

ALBERT FRANCIS  
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Also present: William Russell

Sam Charters book on New Orleans musicians is mentioned; Dick Allen's name mentioned. [There is frequent reference to Charters's book, first edition, throughout the interview; the names of those shown in some of the photographs therein are mentioned; those names will be mentioned here also, with information, if any, added.]

AF worked with Arnold Metoyer; when Metoyer left, Louis [Armstrong] replaced him in the band at Tom Anderson's--about 1919. In the group with Metoyer [cornet] and AF [drums] were Paul Dominguez [violin] leader, and manager] and AF's wife, Edna Mitchell, piano. Edna Mitchell died December 10, 1942. AF says Louis Armstrong left New Orleans to join Joe Oliver in Chicago] about June, 1922; AF remembers that his wife had a baby in August, 1922, and that Louis had left shortly before then. [Compare Walter C. Allen and Brian Rust, King Joe Oliver, p. 9, and Louis Armstrong, Satchmo, ..., p. 216].

Albert F. Francis was born March 24, 1894 in New Orleans's Eighth Ward. None of his relatives played music, except Frankie Duson [trombone], an "off-cousin" of AF. AF "had a good age on me" when he began playing drums [see below]; he first joined Buddy Petit, at which time he decided to quit his day job and play music full-time. Shortly afterward, he went into the Army; he and Punch [Miller] were together in service. AF took up drums about 1914; he liked the drumming of Louis Cottrell, Sr., so he studied with him, (The son of Cottrell, Louis, Jr., clarinet, is mentioned; WR says the younger Cottrell played last night, with Jim Robinson and Ernie Cagnolatti). AF began his drumming studies from a method book, the Imperial. AF says

he likes to read, can read anything; at one time he played with [Henry] Pritchard's Band (overtures, etc.); he worked reading jobs [with dance bands] a long time, finally got back into jazz. WR says Baby Dodds started with the Imperial method; AF knew Dodds; when AF was at Tom Anderson's, Dodds and Armstrong were on the steamer Capitol with Fate Marable; Armstrong left Marable to join AF's band. Discuss drums sets--AF even had a full set of orchestra bells [chimes?]; he would play over the lead, from a violin sheet, so that [Lester] "Blackie" Santiago [piano] could learn to tune. AF says he was about the only real drummer (i.e., one who could read and play any of the percussion instruments) around New Orleans after Cottrell died. AF would sit-in for Cottrell at night clubs. AF mentions Manuel Perez, with whom he worked a number of jobs. AF took only a few lessons from Cottrell; AF's wife taught him most of his music. WR mentions Wilhemina Bart (DeRoun); AF says she worked with him at Tom Anderson's. [Compare Louis Armstrong, Satchmo, ..., p. 1] Lizzie (Pajeaud) Miles, good friend of Wilhemina Bart, is mentioned.

AF mentions Manuel Manetta. AF greeted [William] "Bébé" Ridgley at the funeral of [Alphonse] Picou. AF worked with Ridgley, [Papa] Celestin [Ridgley and Celestin had the Tuxedo Band together for sometime], Paul Barnes [probably in Ridgley's and/or Celestin's band]. The first band AF played in [earlier he said Buddy Petit, see below]: Thomas Copeland, bass; Maurice Durand, piano; Charlie Bernard, banjo; Joe Watson, clarinet. Durand, the only other one still living, was in New Orleans when Ricard [Alexis] died; Durand

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lives in San Francisco [since died--1964?]. WR saw a picture of Watson in (he thinks) the Camellia Band; AF says that was Emile Barnes's band, but it was something else before it was the Camellia. [Check this]

AF went to St. Louis, not playing there; he was drafted into the Army about 1916-17.

AF's wife was a sight reader and "could change keys" [i.e., modulation? fake]; she worked with all the bands around New Orleans. Pianists in bands took solos in the old days, same as now; drummers didn't, though--AF believes Lionel Hampton, Gene Krupa, Cozy Cole, Sidney Catlett...people like that, started drum solos. AF met Cole the last time Louis Armstrong was in town; Armstrong always comes to see AF; AF was the last person Armstrong played with in New Orleans (at Tom Anderson's) before he went to Chicago. WR says "Wooden Joe" [Nicholas] had a picture of a band at Anderson's--Barney Bigard, Albert Nicholas, Willie Santiago, Paul Barbarin [and others]; AF says that band came in after he and his band had left. Talk about reading music, then about fakers; AF says Buddy Petit, Chris Kelly, Kid Rena and Sam Morgan [all fakers, all cornet or trumpet players] "had the town" [i.e., got most of the music business]. Petit's was the first band AF worked in that played in a cabaret; the Poodle Dog was the place, in this case. AF names others. The [Big] 25 was a gambling place, but there were bands there too; pianist Albert Carroll [spelling?] played there; Wade Martin played

there. [Could he mean Louis Wade? Wade Martin is a Louisiana politician.RBA] Talk about Tom Anderson and his place of business-- Anderson a politician--mirrors on the walls. AF refers to [Herbert Asbury,] The French Quarter. George Delsey operated the place for Anderson. AF tells about a dodge for concealing by-the-drink whiskey during Prohibition--a milk bottle was painted white, whiskey put in it. AF mentions Willie Jackson; WR says he recorded with Steve Lewis; AF played with Lewis, whose regular band was [A.J.] Piron's. AF worked a long time at Club Forrest (Jefferson Highway-- Louis Armstrong played there [was then Surburban Garden?]; was also Beverly Garden), with Duck Ernest [Johnson] and others. Anderson's other place, the Annex, was operated by Billy [Struve?]. AF began working for Anderson's the latter part of 1918; the District was still operating, on the sly. AF says there are still houses[of prostitution] now.

Good drummers other than Cottrell, Sr., when AF was coming up: Walter Brundy (WR says Baby Dodds liked him, took lessons from him); Arnold Metoyer [must mean Arnold Depass], reader; [John] MacMurray; AF and Paul Barbarin started together; Joe Lindsay also started when AF and Barbarin started; Baby Dodds; Henry Zeno; Black Benny [Williams]; Red Happy [Bolton]; Zutty Singleton. WR mentions Jean Vigne, saying Singleton talked about him; AF took his job once (Vigne had a shop in the day, would go to sleep [on the job] at night)-- Sidney Bechet was also on that job. Vigne played bass drum in parades; he played with "all them bands", the Imperial for one. Trombonist Bill Matthews (once a drummer) had a brother, "Bébé" Matthews, who was a drummer.

AF played with "Louis [Armstrong]'s double, "Red Allen"; with George Augustine; with Pete Alexander (violin, who played with Sam Morgan, but hasn't played in years); with Adolphe "Tats" Alexander, Jr. (no relation to Pete). Adolphe Alexander, Sr., was a [music] teacher. Pritchard's (brass) Band was good, but Pritchard couldn't get a lot of the men to rehearse; the last place AF rehearsed with them was at the Tulane Club. Many of the Pritchard men are dead: Willie Pajaud, [Alcide] Landry, Joseph "Red" Clark. Pete Raphael, bass drummer, in that band, was good; he now has only one leg. Photo of Pritchard's Band show Albert Warner, Clark, trombone; Pajaud, Landry, Pritchard, AF, AF's son on clarinet, a "Jewmaker" [i.e., Jamaican] on clarinet, Rayfield. Pritchard works in a pressing shop-- Grosby and Grosby-- on [South] Rampart, one and one-half blocks off Canal, river side of street. [Now on Orleans Avenue.] Photo identification continues: two girls on saxophone, Isidore Barbarin, Oscar "Chicken" Henry, old man Delmar, co-director with Pritchard. AF says a woman he knows has several picture[s?] of old-time bands; Billy Marrero, father of Lawrence Marrero, is in them. Manuel Perez played in the Imperial, Bunk Johnson in the Superior; the woman's picture[s?] shows them.

Talk about when saxophones were first used in New Orleans. Talk about A and B [flat] clarinets, different shanks for cornets to change pitch of instrument. Joe Petit played key (valve) trombone;

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WR made recording of Petit on slide trombone in 1945 with Wooden Joe and Albert Burbank. AF tells of a photo he is in with Albert Burbank, [George] "Sheik" [Colar] and others; it was taken at the Green Hall, far out on Gentilly [Road or Highway]. AF has played with "Slow Drag" [Pavageau].

Talk and description of old-time drum sets. AF is a left-handed drummer; WR says Alfred Williams is left-handed, too. AF says Red Dugas was another good drummer, not left-handed. AF rarely with Joe ["King"] Oliver.

AF played snare drum in parades.

AF played with Peter and Charlie Bocage; many times he played with Peter in his Creole Serenaders, also with Piron's band. Louis Warnick, saxophone [with Piron], is mentioned. AF's wife played with Big Eye Louis [Nelson] at Luthjen's until she had a stroke; WR says the first time he heard Big Eye was about 1942, the year AF's wife died. Ernest Rogers played with that group. Walter Decou was the pianist when WR heard the group. ...[Restricted]

AF mentions Lorenzo Tio [Jr.]; WR says he has talked to his brother, Louis Tio. ...

END OF REEL I



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Pritchard's Band is mentioned again; the photo is shown again [see Reel I]. [Alphonse] Picou played with that band upon occasion. They played "Poet and Peasant" and "William Tell" [overtures]. Albert Francis may still have photographs.

AF describes Cottrell's drum set. AF thinks that when Cottrell left [died?] he was playing with [A. J.] Piron; he was replaced by Paul Barbarin. RC mentions Alfred Williams, "after beat", "double beat"--AF explains. AF learned his various beats from music he played with a reading band, with which he played about four years. AF talks about the lessons with Cottrell; cost was about thirty-five cents per lesson.

Louis Armstrong never practiced; photo of the band at Tom Anderson's [see Reel I] is shown again. When Armstrong was on the steamer Capitol, he learned the tunes in the same styles, from recordings which the captain would play. Louis required only one listening!!!

Joe Lindsay was a good drummer, but AF says he didn't stay with it. WR saw him in the Absinthe House in later years [where he worked but not as a musician. RBA]. Lindsay acted as a bodyguard for Armstrong at one time. Lindsay died seven or eight years ago.

Henry Martin, also a left-handed drummer, had a brother named "Coochie" [Martin] who played guitar.

AF has played in brass bands; he worked in one brass band with Punch [Miller], for a long time. AF had his special cadence, which he figured out from a drum method book. Comment on the fact



Vic and Oke Gaspard were brothers; Vic (died recently) played trombone, Oke played bass. [Oke was, I believe, the manager of this band and hired various men to play lead. RBA]. Talk about music at time District was going; plenty of work, plenty of good bands until the [World] War [I?]. RC mentions Eddie Morris, trombone, who worked with AF and the Pierces a few nights prior. WR mentions Kid Thomas [Valentine].

"Red Happy" was a favorite [snare drum?] of AF's for playing parades. Ernest Trepagnier was AF's favorite bass drummer. Black Benny [Williams] was comical; sometimes when he was playing bass drum, he would get in a fight and leave the band [while on parade].

Buddie Petit "was to hisself", [i.e., in a class by himself] and powerful. Chris Kelly, [Kid] Rena and Sam Morgan were also good trumpet players, on a level with Petit. AF tells of advertising wagon bands having contests; he describes set-up of band on wagon.

Talk about Louis Armstrong: AF worked at Tom Anderson's about three years; Armstrong with AF there a little over a year. Armstrong came to the band when he quit Fate Marable's band [on Streckfus boat] in St. Louis, because of an argument. Armstrong had offers to leave AF (including one from Ethel Waters, who had Fletcher Henderson as her piano accompanist), but he didn't accept any of them until Joe Oliver sent for him in 1922. Armstrong still writes AF; AF sold him an insurance policy once, too.

AF mentions his wife, Edna Mitchell [deceased] who was younger than he.

Talk about the ability of Armstrong: When Armstrong left to join Oliver, he was not as good as Oliver, but the situation was reversed later. Armstrong learned how to read with AF's band, at Anderson's [Compare Louis Armstrong, Satchmo,...] Paul Dominguez, violin, was with the band, as was AF's wife; all the band members read well. Dominguez's father played bass [elsewhere], but could not fake a note.

Guitars, rather than banjos were used in early bands; Willie Santiago was a good guitar player. John Marrero, brother of Lawrence [Marrero], was a good banjo player; his father, [Billy Marrero] and a brother, Simon [Marrero] played bass. Paul and Emile Barnes are cousins of the Marreros and also of Cie Frazier.

Pianos were used in bands in the old days when there was a piano; everybody had a piano in his home in the old days.

Comment on sizes of bass drums; AF says Ernie (who is called Sidney by AF) Cagnolatti's brother, [Klebert] Cagnolatti, [both small men] had a thirty-four inch bass drum, so tall one couldn't see him behind it.

A son-in-law of AF, Vernon Gilbert, plays cornet [i.e., trumpet?] with [Herbert] Leary.

John Casimir [leader of the Young Tuxedo Brass Band] is mentioned. Emma Barrett who played piano is mentioned. Eddie ["Big Head"] Johnson [alto] saxophone (works at Werlein's), has two sons who play saxophone; they are in California, where one teaches school music.

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AF quit playing music professionally about fifteen years ago, returning to it about two years ago, although he played with Pritchard's Band (discontinued only about three years ago) during that time.

Manuel Perez, Bunk Johnson and Walter Brundy are mentioned.

End of Reel II