

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1971

The return of Clay Shaw as a force in the city

The scene was worthy of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, or any of those contemporary playwrights who revel in paradoxes.

Gathered at a luncheon table in the plush Escoffier Room of the Royal Orleans Hotel were about a dozen of the most straightbacked business and professional men in New Orleans.

The wine was good and the mood was convivial. Sausages offered a toast. Glasses were raised.

And one of those toasted was Clay L. Shaw, a man who for two years stood formally accused of plotting the murder of the President of the United States.

A high honor

But no one seemed to mind the accusation. In fact, the subject was never introduced at the table. Moreover, Shaw, once accused of conspiring to commit one of the 20th Century's most heinous crimes, had just received a high honor from some of those assembled.

An hour before, they joined Mayor Moon Landrieu in announcing that Shaw will be entrusted with overseeing a \$2.5 million redevelopment of the French Market complex in the Vieux Carre, the most ambitious public project undertaken in that historic area in decades.

When the newspapers appeared telling this story, they too avoided the subject of the arrest, trial and acquittal of Shaw.

At Tuesday morning's press conference called to announce Shaw's new appointment, only Rosemary James of WWL-TV — a reporter not known for biting her tongue — came close to asking him a question related to his prosecution.

'How does it feel?'

"How does it feel to be back on the ball, so to speak," asked Rosemary.

The rest of us, including Rosemary, tensed a bit.

Shaw, however, handled the question with an almost phlegmatic response — something about his feeling "very fortunate" in being given a position which combines his two chief interests — historical restoration and civic improvement.

Nobody pressed him further.

Shaw himself was fitzety, commenting in spurts about certain aspects of the renovation plans for the French Market. He was preoccupied, but it was difficult to determine if the preoccupation was with the prospect of being questioned about the nightmare he lived since his arrest in 1967, or

Point of View

By GENE BOURG

of The States-Item Staff

with the honor and attention he was being given for the first time in so long.

There was one certainty at the press conference: We reporters were strangely reluctant to raise the question of Shaw's being returned — officially — to the city's good graces with questions about his ordeal at the hands of Dist. Atty. Gen. Garrison.

Everyone wanted to forget.

Everyone concerned, it was obvious, wanted to forget that it ever happened.

That New Orleans would like to forget the prosecution of Clay Shaw is understandable. It adds a dirty page to this city's history.

For two full years, the city stood by its Garrison, with the financial aid of political cronies and tens of thousands in public funds, grabbed at straw after straw in trying to prove that Clay Shaw conspired to assassinate President John F. Kennedy.

Politely, rather strange.

It took a jury 33 minutes to decide that straw, and nothing more, was the substance of Garrison's incredibly elaborate case, following testimony by a levy of prosecution witnesses who might be described politely as being rather strange.

Maybe even more incredible, however, is that Clay Shaw survived, that he could undergo deep emotional strain and financial ruin, and emerge with his life reasonably intact.

Shaw's friends like to point out that he never compromised his wife by going into hiding during the months before his acquittal. He was seen often during those times at concerts, at the theater and in restaurants, a familiar figure also in the French Quarter, many of whose buildings he has preserved.

Shaw supervised the operations of the city's International Trade Mart from the time of its founding in 1947 until his retirement in October, 1965. The ITM tower at Canal Street and the Mississippi River was built largely because of his work.

A major positive force

This week Clay Shaw stood before the reporters and the television cameras and let it be known that he's once again a major positive force in this community.

And he stood with his honor unblemished.