

ISRAEL GORMAN [died September 21, 1965] Also present:
Reel I--Digest--Retyped WILLIAM RUSSELL
October 21, 1959 RALPH COLLINS

Interview conducted at Israel Gorman's home, 2457 North
Rocheblave Street, New Orleans.

IG began playing music when he was fifteen years old. He was
born March 4, 1895, in Oakville, which is fourteen miles south of
New Orleans, in Plaquemines Parish. He tried to play trumpet, his
first instrument, for about three years, but not being successful
at it, switched to clarinet, on which he became proficient. His
first teacher on clarinet was Alphonse Picou, and his last one
was Lorenzo Tio [Jr.]. During World War I, he played "in and
out" [?], his first band being that of George Jones, with
Cornelius [?] and "Snow"; they played at Tom Anderson's, Iber-
ville and Franklin [now Crozat]. On Sundays they played at
Spanish Fort. He was with that band about three years, leaving
to go with the Young Tuxedo Band [?], in which Maurice Durand
also played; he worked with that group for about four or five
years, then they [he and Durand?] were drafted into the armed
service, into the 815 [Pioneer?] Infantry, where he was placed
in the band of the 92nd Division. He was in France for about
one year and three months. When he returned to New Orleans, he
joined Buddy Petit's band. Then he left Petit to join Joe
Nicholas in the Camellia Band, which got its name from the boat,
Camellia, on which they played excursions running from West End
to Mandeville. After quite some time with Nicholas, he went to

Baton Rouge, joining the band of "Toot" Johnson, remaining with him for two years. He then went with Buddy Petit again, going to Pensacola [Florida], where he [and Petit's band] remained for two years. Then he went to Chicago, ^{and} played with dance bands for about six years; then he went to New York, playing casual jobs for about nine years. Upon his return to New Orleans after that, he played several dates with the old Tuxedo Band of Papa Celestin; then he played with [Maurice] Durand's band for a while. After that, he organized his own Gorman's Dixieland Band, which he headed for about nine years, and played at various small towns around New Orleans. After that period of being on the road, he went to the lakefront place, The Happy Landing, where he played for about five years. After that, he began playing casuals with Percy Humphrey and Emma Barrett [in the same band].

IG was the only New Orleanian in the 92nd Division Band, which was 55 pieces; the band played for a wide variety of affairs--concerts, parades, dances, shows, etc. IG was a part of [some of] the stage shows, as he played in the featured Dixieland band.

IG's parents did not play music; he became interested in music because a close friend of his, Henry August, played clarinet; IG first took up trumpet, but finding it beyond his ken, he switched to clarinet. His first clarinet, a beat-up Albert system, cost \$9. He first learned Boehm system in the army,

as Boehm system clarinets were the standard issue. After IG learned the new fingering, he decided the Boehm instrument was better than the Albert, and prefers a good Boehm to a good Albert. He explains some of the differences of the two systems. IG says the tone of a Boehm is good; he explains that the instrument doesn't inherently have the good or bad tone, and that the person who plays it produces the tone. His last teacher, Lorenzo Tio, Jr., taught him that the best thing to learn was "tonation" [i.e., tone quality or timbre].

IG says he wants to organize a "spiritual" band, a five-piece band to play hymns.

IG says the attitude of [most of] the teachers in his day was to let the student figure out things for himself--fingerings, reeds, etc., and that is what he did when he began studying with Picou. IG had a method, by Otto Langey, but he figured out the lessons mostly by himself. He used to go to dances where various musicians, and especially Joe "King" Oliver, who had Johnny Dodds playing with him, were playing, to learn things aurally. He also heard [George] Baquet. After hearing them, he would go home and work until he could play the things he had heard. He was encouraged by older musicians, among them [John] Robichaux, who told him to continue working, and that he had a real clarinet tone. IG says he was told that in the Army, too, and [later] in the Navy. IG illustrates his precise "tonation" [and intonation, apparently] by saying, "Like if you're playing the 'Star Sprangled

[sic] Banner,' you going to play 'Star Sprangled Banner.'" IG tells about how he and Charlie Love, who had a fine tone on the trumpet, would play requests at the Happy Landing; they would play the straight melody, relying on good tone rather than on off-notes or other kinds of variances. IG hopes that Lorenzo Tio, Jr., went to heaven, if there is a heaven (IG studied first with the elder Lorenzo Tio, or Louis Tio, but he was too busy, so he studied with the younger), because he was a real clarinet man, who didn't believe in bad tones. IG uses the double embouchure. IG uses a medium strength (# 1 1/2) reed now, but when he played with "Wooden Joe" (also called "Kid" Nicholas in those days) Nicholas, he used a stiffer reed (# 2), because Nicholas was a powerful trumpet player. IG says that when they played a parade for the Quaker Club (located on Villere between Spain and St. Roch), two trumpet players didn't show up, so Nicholas played the entire parade by himself, never weakening; the parade went from the Quaker Club to Arabi (in St. Bernard Parish), back to Canal Street and back to the Quaker Club. IG was the only clarinetist, and Ambrose [Powell] was the only trombonist. Nicholas was older than IG. IG says the story of the origin of Wooden Joe's nickname is that when he was young, he would spend much time in the woods, trapping birds for sale. WR says he has been told it came from Nicholas's strong lip. Nicholas was a very loud trumpet player; he also used mutes. IG describes jam sessions, or "bucking" at the old-time Milneberg; he also says that on Sunday there would be

fifty-five to sixty [!!!! RBA] bands riding the train, "Smoky Lizzie" [sic]. IG made contacts with many musicians in those days--Manuel Perez, the Excelsior Band of George Moret, Jack Carey (Punch Miller was in the band then), Zue [or Zool?], Willie Cornish--Zue was a trumpet player who was Sam Morgan's cousin--Chris Kelly, Buddy Petit, Peter Bocage. IG worked with them all, and with practically every band in New Orleans; any musician who has been playing music for about twenty-five or forty years knows IG. IG doesn't go around much to places where music is being played; if he is lonesome, he takes out his method and practices clarinet. One of his sons, who plays drums and vibraphone, plays in California with a band; another son, George Gorman, was in California for a number of years, where he was given [or took] the professional name of George Dexon [Dexin, Dixon?], and he plays "Bop" combo work [i.e., rhythm and blues] with fellows like Smiley Lewis and Smilin' Joe [Joe Pleasant]. IG has had his present clarinet, a Martin, which he got from Dugan's music shop on Baronne, for about forty years. IG says all clarinetists in New Orleans once used Albert system clarinets; he names some who used Alberts--Zeb [Lenoir], George Lewis, Picou. . . .

END OF REEL I

Lorenzo Tio [Jr.] also played Albert system. IG says that for a long time he himself was the only person around New Orleans using a Boehm. He tells of tricking other clarinetists, asking one to sit in for him for a couple of numbers (he names Willie Humphrey, for example, as the possible sucker), then hiding to enjoy the frustration of the man trying to use Albert fingering on a Boehm.

IG says that he sticks close to the melody in his playing, playing enough [variation to make it interesting] but not too much; he says that he usually doesn't get away from the melody more than [the interval of] a third, but sometimes he gets away as far as a fifth; he never gets as far away as a seventh or ninth, except in a big band. He says seventh and ninth chords are too big for little bands. IG says he plays like Louis Armstrong [of that time], in that he will always play enough of the melody to identify it for the listener; he will play away from the melody for awhile, but if he feels that the listener [or another musician] is losing the thread of the melody, he will return to the melody for a few bars. IG says Tio taught him about the outer limits of straying from the melody. IG says he has never tried to imitate anyone, that he has his own style. IG reminds WR that he brought someone from Switzerland to see IG across the river; IG had Alvin Alcorn playing [trumpet] with

him then; IG says he recorded "March of the Bobcats" and "High Society" for them, but he has never heard from the Swiss, nor has WR. IG also cut "Muskrat Ramble" and one other tune for him; WR did not live in New Orleans then.

Tio had a really nice clarinet tone; IG says there was very little difference between Tio and Benny Goodman; he was not loud, and he played cleanly, not rough. When teaching, Tio would let the student alone until he needed help. Sometimes he and IG played duets. He would never take a student off a lesson until the student had learned it. IG explains that a musician has to know how to add and subtract [in division of duration], and that a musician [who takes ad lib solos and/or plays jazz] is a kind of thief, because he takes from one note and adds it to another [expression and phrasing]. IG explains how a beginning musician learns to count. IG and WR talk about "tonation," long tones, scales, and "condenzas," (as in "Light Cavalry").

IG uses a plastic reed; he used to use Buffet cane reeds, but since learning to use plastic, about twenty-nine years ago, or perhaps ten years after World War I, prefers plastic; [Harold] Peterson, of the music shop of the same name, recommended that he use them. IG says plastic produces the same tone, lasts longer and produces a stronger tone; plastic reeds last him about four months [playing weekends], whereas cane reeds, used every night, would last only about one week. IG says he cleans

his mouthpiece and reed every night, and dries the reed, so that the horn, etc., last longer.

IG played E flat clarinet sometimes, years ago, but he played in a lot of parades and funerals--with Papa Celestin and the old, old Tuxedo Band, with Manuel Perez, with the Excelsior Band--using a B flat. Years ago, there were sometimes parts for "A" clarinet, for "B flat" clarinet, and for "C" clarinet, and a clarinetist would use the appropriate instrument; since then, music parts have become more standardized [and the B flat is used almost exclusively]. Tio and [George] Baquet had E flat clarinets for parades, and B flat clarinets for playing dances; IG says he didn't know that either one had an A clarinet. WR says Bunk [Johnson] once told him that Tio came to a brass band job with the Eagle Band; he had only his B flat clarinet, but contrary to the warning of some of the other members, who said he needed an A clarinet to play some of the music in many sharps, he played everything on the one instrument. IG says if a person knows his instrument he doesn't need but one; "when you know your keys and you know tonation, you got everything." WR says, and IG confirms, that "Big Eye" Louis [Nelson], who used B flat in later years, used a C in earlier years; IG says that [Phil] "Pill" [Coycault] used a C, als, never being able to play a B flat. IG says Big Eye was a great player on a C, but he seemed to be slowed down by the B flat. [He was a bit older, too.]

IG worked with "Wooden Joe" [Nicholas]'s brass band, sometimes on E flat. He worked with Chris Kelly's brass band, with "Duck" Ernest's Young Tuxedo Band on E flat. He worked with Maurice Durand in a brass band. IG apparently worked a good number of parades with E flat; he says he found that the E flat was easier on parades, because it was so loud [and shrill and could be heard without the player's playing so hard], and the E flat often played the melody, and was employed quite a bit like a piccolo.

IG began playing saxophone in Pensacola, [Florida,] with Buddy Petit's band; they were working for Prince Marble, who had an undertaking establishment; they were on a two-year contract. Other than IG and Petit, there were Sadie Goodson (sister of Billie Pierce) [on piano], [Abby] "Chinee" [Foster] [on drums], Albert Morgan, bass, John Smith, banjo. Prince Marble had the sax laying around, apparently having bought it for some one who later relinquished it because he owed Marble money. IG looked at the instrument; he says it was a Carl Fischer, and had a double E flat key, which use he explains. He says it was the only sax he ever saw with that feature. Also, the sax could be tuned from international high pitch [144 cps?] to A flat [Perhaps it was a B flat tenor?]. IG fooled with it until he ran a scale; Marble offered it to him to practice; IG says he worked with it for about two weeks, then came on the job one night with it, and from that time on--

END OF REEL II

Buddy Petit had his own style; he was one of the greatest trumpet players in New Orleans; he stuck close to the melody, but could play many variations [cf. Punch Miller, Reel ?]; he was not a high-note man, preferring, as he said, to save his lip; he was a fast fingerer, fast like Louis Armstrong and Punch [Miller]; he could play anything anyone whistled, and then make variations on it; he could play things like "Frog Legs" and "African Pas" [both rags], although he didn't know a note "as big as that television."

IG tells of playing with "Wooden Joe" Nicholas at a lawn party at Magazine and Lyons [streets]. During the job the lights went out, and a woman from the North was amazed that the musicians could continue playing in the dark, even to playing requests. IG says New Orleans musicians are brought up to play from memory, and that is what makes them so great. He says the North has opened up some recently [meaning that the musicians there have begun to play from memory some].

WR asks about a picture of "'Fats' Houston and [Louis] Dumaine's Dixieland Band"; the members of the band were Emma Barrett, piano; Louis James, bass; [William] "Specs" [Robinson], guitar; Houston, drums; Israel Gorman, clarinet; and Dumaine, trumpet (died, 1949); the picture was taken at the Tulane [Howard-Tilton Memorial] Library in 1948. IG had worked with Dumaine off and on from the early years; he was also in the Dumaine-led W.P.A. band, remaining in that organization from the beginning (IG says 1932 [but it was probably 1933 or 1934--PRC]) until the end; he and Willie Humphrey [the younger] were the solo clarinetists in that band until 1940 or 1941. Dumaine and IG worked in Dumaine's dance band at night, playing in the W.P.A. band during the day. Immediately after Pearl Harbor [December 7, 1941], IG joined the Navy as a musician; he had basic

training at Great Lakes, [Illinois,] and after a short leave, he was sent to Pasco, Washington. He says he was in both the world wars, having been a member of an Army band in WW I [see Reel I]. IG was the only New Orleans man in the WW I Army band, but there were three in the WW II Navy band--Scott [Richard McLean's son?], Richard McLean, and IG.

George Jones, bassist, was the manager of the band in which IG worked at Tom Anderson's, in the old District, at Customhouse [now Iberville and Basin]; Jones could make up rhymes about anyone, and often would do so on the job, presenting the rhyme [perhaps about a well-to-do customer] to musical accompaniment. WR says Johnny St. Cyr told him about Jones; IG says St. Cyr played with him at The Happy Landing, leaving there to go to California [1954]. Others in the band at Anderson's were Cornelius, violin and leader; "Snow," bass [Jones apparently didn't play with the band, just rhyming and managing?]- IG doesn't know Snow's real name; he says Snow was a smiling, taciturn man; IG, clarinet. The band played from "can't to can not" [one interpretation I have heard of that phrase is can't see when you go to work and cannot see when you get off from work--dark both times--PRC], sometimes going to work at 6 p.m. and working until 9 a.m., never knowing when the job would end. Wages were short, hours long; the money was made in tips. IG names some well-known people who used to "bum" at Anderson's, saying it was the big-time place. The band was four pieces--guitar, violin, bass, and clarinet [Who played guitar? Jones?]. Snow played his bass piccicato and arco. The band played in the bar (Anderson's was one big room); sometimes some of the patrons would dance. Poor people were not patrons of

Anderson's; it was high-class. [It was equivalent to the Roosevelt Hotel?] The year was about 1915, when the District was wide-open. IG says a person could buy lunch extremely cheap just outside the saloon [referring to Anderson's]; if a patron got sleepy from drinking, he could go to sleep in the place and not be bothered; the bartender, with witnesses, would remove the man's valuables from his person and hold them for safekeeping, returning them, intact, to the man when he recovered. Now they are happy to see drunk. IG tells of working with Maurice Durand and his band during the depression at Charlie [Armstead]'s place [Silver Slipper Cafe?] on [Dorgenois Street? See Soard's, 1932]; the proprietor would sometimes (if they had no money) pay a cab to take his incapacitated patrons home, and generally take care of them and their valuables [good customer relations]. The band twice a week there, and for shows, featuring Eddie "Kid" Wise and a man named Cook. The place was very popular; the shows were good, the band was good and the protection of customers was good. IG explains that Chris Kelly's band, with which he played, worked at halls, such as Economy Hall; the halls were rented by organizations which tried to make money; therefore, the policy was not the same about customer protection as places like the one mentioned above. IG says fellows like Isidore and "Gos soon," gamblers, ran [dances at] Economy Hall [and other places], and they were strictly after money, and given somewhat to dishonesty.

Chris Kelly was a good trumpet player (they all had their own styles); when he played, the place would be packed. IG worked with Kelly, and he worked with Kid Rena; he says Sharkey [Bonano] sounds

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ISRAEL GORMAN

I [only]--Digest--Retyped

November 20, 1963 Also present: Richard B. Allen

Israel Gorman was born in the Algiers section of New Orleans March 4, 1895; he grew up in N.O. [east side of the river]; a cousin, Johnny Jones, who died years ago, was not a very good banjo player. IG studied solfege for about 3 years before he began studying an instrument; he studied [clarinet] with Lorenzo Tio, Jr., and later, with [Alphonse] Picou. IG's first instrument was trumpet, which he studied for about 3 years; when he lost his lip, he changed to clarinet c. 1905; he later added saxophone. IG's first clarinet [as will be clarified] was Albert system; he changed to Boehm system in 1918, when he was in the Army, because he had no choice. A friend, Herman Good, fine clarinet and sax player, told him he'd never change back to Albert once he played Boehm.

IG modeled his style of playing on that of Lorenzo Tio, Jr., who played with [A.J.] Piron's band. IG first played music with George Jones, bassist; IG played around the District [with Jones?]; he says he played with 4 pieces--clarinet, trumpet, piano and drums--at Tom Anderson's. IG played with other groups. His "first band start" was with "Wooden Joe" Nicholas; they played on the boat, Camillia; the band was called the Camellia Band; the boat, stationed at West End, traveled from there to Mandeville to Madisonville and back. The place for fun in those days was at the lake; IG says "Smoky Mary," the train to Milneburg, was also known by other names, such as "Smoky Lizzie." When IG left Nicholas's band, he joined Chris Kelly, remaining 6 years; he then joined Buddy Petit, and was with him about 4 years; he then joined Kid Rena, playing with him about 5 years. When he left Rena, he went to Baton Rouge, joining the "Tut" [sp?] Johnson band. When he left that job, he went to Chicago, where he played with the 12-piece orchestra led by Joe Dance; when Dance became ill, the new leader let it be known that he didn't like New Orleans musicians,

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I [only]--Digest--Retyped
November 20, 1963

so IG left. IG took up alto and tenor saxophones while in the Dance band. Returning to N.O., IG played with a lot of bands; he was a long time at the Happy Landing, where he had his own band for [seven or eight?] years.

The most "honky tonk" band IG ever played with was that of George Jones, which played low-down blues; Jones sang smutty songs. Jones was playing guitar at the time, although he also played bass.

IG worked with the W.P.A. Band; he and Willie [J.] Humphrey played solo clarinet in that band for 8 years; they left that band at the same time, both joining the Navy. IG played in a Navy band during World War II, so he served in 2 wars.

Brass bands IG played with in N.O. included those of Manuel Perez, who was primarily a parade musician, George Moret, Chris Kelly (who had a funeral band). IG and Adolph Alexander [Jr.] [check sp] played together in Perez's band, and also in the Excelsior Band, led by George Moret, IG, while studying with Tio, would sometimes be sent to brass band jobs as replacement for Tio. Perez led the Onward Band.

While in the Navy band, IG played marches by [John Philip] Sousa [and others], such as "The Thunderer," "The Stars and Stripes [Forever]," "Gloria" [by F.H. Losey--PRC] and "Chicago Tribune" [by William Paris Chambers--PRC]. The marches IG played in N.O. were not "heavy" marches, as the ones he played in the Navy were.

End of Reel I