

WILLIAM RUSSELL  
August 31, 1962  
Reel I--Digest--Retype

also present: 1

William R. Hogan  
Paul R. Crawford  
First Proofreading: Alma D. Williams

William Russell was born February 26, 1905, in Canton, Missouri, on the Mississippi River. His first impressive musical experiences were hearing the calliopes on the excursion and show boats which came to and by Canton. He first wanted to play bass drum when he heard the orchestra in his Sunday School, but he began playing violin when he was ten. His real name is Russell William Wagner. In about 1929 he began writing music; Henry Cowell published some of his music in 1933 and WR decided the use of the name Wagner on music would be about equal to writing a play and signing it Henry [or Jack or Frank, etc.] Shakespeare, so he changed his name for that professional reason. His parents are of German ancestry. His father had a zither, which WR and a brother used for playing at concerts à la Chautauqua. He remembers hearing Negro bands on the boats playing good jazz as early as 1917 or 1915, and he was fascinated by it, although he felt jazz might contaminate his classical studies. He played in a fraternity band at college. He studied chemistry at college although his main interest was music. He went to Chicago to continue studying music in 1924, and he says he didn't have sense enough to go to the places where King Oliver, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, and others were playing then, and he has since regretted that. He began collecting jazz records in 1929 while teaching music at a school on Staten Island, New York. A student left some jazz records there, one of which, Jelly Roll Morton's "Shoe Shiner's Drag," attracted him because of its title. He began looking for Jelly Roll Morton records then. A store on 14th Street was selling records, e.g., Ma Rainey's for 3¢, very cheap because of the depression, and WR bought a few of various artists. (He says John Hammond had enough sense to know which were good records so he really bought a lot.) He decided in 1935 or

1936 to get every record Louis Armstrong had ever made. He and Steve Smith started the Hot Record Exchange in 1936. He met Smith at the main Salvation Army Store in New York. Smith painted for Western story magazines; when he and WR met, he left an uncompleted picture on his easel, where it stayed for years. His wife, Lee Smith, had a job, fortunately; she also took the notes when they began writing Jazzmen in 1938. Smith ran the Exchange, from New York. WR was traveling with the Red Gate Shadow Players.

WR, in college at Culver-Stockton in Canton (3 years and 2 summers) left to teach music and mathematics at Ewing, Missouri. The next year he went to New York and studied violin privately with Maximilian Pilzer, once concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic. He (Russell) then taught violin and orchestra at Yankton (South Dakota) College. He went back to New York studying violin and playing in the National Orchestra Association "Training Orchestra." He also studied music education at Columbia University, about 1928-1929. During the depression he had various part-time jobs, including the Staten Island job and one with Interstate Conservatory, which traveled Long Island, New Jersey, and <sup>Cothran</sup> parts of New York state, inaugurating instrumental music programs in schools. He joined the Red Gate Shadow Players in 1934, and remained with them until 1940. WR joined the Shadow Players when he was at Columbia where he was an assistant in instrumental music; he was recommended to the group because of his interest in Oriental, African, and other exotic music. One member of the group was Chinese; the organizer, a woman, had visited China where she got the idea for her theater. The players made the shadows from behind a silk screen. WR, dressed in Chinese robes (as were the others), also demonstrated the various Chinese musical instruments. The group appeared in the summers of 1939 and 1940 at the [San Francisco]

World's Fair. WR attended the University of California at Berkeley where he studied a general music course and almost completed the requirements for his master's degree. By taking a correspondence course from the University of Chicago, he was granted his bachelor's degree from Culver-Stockton in 1939. In the winter of 1939 he attended UCLA, attending classes in classical music taught by Arnold Schoenberg. During his years with the Red Gate Shadow Players WR also collected many jazz records, and made his contribution to the book, Jazzmen. Steve Smith, his partner in the Hot Record Exchange, ran the business end of the HRE while WR looked for records in the various cities he went to with the Shadow Players. He says the records they found and obtained would be worth a fortune today, but they kept the best ones and used the others for trading. He completed the only known collection of Jelly Roll Morton's commercially-released records.

WR says the first book of any value on jazz [Le Jazz Hot] was written by a Frenchman, [Hugues] Panassié, and was translated and published in the U. S. about 1934-1935. There had been two pretty good books written and published in the United States before Jazzmen; Hobson had written one on jazz, and Winthrop Sargeant's Jazz: Hot and Hybrid had come out.

WR had written articles on boogie woogie pianists: Meade Lux Lewis, Albert Ammons, and [possibly Pinetop Smith?]. Panassié had published some of Russell's work in his magazine, Hot Jazz. Fred Ramsey, who had graduated from Princeton a few years before, had heard of WR [through Panassié's magazine?] and was now working for Harcourt, Brace, <sup>FR</sup> persuaded his bosses there to publish a book on jazz, and Ramsey suggested that WR write chapters on New Orleans, Louis Armstrong, and boogie woogie music. At this time WR had never done any research in New Orleans although he had been through here. WR first visited

New Orleans on his birthday, February 26, 1937. He left the rest of the Red Gate Shadow Players in Pensacola [Florida] and rode a bus over to New Orleans. He stayed up all night that night, looking around the city, walking around all the streets he had heard of from records, like "Canal Street Blues," "Basin Street Blues," etc. The next day he moved on with the company to Baton Rouge, where they were giving a show at LSU. Didn't hear any music that trip. The next fall he made two trips with a record collector from Philadelphia, Hart Breck, searching for records. They had poor luck in Texas--Orin Blackstone had already cleaned out most of the records from there. They stopped in New Orleans a couple of times, met Tom Brown and Raymond Burke, among others. Breck used to write for Down Beat, back in 1938-1939, but when he got married his wife talked him into giving up jazz.

Jazzmen didn't sell too well at first. The editors had made a number of revisions in proof, at 50¢ per word, which were charged against the book. There were so many of these that the first royalty statement was for less than a dollar. The book sold a couple of thousand copies the first few years. Then the Armed Services put out a paperback edition which brought in some money. The book has also been published in England. It is still in print. Currently there is a paperback edition. Sales have died down now; WR has not received any royalties for the past several years. [But who did get them? RBA] The book was reviewed in some non-musical journals, and in daily papers. Got good reviews in some of the New York papers.

After his year in California at the University, WR went back to New York. When the war (WW II) came on, all anybody thought of was the war; WR went to Pittsburgh and worked in a war plant beginning in November 1940. He stayed there in Pittsburgh until 1947. Whenever

he had a vacation he would go down to New Orleans. He began recording in New Orleans in 1942.

WR first met Bunk Johnson in the course of his research for Jazzmen. Zutty Singleton told him about Bunk. [Haywood] "Woody" Broun [Jr.] had tried to record Bunk in 1940; Bunk was busy teaching and working in the rice fields in New Iberia; <sup>he</sup> couldn't go to New York [or New Orleans?] to be recorded; Kid Rena played the date instead. [Archive has these records. Circle Album S-10.] Gene Williams, who had the magazine Jazz Information in New York, read about Bunk in Jazzmen, and asked WR to help him record Bunk in 1942. Dave Stuart was planning to come over from California to record Bunk at the same time. Gene and WR and Dave Stuart all helped arrange the session; Dave put it out on his Jazzman label. This session was recorded at Grunewald's; they did not have good equipment. This was during the war, and it was very difficult to get equipment. The next year WR bought an old machine. His oldest brother, Homer [Wagner], an engineer in Pittsburgh, helped him put it together and into running order. WR's youngest brother, also named William, a chemistry professor at the University of Kentucky, is interested in jazz, came down and helped WR record Bunk in 1944. The two other brothers who are still in Pennsylvania are church organists; their interest lies entirely in classical music.

WR worked in Pittsburgh at a transformer company and also at Pittsburgh Electro-Dryer Corporation, writing instruction books and in the testing department of gas dryers. At the end of the war, in 1945, he gave up his job and went into the music business, forming his own company, American Music Records.

WR spent most of the winter of 1945-1946 in New York with Bunk Johnson's band, who were in New York to play at the Stuyvesant Casino.

Then WR moved back to Missouri, to run his music as a mail order business. In 1950 he moved to Chicago and worked with John Steiner, who had bought out the old Paramount Company and was reissuing their records as well as recording new Chicago musicians. Steiner and Russell were not partners, but they worked from the same address, bought supplies, and issued catalogs together. American Music was a one-man operation, except that he had the pressings done wherever he could.

WR moved to New Orleans to live in 1956.

END OF REEL I

When Mr. Russell moved to New Orleans in 1956, he had in addition to his record company, American Music, a record shop in the French Quarter, which Dr. Hogan states became a rendezvous for musicians. Mr. Russell also taught music and speed reading and remedial reading at Educational Gateways, a private school that specialized in music.

Since 1958 he has been curator of the Archive of New Orleans Jazz at Tulane University. He is now preparing to go back to Missouri to take care of his invalid mother. WR has never married; <sup>he</sup> never had time.

WR believes the New Orleans music is the greatest he has ever heard. Although Schoenberg is considered one of the greatest modern composers, WR feels he learned more from Bunk Johnson about music and what it can do for people, <sup>and</sup> what its real place is in life.

Mr. Russell has never made much money, but never needed much. He has had enough to buy and keep the records he wanted.

In 1938, when WR began collecting notes for Jazzmen, they had no tape recorders, <sup>and</sup> were not recording interviews. He tried to get to know the musicians better, <sup>and</sup> then wrote down notes from memory. Before that, he had met Johnny Dodds, Louis Armstrong, and other New Orleans musicians. New Orleans musicians, colored and white, seemed more friendly, less commercial to him than the New York so-called "Dixieland" musicians, the 52nd Street crowd in the Village, who played at "Nick's" and later "Eddie Condon's." <sup>???</sup> New Orleans musicians living in Chicago like Johnny Dodds and Baby [Dodds] were more friendly, too. Maybe it was something about the city and the music. A friend of Russell's, Ralph Collins, wanted to test the theory when he got to New Orleans. Collins figured a "good guy" is going to be a good musician and vice versa. One of the great principles of New Orleans jazz is working together and helping each other. That's the

spirit Russell thinks has made New Orleans music what it is. The ensemble style opposed to the solo style illustrates this. Of course, there are always some fights within the bands but not as much here as elsewhere. As Baby Dodds says, you have to be friendly and you have to be happy.

William Russell has started a drum book, which may someday be published as part of bigger work. In Chicago, he started interviewing some of the outstanding New Orleans musicians to find out what their part in the band is and how it would be of value to younger players wishing to play the New Orleans style. Included in these notes were interviews with several men who used to play with Jelly Roll Morton. He interviewed Baby Dodds demonstrating drums and traps, and Omer Simeon, whom Jelly Roll considered the greatest clarinetist. Simeon didn't play much in New Orleans but was in Jelly Roll Morton's band in Chicago. He also interviewed Roy Palmer, whom Jelly Roll thought was the best trombonist. Palmer had only recorded one date with Jelly on an old Autograph label. Russell also has an interview with Natty Dominique, who had a rhythmic, driving style and was a fine person.

In December, 1938, while doing research for Jazzmen, Russell went through the old files of the Chicago Defender from 1917 on. These files are now destroyed before 1923. Russell will send some of these notes he took from Missouri to the Archive and some other notes that are in the Jazzmen envelope, including a sketch of the New Orleans Rhythm Kings, one concert they gave in 1937, prepared by Squirrel Ashcraft. When working on Jazzmen, Russell would go to Chicago on trips with the [Red Gate] Shadow Players and would interview musicians, keeping notes in longhand and then dictating them to Lee Smith. For this reason, many of the notes are sketchy and misspelled.

Russell interviewed Clarence Williams and has several fairly

good interviews with Richard M. Jones, an important figure in the Chicago scene, who died about January, 1946. Russell has some notes on the facts of Buddy Christian's life, which are little known. Buddy, now dead, was an outstanding banjo, guitarist, and piano player from New Orleans. He played in New Orleans and New York and played on some of the Clarence Williams Blue Five [records].

In 1938, Russell interviewed little-known Bill Johnson, perhaps the oldest living jazz musician, at least close in age to Papa Laine and older than Buddy Bolden would have been now. At that time, Johnson was running a sandwich shop in back of a saloon on 38th Street in Chicago, around the corner from the Union. Johnson didn't belong to the Union, though; it wasn't very important in the middle of the depression. He had worked with Lil Armstrong in Milwaukee and occasionally around Chicago. Russell got several good pictures of the Original Creole Band from him, which were used in Jazzmen, and Johnson told him where the other members of the band were. In 1938 almost all of them were still living with the exception of Freddy Keppard. *[Freddy Keppard, Papa Laine also died by 1938]*

Russell has notes of an interview with George Baquet in Philadelphia taken after Jazzmen was published.

After the Archive had received the grant to do research on jazz in 1958, Russell went back to Chicago and tried to locate Bill Johnson again, but he had moved to Mexico. Russell later found out that he had moved to Marble Falls, near San Antonio, Texas. He wrote to him with no reply, and Al Rose tried to locate him in Texas. Rose's wife, Mary, suggested that he might be passing for white as he was very light-skinned. This proved to be the case. Johnson was picking up his mail at the Hilton Hotel in San Antonio. About 1959, a man from France, who was writing a book on what had happened to the members of the

Original Creole Band, interviewed Johnson, but told Russell later that Johnson's memory was poor and he was not able to obtain much information from him. Johnson was about 90 years old then, and Russell doesn't think it would be worthwhile to try to locate him now. Russell saw Johnson for the last time in 1940 or 1941. He had some good pictures of Big Eye Louis [Nelson] and Freddy Keppard and some others. Russell didn't reproduce as many as he would have liked because the process was so expensive. Russell has mentioned Bill Johnson to Don Albert, but Albert had never heard of him. Johnson's brother, Dink, was a little darker-skinned.

Mr. Russell also has notes of an interview with Zutty Singleton, who is an interesting talker. Zutty wouldn't <sup>take an</sup> interview with Richard Allen because he is writing his own book on jazz. WR also has some Johnny Dodds notes.

Another interview took place with Paul Mares, a trumpet player, when he had a barbeque place on North State Street in the 800 block. He used to have sessions there on Monday nights with New Orleans musicians like the Bob Crosby band, [Irving] Fazola, and Johnny and Baby Dodds.

Dr. Hogan suggests that all these notes be reproduced and Mr. Russell be given a draft to revise. Russell also has notes on Joe Oliver, made by Walter Allen, and people that are dead today like Tubby Hall and Joe Lindsay. Tubby Hall was one of the great drummers, but Russell has few notes on him. When Russell heard him on the South Side in Chicago with the Johnny Dodds band, he didn't think of him as spectacular; he hardly moved. Johnny Dodds told Russell that Tubby was on some of the Louis Armstrong records, but he didn't play as much drums as he used to, so Russell didn't pay much attention to him. However, Baby Dodds said he got his press roll mostly from Tubby, who was one of the first to have

a good press roll. Tubby went up to Chicago a year or so before Oliver on a job other than music. He had a great simple style.

Tubby's brother was one of the drummers with Kid Ory's band, which had the greatest rhythm section Russell ever heard. It included Eddie Garland, bass; Bud Scott, [guitar;] Buster Wilson, [piano;] and Minor ["Ram"] Hall, the younger brother of Tubby. Minor died about two years ago from cancer. We have an interview in 1958. Russell says he was playing a little then, <sup>and</sup> had left Ory's band after a disagreement. Dr. Hogan has a record Minor Hall made with Joe Daransbourg around 1958 for the Lark label. Russell says he was one of the better drummers, not flashy, and maybe a little monotonous compared to some New Orleans drummers, but good.

Russell also has some notes on Jimmie Noone.

Mr. Russell says the Jazzmen has hundreds of errors, though not as many as Sam Charters' book which was published 15 years after [Cf. publication dates. Thos. Bethell] Jazzmen. <sup>A</sup> For example, we still don't know much about Buddy Bolden. As long as three years ago, Sam Charters told Russell if he didn't dig up some documentary material on Bolden, some of the New York authors, like Marshall Stearns, were going to cross him off the list as never having existed. There is practically no proof he did live except one picture, which has since been lost [through Dr. (Leonard) Bechet ?]. We [CES and WR?] had it and never returned it to Mrs. [Willie] Cornish. Charles E. Smith got it from Cornish himself, and there's no doubt as to its authenticity. Many people have identified Bolden in it, including Mrs. Bolden. The picture was published in Jazzmen, printed backwards by the way. It looks like the clarinetists are holding their instruments left-handed, and the cornetist isn't holding his instrument naturally. As far as we know, there were no left-handed

players in the band. However, the bass player, Jimmy Johnson, and the guitarist, Brock [Mumford], are holding their instruments right-handed, and they actually were right-handed. Russell thinks the photographer might have wanted the bass on a certain side or something of the sort. It looks like Bolden is holding his horn wrong, too, from where the mouthpiece is.

These details were not pointed out in Jazzmen. However, there's no doubt that this picture is of Bolden. As further proof of his existence, he was listed in Soards' [New Orleans City Directory] from 1901 to 1905.

END OF REEL II

There's so little information--and so much of that contradictory-- on Buddy Bolden, who was such a key figure to the whole New Orleans scene. He is such a famous legendary character that Russell doesn't think it necessary to defend the fact that he really existed, but there are several things Russell has been able to find out about him over the years. Many rumors about him have developed, for example, the question of the Bolden cylinder, which to a lot of people is a joke. A fellow from England who was sleeping in a sleeping bag at Russell's and traveling around to hear blues singers asked him if it was true Bolden made a piano roll [!!! RBA]

Russell thinks Bolden actually did make a cylinder or two, but he has given up hopes of finding it. Charles [Edward] Smith, when interviewing [Willie] Cornish, who was in the hospital, but whose memory seemed to be good, told about making cylinders with Bolden. Charles couldn't discover if they made more than one tune. Possibly, if they made several cylinders, they might have played one number over and over again. Often, in the early days, <sup>as</sup> they didn't have duplicating machines, <sup>recordings</sup> they didn't press <sup>^</sup> so they just played the number over several times. Some people told Charles Smith they remembered hearing the cylinders and even sent him to a music store to see if the store had one. The people who had the store remembered burning some old cylinders. Charles Smith worked hard on this project and had no reason to lie about what he was told. Smith wrote an article in Saturday Review about four or five years ago, at which time Bob Morris also wrote an article in the Item, and mentioned that Russell was offering \$200 or so for that cylinder. Nobody brought in anything, not even an old Edison cylinder. We don't know when it was made or what make it would have been; it might have been made from the old soft wax that would be ruined by this time. Russell does not know

the name of the pieces either, although he may have something in his notes on what tunes they [?] thought it might have been or the style.

About ten years ago, a friend of Russell's who was a piano tuner in Chicago claimed he had seen and heard a Bolden cylinder. He had already read Jazzmen. He came across it in another piano tuner's collection, somebody named Jerry [refers to which?], who hated jazz and liked opera. The piano tuner later went back to Seattle or somewhere in the Northwest. He wasn't kidding, but he might have been completely wrong about it. He said he remembered mostly a loud clarinet, not so much a trumpet player, and the tune he remembered, because it was written up in Jazzmen, was "Don't Go 'Way, Nobody." That was practically the Bolden theme song, which they used to play at 12:00 midnight to keep people from going home. He faintly remembered something about Buddy Bolden on the cylinder, but he may have imagined it; he was hazy about it and wouldn't swear to any particular facts. Russell had hopes something would come through on this, but he never could get any action from the piano tuner, so over the years, he has given up trying to locate a Bolden cylinder.

He has some notes based on a letter of Charles Smith's in December 31, 1939. At Mardi Gras time in 1939, about February, Willie Cornish mentioned to Charles Smith that he had recorded with Bolden's band. (At that time Russell and Charles had hopes of finding it, since Russell was traveling all over the country and looking for it wherever he went. They were so confident of finding it that Russell promised Smith the first copy, and they didn't tell anybody about it. Since Russell had not had any luck locating it a year later, they told Orin Blackstone, who was doing a lot of record hunting. For maybe ten years, nobody except the three of them even knew about it. Russell didn't particularly care if they told anyone or not, but it

was Smith's information, and he didn't want to. That's why many people don't believe it today, because they kept it a secret so long. Russell says two-thirds of the people he meets think it's just a joke that Bolden ever made a cylinder, but Russell sincerely believes Smith was telling the truth.)

To continue with Smith's letter, Cornish said he had recorded with Bolden, probably a rag or so, not many cylinders. [John] Robichaux also recorded. Later that same trip after talking to Cornish, Smith talked to someone who had the records or heard them at the music store. Quoting from Smith's letter, "Dr. (Leonard) Bechet (who died about nine years ago) finally talked with E.G. Zahn and learned that the records owned by Dutch Zahn had been burned and subsequently, the phonograph thrown away." (Evidently they tried to find the records at Zahn's house and talked to someone who claimed they had them once and had heard them.) "Made before 1898, Cornish had thought the man at music store might still have them or it," and told Charles to check there. The records must have been thrown away just a year or two before Charles checked in 1939. There is also an article which Smith wrote on the records, which we have in our files. [Mentioned previously.] Bob Morris then wrote an article about Smith's article, trying to get people to come into Russell's store with the cylinder but nobody did.

Russell has notes taken when he was in California that say Buddy's real name was Charles Bolden, Jr., born September 6, 1877. Other people thought he was born in 1875. Tom Sancton got some material that was written in Second Line on the period when Bolden was in the insane asylum at Jackson, Louisiana. Bolden died November 4, 1931, and was buried in New Orleans at Holt Cemetery. Russell also heard that he was buried in Chalmette Cemetery, and he and [Fred] Ramsey

[and RBA] tried to find the grave some years ago but had no success. Russell had hoped he might run across some relatives of Louis Dumaine. He had talked to Louis Dumaine, who kept a very good notebook and what he called a "death list" <sup>talking</sup> when the musicians died. Dumaine had <sup>A</sup> Bolden dying at the age of 56 in 1931, which would make the year of his birth 1875. Russell says Dumaine died the same year as Bunk [Johnson], about 1949, and he doesn't know where the book is now.

Perhaps Dick [Allen] could check with Dumaine's son to see if he could locate it. *[I do not remember Dumaine's son, but I did know a relative. He never found the book - RBA, June 29, 1979.]*

Dr. Hogan asks Russell if he thinks Jelly Roll Morton ever heard Bolden. Russell says he would think so since anyone in New Orleans before 1907 could hardly have missed him. [Manuel] Manetta told about going across the river and sitting on the levee to listen to Bolden. In those days with no traffic noises, it was surprising how far you can hear, especially over water. People ridiculed Jelly Roll Morton when he said you could hear five miles away, but Paul Barbarin has said he could hear music playing at his home from as far away as Globe's <sup>[sic]</sup> Hall. Of course, it often seemed farther away than it actually was. When Jelly talked about hearing Bolden at Lincoln Park so many miles away, it might actually have been only a couple of miles. Jelly was probably thinking of going around the belt on the Tulane streetcar line, which used to go around on Carrollton [Avenue and] down St. Charles Avenue, a six-mile trip or more. In a straight line it would be much shorter, even across the river. People have told of hearing Bolden in New Orleans proper when he was playing at the Pecan Grove in Gretna, and when he played at Globe Hall, Manetta swears they could hear him on the levee over there. On a quiet night, you could hardly miss hearing a loud band.

In Los Angeles, Russell began looking up one of the Bass sisters

and people like Kid Ory and Bud Scott. Scott and Norwood "GiGi" Williams told Russell that Bolden's widow was in Los Angeles. Zue Robertson's sister (WR has notes on Zue which he will talk about later), Mrs. McNeil, told him that she had seen her recently, and she could be found in Watts, California, near 116th Street, where Russell interviewed Norwood Williams. This interview was done after Jazzmen. Williams was the guitar player in a picture in Jazzmen with Keppard and Baquet in the Original Creole Band which Bill Johnson had managed.

Someone told how Bolden used to take these two twin Bass sisters to church. [Kid] Ory published that in a rather confusing interview last summer where he first said jazz came out of Storyville and later said it came from the churches. Ory and [Scott ?] used to tell Russell that jazz originated in church. When Bolden took these sisters, who were quite religious, to church, he came out of church "swinging." Bolden supposedly got some of his ideas for jazzing up the popular tunes and marches from hearing the spirituals and gospel music jazzed up. Russell says we'll never know the details of the origin of jazz. The twin sister lived in Watts, where incidentally Jelly Roll Morton played when the Original Creole Band was out there. It's written up with Buddy Petit and Frankie Duson. They had an amusement park called Leake's Lake there. [See Alan Lomax, Mr. Jelly Lord.]

In May, 1940, Russell located Dora Bass Pinson, who was Bolden's widow's twin sister. She told Russell where her sister was, but he promised not to tell as she is now married to a man who doesn't know she was ever married to Bolden.

On June 3, 1942, Russell talked to Bolden's widow, Norah, who has been married twice since she was married to Bolden. Scott and

Williams thought Norah was living in Los Angeles, but it turned out to be her twin sister, Dora. However, there is no doubt that Norah was married to Bolden. Dora told Russell that Norah and Bolden had a daughter named Bernadine Bolden, whom Bunk [Johnson] mentioned too, who was living in Chicago as of 1940. Bernadine was probably too young to know much about Bolden but might know some of the musicians living in Chicago. The Besses were Baptists, but Dora didn't mention anything about Buddy taking them to church. She didn't have any pictures of him. She said Bolden "would break his heart" when he played, meaning he was very expressive. Dora remembered giving Buddy medicine when he was sick. He was in the asylum at the time of the San Francisco earthquake, April 1906, or the year of the [Jack] Johnson fight in San Francisco. However, it's fairly well documented now that Bolden entered the asylum in 1907. There are some clippings from the newspaper when he was first put in jail and when he was going crazy, maybe a year before.

Russell visited with Bolden's widow in June, 1942, when he was on his way to record Bunk [Johnson] for the first time. She was living in a medium-sized town in Iowa. When he asked her about Bolden, she seemed stunned as if someone had finally caught up with her and half-heartedly denied having been married to Bolden. She looked carefully at the pictures in Jazzmen to be certain she was not in any of them. She seemed afraid of being identified with Bolden in any way as her present husband knew nothing of her life with Bolden and "those people," whom she seemed ashamed of. Russell did not notice particularly what color she was, probably about medium [brown]. He would have noticed it if she were very light. She had no pictures or written records of Bolden and was certain he had never recorded, but Russell discounts this theory as [Willie] Cornish would probably know more about it

than she did. She confirmed that Buddy's real name was Charles. She said his family were "funny people" and Norah couldn't get along with them. There were only four in the family, including father, mother, one sister, and Bolden. His mother died soon after Buddy was committed and his sister died soon after her funeral. (Russell was told by Bunk Johnson in 1939 that Bolden's sister might be living on Philip Street, but Russell couldn't locate her.) According to Norah, the sister went to pieces as a result of her mother's death. Buddy had gone crazy a year or so before he was committed to the asylum. Her principal memory during that time was that he was afraid of his horn. She wasn't clear on exactly when he went crazy but was certain he didn't play as late as 1910 or 1911, so the 1907 date is probably fairly accurate. She implied he didn't play after 1904. According to her, he did not run a scandal sheet and was not a barber although he drank a lot and hung out at barber shops, but he "never earned a nickel in his life except by music." Richard M. Jones, whose father was a barber, told Russell that Bolden had been a barber. Dr. Hogan suggests that the idea of his being a barber might have arisen from the fact that the scandal sheet called "The Cricket" was sold in barber shops. Russell says they have located a copy of "The Cricket," but Bolden's connection with it is still disputed. Russell Levy has done some investigation on this question.

Mrs. Bolden told Russell that his mother never made him work as a kid and always provided the best for him, implying he was a fine musician well able to earn his living that way and that he was well trained. Russell says a man [Lewis Jones] he interviewed on Jackson Avenue seemed to know who taught Bolden and also about his daughter, Bernadine, whom this man thought was illegitimate, or at least that Bolden had some illegitimate sons. Zutty Singleton in New York said

he had played with Bolden's son when he was a kid. Russell thinks it might have been the son who was buried in Chalmette Cemetery.

From the pictures in Jazzmen, Bolden's widow remembered [Willie] Cornish especially and Brock Mumford [still disputed whether his name was Mumfrey or Mumford. See Soard's 1905.] They used to come to the house on band business. Russell promised he wouldn't bother her again or disclose her whereabouts.

Bolden must have stopped playing when he was quite young, around 30 or so, and yet, in that short time, established such a fabulous reputation.

*[Compose Don Marquis In Search of Buddy Bolden,  
(Baton Rouge: L.S.U., ©1978)*

END OF REEL III