

Both Summers and Craford claimed they did not know each other until first meeting at the State Fair in early Oct 1963. But was that truthful? Summers told the FBI he had "worked at numerous service stations in the Dallas area as an attendant and as a carnival worker periodically for many years." When he was asked if he had a criminal record the FBI notes of his response were: "None admitted, states was questioned once concerning the theft of an Army uniform and on another occasion regarding a stolen car but was not charged with such offenses."

Clarence Summers by his own account for years was in the same carnival employment world as Craford, and that world probably was to a certain extent "a small world" in that people knew each other. A possibility is that Summers and Craford did know each other before the State Fair; they agreed on a story at Craford's request in which both would say they met at the State Fair, and they would say Summers gave Craford a ride by accident while on his way to Carrollton. Their stories diverged because they were separated from each other when each told their versions.

It could be Craford's friend who loaned the use of a cabin to Craford at Possum Kingdom Lake was someone different and unrelated. But Craford *did identify this* ride's driver—*Clarence Aubrey Summers*—as a friend who *had a "cabin" on a "lake", "west"*. And Clarence Summers and Craford had years of experience in common in the probably small carnival world.

Odell Estes remembered the car that "Lee" (Craford) drove to Possum Kingdom Lake as a "1961 Chevrolet Impala that I think was an off green color". It may be coincidence, but that is the color of the car Clarence Summer told the FBI in June 1964 he drove when he picked up Craford, although he said it was a different car: a "green-colored four door 1952 Dodge automobile".

Finally, a question might be raised whether Clarence Aubrey Summers, with an employment history of a series of menial jobs as a gas station attendant (most recently employed with a tree trimming service in Carrollton at the time the FBI interviewed him in June 1964) at age 35, with a 7<sup>th</sup> grade education, would be likely to have the financial means to own or possess use of a cabin at Possum Kingdom Lake. That is

unknown. Perhaps he had married into a family that had that cabin and made it available to family such as Clarence and his wife. Or perhaps the cabin belonged to the brother who lived near Carrollton, and in exchange for labor to fix it up, Clarence had a certain use of the cabin.

~ ~ ~

According to Estes's account, when they arrived to the cabin at Possum Kingdom Lake, "Lee" had a 30.30 Winchester rifle, the same as Estes brought. Estes said every other time he saw "Lee", "Lee" was carrying "a Smith and Wesson 38 calibre pistol, six shooter ... He carried this on his left side with a waist holster."

They drank beer and "Lee" told of travels in the military. According to Estes, "Lee" said he had been in Japan, Korea, Mexico, all over the U.S., had a friend in Monterrey, Mexico (a parts dealer for used cars), had been in Guam and Hawaii. Craford's military service record shows him only in Germany, but Craford claimed to Peter Whitmey he had also been in southeast Asia off the books. Whitmey:

"Despite having 'messed up, as he put it to me [in 2001], he claimed to have been selected for several covert operations as a demolition expert, which took him over the Berlin Wall as well as into southeast Asia (presumably either Laos or Vietnam). He even showed me a scar on his leg, which he treated as a badge of honor related to one of those operations. Craford was vague about whom he was working for, but emphasized to me that there would be no written records related to his covert operations." (<https://www.jfk-assassination.net/creatingapatsy.htm>)

Estes said "Lee" talked of trouble with his wife. That agrees with Craford, who was married but separated from his wife, Wilma Case. Wilma lived in Dallas normally, but that summer she with her children journeyed to Port Angeles, Washington. Although Craford did not say why she went to Port Angeles, Washington, Tony Krome in unpublished research found the explanation. Wilma's father, John W. Case, after a divorce from Wilma's mother, had remarried a woman named Elaine Taylor, and they lived in Port Angeles, Washington. (In the trailer park in Dallas, it was Wilma's mother, Ruby Case, and her boyfriend, Robert Peaney, before they moved to Oregon and married in Klamath Falls, Oregon in Nov 1963.) Wilma left her life with Craford in Dallas and went to Port Angeles, Washington, in June 1963 because that was where her father and stepmother were. Craford may have taken a trip west related to Wilma's trip (he said he did) and then returned to Dallas, perhaps continuing to live in

the same trailer park in Dallas during the times Odell Estes saw him in July and August.

Estes said the next weekend following the first weekend at Possum Kingdom Lake, "Lee" invited him to go again to the same cabin at the lake. This would be about wk #3 or #4 of August. This time Bonnie Kellough lent her car to Estes for the drive to Possum Kingdom Lake. Note that "Lee" is able to drive but does not appear to own a car, which is in agreement with Craford.

### **"Lee"'s Smith & Wesson .38**

"Every time I had seen Oswald [*Craford*] he was carrying a Smith and Wesson 38 calibre pistol, six shooter. He carried this on his left side with a waist holster ..."  
-- Odell Estes

On this second trip to Possum Kingdom Lake, Estes says "Lee" did not bring a rifle but was carrying only his Smith & Wesson .38 revolver. This handgun of "Lee" was the same make and caliber of a Smith & Wesson .38 revolver found by a Dallas citizen along with some fruit in a paper bag near a downtown street curb, as if it had been tossed from a moving car, only a few blocks from the Carousel Club, in the early morning hours on the same morning Craford left Dallas hitchhiking for Michigan, Nov 23, 1963.

MEMORANDUM TO SAC, DALLAS (89-43) DATE: 11/25/63

FROM SA RICHARD E. HARRISON

SUBJECT: ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY

On 11/23/63, Patrolman J. RAZ brought into the Homicide and Robbery Bureau, Dallas PD, a brown paper sack which contained a snub-nosed .38 caliber Smith & Wesson, SN 893265. This gun had the word "England" on the cylinder and had been found at approximately 7:30 AM in a brown paper sack, together with an apple and an orange, near the curb at the corner of Ross and Lamar Streets and was turned in by one Willie Flat, white male, 9221 Metz Drive, employed at 4770 Memphis, to the Dallas PD.

2-Dallas

REH:cah

FBI DL 89-43-636

The FBI paperwork on this paper-bag revolver, and knowledge of this paper-bag revolver's existence, were not disclosed to the Warren Commission and not discovered until the 1990s

(<https://maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=48693#relPageId=8>).

That revolver was not traced to any recent owners by the FBI in 1963, and the revolver's whereabouts today are unknown. Was that Craford's revolver, and the tossing of it on a street curb in downtown Dallas disguised as ordinary street litter—was that Craford disposing of his Smith & Wesson .38, the same revolver Odell Estes saw on Craford, before Craford left Dallas later on Nov 23?

But if so, why would Craford—why would *anyone*—dispose of a revolver in such an odd way?

Whoever disposed of that weapon wanted it to be untraceable to the person disposing of it. Had that revolver been used to kill someone? Were there any unsolved murders in the Dallas area prior to the morning of November 23, 1963 involving death by .38 Special bullets? (The paper-bag revolver had been modified to fire the slightly smaller and more common .38 Special bullets.)

As it stands, that paper-bag revolver, found the morning Craford left for Michigan, appears to be a murder weapon without a murder. And because of the timing, Craford is a person of interest as a possible source of that weapon in the unusual way it was found.

### **Left-handedness**

Odell Estes said “Lee” carried his Smith & Wesson .38 six shooter in a holster on his left side. The holster “on his left side” indicates Estes’s “Lee” was left-handed.

Craford's left- or right-handedness is not stated in any document and was unknown until Sept 21, 2024. That is the day a family member of Curtis Craford—a daughter, Jaci—informed me that Curtis Craford was left-handed, as was she herself and one of

her siblings, but not her 2 other siblings

(<https://educationforum.ipbhost.com/topic/30815-curtis-craford-information>).

Only about 10 percent of men are left-handed. If Odell Estes was correct that his “Oswald” carried his revolver in a holster on his left side, this becomes another specific agreement consistent with Estes’s “Oswald” having been Curtis Craford.

### **Odell Estes leaves Dallas**

Soon after the second trip to Possum Kingdom Lake, about the last week of August, Estes received the advice from Bonnie Kellough that he should leave Dallas, and Bonnie gave him money to buy a used car to be able to do so. Estes said he paid \$150 for the car with cash he received from Bonnie. In the Diana Hunter book, *Jack Ruby's Girls* (1970), pp. 111-14, Hunter tells of an incident in which Bonnie confessed to Ruby that she had wrongly taken \$200 out of the till of the Carousel Club. Bonnie told Ruby she did so to pay for emergency medical expenses for another dancer, and Ruby forgave Bonnie. It could be unrelated, but is it possible that was the source of the money Bonnie gave Estes to buy the car?

Estes said he left Dallas either the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> of September. Estes said his last day of work at the Carousel Club was Sept. 2, and implies he quit and left with no notice. Heightened by the assassination and Ruby’s killing of Oswald which happened not long after he left, Estes lived a life of fear and moving for the remainder of his life, in fear of the people finding him with whom he inadvertently had become mixed up in the summer of 1963.

Bonnie told Estes she was leaving Dallas too although she had not yet done so when Estes left. In fact Bonnie did not leave for another two months. As noted earlier, she dropped out of sight in December 1963 and was said to have gone to Los Angeles. If she did go to Los Angeles it does not appear to have been permanent. It appears Bonnie was back in Dallas by 1964 and lived most of the rest of her days in Dallas without fanfare until her passing in 2020.

### **“Mike” the bartender**

A good possibility for identification of “Mike” the bartender—the one who broke the glassware after certain meetings—is a friend of Jack Ruby referred to in Ruby’s Warren Commission testimony as “a bartender named Mickey Ryan”, also known as Mike Ryan, true name Roy William Pike. Craford in his testimony referred to him as “Mickey Ryan ... a bartender in a gun club located in Dallas ... a very close friend [of Ruby]” (<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=57001#relPageId=199>). Carousel Club dancer Tammi True (Nancy Powell) told the Warren Commission that Ruby had Mickey Ryan tell everyone he was “Mike from Chicago”.

The son of Mickey Ryan, Michael Jonathan Pike, in a recorded oral history of 2014 done by the Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas and available on the Museum’s website, says his father served as a functionary or middleman for mob interests in New Orleans and Chicago in his involvement with Jack Ruby (<https://emuseum.jfk.org/objects/43035/michael-jonathan-pike-oral-history?ctx=9b7d689f0cde272b1f76ffaa2a8bc631410fd35c&idx=0>).

In November 1963 Mickey Ryan was employed as a bartender in another club located a few blocks from the Carousel Club, but continued in and out of the Carousel Club visiting Ruby frequently. Craford said in his Warren Commission testimony, “I have saw Mickey Ryan probably about eight or nine times while I was working for Jack.” Carousel Club manager Andrew Armstrong testified that the last time he saw Mickey Ryan in the Carousel Club was Nov 21, 1963, the day before the assassination, when Ruby met “with Mickey Ryan, a bartender who wanted to borrow money from Ruby”.

Andrew Armstrong testified that Mike Ryan had been around the Carousel Club quite a bit during a two-week period in the summer of 1963, consistent with the Odell Estes account of bartender “Mike”.

Mr. HUBERT. Who was Mike Ryan?

Mr. ARMSTRONG. He was just a—he came in—the first time I ever met him he was with Jack, and he was sort of a lone wolf sort of on the go all the time.

Mr. HUBERT. Did he come around the Carousel very much?

Mr. ARMSTRONG. At one time—I would say it was within a period of a couple of weeks he was around there quite often.

Mr. HUBERT. When was that period of a couple weeks that he came around very often?

Mr. ARMSTRONG. I don't recall—it was during last summer.

Mr. HUBERT. You mean the summer of 1963?

Mr. ARMSTRONG. Yes.

Mickey Ryan's name was "Mike". He was a bartender, he was close to Ruby, and he was around in the summer of 1963. That seems sufficient to identify Odell Estes's bartender "Mike" as probably Mickey Ryan.

### **"Nick" the mob-type from New Orleans**

For "Nick" the mob-type from Louisiana, who Odell Estes says he saw with a briefcase of \$100 bills and Governor Connally in Ruby's office ca. early August 1963, Estes gave a rather specific description:

"a white male but had a dark complexion. He was in early thirties or forties. He was about six feet two inches tall and he weighed over two hundred pounds. He had a very big frame. He had real black hair cut short and had a moustache. He wore a real nice looking suit ... He also had an accent like New Orleans or Boston ... Nick's car ... was a marron (*sic*) cadillac and was a 1962 or 1963 model. It had Louisiana plates on it ... I heard Ruby call this man Nick. Nick had a tattoo of a dagger with a snake wrapped around the dagger on his right arm. He also had a ring on his right hand that had a large diamond in the middle surrounded by smaller diamonds in a diagonal shape. He also had a watch on his right arm."

Might that have been Nick S. Karno (Samuel Karnofsky)? "The owner of the Court of Two Sisters [restaurant in New Orleans], Nick Karno, is a close associate of Carlos Marcello and is alleged to have his names on businesses in the French Quarter that are actually Marcello's" (HSCA 180-10114-10154). Nick Karno was present at mobbed-up fellow restaurant owner Frank Caracci's establishment when Caracci gave Ruby the lead to hire exotic dancer Jada, who then moved to Dallas in late June 1963. Karno was "an underworld figure and prominent nightclub owner; partner of Frank Caracci (<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=3589#relPageId=4>). Caracci "was involved in extensive gambling operations in Louisiana and Texas" ([https://www.crimelibrary.org/gangsters\\_outlaws/family\\_epics/marcello/18.html](https://www.crimelibrary.org/gangsters_outlaws/family_epics/marcello/18.html)).

Here is a photo of Nick Karno (1909-1994). He looks like a big guy, and he has a mustache (<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/149495851/nick-s-karno>).

However, Nick Karno would have been 54 years old in 1963. Is that compatible with Estes's age estimate of "early thirties or forties"? Possibly. But on the other hand Nick Karno surely was not the only big guy named Nick who wore flashy jewelry and clothes and was shady from New Orleans. Maybe we should keep looking on this one.

### **Cadillac Coupe de Ville and Ralph Paul**

"Chuck gave me the keys to a white Cadillac that I knew belonged to Mr. Ruby ... This was a 1963 Cadillac and I am sure it was a Coupe de Ville. It had a black interior ... When I returned to the club Chuck told me to wash the car inside and out. He didn't say why but I did it." – Odell Estes's account

That Cadillac Coupe de Ville may have belonged to Ralph Paul, involved in the ownership of the Carousel Club (thanks to Paul Joliffe for drawing to attention this car identification).

Ralph Paul, who owned another restaurant in Dallas called the Bull Pen Drive-In, was involved in the ownership of the Carousel Club, while Ruby was the manager, not involved in ownership. At least that is what Andrew Armstrong testified to the Warren Commission was his understanding ("he [Ralph Paul] told me he had a financial interest in it ... Jack told me that Ralph Paul had a financial interest in the club, but he, himself, did not").

Ralph Paul testified his business arrangement with Ruby was a bit on the informal side. It started with Ralph Paul giving Ruby a loan of \$1000 in 1960 or 1961. That was followed by extensive further loans, whenever Ruby needed more money. Generously, Ralph Paul never asked for repayment or bothered with such unnecessary details as getting those loans in writing. Ralph Paul was a perfect creditor from a debtor's point of view. He never asked for repayment, no repayment was ever made, and he was always willing to lend more when asked:

"Since that time, Ruby has continued to ask for loans which were granted by Paul without security, no note or any evidence of this indebtedness to him, except cancelled checks reflecting the amount of loans made. Jack Ruby has never repaid any money loaned to him and/or the Carousel Club ... Ralph Paul considers himself as the closest friend of Jack Ruby. Any acquaintances or



friends of Jack Ruby he could not recall ...” (FBI, interview of 11/24/63 reported 11/25/63)

In a shocking development no one could have foreseen from the above picture, in 2013 Lamar Waldron reported an FBI informant had learned that Ralph Paul was a front and that there was a hidden owner of the Carousel Club, New Orleans mob boss Carlos Marcello. Waldron:

“New information for the first time shows that Carlos Marcello and his organization actually controlled the Carousel Club, not Jack Ruby. Ruby was only the club’s manager ... Ruby ran a string of failed clubs before the Carousel, and for decades it was assumed by authorities and historians that Ruby had at least one investor, his good friend Ralph Paul, who kept lending Ruby huge sums of money for his money-losing ventures.

“Ruby also owed large sums to the IRS throughout the early 1960s, first approaching \$20,000 and by 1963 \$40,000. In today’s dollars, that’s [\$420,000 in 2025]. Yet the House Select Committee on Assassinations found that Paul repeatedly loaned Ruby money, “which eventually may have totaled \$13,000” plus an additional “larger sum of money (allegedly \$15,000 to \$17,000) to assist Ruby” with his taxes. In today’s dollars, that’s at least [\$290,000 in 2025]. Yet Ralph Paul was only the owner of a relatively small restaurant in Dallas, the Bull-Pen Drive-In, and it’s impossible to imagine he could have come up with those sums let alone continue to loan money to a man who owed the IRS so much money.

“Even more bizarre, despite the best efforts of the FBI and the Warren Commission, no one could ever determine who owned the other 50 percent of the Carousel Club. More unusual still, after Ruby became famous for shooting Oswald and the Carousel Club became known nationwide, Ralph Paul simply gave up his 50 percent ownership in the club. Instead of profiting from what could have been a must-see tourist stop (even if Dallas had pulled the club’s liquor license), Ralph Paul simply walked away from his 50 percent ownership of the club and the [\$290,000 in 2025] in today’s dollars) he’d sunk into the club and Jack Ruby. It all makes no sense.

“We now know from Carlos Marcello’s admission to Jack Van Laningham during CAMTEX that Marcello’s organization controlled the Carousel Club. One of Marcello’s underbosses in Dallas—most likely Joe Campisi Sr.—funneled the money to Ralph Paul to launder the funds for the Carousel.

House Select Committee investigators were confused when Joe Campisi said in an FBI interview that ‘Ralph Paul [was] his partner.’ Campisi’s Egyptian Restaurant was large and popular, and Campisi was powerful, so he certainly didn’t need Ralph Paul as a partner. However, Joe Campisi’s comment makes perfect sense if he was funneling Marcello money to Paul as part of Paul’s fronting ownership of the Carousel for the mobsters.” (Waldron, *The Hidden History of the JFK Assassination* [2013], 121-23)

Ralph Paul had a “1962 Cadillac Coupe de Ville”, color not stated (FBI, interview of 11/24/63, reported 11/25/63, [https://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh21/pdf/WH21\\_Paul\\_Ex\\_5319.pdf](https://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh21/pdf/WH21_Paul_Ex_5319.pdf)). Ruby may have had “Chuck” have the hired help—Estes—wash the car as a courtesy to Ralph Paul on one of Ralph Paul’s visits, something like that.

### **Jack Ruby, mobbed-up Nicks in New Orleans, and Jada**

FBI documents tell of Jack Ruby going to a place of business in New Orleans, Club 500, where the previously-mentioned Marcello-connected Nick Karno was present with that business’s owner, another Marcello-connected operator named Frank Caracci, on a night in June 1963. As Caracci told it, Ruby showed up to Caracci’s place of business and Karno by accident happened to be with Caracci at the time. Caracci claimed to the FBI that though he and Karno were told that Ruby was on the premises asking to see Caracci, that neither Caracci nor Karno met Ruby face-to-face (<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=10477#relPageId=496>). This was the trip in which Ruby recruited (with the help of information conveyed to him by Caracci) the famous (and mobbed-up) exotic dancer, stage name Jada (Janet Conforto), to work for him in Dallas. Here is an FBI document with information that Caracci *did* meet with Ruby in person in June on that trip, contrary to Caracci’s denial: <https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=10489#relPageId=515>.

Also listed as meeting Ruby in that FBI document is Nick Graffagnini, night manager at the Sho-Bar in New Orleans where Jada worked before her move to Dallas to work for Ruby. Could Nick Graffagnini be a possible identity of Odell Estes’s “Nick” (Tom Gram asks)? Here is an obituary of Nicholas J. Graffagnini (1922-2003): <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/nola/name/nicholas-graffagnini-obituary?id=16322705>, and this FBI document from Sept 1989 confirms the Nicholas J. Graffagnini of that obituary is the correct one associated with Frank Carraci (<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=124409#relPageId=5>).

Graffagnini at age 41 in 1963 would agree with Odell Estes's "early thirties or forties" of "Nick". Unfortunately I have been unable to find any photo or physical description of Nicholas Graffagnini to compare with the physical description of "Nick" given by Estes. Jada relocated to Dallas in late June and began her first night onstage at the Carousel Club on July 17, 1963.

"[Jack Ruby] brought her [Jada] to Dallas in July of 1963 from Carlos Marcello's Sho-Bar in New Orleans and they signed a contract. Jada was Jack Ruby's favorite stripper. She drove a pink Cadillac convertible around Dallas while not dancing in Jack Ruby's Carousel Club."

(<https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/original-janet-jada-conforto-photo-1888090728>)

### **Was "Chuck" Hank Killam?**

"I talked to a man by the name of 'Chuck' but I do not know what his last name was. He seemed to be the manager. He gave me a job to clean up the place, wash windows and general clean up ... I can only describe Chuck was a white male, about middle thirties, 6'4" tall with reddish hair. He had a tattoo of a marine insignia on his left arm." – Odell Estes

Identification of Odell Estes's "Chuck", who appears to function as a manager of the Carousel Club under Ruby at the time he hired and paid Estes starting late June 1963—was a tough one at the beginning. I could find no "Chuck" or Charles matching that description associated with the Carousel Club or in Ruby's circle. I did look at one Charles Isaacs of Dallas. Charles Isaacs' name was in Ruby's notebook/phone book. His wife had done costume designing for some of Ruby's dancers. And his name featured in the Winnipeg Airport incident story. (On Feb 13, 1964, a Winnipeg witness, Richard Giesbrecht, believed he overheard men in the Winnipeg Airport discussing inside knowledge of the assassination of JFK, and among other details, he believed he had heard the name "Chuck Isaacs" mentioned as someone at Dallas Love Field mixed up in the JFK assassination in connection with appearing in a photograph.)

However, Charles Isaacs of Dallas told the FBI in Jan 1964 that he had met Ruby only once in his life and that was three years earlier, when Ruby hired his wife to do some costume seamstress work at that time (FBI, interview of 1/3/64 reported 1/6/64, <https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=57025#relPageId=116>). Peter

Whitney suspected Charles Isaacs could have been more involved with Ruby than he admitted (<https://www.jfk-assassination.net/winnipeg.htm>), but there is little in the way of evidence to substantiate that. Unfortunately I was not able to find a photo or physical description of Charles Isaacs with which to compare against Estes's physical description of "Chuck", most notably the detail that "Chuck" was 6'4", very tall. Also, Isaacs was employed fulltime at a job at American Airlines at Love Field at the time the FBI interviewed him. Unless Isaacs had been laid off from American Airlines the previous summer, had not been hired yet, worked for Ruby during a paid vacation, or was working two jobs at different shift hours that summer, it is difficult to see this identification as viable.

However the detail of the 6'4" height may be the key going to an identification that may come as a surprise: possibly Hank Killam, a name otherwise well-known in JFK assassination research discussions with respect to being one of the earliest "suspicious deaths" associated with the JFK assassination.

At the time of the assassination Hank Killam was employed as a house painter working for his friend John Carter, who ran the painting business and lived at the same rooming house on Beckley in Oak Cliff where Oswald lived. Killam's wife worked for Jack Ruby. Killam fled Dallas for Florida after the assassination expressing fear for his life. On March 17, 1964 Hank Killam died under suspicious circumstances in Pensacola, Florida. He was 45. According to Eitan William Killam, an attorney and public defender in Pensacola, Florida, and a relative of Hank Killam, Hank had been involved with the Carousel Club to a greater degree than realized, spent time in New Orleans, and may have been involved in the move of Jada to Dallas. Now notice the physical description. Eitan Killam:

'Hank was a large imposing individual, approximately 6'4", 250 pounds. I have information that he worked as either a bouncer, a bar tender or a hanger out of sorts at Ruby's Carousel Club.' (see link below)

Hank's wife, Wanda Joyce Killam, who knew Ruby for a long time, became employed by Jack Ruby at the Carousel Club starting in July 1963, working as a waitress or cigarette girl  
(<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=1142#relPageId=374>).

The following is from Eitan William Killam to the Assassinations Records and Review Board (ARRB), June 28, 1995  
(<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=145543#relPageId=89>):

“Back when Henry Thomas Killam died in Pensacola, Florida, I was just 15-years old ... I’m a distant cousin of Mr. Killam. He was one of the first suspicious deaths in the wake of the Kennedy assassination. At the time of Hank Killam’s death, he had lived previously in Dallas and was married to a long time employee of Jack Ruby, Wanda Joyce Davis Killam.

“Hank was a large imposing individual, approximately 6’4”, 250 pounds. I have information that he worked as either a bouncer, a bar tender or a hanger out of sorts at Ruby’s Carousel Club ... While in Dallas, Killam painted houses with a John Carter, who was a Beckl[e]y Street occupant ... Within approximately one week after the assassination, Killam returned to Pensacola a very frightened man and spoke to various people about the circumstances surrounding the assassination ... Killam had stated that he had been in meetings in New Orleans and in Dallas where the assassination had been discussed.

“Killam was also a frequent visitor to New Orleans and liked to go to the Show Bar [*sic*, Sho-Bar] and, as the committee may know, that’s where Jada was employed, and I understand that she rode around in a red Chevrolet Impala convertible that was parked in the garage of Jack Ruby.

“Killam was picked up for violation of probation in Pensacola in 1963, in December of ’63. He was in jail for approximately two weeks, but was checked out of jail daily and allowed to spend his days in a local bar. Killam told the owner of the bar that he had special knowledge of the assassination, and that he had been involved in the transportation of a woman associated with Ruby ...

“After the interview with the FBI, they advised the probation officer that Mr. Killam needed psychiatric help. That psychiatric help was never forthcoming because the next morning Killam was dead. His death occurred on March 17, 1964 in the early morning as a result of a single slash that was three inches deep into his jugular vein. Officially the death was ruled as a suicide or an accident, that he had apparently jumped or fell through a plate glass window ...

“I have interviewed three of the four wives allegedly married to Mr. Killam. Upon his return from Dallas, he told one of them specifically that he knew Lee Harvey Oswald and also kn[e]w Jack Ruby, that he has special knowledge concerning the assassination. I’ve also interviewed a niece of Mr. Killam’s, who talked to him several days before his death. She related to me that he told her that he knew Lee Harvey Oswald and also knew Jack Ruby.”

The references to “he had been involved in the transportation of a woman associated with Ruby”, and, “Killam was also a frequent visitor to New Orleans and liked to go to the Show Bar [*sic*, Sho-Bar]” suggest Hank Killam may have had something to do with the move of Jada to Dallas. That happened during the time of Odell Estes’s account, although Jada herself does not appear by name in Estes’s narrative.

Since Hank Killam was 6’4”, was 44 in 1963, may have spent time in New Orleans at a Marcello-controlled restaurant, there is a rumor he may have played a role in Jada’s move to Dallas, and there is a claim of “information that he worked as either a bouncer [or] bar tender” at the Carousel Club, this sounds like a candidate for identification as Estes’s “Chuck”. The memorable 6 feet 4 inches is not a common height. It is an outlier for men’s heights, and is the argument that Hank Killam is the match.

All that would remain to be explained is the difference in the names. “Hank” spoken of fourteen years later as “Chuck” becomes another example analogous to Bonnie remembered as “Barbara”, and Larry as “Lee”. These mistakes nevertheless retain some assonance (similarity in sound) to the true name. In this case, “Hank” and “Chuck” both end with the voiceless velar stop sound, [k].

Hank Killam left Dallas following the assassination, by all accounts in deathly fear for his life, which was followed by his suspicious death in Pensacola, Florida on March 17, 1964, extremely questionably ruled suicide (<http://jfk.hood.edu/Collection/Weisberg%20Subject%20Index%20Files/R%20Disk/Ross%20Stanley/Item%2007.pdf>). Killam’s alleged suicide—allegedly throwing himself through a plate glass window which killed him, not a usual method of attempting suicide—followed Killam’s expressed terror to family members that he was going to be killed.

In fact the ruling of Hank Killam’s death as suicide was little short of farcical. The facts of the case suggest either foul play or a psychotic episode as about the only two possible reasonable explanations, not suicide. If it was murder what would remain uncertain would be the motive for the murder, but Killam’s own interpretation of motive for why he expected to be killed, voiced in advance, was because he knew too much related to the JFK assassination, which by all appearances would go to his Jack Ruby, Carousel Club, and perhaps New Orleans associations.

The suspicious death aspect of Hank Killam has received reporting and commentary over the years. But until now no one has considered Hank Killam as a possible

identification of Odell Estes's "Chuck" in the Odell Estes narrative, and the possible context that might add in attempting to understand the tragic death of Hank Killam.

### **The Odell Estes claim of Governor Connally**

#### **in Jack Ruby's office, August 1963**

In the Odell Estes narrative, after Estes had become acquainted with "Lee"—this would be ca. early August in the Estes narrative—Estes saw "Lee" again at the Carousel Club, this time with "Nick", the well-dressed mobster type driving the maroon Cadillac with Louisiana plates. "Lee" and Nick went to Ruby's office. There was a two-hour meeting, after which Estes says bartender "Mike" smashed the glassware used in that meeting and disposed of it.

The next day, mid-afternoon, Estes said he saw "Lee", "Nick", and "Chuck" come in the back door of the Carousel Club and go to Ruby's office. Fifteen minutes later Chuck went down and met two men coming in the back door. Estes recognized one of them as Governor Connally. John Connally, the Governor of Texas.

As for the second man accompanying Connally, Estes said although he did not know the man's name he had seen him in the Club "a number of times" and Estes gives a physical description. Estes believed that man may have been an off-duty Dallas police officer. Perhaps he was accompanying Connally for security, or maybe escorting Connally as a contact or go-between, in terms of the narrative.

Estes, while serving beverages in Ruby's office to these men, says he saw a black briefcase open, with \$100 bills.

By Estes's account, the men stayed about 45 minutes or an hour in Ruby's office, after Estes served them drinks and cigarettes and had left the room.

When the meeting was finished, Chuck escorted Governor Connally and the man with him out the back door the way they had come in. This occurred about wk #1 or #2 of August 1963 in the Estes narrative.

On its face it reads as a story of a bribe to Governor Connally, with "Nick" the well-dressed mobster type from Louisiana perhaps representing some mob interest from New Orleans. Was Connally corrupt in the sense of: is it *plausible* that Governor

Connally could take a briefcase of cash conveyed to him in a back room by unsavory characters?

John Curington, aide and fixer for Big Oil man H.L. Hunt of Dallas in the 1960s, told me Connally was corrupt. He told me H.L. Hunt had conveyed corrupt money to Connally. Curington told me the way this was done was Connally was a cattleman. H.L. Hunt would send Curington to cattle auctions. Hunt's people would give the winning high bid for some prize steer paid to the seller—in this case Connally—and simply never take delivery. The large amount of money in that way would be conveyed legally with all paperwork in order and aboveboard for the money transfer, except no one would know that delivery was never taken. Curington told me this was done. Of course this is uncorroborated hearsay a half century later, but that is what Curington, in his 90s, told me. (Curington told me this outside of my recorded interview with him which is here: <https://www.scrollery.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Billionaire-Logic-and-the-Fate-of-JFK-1008-scrollery.pdf>.)

Turning to a matter of record, in 1974 Connally was charged by federal prosecutors with accepting a bribe from a dairy consortium. It went to trial, but Connally and his lawyers fought back and in 1975 Connally was acquitted by a jury, with the help of character witnesses testifying on behalf of Connally's integrity including Lady Bird Johnson, Billy Graham, Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, and Barbara Jordan (<https://time.com/archive/6854565/nation-the-milk-case-revisited/>).

In Estes's description, Connally and the man with Connally came up to Ruby's office via a "back" door entrance with a stairway up to the second floor, then went to Jack Ruby's office which was at the end of a hallway off the club premises proper. That walking path never entered the stage and customer seating area of the Carousel Club proper. On analogy with many such alleys and commercial buildings I have seen, the ground-level door at the alley entrance typically is unmarked, just a rear doorway into a multi-story building from an alley, likely going up all floors with doorways to the floor of choice as one went up the stairs. As viewed from the outside, parties entering could be going anywhere, including to other businesses in the building unrelated to the Carousel Club. The Carousel Club was closed during the daytime, and Connally's entrance was not through the main entrance with signage on Commercial Street. If some underworld types visiting from New Orleans sought a brief in-person meeting with the governor involving conveyance of a gratuity or advance token of tangible appreciation for some sought-after favor, Connally (if so) might not wish his normal staff to be aware of the meeting, or to be accompanied by staff or to have such a meeting on premises known to staff. An escorted visit to an office in a building entered by way of a non-public unmarked ground-level alley entrance could be how it



was done. It is not as if Connally risked being seen walking into an entrance of a nightclub with strippers or seen inside when such entertainment was occurring.

Who was the man Odell Estes saw accompanying Connally in the Estes narrative? Here is Estes's account:

“Chuck then came back down in about fifteen minutes and met two men who came in the back door. I recognized one of the men as John Connally who at that time was governor of the state of Texas. The man with him was a man who I had seen in the club a number of times previously. I never met him and never knew his name. This man was a white male, forty five to fifty years old, six feet tall, weighing 185 pounds. He was stocky but well built. He always wore western type clothes. I don't remember the color of his hair. I had no idea what he did at that time. I know that I saw this man subsequently in newspaper pictures that showed Ruby shooting Oswald. This man was standing directly behind Oswald in the pictures and was identified as a police officer. He had the same type hat that I had seen him wear in the club.

“Chuck took Connally and this other man to Rubys office. Chuck then called the bartender and told me to bring scotch, water, cigars and cigarettes to Rubys office. I took a bottle of Cutty Sark along with the other things to Rubys office. When I went in the following were in the room: Mr Connally, Mr Ruby, Chuck, Nick and Oswald [Craford], and also the man who had come in with Connally. I put the liquor down and at that time I saw a black briefcase that was opened and was filled with money. I know I saw hundred dollar bills. This was the same type of brief case that Oswald [Craford] had carried to the airport. I then left the room. The other men stayed in the room for forty five minutes to an hour. At that time Chuck came down stairs with Mr. Connally and the man who was with him and took them to the back door. I did not see how they left the club and I did not see how they arrived. Oswald [Craford] then came down and caught a cab that was cruising by. He did not say anything to me. To the best of my belief this meeting took place during the first or second week in August [of 1963] and was a week day.”

Estes appears to have believed based on photos that the man with Connally had been Dallas Police Detective James Leavelle. Leavelle was the officer dressed in a white or near-white suit to Oswald's right in the famous photos of Ruby shooting Oswald. Leavelle knew Ruby, but whether this kind of delayed identification based on a later photo match can be considered reliable is questionable; such witness identifications are notoriously problematic (high incidences of mistaken identifications, in cases in

which the witnesses have no prior familiarity with the persons seen or in the photos; the mistaken identifications of Oswald being prime examples). There is nothing else known that connects Connally and Leavelle. I wondered if it was possible the man could have been Detective William Courson of the Dallas County Sheriff's Department, with Estes mistaking him for Leavelle. Courson's job, assigned to him by Sheriff Decker, involved spending time in night clubs, including the Carousel Club, as described by Courson in Sneed, *No More Silence* (1998). Courson's job was to fraternize with known criminals and report to Decker, simply to keep tabs on them for Decker. But there is no information either Leavelle or Courson knew Connally. Against the Courson possibility is Courson was early 30s in 1963 whereas Estes's estimate of the man's age was ca. 45-50. (Leavelle was early 40s.)

Whoever it was who accompanied Connally, the story told by Estes suggests a bribe going to Connally. It should be noted that Odell Estes, telling of this years later, would be unlikely to be mistaken on the Governor Connally identification, since Governor Connally was a public figure in the news and not so easily mistakable. And everything about Estes's narrative seems to support that, although Estes may have been mistaken on some details, he was not wilfully lying. Everything says Odell Estes was doing his best to tell the truth as accurately as he could.

### **Invisibility in open view**

As noted earlier, it is surprising that the Odell Estes story seems never to have received a discussion in a book or article before now, even though it is no secret. It is a true story of an honest man living with what he believed were dangerous secrets. With the knowledge that his own death was imminent—which was true—he unburdened his story the only way he knew, by going to the FBI and telling them. There is no indication Odell Estes sought fame, publicity, or money for his story.

The FBI humored the dying man who had lived a rough life at the low end of the socioeconomic ladder and had no social status or standing. The FBI agents politely took his statement, collected some background information on Estes, wrote up a report, and sent it in to FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C., with a note saying no further action would be taken, and that was that. Nothing to see there.

It's only a firsthand claim that a witness saw some things in the Carousel Club about three months before the assassination.

It's only an *allegation*—uncorroborated, could be total fiction, but an allegation—concerning Governor John Connally, an appearance of a bribe or at least bribe offer (who knows, maybe Connally refused to accept the briefcase of money, Estes didn't see him *take* it)—three months before Governor Connally rode in the presidential limousine with President Kennedy in Dealey Plaza and was shot along with Kennedy in the JFK assassination.

It is only a witness's claim that Connally was meeting with a Louisiana mob-type looking character *in the office of the nightclub of the man who shot and killed Oswald* after Oswald had been arrested and was believed to have shot Kennedy and Connally.

The Odell Estes story came in too late for the Warren Commission; they knew nothing of it. But after Odell Estes's story did become known it was still missed. It has been missed in all of the published books, TV specials, and magazine feature articles about the JFK assassination, Ruby, and mobsters. It has been missed in books on John Connally. It has been missed in analyses taking an interest in Curtis Craford. Why?

It has to be because Estes's "Oswald" identification was perceived as outlandish. But Odell Estes was hardly alone in making a mistaken identification of Oswald. His Oswald misidentification and some other garbling of names of persons do not mean his story was an hallucination or should be dismissed.

To review, Odell Estes thought—like a number of other witnesses who had seen Craford with Ruby—that Craford had been Oswald. But—

FACT ONE: the man *was not Oswald*. Oswald was in New Orleans during the summer of 1963. There is no sound reason to suppose Oswald ever was in the Carousel Club in his life. It is not possible Odell Estes's "Oswald" *was* Oswald.

FACT TWO: Odell Estes's "Oswald" *was* Curtis Laverne Craford (1941-2011), for reasons argued.

The possibility that anyone was impersonating Oswald (intentionally falsely claiming to be Oswald or intending to induce people to think so) in the summer of 1963 at the Carousel Club, for no obvious or known reason, showing up in a nightclub to convince the janitor (Estes), has nothing substantial to support it. Therefore it was a mistaken identification on the part of Odell Estes which created a false memory of having heard the name "Oswald" once or twice, in addition to a garbling of a real use

of the name “Larry” remembered as “Lee”. It has to be this explanation, because no other alternative makes sense.

The JFK assassination research community, like the FBI office which humored Estes and took his report, also considered Estes’s story to be of no interest, thereby missing a possible source of information: a witness’s true story, not previously recognized, concerning Jack Ruby, Curtis Craford, a potentially identifiable New Orleans mobster named “Nick”, perhaps Hank Killam, and maybe even Governor John Connally.

That’s a lot of nothing not to see there.