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Also present Richard B. Allen, Marjorie T. Zander

[Interview recorded in Reserve, Louisiana, behind the New Rhythm Club in Marshall Lawrence's home.

Marshall Lawrence was born in Reserve in 1887. (He is part-owner of a funeral home, although he is not an undertaker and [never was in that business?]; he used to make caskets, however.) His music career began with a boys' band he and others formed; they bought second-hand instruments; they had John Robichaux teaching them for about six months, then Claiborne Williams for about another six months. The boys' band played jobs around the area. When he was about fourteen, ML joined the band of Dejan [sp?] Alexander, a cornetist; they played together about three years. There were seven pieces in that band; they were cornet, clarinet, bass, trombone, violin [and ? ?]. The band played about four years using only the lead from piano scores, with the other instruments "playing along" [i.e., faking]; then the band began using orchestrations (the orchestrations then had cornet and clarinet in either B [flat] or A, and the trombone was written in the treble clef; the trombone part was later changed to bass clef); the band went along for about ten [more?] years, until Alexander was drowned one night. The band was called Alexander's Ragtime Band until then. ML and the trombonist re-named the band Lawrence and Duhe Orchestra; they played together some years, until the trombonist left the country. There were various personnel changes. Herbert Hall came into the band, playing banjo until he switched to clarinet. The band name was changed to Nile[s? RBA] Band, which it remained for some time. After a while, ML began training young musicians in the band; when they would

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become good; other bands would get them; some of them were:  
Clarence Hall, clarinet; <sup>John</sup> Johnny French (brother of Morris French--  
ML thinks there are four French brothers who play music [Cf. Morris  
French, reel ?]), trumpet; Herbert Triche [sp?], sax;  
Roland Arcenaux, trumpet; Leroy Robinet, tenor sax; Marshall  
Lawrence, Jr., sax. There were others who played with the band and  
left it; Faido Marzelle [sp?], trumpet, was one; Lawrence Duhe, clarinet,  
who was "famous in playing music," was another. Duhe now lives  
in Lafayette, Louisiana. RBA mentions <sup>W</sup> Wellman Braud, bassist, who  
worked with Duke Ellington, and who comes from Donaldsonville,  
Louisiana. ML says Alvin Alcorn played trumpet with his band when  
Alcorn was still a little boy; ML doubted that he could play the job,  
but Alcorn could play anything put in front of him. Then Joe Johnson  
came in on trumpet; he wrote music for the band, too; he has been dead  
ten or fifteen years. [Hunter?] Gardette, trumpet, who also played  
with Joe Robichaux, played with ML; Gardette's brother-in-law  
[Wilbert Tillman? RBA] played saxophone with ML then. Percy  
Humphrey, leader of the Eureka Brass Band now, played trumpet with  
ML at one time. Louis Dumaine also played trumpet with ML. Lewis  
"Chif" Matthews (brother of "Stonewall" [Matthews]), who had played  
trumpet with Kid Ory when Ory first went to New Orleans, also played  
trumpet with ML, after his work with Ory. RBA says Punch [Miller]  
has talked about Chif. ML would send to New Orleans to get trumpet  
players (and other instruments) when he couldn't get men from his  
home area. Professor [Anthony] Holmes, of Lutcher, Louisiana, also  
played with ML for a good while. A man from Lutcher was one of the  
drummers

drummers ML used at one time. In later years, a lot of the boys that had left ML returned to Reserve and they reorganized the band, which stayed together until ML quit playing which was about 1938. (They are shown in a photo.)

ML played for the enjoyment of playing, rather than for money. He likes the kind of music of the old times; people didn't know much about music then; a band could play anything (Dejan Alexander would make up tunes on the <sup>band?</sup>stand); the people didn't know much about dancing, especially the white people; there weren't many bands in the country that could play from music; the only times the people in Reserve heard music were twice in the winter, when French and Price showboats would pass; those were also the only times they would see a moving picture, too, as they had none in the country. The showboats had good bands; ML used to buy music from them, too.

ML had an uncle, Joseph Lawrence, who played drums in the Pickwick Band of Reserve; he knew music.

The father Hall played clarinet in the second band [of ML?], after Alexander drowned; Hall couldn't read much, but he played very well. He played more in the style of his son Robert Hall, less like his son Edmond Hall. The elder Hall was playing what ML would call Dixieland jazz then, which was around 1918 or 1920.

Before ML began playing, there were only brass bands in the country; string bands [i.e., those dance bands which included strings, such as violin, string bass, guitar, as well as percussion, brass, reed instruments] came later; they were about seven pieces at first, becoming larger later. Ragtime pieces became popular; some were "Alexander's Ragtime Band," "Steamboat Bill," and others. ML's

band [Alexander's?] played in any style; they would play different styles at dances until they found out what the particular crowd wanted. There were plenty of blues around when ML was coming up; one was "You Cook Good Cabbage, So They Say," [Cf. recording of this tune] which was played in blues time. ML says people might not like a tune a first hearing; he says his band had "If The Man In The Moon Were A Coon" for two years before the people began to like it.

There were single entertainers, such as banjo players, who played for dancing the jig, and pianists, who played around Reserve when the Pickwick was the only band; Jim Barré [sp] could play any stringed instrument.

The Pickwick Band played for dances, as there were no string bands around at that time; they played regular dance music, but no Dixieland. The first band ML heard play jazz was the Kid Ory band, which started at Laplace; "Stonewall" and "Chif" Matthews], Ory and a violinist, [Bull White, Bulwer?] who also played with ML [plus others?] were playing jazz, and the people really liked; ML says they didn't get it from anywhere else, as they hadn't been anywhere but Laplace. [Cf. Kid Ory reel ?] Chif learned to read after being with Ory.

In the first band ML played with, the personnel was: Dejan Alexander, leader [and cornet]; Gil Duhe (uncle of the Halls), valve trombone; [Fernold Madere?], guitar; Joe Robinette, bass; ML, violin; later, the elder Hall, clarinet, and a drummer. Paul Ben replaced Duhe on trombone. ML talks about the roles of the various instruments in that kind of band. Violin and trumpet

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played the lead simulanteouly. Piano was used sometimes. Guitar pre-dated banjo. The bass used his bow all the time. There were saxophones played in Reserve when ML started.

End of Reel I

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When ML was blacksmithing, he bought a violin; the next day he told his boss he could play; the boss got his own violin from home, but ML couldn't play it, as it was tuned correctly, not the way ML had tuned his own; ML returned to his home, tuned his violin correctly, and was able to play his boss's violin the next day. One of the boss's cohorts wanted to send ML to [music?] school, but ML's parents decided he should stay at home. ML also became an expert blacksmith.

Although ML's band [which one--with Alexander or later?] was at first denied the privilege of broadcasting over radio station WWL, they gained enough notoriety on a tour they made that WWL asked them to broadcast when they returned. The tour went through Mississippi, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky, Illinois and Missouri, plus about four other states, as ML says they went into about eleven states; when they got back, they played in Texas and in southwest Louisiana. They were on the road two months, nine days. People from all over the area around Reserve would come to Reserve on Sunday night to dance to the music of ML's band.

ML mentions [A.J.] Piron<sup>r</sup>, violinist; RBA knows his trumpet player [Peter Bocage], and says Alvin Alcorn worked with Piron at one time, in Piron's later years. RBA mentions several Piron compositions. The theme song of ML's band was "Say A Little Prayer For Me."

The first piece ML learned to play was one his boss played; they called it "Lizard On The Rail"; RBA says "Hiawatha" is the real name of the piece. ML mentions others he played, including a later one called "Here Comes Your Daddy Now," which was featured by [John] Robichaux's orchestra.

[           ?], of Florence, Alabama, booked ML's band on tour. ML points out persons shown on a photograph he has: Etienne Placide, trombone; Roland Arsenaux, trumpet; Charles Louis, drums; Gilford Duhe, trumpet; ML, violin; Edward Hall, bass; Jimmy Raney, banjo; Herbert Triche, alto saxophone and clarinet; Marshall Lawrence, Jr., alto and soprano sax and clarinet; Catherine Arsenaux, piano; Leroy Robinette, tenor sax. ML says they had the piece, "White Heat" [by Will Hudson--PRC]. ML's band was also booked [later] by a man who had a place on Rampart Street, near the [railroad] station; the booker also booked Joe Robichaux, and another band. RBA says Clarence Hall still has a soprano sax, but doesn't play it much; ML says Hall played tenor sax then, and also baritone sax.

The Pickwick Band is mentioned. ML played in brass bands; he says all the members of brass bands in the area would get together to play the funeral of any brass band member; ML didn't want them to play for his funeral, as he didn't like the fast music they would play on the way back. The last person a brass band played a funeral for in that area was Erskine Tony, bass player, who worked with ML some; the funeral was eight or ten years ago. Bands have always played "ratty" music on the way back from funerals, even when ML was a little boy. ML tells of getting a phonograph to play church music for wakes at the funerals home, but the people didn't ask for it, so they stopped using it. ML tells of playing ragtime music for a Catholic group to march from a hall to a church (and return) for an annual mass.

The Pickwick Brass Band played for Carnival [i.e., Mardi Gras] every year; ML never played for Carnival. ML played alto horn in brass bands. ML mentions the daughter of Willie Humphrey [the elder]; she was teaching band in a school [in Reserve?]; ML helped her get some additional instruments, including tenor and baritone horns, which he says are not used much in brass bands now, but should be.

ML mentions that the Bienefaisance [sp?] Society buried its dead. He mentions two other societies, benevolent societies, the God Help Us and the [He's the Light?]. There are pleasure clubs in Reserve, as there are in New Orleans, but the Reserve clubs do not bury their dead. The bands in the Reserve areas played funerals only for their own members, not for any of the societies; the surviving bandsmen played the funerals free. The brass band ML played in read funeral marches; ML guesses the Onward Brass Band also read funeral marches; ML was a boy when there was an Onward Band. RBA mentions [?]; ML says he is dead, was a good bass player, and a good reader; he played bass several times with ML's brass band, a made-up group put together to play parades for various societies.

There were three French brothers, Morris, Bob and Johnny (the latter played trumpet). They had a band after Kid Ory left [Laplace or New Orleans?]; led by Morris French, trombone, and "Bull" White, violin (he played with ML at one time), the band was called the French and White Band.

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M ML went to night school "under" Gus Metcalf. Metcalf could play anything he heard, but he couldn't read. He played trumpet with ML in Dejan [Alexander]'s band. Metcalf could play any instrument in the band, although he didn't play them all in performance; he played both valve and slide trombone, and his baritone horn playing created ML's fondness for that instrument. RBA mentions some of the [Henry Fillmore---PRC] "trombone family" of music pieces. The Pickwick Band first heard a slide trombone, for piece bandslide trombone, that they got a slide trombone for the band.

The father of Kid Thomas [Valentine] played in the Pickwick Band. Joe Stewart was also in the Pickwick. Lionel Thomas was a boy, playing marbles, when ML picked him up to play drums in his band; Thomas later went to Baton Rouge. Perre "Son" [sp?] Mason played bass drum in the Pickwick. There were four August [sp?] brothers; "Piton" August played valve trombone; [ ?] August played clarinet; "Fat" August played trumpet; another brother didn't play in the band. Ernest Martin played alto horn. Dejan Alexander's brother, "Joe Pierre" Alexander, played E flat cornet (the instrument played lead). Joe Stewart [previously mentioned] played bass. George Triche [sp?], father of Herbert Triche (who played with ML), played in the Onward Band.; his brother Albert Triche, played E flat [?] in the Onward. ML thinks Murray Cole played drum in the Onward Band. Dave Bartholomew's father, Joe (ML thinks) Bartholomew, played bass violin in a little band he and others had; ML thinks Thomas [Kid Thomas?] started in that band; ML's brother played violin in that band; ML thinks Etienne Placide, who [later?] played with ML,

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played trombone in the band. ML thinks Dave Bartholomew was born in Edgard, right across the river from Reserve; ML got Dave to come to rehearsals of his band; Dave played about three years with them; he then left to go with Sidney Desvigne, playing on the boat [Capitol?]. ML bought a trumpet for Dave to play at first. ML thinks Dave began with his [ML's] band about 1928; Dave played the same style then as now; he would always get away from the music, preferring to make his own part.

End of Reel II

ML helped a lot of young fellows learn how to play music. He also helped the father of Kid Thomas [Valentine] in music, but that was a long time after the father had begun playing. Some of the young fellows ML helped get started were Herbert Hall, Leroy Robinette, Herbert Triche [sp?] and Roland Arsenaux [sp?].

The Community Club at Godchaux [sugar refinery?] sponsored dances. Louis Morand [sp?] had a "dancing place", where dances were held every Sunday. The Mayflower Benevolent Society sponsored an occasional dance.

ML has played in church once or twice, but only for midnight mass, around Christmas; he is Catholic.

Benevolent societies had parades and dances; they also took care of their sick, and paid part of the funeral expenses of members. There are no more walking parades in Reserve; participants ride in trucks. There are local bands which play for the parades; Lennox [sp?] has one, and Kid Thomas's brother, Joseph Valentine, has a band, working mostly in Baton Rouge (father of the Valentines is Pete Valentine). The only brass bands in the area, including Donaldsonville, are school bands. Talk of banquets, then and now, as held by societies; talk of uniform of the societies, as worn during official society functions; talk of et cetera. There are fewer members of societies now than in the old days; most people now "belong to insurance" instead.

There are fewer dances now, because of music boxes [i.e., automatic phonographs]; ML tells of first seeing one in Chattanooga [Tennessee], when he was on tour with his band. [see Reel I].

Talk of playing music for pleasure, rather than profit; ML says he has spent more money playing music than he has made.

The picture of ML's band was made in 1936; they were playing in the Club Pine, Baton Rouge, at the time, and took the club name for the name of their band, Lawrence and his Club Pine Orchestra, when they went on their tour. Edward Hall, bass player, is one of the Hall brothers, including Clarence Hall (whose original instrument was banjo) and Herbert Hall (also started on banjo); Herbert replaced Clarence in the ML band. Edmond Hall, says RBA, had an uncle who played guitar; ML says his name was Edmond Hall, also, and he was called " 'Ti Man;" he also worked with ML, in the band right after Dejan [Alexander]'s. "It was Lawrence and Duhé; his [?] brother was playing trombone."

End of Reel III