

ALVIN ALCORN (AA).
Reel I [of 2]--Transcript
November 30, 1960

(Transcript prepared by Christopher Wilkinson
West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV. 5/89)

Also present: Richard B. Allen (RBA)
Majorie T. Zander (MTZ)

RBA: Well, let's see... We're interviewin' tonight at, uh, Howard-Tilton Library, Seminar Room 2. Let's get your name on here. ... Your full name, yes.

AA: Alvin Elmore Alcorn.

RBA: Senior?

AA: Senior.

RBA: Yeah, you got, uh, a boy named after you--.

AA: Junior.

RBA: And, uh, let's see, today's date is November the, uh...

AA: 27th, isn't it?

RBA: No, it's the 30th.

AA: 30th, yeah.

RBA: Oh, the last...pay day. That would be the 30th...for me--.

AA: Is this, is this [i.e. the tape recorder] on here?

RBA: Yeah, we're, we're recording it.

AA: Oh yeah?

RBA: You don't mind, huh? This is 1960 anyway, and, uh, hollar out your name.

MTZ: Majorie Zander.

RBA: It picked it up [i.e. the microphone recorded her voice]. Dick Allen. We're gonna play a little Don Albert record first, and maybe you could tell us sum'um' about it.

AA: Okay.

[Music begins]

RBA: This is "Rockin' and Swingin'" huh?

AA: "Rockin' and Swingin'"

[Music continues].

AA: "Swingin..." [as if recalling the lyrics].

RBA: Yeah. It's a good sax section.

AA: Louis Cottrell's [Jr., tenor saxophone] on that record.

[Music continues].

RBA: Um hum.

AA: Herbert Hall [clarinet and alto saxophone].

[Music continues].

RBA: Did you change much on the records; the band, did it change at all?...different guys come in?

AA: Well, later years we started losin' wh'--a couple. We--.

RBA: And that showed up on the records?

AA: No, not on this record here.

RBA: No, I mean you had the same men for all records or did it change?

AA: No, we didn't make no more recordin's after we made those four.

[NB: Four 10-inch discs=eight sides].

RBA: Just one time.

AA: Yeah, well, we made all those sessions at one time. ... It was on a Vocalion label. [Music continues].

RBA: Now, who's that?

AA: Tenor, Louis Cottrell.

RBA: Trumpet?

AA: Hiram Harding.

RBA: Oh.

AA: Boy from Dallas. [Music continues].
RBA: Well, which one did the growl work?
AA: Hiram Harding.
RBA: He did the growl work--.
AA: Yeah, he was the growl man. [Music continues].
RBA: Did he use a mute when he growled.
AA: Used to use a plunger...one of those big rubber plungers. [Music continues leading eventually to a trumpet solo].
Billy Douglas [trumpet soloist].
RBA: Um hum...hey that's good. [Music continues to its conclusion].
AA: That's '35 wa'n't it? 1935 or '37?
RBA: You know, I can look it up.
AA: I think it's '35 or '37.
RBA: I know I got a book with it. Orin Blackstone's INDEX TO JAZZ.
AA: That's who'at?
RBA: Yeah, a, a guy who used to have the record--.
AA: Yeah, on Broad Street, yeah, um hum.
RBA: Put this book out, and he interviewed Don [Albert]. ... 1936.
AA: '36; I said '35 or '37.
RBA: You want to hear it again or--?
AA: Don't, don't you have another one on that side?
RBA: Yeah, we have another one.
AA: Yeah.
RBA: I'll put it on--.
AA: You want to ask, uh, any questions about that record? 'Bout that, 'bout that group--?
RBA: Yeah, I like to know who did the arrangement.
AA: Uh...[almost inaudible:] "Rockin' 'n' Swingin'", I think that was Geechee Robinson's arrangement. Trombone player.
RBA: Um hum. ... Let me put this uh--.
AA: William Robinson. William "Geechee" Robinson his name.
RBA: I got another one, so why don't we turn the [tape] machine off while I'm puttin' it on. [Tape off until after the music has begun. Music is playing as interview continues]
AA: Yes.
RBA: It's "True Blue Lou" [Music continues and vocalist begins to sing].
AA: It's Merle Turner.
RBA: Oh yeah? Who played first trumpet, you say?
AA: Me.
RBA: Who?
AA: I did all that.
[Music continues].
In later years he [i.e. Turner] went with Erskine Hawkins. ...
RBA: Um.
AA: Turner... singer.
[Music continues to end of vocal solo and on to trumpet solo].
Billy Douglas [solo trumpet]. ... Swingin' trumpet player.
[Music continues to end of trumpet solo].
RBA: He reminds me of "Red" Allen somehow.
AA: Yeah. Whenever he was in New York with...him and Charlie Shavers has ...a session one night down in Sev--on Seventh Avenue. He ran us out of 'bout five joints that one night. It was crowded; nobody spent any money; him an' Billy outblowin' each other.
RBA: Oh yeah.

AA: Bad man, Billy...
[Music continues].
Sweet trombonist. [Music continues].

RBA: You have the valve, I g--

AA: Valve.
[Music continues].
We have a bass player that's on that record, Jimmy Johnson, used to be with Buddy Bolden long ago.
[Music continues until vocal reprise].

RBA: Wha, what kind of style of bass did he play usually? Did he play pickin' or bowed or how?

AA: Well, he, he was just a good bass player. He picked and bowed. He was a fine bass player, fine musician.

RBA: Did he slap in his style or--.

AA: He never had no slappin' style; he used t' pick when, you know--.

RBA: Yeah.

AA: When he was mostly,...he would bow on waltzes and slow tunes, pretty tunes.
[Music concludes].

RBA: We'll run ahead; there's somethin' that would interest you here.

AA: Um.
[RBA fast forwards the tape of recordings he wants Alcorn to discuss].

RBA: Yeah, we're going; better turn it off [i.e. the machine recording the interview].
[Recording of interview begins again with another recording. The music plays for a few seconds; it is not by the Don Albert Orchestra].

AA: Papa Celestin.

RBA: I knew you'd get it. You got an ear.

AA: "My Josephine" [Song Title].
[Music continues].
That it?

RBA: Um hum. That's right. I just thought this would interest you.
[Vocalist sings]

AA: Hum. Paul Barnes [referring to alto saxophonist backing the singer with a countermelody].
[Music continues].
He was fast on that saxophone, wa'n't he.

RBA: Um hum.
[Music continues].
Did you ever play with Papa [Celestin]?

AA: No, in later years, um, just after he started in his Dixieland music, I started with him. I never did work in his big band. Never played one job with him in the big band. ... See, when he, uh, when he went in the Paddock [Lounge, New Orleans]...

RBA: Um hum.

AA: Uh, job was gettin' kind of rough for him; he wanted to lay off some nights so he had me to go play some nights for him. ... So he asked me to stay on nights till he come back, but he wa'n't particular 'bout comin' back, you see, so I stayed there...

and, uh, it was fixed with the proprietors, if you ever wanted to come back, you could always come back, and I'd stay on and work too, use both of us. They never was particular. He would'nt come back.

RBA: You need two trumpets on that job.

AA: You need five sometime. [Laughs with RBA]. ...

Not necessary for a job to be that hard though you know--.

RBA: No.

[Music continues eventually leading to a trumpet solo by Celestin. AA and RBA chuckle at a trombone glissando].
Wonder what kind of mute he was usin'?

AA: Seem--.

RBA: He's got some funny mutes.

AA: That sounds like a wah-wah mute.

RBA: Harmon?

AA: Yeah, you know those silver-lookin' mutes?

RBA: Yeah, that's a Paddy Harmon make.

AA: Yeah, 'n he uses it with his hands...; it's a wah-wah mute.

[Music continues to its conclusion: an unexpected saxophone coda at which AA chuckles].

That's old Papa.

[Tape recorder is turned off and subsequently begins again as still another piece of music starts to play].

AA: Don Albert's "You don't love me".

RBA: Yeah.

AA: Used to be the theme song of the band. [Music continues].

You notice how they used to write for those saxophones in those days; everything was fast; the whole band used to play fast; playin' in double time 'n...; brass 'n all used to play fast.
[Music continues].

That's Lloyd Glenn, pianist.

RBA: Did you know him later on? I mean, did you see him out in California?

AA: Yeah, I saw Lloyd since I've--; Lloyd and I worked together in the--, did the recordin' for the "Benny Goodman Story". Lloyd, "Red" Callendar, and all that...

[Music continues leading to a trumpet solo].

This is the end of the little theme, uh...right there.

[Solo continues].

RBA: How do you get that tone?

AA: It's, uh,... It's a mute. We call a cup mute.

[Solo continues].

RBA: I can hear that you're leadin' the section--.

AA: Yeah.

[Music continues].

That's all I used to do: play over first with different [inaudible: harmonies??]. [Music continues].

RBA: Did they write a lot of hard stuff for first in those da--?

AA: High? Me, I had some high writin'. Right on F-4, up there. Bands were writin' like that then. ... They would write F.

RBA: That's F above the staff?

AA: That's right. For endin's, you know? [Music continues].

I got some records, old records with [Thomas "Kid"] Ory used to make F in...I think was the record "Shine" or somethin'. Made F in there once in a while.

RBA: "Kid" Ory made the album?

AA: No, me.

RBA: Oh, oh yeah.

AA: No, Ory didn't have too high a range on his horn. Believe it was a big broad sound, you know.

[Music concludes].

What's on the other side?

RBA: "The Shiek [of Araby]".

AA: Oh yeah. ... Well, you get a chance to hear Cottrell and Herbert Hall.

[Music starts].

That's how they used to play that horn.

[Music continues].

I like that way this band records...today, you know definitely these mikes set up, you know. Used...I think we recorded with one little old mike in front, you know, what everyone was doing in them days, you know.

RBA: Some of those are better. Sometimes that turns out better.

AA: Yeah.

[Music continues, vocal begins].

That's Lloyd Glenn, the piano player.

RBA: Uh, who did these arrangements?

AA: The guys in the band. Herbert Hall, Billy Douglas, Geechee Robinson; there was a saxophone player used to be with us used to send us arrange--: Phil Tiller, Lloyd Glenn. Most of the guys in the band. You know, the environment. ... [Referring to the clarinet solo accompanying the singer:] Louis Cottrell. [Vocal ends, music continues and Alcorn identifies the next soloist].

Herbert Hall [on baritone saxophone].

[Music continues]

RBA: That's a baritone... [Music continues].

AA: You know he messed with the baritone; he came on baritone; he's a baritone player still today. [Music continues to clarinet solo]. Louis Cottrell. ... Notice all that syncopation in the brass playin', notice that? [Laughs] [Growl trumpet part is heard:] Hiram Harding. [Music concludes]. You notice the, the ...there was plenty of syncopation in those days, you know?

RBA: Um hum.

AA: Rhythms.

RBA: Uh, who, uh what was that valve trombone player's name?

AA: Uh, Henry Turner.

RBA: Did he have a nickname?

AA: We used to call him Nick.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: He used to play, uh, bass tuba and valve trombone.

RBA: Um...let's see..."True Blue Lou", who arranged that; did I ask?

AA: Billy Douglas.

RBA: And "Shiek of Araby" was arranged by...?

AA: [Pauses to think]. Tryin' to think who "The Shiek"...I can't remember if it was Herbert Hall or... I think of Herbert Hall or Phil Tiller, one of those two, I just remember...

RBA: Um hum.

AA: I just remember that...we had some arrangements by, uh, a piano player named Freeman, Al Freeman, but...he had left the band when Lloyd came in the band. ... He was a good arranger too, very good. He use to be with [Sidney] Desvigne, I mean.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: He left--from Columbus, Ohio...very good pianist.

RBA: Desvigne had out-of-town [i.e. not native New Orleanian] musicians with him, huh?

AA: Oh, he used to have quite a few.

RBA: Um hum. ... Who arranged "You Don't Love Me"?

AA: Billy Douglas made that arrangement on "You Don't Love Me".

RBA: Um hum. And you say "Deep Blue Melody", you, you can, you can hear yourself on that pretty good, huh?

AA: Just playin', uh, the uh, matter of fact I played the solo part on "Deep Blue Melody."

RBA: Oh yeah.

AA: Um hum.

RBA: I never got that here.

AA: It's a slow tune. It's on the Ellington style with the, uh...

RBA: Um hum...and "Sunny Side of the Street", I've never heard.

AA: "Sunny Side" with Billy Douglas playin' all the repeats on it.

RBA: And "Liza" I've never heard and never heard "Tomorrow".

AA: No. ... Billy Douglas made "Liza" too. He made the arrangement on "Liza".

RBA: Um hum. ... I never did--; I got so interested in the records, I knew that's one thing you wanted to hear, I forgot to ask you where you were born exactly.

AA: In New Orleans.

RBA: Um hum. What section of town.

AA: In the uptown section we called the Garden District.

RBA: Um hum. You 'member the exact address that was told to you?

AA: Well, it was in the 2800 block of Magnolia, right across from [Tomy] Lafon School.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: It's Magnolia between Sixth--there's a [housing] project there now--between Sixth and Seventh.

RBA: And the exact date.

AA: September the 7th, 1912, exact.

RBA: [Writing this down]: 19 'n 12. ... Certainly don't look it.

AA: Feel it sometimes. [RBA laughs as does AA].

RBA: Did you, uh, follow bands before you started playin'?

AA: Um uh, my whole family was musically inclined. My brothers, different things, they played with bands. All my days I remember musicians rehearsing in the house, you see.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: George McCullum [Jr.] which was my teacher...my brother Oliver Albert Alcorn, you know, they always stay up--had a group the--a little group together...

RBA: Um hum.

AA: And, I think it was a Monday night, mostly Monday nights when they wasn't workin', they have a weekday rehearsal, you know, go from house to house. Most nights, wind up at my house all the time.

RBA: What about people older than that, uh--?
AA: Grandfather.
RBA: Your grandfather played.
AA: Um hum.
RBA: What was his name?
AA: He was, uh, Sandolf Butts, ...was a guitar--use to play string, guitar, and violin, that thing.
RBA: Um hum. What did he play, did he play what you'd call Dixieland or New Orleans style--?
AA: I didn't know much about him, my mother say he was...she was just explainin' to me what it--.
RBA: Um hum.
AA: I just remember what type of music it was then...
RBA: Um hum.
AA: He was a string man. I had an uncle used to play with...he was a mellophone player, we called "peck horn", we called it.
RBA: Um hum.
AA: His name was "Knottsy" Butts.
RBA: Hum.
AA: Played along with George Mc--, with, uh, George McCullum Senior's brass band.
RBA: What was that called?
AA: George McCullum's Brass Band.
RBA: That's all, just like that.
AA: Yeah.
RBA: And your teacher was George Mc--.
AA: George McCullum Junior.
RBA: I see. And, uh,...
AA: In those days, George McCullum Senior's Band was recognized as a very nice band. In the days of the old Excelsior [Brass] Band.
RBA: Um hum.
AA: Way back in those days.
RBA: What kind of jobs did they play?
AA: They played dance music and, uh, parades for different things.
RBA: Oh, he had parades.
AA: Parades and dance music, yeah. ... Most of all them band--.
RBA: Yeah. ... Did he play any, uh, funerals?
AA: Mostly, he used to rely on those funerals.
RBA: Um hum.
AA: I imagine, you know, in those days those guys most every--, looked like everyone who passed would have a band of music behind them, you know? ... I remember my brother was playing with the Excelsior Brass Band; looked like every day they had a funeral for many months over the river or on this side.
RBA: What instrument did your brother play with the band?
AA: Uh, alto saxophone...he's playin' tenor now.
RBA: Yeah. What years would that be that he was playin' alto back then?
AA: Oh.
RBA: With the, with the Excelsior [Band], I mean.
AA: With the Excelsior, would be roughly around 'bout...'29. '28, '29.
RBA: So they were usin' saxophones in the street then, huh?
AA: Yeah. 'Bout '28 to '29.

RBA: I just wondered when saxophones came in?

AA: Um, well saxophone was in before that. 'Cause, uh, I understand that Louis Warnicke was one of the first guys to have an alto sax in, in town.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: He was an old clarinet, he was an old saxophone player used to play with, um, [Armand J.] Piron's Band.

RBA: And--, but he would work in the street too on saxophone then.

AA: He would. ... I remember when the f--, when my brother, he, he first started on a C melody saxophone. It looked like a tenor; it looked between a tenor and an alto.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: He started out on one of those. ... In later years he bought him...bought him one of these altos. ...

RBA: How many brothers do you have that play now?

AA: Well now, I, its, uh, my brother in Chicago, he still playin' but not regular, a saxophone player and I have my brother younger than me that's playin', uh, bass viol.

RBA: And what's his name?

AA: Seymour, Seymour Alcorn. He's in Los Angeles.

RBA: Ah, I see.

AA: Um hum.

RBA: And, uh, how many brothers were there in all?

AA: It's four brothers.

RBA: Um hum, and does the other one play?

AA: Let's see, I had two, that's one started out on saxophone and, uh, he was next to Oliver, the oldest boy, and the baby, the younger one, he started on trumpet but he didn't do very much with it, so altogether it was five boys and four girls, you see I have four sis--.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: Four sisters and four brothers.

RBA: Your sisters play anything?

AA: Used to play piano, not professionally, just...play at piano.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: Um hum.

RBA: Well, before you started playin', uh, if that, why if you remember that far back, when did you start anyhow, 'bout what age, did I ask you that?

AA: I started in the Depression days, around '29 or '30, 'bout '29, in there, something in there.

RBA: Just about the time the Depression hit.

AA: Yeah, it was right in there.

RBA: So, let's see, how old would you be then. 'Bout seventeen.

AA: Well, 'bout sixteen, seventeen years old. Sixteen years old. Well, less--'bout sixteen years old.

RBA: Did you have any lessons before you--.

AA: No.

RBA: By that time.

AA: First teacher was [George] McCullum [Jr.].

RBA: Um hum, ... but I mean were you playin' professionally 'fore you had a teacher.

AA: No.

RBA: No.

- AA: Uh, matter of fact, I didn't, ... I didn't...try to take a job till after I was with George [McCullum] almost a year. ... Just taught the methods, studyin' the music, no jazz or nuthin'. He didn't show me...he was interested in teachin' the instrument right, you know, 'cause he was a fine musician himself. He always used to say "That'll come later," you know? I couldn't see how it would come... He says, "It'll come." Finally, it did come, but, he actually...taught you right on things; everything he did was right. Matter of fact, he's one of the finest trumpet players I ever heard in my life.
- RBA: What sort of a style did he have?
- AA: He wasn't what you'd call a real hot trumpet player, you know real jazzy trumpet player, but he had a beautiful tone, very good range on his horn, and excellent in readin'. ... Just a fine musician.
- RBA: Did he make it, uh, outside of the city? Did he ever go and leave town?
- AA: Well, uh, he made a few trips; he could have; I mean, I don't think it was any band in those days that he couldn't have performed with; I could even see him with Ellington...for his musician ability. McKinney[']s Cotton Pickers, any of those bands, right along with [Alphonso] Trent; I think he could have made any of 'em.
- RBA: Um hum.
- AA: For the guys that I knew that was with 'em [i.e. those bands] in later years, I mean I know he could have made it.
- RBA: Well, did you second line before you started playin'?
- AA: Well, we all did that, but the majority of times, like on advertisement, I used to be on the truck with my brother and them, you know, sittin' on the truck or somethin', always went with 'em...so I had a chance--as a matter of fact I knew all the musicians before I could play, you know, 'cause I used--they all knew me, and after I came up to be professional, well I was actually known because the others guys, they knew me from seein' me around with my brother.
- RBA: Well, what about the funerals in those times; what were they like when you...before you started playing?
- AA: Well, what you mean on hours an'...?
- RBA: Well, were they, in what ways were they different from the ones that you goin' to play, say you got one...Saturday, you got a funeral--.
- AA: Um hum--.
- RBA: You gonna play?
- AA: Yeah.
- RBA: What ways would they be different?
- AA: Well, uh, back in those old days they used to play a little more music than they play now far as readin' music, you know, heavier marches and things; everything was...written, the majority of the marches, you know. Ev' once in a while they may play some march from memory, something like that, but they used to play more heavy marches and things. That's most of the bands used to rely upon is playin'...the heaviest marches they could find, you see ...and you had quite a few musicians out there with names like Manuel Perez, Peter Bocage,...and uh...um, George McCullum. Even [Henry] "Kid" Reny, all those guys would be out there

playin' funerals. Lee Collins... I don't remember Buddy Petit on funerals, but I remember him playing. I never saw [Ernest "Kid"] "Punch" [Miller] on a funeral; I used to see him on advertisement. ...

RBA: What about clarinet players who played funerals?

AA: Well, your clarinet players was Lorenzo Tio [Jr.]. He used to play quite a few. He played with the Eureka Brass--I mean with the Excelsior Brass Band. And, uh, Joe Watson used to play with the Papa Celestin Tuxedo Band. Eddy Jackson used to have the band most of the time, bass player. That was the Tuxedo Band. And, uh, Willie Humphrey, well he was playin' on a boat, but when he used to come in town, he used to play, he used to be on, at that time he was playin' on the [riverboat] Capitol. When he was in town, he used to play funerals with different groups too. And, uh, George Lewis used to play with different little groups around here.

RBA: In the street or...?

AA: Street, playin' funerals an' things.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: Um hum. ... We had the old clarinet player like Zeb [Lenares?] ...never did know Zeb's other name, but all we knew was Zeb ... and, uh...had a couple more clarinet players; I've forgotten to remember...Georgie Boyd...he used to mostly to play on advertisement with Reny and different bands, you know. ... This town was noted for clarinet players back in those days, the old guys played clarinet.

RBA: I just wondered who the best ones were in the street?

AA: I don't know, but one of your finest clarinet players was Lorenzo Tio in the street or off the street, you know.

RBA: Oh yeah.

AA: He was...just a fine clarinetist.

RBA: Um hum. ... You know, uh...I wondered, uh, back, uh, back, back about those times, would the, uh, funerals last longer? Would they have to play longer on one or would it be about the same?

AA: Well, just about the same thing, uh, most of the time was spent in the churches. The funeral never was too hard, most of the time you consume in playin' the funeral was takin' the...the body to the church and sit there maybe two or three hours and wait for them to come out and go to the grave yard and make a little short round and it was all over. Sometime they used to, in those churches they stay so long that... 'bout the same, just about the same routine as, that never change very much...

RBA: Um hum.

AA: From those old days.

RBA: So they've got that tradition more or less...

AA: That's right.

RBA: And they keep it.

AA: That's right, because you take a majority of people that... carryin' on with those societies, those societies are, say, roughly 75 or 100 years old I imagine, you know. ... Cause I know they--some of those societies over the river, over in Algiers, that's been g--carryin' on I know way before I was born and is still going strong yet!

RBA: Um hum.

AA: Fact the Eagle Eye and couple others...

RBA: I think the first place I ever heard you was in the street with "Old Man" [Henry] Allen [Sr.].
AA: Yeah, I used to work with "Old Man" Allen's band; I was a member of..."Old Man" Allen's Brass Band, used to do quite a bit of work over there [Algiers?] too, you know.
RBA: Um hum. Well, what, uh, what is a member; how, how do you get to be a member of a brass band? I never did understand that.
AA: Well, we c--we used to see if you...joined a brass band; if a guy hire you, and you play his jobs all the time...
RBA: Um.
AA: You're considered a member of his band, regardless who el--get a job, if they get a job the same time with you...
RBA: Um hum.
AA: Two brass bands, well you'd always play with the one that you're supposed to be...a member of.

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Reel II [of 2]--Transcript
November 30, 1960

AA: Was a member of a group of brass bands.
RBA: Yeah. So you're...you become a member then; you don't get elected a member, its just--.
AA: No, its just a guy who wants you join his band, and you join him and...
RBA: Um hum.
AA: And when you cut out then you tell him "Well, I think I'm goin' with so and so," it's mostly--not a contract, it's just a word...
RBA: Yeah
AA: That's all it is.
RBA: Um hum, I see. ... What was the first brass band you ever worked with?
AA: [Pauses to think]. I think the Excelsior Brass Band was the first brass band I worked with.
RBA: Um hum.
AA: That was in, uh, George McCullum's [Jr.] place; he sent me; he was a member, a regular member of the brass band.
RBA: Um hum.
AA: And, uh...am I mistaken? He couldn't get off one day from his work, so he...sent me over to work with the band. ... And that particular day was Manuel Perez, Peter, Peter Bocage, myself: that was the trumpets. It was Buddy Johnson, trombone,...Harrison Barnes, trombone,...Henry Martin, bass drum, ... I don't remember who was on snare drum...can't remember. His brother, Henry Bocage, Pete's brother Henry, was playin' [brass] bass,...we had a fella, his name was Joe Payen, he played...French--mellophone, I mean. ... And, uh, tryin' to think who was playin' clarinet that day. My brother was out of town too, I think, if I'm not mistaken.
RBA: How do you spell "Payen"? I never could--or do you know?
AA: No, I don't because I never did get the right pronunciation of that name, you know, the way he used to say it; well, everybody used to say it different ways.
RBA: Um hum.

AA: But he was like a little manager of the band. He used to get all the work, you know, for the Excelsior Brass Band.

RBA: Did they hav--.

AA: Pete was the leader and he [Payen] was the manager.

RBA: Did they have a, uh, a set-up, uh,...with the saxophones at all then or did they have a baritone horn or what?

AA: No, they used to use, uh, uh, a saxophone.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: That was a, the...the reed instrument.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: And one time, I understand they used to use clarinet, but when Oliver [Alcorn] went with the band, he wa'n't playin' clarinet. You know, for brass band music you--so they put him on alto; he played alto saxophone.

RBA: They'd have him and Joe Payen at the same time?

AA: Yeah, he played the--sort of a French horn, I mean Peck horn [mellophone], you know?

RBA: Yeah, now would--what kind of part would they carry?

AA: It was the alto's, first alto saxophone part.

RBA: They had an alto --

AA: Yeah, alto saxo--

RBA: Saxophone part and an alto horn part.

AA: That's right, that's right.

RBA: I see. They didn't have a baritone horn then, huh, or did they?

AA: Yeah, they was usin' a baritone. The baritone horn was, uh, uh, ...Vic Gaspard.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: And sometime Vic used to play trombone, but he used to mostly play baritone with the horn--with the band. Vic Gaspard.

RBA: That about fills the band out.

AA: Um hum.

RBA: Did you ever work with, uh, any of the Matthews boys who were drummers other th-- Bill [Matthews]; I know you played with--.

AA: No, I worked with his brother Remus too.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: I didn't work with others--.

RBA: Bebe?

AA: Bebe and them, no I didn't know very much of Bebe.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: But, uh, I did work with, uh--at this time, the time I was speakin' about, Bill was playin' with my brother and them in George McCullum's band. He was playin' trombone with George McCullum's band at that time.

RBA: What year was it you think that you first started playin' in the street?

AA: ...Think it was about '29 or '30, somewhere around then.

RBA: So it was when you just gettin' started.

AA: Yeah, I hadn't been playin' very long.

RBA: Um hum. Well, that was a real honor to be sent with the... Excelsior, huh?

AA: Well, it was a fine band.

RBA: Yeah. But I mean, if you were that young [approximately seventeen or eighteen years old] and just startin'--.

AA: Yeah.

RBA: I bet you were tremblin'.

AA: No, I wasn't.

RBA: No?

AA: No, because, uh,... in those days, I mean, they mostly played music, ... and we used to stay in the method all the time, so if anything you play in the method, you still would play in the street, you see?

RBA: Um hum.

AA: So there was just playin' funeral marches, and I was well schooled with 6/8s and all like that from when I was in the Arban method...so I mean it was just actually walkin' it in the street and playin' with a group, [not] just playin' with the two of us like, with George and I used to run through all type of marches together.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: It's duets and things, you know, tr--two trumpets.

RBA: Did you have any trouble with the marchin'?

AA: No.

RBA: Just, you just st--.

AA: I just looked at 'em before they play 'em and play 'em on--.

RBA: No, I mean, did you get confused about which foot you were goin' on.

AA: No, no, I was always schooled on that too.

RBA: Ah, the, the, who would teach you that?

AA: The left foot? George...teach, yeah. He showed--.

RBA: Yeah

AA: He showed, he showed you how to walk off and everything.

RBA: Yeah. So you got to be careful when you do that, huh?

AA: Oh yeah.

RBA: So they--.

AA: Specially if you're playin' somethin' you've never read before.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: But after you know a tune, you can walk in any type of way you want with it, see--.

RBA: Yeah.

AA: --and that depends on the time.

RBA: Uh huh.

AA: But when you first startin' off, you're so particular.

RBA: Well, that walkin' helps you keep the time of the music--.

AA: Yeah, well, you know, that's right you see; every first beat is your left foot, you see.

RBA: Um hum. ... Well, then you--well, how did the bass drum start off a, a march or a dirge, those tempos; they just go "Boom, boom, boom"?

AA: No.

RBA: Or would they go--.

AA: "Boom, boom, boom-boom".

RBA: Like that--.

AA: Just four beats, you see.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: They, uh, the last two beats is right, right behind each other, like "Boom-boom".

RBA: Um hum. And then what foot would you hit right after that "Boom-boom"?

AA: "Boom, boom, boom-boom," then you'd step out with your left foot right then, see?

RBA: I see.

AA: And you start off, and then you're ready for the first beat in the next measure.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: Startin' the tune, "boom".

RBA: Yeah.

AA: You're right there with that.

RBA: Um hum. ... So you know exactly how to step out.

AA: That's right.

RBA: And, uh, the first beat of every measure is going to be on your left foot.

AA: On the left.

RBA: I hadn't thought about 6/8.

AA: 6/8's the same way.

RBA: Yeah, I guess it would come out, yeah.

AA: See, 'cause you knock it off the same way: "Boom, boom, boom-boom, [now in "triplets":] buh-buh-buh, buh-buh-buhp, buh, buh, buh; the bass can give you the same lick.

RBA: Um hum. Yeah, they played 2/4 and 4/4; there not many 6/8s any more...you don't play it too much.

AA: No, you don't get very many 6/8 marches now. I don't know--.

RBA: Does John [Casimir?] play 6/8s?

AA: Yeah, I tell you when he usually use quite a few 6/8s--;we don't play very many of them now, but, uh, like we used to play for a drilling group, like the Patriarchs or the...Odd Fellows, or somethin' like that, used to have that drilling group?

RBA: Um hum.

AA: Yeah, well they liked plenty of marches, so we used to play quite a few 6/8s for 'em. Ordinary, uh, playin' ad lib music, most of the guys play for like clubs, they mostly like want ad lib music, like blueses and different things like that, you know.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: ...With that blues beat, somethin' like that.

RBA: Um hum.

AA: Not that stiff, you know, just 6/8s. ...

MT2: I was just wondering what a drilling group did. I haven't heard about them.

AA: The drilling groups?

MT2: Um hum.

AA: Oh, they have little things they do on the street, you know. It's...well, you see, uh, quite a while ago they used to have the 10th of May Parades around here, and they used to have quite a few, uh, drilling groups in there, Oddfellows 'n different things.

RBA: [Speaking to MT2] You've never seen a fancy drill, huh?

AA: And they had different things and different marches, and different things they'd do, and everything was in march time, you know for--like 6/8 tempo, they mostly used to drill on.

RBA: Well, that would be for parades.

AA: Yes, that--sort of, sort of a military group like, you know.
RBA: Would it be for funerals, would they--?
AA: No, for parades, that's all.
RBA: For parades.
AA: Yeah.
RBA: Oh. [To MTZ] You might have missed it on account of that.
AA: Yeah.
RBA: They have 'em. The Oddfellows', I guess, is the last ones that I saw.
AA: Well, Young Men Olympian, they have a little group they--.
RBA: Yeah, that's right. And they wear the sort of tan--.
AA: Sort of a tan lookin' stuff like a soldier.
RBA: Yeah.
AA: ...But the group I was speakin' about used to have all these feathers around their head. You know who I think?
RBA: Um hum.
AA: It was...
RBA: The, the Wellington Caps, or somethin'--.
AA: Yeah, was it.
RBA: To scoop up--.
AA: Yeah, that's it, um hum.
RBA: Like that, like the one you have...we found one of those--.
AA: You did? [Laughs]... It was a big day when those guys used to get out there and drill.
RBA: Um hum. People used to watch 'em at it?
AA: Yeah, man, I used to watch 'em. Some of those guys would, was real good with that. ... They had so many groups out of them, you know?
RBA: Um hum. ... I guess Eddie Dawson drills one of 'em. doesn't h--.
AA: That was, uh, I think Eddie Dawson still have...he's a...a lieutenant or something, now; he big man up in there, and--no, he's a colonel, that's what he is.
RBA: He's a colonel.
AA: Yeah.
RBA: Uh, that's right. They call him--I think there's a captain rank--.
AA: Yeah, yeah, they get their, their rates and different things.
RBA: Just, just like the service. Were you ever in the service?
AA: No, I wasn't. I was never in the service.
RBA: So you were--.
AA: I was the man behind the service man.
RBA: Yeah. You played music on through the war, huh?
AA: Yeah.
RBA: What was your first dance band that you ever worked with?
AA: The first dance band was a little group I had of my own.
RBA: Um hum.
AA: We used to play little jobs around town. Then in later years I joined a group they called the Sunny South Syncopaters.
RBA: You know what? I, I see our time is just about to run out, so I'm afraid we're goin' to have to turn it [the tape recorded] off.
AA: Oh, ok.

