

EDDIE SUMMERS
I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped
September 16, 1960

Also present: William Russell
Ralph Collins

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[Recorded at Summers's home, 1429 St. Peter Street]

Eddie Milton Summers was born September 15, 1903, in Port Allen, Louisiana, which is just across the [Mississippi] river from Baton Rouge. ES's father played string bass with Claiborne Williams's band. (Ralph Collins wishes ES a belated Happy Birthday; ES says [George] "Kid Sheik" [Colar] has the same birthday; RC mentions that ES and Sheik and "Noon" Johnson have had birthday parties at Bruce's in the past; ES says Noon's birthday is in September, but not on the 15th.) ES's father, who died in 1956 at the age of eighty, was from Moreau [spelling?], Louisiana (near Natchez [Mississippi]). The father, Allen Leon Summers, played with [probably until years mentioned, as he says later] Williams in about 1916-17; he also played around with other bands.

ES says there were no brass bands [other than Williams's?] around his home like the bands from New Orleans. WR mentions that the Eureka Brass Band made a trip to Baton Rouge a couple of years ago. ES says he went on excursions with Kid Rena to New Roads [Louisiana].

The first band ES played with was that of Kid Sheik, in 1925 [he later says 1926]. ES's first instrument was the string bass, his father's, which his father showed him how to play; he began playing it when about fourteen years old, but never played any jobs on it. He began studying trombone in 1925, with Vic Gaspard, (one of the best, as was "Sunny" [Henry]). Gaspard taught ES from the White Excelsior method. ES also had some lessons from Sunny Henry; he mentions Yank Johnson, Buddy Johnson and Harrison Barnes [all trombonists--does he mean he took lessons from all, or that they were the other good trombonists?]. ES played "extra" [i.e., as replacement

sometimes] in the Eureka Brass Band, sometimes replacing Henry and sometimes replacing Albert [Warner]. ES came to New Orleans in 1910. He heard Gaspard when he was playing with John Robichaux at the Lyric Theater. [When? RBA.] Gaspard had a smooth style. Gaspard played slide trombone, valve trombone, baritone horn and bass horn. When he began teaching ES, he had been playing trombone twenty-two years, since about 1903.

The Claiborne Williams orchestra, one of the greatest bands in the South, had about fourteen pieces (including violins--Williams himself played violin) when ES heard it; it was almost strictly a reading band. Williams's son, George Williams played trumpet [check this] and his daughter, Mary Williams, played piano; both, however, played after the career of the father had ended. (WR asks about a Williams who played trombone with W. C. Handy, according to Roy Palmer, but ES does not know of him; ES mentions trombonist Sam Williams, who played with John Handy, Kid Howard, Kid Clayton). [See Roy Palmer, reel ? and Brian Rust, Jazz Records, 1897 to 1931]. The only members of the old Claiborne Williams band ES can recall, other than his father and Williams, is Maurice [spelling?] LeBlanc, saxophone player; if any of the men in that band were living today, they would be about ninety years old. ES's father had learned bass by the time he came to Port Allen, when he was about eighteen years old. The father played with Williams's even after he moved to New Orleans, traveling to Donaldsonville [William's home) and other places in Louisiana.

ES took up trombone because he liked it; he studied with Vic Gaspard, then with Sunny Henry (who had known him since he was a child), then back to Gaspard. Gaspard used a Holton trombone; ES uses a C. G. Conn. ES tells of Gaspard's lessons in embouchure--"hold your mouth like you was sucking

peas out of a jug", says ES. Cheeks should not be puffed out. (WR speaks of Bunk Johnson's telling Jim Robinson he should go to Vic Gaspard for lessons.) Gaspard and Henry were the best trombonists and teachers in New Orleans; Gaspard was better in an orchestra, and both were "tough" in the street [i.e., with brass bands]; they sometimes worked together. Gaspard worked only with Robichaux extra; Henry worked with Willie Pajaud, and also with the Tuxedo Band, led by [Papa] Celestin; both worked with various brass bands, including the Excelsior, the Tuxedo and the Onward. Gaspard could fake, as well as read. Gaspard was a dark brown man, about the size of John Handy [five feet, six inches?]; he lived on Allen Street, where he owned a lot of property (he was about the most well-off musician in the city, [Alphonse] Picou being the next most prosperous). (Picou played at the Lyric with them [Robichaux?] a long time, being replaced by "Big Eye" Louis Nelson (recorded by WR); Big Eye Louis carried his clarinet everywhere he went). Discussion of Gaspard's lessons, holding the trombone, vibrato (wrist), etc. Bill Matthews was a student of Gaspard, as was Jack Teagarden; Teagarden and Summers took lessons together. [Compare Jack Teagarden, reel?]. Teagarden was playing at the Palace Theater then. (ES later met Teagarden in California; although ES didn't recognize Teagarden, but Teagarden remembered ES). Gaspard was a fine musician and a fine man, although he was strict about lessons. ES tells of Gaspard's trick of writing wrong notes in solos [songs], to keep the student reading his music, rather than faking the [perhaps familiar] melody; if the student played the wrong notes as written, Gaspard would then have him play them as he thought they should be. Gaspard had a piano, on which he could play chords and arrange; he also played bass fiddle. His brother, Octave "Oke" Gaspard, was a bassist. Vic Gaspard would be about eighty-six years old if he were still alive; he died in September, three [or four?] years ago. ES had just a few lessons from Sunny Henry; he was also studying with

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Gaspard at the time, remaining with him about two years. Other trombone players ES liked, and who helped him, were Harrison Brazley and Albert Boots" Young (actually, Austin Young) (brother of William "Sport" Young)-- WR mentions that Boots Young played string bass on some recordings with Wooden Joe Nicholas, made for WR; Young had lost his teeth then, but he could still play trombone. [Jim Robinson's name is not James. RBA]

End of Reel I

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Albert (i.e., Austin) "Boots" Young recorded on string bass with Bunk [Johnson] in 1942, for WR, and later with Wooden Joe [Nicholas], and with [Albert] Burbank and Herb Morand in 1945, and later in 1949. Young's brother, William "Sport" Young, was a saxophone player. [Not to mention his cousin Lester.]

Morris French's [real name, Maurice French] (now living around Laplace) was another trombonist ES liked, although he was more of a faker than a reader; French played mostly with Kid Rena. French was not the kind of trombonist Sunny Henry and Vic Gaspard were (they were more polished, and were very good readers). ES heard Kid Ory; says he played in a band with Louis Armstrong before Armstrong went to Chicago. WR mentions that Ory left before Armstrong, and that Ory played with Joe "King" Oliver [in New Orleans]. ES heard Oliver in New Orleans. Also Red Allen, [A. J.] Piron, [Louis] "Shots" [Madison], George McCullum, Arnold Metoyer.

The first band ES played with was that of George "Kid Sheik" Colar, in 1926. Then he joined Albert Jiles and Lawrence Toca [Martin] in 1927. The first job with Kid Sheik was at Rockford Lewis Hall [? and spelling?] which is in the Ninth Ward, across the [Industrial] Canal; ES amends his statement, saying the band had played plenty of house parties prior, but the R. L. Hall job was the first public job they played. Remaining with Sheik about a year, ES then joined Lawrence Toca [and Jiles?]; leaving that group, he went with trumpet player "Mealy" Hopkins, who no longer plays, being a deacon in a church (Hopkins lives right around the corner from ES). ES played a few jobs with Chris Kelly, and a few with Sam Morgan. The jobs with Toca were

mostly lawn parties, but two of the halls where they played were Cooperators Hall (now a church, on Treme Street) and Young Men's Liberty Hall (which is on Derbigny Street between Annette and St. Anthony). During one period, ES replaced Maurice French with Kid Rena's band, playing every Wednesday night at Italian Hall (on Esplanade Avenue); others in the band: [Eddie] "Ti' Boy" [Gilmore], bass; "Gossoon" [Phillips, spelling?] banjo; George Lewis, clarinet; Hickman, saxophone; Joe Rene [sic], Kid Rena's brother, drums. ES next went to the Johnson Serenaders, being replaced in Rena's band by Harrison Brazley. The Serenaders, a downtown group, played in St. Bernard [Parish] a lot; Jules Hill was [leader or?] another member. ES replaced Eddie Morris with the Serenaders; Morris joined Earl Vinette [Spelling?] in St. Rose. There was more money to be made playing with smaller bands. ES also played a few jobs with "Mealy" Barnes.

Harrison Brazley was a good trombone player, "full of harmony." "Boots" Young was another who was full of harmony. Brazley and Young played as ES was taught by Vic Gaspard, to play so that the other instruments could be heard rather than play as though there were only the one instrument in the band. ES talks about the two trombones in a brass band, saying that each has his own part to play; he liked to play with Sunny Henry and with Albert Warner, because they played their parts, did not steal his and did not try to show off, as some of the others do.

Speaking of playing the lead in a band: if there is a violin, he plays the lead; if not, the trumpet plays lead. Trumpet plays a modified lead if there is also a violin. ES says the solo part plays strictly lead

[i.e., melody], but the lead part plays lead and can "make all kinds of junk [i.e., variations] in there."

The best brass band ES has ever played with is the Eureka, with which he has played as an extra [replacing one of the regular members]; the other bands he has played with have been "make-up" bands, such as those gotten up by Harold Dejan, for example, or Kid Howard. The Eureka is the best; it "plays all that stiff stuff."

ES tells of a forthcoming job he will play on the [Steamer] President, which will take them to Avondale to play for the launching and christening of a new ship. This job and previous ones of the same nature have been ES's, as he is in touch (at the New Orleans Athletic Club) with someone connected with that [the shipyard]. WR and RC saw the President, with the band on it, leaving for one such job; ES says Walter [Eysselink] went with them. ES also gets jobs at the New Orleans Athletic Club, where he has been working [as a masseur?] since 1924, having been away only three years, when he was in the Navy. ES achieved the rating of Musician First Class in the Navy. ES points out a photograph of himself [in a Navy band?RBA]. He was stationed in Los Angeles, and in McAlester, Oklahoma. ES was at Great Lakes [Training Station, Illinois] with Harold Dejan, who was sent to another band; also at Great Lakes were Cie Frazier, Gilbert Young and Henry Russ (bass player, ex-trumpet), who were sent to Algiers [New Orleans]. ES, Herbert Leary's brother Jimmy Leary, and Louis Nelson's brother George Nelson were sent together to Los Angeles.

When ES worked a few jobs with Chris Kelly, others in the band were: Roy [Evans? PRC], drums; Angle Steve [i.e., Angrum], clarinet; "Fan" [Bourgeau], banjo; Johnny Prudence, bass. ES was extra [substituted] for Eddie Morris. Comparing the styles of Kid Rena and Chris Kelly; Rena was

more classical, [more like a popular music trumpet-player?RBA. Compare The Baby Dodds Story on Celestin's band] Kelly was more "bluesified." ES says Kid Howard played drums with Kelly at one time.

ES has played with Kid Sheik off and on for thirty-five years; they hire each other for the jobs on which either is leader.

ES mostly plays music "for kicks" relying on his day jobs for a living.

ES says the trombone is the best instrument for a band, better than any other [blowing] instrument. A trombone is "something like a mockingbird; a trombone represents] all instruments, all blowing instruments." ES tells of playing with a seven-piece band, and of how they would get all seven on a six-piece job; they would send drums, trumpet, saxophone, guitar, piano and bass, leaving the trombone off the job. The trombonist would appear at the job, sit in and make the band so much better that he would be paid to stay. A banjoist, saxophonist or bassist, for example, could not succeed with such a scheme.

ES played jobs with Sidney Desvigne and a couple with [Papa] Celestin, not as a regular member, but just extra; he also played job[s?] with Paul Barbarin, and other bands.

When ES began working with Sheik, Sheik was "going on" eighteen years old; ES was going on twenty-three.

End of Reel II