

MR. AND MRS. A. C. SYNIGAL

I [of 3]-Digest-Retyped

May 24, 1962

Also present: Richard B. Allen, Marjorie T. Zander

1

(Interview recorded at 1938 Lapeyrouse Street, New Orleans, Louisiana)

Interviewees are Alphonse C. Synigal and Edna Bibolet Serena Synigal; Mrs. S was first married to Victor Serena, whose grandfather came from Spain; Mrs. S.'s mother was Marceline LeBlanc; her father was Johnny Bibolet. Mrs. S. talks about her grandmother, who lived in Ascension Parish with her husband, who was a white man, and the old times. Mrs. S. mentions a cowbell, which was rung by her father to announce his arrival. He was a butcher who sold meat from a wagon in the country around her childhood home. She still has the bell, which is traditionally rung at her home on New Year's Eve. Mrs. S.'s childhood home was about one-and-a-half miles from Donaldsonville and about ten miles from Thibodaux, where she and her family sometimes attended mass. Mrs. S. can remember that when she was about ten years old there was no segregation in [New Orleans, rural Louisiana?]; she used to visit the city, before the family moved there. Mrs. S. says there has been segregation since about 1900. Mrs. S. says her family moved to New Orleans when she was fourteen years old, after the death of her father. Mrs. S.'s first husband, Victor Serena, was drowned; she and Mr. S. married eight years after Serena's death.

Billy Kersands [check sp.] made appearances at the Holy Family [school?] which Mrs. S. attended. Mrs. S. heard Claiborne Williams, of Donaldsonville; she played piano, and says she played with him. [See reel II, below]. She studied from one of the sisters of the Holy Family and from a white lady in New Orleans. Home entertainment was more prevalent in those days. His son [George Williams] still plays, in Baton Rouge, she thinks; a daughter is a nun, perhaps at the Holy Family, Orleans Street, in New Orleans. A daughter of Mrs. S. has written a song. Mrs. S. tells of her daughters life. RESTRICT....

Mrs. S. says she thinks Bunk Johnson was about seventy years old when he died [1949]; he was about four or five years older than Mr. S.

End of Reel I

May 24, 1962

Also present: Richard B. Allen, Marjorie T. Zander

RBA looks at a piece of sheet music copyrighted in 1944, [words] written by Mrs. S. daughter, Emelda [sp?] Serena Robinson, music by J. Charles McNeil [sp?], the latter from California. A recording was made of another song written by the daughter; Mr. S. says the title was "If You Loved Me As I Loved You, We Wouldn't Be Apart."

RESTRICT....

Mr. S. says he thinks, and is almost sure, that Billy Kersands was from Donaldsonville [Louisiana]; Kersands traveled on showboats; Mr. S. saw him when he played in New Iberia [Louisiana]; Kersands had his own troupe and brass band; Bunk Johnson played cornet in that band at one time, and was, in fact, leader of it. Kersands sang, told jokes and had a big mouth which made people laugh when he opened it. Kersands made a trip to England, and is credited with being the first person ever to make Queen Victoria [died 1901--PRC] laugh. [Cf. Tom Fletcher, 100 Years of the Negro in Show Business, p. 61. RBA]. RBA says Charlie Love, originally from Plaquemine [Louisiana], played trumpet with Kersands' band at one time; Love said Kersands could put a cup and saucer entirely inside his mouth. [Cf. Love reel ?].

Mrs. S. mentions seeing some members of the Eureka [Brass] Band on television; they were going to Washington [D.C.] shortly afterward.

Mrs. S. didn't play in Claiborne Williams' band [see reel I]; she was too young. She played with him at his home in Donaldsonville, where they were introduced by Mrs. S.'s mother (Williams was a groomsman at her wedding); Mrs. S. played piano, Williams played violin. She joked with CW saying he was old enough to be her grandfather.

RBA mentions George Sayles, guitarist, originally from Donaldsonville, and they father of Manuel Sayles, also² guitarist.

Mrs. S.'s father played tuba in a brass band in Donaldsonville; the band played at his funeral. RBA mentions Freddy and Alcide Landry, from the Donaldsonville area. Mr. and Mrs. S. say the bands which played for funerals in the country followed the same procedure as the ones in New Orleans, i. e., slow, sad music until after the burial, then fast, happy music. [Incorrect, but usual, description. RBA.]

The funeral of Alphonse Picou, clarinetist, is mentioned; RBA says the first tune played after the band and the procession parted was "Oh, Didn't He Ramble?" Mrs. S. says Picou played "High Society" on the piccolo in the concert for the Creole Fiesta held at Beauregard Square [see Mr. and Mrs. S.'s interview May 17, 1962]. Mrs. S. was in the hospital at the time of Picou's funeral, and the Creole Fiesta was not held that year, 1961, (or the previous one, 1960?), (or both?), either. ^{said to be} There were/50,000 people at his funeral. Mrs. S. doubts this.

There were dances at the Holy Family Convent in Donaldsonville for which bands played when Mrs. S. was a young girl; Claiborne Williams played for some of them, but there were other bands besides his.

Mrs. S. tells of arguing with a sergeant [of the New Orleans Police Department] about a parade route and the placing of bands; Mrs. S. wanted a band, St. Mary's school band, which had been playing for the Creole Fiesta since its ~~xx~~ inception to be first in the parade, but the sergeant wanted another band there, saying the senior [in age?] band, St. Augustine school band, should be first. There was also talk about placing the queen behind the king; Mrs. S. explains that since theirs was a ladies organization, the queen always went first; in fact, there was no king until about three years ago, and also in fact, there was no queen until about the fourth year of existence, because the ruler was a young girl called Mademoiselle Fiesta until that time. Mrs. S. eventually had her way. Mrs. S. talks about the ball; [Joseph] "Brother Cornbread" [Thomas] sang in Creole at it.

MR. AND MRS. A. C. SYNIGAL

II [OF 3]-Digest-Retyped

May 24, 1962 Also present: Richard B. Allen, Marjorie T. Zander

4

Mrs. S. shows a photograph to RBA; she lists the names of those shown on some of them, including her daughters, granddaughters, and members of the [Creole Fiesta] board. Talk of block dances held by the Creole Fiesta; one was held in the Wonderful Boys Hall, 1660 North Miro, because of rain (1960); the first block dance was held on Lapeyrouse Street, in the block between Johnson and Prieur [streets]. Mrs. S. shows various other photographs, including one of the mother of Debria Brown, a singer. The [ex-New Orleans Dock Board yacht] Good Neighbor, on which the Creole Fiesta organization took its first collective ride, is mentioned. More photographs and identification of various queens, kings, attendants; one king was Phillip Marrero [?]; RBA mentions Eddie and Lawrence Marrero, perhaps cousins of Phillip, he says.

End of Reel III