

Reel I [of 4]

December 15, 1967 Also present: Jusady Pushker, Martin Sher (students at LSUNO working on papers), Richard B. Allen.

Jessie Charles has notes on his life. He was born June 25, 1900, in Raceland, Louisiana. His first job was with his brother, Kid Sidney's Band. "[Brother] Cornbread" [Jos. Thomas], played with Kid Sidney. The brothers came to New Orleans after they were grown. They played house parties, lawn parties, dance halls, etc. Jessie Charles' first big break was with Jack Carey's band. He was paid \$15.00 for a Carnival Day job, at Eighth and Franklin, in 1926. He left New Orleans in 1928 and went to Monroe, La., to play a Labor Day dance. He returned in 1939. Then it was big band days. (Machine off, phone rings.) JC worked some with Kid Howard's big band, and Papa Celestin's band. He played many "Dixieland" jobs with Papa Celestin. In 1941 JC went to Jackson, Mississippi on an "every Night" job. He went back to New Orleans in 1945. In 1947 or '48 he joined Kid Thomas; [then?] he went to Luthjen's "Old Folks' Home". [Cf. RBA notes.] [Narvin] Kimball [sp?], and Kid Punch [Miller] played there.

His brother Sidney Charles quit music during the Depression. Two other brothers tried to play music, but didn't make it. Sidney was around three years older than JC, and he played trumpet. Kid Punch [Miller] had a brass band in Raceland. PM is from Raceland. PM went to World War I. JC was then 18, and was almost drafted. JC had a wife and two children

when he was in Jackson, Mississippi during World War II.

In 1923 JC began to play with SC. They went to New Roads on excursions. They also played excursions in Southern Mississippi; they went to a dance hall. In Kid Sidney's band were SC, tp; Ernest Roubleau, bj; [Edmond] "Son White" [Washington], JC, cl; [Ananais Brooks, 3322 Loyola St., from RBA's notebook], tb. JC had no teacher on clarinet, which was his first instrument. Punch Miller showed JC how to put his cl together. He loved the cl. He heard it on a truck. Georgie Boyd was playing cl with @ PM. PM had quit Jack Carey. JC tried to get Georgie Boyd to teach him, but GB did not teach JC because he drank. JC liked GB's playing. He also liked Zeb [Leneres], who was with [Kid] Rena's band, Around 1921, 1922, JC moved to New Orleans. JC didn't begin to play until he was in the city. He heard PM in "Dixieland" band and brass bands in the country. JC didn't know Lonnie Johnson. He thinks PM doesn't get enough recognition in New Orleans. PM "made his foundation here." JC heard PM's records in Monroe when he first arrived (1928). He heard Frankie Franko "Somebody Stole My Gal." (F.F.'s name from RBA.)

JC heard brass bands when he first came to New Orleans, but he was more interested in "Dixieland." Perhaps brass bands were bigger. [There, brass bands would not be hot in style?] He saw Papa Celestin's brass band

but didn't second line. He played clubs every Sunday, advertised dances with jazz bands on trucks. At these parades girls were costumed in short skirts like miniskirts. [Cf. Chester Jones band photo in Ralston Crawford collection.] Later JC played brass band jobs with George Williams Brass Band and John Casimir's [Young Tuxedo Brass Band]. "I walked just about all over this town with bands, parades, yeah, funerals and things...". JC didn't play with brass bands until he returned from Monroe around 1945 or 46.

Clubs that hired trucks were the Jolly Boys, the Baby Dolls, the Million Dollar Dolls, almost every club that gave a dance. Cars followed the trucks. They would have a ball. The Economy Hall, the Co-operators's Hall, were in bloom. There were also bands at the Lake, [especially?] in summer. [They?] would swim and dance, e.g., at West End. [They?] caught the O. K. [street?] car to West End. It had two coaches and came to Rampart and Canal streets. JC also went to Milneburg, Spanish Fort, playing dances. [They?] played there in the summer during the week. People flocked out there because there were not as many places to go as now. They had live bands, no juke box or record player there.

JC played house parties with his brother's band of six pieces. They also played lawn parties every Monday night. People danced on the ground

years [see notes]. Harold Dejan, [the leader of] the Olympia band, hustles for jobs. RBA says that HD gets more jobs than anyone else.

JC worked a few jobs with the Olympia. HD worked with JC also . JC

decided to quit brass band work. When HD sees JC, he mentions rejoining the Olympia. HD took a lot of work from the Eureka. Parades which use bands are usually church parades, club parades. The church parades go from church to church, then from church to an auditorium.

They talk about ^{the} church association. Perhaps people from different parts of the country may meet at church.

End of Reel I.

December 15, 1967 Also present: Judy Pushker, Martin Sher, Richard B. Allen

Jessie Charles is the correct spelling of his name.

The big Zulu parade is on Carnival Day. They also have a parade [or parades?] in the summer. They have floats like ^{those} for the Rex parade, but not so many, and they have a route. [Obviously comparing Zulu vs. Rex.] The Zulus give away cocoanuts.

The Indians parade up and down the streets but don't have real parades. [See Indians folder.] The groups meet, have expensive costumes, but no band. They sing and pat their hands [and beat tambourines.]. They used to fight if the chief of one tribe would not bow to the other [e.g., uptown and downtown chiefs]. They used knives and spears to fight.

There has always been dissent between uptown and downtown sections of New Orleans. Years ago one could not court a girl from uptown, it is said.

JC never went to Pete Lala's or Big 25's when he was with his brother Sidney. JC played uptown mostly, but also played downtown. JC played parties at the lake, in dance halls, and on excursions. JC remembers the District, but it was before his time. [Cf. other interviews.]

Buddy Petit, Kid Rena, Sam Morgan and Chris Kelly had big regional names. Punch Miller was later [c. 1919]. [Cf. PM interviews.] JC never saw these fellows in the District. He saw Willie Humphrey at Lyric

Cabaret (underneath the Lyric theater). PM took JC around and introduced him as his clarinetist, though JC wasn't playing. JC played tenor sax in brass bands, and later played clarinet in Dixieland bands. [Cf. JC folder.] He also played some cl jobs in brass bands. (with Abbie Williams and others).

They talk about Kid Sheik [Colar] "send off" [cf. notes and photos.].
A send off is usually a donation, ^{i.e.,} the musicians play for free. They play free funerals for union members , e.g., [Louis] James, George Williams, John Casimir. Usually they get paid for funerals. The friends of the deceased may get money from the neighbors to hire a band for a funeral. JC never saw, but has heard of, the custom of putting a saucer on a body's chest (for donations to cover funeral expenses). This must have been years ago. Sometimes friends pick up money door to door or in barromms to meet the bands price. One man, e.g., a bar owner, may pay the lacking money to meet the price. [e.g., Gray Eye of the Cadonia Inn-RBA, Jan. 27, 1971]. "Second line, that's the life of the parade. and a funeral". The second line is followers, not members [of organizations]. The second line can be rough , "kill up somebody." JC thinks the Second line will do anything for a kick.

JC has never been around dope users. RBA mentions funerals in the Tremé section. Ruth (of Ruth's Cozy Corner) is "a big time broad" and has a club. JC, playing with Abbie Williams brass band, played her first parade, around three years ago. JC defines "door popper" as equal to a gossip. Then mention Caldonia Club [i.e., Caldonia Inn]. "Door poppers" exaggerate. Brass bands never play for weddings, mostly for street functions or games out of doors. [Cf. Young Tuxedo folder.] The Bureka band played for a benefit for the Halfway House "a couple of Sundays ago" [see files]. Paul Barnes played Eb clarinet outside, Willie Humphrey played inside. There were few people at the concert inside. Many were outside. Ex-prisoners are helped by the show because their art works were shown.

Cornerstone layings are usually for Baptist churches, on Sunday. The name of the pastor of the church, etc., are engraved on the stone. Church congregations march to one church. The trumpet blows taps as the stone is laid. The beat is not the same in Baptist churches as in the second line. Dancing in "sanctified" churches is like the second line. The Baptists do a "shout". JC is ^Methodist. He doesn't like the Baptist "shouting". It's like a perform [ance]. JC likes a sermon. Baptists sing, and clap their hands. Methodist preachers lecture instead of holler.

They talk of the Catholics. Methodists clap and stomp their feet on some numbers. They have choirs and teachers. The younger Baptist preachers don't holler. They are more educated.

JC usually played by head. "Just play the way you feel." There is written music for Dixieland, but it can't get the feeling. [I.e., notation of music.] Papa Celestin had [notation of] music for Dixieland for his big band. JC rehearsed several times with PC. He played in PC's big Dixieland bands as an extra man [i.e., substitute] and also with Albert French when he took over [PC's band]. JC can read also. He had to read during the big band days. Most colored brass bands now don't read. High school band read. They play Dixieland numbers in style. Younger musicians are being broken in in the style and "Dixieland" bands. Once oldsters didn't want to give youngsters a break. But they must do so. Theodore Riley is the youngest union colored trumpeter who can cut all the hard "Dixieland" numbers. RBA mentions youngsters in non-union brass bands. TR is now with Fats Domino. Jack Willis is also good. JW is probably older than TR.

JC may return to playing music. RBA comments on lack of clarinetists, and the fact that there are many saxists.. He says that 3 or 4 clarinetists are used at Preservation Hall, and 2 or 3 at Dixieland Hall.

George Lewis is in poor health, but still travels. He always gets sick.

JC didn't know Louis Armstrong in [LA's N.O.] early years. He heard LA with Joe Oliver [on records?] and with his own band on records. They mention Lil [Hardin Armstrong] and Johnny Dodds.

End of Reel II.

Henry ["Red"] Allen [Jr.] is from the other side [of the river].

Baptist churches mostly ^{have} cornerstone ^{layings.} The church members lay the stone, and other churches are invited to come. RBA suggests that the [i.e., the fraternal] organization, Masons, lay stones, & JC agrees.

JC says that Catholics may have a musical funeral, e.g., Louis James. They discuss this funeral. Louis James' priest agreed to have music. Isidore Barbarin was a Catholic who was buried with a ["hot" brass band]. JC never played a funeral for a Catholic or a woman.

Both are rare. Judy Pushker has read of there being a crown placed on the body of a woman who was buried with a band [in Gumbo Ya-Ya?]. RBA

mentions seeing the funeral of a woman. ^{1.20} Many societies and clubs include death benefits in their dues to hire a band.

or whoever pays the costs if no band is hired
JC imagines that the family would keep the money, [Cf. funeral

holder.] JC has never seen a band leave the Federal undertakers which is across the street from his ^{residence} of four years. Many funerals leave from this parlor. They may leave from other places; usually the band meets the body at the church.

RBA asks about Harold Dejan's Eureka #2, a brass band which became the Olympia, and HD and JC ⁻⁵ riffing. There is no teamwork in brass bands [of today?]

as there is no teamwork in Dixieland bands. HD and JC used to team up.

Also JC harmonized with [Ernest] Poree. [Herman]

Sherman won't team up. JC likes harmonizing. [Theodore] Riley and

Sam Alcorn compete and are noisy. They are progressive^[in style] They don't

work together; they try to outblow each other. TR can play with other

guys. Teamwork is like singing: it has first, second, third parts.

The Lannon sisters on tv are an example. The George Williams band of
ten men did not use music but sounded ^{as though they did.} They played for many
Poree, as, JC, ts,

carnival balls

the Knott bros., Edward, ts, and Duncan, baritone, were the reed section.

Albert Walters, tp; Show Boy [Thomas], tb, Ernie Cagnolatti, tp, and

others, GW, [d] ^{that is,} [not George Williams' brass band but his dance band.]

[Cf. photos in Ralston Crawford collection.]

(2:3) JC explains a riff^{which is} used as a background for a soloist. It ^{supplie} [^]

a beat in harmony which gives a push to the soloist. JC can't sing.

Vocalists can riff like horns; JC thinks the Mills Bros. started this

(2:6) The biggest funeral that JC played was Old Man [Henry] Allen's [Sr.].

He thinks it had^{about} four bands. There was a big second line, but not as big

as on the eastside. The second line increases as the parade moves along.

If several bands are present, the bands play in rotation and second liners

follow different bands as they prefer. Sometimes both bands play at once.

[Two bands are rarely hired for funerals?] JC thinks this is wrong:

There should be music at all times. The bands should alternate. JC

complained, but it did no good.

is "about... this was at

3:22 The largest number of bands at one function ^{four}, ^{Allen's funeral}

Papa Celestin had three: Young Tuxedo, Eureka, Geo Williams [cf. photos

^{PC} and folder.]. [Alphonse] Picou had two bands, according to RBA. JC was

not there. John Casimir had only one. [Wilbert] Tillman's funeral is

mentioned ~~which had Harold [Dejan's Olympia Brass Band]. [!!!RBA]~~

in size

34 The Jolly [Bunch] is the biggest parade. Next is the Young Men's Olympians.

RBA comments on the lack of parades downtown, e.g., 7th Ward. JP

mentions that the Jolly Bunch paraded at a Saints football game. JC

comments on their cutting up and says they get well paid. RBA talks

about the Shriners' parade on Saturday [see file]. The new members were

unusual dress including ^{clothes.} wearing ^{long underwear and women's} Sheik Colar is a Mason, so is

Harold [Dejan], Andy Jefferson, Noon [Johnson].

354 JC has never belonged to a pleasure club. RBA notes

that many bandleaders belong to clubs [to get work--RBA]. Geo Williams

belonged to many clubs. JC thinks that GW worked too hard. He had two

jobs, day and night, plus brass band jobs, and didn't get proper rest.

He played every night at the Paddock until around 2 a.m. Then he often cleaned a theater, aided by his grandson. He was in the hospital briefly and died.

(411) JC often played minstrel shows with Showboy around 1950. His first show job was in the summer of 1939 with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. It velled for/around four months and closed in September. They had a band of about pieces, which played in a tent holding more than 2000 people. They re-

hearsed for three weeks. It was not a real minstrel show, ^{i.e.,} with men only.

They had ten girls and three comedians. ⁽⁴²⁶⁾ JC thinks Wolcott still lives

in Port Gibson. His wife is dead. He sold out and retired. Then they

rehearsed in Memphis instead of Port Gibson, ^{after JC's first tour.} [Therefore it was c. '42, c. '44] ^{c. '42, c. '44}

or c. '44 that Wolcott sold out. ^{see end of paragraph also. No. See reel IV} Showboy and JC were with this show for

three or four seasons. The show made short jumps. They had a big bus, [i.e. the show people]

they and would room with people if there was no hotel. They advertised two

or three weeks in advance, and people would give their best room to

the show people. Advertising parades have stopped, but they had them in 1939 when they were

with Wolcott. They would parade every day at noon from the tent to the

heart of town. The girls wore costumes, and the band wore hot uniforms.

^{Because of this JC quit.} which JC didn't like. In a couple of years they cut out the parades. JC returned. [see above on rejoining].

JESSIE CHARLES
Reel IV [of 4]
December 15, 1967

Also Present: Judy Pushker, Martin Shea, Richard B. Allen

They talk on parades ~~and~~ advertising. JC played one season's parades. He didn't return ^{because} ~~on account~~ of parades. When he went back a few years later, the parades were eliminated. A minstrel show rehearsed until it was perfect, and then went on the road. They used the same show every night. The minstrel show had parades too. They played mostly Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana (but not New Orleans), Arkansas, Texas, playing in many towns in each state. This was a 3 or 4 months tour [Cf. above reels]. Sometimes there was seating room only in the tent for two thousand people. People awaited the show each year. JC describes production & assembly of shows. They had ~~kvans~~ vans, light systems, [roustabouts?], stage, & costumes. They had [written] music for everything. They had their own arrangers, if necessary. JC and Show Boy [Thomas] were the only ones from New Orleans. The manager [advertised or read advertisements] in Billboard for performers, as there were many performers and shows then, e.g., the Rabbit Foot, the Georgia, the New Orleans minstrels. They also used theaters. Every year they left New Orleans in May to rehearse. JC enjoyed it. Shows didn't come to Raceland when JC lived there or to New Orleans. Frank Pania (manager of the Dew Drop Inn) came to probably Hattiesburg, Miss, to get a show to come to New Orleans, but it was too expensive. JC's nephew is Buddy Charles. BC, guitar, and Papa John

[Joseph, b], and a pianist started the Dew Drop Inn, i.e., were the first band there years ago.

JC only remembers that he recorded with ^Harold Dejan's Olympia around 1963 at Preservation Hall for Barry Martyn [see notes in ANOJ].

Brass bands are mostly for the street, and Dixieland bands are for the nightclubs and dances. They play some of the same songs. JC would say that "Dixieland" has a better beat. Instrumentation is different, i.e., the drums. More instruments are used in the street. Five or 6 pieces were used in "Dixieland", and 10 in the street. Brass bands had no piano. JC heard that [Fred Minor] played banjo in the street with Anderson Minor. He never heard a string bass in the street. // During JC's first year with the Rabbit Foot in 1939, they featured a banjoist in parades. They came to the heart of town at noon and made a "circle". They discuss Joe White on the [Rabbit Foot] show. He was terrible [i.e., good]. JW was featured in the street and coming down the aisle before the show. He had a name "out there." JW had a band in Jackson.

JC was with Doc Palmer [sp. in ANOJ files. Pamalu?] in Jackson in 1941. George Guesnon contacted JC for the job. JC was in and out of town. Joe White had a band then. JC stayed about three years on the same job. In 1943 he went to Gulfport. Alvin Woods, drums, was on the same job.

Jc was paid \$80.00 a week at the Embassy Club in Gulfport and Biloxi.

Leon Mumfrey had a job [cf. Leon Mumfrod's letters]. JC was there about two years, and came back to New Orleans in 1945. Then he was with Kid Thomas about three years. Then he was with Ernest Rogers at [Luthjen's] [cf. RBA's notes].. Then JC played with Doc Palmer's [sp?] band, ~~then~~ with his brother Lou Palmer [sp?], sous; Billy [?], drums; JC [sax]; and Sanders, piano, (4 or 5 pieces.)

JC didn't know Little Brother [Montgomery]. He had left Jackson. George Guesnon had worked with Palmer in Jackson before JC did. JC then lived in Girttown. ~~55~~ There were no parades in Jackson. JC worked at Bradley's night club [with a brass band]. It was a nice job. JC has seen funerals [with music] only in New Orleans, but has heard of them elsewhere. Parades with jazz are fun ~~and~~ are unique. JC has never even seen them on TV. JC describes fun dancing: "These people just music ~~is~~ crazy."

JC got small pay at first. When he played a Carnival job with Jack Carey, Mutt Carey was in town for Carnival . It was not an organized band. JC was paid \$15.00- his first big money! Some musicians now work every night and have no day job. Others work both. Some people need more money. JC has been lucky in music. He went to Monroe around 1928. He had

been working on the riverfront. That was his last day job.

Musicians made \$1.00 or 75¢ a night and tips during the depression. in New Orleans. In some places the tips were good. JC and Charlie Hamilton left in 1928 for Monroe to play a Labor Day picnic. Emile Thompson, tp, and I.C. Page, of New Orleans went to Monroe. Ed Robinson [Robertson?] drums, hired JC. There were no "Dixieland" musicians there; they had better pay, no competition, because there were few bands there. JC returned in 1939. ET was on the road a lot. He had bands himself.

A musician can belong to two brass bands at one time. The Olympia uses many Eureka men, e.g., Manuel Paul, drummers, and sometimes Chicken [Henry]. At the first Saints game, Manuel Paul had a job with the Olympia. The Eureka got a job, and caused a conflict. Sheik[Colar] works with the Olympia mostly. Olympia gets more work than the Eureka. JC doesn't think one should play with the leader who calls first. JC believes one should play with one's regular band, even if another leader calls first. Other musicians don't agree; they will take jobs with another band for more money. He explains getting substitutes. He believes one should send a good man as a sub. JC may check with his leader before accepting other jobs.

JC didn't take the trip to Atlanta & Birmingham with [Theodore] Riley,

tp; [W. Grant] Brown, bass. JC has not played much rock and roll. JC doesn't like it. ~~XX~~ At Magazine and Napoleon he worked with Nookie Boy, as a sub. He was regularly with Geo Williams. JC had played a little progressive [jazz]. Buddy and Don Conway were saxists from Monroe. Buddy Conway was good and was on the show during JC's last year. There were others from Monroe who were mus~~ic~~icians. [B C ?] was with Clkde Beatty circus which played across the [Mississip]pi river recently.

JC offers hos~~ti~~pitality. RBA accept~~s~~ a drink (whiskey and water).

End of Reel.

