

Allen: Just tell your name and where you were born and when?

Handy: My name is John Handy.

Allen: Uh-huh.

Handy: And I was born in Pass Christian, Mississippi, in 1900.

Allen: The exact date? The month of the year?

Handy: The twenty-fourth day of June. I made fifty-eight on the first day of June, '58. And I've been fooling around with music since I was around ten years old.

Allen: Were your family musical?

Handy: Everybody.

Allen: What about your father and mother and your grandfather and those that age?

Handy: Well, I don't know, I don't know my grandfather; he died before I was, you know, big enough to know him. And--but my daddy, he played violin; my mother was a pianist; my sister was a pianist; my brother's a guitarist, and I've got one that plays bass. The one that plays guitar, his name is Julius Handy; my sister's name [is] Mary Louise Handy; my mother's name is Mrs. Elizabeth Handy; my daddy's name is John Handy, Sr.

Allen: What did you say your daddy played?

Handy: Violin.

Allen: Violin.

Handy: Uh-huh. And my brother next to me plays bass violin--Sylvester; I guess you know him.

Allen: Yes, I do.

Handy: Uh-huh.

Allen: Ahh [cough] Boy! Cough once and it [unintelligible].

Handy: At first I start playing with the round out of a chair on my finger, making a bass out of it.

Allen: Uh-huh.

Handy: You ever seen anybody do that?

Allen: No.

Handy: Well, you take ^a round out of one of those chairs and you put your finger down like this, and you saw on it with that round and it sound just like a bass violin.

Allen: Your finger rubs across the round?

Handy: No, you take the bow, the stick and rub across right here.

Allen: Oh, a stick.

Handy: That round out of a chair.

Allen: Uh-huh. And it goes like a bass?

Handy: Just like a bass violin. And when my daddy used to be rehearsaling like that, I'd get my stick and get on the porch [laughs]; [I] used to play bass with him. And then I start playing guitar; from there I played mandolin; from there I played a little bass; then I become a drummer. I played drums for about-- oh, I'd say for about six years.

Allen: What about the guitar? How did you play, with picks?

Handy: Yeah, yeah, with picks.

Allen: What kind of picks?

Handy: Celluloid picks.

Allen: Would they be a flat pick or a --

Handy: Yeah.

Allen: Thumb pick?

Handy: No, flats--flat picks.

Allen: Flat pick.

Handy: Oh, I never was a picker, never could pick no guitar, I just chord, you know?

Allen: You played chords. And mandolin--how did you play that, with a flat pick?

Handy: Yeah, I played lead on that. I played mandolin, my brother Julius was playing guitar, and my [other] brother [was] playing bass--Sylvester. And we had a nice trio; we used to make a lot of money. We used to go around serenading people at the different hotels in Pass Christian, Biloxi, Gulf Port. [We] used to go all around out there, adver--serenading--go from house to house. We made nice money; sometime we used to come back with \$75 or \$80 dollars, a night! We used to make nice money out there. Well, from drums, I wanted to play clarinet. Well, they had a fella over there; he was a white fella [who] was a barber; his name was Picou Lizander ^[Lizander, Carl, Lizander, RBH]. He was a clarinet player, and I just liked the way he played, and I never [had] fooled with the clarinet. And-- but, I heard him playing, and I got interested in playing clarinet. So I kept after my daddy to buy one; he kept telling me he wasn't able. Well, I was working; I'd take my own money and buy it, but he wouldn't let me. (Chuckles) So, he went up and talked to Picou [Lizander], and Picou got him one, and he give to me. Well, that one was brand ^{new} [that] he give me. So--

Allen: Do you remember what kind?

Handy: It was a Albert. And so he told my daddy to give him the brand new one because it was hard to work--you understand what I mean?--it was brand new. And he knowed about, more about it than I did, and he swapped it for his old one. Well, his'n was in perfect condition, and I was willing, because that one was hard to blow, what I had--[?] brand new one, see? So he swapped me. And I

never taken a lesson in my life; I just taken the clarinet and sit on the porch in the evening when I'd come from work or get in the room, and figure out note for note. If I could get make, to where I could make three notes, then I'd go look for another note until I learnt the whole horn like that.

Allen: Oh.

Handy: Just note for note; feeling for them until I found them, [until?] I commenced to playing a tune; anything I could whistle then I could play it on the clarinet. Well, I played around here for, I'd say for about a year and a half.

Allen: What age were you then, when you started clarinet?

Handy: I was, I was around, I was around seventeen years old then--sixteen or seventeen years old when I started to playing clarinet. Well, then various bands used to come from here over there; when they'd come I'd bring my clarinet you'd swear I was going to work. [Chuckles] Bring my clarinet--pay to go in just as big, and have my clarinet with me. I'd get in there and I'd beg them to let me play with them; sometime they'd turn me down, and sometime they'd let me play. But after they hear me play once, then they wouldn't have no trouble, I wouldn't have no trouble asking them no more; they'd be begging me to come play then. Well, that's where I used to started playing, and--

Allen: Well, who were some of those guys?

Handy: Well, I used to play with Punch Miller; he'd come over there. I used to play with Dude "Foster" [Lewis] when he'd come over there, and ["Kid"] Rena.

Allen: Now, who is Dude "Foster"; is that the trumpet player?

Handy: Yeah, uh-huh.

Allen: Well, did he have a brother?

Handy: Yeah, he played trombone, yeah.

Allen: Oh, yeah. I just wanted to get him straight--

Handy: Yeah.

Allen: so I'd know who he was.

Handy: Uh-huh. Then I played with ["Kid"] Rena when he'd come over there; cour--matter of fact, I played with Rena here, but I, he first knowed me from over there. When Jim Robinson used to come over there with Sam Morgan I was a little boy then, and he used to come over there with Sam Morgan, and I used to play with them. And then Isaiah Morgan made up him a band; he used to come over there, and I used to play with him. I played with Isaiah a long time. And then Tom Albert come; he played with my daddy. And Tom Albert heard me playing--as a matter of fact, I played with him several times [when] he come over there, to play with my daddy. And he thought I was a sensation. So he asked my dad to let me come over here with him and play with him. So they agreed, and I come here around 1928--around 1918, rather. And I start playing with Tom Albert. And I had a lot, a lot of opportunities to go with different bands, but I don't know--I always thought of Tom as my daddy. And he was a fine old man; I just stuck with him; I had plenty of opportunities to leave him, but just stayed. He couldn't play much, but he was [a] nice fellow.

Allen: What kind of cornet did he play? Did he play straight or hot or?--

Handy: No, he was more of a musical type; he was a straight trumpet player.

Allen: Did he get off at all?

Handy: Uh-huh.

Allen: Had to have the music in front of him?

Handy: Unless it was something he had been playing about three or four years [laughs].

Allen: And then could he vary it? Did he play?--

Handy: No, no,

Allen: Just played it the way it was written?

Handy: Just like it was written, note for note; he couldn't play nothing else but note for note. No, he used to--he was a great brass band man, too; yeah, he played a lot--

Allen: Who did he play with?

Handy: Oh, him and Peter Bocage and them used to play together, on those parades. He played with--I think ["Papa"] Celestin had a brass band at that time; they were playing together then; he was a member of the band. But I didn't like that.

Allen: You didn't like that?

Handy: No, I didn't like that. [laughs] Couldn't get me out there; I don't want to play. Now sometime when a musician would die like that, or Rena and them [would] get together, just build up a band--no, no pay, just play behind him, you know what I mean?--I'd go out there [for] something like that. But Peter Bocage and them was playing; that was too much for me. They was playing strictly by music and I wasn't ^A I didn't know nothing about no notes or nothing like that at that time. So I stay out of that. [laughs]

Allen: How long were you with Tom Albert--how many years?

Handy: I was with Tom for about, I'd say five or six years. Matter of fact, I was with him from 1918 until 1924. Around '24--I got married in 1923--and in '24 I left here and went to Baton Rouge with "Toot" Johnson's orchestra. And he had

one about, one of the leading bands outside of New Orleans. And it was "Bud" Scott out of Natchez, and [Claiborne] Williams out of Napoleonville there, Napo-- Donaldsonville.

Allen: What was "Bud" Scott playing at the time--which instrument?

Handy: He wasn't playing no instrument at that time.

Allen: He wasn't?

Handy: Uh-huh.

Allen: What did he do?

Handy: Sing.

Allen: Oh.

Handy: "Bud" never did play no instrument.

Allen: Oh.

Handy: You might be talking, you might think I'm talking about "Bud" Scott, the guitar player, but I'm just talking--

Allen: Yes. Oh, well there's two different guys?

Handy: Yeah. I'm talkin' about "Bud" Scott out of Natchez, Mississippi; he had a band, but he didn't do nothing but sing.

Allen: Uh-huh. And the "Bud" Scott, the guitar player, where was he from?

Handy: I don't know "Bud" Scott, the guitar player; I've heard of him, but I don't, you know, I don't know him.'

Allen: That's always been confusing to me. That's news.

Handy: Yeah. Well "Bud" Scott he, he taken care of part of Mississippi, up that northern part, and all of Louisiana, practically. Oh, he was as big as that sign

there.

Allen: Uh-huh.

Handy: And he weigh around 200 and something; he was a great big man. And he would sing without a microphone. You know in, at them times they didn't have these [microphones]; [they] had one of them things you used to sing through like--

Allen: A megaphone.

Handy: Yeah. He didn't sing through that. [laughs]

Allen: He'd just stand up and shout.

Handy: Just stand up and sing. [And he had a voice?] [that] some places he'd go he'd jar the building; he was a big powerful guy.

Allen: What would he sing--what kind of numbers?

Handy: Anything they played, he'd sing. It was his band, see?

Allen: Uh-huh.

Handy: They rehearsed together, they--

Allen: But he would sing popular songs--

Handy: Yeah.

Allen: of the day?

Handy: He used to sing a lot of popular songs; some jump numbers; he used to sing a lot of waltzes--in them times waltzes was awful popular, and he'd sing a lot of them. He was a great, a great comedian, like. Did a lot of singing, but he didn't play anything. Oh, he had a play house in his yard; oh, that thing was around 12 by 12 [feet], for his little girl. They had real furniture in there, too. Just, that was just a play house, for his little girl. He a wonderful home over

there. Well, that was the three leading orchestras outside of New Orleans:
was "Bud" Scott, Claiborne Williams, and "Toot" Johnson--Claiborne Williams
out of Donaldsonville, "Toot" Johnson out of Baton Rouge, and "Bud" Scott out of
Natchez. Well, they was doing all the business out there when I was with "Toot".
Well, I stayed with "Toot" from '24 until '26. Then I left "Toot" and went with
"Toady" Harris.

Allen: Well, who was with "Toots" at the time?

Handy: "Toot" Johnson had at that time Clarence Thompson on drums, Ulysse
Jarrow [spelling?] on trumpet, and Dimes on trumpet.

Allen: Which Dimes was this?

Handy: Little Wesley Dimes; he's dead now; he got kilt. And he had Robert--
they call him Bob; he plays around here, he plays on--he's kinda sick like [had
tuberculosis]; he works down here at the First Precinct. You know Bob, play trombone?
Sure, he recorded with--

Allen: Bob Thomas?

Handy: Yeah. He recorded with [Paul] Barbarin and he recorded with several
orchestras around here.

Allen: Yeah.

Handy: Well, he was playing trombone at that time.

Allen: And is he from Baton Rouge, or [somewhere up there]?

Handy: I think Bob is from Baton Rouge.

Allen: He's out in California now. You know that?

Handy: Is he?

Allen: Yeah.

Handy: Yeah? I thought he was still working downtown here.

Allen: Uh-huh, no, I want to see him if I get out there.

Handy: Oh, yeah. Well, "Toot" was a guitar player-- "Toot" Johnson, he was the guitar player, he was playing guitar. Had a fella by the name of Mal playing bass. Mal got kilt one night; we was coming from ~~the~~ White Castle ~~Cafe~~. A fella, drunk, ran into our car and hit the back wheel and turned us over and-- turn us over three times in the middle of the street. And I was sitting right beside of Mal; he was sitting on that side and I was sitting in the middle. And the automobile turned over, busted his bass all up and kilt him. Didn't kill him right then--we taken him to Plaquemine to the hospital, and when we got there he was dead. Then, from "Toot" Johnson, I went with "Toady" Harris--now he was another singer; he didn't play nothing. And--

Allen: I don't know him.

Handy: No, I don't think you know him. "Toady" Harris, he was a big fella, too; he weighed around 200 pounds. Well in "Toady" Harris's band they had Lionel Thompson on drums; Louie Fritz on trombone; had Ed Collins on trumpet, Guy Kelly on trumpet; Joe Robichaux on piano; Percy Severe on guitar; and I was playing clarinet; Clarence Hall was playing tenor saxophone, and a fella by the name of--what was his name? Oh, I forget his name, but anyhow, he was on alto.

Allen: Where was that? Here?

Handy: No, no, that was in Baton Rouge.

Allen: Oh.

Handy: All that was in Baton Rouge. Well, then I stayed with "Toady" Harris about a year--eight months or a year--and I got a telegram that my wife was fixing to be operated on on a Saturday, and I got the telegram that Friday evening, and that's when I left, that Friday evening, [to] come here. Ah that Monday, I went to work at the Hummingbird--no, I played at the the Entertainers', played at the Entertainers' for about six or eight months. And then we left there and I went to the Hummingbird, and that's where I sent for Guy Kelly, the trumpet player. I sent for him, and he come down there. We stayed at the Hummingbird's until it closed that's when Streckfus used to come from off the boat, used to come up and hear me play clarinet--he wouldn't never come inside; he'd sit outside all the time, in his car. I wouldn't never know he would be out there till somebody would come in and tell me he was out there. Him and his wife and his brother used to come out there and sit down and listen at me play. Fate Marable was playing with him at that time, on the boat. And he asked Fate to bring me out there, one night. I went out there--stayed out there--I stayed out, I played out there with him until he got ready to make that trip and leave. Well, I couldn't go with him on that trip because they don't come back until 12:00 o'clock, and I'd have to come back to work. Well, I played that matinee with them and I had to leave and come back to work because they was fixing to pull out. Well, he wanted me to join the band, go back up to St. Louis; but that boat job was a little bit too hard. [laughs] You get up in the morning at 6:30, eat breakfast, and you rehearsal two hours; eat lunch and then you go back and rehearsal about two more hours; and then you rest and then go back to work that night. [Now?], that's too much. I didn't like all that playing; course

I liked to play, but I don't like that much playing--just to be playing to the empty walls like that. So, O, told them no, I didn't think I wanted to go out; I was doing all right there by the Hummingbird. So anyway, we stayed there for quite a number of years. Then I left there and went to ~~the~~ La Vida dance hall on Iberville Street between Rampart and Burgundy, and I stayed there several years.

Allen: Well, who, who all was in the Hummingbird? Guy Kelly?

Handy: I had Guy Kelly on trumpet, a fella by the name of "Tink" [Batiste] playing--that wasn't his name; we all called him "Tink"; he was a piano player; he's dead now. Nolan Williams on drums--he used to play with Sam Morgan; you might see his picture in Sam Morgan's band--and George Guesnon on banjo; that was all of us.

Allen: And you were playing clarinet at the time^{or}?

Handy: Yeah--clarinet; I was playing clarinet at the time.

Allen: Where was the Hummingbird, anyway?

Handy: The Hummingbird was on Bienville and, and Marais [streets]--yeah, Bienville and Marais.

Allen: What kind of place was it? What was going on in that neighborhood at that time?

Handy: It was a little night club.

Allen: Was the District wide open then or?--

Handy: Yeah, yeah.

Allen: This was [19] 20 what? [Which end of?] the twenties?

Handy: Yeah, that was in the [early?] twenties; that was around '28.

Allen: Around '28?

Handy: Yes.

Allen: Things were jumping then?

Handy: Oh yeah, things was wide open then--everything: gambling, the District, and everything; we was right down there in the District.

Allen: Did they have any girls turning tricks in the place?

Handy: No, not in the place, no.

Allen: Dancing?

Handy: Just a lot of dancing and drinking.

Allen: Uh-huh.

Handy: The thing about it was when the, when the girls come out them cribs, they go home and take their bath and straighten theirself up and put on them clothes and come out there and just throw away some money.

Allen: Uh-huh.

Handy: And all them pimps, they'd just come right along there and just burn up money. And I'd enjoy it when they'd get off, too; I liked ^{that of} ~~to do it?~~ [Laughs]

Allen: Yes.

Handy: See it wasn't nothing for them to come up there and give you four or five dollars to play a number. Yeah--"Play me such and such a thing. Thank you. Whatcha drinking?" So and so and so-- "Here, send the waiter up there." [laughs] Used to have a lot of fun like that.

Allen: What kind of numbers did the girls like?

Handy: Well, they didn't have anything particular; just like a lot of ragtime stuff,

jump stuff--they didn't like nothing too slow, unless it was the blues. Now if you could play the blues for them all night they'd like that--[just nothing but?] the blues. But nothing slow like "Stardust", something like that--they didn't like nothing like that. That was too slow; they didn't want that. But if you played a blues in that tempo, that 's right down their alley; they liked that. They used to get off from work around 1:30, 2:00 o'clock--anytime they got tired. You know; close up that crib and go ahead home and clean theirself up. They'd put on their clothes and get them a cab. Their boy friend [would] go get them, or something, and bring them out. Them was the good days, though--we won't have no more days like that. *P*Over at the La Vida dance hall, [when] we used to play over there, [we'd] go to work at 8:00 o'clock at night and work until 2:00 or 2:30 in the morning. But the dance hall music never stop there--[just] one number right behind the other. We had music--oh, music like that--we'd put it on our music stand and start from number one. I guess we played three hundred and something numbers a night. Trumpet take the first chorus, and I take the second chorus. While I'm playing my chorus, he turned over number one, and get ready to play number two. Me and him go out together, and pick up number two. While he's picking up number two, I turn over number one and put number two up. And that goes on all night long. Course, when he gets ready to go to lunch, he'd go to lunch, [and] I'd pick up the first chorus, Joe Robichaux [would] take the second one; I'd take the third one out; then I'd pick up the fourth [number?]. And then he'd pick up the next chorus--he'd take the second one, and go on out. Well him--some numbers Jim could play, [but I'd pick up where?] Jim Robinson would take the second chorus

then. But I'd always have to pick up the first chorus when the trumpet was gone, see? When he come back, then either one wanted to go, the next fellow--we'd alternate like that until all of us had went to lunch. At night, stay for a half an hour, an hour, something like that--come back--start back to work again. Well, I stayed there for, oh Lord--I guess going on six or seven years. In that place I had Lee Collins on trumpet, John Marrero on guitar--no, he was playing banjo then--his brother on bass, Joe Robichaux on piano.

[Allen:] Is that Simon or Eddie Marrero? Which one?

[Handy:] Simon; Simon's on bass.

[Allen:] And drums?

[Handy:] The drummer was Alfred Williams.

[Allen:] And yourself, what were you playing then?

[Handy:] I was playing clarinet.

[Allen:] Still?

[Handy:] No, I was playing saxophone then. Yeah, because I started to fooling with saxophone when I was at the Hummingbird.

[Allen:] Uh-huh. Well, what year did you start fooling with sax?

[Handy:] Oh, around '29--'28, '29, somewhere in there.

[Allen:] And how come you took up sax?

[Handy:] Well, that was all they was playing around here at that time, [I had?] ~~to~~ give up clarinet. [But I wanted to?]--one man I wanted to meet with clarinet was Sidney Bechet.

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Handy:] But I never got a chance to play against Sidney, because he was in New York; he left the week before I come here. And I never got a chance to even

hear him play but on records, that's all. But I sure wanted to play against him. When I went to Baton Rouge I met a fella up there called Green; he had Baton Rouge sewed up on clarinet. Man, that cat could play some clarinet. But after I was up there about six months, he was just another clarinet player. (laughs)

[Allen:] Who was that guy in Baton Rouge that didn't have any keys on his clarinet? Did you know him?

[Handy:] No.

[Allen:] That was strange; they said he could play any number you wanted, but he just fingered the holes, [that] was all. Stopped everything else up--just used those three fingers on each hand.

[Handy:] I don't know who that was, --

[Allen:] It beats me; I don't know how he did it.

[Handy:] unless it was Green. They had some nice clarinet players up there, now; they were strictly musicianers; they couldn't get off at all--just play strictly music. Had a fella up there by the name of "Toot" Knox had a band up there. They were fine musicianers, [they were arranging?] and play that stuff and they sound some good. They really sound good, but they played strictly by that music. And they kept pretty busy, too.

[Allen:] What about ["Kid"] Victor; did you know him up there?

[Handy:] Yeah, Victor, he was a trumpet player--he was stout--he had a brother [Morris Victor] [who] played violin. And he was a great man with one of those little tomato cans--

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

JOHN HANDY
Reel I, retyped
Dec. 4, 1958

[Handy:] Ooooh, man--drink? I used to drink myself; that's the only way I could play was [to] drink. [laughs] Yeah, that's the only way I could play was to drink, and if we didn't have nothing to drink, that was it. [Too bad] I remember when I was playing at the LaVida, I used to go to work every night with a quart of whiskey--every night. [Tear up a?] quart of whiskey. I bought so much whiskey at Waldy^{of} Drug Store until I wouldn't have to tell the man what I want; he'd see coming in the door he'd grab the bottle and wrap it up--[laughs]--give it to me. Git it on credit; I didn't have no money all the time--get it on credit; pay him when I get off. [laughs]

[Allen:] Well, when you moved to the city, where did you live, what neigbbrrhood?

[Handy:] I lived on Dauphine and St. Louis, right with Tom Albert, right in his house with his wife and his little girl. They was same as my people; I lived right there with them--[go out?]. And then we moved from there to right where he's living now.

[Allen:] On Burgundy?

[Handy:] 635 Burgundy Street, right around the corner [from Dauphine and St. Louis]. [When] we moved from there, we didn't have no truck, either; carried everything around there by hand. [laughs] He had a gallon of whiskey and a clothes basket of sandwiches. And everybody we seen on the street--"You want a drink?" "Yeah." "Come on, go get a piece of furniture and bring it around [here, and] we give you a drink." [laughter] That's the way we moved: everybody we seen there on the street, [that we] thought they'd drink, we'd offer them a drink, but they'd have to bring a piece of furniture first, before they'd get a drink. Then we'd give them a drink. He had

a fine wife; Miss Louise was a very fine woman.

[Allen:] She's dead now, or is she still living?

[Handy:] Yeah, she'd dead, poor soul. She made Tom what he is today. Because Tom used to work out there on the river front, then he used to be a trapper; and in the winter time, he'd do a lot of trapping and he made a lot of money, but if you'd let him keep it, he'd throw it away, see? Yeah, she taken that money and bought that house she got right there now, and furnished it off. And when she died, she left him, she left him a lot of money--I don't know if he still got it, but she-- I say a lot--she left him about twelve or fourteen thousand dollars when she died. And he won't have to spend that money, because he got everything in that house.

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JOHN HANDY

[Allen:] Now you were saying who you had in the band at the La Vida, too--you know, we were just talking about it.

[Handy:] No, I said [Alvin] Alcorn played with me at La Vida after Lee Collins left and went to Chicago. Him and John Marrero--

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Handy:] --went to Chicago. And then Alcorn and George Guesnon come in.

[Allen:] Now, was that after Al--was that after Collins worked at the Astoria with Davy Jones, or do you know?

[Handy:] [Well?], that was ooooh--matter of fact, Davy Jones played at La Vida with me, too.

[Allen:] Well, they were together at the, at the Astoria.

[Handy:] Yeah.

[Allen:] And I wondered if that was before.

[Handy:] No, I think that was after they was at the Astoria.

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Handy:] They left and come down ~~ma~~ there with me at the La Vida. Well, I think John--Lee Collins and John Marrero left for, left that tenor player there--yeah, they went to Chicago, and left him there. But Davy Jones stayed there with me a long time. As a matter fact, he opened up a teaching school uptown here, somewhere. Alfred Williams stayed there a long time; Jim Robinson stayed there a long time. But Alfred left and went to Texas, and Robinson and I stayed there until the place closed down.

[Allen:] Who took Alfred's place?

[Handy:] [Let me see?], who was playing drums there? I can't remember who, who played drums there, after Alfred left, now. Oh year: "Papa"--little fellow they call "Papa"? I don't know his other name; he died here about three years ago. He was playing with [Willie] Pajani and them at, next door to the La Vida.

[Allen:] Was that that sort of Mexican-looking fellow?

[Handy:] Yeah, yeah, that's him. Uh-h~~h~~h.

[Allen:] I think Andy Anderson was talking about him--

[Handy:] Yeah, that's him.

[Allen:] --the other day.

[Handy:] Yeah, he died here about three years ago. Think he taken Alfred's place with me at the La Vida. Well, after I left the La Vida, then I organized me a large band; it was named Louisiana, Handy's Louisiana Shakers. Well, I had Willie Pajard on first trumpet; I had Ricard Alexis on second trumpet; and I had Robert [Thomas (?)] on trombone. I had George Clark on tenor, myself on alto, and a little fellow playing alto--he dropped dead up at Jackson and Derbigny. What was his name? I'll think of his, I'll think of his name in a minute. Had [Fred] "H. A." Minor on guitar; I had old man [Henry] Kimble² on bass; Raymond Doris, on piano, and Roy Evans on drums. No vocalist--didn't have nobody singing. At that time, singers wasn't going so well--just instruments, you know?--instrument bands. The singers wasn't doing so much. Now, we done a lot of work; we worked out at Fort Worth, Texas; Beaumont; San Antone; Houston; Galveston; up in Florida--Pensacola; and Alabama--played a place out there called Chickasaw, Alabama. Played Mobile a lot of times. Around Biloxi, Gulfport, Pass Christian, place they call Franklinton, out here on the other side of Bogalusa--played out there a lot. We used to play in Bogalusa around three and four time a month. Played against ["Papa"] Celestin at the Roosevelt Hotel; that's the night I lost all my music.

[Allen:] What happened?

[Handy:] Well, we was coming from Bogalusa--and we played a dance up there that Saturday night, and had this contest with Celestin on Sunday night, at the Roosevelt--and we put the music on the running board, or somewhere--the piano player was in charge of it--and he forgot to tie it on, or something like that. When we got to Slidell I missed the music, and [I] asked him about it, and he say he put it on the hood. On the hood, no music, eleven of us. I let them out at the White Kitchen and

[Allen:] Well, who won these contests? I hate to interrupt you. What about Claiborne Williams and all that? How'd you come out?

[Handy:] He had a, Claiborne Williams had a fine band, really a fine band. But I was blowing so much horn in them times that his band didn't count too much; because I was breaking up the house then [unintelligible]. I was tearing [up the house?]. I was young, I liked to play and could play, and I just went on and tore up everything. All I wanted was a piano and a drum behind me; I didn't need nothing else. And--

[Allen:] People liked what? What did they want you to play? What would you win the contest with?

[Handy:] Anything. I didn't have anything--

[Allen:] Would you use a waltz?

[Handy:] Oh, yeah; I had, we had waltz some time; I made a big hit with that. I used to play that all the time, a lot of times. They would request that waltz four and five times a night, sometime. There was a waltz where we used to--the reeds would get off the stand and walk around the hall, one behind the other.

[Allen:] Uh+huh.

[Handy:] We'd play that in three-part harmony. And we'd come back, and walk back on the stand. And then the brass would get down, and they'd go around and do the same thing, then come back, and we'd all go out together. That was a beautiful waltz. I used to break up the house with that; we'd play that thing three or four times before they'd let us stop playing it. It's a pretty waltz; I really had a nice arrangement on it.

[Allen:] Well, when you had a contest, would the other band play the same tune, or what? How would that, how would that work?

[Handy:] Oh, no, they'd play what they want; they used to play what they wanted; played the best they got--I reckon they was playing the best they got; they was playing what they wanted to. You don't have to play just what they play; sometime, accidentally, you'd play a number they'd played already, or they were going to play,

something like that. But you don't have to play--you just play what you think you can play best, that's best suitable for your band; that's what you play. Because the night I played against Earl Hines down there--and Earl Hines had a good band in them days, in them days he was a wonderful piano player, and he had a good band. We won that contest too. Earl Hines, he broke out there and--matter of fact, he had everybody all out of the dance hall over there on that, on his stand. But, I didn't generally do that; I don't break out and start to playing right off the reel; I generally let the other fellow have a little fun for a while. Now and then I might take me a couple of shots; then I begin to call some numbers, and then I begin to blowing a little bit. Then take me a couple of more shots, and just give me that drum and that piano and bass; then I'll get the people over here. You just clap your hands, I'll bring the people here. Well then, around 1, 1:30 [a.m.] I had Earl Hines over there, let alone all the people. Had him over there--him and his whole band. Course, course I know that boy what played first alto [sax] with him; I know him very well. He's a fine guy; he plays violin, too.

[Allen:] Who was that?

[Handy:] I forget his name now, but he's a fine violin player.

[Allen:] Was that Darnell Howard? Would that be the fellow?

[Handy:] No, it wasn't Howard--not in them times.

[Allen:] Oh, let's see--Mundy, Jimmy? --Not Jimmy Mundy.

[Handy:] No, not Mundy; I know Mundy. He was a kind of heavy-set, brown-skinned fellow. Kind of Indian-looking fellow.

[Allen:] By the way: when did you first meet Louis Armstrong?

[Handy:] I met Louis around, around 1919, 1920; he was working right around the corner from me.

[Allen:] Oh, yeah.

[Handy:] Yeah, he was working on Rampart between Canal and Iberville, and I was working on Iberville between Rampart and Burgundy.

[Allen:] What places were these, where you [unintelligible]?

[Handy:] That--at that time, that was the Elite--Elite night club.

[Allen:] Uh-huh. And who was there, which one? He was in the Elite, or you were?

[Handy:] No, he was at Tom Anderson's around on Rampart Street, and I was at the Elite. I was working for "Beansy" Fauria then.

[Allen:] "Beansy" owned the Elite?

[Handy:] Yeah.

[Allen:] I didn't know that.

[Handy:] Yeah, that was his place. I was working for "Beansy" Fauria then, and Louis--Udell [Wilson] was working right next door at Black and Tan.

[Allen:] The piano player Udell?

[Handy:] Yeah, uh-huh. He was working next door at the Black and Tan. Working for "Beansy" at the Elite, [we] had two clarinets: Willie Humphrey and myself. We had two clarinets.

[Allen:] How did that work out, when you had two clarinets? How would you play? Would you read? Could you fake together, or what?

[Handy:] No, we fake together.

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Handy:] Fake together. And we had Charlie Love on trumpet.

[Allen:] Oh, yeah.

[Handy:] Uh-huh. When he was sober.

[Allen:] [unintelligible]

[Handy:] Yeah, when he was sober, he might not come there at all. That's the reason we had two clarinets.

[Allen:] Well, would one play lower register and one play upper, or would you both play upper and harmonize, or what?

[Handy:] No, both of us play up, or both of us play down.

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Handy:] [But we'd?] play first and second.

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Handy:] Could do that, could do that well. Lot of numbers I didn't know how to play the second, well, I'd play the lead, and Willie played second. We had a nice band over there at the Elite. They had the--the Lyric Theater, at that time, was right on the corner. And they had all those minstrels come in here, and vaudeville and things like that. Lot of talents used to come over there after the show--or between shows. The show ~~is~~ was out around 11:30, 12:00 o'clock at night, unless they was giving a "Midnight Ramble." And we had a lot of, lot of musicians used to come in there from off--out-of-town musicians, that would be with the shows. [They] would come in, stop there, and listening--a lot of them used to come in and sit in. Old man John Robichaux, he had the band at the, at the Lyric Theater. You don't remember "Red Happy" [Bolton]? You don't know, you never, you never heard talk of him?

[Allen:] I never knew him, but I heard a lot of guys talk about him.

[Handy:] Ah, he was a son of a gun, him, that "Red Happy." He was with John Robichaux.

[Allen:] Oh, yeah.

[Handy:] [unintelligible] He was a fine, fine drummer. This guy "Black Benny" [Williams] was a fine drummer; he got killed or poisoned or something--I think he got killed, yeah. We had some nice trumpet players around here, like Buddy Petit, Picard [Alexis], ["Kid"] Rena, Chris Kelly, Lee Collins, Alvin Alcorn, Manuel Manetta.

[Allen:] What did these different guys specialize in?

[Handy:] Oh, they all practically played just about alike except Buddy Petit. He had his own style of playing. That's where Louis got a lot of his ideas, from Buddy Petit. Louis got a lot of ideas from Buddy Petit, Chris Kelly. This fellow, Dude "Foster" [Lewis], he got a lot of ideas from Buddy. Buddy was just a natural gift[ed] trumpet player. And he never played nothing high; he never went out of the staff;

everything he played was right down in the staff. Buddy was a wonderful man when he, when he was sober.

[Allen:] He drank too, huh?

[Handy:] Oh, yeah. And then, he used to take three and four jobs for one night. Everybody would be looking for Buddy to come on one job; Buddy would be on one, he couldn't be on all of them; but he'd take them all. And wouldn't send nobody [to replace him]. He was one of the luckiest musicians ever lived, you know. Because I know people would be looking for him with pistols, to kill him, and when they see him, they don't do him nothing. He laught and lie right on out of it. Now we had some fine trombone players around here. The guy who I think was the best trombone player was a fellow they called "Yank" [Johnson]. He lived across the river. He died. Used to play with Sam Morgan.

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Handy:] He was another Louis Armstrong; he never missed. He never hit nothing unless he was going to make it; and he never tried nothing unless he was going to make it. "Yank" was a wonderful trombone man.

[Allen:] Say, I wanted to show you this picture; that's what I've been looking for. Here's Earl Hines, and here's his sax section here. This is--

[Handy:] [Let me] get my glasses on.

[Allen:] I was wondering if this was the guy--any of these guys?

[Handy:] Uh-uh.

[Allen:] That looks like Omer Simeon to me, there. And I don't know who that is; that beats me.

[Handy:] This guy looks something like Paul Barnes, ain't he?

[Allen:] Uh-huh. I know it isn't, though.

[Handy:] No, that's not him, no.

[Allen:] Well, I'll find a picture of the guy.

[Handy:] I'm trying to think of his name.

[Allen:] I think it's Darnell Howard, but I'm not sure.

[Handy:] No, I think his name is Simenon, Seminole, Semino--

[Allen:] Simeon.

[Handy:] Something like that.

[Allen:] Omer Simeon?

[Handy:] Something like that, I think was his name.

[Allen:] Was he born and brought up here?

[Handy:] I believe he was from around here; yeah, I think he was from around here.

He must--he left from around here before I come here.

[Allen:] Here's, here's Darnell Howard, when he was playing with King Oliver.

That's not the guy there, huh?

[Handy:] Uh-uh. No, no. Right here I see Bigard there, too? Ain't that Bigard sitting [by the] side of him?

[Allen:] Yeah, that's Albert Nicholas and Barney Bigard.

[Handy:] Yeah, uh-huh. You see, that was Louis's band before he left New Orleans; Albert Nicholas, Bigard--

[Allen:] Oh, yeah.

[Handy:] Ah--what's this guy's name playing piano? Not--

[Allen:] Was the guy from here?

[Handy:] Russell.

[Allen:] Oh, Luis Russell.

[Handy:] "Louie" Russell--yeah, all that was Louis's [Armstrong] band, before he left here and went with Oliver.

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Handy:] Uh-huh. They were around there on Rampart Street; played at Tom Anderson's. And he left there and went with Oliver.

[Allen:] Was Tom Anderson's a very jumping place? What happened there?

[Handy:] Well, that was about the most exclusive place they had around here at that

[Allen:] Would they try to "buck" [compete with] each other?

[Handy:] Oh, man--"buck"? "Buck" all day long. Man, after they'd get full of that whiskey and wine? Man, they'd "buck" all day. I used to--Tom Albert used to be out there; well, he didn't never "buck" none of them, because he couldn't play with them fellows. Less'n they was going to play some music; now, he was at home if you put some music in front of him, but other than that--uh. I used to take his place when they'd go to "bucking." I [would] go over to the window, too; they'd be at the window blowing the trumpet, I'd be at the window with my clarinet.

[Allen:] Who'd be out there?

[Handy:] Oh, man, they'd have a gang of people. You know, like if you had a little club?

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Handy:] And you, you could buy one of those camps out there; a lot of people bought them out there--matter of fact, lot of people used to live out there, all the summer. You could rent one of those places for the day. And they had stores out there; they had beds you could get and lock up in the room with your friends, and go to bed. And you could dance, and you could swim, and dining room--eat. A lot of fellows, a lot of guys used to bring their food out there and cook it out there; and then, a lot of them used to cook it at home, and bring it in baskets. We used to have a lot of fun out there, in the water, swimming. You'd just swim 'til you get tired, and come dance 'til you get tired, and go back to swim. Really had a lot of fun. They used to have that keg beer; they'd have, sometimes, fourteen kegs of beer out there. Everybody'd get drunk; fall overboard. I seen more people fall overboard out there than I--trying to walk that walk, from the landing to that thing--fall right in that water, puhchoong. Somebody got to go down there and get them out.

[Allen:] Well, how deep was the water?

[Handy:] Oh, about up to here; ain't nobody get drowned, just fall in the water.

[Allen:] Just up to your waist?

[Handy:] Yeah.

[Allen:] Well, that might sober'em up.

[Handy:] Yeah, some of them.

[Allen:] Some of them.

[Handy:] Then some of them used to just jump in there for fun [when] they'd get drunk like that; just jump in the water--clothes, watch, everything, loaded--they'd just jump overboard. I used to like to play out there. What used to get me, though, I used to play out at--we used to go to Moss Point, Mississippi, [and] play there Saturday night. We had to catch that first train out of there--passes through there around 4:00 something in the morning, and it get in here around 7:30 [or] something to eight, and we got to be out there at the Lake at 9:00. We was scuffling then. No sleep--that's when it would get you; around 2 o'clock in the evening [afternoon], everybody's gone swimming, and nobody in there but a couple of old people setting around there eating sandwiches, or drinking, or something like that; they don't want to dance. Finally, you get tired of just sitting there playing to the walls, and that sleep comes down on you. But it's tough; then you got to get up and walk around, go get some ice water or wash your face, try to get yourself straightened out. And the beatingest thing, then you have to go play at the Cooperator Hall that night, or the Economy Hall. Oh, man--when you get there, them people in there like that, and they wants nothing but them old blues all night long; if they don't want the blues, you play something--you don't never play too fast for them; it ain't like it is now. You could play fast as you want to, that was a one-step for them. We used to play schottisches, cake-walks, and all those things for them. And they used to have a prize for the best waltzer, and a prize for the best schottische dancer, prize for the best cake-walk dancer--play all that music through the night

during the dance. Now then, from there on Monday night they'd go to Ponchatoula; play another dance there. Well, you might rest Tuesday night. Wednesday night you'd go to Thobodzus, [and] play a jitney dance there. Thursday night you'd go to Raceland; you'd play a jitney dance there. Friday night you'd play at the Firemen's Hall in Westwego. Saturday night we [were] gone back to Moss Point, Mississippi, or Gulfport--one of them places. We used to play so much, to tell you the truth, we used to send somebody in our place sometime. Albert Morgan was playing bass with us; him and I taken a vacation and went to Chicago--just got tired of working. Went to Chicago, stayed in Chicago a week. And we'd come back; got, we done got about broke. We'd come back to New Orleans--

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[Allen:] Who was at the La Vida with you? You were talking about that.

[Handy:] Oh, I mentioned the fellas that, that was at the La Vida with me, already-- such as Lee Collins, John Marrero, Simon Marrero, Roy Evans was there around [with me?] on drums; and Alfred Williams on drums; and Davy Jones on tenor sax; [Joe] Robichaux on piano.

[Allen:] Trombone, did you?--

[Handy:] Jim Robinson on trombone. [We went over all that?]

[Allen:] Yeah, we got all that. Now, when did you leave the La Vida--what year?

Do you remember about?-

[Handy:] Ohhh, I left the La Vida somewhere around--ohhh, I think it was around '27, I think--no, later than that--it was around '29 or '30 when I left the La Vida. [Cause?]

I left the La Vida to go organize a band, and was playing at the, at that time they called it the Golden Dragon, but that was the Astoria--

[Allen:] Uh-huh.

[Handy:] And then from there to the Pelican.

[Allen:] Oh, how many years were you at the La Vida?

[Handy:] I was actually at the La Vida from around '26 to around '30.

[Allen:] So, then who did you have at the Pelican and the Golden Dragon?

[Handy:] Oh, I had a pretty large orchestra here; I told you yesterday--

[Allen:] Yeah, the Louisiana Shakers--that bunch.

[Handy:] Yeah, I had that bunch together there then.

[Allen:] Who was your bass player with that band? I've forgotten.

[Handy:] Kimball, old man [Henry] Kimball [Sr.].

[Allen:] Yeah, I was trying to remember his name, but I'll check on that.

[Handy:] You might know his son--he used to--he's a left-handed guitar; used to play with Celestin.
A