

BILL MATTHEWS  
Reel I [of 3] --Digest--Retyped  
March 10, 1959

Interviewer: William Russell  
Also present: Ralph Collins

[BM reading?] "This is Old Man Bill Matthews speaking, one of the New Orleans originals, who has been playing jazz for over forty years, is still going strong [in] 1959, one of New Orleans's original drummers, 1915-1919. It was Alphonse Picou's suggestion "You're a young man, Billy, my boy. Why don't you learn some other instrument?" So I taken Picou's advice; my choice was trombone.

But before I quit playing drum I was playing with some of the New Orleans's best jazz bands. In 1915 Buddy Petit, one of New Orleans's jazz trumpet players; [Frank] "King" Duson, trombonist, former of Buddy Bolden; Kid Rena, one of Louis Armstrong's jazz boys that come up together; Jack Carey, known as king of the world as 'Tiger Rag' [sic]; and old man Joe Johnson, one of the best trumpet players we ever had in the city of New Orleans, so sweet, so mellow. Then old Sammy Morgan came along--Sammy ' had the best go here'; Sammy did wonderful with his orchestra. Old man Robichaux picked me up, John Robichaux. I joined John Robichaux as drummer. I played with him a while. . . . at West End. . . . at the West End Country Club. Frank Duson come over to hear the band and he said, "Billy, you come on with me, I want you to come to the roadhouse," Jim Tom's [Thom's] Roadhouse. . . . So I went over to Jim Tom's Roadhouse with him--we didn't have no union then at that time--you do what you want to--quit tonight--so I went over to Jim Tom's Roadhouse and I played with Frankie Duson's orchestra. Mutt Carey was on cornet. . . . Henry Martin was on drums. . . . Buddy Christian was on piano and banjo. . . . We stuck around there and old Frankie Duson stayed there a little while, until here come Walter Decou from the next block, wanted me to play at the Bungalow. . . . I jumped there for a little more money. Them times, money was money, a dollar was a dollar. . . . Walter Decou's lineup was Old man

[Sam] Dutrey, [Sr.,] on clarinet; old man Joe Howard on cornet, Walter Decou on piano, myself on drums, and Big Eye Louis [Nelson], on clarinet. Old man Dutrey used to double [on saxophone?RBA]; Big Eye couldn't double. . . . A.J. Piron came along: 'Billy,' (they all called me 'Billy') 'I want you work over there at Tranchina's with me. I'll give you fifteen dollars a week.' Fifteen dollars was big money in them days. . . . Go to work at eight, knock off at twelve, all overtime you get paid for. Piron had a pretty good lineup. I was a young fellow then, jumping from place to place. . . looking for the money. So I went over there with Piron. . . . I met Steve Lewis on my way coming into town on the West End car. I said, 'Steve, I 'm going to play with Piron.' He said, 'Well, I'm going to play with Piron myself. When are you going to start?' I said, 'Tomorrow night.' He said, 'I'm going to start there too tomorrow night.' At that time Piron had [Lorenzo] Tio [Jr.] on clarinet, Peter Bocage on trombone and violin, Piron on violin, . . . Louis Warnick on saxophone. He had Udell [Wilson] on piano."

Old man [Louis] Cottrell [sr.] said he was going to New York because he wanted to get away, but instead of going to New York he went to play at the [Lyric?] Theatre with Old Man Robichaux. Matthews stayed out there until they got tired. Prohibition came along then, and bootlegging, and chased them all around. [Compare chronology below.] The West End Tavern opened up, a new place, with Papa Celestin, Alphonse Picou, Steve Lewis, Bill Matthews, and Hamp Benson. Hamp Benson, an old trombone player, was the manager. Hamp chose the band and they went on to play at the West End Tavern with him. Papa Celestin didn't have a band of his own at that time. "We stuck around out there at the West End Tavern until Uncle Sam opened up the joint [Camp Leroy

Johnson? World War I] out there with the soldiers and sailors, closed down everything." This job lasted six or eight months. Another break came through when Jack Sheehan opened up a place out on the highway. Jack Sheehan's place was the Beverly Garden. Jack Sheehan asked [William] "Bebé" Ridgley to get him a band. Ridgley chose Matthews, who played drums with him a while, until the "wolf" came out there <sup>and</sup> closed down the gambling and bootlegging. Ridgley had old man [Henry] Kimball, Matthews, Papa Celestin. They left Hamp Benson out because Ridgley was a trombone player himself. Tio quit Piron and went on over there with them. "We stuck out there a long time, making good money. . . . Boys got so they say they want to go back to the red light [district].

> They went back to the red light and played. King Oliver was there at Pete Lala's, playing there with Mack and Mack and them, Mack and Mack's show." [Oliver left New Orleans in 1918. Compare above.] They had King Oliver, Buddy Christian on piano, Old Man Volteau on violin. "A band in them days, if they [didn't?] had a violin, they had no leader. Oliver was leading." ✓ Henry Zeno was on drums, and Zue Robertson on trombone. The floorshow was running pretty good. One Night when Matthews was going through there, Henry Zeno asked him to take his place so he could go gambling. He never did come back. Joe started arguing with Mary Mack of Mack and Mack. "That's my home boy crowd--we're [who?] all from Algiers--we always stick together, play together." When Henry came on back, they fired him for Matthews. Henry was a first-class drummer, but Matthews was a younger man. Mack and Mack were getting ready to make a trip, invited Matthews to come with them. He told them he was learning to play the trombone now.> Picou had suggested to him one night going out to the West End, "Man, you're a young man. Why

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don't you learn how to play something before you get too old, lugging them drums all around?" They used to call Picou "Peek" or "Pike." Matthews took Pike's advice, went to Vic Gaspard, who was one of the greatest baritone horn and trombone players in the city of New Orleans. Matthews asked Vic, who was a Creole, to teach him. Matthews went to Vic's house, took an Imperial Method [i.e., instruction book] with no horn. BM knew the treble clef music because he used to play bells with his drum; he didn't know much of the bass clef music, but in two weeks of going over it, Vic **told him to get himself a horn.** BM went to his friend in Algiers, Harrison Barnes, <sup>and</sup> told him he was learning to play the trombone, asked him to lend him a horn. Barnes told him he had an old horn; the bell was all right but the slide wasn't much. So BM went to Jack Carey's barbershop, asked him if he had an old trombone. Jack had an old one he told him to take. Jack's slide was good, so BM put Jack's slide and Harrison's bell together. When he went to Vic Gaspard's house he went through the method so well that in two weeks time Vic told him to leave the book at home. Vic had some of the orchestrations that John Robichaux used to use. They went over this music. [Archive has approximately 6,000 orchestrations used by the Robichaux orchestra.] Gaspard told him he didn't need any more lessons; "You know more music than what I do. I wish I had ever learned as much as you do." Matthews was going so fast with it because he had been playing in the orchestra, knew all those old numbers, knew the tempo, <sup>and</sup> couldn't go wrong. He wasn't like a fellow who had to pick up the instrument.

One day they were short in the Excelsior Brass Band; Vic Gaspard told him to bring his old trombone, <sup>and</sup> get his brother on the drum. BM asked which brother he wanted. Vic said, "Any one you want, bring them." BM brought

his older brother, Remus Matthews, because he was a first-class drummer. This was BM's first time out on the trombone. He went on through real well, knew all those marches. Harrison Barnes, who lived right ácross the street from him, told him after that parade that he worked in the day, and when he couldn't get off, BM was to be the trombone player in the brass band, and to use his brother on snare drum. They did that often.

One day they were playing a parade on Lapeyrouse Street, on a Sunday evening. BM was playing the trombone. They had Arnold Metoyer on trumpet, and George Moret on trumpet, but they had to get another trumpet. BM said, "Why don't you try Dippermouth [Louis Armstrong]?" They said, "Oh, man, he can't read." BM told them he would make out, so they took his advice, they couldn't go out with only two trumpets, because it was an all-day parade. BM went by Louis's, and asked him if he wanted to play in a brass band the next day. Louis said, "Oh, man, you know I can't make that, I can't make no brass band, not with the Excelsior Band." BM told him they weren't going to play any music the next day, also told him the only way he could get into a band would be to learn how to play that music. [Does he mean read here? BBR. I don't know. RBA]. BM told him he was going to play the trombone. LA said, "That's all right, I can play as much [music?]--on Lapeyrouse Street by Mulé's. Mule wasn't running it then, but another fellow was running it. They could get a big Jumbo bottle then for a nickel. "Louis took a big Jumbo bottle and drank it down--he never did drink--drank it down, and then he had the cramps. We had to lay Louis out. Louis got overheated and had the cramps from that Jumbo bottle. He stayed right there. So we went and played on through without Louis."

"That night I was coming to work right around the corner at Ame. lia

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and Willow. I was coming there to play with Old Man Humphrey [Willie E. Humphrey, the Elder], Willie [J.] Humphrey's daddy." They had "a double band" that night. John Joseph was on bass with them. He asked BM if he could get another cornet to play with them; the big band was coming back. BM said he could get "Red" [Allen], whom he called "Biffly." BM told Biffly they were going to play against Kid Ory and Oliver "and them" at Amelia and Willow. Biffly "blowed them out." Ory only had one trumpet, Joe [Oliver]. Joe called them "all kinds of little young names"--he always did curse. He and Ory had a few words about it; he wanted some more help. Ory said the job didn't pay enough to hire more help. They decided to get this little boy, Louis Armstrong, to help them. Joe said "We going to kill New Orleans, we going to kill 'em dead." Finally Joe used Louis Armstrong on some engagements, and there were the two best jazz trumpet players in the city of New Orleans, Louis Armstrong and Joe Oliver. [Compare Louis Armstrong, Satchmo R.A, born 1908 and Oliver left in 1918! ! !]. ✓

Joe and Mary Mack had a few words, and Joe told her he was leaving. [Compare Stella Oliver, reel ? ]. When he left, Joe said, "When I come back to New Orleans, Jerry Thomas will be the mayor." Jerry Thomas was the president of the Bulls Club. Joe never did come back. BM saw him in Quincy, Florida. Once he got as close as Biloxi, had Paul Barnes and Paul Barbarin playing with him and even then didn't come back to New Orleans. [Compare Brian Rust and Walter C. Allen, King Joe Oliver, on personnel.]

One day when BM was playing a parade Amos White, another great trumpet player, came along, asked BM to make a trip with him to the north of Louisiana. They made up a road band to go with Andrew Foster. BM's brother "Bebé" [Matthews] told BM, "Billie, <sup>you're</sup> going up there by Joe and them now;

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I know I ain't going to see you no more. Louis and all of them are up there." BM told him, "Don't say that, man." BM took his suitcase and went, but in Kansas City, Missouri, that Christmas Eve night, he got a telegram telling him that his brother was dead. BM kept on going; there was no use to come back; he couldn't see his brother Bebe any more. [Compare Amos White reel ? for approximate date.]

He played around Kansas City, Missouri, a while. A young boy who played a lot of banjo with Nat Towles--all of them were young--they went to Oklahoma, and stayed there about fifteen months, around Bowley, [spelling?] Oklahoma. The mayor was a woman--it was the first time BM ever saw a woman be mayor of a little town. They were doing well there, but BM got a wire from Charlie Creath asking him to come to St. Louis. BM had known Charlie a long time--Charlie had been on the boat. In St. Louis Charlie put BM in the Jazzland [dance hall?] playing with him. Amos White went to Oakland, California--he is still in California. WR and Fess [Manetta] saw him there [date of California trip--summer 1958]. The little band broke up; nobody came back home but BM. Nat Towles, who was a bass player, was the leader of that band. [See photograph of N.T.'s band.]

While BM was playing at Jazzland with Charlie Creath, Pops Foster was on the boat [with Dewey Jackson? RBA.]. Pops gave him a telegram he had received from Sidney Desvigne. Sidney wanted Pops and BM to come to Cincinnati, pick up the Island Queen and come back home. BM thought this was okay. Their tickets came that evening. BM came back and settled down here. He played with Sidney a little while, but Sidney was sort of funny with "that stuff" (money). They called him "Roach." Roach liked that money so well, he messed with the money so much, that BM and a nice little trumpet player named George

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McCullum made up a good bunch of fellows and started playing around here.

5:25 They did so well that Papa Celestin grabbed BM, and BM stayed right there with Papa. Papa offered him money and work. Papa was improving himself then; he had Ernest Kelly on trombone with him; he had Guy Kelly, BM, and himself.

His piano player was Jeannette Salvant [Kimball]. Emma Barrett was with Ridgley; when they left <sup>Jack Sherman</sup> Tio stuck with Ridgley. When "things got" good he jumped over to Piron again; then he went to New York and never did come back any more. [Compare Louis Tio, reel ?]. He died in New York. His wife, Peter Bocage's sister, played bass too. She was a good bass player.

Papa Celestin's band got on a little pleasure boat they called the Greater New Orleans. Then they closed that boat down. Every year for five straight years the band went over to Biloxi to the White House and Buena Vista Hotel.

Matthews got married.

Joe Rouzan played saxophone with Celestin, Edmond Hall, and Clarence Hall. [Compare Edmond Hall, reel ?] Edmond Hall "jumped down," and they took Earl Pierson. He doesn't play any more; he's on the road now. WR met him on a train. <sup>He is a</sup> porter (S.P.-New Orleans to Los Angeles). When Papa Celestin's band first did that recording, "My Josephine" and all that, they used Paul Barnes, BM, "this boy sing--I disremember his name" [Check discography], Sidney Carrere, Simon Marrero, John Marrero, August Rousseau [spelling?] on "My Josephine." BM was not on <sup>My</sup> "Josephine." *Guy [?]* did not come to [?]

Second trumpet with Papa Celestin at that time was Albert Snaer. Upon questioning by WR, Matthews says Ricard Alexis was the one playing second

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trumpet on "Josephine." [Compare discography]. Kid Shots Madison was not on the records with Matthews; Shots stuck with Ridgley, never did leave him [after the Celestin-Ridgley split]. Davey Jones stayed on at the Pelican with Ridgley. So did Emma Barrett and John Porter.

Papa Celestin and Bebé Ridgley fell out over one dollar, made their split, one lousy dollar. That's why there were two Tuxedo bands, Celestin's Tuxedo Band and Ridgley's Tuxedo Band. Ridgley is out of the business now, but still living. [R idgley died May 28, 1961.] Papa is already dead and gone forever.

They did fine with Papa's new big band. They stuck around here; Matthews settled down and got married. The depression came along. He played in and out, gig work, played every place you could play. Then the boys got to splitting up; Guy went away; Paul Barnes went away. Things were really dead. This made a big change in the band. BM and Happy [Goldston] stuck with Celestin. Celestin announced he was going to make a comeback. BM was working at the shipyard then. They made a couple of rehearsals. They had Ricard on bass, Picou on clarinet, Matthews on trombone; Papa Celestin on trumpet; Black Happy on drums, and Mercedes Fields [spelling?] on piano. This was the comeback band that rehearsed at Papa's two or three times a week. Johnny Curran [Check spelling] started booking Papa Celestin, and they started coming back gradually. Then Ricard got a job at the Paddock Lounge, where his little brother Lester [Alexis] was working. Lester had a combo there. Mr. Valenti wanted to try a Dixieland band; Lester brought his brother Ricard to see him. Ricard called BM up at 12 that night, told him "You got a job, man, on Bourbon Street." That was on May 8 or 9, 1949. They started on May 10, Saturday night. They

had to get a good Dixieland piano player; they [the band or the Valenti's?] didn't want a woman to play piano, so Ricard said he'd get Octave Crosby. Celestin told him to get who he wanted; he wasn't "going to lead my band out here; I'm not going to play here to help you build it up, because I got too much work coming up." BM and Happy assured Celestin they would be with him; they would not leave his band. So the first six months at the Paddock, Celestin worked under Ricard. The next six months, Celestin took the job over from Ricard. "Everything was Papa Celestin." Papa Celestin was very sick then, but he worked there a few years, got himself straightened out, [started? stopped?] fooling around. He didn't want to work any more; he didn't know how to quit. Finally he jumped down. [William] Houston, [union official?] asked him what he wanted to do. He said he wanted to get his own band in there, his band he had on the outside. He was all tied up with Mr. Steve Valenti; *he* thought Mr. Valenti would do anything he wanted to do. Papa Celestin told Houston he wanted three hundred dollars a week. At that time he was getting seventy dollars. BM told Papa he must not want to work there. Celestin said, "You're right, Billy, you're right. I don't want to work there. If you give me three hundred a week I'll work, and I'll work with my other band." Celestin asked BM what he intended to do. BM said he intended to stick on the job he had, with Ricard. "Ricard brought us here, and I'm working, I'm making a great improvement in it. You'll get on out there and make another band up yourself, that's all you can do, it'll be OK with me. Any time I happen to need you I'll ask you for a job; that's all I can do. Until now. [Papa made up?] that little band until now; and I'm still at the Paddock." [Celestin had another band while at the Paddock. He continued to lead this band after leaving the Paddock. RBA]

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Also present: William Russell  
Ralph Collins

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BM was around St. Louis, living out on [Phoenix?] with old man [Henry] Kimball, the bass player. Kimball said he wasn't doing anything; he was going to join Jelly Roll Morton, who was on the road at that time and had an old bus. BM asked Kimball when he was going back home; Kimball told him, "Anywhere's my home now, my son is raised now." That son is "little bitty [Narvin] Kimball, the banjo player." Kimball and several other fellows BM knew, including [Dolph?] and Harry Dial, joined Jelly Roll. Jelly went to Chicago to pick up a bunch. BM said he wasn't going right then; he wanted to stay with Charlie Creath and make some money. "Pop" Foster advised him to stay in St. Louis with Charlie Creath. The other men made their tour, about four months, and went back to St. Louis. When they got back to St. Louis they were down, and that's where the boys "jumped down" from Jelly Roll. BM got "kind of funny" himself about staying in St. Louis. BM says Jelly's name was "Fred" [Ferdinand], but they all called him "Jelly." Jelly told BM to look him up any time he came to Chicago <sup>and</sup> gave BM his address. "Jelly was kind of a smart guy, you know, his old pigeon-toed self". He was pigeon toed. Kind of smart old red guy." After he urged BM to look him up in Chicago, Jelly asked him to advance him the fare to Chicago. BM says Jelly's home was not in New Orleans, but in Iron-ton, Louisiana, about twelve miles from here. [!!!] BM says Iron-ton was also the home of Jim Crow [Robinson] and Jimmie "Jimbo" Noone . WR suggests that it is down toward Buras.

BM went to the station with Jelly, gave him his fare and two dollars extra because he was planning on going to Chicago anyway. When Jelly got back home he wrote BM a nice letter and two weeks later sent him ten dollars, told him anytime he came to Chicago he would be welcome at his house. Jelly had bought himself a fine home. At that time Jelly had twelve, fifteen men in the band. Traveling with them in a bus was tough; Jelly could go broke very easily.

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BM told Old Man Kimball he was going to make a trip over to Chicago, not to stay, but just to look it over. Promised he would come back.

Jelly Roll was the first one to meet BM at the station in Chicago. He had a nice place for BM to stay and everything. <sup>Jelly Roll</sup> wanted BM to join his band. BM told him he was only going to be there for a week or so, then was going back to St. Louis.

This was when he met Arnold Metoyer, whom he had known at home--they had played in the brass band together. Metoyer asked him how long he had been there, and he told him he got there about two months ago. Arnold Metoyer asked him where he was working, and he told him over in St. Louis. Metoyer had heard about his playing trombone there. >Arnold carried him around to Joe Oliver's house. While they were talking, Mrs. Oliver fixed dinner. Joe said, "You little so-and-so, don't you want for nothing." Kid Ory was living right next door. Oliver told him Ory couldn't make it there. He implies that Ory couldn't make it because he couldn't read [music]. [Joe said he was helping Ory by putting him on four saxophones to carry him through.?)

Joe had in his band: [Omer] Simeon on violin, clarinet, and saxophone; Albert Nicholas [alto saxophone]; Barney [Bigard] [tenor saxophone]; King [Oliver] on trumpet, Paul Barbarin on drums; Russell on piano; George Fihle, on trombone [WR's suggestion]. Louis [Armstrong] was in Chicago then, doing well. This was after Louis and Joe broke up. BM says they broke up on account of Lil [Hardin Armstrong]. Lil had been Joe's girl until the young Louis came along, took her, and married her. [!!!RBA]?

Honore Dutrey was in a band across the street from Joe Oliver's. Honore and BM had played together in New Orleans for Old Man [George] McCullum, who had a wonderful band, a nice, musical band. BM always said "Yes, Sir," to Honore. Honore told BM he was sickly, that he and his wife wanted BM to stay with them at their house, <sup>and</sup> would give him a nice place to eat and sleep. BM said he was going to stay with Joe; Honore said he didn't want BM to stay with Joe. Then along came Zutty [Singleton] in his little car, wanted to go get BM's luggage at the station, <sup>and</sup> have BM stay with him. BM stayed there with Zutty because he liked him, <sup>and</sup> had taught Zutty how to play the drum. He used to make two trips over the river every week to learn.

BM talked to Old Man Kimball over the telephone. Kimball wanted him to come back to St. Louis. Kimball was going back on the boat. BM said he didn't want to work for the Streckfus people [as] they were too hard. BM went right back to St. Louis to Jazzland. That's where Pop Foster grabbed him and told him about Sidney Desvigne wanting their group to come back down here.

BM didn't see Ory any more to talk to. Ory was playing that old saxophone Joe Oliver had given him to help him out because trombone was too fast at that time. Since this Dixieland stuff came back, it's the same kind of stuff that was played down here years ago; Ory knows all that; it has made him great and famous. But we had some [great] [reading?] trombone players in New Orleans: George Fihle, Eddie Atkins, Honore Dutrey, and Vic Gaspard, Batiste Delisle [WR's suggestion] was a real reading up-top trombone player. BM was drummer with him. Vic Gaspard was not a jazz man but was a musician. You couldn't lose him in music. He taught BM. He never did "pop", played smooth and slow. Zue Robertson was a smooth trombone player. Vic taught

BM that loose wrist action. BM used to play drum with Jim Crow [Robinson]. Jim was impressed at how quickly he learned to play the horn. It was just that he learned the music. When they were out at Tranchina's, Tranchina bought a big xylophone. Peter Bocage took the xylophone home. He could really play it. BM surprised him once by playing "Liza Jane" on the xylophone for him. Musicians used to have a good time, in those days, <sup>and</sup> used to love each other. The only union in New Orleans then was the white union; you had to go through an examination to get in any union [i.e., local?] in those days. These days you don't have to know anything; they don't ask you about note one, just want your money.

BM learned to play drums by fooling around with his brother Bebe's drums.

*P* BM's father played melodeon, in the Baptist church he belonged to over in Algiers, Providence Baptist Church, <sup>[pastored by]</sup> Reverend George [?]. <sup>[i.e., the father,]</sup> He <sup>and</sup> read music <sup>and</sup> practiced. BM's brother started playing drums with them. There were thirteen children in the family. The oldest was Remus, who died October 20, 1958, at the age of 72 at least. <sup>He was eleven years older than BM.</sup> The second was a daughter, Elizabeth, named for her mother, who died at about the age of five from "typhoid-malaria fever." The next was a boy, Sammy, who got killed. Bebe was next--his real name was Nathaniel, but they called him Bebe. Next was Charlotte, who is still living. Next was Irma, who died. BM was next. Remus was about eleven years older than BM. Their father played his melodeon in church, made them all go to Sunday School. Irma was gifted; she couldn't read a note but could play anything you wanted on the organ. The father played only in the church, never played dance music. The mother did not play any instrument; "she was strictly church."

A younger brother, Harry, who died during Prohibition, fooling with that "old hard corn likker and stuff", played drums too. He used to play bass drum with Old Man [Henry] Allen [Sr.]. BM was the only brother who 'switched off' the drum. WR asks if one of them didn't play bass once, but BM says it was the bass drum. BM has a niece in Milwaukee, married, who can play the devil out of a piano. [William] Houston taught her a little bit about music. The gift of music seems to run in the family.

The reason all the boys played drums was because that was what Remus started on; the rest of them saw the drums around the house and picked it up. The reason BM took up another instrument was on Picou's advice (see Reel I). In those days a youngster would listen to an older man <sup>and</sup> take his advice.

Bebé didn't teach BM; BM would wait until Bebé had gone fishing or hunting then would set up his drums. Bebe liked to hunt and fish. BM's mother wouldn't worry him or anything; it was just that the gift was in him. Bebé had a set of bells he had bought from Old Man [Louis] Cottrell [Sr.]. BM just took them and started fooling with them one day when Bebe had gone hunting. Just started playing them. Music just came naturally to BM. When he took lessons from Vic Gaspard, the only thing he didn't know much about was the bass clef. BM can still read more treble clef than bass clef. BM made a bet with Professor Manetta when he went to Manetta's house <sup>He</sup> bet that he could take any piano part Fess had there <sup>and</sup> play it on his trombone. He didn't even have to change the key. The trombone is a C instrument; Vic taught him that. He read what was there <sup>and</sup> didn't have to transpose. He could take a violin part and do the same thing, just forget <sup>-ting</sup> about the bass clef. About a month afterwards he met Fess, who admitted he was certainly right, saying "You're never too old to learn."

*The* Imperial Method was one method Vic Gaspard used to teach BM. BM says that was one of the best Methods that ever was. BM already knew the scales in treble clef. He had been playing [drums] with great trombone players, knew what they were doing. This made it easier for him too.

WR asks BM if his drumming had anything to do with his loose wrist action on trombone or if Vic had taught him that loose wrist action. BM says fellows who don't play another instrument don't know the wrist work. Lots of regular drummers can't even make a clean roll, the bop drummers. They all know BM knows it. The best drummer in the City of New Orleans now for a roll on the snare drum is [Christopher] "Black Happy" [Goldston]. Black Happy can make a nice clean roll. Another one is "Little" Louis Barbarin. ~~BM~~ considers them about the cleanest drummers on snare drum.

BM tells how when they were on the boat, playing with Sidney Desvigne, the captain told him to take Louis Barbarin in charge every morning at nine o'clock. <sup>The</sup> captain had "Fats" Pichon take Albert Morgan and George Foster in charge at the same time. They had to go on the stand and rehearse. Sidney Desvigne had to take the brass section. Louis Barbarin is one of the best drummers now, but the two bass players, Pichon would show them the bass with the music, but they couldn't-- They had a nice combination on the boat, nice fellows to get along with.

WR says he saw Al Morgan "this summer" and he told about having to practice on the boat. They had an old brass helicon on there. George Foster was playing [bass?] violin; he had his sousaphone on there. BM says he hasn't seen Al Morgan in a long time, but that he's a nice fellow. WR says he is still in California.

BM played drums with Sam Morgan's band, with Jim Crow [Robinson]<sup>N</sup> and them. " This was when he first began; he was going forward all the time. He left Buddy Petit and came uptown to go with Jack Carey. He left Jack Carey to go with Old Man George McCullum, who was playing three nights a week at the Crescent Billiard Hall on St. Charles Street and Royal at that time. They were playing Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights. He didn't have to lug his drums around so he just stuck there with him, getting a little bit better all the time. The dance hall was upstairs there; it's all cut out now; all that is gone. It used to be packed and jammed on those three nights.

BM never played any jobs with Jelly Roll, but he knew him from here before he left here. [Compare RBA's notes on interview with BM--Bill Matthew's article in Second Line.]

BM's birthday was on May 9, 1899. [Compare RBA's notes]

WR asks BM about his very first job. BM says there used to be a fellow who played on the street called Jack "Pie Eater" [Williams]. Jack is now a preacher living in Bessemer, Alabama, but at that time he played the bugle and the cornet. He had a four-piece band: bugle, clarinet, bass drum, and snare drum. On May 30 they used to go to Chalmette, march up and down the street. They called it a field-drum [or field] band. [See Memorial Day Services, Chalmette, notes.] BM was in "bloomer pants" [knickerbockers?]. After that he started playing at penny parties, playing traps and everything like that.

One night Frankie Duson was playing at the Progress Hall, in Algiers. He had Bunk Johnson, who was the top trumpet player then, Buddy Johnson on trombone, Frankie Duson [also trombone?], and Arnold DePass on drums.

Jimmy Johnson was on bass. Lorenzo Staulz was on banjo. That was the instrumentation they always used. People call it Dixieland now, but it is nothing new, This is what they were raised on. <sup>They</sup> didn't use any piano, <sup>but they</sup> used a bass and violin. The violin was leader; you had to have him.

NiNi [Arnold DePass?] knew that BM could play, said, "Come on, little Bebé, come on, rest me up." So BM got up there and played. Algiers was Frankie's home; he lived there then. Frankie said, "You little rat, you learn how to play good, I'm going take you with me." BM said, "Okay, Mr. Duson." He called Frankie Mr. Duson. Every time ~~a~~ band came over, ~~BM~~ would jump in and play. He played real good. Frankie took him with him <sup>when he was good <sup>enough</sup></sup> BM was also playing with Sam Morgan, used to transfer back and forth.

When BM played in the brass bands he played snare drum; <sup>he</sup> never did beat a bass drum. BM says many people do not know that one of our great bass drum players was Old Man [John] Rôbichaux, the violin player. He was wonderful bass [drum] player, but strictly by music. He played funerals "and everything." When he took sick, they called "Red Happy" [Bolton] to play the bass drum. Red Happy insisted on playing the snare drum so BM gave him his snare drum, took the bass drum himself and played a couple of numbers, but he didn't like it, <sup>and</sup> told Red to give him back his snare drum. <sup>He</sup> knew Red could do better at the bass drum than he could. Red took the bass drum, and "Oh, man, we did a cut up." This was with the Excelsior Brass Band. This was the first time BM tried to play bass drum. He could play it, but he didn't like that one beat.

George Moret was the leader of the Excelsior Brass Band. The band played mostly on this side of the river [ New Orleans side, not the Algiers.] Moret's brother was one of the great professors, who had a Moret's band at City Park for so long, <sup>and</sup> at Audubon Park every season with Dave Perkins "and all them." In those days they had white and colored musicians working together. Picou worked with many of them [many white men?], Arnold Metoyer "and them." "One of our great trumpet players we had 'round here. -- people didn't talk too much about, but he was always working," was Andrew Kimball, "you couldn't even tell he was --" Andrew Kimball, Joe Oliver, and Manuel Perez were the stiffest [means what?] trumpet players they had around here since Buddy Bolden stopped. And you could hear them from here [2821 Milan Street] to the river.

End of Reel II

BILL MATTHEWS  
Reel III [of 3]--Digest--Retyped  
March 10, 1959

Also present: William Russell  
Ralph Collins

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BM never recorded with Buddy Bolden, but he heard him play often. <sup>He</sup> used to go to hear him at the Mason's Hall on Perdido Street. Buddy was one of the heaviest, loudest trumpet players that ever was in New Orleans. Willie Cornish was an old friend of BM's. Cornish had a good ear, but he never was a [reading] musician. He knew the instrument all right, had a good ear, and was a good fellow to get along with. Cornish and Buddy Bolden and them used to play together.

Buddy used to wear a derby all the time in the street. It was the style then. It was like Sharkey [Bonano] does now. BM says in an aside that he could tell us plenty about Sharkey, too.

Buddy always left home with his horn <sup>and</sup> always had it with him, in a pool room, anywhere. You could leave your instrument anywhere in those days, pile them up in a corner. Nobody would take anything. You could walk New Orleans from Jackson Barracks to the Protection Levee, <sup>and</sup> no policeman would stop you. You can't do that now.

"Buddy Bolden always had his cornet with him, would pull it out in a bar-room and play, him and his derby, when he'd get drunk <sup>like...</sup> Buddy was the loudest cornet player we ever had in the city of New Orleans-- <sup>down</sup> come to playing sweet <sup>and</sup> waltzes, there was nobody in the country--

He played something on the order of Wayne King. He was one of the sweetest trumpet players on waltzes and things like that, and <sup>Buddy Bolden</sup> the old slow blues-- <sup>And</sup> could make the women jump out of the window." On those "old slow, low-down blues, he had a moan in his cornet that went all through you, just <sup>like</sup> like you were in church or something."

"Everybody was crazy about Buddy Bolden when he'd blow a waltz, a schottische, <sup>And</sup> and them old low-down blues. <sup>And</sup> he was the sweetest trumpet player in the world.

*in Jackson.*

The poor boy went crazy. He died<sup>^</sup> about eight years ago<sup>^</sup> [Check date. 1931?]  
He'd tell his boys [in the band] to get low, they'd get low and he takes  
it. Women would be jumping out the windows, jumping around, hollering  
"Buddy Bolden, Buddy Bolden." There's no cornet player yet that had a tone  
that Buddy Bolden had when he'd play slow... Louis Armstrong, Joe Oliver,  
none of them--Louis is the only one living<sup>^</sup> none of them had a tone like  
Buddy Bolden.<sup>^</sup> He found those<sup>^</sup> things to put in a blues, like old levee camps,<sup>^</sup>  
and like that, make<sup>^</sup> a spiritual feeling go through you. He had a cup, a specially  
made cup, that made that cornet moan like a Baptist preacher. "He could play  
just as sweet as he could play loud." The cup was an ordinary cup, like a  
tin can, like a little dinner cup or dinner bucket. All the trumpet players  
started carrying them since Buddy Bolden. Buddy carried his mute, his cup,  
and his derby. All of them started carrying them like him. [This amount of  
detail makes me doubt his statements about his age. RBA.]

Bunk Johnson never was a rough cornet player; he was a sweet player  
*[i.e. reader].*  
musical<sup>^</sup> "He could play as much cornet as he used to drink." Bunk was a nice,  
easy-going fellow. Bunk could play sweet. All of them tried to imitate  
Buddy Bolden. "That's where Bunk got that style, following Buddy Bolden with  
his sweetness." Bunk had a sweet, lovely tone. He never was rough, never  
could play loud and rough like Buddy Bolden. When Bunk left and went back  
home,<sup>he</sup> joined that band out there in New Iberia, Louisiana, people forgot  
about him,<sup>^</sup> until Mr. Bill Russell picked him up<sup>^</sup> and<sup>^</sup> brought him back in the  
light again.<sup>^</sup> He put him on the top shelf. Bunk came back down home again.  
When BM saw Bunk again, he was in New Iberia, sick.

Reel III [of 3]--Digest--Retyped  
March 10, 1959

WR asks about how Remus Matthews, BM's brother, got started. BM doesn't remember. When he got old enough to remember, Remus was playing at penny parties "and things." BM gets off onto another brother, Bebé. Bebé started playing with Old Man Lindsay, who had a string orchestra in his own family. Old Man Lindsay played violin; Johnny Lindsay, bass; and Herbert Lindsay, violin. Then they added on: Bebé on drums; Dude Gabriel on clarinet.

Remus Matthews never worried about trap drums; he played bass drum or snare drum, whichever you put him on, in the street.

The first time BM saw Bebé play trap drum was with Old Man Lindsay's group at a penny party. Both Herbert and Johnny Lindsay are dead now; <sup>they</sup> died in Chicago.

When BM was big enough to go around, Bebé would have him go with him to help bring his drums. The first time he accompanied his brother this way, they took the Third District Ferry <sup>and</sup> went to Economy Hall, where BM stayed all night. "They" made BM play some there with Manuel Perez. Buddy Johnson and "all of them" were from Algiers; <sup>Jimmy Palao of Algiers</sup> was leading the band. This was before Peter [Bocage] was leading--Pete used to lead the Superior Band too, but Jimmy was before Pete. "Jimmy used to play alto--toot toot horn--in the brass band, and violin in the orchestra." All musicians doubled on instruments then. They all tried to learn something.

All the Matthews children were born and raised at 719 Newton Street, Algiers. None were born in the Charity Hospital; all were born at home. They had what they called "Grannies" [midwives?].

BM lived with his first wife six years. They separated. "That" [marriage or separation?] "was after we come back from off my tour, when I joined Pop" [Papa Celestin?].

In about 1922 or 1923 he went to hire George Williams, the drummer. Pop had so much work, he asked BM to help him line up a band to go to Patio Royal on a Mardi Gras day. [Check date of start of Patio Royal.] BM knew George was pretty good, thought he could get a bunch together. They used to call George "Big <sup>Huck</sup>". When BM went to get George, he saw a girl sweeping off a porch, asked her, "Lady, can you tell me where George lives at?" She said, "Yes, sir, right down there. I'll go get him for you." This was the way he met his wife, to whom he is still married.

BM has known George for a long time. <sup>He</sup> has also known Black Happy [Goldston] all his life. Happy used to have a coal route over the river, go around selling coal. When Happy got sick, BM's first thought was to give George a break.

The last job BM played on drums here in New Orleans was out at Tranchina's restaurant. He told [A. J.] Piron, <sup>that</sup> he was going away, <sup>that</sup> he was going to take a trip and that he had a chance to develop on his trombone. Peter Bocage was out there with them. Bocage was playing trombone with them out there, too. They all used to go home together every night--sometimes they would meet [Manuel] "Fess" Manetta, sometimes Charlie Love, but Pete and BM went home together regularly every night, on the old West End [Street] car. Pete told him he was doing pretty well around here. He told Pete Amos White wanted him to go with him; while BM was single he wanted to make a trip to see what it was all about so he could develop on his horn. This was the last he remembers playing trap drum here in town.

He did play drums in Kansas City, Missouri, after that. Frank Paisley got a [riff?] to play on the outskirts of town. His drummer was sick, or somebody in the family was ill or dead or something. He didn't want Amos White--had already hired Herbert Morand, who was on the trip too. Paisley was a banjo player, used to play with the Honey Drippers. WR remembers hearing him play one date with Bunk [Johnson] once in San Francisco. He is on some records with Wade Whaley [WR: check label and release number. Ory World (Decca) Transcriptions by Bunk's Band. Made in Los Angeles] Frank liked Herbert Morand's playing better than he did White's--Herbert was more jazzy. They (Nat Towles's band. BM went out there with) had two trumpets; they had a big band traveling. Frank didn't want Thomas Taylor, a little drummer who lives in Chicago now. He wanted BM to come on play drum<sup>and</sup> make that money since the boy was liable to be out two or three nights. So BM went out to the nightclub and played. They wanted him to stay around, but he was waiting for a call from St. Louis from Charlie Creath. He worked out ~~there~~ three nights, took that money, and told his boys he was going over with Charlie Creath. They were living at 2727 Garfield [in Kansas City?].

WR asks if BM ever played with Wade Whaley, the clarinetist. Fess and WR tried to find Wade Whaley when they were in California, but couldn't. Nobody knew where he was. Ory nor anybody else.

BM thought Wade had died. BM sure would like to see Wade again. They used to play in the district together, with Piron, at the Casino. They had four of them, Wade, Piron, BM, and "Black Pete," [piano]. BM never knew Black Pete's real name. Little Black Pete talked in a high voice, which BM imitates.

BM worked with Jimmie Noone when they worked for Manuel Perez. Jimmie was a nice boy, a homely [i.e., see dictionary] fellow. "You'd never catch him bumming after--you know." BM's brother Bebe was playing there with them too, before they closed down. Jimmie was a first class reader. BM says Jimmie came from around Ironton, same as Jelly Roll [Morton]. They called him Jimbo. BM visited Jimmie when he was in Chicago, playing with three pieces at the Nest [Later the Apex].

BM knew Zue Robertson<sup>and</sup> used to play with him in the Excelsior Brass Band and the Onward Brass Band. Zue Robertson, Honore Dutrey, Roy Palmer, Vic Gaspard, [George] Fihle<sup>and</sup>, Old Man Batiste [Delisle]--all of them were top musicians. Eddie Atkins, and all those fellows--they never [scats to demonstrate popping]. But Ory, Yank Johnson, Buddy Johnson--he was a popper. Frankie Duson was a popper, just like Jim [Robinson] and them. The best ones use the trombone as a slide." Honore Dutrey wanted "the cello part" when they pulled out orchestrations. [Scats to demonstrate.] Zue Robertson would cross his legs and do more stuff on a horn than a man can make on a saxophone. Roy Palmer was in between them. He was a good musician on baritone and trombone. He played at the Villa all the time. Old Dude [Frank Amacker] used to play around all the time. They played there with Fess [Manetta]. Fess had charge of the band.

BM played with Fess. He went to Fess when he took his first lesson, when he was learning how to read [music]. Fess was living on [Alix?] Street in Algiers. Fess told him to get "a little ten cents catechism" [i.e., *hard-*book]. Fess told him later he had improved mighty quick on that horn. BM told Fess it began from that catechism he started him on.

Steve Lewis was learning to play the trombone. He didn't make it, but he bought a brand new horn. Eddie Pierson came to BM's house, said he wanted to learn to play a trombone like BM. This was when BM and his present wife were first married. Eddie was a grown man, seven or eight years younger than BM, but they all had come up together. BM said he'd teach him what he knew. Eddie was driving a truck for a cigar factory then. Eddie had bought Steve Lewis's horn. BM suggested that Eddie go to Vic [Gaspard] or to Fess for lessons. Eddie wanted something for nothing. BM was the first man to teach Eddie where the B flat was on the horn. Eddie took lessons from BM about a year and eight months. BM had to go over the lake every summer, but when he would come back, Eddie would be waiting. BM told him what to do <sup>and</sup> what books to use. <sup>The</sup> next time Eddie went to Fess, Fess said Eddie had really improved on that horn <sup>and</sup> that he couldn't do anything for him. So Eddie was gone. Eddie told many people that BM taught him. BM also taught Little [Louis] Barbarin how to read drum music, and also <sup>George</sup> Williams and Happy.

When they had the big band they had Cecil Thornton, a great arranger from St. Louis. He came down and joined the Celestin Band. Thornton is the one who put Ricard [Alexis] out of the band. Thornton used to work on the Capitol. He got him a wife down here so he stayed here and started arragnnging for Papa Celestin. He's the one who put so much stuff on Ricard on trumpet. Thornton went back to St. Louis and is in the mail service now.

BM has a big picture of Zutty Singleton, inscribed: "Old pal, Bill, I'll never forget what you did for me." BM gave Zutty his set of drums to learn on, when BM went away. BM was teaching him, told him to take the drums,

and if he got a break, they were his. Zutty started playing them around here while BM was away. BM has never seen Zutty since he [BM] left Chicago. Zutty had a wonderful set of drums.

BM says he was the first one to give Red Allen a break. They called Red "Biffly" because of the way he talked; he couldn't talk plain. All the boys over in Algiers where he was raised called him Biffly. WR says Red made a record called "Biffly Blues." [Victor about 23000 or 24000 plus]. Sidney Desvignes used to play in Old Man Allen's brass band. So did BM. He was playing snare drum while his brother Remus played bass drum. Allen's brother, George Allen, was the snare drum player. George Allen got too old, went back home to Morgan City, and died. Remus played extra in other bands [i.e., as a substitute]. Harrison Barnes, who lived right across the street from Bill, would ask Bill to play trombone <sup>and</sup> get his brother on drums on occasion. It might be a funeral, and Harrison might not be able to get off. They would have three, four, or five funerals a week like that. Harrison would be playing with his orchestra. BM was working every night out at the lake with Piron; he would play in the brass band for these day jobs. Remus Matthews did not play in dance bands, except that sometimes at the Fairgrounds they would have two bands, a brass band and an orchestra.

BM's brother Bebé was one of the head snare drum players in the Onward Brass Band. [Means what? RBA] He also played in the Superior Orchestra. WR asks if that was Imperial or Superior. BM now says Imperial. All the bands in those days had names; <sup>they</sup> did not go by a man's name the way they do now. Sam Morgan was the trumpeter in the Magnolia Band. Buddy Petit and John Robichaux were the only ones who had a band under their own names. After Buddy, they all started that. [William] "Bebé" Ridgley made up his band

out at Jack Sheehan's [Check spelling]. They called it Ridgley's Band, but before that Ridgley always was manager. He had Piron on violin, Lorenzo Tio [Jr.] on clarinet, Ridgley on trombone, Celestin on cornet, probably George [Pops] Foster on bass, Ernest Trepagnier on snare drum, and somebody other than Freddie Washington on piano. Freddie Washington was primarily a solo pianist. This was when "the wolf began riding the red lights "; they began closing down. Ridgley's band played the Tuxedo Dance Hall, took their name from that, <sup>and</sup> called it the Tuxedo Band. Then Piron pulled out and made up Piron's band. Then they [the Ridgley band] took Peter Bocage to lead. This went on until Ridgley and Celestin fell out over one dollar.

Freddie Keppard, Big Eye Louis Nelson [Delisle], Eddie Garland, and Eddie [Vinson] from Algiers on trombone were the first Dixieland band that left here. <sup>[Original Dixieland Band]</sup> They went with Sophie Tucker [Probably Trixie Fernanda. WR. (probably Friganza. RBA).] on the Orpheum Circuit. That was years ago.

Freddie Keppard played a style a lot like Buddy Bolden's, but he was more of a musician than Bolden. He could play more late numbers. In those days you could take five or six numbers and play them all night. But Freddie and them were musicians; they had music classes then. Anything you asked them for, they would play.

End of Reel III