

Ricard Alexis was born in New Orleans on October 16, 1896. His family moved to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, when Ricard was still a baby, but after Joseph, his oldest brother, had begun to walk. His mother had fourteen children. Ricard was the second oldest. His father was a "professor," a violin player who also taught music in Bay St. Louis. The older brother, Joseph, "was a great drummer" who played with Sam Morgan's Band and like Ricard played in their father's band. Ricard first played drums, but gave it up because his brother played them. His father bought a cornet in New Orleans from Henry Davis, a famous cornet player who later dropped dead while playing a funeral. Ricard played the cornet in his father's dance band which was similar to what we today call a "Dixieland" band: trombone, clarinet, bass, no piano, guitar, and violin, which was played by his father. The band was well dressed in brown uniforms: coats, caps, and pants. Peter Alexis, Ricard's father, was also born in New Orleans. In answer to Russell's question as to whether he played lead on the violin, or variations, Ricard replied that he played "more melody." His father was a leading "professor" who taught many instruments. Also played with father's Manuel Perez['s band?]. In his/band Paul Maurice [sp.?] played clarinet; Armand Prudhomme, trombone; Bogey Saucier [sp.?], bass violin; Oscar Barabenow [sp.?], guitar; and Joseph Alexis, drums.

Ricard married when he was twenty-one and was called into the army when World War One came. He had bad feet and could not drill so he was made a sergeant bugler (he still has his bugle) and taught the bugle from music books.

Shortly after he got out of service, Alexis moved to New Orleans. The first band he worked with in the city was Paul Moliere's [sp.?] Young Olympia Band. His brother, Joseph, played

drums with this band. (Ricard has two younger brothers playing with their own band in Biloxi. Lester, the baby of the family, was brought up by Ricard. Paul Barbarin started Lester on drums and he now is a "good rock and roll drummer." The other brother in the band is Kingston. They work at <sup>Kessler</sup> Kessler Air Force Base often.) Among the members of the Young Olympia, besides Ricard and his brother Joseph on drums, were leader Paul Moliere on bass; Ambrose, a trombone player who had trouble with his teeth [probably Ambrose Powers, Lawrence "Tocca's" <sup>uncle</sup> uncle who played stringed instruments as well as trombone--see "Mealy" Barnes]; and "Cripple Pill" [Coycault] who looked like a white fellow on clarinet. At the same time Ricard left the Young Olympia, Pill left the band to join Buddy Petit.

The next band Alexis played with was the Young Tuxedo Band that took all the work Celestin couldn't handle. "Duck" Ernest [Johnson] was manager and the bass player, Ricard played trumpet and Joseph Alexis, drums. When he left this band, Frankie Duson wanted Ricard to join his band, but he went with Bob Lyons. This band had Lorenzo Staulz on banjo (Son Thomas later replaced him); Ernest Kelly, trombone; Freddie Bubu [see Cl. Vincent, Reel ?], trombone; Bob Lyons, bass. The band played many dates in the Gold Room of the old Grunewald Hotel (Roosevelt). Willie Edwards [see Peter Bocage, Reel ?] was the trumpet player Alexis replaced with Lyons. Edwards joined A. J. Piron.

Alexis next went with the No. 1 Olympia Band. Arnold DePass was the drummer and manager. He did his business sitting in a chair on the corner of Dumaine [Street] and Claiborne [Avenue]. Sidney Desvignes played trumpet with this band. Replaced by Alexis. Ricard remembers Freddy Keppard playing with the band before

the War upon prompting by WR. Buddy Johnson played trombone and there was a violin player who would stand up on a truck and knock the band off with his foot on advertising jobs, but Ricard couldn't remember his name. (He was none of the half dozen violin players that Russell mentioned.) Eddie Jackson played string bass in this band.

Every Sunday, this band, like a lot of others, played Epics out at the lake. There was a West End "Train" (five or six street cars hooked together) that would carry "18 or 20 drums, that many basses and everything" out to the lake on a Sunday morning. "Smokey Mary" that ran out on Elysian Fields [Avenue] rattled so much that you had to hold on to the seats. (Banquets were on Monday evenings, so "blue Monday" must just apply to Monday morning.)

Keppard was good, he bucked with Oliver and Perez. Perez turned his music over and cut the name off it. He didn't want his pieces stolen. Oliver's style was "more with his hands" and with a derby put over his horn, "a lot of growls and things, he was a growler." Bunk [Johnson] started Buddy Petit off. Buddy played Bunk's horn and got ideas from him at the [Big] Twenty Five [Club], where he would sometimes sit in for Bunk. Bunk was better when he was young [in answer to Russell's question], and all the good trumpet players had [more or less] their own style. Manuel Perez was very powerful. Alexis was powerful, too. Ricard was playing at the Elite when Perez was at the Black and Tan at Iberville [Street] back of the Lyric Theatre and Perez told Willie Humphrey how powerfully Alexis was blowing. Manuel Perez was Ricard's favorite trumpet player and he was taken into the Onward by Perez who used to play side by side with him.

Ricard and Kid Rena were called the "iron-lipped trumpet

players of the city." It was hard to tell Alexis from Rena and there would be a lot of bets about who was playing. Ricard played in Rena's band at the Bull's Club on Tuesday nights for years. Alexis played second trumpet, Rena played lead in the band that became very popular. Ricard had a good range. Bill Phillips had a band and tried out a lot of trumpet players on "Sweethearts on Parade," a tune with a lot of trumpet high notes that Louis Armstrong had recorded and that he wanted to use. Ricard played the high notes and got the job. Buddy Petit liked to play second behind Alexis because he never made many high notes, but made "such beautiful things" down in the staff. This is what "made him great." He liked Alexis to play lead so he could play variations behind him, when they played on the street.

Papa Celestin's Tuxedo Band was the first brass band that Ricard played in [dates ?], then the Excelsior Band over the river led by Joe Pierre, the alto horn player. The band had fine bluish uniforms; coats, caps, and everything else matched. - Mobile end of reel 1  
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Most of these jobs were at West End, some were at Milneburg. The sites were usually camps located near the water rented by social groups or individuals for the occasion. " . . . Kid Rena over there or Buddy Petit over here, Celestin over there, [all trying to outblast each other ?]." As many as twenty bands would play at the lake on a Sunday. Draft beer was usually the drink at these picnics.

Saturday afternoons the band played advertisement jobs for Economy Hall or Cooperators Hall, or the Bull's Club. They would play from a wagon and sometimes stop on a corner trading numbers for rounds of drinks from bartenders. Bands often "bucked" one against another, sometimes the wheels of the band-wagons would be locked together to prevent one band from getting away. On one corner four



or five bands would sometimes engage in a cutting contest. The bands would take turns playing numbers which were short and usually ran to two or three choruses.

On Saturday night the bands played dances. At Economy Hall, the job ran from eight until four in the morning and paid \$2.00. A job from one to six in the evening paid \$1.50. There was never any tipping, but from twelve to one in the morning, the band was off the stand eating a meal in the kitchen (red beans and rice or spaghetti and meat balls or ham and salad). The musicians got as much beer as they wanted. Many of the bandstands were high like the one at Artisan's Hall, Cooperator's and Economy Hall.

"Blue Monday" was a vacation for the colored population of New Orleans.

All the halls: New Hall, Artisan's Hall, Economy Hall, Francis Amis Hall, Cooperator's Hall, were used for banquets [apparently what we call "buffet"]. The pay was only \$2.00 for playing one of these, but there was plenty to eat and drink. Musicians used to come and sit in for one another, and get all they wanted. Ricard used to take the trumpet away from Kid Rena or Sam Morgan and play in their place. He took Rena's place for a while when Rena was playing a banquet at Cooperator's Hall with the Kid Ory Band shortly after he came to town. [See Joe Rena Reel ?] Rena went to see his girl. "You don't see that kind of thing no more," says Ricard.

There were no brass bands in Bay St. Louis, but there was a great brass band in Mobile, Pope's Brass Band, that used to come to Bay St. Louis and travelled up and down the coast. In New Orleans they stacked up well against the local brass bands [See William Edward Ballaral Reel ?].

End of part I.

There was a brass band in Bay St. Louis [Mississippi] which came here and played for a big St. Katherine's Hallor Knights of Peter Claver or something. <sup>[cf. reel I, p. 5]</sup> They had a little old brass horn; baritone, which is a little horn, funny looking instruments. They tore up New Orleans. Old Baptiste [Bianouse ?] with his small bass horn ate it up! These fellows really played. The band was called the [Promo] [Chromos ?]. It was named after their society.

Alexis never played with the [Chromos ?]. The [Chromos ?] played before World War I.

There was a band in Mobile whose leader was [John] Pope. He was an undertaker in Mobile and had three daughters who were stars in a singing outfit, years ago. They were called the Pope sisters. Pope's band was called the Pickwick Brass Band. Alexis hasn't been to Mobile since he was with [Papa] Celestin and doesn't know if there is a band there now or not. He used to go there regularly every week, on [Main Street ?] to play for some brothers who had a pool room and bar.

The first band Alexis played in was the Tuxedo Brass Band with Celestin. Then the Excelsior Brass Band. Playing with Celestin in the Tuxedo Brass Band was: Eddie Jackson, [tuba]; Louis Armstrong, trumpet; Sunny Henry, trombone; Lorenzo Tio, [Jr.], clarinet. They had alto horn and baritone in those days. They didn't have any saxophone, and today they make Alexis sick. Lorenzo Tio played E flat clarinet. Drums: Ernest Trepagnier played bass drums. He was the greatest, along with Blatck Benny.

The Excelsior Brass Band which he joined next was located across the river, and [Joe Payen ?] was the leader [or manager ?]. Peter Bocage played trumpet with him and so did Charlie Love. The trombones were: Buddy Johnson and Yank, two brothers. Drums: Bébé Matthews was a great drummer, and [Clay] Jiles was bass drummer. [Clay] Jiles was some kin to Albert Jiles, perhaps uncle.

Alexis used to play with Black Benny [Williams] in the streets. Black Benny loved to fight, and he would put his drums down and knock fellows out [physically, not musically] in the "second line."

Alexis knew Louis Armstrong when he was driving a mule drawn coal cart barefooted for a \$1.25 a day. That was when he was in his teens before the war and before he got in trouble and was sent to the [Waifs'] Home. Alexis knew Kid Rena when he was in the Home, too. Rena started playing in the Home some, but he wasn't much of a reader. [A.J.] Piron called a rehearsal when he was playing at the [Pythian Temple] Roof Garden, tried both Rena and Alexis, and chose Alexis. Rena wasn't a fast enough reader for a band like Celestin's [or Piron's].

[Alexis liked Manuel Perez on trumpet] and also Hyppolyte Charles, a sweet trumpet player. Hyppolyte Charles played in Bob Lyons band before Alexis. Hyppolyte Charles was a clean man: gave up music and started selling insurance, he didn't drink, didn't curse, and didn't fool with no women, didn't smoke, and didn't run around. Alexis thinks Hyppolyte Charles played with Celestin for a while. Was a beautiful player. [He lives out in Lafayette, or St. Martinsville [La.].] Took each other's places on

jobs with Bob Lyons, etc. In those days, they had little cornets, no trumpets. Charles had a trumpet (probably means cornet) with a bell.

The first cornet Alexis used was a Holton. His father bought it here from Henry Davis who dropped dead playing a parade uptown (or his son--not clear). He liked the Holton horn for many years, and then he switched to a Buescher. He has used a Conn, too, a good bit.

When Alexis played with Celestin's dance band he made some records, five or six: "Eh, La Bas." Alexis sang on the latter in Creole; however, this was at a later time. He made quite a few with Celestin. (He remembers a little from back then: "It's Jam

Up," "The Sweetheart of TKO.") He thinks Emma [Barrett] was playing the piano on them. [At another session for Okeh they made

"Careless Love" and "Black Rag." Professor [Manuel] Manetta claims he replaced Emma on ~~one of~~ those.] Shots [Madison] wasn't on these; he joined the band later.

Alexis remembers when the Pelicans [baseball club] went to play the "Dixie series" in Fort Worth, Texas, many years ago. They had a special train. Alexis was with Celestin then. They stayed over there three or four days. They played in a hotel there. Thinks Ernest Kelly was on trombone. Upon prompting from WR [Bébé Ridgley was in it then on trombone.] Bébé Ridgley was the manager. He left later and Sweet Emma went with him. Alexis stayed with Celestin. Also, a crippled boy who's now dead. Sidney Carrier was saxophone player. Paul Barnes was in the band two different times with Alexis. Professor Manetta played piano with Celestin. Alexis thinks Manetta made some of the records with them. [Emma Barrett told RBA that the Kid Clayton session was her first.]



Alexis played with John Handy's father too, who played violin. John Handy, Sr. [He is still living and has a good age on him. RBA says]

On the first session ["Careless Love"] Joe Lawrence was the singer, Ridgley was the manager, Emma Barrett was on piano once and Manetta was on piano once. [The two rags they made that day were: "Black Rag" and the other "Original Tuxedo Rag."] Alexis thinks he made the record with Manetta on Canal Street, but its been so long. [Guy Kelly came in after Alexis in the twenties. Then Shots after that.] Ernest Kelly replaced Bébé Ridgley on trombone when he left. Joe Lawrence sang some numbers. The drummer was Chineé [Foster]; [he played a slide whistle on "Careless Love."] Alexis was with them when they made "My Josephine" on trumpet. [Compare record]

Ferdinand Joseph was singing with Celestin before Joe Lawrence. (He is supposed to have sung "Just For You Dear I'm Crying" and is supposed to be Waldren "Frog" Joseph's brother.) He's out cooking as head cook somewhere now.

Alexis took up the bass when he was in the WPA band playing trumpet, and he was having trouble with his head, ear trouble, and Dr. [Howell ?] at Charity Hospital ask him to put the horn down a while. [Compare other tapes] So he bought him a bass violin, practiced it at the Tulane Club. He was in the WPA band for about eight years on trumpet. Kid Rena and Alexis were called the "iron lip" trumpet players of New Orleans, because they played so high, which the doctor thought affected his ear.

Mr. [Joe] Martinez was leader of the WPA band when he was in it. He split up the band on different occasions. They had thirty-nine trumpet players when he first was in it. Celestin was in there, but Mr. Martinez, an old white piano player, a good

musician, did not like him, and when they had an examination they tricked Celestin and got him out. Celestin could read. There were twenty-five trombone players. They had examinations every five or six months, and they would let a few of them go. They would go to Werlein's, and everytime they would drop some. Alexis stayed with them till they went down. Some couldn't read much. They played some heavy overtures: "William Tell" and "Poet and Pesant," "Chicago Tribune" [march]. Mr. Martinez would sit up at the Tulane Club and listen and if one man out of about 75 made a bad note he'd come put his hand on him. The WPA band started around 1939. He played with them about 8 years [wrong date!!]: They played at the Charity Hospital and the Boy's Home every week and Parish Prison every Monday night in the yard for two hours from 6 to 8.

(The piano players with Celestin were: Manetta and Emma Barrett as above.) Jeanette [Kimball] came in after Alexis, while he was still in the band. She came in when Bébé Ridgley left and took Emma Barrett with him. Henry Kimball was playing with Sidney Desvigne's. <sup>H/K</sup> His band came with Celestin because he was in love with Jeanette and they married. They, the band, used to go over to Biloxi [Mississippi] every summer at the hotel. Lester ["Black"] Santiago substituted sometimes when Jeanette couldn't go because of the children. "Black" made some trips, to Mobile and places. Drummers: Chinee was there when Alexis started.

End of Reel II

Si-E [Josiah Frazier] replaced Abbie "Chinee" Foster on drums in Celestin's band in Biloxi, Mississippi, because of Chinee's drinking. Chinee got Alexis to join Celestin's band at [Manuel's?] Pavilion at Milneburg. He got out there on "Smokey Mary." Alexis replaced Baby Dodds as Emma Barrett's boy-friend; he has a 35-year old son by her. [See The Baby Dodds Story, as told to Larry Gara, Contemporary Press, 1959, p. 21. Fall 1918--September 1921.]

Baby Dodds was a good drummer, even long ago. He and his brother, Johnny, were raised in Waveland, Mississippi, and went to school with Alexis in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. Alexis's oldest brother, now dead, a drummer who used to play with Sam Morgan, was the same age as Johnny. Ricard was the same age as Baby. The Tios had their home in Bay St. Louis when Alexis was a child. Alexis does not know what the national ancestry of the Tios was. Lorenzo (Jr.) went to school with them. They lived on (back) Main Street. Papa Tio used to play with Alexis's father.

Baby Dodds worked with Celestin, but was working with Fate Marable on the S. S. Capitol when he lost Emma Barrett [about 1919--see brackets above] when Alexis joined Celestin.

Alexis worked with the Young Olympia Band first, when he came back from World War I; he then worked with the Young Tuxedo [Dance] Band, whose manager was Duck Ernest [Johnson], the bass player; Freddie Bubuy<sup>y</sup> was the trombone player. The Young Tuxedo/<sup>Band</sup> was not a rival of the Original Tuxedo; anything that Celestin could not handle, because of other commitments, he would delegate to the Young Tuxedo. When Alexis left the Young Tuxedo, he joined Bob Lyons' band, taking the place of Willie Edwards; Sidney Vigne was the clarinetist, Ernest Kelly was the trombonist. August Rousseau worked with Lyons' band during the time that Alexis did; Rousseau, who

had a barber shop at one time, could read music; Alexis says that if he [Rousseau] played with Celestin's band, he played only on the streets with him. [Some discographies list Rousseau as having recorded with Celestin in 1926 and 1927.]

Johnny Dodds began playing in Bay St. Louis on a tin flute [i.e., fife], as did Sidney Bechet in New Orleans.

Alexis lived on Marigny Street, between Johnson and Galvez streets. Sidney Bechet lived near him. Alexis took a Creole girl from him when they were in knee pants. Alexis lived in a double house, the other half being occupied by the Marreros: Billy, Simon and John. Buddy Petit's band used to rehearse next door; Simon Marrero was playing bass with Buddy at that time. Billy Marrero, the father, was playing bass with the Superior Band, or the Imperial--Alexis not sure. Buddy Petit was no high-note man, but he played the most beautiful trumpet, in the staff, that Alexis ever heard in his life. Kid Rena was a high-note man, as was Alexis; Alexis says that even today people talk about Rena and Alexis "being the iron lip trumpet players of New Orleans." When Manuel Pérez was playing at the Black and Tan, behind the Lyric Theater on Iberville [Street] between North Rampart [Street] and Burgundy [Street], Alexis was playing at the Elite. Red Happy "and them" were with John Robichaux at the Lyric. Alexis was playing for Beansy Fauria at the Elite on South Rampart [Street], next door to the Black and Tan, with Black Benny Williams [drums], Willie Humphrey [clarinet], Adolph Duconge, Pérez could hear Alexis playing.

Alexis does not know whether Johnny Dodds took any lessons; he never saw him doing any reading. Dodds had good, clean tone, could play beautiful variations. A. J. Piron hired Alexis at the Roof Garden instead of Kid Rena because Alexis was the better reader.



Louis Armstrong was also a very poor reader; Alexis says that he could not even sign his name legibly until Lil Hardin [Armstrong] taught him, after he had gone to Chicago. Alexis has letters from Louis, but could not find them at the time of this interview.

Armstrong would end his letters; "I'm red beans and ricely yours, Louis Armstrong." [Cf letter to Isidore Barbarin, September 1, 1922.]

The violin player with the Olympia Band was Emile Bigard, Barney Bigard's uncle. Eddie Jackson played bass in the same band, advertising in a mule and wagon. Alexis took Sidney Desvigné's place.

Alexis did not play bass in the WPA band. He went to [Henry] Kimball for lessons, on Seventh Street for seven weeks, learned method while Kimball played piano. After that, he went to various bands [Herbert Leary's, William Houston's?--he said, "If anything ever happens to Jerry Green, you're my bass player] and played the bass book for them, so it would be known that he was a competent bass player and that he was available for work. Had music written by [John] "Picket" [or "Pickey" Brunious]. The method he still has is marked only M.W. and Sons [probably M. Witmark]. (scats "South Rampart Street Parade") Alexis says he quit playing trumpet in 1948, but Russell heard him play a parade or funeral in 1953. [Also Celestin's funeral] George Lewis was in band. Ricard has the music from Louis Dumaine for "Indian Sagway" [sp.? <sup>Sagua</sup> Ségua?], a good number now played only by Israel Gorman. [See Charlie Love Band, Reel 7] Dumaine also wrote "War Cloud" on the other side. "War Cloud" is same as "Fidgety Feet."

Picket wrote an arrangement for him named "Charley Nick."

Ricard used to play with Picket at a white nightclub at Rampart and Bienville [streets], where they had "all them dope heads in there," the Dog House. After Alexis' band left there, they

had a whole white band, all dope-heads, arrested everybody in the place.

Alexis used to like George ["Pops"] Foster's bass playing; he played with Celestin. Henry Kimball, Billy Morand [Marrero], Eddy Jackson, were all in the same category as bass players. Eddy was more outstanding on the tuba than on the string bass. He wasn't exciting on the string bass, but there weren't too many exciting bass players.

Bob Lyons is a good manager and a good bass player. He got more money for jobs than any [other] band Alexis played with. They used to "live" in the Gold Room at the Grunewald Hotel [now the Roosevelt], play in there with tuxedo suits on. He also played at a club on Jackson [Avenue] and St. Charles [Avenue]--the Harmony Club.

Alexis played for so many big people; didn't play many colored jobs at all. Played many fraternity parties at Tulane.

Jimmy Johnson was another good bass player. He and Bob Lyons both used the bow. All of them bowed at that time, Bill Morand [Marrero], Eddy Jackson. Picking the bass came later. Old Man [Albert] Glennie never was tops, never knew the finger board of the bass, never was much on bowing, worse when he started picking. He played with Alexis's father in Bay St. Louis when Alexis was playing trumpet. Bébé Mitchell was in a class with Albert Glennie. Jimmy Brown was a good bass player, used to play with Alexis's daddy. Dandy Lewis, from the Carrollton section, was just an average bass player.

Clifford "Snags" Jones worked with Alexis and ~~XXXXX~~ Celestin a long time, way before Ci-E. He was left-handed when Russell saw him, but right-handed according to Alexis. He was starring in the band like Red Happy Bolton and Zutty Singleton.

Nobody did any arranging for Celestin; they bought stock numbers.

Celestin played "My Josephine" a lot, he [Celestin] mostly sang it. Alexis never saw any music on it. [Paul Barnes claims it is his number--WR] Alexis says he made it (the recording) with him.

["It's Jam-Up" was played with two trumpets--RBA] Celestin would play something; Alexis would answer it. Celestin was a very powerful trumpeter, especially as a younger man. Used a mute a great deal. Alexis used a mute when he was playing with his own band, when he and Rena <sup>or Alex Celestin</sup> were playing together, using two trumpets. All three used "wa-wa" mutes, silver with bell, other kinds. [Probably Harmonics]. Alexis and Rena used to hang a little bucket on the horn by the handle; it would give it a deep tone. When Mercedes Fields was playing piano for Celestin, she used to holler at Alexis, "Put it in the bucket, Rick."

Celestin usually had a woman playing piano, except for a while he had Manuel Manetta.

Woodan Joe [Nicholas] was the most powerful trumpet player Alexis ever heard. Never saw him use a mute.

End of Reel III  
January 16, 1959

Note from MTZ [Soard's Directory?]: 1923. Vigne, Sidney, egg candler, 2413 Dumaine.

Vignes, Sidney J., clerk, Service Drayage Co., 817 Richard.

When Lee Collins came to New Orleans from Chicago, he stopped at a hotel on Bienville Street. He called Alexis and told him that they would stay at the Page Hotel. Alexis, who had been living alone since his wife had been killed in an automobile accident, invited them to stay with him and went and picked them up. They got a job at the Paddock [Lounge--around 1953, according to Russell] with Alexis on bass violin. Lee Collins played trumpet and had people standing on their heels. At that time Collins was as strong as "he ever could be." Alexis had never heard anyone play so many choruses (as many as ten to fifteen) without taking the horn from his lip. Even though Alexis considered himself an iron lip, he was impressed because every time Collins would start a new chorus, he would go higher instead of getting weaker. Alexis can't say that about Louis Armstrong or Manuel Perez or anybody else, and they were all great. You can ask Mr. or Mrs. [Steve] Valenti. <sup>[Owner/Aggr of Paddock]</sup> He was at his peak when he came here, but according to Russell he got sick right after that. A year later he was through and has never played a note since. He and his wife, Mary, lived with Alexis until they went back to Chicago. When Russell visited Collins at the Victory Club in Chicago, Lee would always ask about Alexis.

Before Collins first went to Chicago, he played with Alexis and Rena in parades and funerals, but he couldn't match them as "iron lips." After he returned from Chicago, he was playing fifteen choruses without taking the horn from his lips like no one Alexis had ever heard. In response to Russell's leading question, Alexis said that Collins played too high on the staff to sound like Buddy Petit. He sounded more like Louis Armstrong or Kid Rena. Nobody today plays like Buddy, who played beautiful stuff down low. He hardly ever went



above the staff. Russell says Collins thought he was playing like Petit. "Kildee" [Henry Holloway] was a good trumpet player, a good reader with good range, but he wasn't that kind of player, not a "get off" man. Alexis worked with him at the Famous Door for about six years.

Merce Mercedes Gorman Fields was a good piano player. Alexis had rather hear Mercedes than Emma [Barrett], although she is still good. He thinks Mercedes even sings better. Wilhelmina Bart wasn't a "get off" piano player, but she read music (a good chord player), and played Dixieland music and jazz. She lives near Slidell [Lacombe] now. She played with Louis Armstrong at the Cadillac on Rampart Street. Albert Francis's wife, Edna, a pianist who is dead now, played with Louis Armstrong, as did her husband, who played drums. [Check Armstrong, Satchmo.] He's with Standard Insurance on Claiborne Avenue now.

Alexis went to St. Rose Catholic School in Bay St. Louis until his First Communion when he was eleven, a year early. He recalls how the white and colored had a retreat together the week before Communion. Then he went to public school through the seventh grade. It was the school where Baby Dodds, Johnny Dodds, and Lorenzo Tio studied under Professor Ross, before Professor Brown.

They had a "terrible" [meaning "great"] band in Bay St. Louis when Alexis first started there with his father and his brother. They had a great band there, the Supreme Band. Paul Maurice, their great clarinet player, came to New Orleans and did great with bands in the city. Alexis's brothers, Lester and Kingston, have their own band in Biloxi. Lester often plays at the Base [Keesler Air Force]. Another Alexis brother took up trombone, but he gave it up. None of their sisters played anything or sang. Alexis's father died when he and his brother were in the service [during World War I] and by the time

they got home for the funeral, he was already buried. He was probably around 55 when he died. Alexis knows he [his father] played in a band other than his own and Manuel's [Perez], but can remember neither the name nor the personnel.

Alexis says that you have to play harder on Bourbon Street than anywhere else. He uses a bow on his bass a lot, on waltzes, at places like the New Orleans Country Club or the Southern Yacht Club. He thinks the reason they have to play so fast and loud on Bourbon Street is to attract people in off the street. Mrs. Valenti [at the Paddock], where he's played for the past two Tuesdays, doesn't like slow numbers. They've had so much trouble with her about it that she doesn't have to give orders any more; they know what she likes. Even if a customer requests a slow number, the band will play it fast, something Alexis is not used to. Sometimes George Lewis plays a slow "Burgundy Street Blues"; she doesn't fool with his band. She can't tell him who to bring in there, or what to play. She can't get along with Paul Barbarin either, because he wants to run his own band instead of letting her run it.

When they played at the Paddock for a few years [Russell heard them there in 1949], Alexis and Papa Celestin split the leadership money. Mrs. Valenti liked Celestin very much. Alexis signed the contract, but Mrs. Valenti asked him to let Celestin take over the band entirely. He agreed since they were using Celestin's name anyway and since he would still get his half of the leadership money. One slow number Mrs. Valenti never seemed to mind was "Marie Laveau." Although Alexis never did care for it, they used it a great deal.

WR states that RA played with Paul Barbarin [See GTJ LP].

Alexis used to have a contract to play with his own band for

the Streckfus [Lines] on the boat every Sunday. His name would be in the Picayune: "Ricard Alexis and his Dixieland Band and Fate Marable's Band." This was before the WPA band [also before the depression]. They had twin piaps on the boat. Fate would lock his up every time he went for intermission. Emma [Barrett] was playing piano with Alexis and wanted to play Fate's piano. Alexis asked Roy Streckfus if she could use it, but Fate was kind of funny about it, so she used the other one. They had [Borroughs] Lovingood there with twin pianos. One band would play a few numbers, and then the other would come up and play, five or six numbers apiece. Alexis doesn't remember who was with him, but recalls that Fate had more men from away than from New Orleans. This was on the [S. S.] Capitol, on which they'd make the trip and come back in the afternoon.

Alexis used to belong to Chris Kelly's band. That's where George Lewis started, playing clarinet. Ik<sup>e</sup><sub>A</sub> [Robinson] was the trombone player. He is still alive, on Claiborne, around Dumaine and [unintelligible] streets. Pratts, now dead, played banjo. Alexis and Chris Kelly used to switch playing first and second trumpet; so did Alexis and Kid Rena. Alexis can't remember when he switched from cornet to trumpet. He used a C. G. Conn trumpet, as did Rena. When Alexis and Kelly had a number they could read, they had first and second parts. Sometimes Christwould leave the stand and Alexis would take over. Kelly was a "wa-wa" player, "the best blues player they ever had here." He wasn't too much of a reader, but could read a little. He played the halls, but not the country club jobs like Alexis played. Kelly didn't play much for white people. When two trumpet players played together, one would go off the stand occasionally, chat with the women, have a drink, "turn a trick," etc.

Alexis played in the brass band with [Henry] Red Allen [Jr.]'s

daddy, [Henry] Allen, [Sr.] a long time. Old Man Allen didn't play much himself; he was mostly the leader. The other two trumpets had to do all the work. His son was great. RBA says that Alvin Alcorn and Pete [Bocage] were with him [in the early 1950's]. Alexis played many times with the Eureka [Brass] Band, and many times with John Casimir's [Young] Tuxedo [Brass Band]. He played trumpet with them until he gave it up. He also played alto "peck horn." (Alexis plays "Margie" on the peck horn.)

Bill Matthews called Alexis and asked him if he still had that horn [the one he has just played on], as Louis Cottrell, the president

[of the Union], had told him Alexis was the only man still playing it. He sent him

to the Union to get his name put on the list for a picture that was to be made, but Mrs. Alberts [sp.?] told him that his name had been on since last week. When the time came to make the picture, they found that they had eighteen men on the list, instead of the seventeen that they needed and he was out. [Anderson] Minor, on bass horn, made so many bad notes, they were going to scratch that part out. Adolphe ["Tats"] Alexander, [Jr.] who was great playing all those heavy overtures on baritone for the WPA band, wasn't used either. The two horns that would have fitted in weren't used. [They used saxophones instead.] There's been some talk about it down at the Union.

They never had saxophones in the old brass bands. They had two trombones, the bass horn would walk in the middle, the baritone and alto horns would walk together, and they also had E flat clarinet and two drums. Nowadays, they walk down the street, some in a blue coat and red hat; it's disgraceful. They used to wear the uniform from head to foot: pants, coats, everything.

Alexis used to play in the Onward [Brass] Band with [Isidore]



Barbarin, where they never used two alto horns together. Alto came in on the after-beat (scats to demonstrate this) like the music is written. It carried the band, like somebody playing the guitar behind it. It was the main thing in a brass band, but in that picture they had [John] Handy and Andrew Morgan playing saxophones when they went to the graveyard.

Good alto horns when Alexis started out were: Joe Payen from the Excelsior Band, Old Man [Isidore] Barbarin, and Walter ["Fats"] Pichon, the piano player now, who used to play alto horn in the streets with Alexis. John Porter was a great baritone player. Harrison, Barnes and Georgie Hooker also used to play baritone.

It's not too hard to fake on the alto, if you have a good ear. You do the same thing with a horn as if you were complementing the lead with a guitar. You can play it from the music (scats to demonstrate). (Scats "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" to demonstrate how he played alto on a funeral march. Plays on two, three, and four.) [Compare John Casimir, Reel ?]

End of Reel IV