

JIM ROBINSON
Reel I--retyped
December 10, 1958

Present: William Russell
Richard B. Allen
Bill Simmons

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[Russell:] You can just give your name first, who you are and when you were born, Jim.

[Robinson:] You want the right name of Nathan, or Jim?

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Robinson:] Jim Robinson, Jim Robinson.

[Russell:] Everything about it. Your real name is Nathan?

[Robinson:] Nathan, yeah.

[Russell:] Uh-huh.

[Allen:] But you wouldn't want us to tell anybody.

[Robinson:] Oh, that's--see, my professional name is Jim Robinson; seem like everybody say go by my professional name.

[Allen:] How did you get the name of Jim? [From his nickname "Jim Crow"]

[Robinson:] Well, people, you know, like they give people nicknames, you know, call you--especially when the kids start calling you nicknames, everybody just use it, so it just stay like that-a-way.

[Russell:] Where were you born?

[Robinson:] Deer Range, Louisiana.

[Russell:] That's down the river, on the other side, huh?

[Robinson:] On the other side, the Algiers side.

[Allen:] How close is that to Magnolia Plantation?

[Robinson:] About three miles.

[Allen:] About three miles?

[Robinson:] About three miles from Magnolia.

[Russell:] Is that farther down the river than Magnolia?

[Robinson:] Magnolia [is] below me.

[Russell:] It's below you. What was the date you were born?

[Robinson:] December 25.

[Russell:] 18--

[Robinson:] 1890.

[Russell:] 90. Did your parents play any music?

[Robinson:] All my brothers, all my brothers played music.

[Russell:] Your brothers? How many brothers did you have?

[Robinson:] I had three brothers beside myself.

[Russell:] Were they all older?

[Robinson:] They were older than me; I'm the youngest; I'm the youngest in the family.

[Russell:] Did your father play anything?

[Robinson:] No, my father was a Christian man.

[Russell:] Did he sing in the churches, though?

[Robinson:] Well, he was a deacon of the church.

[Allen:] What would he do in the church?

[Robinson:] He just was next to the preacher.

[Allen:] Would he lead the singing or anything?

[Robinson:] No, he didn't sing--he [would] sing when he was to--

[Allen:] Oh, I thought maybe he was featured or something.

[Robinson:] No, no, no, no.

[Russell:] Well, sometimes I've seen the deacons, in the Doctor Watts' chants, they'll lead before the preacher gets there--

[Robinson:] Oh, yeah, but--

[Russell:] They'll lead the singing a little bit on one of those chants.

[Robinson:] A deacon always takes char[ge]--if a preacher's not there, the deacon always takes the preacher's place, you see.

[Russell:] Yes.

[Robinson:] That's his position.

[Russell:] Was your church right down there near your home?

[Robinson:] Oh, the church was at my home, at my home.

[Russell:] How many people were in that town, about?

[Robinson:] Oh, they had, say, about four or five hundred head of people.

[Allen:] Would there be any musical instruments in the church? Would they have a piano or a guitar?

[Robinson:] No, they'd have what they call the organ--what they called a melodeon years ago, what they call an organ now, you know.

[Russell:] Melodeon?

[Robinson:] Melódeon, melodeon.

[Allen:] That's a small organ, not a big one?

[Robinson:] Yeah, with the pipes on there, with the pipes.

[Russell:] Do you remember any other music when you were ~~X~~ young, when you were just a child there? Was there any band or dances?

[Robinson:] Oh yeah, they had at my home they had one of the best brass bands in the world--I mean in the country, understand--at my home, because Percy Humphrey's father--grandfather--Percy Humphrey's grandfather taught that band, that Deer Range Band. And the Magnolia band, too--he's the one taught Sunny Henry and them fellows.

[Russell:] They had a band at Magnolia?--

[Robinson:] Oh, yes.

[Russell:] And one at your town too?

[Robinson:] Magnolia, too, yes. Magnolia--had one at Magnolia, had one at Deer Range, had one at Oakville--had a band at Oakville.

[Allen:] Where is Oakville exactly?

[Robinson:] That's before you get to Deer Range; that's about five miles after you leave Belle Chasse, after you leave by that, that [seaplane ?] there.

[Allen:] Oh, one more thing! Where is St. Sophie?

[Robinson:] St. Sophie is on this side of the river, about thirty miles, on this side of the river.

[Allen:] And how far is that from Deer Range?

[Robinson:] Oh, that's just across the river.

[Allen:] Just across the river?

[Robinson:] Across the river, yeah. See Deer Range [is] on the Algiers side, St. Sophie [is] on this side.

[Allen:] I was wondering because that's where Willie Parker is from.

[Robinson:] Yeah, that's where [he's from ?], St. Sophie, huh?

[Allen:] And I just wondered how long he had known you and all that.

[Robinson:] Oh, Willie, Willie been knowing me before I was born; Willie is the age of my oldest brother.

[Allen:] How old is your oldest brother? Is he?--

[Robinson:] My oldest brother, he's, he'd be about Willie Parker's age, around [his?]-eighty some-odd.

[Allen:] He's--

[Robinson:] My oldest brother. You know I had two brothers besides, you understand, was older than me. That's right.

[Allen:] Were they, say, fifteen years or twenty years older than you, or what?

[Robinson:] Who, my brothers?

[Allen:] Yes, how much older were they?

[Robinson:] Oh, my brothers, we was two years apart.

[Allen:] All two years apart?

[Robinson:] I mean [this one ?], me and my other two brothers were two years apart, but my oldest brother was older, understand.

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Robinson:] Was older.

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[Allen:] Fifteen years, you'd say, or twenty or ten? What would you say?

[Robinson:] Well, I couldn't imagine how old my oldest brother was, because I know he was with Willie Parker.

[Allen:] Well, how would Sunny Henry compare with Willie Parker?

[Robinson:] Well, Sunny and Willie--well, I couldn't [venture ?] that, you understand, but I know they is round about the same age, you understand, you see.

[Allen:] Yeah. It's so hard to figure out how old people are, [those ?] you know; [since ?] records got lost and everything, as you know.

[Russell:] What about the dance bands? Did you go to hear any dances down in the country there?--

[Robinson:] Oh, well--

[Russell:] That had the bands? Even when you were a child, from outside the hall? What kind of?--

[Robinson:] Well, they used to have bands from the city come there and play, like the orchestras play like when they have little fairs and different things. We used--I was a small kid, I'd [unintelligible] go round and hear the bands play, and different things.

[Allen:] Who were some of the people that came down there?

[Robinson:] Well, Tom Albert used to come down there all the time and play music--Tom Albert. He was well-known; come down there and play music.

[Russell:] Did he play his trumpet or violin, or what?

[Robinson:] Tom was playing, Tom--once, first time he come here playing the violin; next time he came again, he was playing a trumpet.

[Russell:] Who else was with him? Do you remember who else was with him?

[Robinson:] Well, some of the fellows--let me see--I remember once

Frankie Duson came with him once, played trombone.

[Russell:] Oh, really?

[Robinson:] Frankie Duson came with him once.

[Allen:] Did Frankie Duson ever teach music down there?

[Robinson:] No, not to my knowledge.

[Allen:] I just wondered; I--

[Robinson:] No, Frankie never taught no music. The onliest man who taught music down there what I knowed was, it's Jim Humphrey, Percy Humphrey's granddaddy; he's the one taught all them bands down there--Jim Humphrey.

[Allen:] Would there be much difference between the Deer Range Band and the Magnolia Band, and say, Tom Albert's Band? What would the difference be?

[Robinson:] Well, I didn't find no difference, because they all was playing the same type of music.

[Allen:] What kind of music was that?

[Robinson:] Was marches.

[Allen:] It was all marches?

[Robinson:] Six-eight [marches], one-step, quick-step--they'd play all different kinds of music, you understand.

[Allen:] Well, where was?--

[Robinson:] But they didn't fool with no--like that symphony orchestra music, they didn't fool with that, understand.

[Russell:] No, none of the classical.

[Robinson:] No, that classical. But like them six-eights, them fellows used to play that stuff, you know; take twelve of them men and play just as much as a big symphony orchestra.

[Russell:] How many were in a brass band in those days?

[Robinson:] Well, used to use, I believe it was either--I believe

fourteen or--thirteen or fourteen men, I think. You see, at that time we used to use the peck horn.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Robinson:] Used to use a first tenor, solo alto, first alto, and use the--let me see--

[Russell:] The tenor, [unintelligible]--

[Robinson:] The tenor.

[Russell:] Was that like a baritone horn?

[Robinson:] No--yeah, yeah, like a baritone horn, you understand, the tenor.

[Allen:] Is it upright?

[Robinson:] Upright, yeah; a tenor, you understand. Upright, made like a baritone, but it's not so big as a baritone horn.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Robinson:] You see, that's the time when them bands didn't have all them like they got now--a ~~t~~ tenor sax, see, they use a baritone; just was using a baritone and clarinet, you see, an E flat clarinet. They didn't use all that kind of stuff.

[Simmons:] An E flat clarinet?--

[Robinson:] E flat clarinet, yeah.

[Simmons:] Instead of playing a B flat, huh?

[Robinson:] E flat, little short one, E flat clarinet.

[Russell:] How many trombones did they have in a band?

[Robinson:] Well, they didn't use no more than one trombone at a time.

[Russell:] One trombone?

[Robinson:] One trombone.

[Russell:] And a tuba, I guess?

[Robinson:] That was a valve trombone, you understand, valve trombone.

[Russell:] Uh-huh. Use a tuba?

[Robinson:] Yeah.

[Russell:] Was it the upright horn or one that went around?

[Robinson:] Upright.

[Russell:] Upright.

[Robinson:] Yeah, upright.

[Allen:] How many cornets?

[Robinson:] Four--four trumpets.

[Allen:] And drums, would they have drums?

[Robinson:] Two drums, snare drum and big drum--bass drum.

[Russell:] What kind of parades did they have; what--on what occasion did they put on a parade?

[Robinson:] Well, they put--like for societies and different things, you know; going to all different places [and all that ?], you know--like societies got like parades, well, they'll go over like so many miles [just to this place ?] on a Sunday, different places when--

[Russell:] Ever play for a funeral down there in those?--

[Robinson:] Well, no, they never did fool with that, no. I never, as far as I remember--not to my knowledge.

[Russell:] Never had music with funerals?

[Robinson:] No, no, didn't fool with that.

[Allen:] Well, where would they play? Would they always march? Would they sit down? Would they play inside a--

[Robinson:] Oh they would--like on the rehearsal, like that, they would sit down, but like everytime they would have a session, the rehearsal, they would make a parade around the village and different places; they would make a parade, you see, to keep in trim, you see.

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Robinson:] Walk about a mile going and a mile coming, you see.

[Allen:] Did people dance to the music?

[Robinson:] Oh, sure.

[Allen:] So would they play in a dance hall?

[Robinson:] They'd play in a dance hall, yeah, sure.

[Allen:] And what would they play then? Would they play the six-eight marches?

[Robinson:] No, no, they'd play other different songs.

[Allen:] Oh, I see.

[Robinson:] Yeah, different songs.

[Russell:] The brass band would be in the dancehall?

[Robinson:] Yeah, the brass band, yeah.

[Russell:] Play in the dancehall.

[Robinson:] Yeah, they'd play different songs.

[Allen:] Would they play hymns, ever?

[Robinson:] They'd play hymns on the church affair, like that, in the church, you see.

[Allen:] Would the band go inside the church?

[Robinson:] Yeah, the band, sure.

[Allen:] I've seen the Young Tuxedo [Brass Band] do that.

[Robinson:] When they picked up a collection.

[Russell:] Yeah, I've seen the Eureka [Band] do it.

[Allen:] The Eureka.

[Robinson:] Yeah, they goes in the church.

[Allen:] They would play for collection?

[Robinson:] Yeah.

[Allen:] And how would they take up the collection?

[Robinson:] Little basket; a little--like they got the basket in the churches, you know.

[Allen:] Would the men; the members march or would they?--

[Robinson:] No.

[Allen:] Pass it.

[Robinson:] No, no, everybody sat in their seats--.

[Allen:] Oh, I see.

[Robinson:] And the fellow goes round with the basket; pass it and you put in--

[Russell:] Oh, did we ask what kind of a church your father was deacon [of]?

[Robinson:] Baptist.

[Russell:] Baptist, I thought so. I didn't know if we had it down.

[Robinson:] Baptist, yeah.

[Russell:] [Thought it ?] could have been Methodist. Did they have a Methodist church down there, too?

[Robinson:] Oh yeah, they had Methodist--Methodist, Catholic, all that.

[Russell:] Were most of the people down there Methodist or Catholic, do you think?

[Robinson:] It's between--it's all half and half. [What ?]

[Russell:] About half and half?

[Robinson:] Half and half.

[Russell:] Did you ever get up to the Magnolia plan--was it more of a plantation or a town?

[Robinson:] Plantation, a plantation.

[Russell:] Was there a little settlement there, stores and [all, too ?]? I never saw Magnolia.

[Robinson:] No, no, they had the big refinery there; used to refine sugar and stuff.

[Russell:] Did you ever get up there to hear their band?

* Sept. 12, 1972.]

[Robinson:] Oh, yeah, I heard--sure, I heard their band. I was small. That band used to come [to my] home many times, you know. Like this band come over on a Sunday, and then various bands would go down [to] Magnolia, understand. Well, they were all the same professors was teaching us, you understand.

[Allen:] Who were some of the people in the bands down there?

[Robinson:] Oh well, I'll tell you, a lot of those people is dead; I couldn't remember all them people's names.

[Allen:] I just thought you could tell us--

[Robinson:] But Sunny [Henry] could tell you all them fellow's names because he used to play in that band with them, you know.

[Allen:] I thought maybe some of them were here, [that] you could tell us where to find them, you know.

[Robinson:] Oh no, them fellows--onliest one fellow I know played in that band, he's across the river--Harrison Barnes.

[Russell:] Oh he was in it?

[Robinson:] Yeah he was in that band; he was playing trumpet.

[Russell:] Was he in Deer Range or Magnolia?

[Robinson:] No, he was in Magnolia band.

[Allen:] Are the Deer Range fellows alive?

[Robinson:] No, all them fellows is dead.

[Allen:] Every one of them?

[Robinson:] Yeah, all them fellows used to play in that band, all them fellows is dead.

[Russell:] What about, what is Deer Range like today? What kind of a town is it?

[Robinson:] It's nothing but water now.

[Russell:] Nothing there now?

[Robinson:] It had, they had a crevasse there; ship run through the

levee in high water and just ruined the whole parish down there, that ship.

[Russell:] Nothing there now.

[Robinson:] Nothing but water, nothing but a duck pond now. People, that's where they do all their hunting down there.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Robinson:] Onliest way I know it's my home [is] when I get there where that water [is].

[Simmons:] What was it when you lived there, farming area?

[Robinson:] Yeah, yeah, farming, yeah, big farming.

[Russell:] Sugar cane?

[Robinson:] Sugar cane, yeah.

[Allen:] What would they do in the fields when they were working?

Would anybody ever sing?

[Robinson:] Sing?

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Robinson:] Well, they'd be whistling, like the fellows do here, and singing and whistling.

[Allen:] What would they sing and whistle?

[Robinson:] Oh, some sing hymns and some whistle songs, whatever they want to do.

[Allen:] Do you remember any of the ones that you used to sing when you were a little boy?

[Robinson:] I forgot them things. A lot of things when I was a boy I used to do, but I forgot them things.

[Allen:] What was the first band you ever played with, yourself?

[Robinson:] The first band I played with was with--you mean [who] I played with?

[Allen:] Yes.

[Robinson:] Oh, the first band I played with was a orchestra
[unintelligible] they had a band here--Isaiah Morgan.

[Russell:] But tell me, first, what instrument did you start on?

[Robinson:] Oh, I started on guitar first; I started on guitar.

[Allen:] What would you do? Would you play chords or were you a
picker?

[Robinson:] I was playing chords.

[Allen:] Did you pick at all, with your finger?

[Robinson:] No, just playing, just rapping chords, you know,
playing with--

[Russell:] Did you have a teacher, or did you pick it up yourself?

[Robinson:] No, I picked it up myself, yeah.

[Russell:] Do you remember where you got your instrument?

[Robinson:] Oh, my instrument--when I got an instrument, well, I was
round about fifteen years of age.

[Russell:] Did you have to earn the money or [did] somebody give it to
you or your folks?

[Robinson:] Well, my sister bought it for me; she bought it. See,
cause my--in other words, fellows had a guitar around here, I used
to like to play so much, so she went and bought me the guitar, and I
just took and played it, you see. Then the fellow, Jim Humphrey, used to
come home--he used to stay by my sister's house, you know, understand--
[when] he'd come and give lessons, he'd stay there. But he used to
show me the chords and everything. Well, he learned me a lot himself,
understand.

[Allen:] Did you sing when you played guitar?

[Robinson:] No, I never, I never could sing, Dick, but I could play
good guitar. Oh, yeah, I could pick all them songs, I could--

[Allen:] And what about?--

[Robinson:] I could pick hymns and different things. But now I can't play nothing on it; I forgot about it. That's true--I can play a few chords but--

[Russell:] When did you take up trombone, then?

[Robinson:] I took up trombone in 1917.

[Russell:] Where were you?

[Robinson:] In France.

[Russell:] In France?

[Robinson:] Uh-huh. I was in ^{Bourges} [unintelligible,] France. [Unintelligible.]

[Russell:] Did you join the--that was pretty early wasn't it? Were you drafted or did you enlist?

[Robinson:] No, they drafted me. So how I come to took up trombone: the lieutenant, he wanted a band for the company, and so he asked if any fellows had an idea [that] they wanted to take a part in music. Well, I knew I could play guitar, but I didn't fool with no trombone. So they had a fellow from Napoleonville [Louisiana]--Ernest Himes-- [he was from bowleg ?]--he used to play in Claiborne Williams's band. Well, they were good musicians. Willie Foster, well, he was from here and he was a good musician. So he ^told me, Willie say--he called me "Bob"--say "Bob, man, come on why don't you take up trombone; we'll learn you how to play." I say, "Oh, man, I don't want to fool with nothing like that." He say, "Man, listen, you see they done took the rifles from us? Now listen: you got a shovel and you got a pick; now you got to handle both them things. You got to dig a hole and got to shovel all that dirt out of there." I say, "Man, that sure is true." So I looks every day--and we had them big heavy shoes on and they had given them fellows that was in the band them nice army [ruskin ?] shoes, you know, light shoes.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Robinson:] Keep them shining, nice leggings. So [I say I might ?] get on this stuff, myself.

[Russell:] They didn't have to work hard then?

[Robinson:] No, just go to the YMCA and every day 'and rehearsal, yousee. So next morning when they called the roll, understand, I stepped on out too! I just took a chance; I took a chance, man, and walked on out there. And the lieutenant--fine lieutenant, too, names Lt. Lyons, too--^said, "All right, Robinson, you want to play trombone?" [I] say, "Yes, sir." "All right," [he] said. Well, he give me a brand new Conn'trombone. So Ernest took it and put it together, you know--but I could full it up, you understand. Well, every day--so after--they had a fellow was working with the band, had been there about three or four weeks, and he couldn't eveh full his horn up. Every day Ernest would take him and after the rehearsal would take him down behind the hill, you know, and show him how to handle his positions, you see. So after that Ernest used to take me and him both.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Robinson:] Every day after that, you know, behind the hills, and [be together had it, ?] blowing the trombone, and Ernest would have his hand and show him how to put the positions. And after that, say in about two weeks time, I started running my scales, you know, and this fellow, he couldn't blow nothing.

[Russell:] Did Willie Humphrey--Willie Foster help you much?

[Robinson:] Yeah, Willie Foster, yeah. You see, Willie had to leave the violin, had his violin, and every day when I'd get a chance, you know, I'd go over by Willie with his violin, and he'd play a song for me and I'd take the trombone--[I could ?] vamp, you know; he shoed me what to make [just ?] vamp. Man, I got to doing that, so everything went on fine. So this other trombone player, he wasn't doing nothing

so much and so they had us both in the band together, you know, playing in a jazz band, but he just confused me because he couldn't play nothing by making [all that harmony ?]. So Lt. Lyons said, "Well, I think the best we got to put this fellow back in the big band and let Jim play by himself"--understand--"in the small band."

[Russell:] The dance band.

[Robinson:] Yeah, in the small band. And, man, right after that I went on, then, after that, sure. Look to me that thing just come to me over-night; I swear to Christ, that trombone came to me over-night. You know, my whole heart and mind had got to it. And like it just come to me over-night. And man, [I] went out there and [in] three weeks time, man, we were going all over France playing for the lieutenants and for the buck privates--the buck privates treat you better than the lieutenants did, because you'd get more money from the buck privates; they'd buy all the liquor you want and different stuff. The lieutenants, somethines they'd give you a good pay, sometimes they wouldn't give you nothing. Yeah, man that's--I went, I seen a lot of France.

[Russell:] Anybody else in that band, that you remember, from New Orleans? Just Willie Foster? Anybody else?

[Robinson:] Willie Foster--let me see--oh, they had a bunch of fellows from New Orleans, but they wasn't playing in the band, you know.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Robinson:] Just fellows overseas with me.

[Russell:] I wondered in the band, though.

[Robinson:] Wasn't in the band. I meet a lot of fellows right now when I go downtown; they all live around back of St. Bernard Street. I met a bunch of them just last Sunday [when] I was down there for a meeting.

[Russell:] Did you stay in France until the war was all over then?

[Robinson:] Oh, man, I stayed in France, stood in France eighteen months. Eighteen months. I stood so long [I didn't think they were going to sen me ?] back home.

[Russell:] Did you learn any French over there?

[Robinson:] I couldn't say nothing. I'll tell you one thing about them people: I got ruined with my American money because, you see, I couldn't count their money, so I'd give my American dollars and so they used to give me any kind of change [of ?] that money, understand; I didn't know what it was and--. But they like that American dollar; I swear to Christ, they follow you, run you down for [an] American dollar.

[Allen:] Say, can you hum a little vamp for me? I was wondering what kind of vamp you learned when Willie Foster would play the violin.

[Robinson:] Just the same like I'm playing now.

[Allen:] Yeah. Well, just hum a couple of little licks for me. Can you do it?

[Russell:] Talking about the vamp style, what is that? I mean, is it a bass style, or what?

[Robinson:] That's a vamp: (scats). It's just a vamp, you see, just fitting in, you know. Like [they say ?]--"High Society"--(scats melody of "High Society")--see, the trombone: (scats trombone part of "High Society"). That's all it [is ?]. But [the other way is that's ?] what you call the tailgate, you see. But sometimes I play it whole lot, you know. When the trumpet player holds a good lead, like "High Society," I'd rather vamp the part than try to [sing ?] the solo, understand, because it sounds much better.

[Russell:] I've heard you talk before, years ago, about the importance of the rhythm: that is, that you have to have that beat on the trombone. Can you tell us about that a little?

[Robinson:] Yeah, that beat: you see, that beat on the trombone is just-- in other words--well, like when you play that Dixieland music, you can't rush it; if you rush it, you can't make your chords and things good, you understand. See, because you're rushing the notes, too, because you see--now, especially like our band, like the band we got there now: well, our band, this band don't never play like Sam Morgan's band, because Sam had a tempo; he'd set you to a tempo and that rhythm would hold you right there; you never would move (taps his foot). Because that's your whole background: that piano, your drums, bass and banjo, that's your background. Now, if them people don't work together, you can blow your brains out there and you can't, you ain't getting nowhere, and, Bill, you know I'm telling the truth about that.

[Russell:] Yeah, I know.

[Robinson:] You see? Now, if that banjo (scats) and that drum (scats) you [are] going just as fast as a cyclone, [and] you can't execute your horn like you want to. It's too fast, understand? But as long as that drum and that piano and that banjo and bass, that must work together. Well, that's the whole thing. Any man got a band should get that together: that drum and bass and banjo, and piano. Because that's the main thing; that's your background, and if that's clicking, your band got to go right.

[Allen:] Well, how would they work with Sam Morgan?

[Robinson:] Oh, Sam was on the time because Sam had one of them slapsticks, you see, and Sam [would] get that band to move, he'd hold that stick like that, you understand. But in other words, the fellows had got together so the rhythm, he didn't have to worry at all with it

because [unintelligible] he'd knowck a piece off, you couldn't move them fellows, they'd stay right there, you couldn't move them. No, you couldn't move them, you couldn't move them. Sam would take any kind of old number and make a dance number out of it; I don't care what kind of number it is, but he'll take it and make a dance number. He could put a time to it and play it in a moving time that you'd like it. He was a good man for that, but [in] other words, we had one of the best swing bands in the city of New Orleans. Anybody will tell you that, that Sam Morgan Band we had a swing to that band. Because, in other words, you come to that band, don't care what you could play, [don't say that about the ?] [written] music proposition, but just that swing, you [had to get over ?] to that swing. You see, some fellows had been playing so fast [that when] they get in a swing band they can't play like they want to. [unintelligible] some of them overfinger their horn and different things, and that makes it sound bad. [Russell:] When did you join Sam Morgan? That was your first job, you said, I believe.

[Robinson:] I got in Sam's band in 1922.

[Allen:] Who was the leader then?

[Robinson:] Sam--no, the first band, his brother, Isaiah Morgan [was leader], but Sam, his band, the Magnolia Band he had, they had a split, you see. Sam had a stroke and he got sick; well, the band split, you see. Then after Sam got well, he come with his brother. Put the band under Sam's name, because he had all the work and everything, you know; he was more famous and they put everything in his hands.

[Allen:] Now, you joined Isaiah first then. About what year was that?

[Robinson:] That was the year 1920.

[Allen:] 1920. You had just gotten back from France, I guess, a little while?

[Robinson:] Oh, yes, I had got [back] from overseas.

[Russell:] When did you move up to New Orleans?

[Robinson:] Here in New Orleans? I came, I left home in 1911.

[Russell:] 1911?

[Robinson:] Uh-huh, 1911.

[Russell:] What kind of work did you do before? You were old enough to work then, weren't you, twenty? --

[Robinson:] Oh, listen here, I worked--when I first came to New Orleans, I went to work at the Southern Pacific, [a] steamship company.

[Russell:] Yeah, steamship company.

[Robinson:] Yeah, I went to work there, and I worked there until the time I went to war. I was a very young, young, young man when I came here in New Orleans. And let me see what we were making a day, before I forget now: we was making \$3.30 a day and make \$4.40 at night. Well, that was a big salary [in them days ?]. A fellow--

[Allen:] What did you make in the country?

[Robinson:] Huh?

[Allen:] How much money would you make out in the country?

[Robinson:] Well, we'd make a dollar a day in the country. That was a big percentage, wasn't it?

[Russell:] Yeah, [for the country ?], I guess. You didn't have to spend much money down there.

[Robinson:] That's why I say--oh, sure.

[Allen:] What kind of work were you doing in the country?

[Robinson:] Oh, well, we were just working in the fields, different places like that, you know.

[Allen:] I was wondering about those--you mentioned there were guitar players around Deer Range, huh?

[Robinson:] Oh, they had plenty guitar players around there; they had plenty fellows play guitars, you know.

[Allen:] What would they play?

[Robinson:] Oh, they play like I play: blues and different things, songs, [different things they were ?].

[Allen:] Well, would they be finger-picking style, would they be chord, or what?

[Robinson:] Oh, chords, some of them was chords--some of them was better players than what I was, you see; yeah, better players than what I was, because I come up after them learning under, after them, you know, some of them could play better than me. Then after I'd be-- some of them--I'd beat them playing, you know.

[Allen:] Could they play melody?

[Robinson:] Oh, yeah, sure.

[Allen:] Would they sing?

[Robinson:] Oh, yeah, some of them could sing. [unintelligible] Some of them used to have a harmonica [fastened] to a little piece of wire over their mouth, understand--

[Russell:] Around their neck, huh?

[Robinson:] They'd play the harmonica and play the guitar, too.

[Allen:] You don't remember any of the names of the songs?

[Robinson:] Oh, them old songs--there'd be "Steamboat Bill," all that [kind of old numbers ?]; "Casey Jones," all them numbers was out then.

[Allen:] And the blues, what kind of blues?

[Robinson:] Oh, there wasn't much blues then, at the time then.

[Allen:] What about the blues?

[Allen:] What about the blues?

[Robinson:] There wasn't much of a blues then, understand; didn't nobody fool with blues that much at that time.

[Russell:] Not as many blues then as now?

[Robinson:] No, not like now, uh-uh. Blues ain't been long; just a few years been out. [People was playing the blues not like today; it wasn't proper like in the time I come up in ?]

[Russell:] I wondered when/^{was}the first brass band on the street that you played [in]?

[Robinson:] I played? The first brass band I played was for the Jefferson [City] Buzzards; was on a Carnival day, with Willie Parker.

[Russell:] Willie Parker?

[Robinson:] Uh-huh, he got the job forme.

[Russell:] Was that the Eureka Band or what kind of a band? Any name for it?

[Robinson:] I believe that was the Magnolia Band, I think; I think it was the Magnolia Band; I think it was. [compare Parker interview.]

[Allen:] Did you ever play with the Terminal Band?

[Robinson:] No, no, no.

[Russell:] Can you tell us a bit more about the Sam--or the Isaiah Morgan Band? Who else was in that band when you joined?

[Robinson:] What? Oh, they had, let me see: had Earl, Earl Fouche; my nephew, Sidney Brown; Andrew Morgan; Johnny Dá ve; "Shine" [Nolan Williams]; Sam Morgan; Isaiah, and myself. And we used to get that woman, May, piano--May; sometimes we'd use a piano--Mzy, piano.

[Allen:] Who else did you use on piano later?

[Robinson:] Sometime we used to use Georgie Parker; when May couldn't go to town, we'd use Georgie Parker.

[Russell:] Did you ever use clarinet much in that band?

[Robinson:] Oh, yeah, yeah.

[Russell:] Did Andrew double on it, or who did?

[Robinson:] No, no--yeah; Andrew used to play the clarinet and Earl would play soprano [sax]--Earl played soprano.

[Allen:] Would there be any rule? Would they play those two together and then play alto and tenor together, or would they play soprano and tenor?

[Robinson:] They'd play together, understand; like it's a special chorus like that, you know, they'd play--if a clarinet and a sax--well, the clarinet and soprano, they'd play together, understand.

[Allen:] Would they play alto and clarinet at the same time?

[Robinson:] No, they'd play alto and tenor.

[Allen:] Alto and tenor? That would sound better, I see.

[Robinson:] Alto and tenor.

[Allen:] When did Sam have his stroke? Do you remember about [when]?

[Robinson:] Let me see, Sam had his stroke, his first stroke, I believe it was in 1928, I think; in 1928 I think Sam had his first stroke.

[Allen:] And after he got well, what happened?

[Robinson:] Sam had his first stroke in 1928, I think, Bill, because he took his second stroke--wait a while--no, Sam had his first stroke, I believe in 1926--'26, yeah.

[Russell:] Must have been, because they made those records.

[Robinson:] '26, because in '28 we went to Chicago, because he had got well; we went to Chicago and after we came back from Chicago in '29, he took his other stroke.

[Russell:] Did you travel much, besides that trip to Chicago? Go any place else?

[Robinson:] Oh, yeah; we used to go all in Mississippi, Ala--all through Mississippi, Alabama, West Coast, we didn't never go on the West Coast much, you understand.

[Allen:] Did you get to New York at all with Sam?

[Robinson:] No, we didn't go to New York. We went to Chicago.

[Russell:] When you went to Chicago, that was on the excursion, I believe you told me once.

[Robinson:] Yeah, on the excursion.

[Russell:] Did you play on the train?

[Robinson:] We played on the train and we played at the Warwick Hall in Chicago.

[Russell:] The Warwick?

[Robinson:] Yeah, we played there.

[Allen:] I hate to change the subject but I see the tape is about to [runout]. Did any of your uncles or grandparents or grand-uncles play?

[Robinson:] All my brothers used to play music.

[Allen:] But no others, huh?

[Robinson:] No, no.

[Allen:] Your mother, did she?--

[Robinson:] No, no, my mother died when I was a small kid.

[Allen:] I thought maybe she was a]organ player, or something.

[Robinson:] No, I disremember my mother; I was just a small kid when she died.

[Russell:] What did your brothers play?

[Robinson:] Well, one of my brothers played trombone--oldest one played trombone--and the next one played bass, and the other one played saxophone.

[Allen:] And their names?

[Robinson:] Sam Robinson--

[Allen:] He was the trombone player?

[Robinson:] No, he was the saxophone player. My other brother [was] named Effie [son] Robinson, he was the bass player.

[Allen:] Effie?

[Robinson:] Effie. My oldest brother played trombone.

[Allen:] And his name?

[Robinson:] His name is Sparks.

[Allen:] Sparks. When did the saxophone come out, for your brother to play?

[Robinson:] Well, them saxophones--I didn't know anything about saxophones until the time of World War I; the first time I ever seen a saxophone was World War I.

[Allen:] Did he play anything before he played saxophone?

[Robinson:] Who, my brother?

[Allen:] Yes.

[Robinson:] Yeah, he played a clarinet.

[Allen:] Oh, I see. Which bands would they play with?

[Robinson:] Well, my brother, he used to play with the Deer Range then ?
at that time [there ?].

[Allen:] All of them?

[Robinson:] My oldest brother.

[Allen:] Oh, your oldest brother?

[Robinson:] Yeah, but my brother Sam was playing in the band with me and Isaiah Morgan.

[Allen:] Is that right?

[Robinson:] Yeah, we had the young band, Young Morgan Band at the time then, before Sam took the band in charge--Young Morgan Band. Me, my brother, and "Little Jim" [Sidney Brown] ^{plays ?} played with Eddie Pierson--well, he was playing bass, you understand.

[Allen:] And who would Effie play with?

[Robinson:] He was playing in the Deer Range Band, too.

[Russell:] We're about out of tape. Is there any other question?

[Allen:] Yes--no, I'm out of questions.

[Russell:] We are just about out of tape, too. We may as well call it a day.

[Allen:] Who was your favorite trombone player when you were young?

[Robinson:] Well, I'll tell you one thing, Dick: that's one thing I don't like to give no decision about that; *I love all trombone players.*

END OF REEL I
December 10, 1958