

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins.

... Alexander Pope, father of John Pope, former leader of the Excelsior [Brass] Band of Mobile, because of some disagreement, resigned from the Old Creole Band, which [had?] been in existence about 70 years, and formed the Excelsior Band.

William Edward Ballariel, born [in Mobile, Alabama] October 11, 1881; has played several different instruments; was playing cornet when he first joined the [Excelsior?] band. Didn't begin playing wind instruments until he was an adult, but played string instruments, by ear, before that; played wind instruments from written music. Joined the Excelsior in the Twenties, [See below. Journal begins 1917.], but had played with other bands previously; played with the Excelsior 25 or 30 years. None of the older musicians are now playing with the Excelsior, but some of the younger men use the name, for the purpose of getting work, as the old band had all the work in Mobile at one time; the band was well-known outside of Mobile, too. WB was appointed secretary of the band; kept records of jobs, dates played, amounts paid each player for each job; still has record book, from which he and WR read. WR reads names of two pieces of sheet music which WB has: "New Orleans Jazz", by Don Richards, published by Leo Feist, and "The Royal Scotch Highlanders", by K. L. King, [probably published by Barnhouse, Okaloosa, Iowa]. WB mentions his

own heart attack of 9 years ago, from which he has recovered fully. WB's journal of the Excelsior Band begins in 1917; band played a wide variety of jobs--baseball games, May pole dances, Carnival balls, etc. Band had many jobs, sometimes every night in a month. WR reads a name of an organization, "The Jolly Good Fellows". Excelsior Band was very popular. WR reads the name Manetta [Manuel Manetta, or a relation?]. Prices per man in those days ranged from around \$ 2.00 to around \$ 4.00, and later up to about \$ 6.00. WB says the present-day Excelsior Band usually gets work only around Carnival time; there are many more orchestras now, and they usually get most of the work. WB says there was not a club or organization around Mobile that the old Excelsior didn't play for. The band also sponsored some of its own appearances.

WB says that in his early days, the music around Mobile was played mostly by string bands; only in later years, [around the time the Excelsior was formed?], were orchestras with wind instruments formed. WB played mandolin, guitar, string bass and could play some on piano. WB's wife played piano, but not for public dances, appearing only in her own home. (The Ballariels live in the old home of the wife's father; the house is about 80 years old.) In the early days, the bands played waltzes, quadrilles, mazurkas--many kinds of square dances--but did not play ragtime, as the teachers did not want music

"with all that foolishness." The "hotter" music came later, about 20 years ago, when the younger people were growing up--"The cut-out", "shimme-she-wabbles" [check spelling], etc., were some of the later dances. WB doesn't know that he heard any New Orleans bands in his early days, but he says a band from Pensacola [Florida], the [Wise, Wyse, Wyatt, Wyett?] brass band, Creole Negroes, who played "straight" music, were very well-known, as far north as Chicago; the Excelsior would swap picnics with the Wise band, each traveling to the other's city for the occasion; WB says the Excelsior was the better band. The Wise band was about 20 pieces; the Excelsior never over 14 pieces. The Excelsior [later] played all kinds of music, always catering to public taste.

WB heard the blues before joining the Excelsior. WB says his first brass band experience was with the Pomponette [sp?] band, which came up as a family band; then he joined the Lipscomb band, led by an ex-Excelsior member; there was also the Eureka band, which had most of the work until the Excelsior was formed. When first with the Excelsior, WB played cornet, but was changed to alto horn; there were saxes and clarinets in the band; the clarinets were mostly E^b. The Eureka band had an E^b cornet. Alexander Pope was not [playing] in the Excelsior when WB joined; he still booked jobs, but the band was led by his son, John Pope. Alexander [in the Excelsior?] played for the

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funeral of WB's father, when WB was about 8 years old; the father was a member of a society which had music for the funerals of its members.

End of Reel I

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The Excelsior played funerals. The band would march, to drum taps, from the society's hall to where the body was; then they would play slow music, hymns etc., when the body was brought out; dirges to the church, snares muffled; same to the cemetery, into which the band did not go [only difference from New Orleans funerals. RBA]; after the burial, the music was jazzy. WB says one after-burial piece was "So Glad You're Gone", but [the band?] decided that tune was not good for the occasion. The people following the funeral would have a good time coming back from the cemetery; sometimes the good times got out of hand, and the police would have to break it up. The [protector? protective?] societies, which had the funerals, wore uniforms. The Sunday funerals were finally discontinued, perhaps by the police; the societies would put off the funerals until Sunday, so that they could be sure of having a big crowd of members. WR reads that in the 1918 or 1919 entries in WB's book, a funeral was played for the Young Men's Relief Association.

The Excelsior used to play a ball on the Municipal Wharf on the [Mobile?] river, after the night parade on Mardi Gras night; the ball was for whites, admission was \$ 1.00, benefit of the Carnival association; it was held under canvas on the wharf, because there was no other place big enough; [sometimes] it was freezing cold; the Ex--

Excelsior had that ball almost every year; the ball is still held. All the brass band members played for the ball; used two drummers; wouldn't split the band. The band had 4 cornets--two solo, 1 first and 1 second--2 or 3 alto [horns], 2 trombones, bass, baritone [horn], 2 drummers, some clarinets at times. Marching, the low brass were at the front of the band, then the altos, cornets, clarinets, and last, the drums. The uniforms were blue. Before WB was in the band, some of the members who couldn't memorize their parts wore lights on their caps at night; WB could memorize alto parts, but not cornet. WB was out of the Excelsior for some time, until 1939, because of some dispute; he resigned, but was asked to come back in; he stayed until he got tired of it, and the band was "going down". WB says there are only 3 old-time members living: himself, John Pope and Denny Trainer (real surname, Simon) --Trainer lives in California.

The band always had the music for the pieces they played. WB again mentions the dance "shimme-she-wabble" [sp?]; WB describes it as a wiggle dance. The Excelsior had plenty of blues to play; they played blues in a ratty way, and sometimes played blues in a "decent" way, depending on the circumstances.

WB doesn't remember hearing any bands from New Orleans [!!!]; he says one band from [Pascagoula ?], the Pickwick, would come to

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Mobile for picnics. WB says he thinks there was an Excelsior band in New Orleans; WR agrees. WB didn't learn from a teacher when he played string instruments, but he did when he began playing brass; he says the Excelsior band had a teacher as a member, that the cousin of Trainer was one of the teachers. WB is Catholic, and heard music from non-Catholic churches only when "passing by". Catholics could have music at funerals if they wanted it, but the bands never went inside any churches. WB's father, a Catholic, had the [Excelsior] band playing at his funeral; John Pope's father [Alexander Pope] was leader at the time [around 1890]. WB's mother reared 5 children, and died at age 72.

Some of the older Creoles speak French, which WB says is called "broken French", but there is not much interest in it among the younger people; the people on [[Monalow?] Island, near Dauphin Island, still speak French; the Creoles once owned also the entire island, but they have sold some of it. WB's mother came from Nassau, and spoke French well; his wife's mother came from France.

The early string bands had trap drummers, but not in the really early times; the early early string bands used only bass violin for rhythm.

WB says one little fellow used to follow the Lipscomb Band; one of the members decided to show him a little about the cornet; the

by didn't show much interest, prefering to gamble; later, however, he became a famous musician, having his own band [off and on], and playing with Duke Ellington's orchestra [where he is now, 1964]. His name is Cootie Williams. WB gave Cootie a couple of lessons, when he [Cootie?] played with the comical Cowboy's Band, for Carnival. Another little fellow, first name Silas, disappeared, reappearing in England, having finally learned his clarinet; WB doesn't know where he is now; Silas didn't pay much attention to his music lessons when younger, either, same as Cootie, who was worse about that than Silas. Cootie loved to shoot craps, even doing it during intermissions at jobs. Some of Cootie's relatives still live in Mobile.

End of Reel II

End of William Ballariel