

= Stork Club =

The Stork Club was a nightclub in Manhattan , New York City , which during its existence from 1929 to 1965 was one of the most prestigious clubs in the world . A symbol of café society , the wealthy elite , including movie stars , celebrities , showgirls , and aristocrats all mixed in the VIP Cub Room of the club .

The club was established on West 58th Street in 1929 by Sherman Billingsley , a former bootlegger from Enid , Oklahoma . After an incident when Billingsley was kidnapped and held for ransom by Mad Dog Coll , a rival of his mobster partners , he became the sole owner of the Stork Club . The club remained at its original location until it was raided by Prohibition agents in 1931 . After the raid , it moved to East 51st Street . From 1934 until its closure in 1965 , it was located at 3 East 53rd Street , just east of Fifth Avenue , when it became world @-@ renowned with its celebrity clientele and luxury . Billingsley was known for his lavish gifts , which brought a steady stream of celebrities to the club and also insured that those interested in the famous would have a reason to visit .

Until World War II , the club consisted of a dining room and bar with rest rooms on upper floors with many mirrors and fresh flowers throughout . Billingsley originally built the well @-@ known Cub Room as a private place where he could play cards with friends . Described as a " lopsided oval " , the room had wood paneled walls hung with portraits of beautiful women and had no windows . A head waiter known as " Saint Peter " determined who was allowed entry to the Cub Room , where Walter Winchell wrote his columns and broadcast his radio programs from Table 50 .

During the years of its operation , the club was visited by many political , social and celebrity figures . It counted among its guests the Kennedy and Roosevelt families , and The Duke and Duchess of Windsor . The news of Grace Kelly 's engagement to Prince Rainier of Monaco broke while the couple was visiting the Stork Club . Socialite Evalyn Walsh McLean , owner of the Hope Diamond , once lost the gem under a Stork Club table during an evening visit to the club . Ernest Hemingway was able to cash his \$ 100 @,@ 000 check for the film rights of For Whom the Bell Tolls at the Stork Club to settle his bill .

In the 1940s , workers of the Stork Club desired to be represented by a union , and by 1957 , the employees of all similar New York venues were union members . However , Billingsley was still unwilling to allow his help to organize , which led to union supporters picketing in front of the club for many years until its closure . During this time , many of the club 's celebrity and non @-@ celebrity guests stopped visiting the Stork Club ; it closed in 1965 and was demolished the following year . The site is now the location of Paley Park , a small vest @-@ pocket park .

= = History = =

= = = Early history = = =

The Stork Club was owned and operated by Sherman Billingsley (1896 ? 1966) an ex @-@ bootlegger who came to New York from Enid , Oklahoma . The Stork Club first opened in 1929 at 132 West 58th Street , just down the street from Billingsley 's apartment at 152 West 58th Street . Billingsley 's hand @-@ written recollections of the early days recall that he was approached by two gamblers he knew from Oklahoma in his New York real estate office , proposing to open a restaurant together , which he accepted . The origin of the name of the club is unknown ; Billingsley once remarked , " Don 't ask me how or why I picked the name , because I just don 't remember . " New York City 's El Morocco had the sophistication and Toots Shor 's drew the sporting crowd , but the Stork Club mixed power , money and glamor . Unlike its competitors , the Stork stayed open on Sunday nights and during the summer months .

One of the first Stork Club customers was writer Heywood Broun , who resided in the vicinity . Broun 's first visit to the Stork was actually made by mistake ; he believed it to be a funeral home , but he soon became a regular , and invited his celebrity friends , as the name of the club spread further afield . Before long , Billingsley 's Oklahoma partners sold their shares to a man named

Thomas Healy . Eventually Mr. Healy revealed that he was a " front " for three New York mobsters . Billingsley was kidnapped and held for ransom by Mad Dog Coll , who was a rival of his mob partners . Before the ransom money could be collected by Coll , he was lured to a telephone booth where he was shot to death . After the incident , the secret gangster partners reluctantly allowed Billingsley to buy them out for \$ 30 @, @ 000 .

Another New York nightclub owner , Tex Guinan , introduced Billingsley to her friend , the entertainment and gossip columnist Walter Winchell in 1930 . In September 1930 , Winchell called the Stork Club " New York 's New Yorkiest place on W. 58th " in his New York Daily Mirror column . That evening , the Stork Club was filled with moneyed guests . Someone else who read Winchell 's column in 1930 was singer @-@ actress Helen Morgan , who had just finished filming a movie on Long Island . Morgan decided to hold a cast party at the Stork Club , paying the tab with two \$ 1 @, @ 000 bills . Winchell became a regular at the Stork Club ; what he saw and heard there at his private Table 50 was the basis of his newspaper columns and radio broadcasts . Billingsley also kept professionals on his staff whose job was to listen to the chatter , determine fact from rumor , and then report the factual news to local columnists . The practice was seen as protective of the patrons by shielding them from unfounded reports , and also a continual source of publicity for the club . Billingsley 's long @-@ standing relationship with Ethel Merman which began in 1939 , brought the theater crowd to the Stork ; there she had a waiter assigned to her whose job was just to light her cigarettes . Billingsley later wrote that Merman had offered him \$ 500 @, @ 000 to leave his wife and that he turned down the offer .

Prohibition agents closed the original club on December 22 , 1931 , and Billingsley moved it to East 51st Street for three years . It was raided in August 1932 at the 51st Street location after an angry patron lost a quarter in a coin machine and notified police . The police asked guests to quietly pay their checks and leave the building ; this took two hours . In 1934 , the Stork Club moved to 3 East 53rd Street , where it remained until it closed in October 1965 . Billingsley 's guest list for the 53rd Street opening consisted of people from Broadway and Park Avenue . He sent out 1 @, @ 000 invitations for champagne and dinner . The women found much to like about the fresh flowers everywhere and the mirrored walls , while the men were pleased to see their favorite dishes on the club 's menu as well as many of their personal and business friends at the opening . When the Stork Club became a tenant in 1934 , the building was known as the Physicians and Surgeons Building . Many of the medical tenants were unhappy about the night club moving in , but in February 1946 , Billingsley purchased the seven story building for \$ 300 @, @ 000 cash , evicting the doctors to expand the club .

By 1936 , the Stork was doing well enough to have a million dollar gross for the first time . Young debutante Brenda Frazier made her first visit to the Stork Club in the spring of 1938 ; she became a regular , bringing many young people from the society set with her . Billingsley welcomed young people who were not old enough to drink . He encouraged them to gather at the Stork Club by inviting debutantes to the club and holding a yearly " Glamor Girl " election . As the father of three daughters , Billingsley kept an eye on the young people , making sure they were not served alcohol and that they were able to have an enjoyable time at the Stork Club without it .

The Stork Club previously provided live entertainment but after Billingsley realized the reason people came to the club was to watch people , he abandoned the floor shows in favor of giving expensive gifts to regular customers of the club . A live band was provided in the main dining room for dancing . Billingsley had a keen sense for business . Before he purchased the building the Stork Club was in , the yearly rent for the space it occupied was \$ 12 @, @ 000 . Billingsley rented out the hat and coat check area to a separate concession for \$ 27 @, @ 000 a year . This paid the rent for the Stork Club , leaving \$ 15 @, @ 000 annually to cover bad checks . When Ernest Hemingway wanted to pay his bill with a \$ 100 @, @ 000 check he received for the movie rights to For Whom the Bell Tolls , Billingsley told him he would be able to cash the check after the club closed at 4am . He kept the Stork Club 's name vivid in the minds of his patrons through mailing lists and a club news letter . Billingsley was also aware of the need for a good working relationship with the press ; food and drink for reporters and photographers assigned to cover the Stork Club were on the house .

In early 1944 , New York mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia ordered a check on the books of all major city night clubs . City tax accountants soon investigated the Stork Club , the Copacabana and other city night spots . By July , auditors turned in a report claiming that the clubs were overcharging patrons on tax , sending the city the proper amount and keeping the overbilled sums . On a Saturday in July , city officials arrived at the Stork Club with a court order granting permission for them to seize the club 's property for the amount which was claimed to be overcharged as taxes , plus penalties . The total for the Stork Club was \$ 181 @, @ 000 . Billingsley , out of town with his family , was notified . The club 's employees refused to turn anything over to the officials , who were intent on closing it . Upon his return , Billingsley firmly protested that the Stork Club did not owe the city any money and was up to date on its tax payments . A compromise was reached : the club could stay open as long as a custodian for the city was allowed to be on the premises . Billingsley was eventually able to get a court order to eject the custodian , but the case dragged on for five years , costing Billingsley \$ 100 @, @ 000 .

On October 19 , 1951 , Josephine Baker made charges of racism against the Stork Club . Baker visited the club on October 16 as the guest of Roger Rico and his wife ; both entertainers were at the Stork after their theater performances . Baker said she ordered a steak and was apparently still waiting for it an hour later . The controversy grew when Baker accused Walter Winchell of being in the Cub Room at the time and not coming to her aid . Winchell was at the club ; he said he had greeted Baker and vocalist Roger Rico as the two left their Cub Room table . Winchell said he was not aware of there being any problem , and left for a late screening of the film *The Desert Fox* . The next morning , Winchell 's rumored failure to assist Baker was big news , and he received countless telephone calls . The incident blew into a major scandal and was widely publicized on the radio and newspapers . Mrs. Rico , who was part of the Baker party with her husband , said that Baker 's steak was waiting for her at the table after she returned from her phone call , but the entertainer chose to make a stormy exit from the Stork anyhow . News accounts show conflicting statements from the Ricos .

Along with that of Billingsley and the Stork Club , Walter Winchell 's name was further tarnished by the incident . After leaving the Stork , the Baker party made contact with WMCA 's Barry Gray , where the story was told as part of Gray 's radio talk show . One of those who phoned Gray 's program was television personality and columnist Ed Sullivan , a professional rival of Winchell 's whose " home base " was the El Morocco nightclub . Sullivan 's on @-@ air remarks dealt mainly with Winchell 's alleged part in the event , saying , " What Winchell has done is an insult to the United States and American newspaper men . " Winchell 's column of October 24 , 1951 provides the same details as earlier news stories about Josephine Baker 's accusations that he did not assist her at the Stork Club . Winchell also printed a letter he received from Walter White , who was the executive secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) at the time . A New York police investigation of the matter followed the complaint made by the NAACP . The police investigation found that the Stork Club did not discriminate against Josephine Baker . The NAACP went on to say that the results of the police investigation did not provide enough evidence for the organization to pursue the incident further in criminal court . Baker filed suit against Winchell over the matter , but the suit was dismissed in 1955 . Walter Winchell later said . " The Stork Club discriminates against everybody . White , black and pink . The Stork bars all kinds of people for all kinds of reasons . But if your skin is green and you 're rich and famous or you 're syndicated , you 'll be welcome at the club . "

Because of Billingsley 's long @-@ standing friendship with Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) head J. Edgar Hoover , rumors persisted that the Stork Club was bugged . During his work on the Stork Club book , author and New York Times reporter Ralph Blumenthal was contacted by Jean @-@ Claude Baker , one of Josephine Baker 's sons . Having read an article by Blumenthal about Leonard Bernstein 's FBI file , he indicated that he had read his mother 's FBI file and by comparing the file to the tapes , said he thought the Stork Club incident was overblown .

= = = Union issues and closure = = =

Hard times began for the Stork Club in 1956 , when it lost money for the first time . In 1957 , unions tried once again to organize the club 's employees . Their major effort ten years before had been unsuccessful ; at that time , Sherman Billingsley was accused of attempting to influence his employees to stay out of the union with lavish staff parties and financial gifts . By 1957 , all other similar New York clubs except the Stork Club were now unionized . This met with resistance from Billingsley and many dependable employees left the Stork Club over his refusal to allow them to be represented by a union . Picket lines were set up and marched in front of the club daily for years , including the club 's last day of business . The club received many threats connected to his refusal to accept unions for his workers ; some of the threats involved Billingsley 's family . In 1957 , he was arrested for displaying a gun when some painters who were working at the Austrian Consulate next to the family 's home sat on his stoop for lunch . Billingsley admitted to acting rashly because of the threats . Three months before his arrest , his secretary was assaulted as she was entering the building where she lived ; her assailants made references to the union issues at the Stork Club .

As a result of the union dispute , many club patrons no longer visited the night spot . Those who were performers were informed of the possibility of fines and suspensions by their respective unions for crossing the Stork Club picket line as the issue continued . Many of Billingsley 's friendships , including those of Walter Winchell and J. Edgar Hoover , were over as a result of the union problems . He began firing staff without good cause . As the dispute dragged on , there was also no longer a live band in the dining room for music ; members of the Musicians ' Union had crossed the picket line to perform for some time . Previously , the club had no need for advertising ; it was mentioned frequently in print and word of mouth without it . In 1963 , the club offered a hamburger and French fries for \$ 1 @. @ 99 in a New York Times ad ; when those in the know about the club saw it , they realized the Stork Club 's days were coming to an end . In the last few months of its operation , at times there were only three customers for the entire evening . On a good day in the mid @- @ 1940s , some 2 @, @ 500 people visited the club .

When the Stork Club initially closed its doors , news stories indicated it was being shut because the building it occupied had been sold and a new location was being sought . The years of labor disputes had taken their toll on Billingsley financially . Trying to keep the Stork Club going took all of his assets and about \$ 10 million from his three daughters ' trust funds . While in the hospital recuperating from a serious illness in October 1965 , Billingsley sold the building to Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) , who later turned the site into a park named after its founder 's father . In a 1937 interview , Billingsley said , " I hope I 'll be running a night club the last day I live . " He fell just short of that mark . One year after the Stork Club closed , Sherman Billingsley died of a heart attack at his Manhattan apartment , leaving a wife , Hazel , and three daughters , Jacqueline , Barbara , and Shermane . He was planning on re @- @ opening the Stork Club in another location and was working on writing a book at the time of his death .

= = Interior = =

From the physical layout of the club , as described by Ed Sullivan in a 1939 column , the Stork should have been doomed to failure , since it was strangely shaped and far from roomy in places . The club 's ladies ' room was on the second floor of the structure and the men 's room was on the third ; only the dining room , bar , and later the Cub Room were on the first floor . Despite this , the club could hold 1 @, @ 000 guests . A feature of the club was a solid 14 karat gold chain at its entrance ; patrons were allowed entry through it by the doorman . When the East 53rd Street building came down to make way for Paley Park , one of the artifacts found in it was a still . The New York Historical Society displayed that along with other Stork Club items and memorabilia in an exhibit in 2000 .

Billingsley 's hospitality with food , drink , and gifts overcame the structural deficits to keep his patrons returning time after time . He maintained order through a series of hand signals ; without saying a word he could order complimentary drinks and gifts for a party at any given table .

Billingsley was also able to summon the club 's private limousine to whisk favored customers away to a theater date or a ball game after drinks or dining at the Stork . He changed the meaning of the hand signals frequently to avoid regular patrons ' being able to read them . Guests dined on the finest wines and cuisine , and it was known for its champagne and caviar . The club gained worldwide attention for its cocktails , made by chief barman Nathaniel " Cookie " Cook . Cook invented dozens of cocktails at the bar , including the signature " Stork Club Cocktail " . Today the ornamental bar of the Stork Club is to be found in Jim Brady 's Bar in Maiden Lane . The dining room featured live bands for dancing ; the Benny Goodman orchestra were frequent performers . According to a 1960 Services Labor Report , the kitchen and dining room employees working in the Stork Club did " not enjoy the same wages , hours and working conditions " as the others , a primary factor which led the majority of them to the strike in January 1957 .

Besides the Cub Room , the Main Dining Room , and the bar , the club contained a room for parties , the " Blessed Event Room " , a large private room on the second floor with its own kitchen and bar , the " Loner 's Room " , which was just past the Cub Room and much like a men 's club , and a private barber shop . When the Blessed Event Room was added to the Stork Club , its walls were entirely mirrored . Patrons who had rented the room for poker parties complained that the mirrors allowed players to see everyone 's hand of cards ; the mirrors were then removed from the walls .

= = = The Cub Room = = =

Billingsley 's original plan for the Cub Room was for it to be a private place for playing gin rummy with his friends . The room was added to the club during World War II . Billingsley broke out a wall in the bar to create this private space , but it was Walter Winchell who began to call it the Cub Room . The Cub Room had no windows and was described in a Louis Sobol column as a " lopsided oval " . The room was lit with pink tones . On the wood @-@ paneled walls were paintings of beautiful women ; Billingsley also had similar portraits by the same artist in the Ladies ' powder room . After the club 's labor problems began in 1957 , Billingsley redecorated the entire club , choosing emerald green for the carpet and chairs , and a pinkish @-@ red for the banquettes . The Cub Room 's wood panels were replaced by beige burlap and the portraits of beautiful women were replaced by paintings of noted 19th @-@ century race horses . As a concession to those who wanted to have a business lunch at The Stork , the Cub Room was for men only during lunch time . The sanctum sanctorum , the Cub Room (" the snub room ") , was guarded by a captain called " Saint Peter " (for the saint who guards the gates of Heaven) .

The most famous of the Cub Room 's headwaiters was John " Jack " Spooner , who was well known to many celebrities from his previous duties at LaHiff 's . Billingsley recruited him in 1934 after the death of Billy Lahiff and the subsequent closure of his club . Spooner began an autograph book for his daughter , Amelia , while working at LaHiff 's . Billingsley encouraged him to bring " The Book " to the Stork Club , where stars continued to sign it . Some who were famous illustrators or cartoonists such as E. C. Segar (Popeye) , Chic Young (Blondie) , and Theodor Geisel (" Dr. Seuss ") would add personalized doodles or drawings for Spooner 's young daughter . Billingsley 's rule of thumb for his help , " If you know them ... they don 't belong in here , " did not apply to Spooner . It was Spooner 's knowing the patrons and socializing with them away from the job that helped make the Stork Club so successful with attracting celebrity clients . At Christmas , Spooner dressed as Santa Claus , posing for photos with old and young alike .

= = Clientele and image = =

Author T. C. McNult has referred to the Stork Club during its existence as " the most celebrated nightspot in the world " ; while author Ed McMahon has called it the " most realistic nightclub of all " , a name " synonymous with fame , class , and money , in no particular order " . Society writer Lucius Beebe wrote in 1946 : " To millions and millions of people all of over the world the Stork symbolizes and epitomizes the de luxe upholstery of quintessentially urban existence . It means fame ; it means wealth ; it means an elegant way of life among celebrated folk " . The club was a prime example of

the flourishing cafe society at the time , but the real purpose of the Stork Club , according to journalist Ed Sullivan , was people watching other people , particularly non @-@ celebrities watching celebrities . Author Mearl L. Allen , however , highlights that the club was more than a celebrity playground , and that " many decisions of tremendous social and economic importance regarding world affairs were made in the Stork Club during this time " , and the likes of Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball could often be seen conversing with executive types . Mark Bernardo , author of Mad Men 's Manhattan : The Insider 's Guide , has said : " In some ways , the Stork Club was ahead of its time ? courting celebrities by picking up their tabs , hiring a house photographer who sent candid shots of guests to the tabloids , and offering a private enclave called the Cub Room , where stars could huddle away from the prying eyes of fans , all hallmarks of modern clubs that cater to boldface names " . The venue was usually packed with luminaries during its golden years , and dining orders could take a long time to be dealt with .

Notable guests through the years included : Lucille Ball , Tallulah Bankhead , Joan Blondell , Charlie Chaplin , Frank Costello , Bing Crosby , the Duke and Duchess of Windsor , Brenda Frazier , Dorothy Frooms , Carmen Miranda , Dana Andrews , Michael O 'Shea , Judy Garland , the Harrimans , Ernest Hemingway , Judy Holliday , J. Edgar Hoover , Grace Kelly , the Kennedys , Dorothy Kilgallen , Dorothy Lamour , Robert M. McBride , Vincent Price , Marilyn Monroe , the Nordstrom Sisters , Erik Rhodes , the Roosevelts , Ramón Rivero (Diplo) , J. D. Salinger , Frank Sinatra , Elizabeth Taylor , Gene Tierney , Mike Todd and Gloria Vanderbilt .

The main room of the club was also frequented by many of the prominent figures that had fled Europe , from royals to businessmen , debutantes , sportsmen and military dignitaries , who often , upon departing , took with them the signature ashtrays of the club as souvenirs . The news of Grace Kelly 's engagement to Prince Rainier of Monaco broke at the Stork . The couple was at the club on Tuesday , January 3 , 1956 , as the rumors flew . Veteran columnist Jack O 'Brian passed Kelly a note , saying that reliable sources indicated she was about to become engaged to the Prince . Kelly replied she could not answer the question posed by O 'Brian until Friday . Socialite Evalyn Walsh McLean , owner of the Hope Diamond , wore the gem as if it was costume jewelry . It disappeared at the Stork Club one night during Mrs. McLean 's visit there . Actress Beatrice Lillie found it under one of the club 's tables . Actor Warren Oates once worked at the club as a dishwasher .

= = = Conduct = = =

Guests were expected to dress to high standards , with men wearing evening suits and the women wearing " gowns with silk gloves reaching the elbow " . All women in full evening dress received an orchid or gardenia corsage , compliments of the Stork Club . A requirement for all men was a necktie ; those who were not wearing one were either lent one or had to buy one to gain admittance . Although African Americans were not explicitly barred from entry , there was a mutual understanding that they were not welcome . Billingsley insisted on orderly conduct for all of his Stork Club guests ; fighting , drunkenness or rowdiness were prohibited . He ran the club on the principle of it being a place where people could have a good time and that it was somewhere he could bring his own family without worrying that they would see or hear something he did not want them to . Billingsley closely controlled the seating placement system in the club . Unescorted women were not allowed to enter the club after 6 pm ; this was a protective measure for men who may have been out with someone other than their wives .

Several celebrities did not abide by the rules and were banned from the club . Humphrey Bogart was banned after a prolonged " shouting match " with Billingsley . Milton Berle was officially barred for too much table @-@ hopping , shouting and doing handsprings in the club ; Berle contended that the real reason was because of a Stork Club satire he had recently performed on his television program . Elliott Roosevelt , the so @-@ called " black sheep of the club " , became unwelcome at the club through an apparent misunderstanding . Billingsley had planned an engagement party for Roosevelt and his girl friend , vocalist Gigi Durston on the basis of the couple 's friends ' statements that they were going to be married . Durston had once worked at the Stork Club as a singer and Roosevelt was a long @-@ time customer of the club . Billingsley sent out publicity notices about

the party ; the couple told him that they had no plans to announce their engagement at that time . Elliott Roosevelt was banned from the Stork and the party was canceled . Jackie Gleason , who was a frequent guest of the club with his two daughters , was being seated with a female companion when the couple was asked to leave the premises in March 1957 . Billingsley claimed that Gleason 's conversation became loud and off @-@ color when he arrived at a table and barred Gleason from the Stork Club for life . Gleason said that he had done nothing wrong . He wondered if the problem was because he was a member of the Musicians ' Union , since the club 's wait and kitchen staff had been on strike since January of that year .

Despite the rules and banishments , there were incidents which made their way into newspapers . Billingsley associate Steve Hannagan believed that one " good fight " a year was permissible for a respectable night club . Johnny Weissmuller accused a Navy lieutenant of using a lit cigarette to burn the clothing of dancers as they passed his table . The lieutenant advised Weissmuller to get a haircut ; his wife told Weissmuller to go back to Hollywood with the other ape @-@ men . The Navy man suffered two black eyes and complained that Weissmuller 's friends held him as he was punched by Weissmuller . Ernest Hemingway once took issue with a stranger who slapped him on the back ; knocking him into three chairs and a table as he brushed him away . Billingsley contended that many of the incidents that appeared in print were minor disagreements which were inflated by the press .

Jack Benny invited long @-@ time friend , writer and performer Goodman Ace to lunch with him at the Stork . Ace arrived at the club first and received the " cold shoulder " because he was not recognized by the staff . When Benny arrived and asked for Ace , he was told that Ace became tired of waiting and left . Soon Ace began to receive mail from the Stork , which he proceeded to answer in his tongue in cheek style . Ace 's response to the message about the club having wonderful air conditioning was that after having received the cold shoulder there , he was well aware of the climate . Billingsley responded to Ace with a gift of some Stork Club bow ties . Ace then asked for some matching socks so he might be in style to be turned away again . Ace and his wife became regulars at the club after the issue was resolved .

= = = Stork Club gifts = = =

Owner Billingsley was well known for his extravagant gifts presented to his favorite patrons , spending an average of \$ 100 @,@ 000 a year on them . They included compacts studded with diamonds and rubies , French perfumes , champagne and other liquors , and even automobiles . Many of the gifts were specially made for the Stork club , with the club 's name and logo on them . Some of the best known examples were the gifts of Sortilège perfume by Le Galion , which became known as the " fragrance of the Stork Club " . Billingsley convinced Arthur Godfrey , Morton Downey , and his own assistant , Steve Hannigan , to form an investment group with him to obtain the United States distributorship of the fragrance . The partners expanded into the sale of soap , cosmetics and other sundries under the Stork Club name . They called the business Cignone ? the French word for stork ; the line was carried by various drug and department stores in the United States . Every female guest of the club received a small vial of perfume and a tube of Stork Club lipstick as souvenirs of her visit . It was also Billingsley 's standard practice to send every regular club patron a case of champagne at Christmas .

Sunday night was " Balloon Night " . As is common with New Year 's celebrations , balloons were held on the ceiling of the Main Dining Room by a net and the net would open at the stroke of midnight . As the balloons came down , the ladies would begin frantically trying to catch them . Each contained a number and a drawing would be held for the prizes , which ranged from charms for bracelets to automobiles ; there were also at least three \$ 100 bills folded and placed randomly in the balloons .

Billingsley 's generosity was not confined to those who were always at the club . He received the following letter in 1955 : " I am grateful to you for your thoughtful kindness in sending me such a generous selection of attractive neckties . At the same time may I once again thank you for the cigars that you regularly send to the White House . " It was signed by Dwight D. Eisenhower . During

World War II , three bomber planes were christened with the name of the Stork Club . Billingsley commissioned Tiffany & Co. to produce sterling silver Stork club logo Victory pins as gifts for their crew members . Patrons were not always on the receiving end ; Billingsley 's writings claimed that one of his waiters received a \$ 20 @,@ 000 tip . A bartender received a new Cadillac from a grateful patron , and a headwaiter received a \$ 10 @,@ 000 tip from tennis star Fred Perry . It was necessary for Billingsley to give the expensive gifts and to provide some to all of a celebrity 's Stork Club services for free to bring the stars to the club and keep them coming back . The notables were what brought people from all over the country in all walks of life to visit the Stork Club .

= = In popular culture = =

The Stork Club was a television series hosted by Billingsley , who circulated among the tables interviewing guests at the club . Originally sponsored by Fatima cigarettes , the series ran from 1950 to 1955 . The show was directed by Yul Brynner , who was a television director before he became a well @-@ known actor . The program began on CBS Television with the network having built a replica of the Cub Room on the Stork Club 's sixth floor to serve as the set for the show . Billingsley was paid \$ 12 @,@ 000 each week as its host , but he was never really comfortable on camera and it was noticeable . The television show moved to ABC by 1955 . During the broadcast of May 8 , 1955 , Billingsley made some remarks about fellow New York restaurateur Bernard " Toots " Shor 's financial solvency and honesty . Shor responded by suing for a million dollars . He collected just under \$ 50 @,@ 000 as a settlement in March 1959 . The Stork Club television show ended in the same year the statements were made .

A Philco Television Playhouse presentation , " Murder at the Stork Club " , was aired on NBC Television on January 15 , 1950 . Franchot Tone and Billingsley had cameo roles in the television drama . The television show was an adaptation of Vera Caspary 's 1946 mystery novel , The Murder in the Stork Club , where the action took place in and around the famous nightclub , with Sherman Billingsley and other real @-@ life characters appearing in the plot .

The Stork Club was also featured in several movies , including The Stork Club (1945) , Executive Suite (1954) , and My Favorite Year (1982) . Billingsley received \$ 100 @,@ 000 for the use of the club 's name in the 1945 film . In All About Eve (1950) , the characters played by Bette Davis , Gary Merrill , Anne Baxter and George Sanders are shown in the Cub Room of the Stork Club . The Alfred Hitchcock film The Wrong Man (1957) starred Henry Fonda as real @-@ life Stork Club bassist Christopher Emanuel Balestrero (" Manny ") , who was falsely accused of committing robberies around New York City . Scenes involving Balestrero playing the bass were actually shot at the club . The film 's screenplay , written by Maxwell Anderson , was based on a true story originally published in Life magazine .