

JACK LAINE
April 25, 1964
Reel I--Digest--Retyped

Also present: Mrs. Blanche
Laine, Bill Stuckey,
Richard B. Allen

Interview is being conducted at Laine's home, 421 Hesper, Metairie, Louisiana.

A young man named Joe Cascaro [spelling?] used to play tuba for Papa Laine. One day he took seriously sick, sent Papa word that he wouldn't be able to play that evening for the Wild West show. So Laine thought of Chink Martin [Abraham]. Laine ran up to Castro's [Cascaro's?] and borrowed his tuba, gave it to Martin to play. Martin said he didn't know anything about the tuba. Laine told him, "You shove that in your face and play it." They played out that job--it was a week's work for "Young Buffalo Bill" O'Brian. The band would play down at the corner, go back to the lot and play on the lot. BS asks if it was a marching band. JL agrees [hesitatingly?] They had the contract to play every night for a solid week. Martin could pump on that tuba as well as if he had had it in his hand for a year. (Laine refers to Martin as "that Chinaman.") He played so well that Laine suggested he get himself a good tuba. Martin bought himself a second-hand helicon, double B flat, "like a [Bretzel? pretzel?] . . . you put over your head." Martin said he thought he would play tuba from then on. Laine was pleased, because he could put his hands on him at any moment, wouldn't have to run all over trying to get a tuba player. Martin turned out to be a wonderful tuba player.

BS states Papa Laine is 91 years old. JL agrees. [is in his 91st year actually] So far as he knows, he is the oldest musician living here now. Mrs. Laine thought Papa was older than the other old-time musicians, but Papa says he was younger than Dave Perkins (among others) by seven or eight years. [Achille] Baquet was around

Laine's age. Gil Rouge, the piccolo [i.e., tin flute?] player, was about the same age as Papa, i.e., 18 years of age. Mama seems to differ, but is interrupted.

When the Cotton Exposition was held here in 1885 [date given to JL previously by RBA. Cf. New Orleans City Guide] Laine's father bought a field drum there and gave it to Laine, who was about 12 years old at the time. Laine kept on with the drums. At first he had a regular field band, with Gil Rouge and Kirschmann. Some of the kids made their mammys buy them piccolos, [i.e.?] tin flutes for a nickel.

Laine's first job for money was when he was about 14, for a political parade. Stuckey asks him what kind of music he was playing when he first started playing for money. Laine answers: "Drums, trap drums, a little bit of alto [horn], and bass fiddle." The songs they played were all their own compositions. They had Lawrence Veca and Baquet--and all of the boys, these and the rest, would be whistling all kinds of funny stuff. When they got together, they would try to see if they could play that stuff over again. "Livery Stable Blues" was one of their numbers. Laine says that Achille Baquet and [Alcide] "Yellow" Nunez composed it. They used to call the tunes different funny names, like "Pralines" and "Meatball."

[(Eddie) Edwards sent for Laine to go up to New York and play with him?] Laine wouldn't go, because he had plenty of contracts down here, wanted to fill his contracts, didn't want to leave the city. (RBA says this was in the 1910's) There was no such thing as records during Laine's time. Edwards had this "Praline" played, called it "Livery Stable Blues," and took the credit for it. RBA states that Yellow Nunez sued Edwards over this number. [See Jazz

Journal or Jazz Monthly, c. 1962.]

Stuckey asks Papa to return to topic of music played when he was 14, when he first began playing for money. Papa says they played "Praline," "Livery Stable Blues," "Midnight [unintelligible. He means "Moonlight on the Shovel"?]--all that kind of stuff. They played by ear. Mrs. Laine suggests that he was not playing these numbers when he was 14. He says he was playing it when he had Baquet and Perkins and them with him. It was after he began to play street marches and stuff that he began to play that orchestra stuff, when they were playing for dances, weddings, balls, and stuff like that.

Laine says when he was 14 they called his kind of music ragtime. [!!! RBA] "Used to play all that kind of humbug stuff with them piccolos and stuff. . . . We used to go around the street with a bunch of kids, flags and torchlights and stuff like that, playing. Every night we'd be out in the street playing music, and marching." This was for pleasure, not for profit. Dr. George Howell's [sp?] daddy, who lived right around the corner from the Laines, and had heard them playing, came to Jack and asked if he would like to come out and play for a political parade. Laine brought out about ten boys; they played the parade; Dr. Howell gave them \$33. Laine doesn't remember who was running for office, but it was a city election, during the time when the C.L.'s and the Regulars and different organizations were all mixed up. The band made up the music as they went along. [Stuckey leads him into this statement. Compare above.]

Laine says that from the time he first put a band on the street, whenever they paraded they had crowds of colored children following them.

Laine hums a break he remembers from an early march. [Cf. "Original Dixieland One-Step."] RBA and Papa Laine agree that if you syncopate a march, you have a rag.

Papa Laine recalls a wonderful march called "Under Arms." Dave Perkins, who was a first class note-reader, came down one night with a copy of "Under Arms." Perkins would hum it to the rest of the bunch. Every one of those kids had an ear for music. Pretty soon the boys would be trying to play it, and Perkins would be trying to teach them. Laine recalls another march, something about the American flag. They ask him about "Stars and Stripes Forever," and he says they played that one too. [See Sigmund Spaeth, A History of Popular Music in America for more information on this march.] These were all straight numbers that they ragged. "We'd tear it up. . . . We'd rag it up . . . I mean as far as we could go." Papa thinks he must have been close to 15 when he played for this political meeting.

Papa thinks he must have been about 8 years old when he first heard ragtime. Cakewalks came in style after he started to play. He didn't know anything about "coon songs." [!!! RBA] Dave Perkins was a rag musician, and a good one, but he didn't teach Papa Laine how to play music; Papa picked that up himself.

Laine doesn't know whether ragtime was played before he was born; he heard ragtime mentioned time and time again, but when he was about 8 or 9 years old.

Laine is asked if ragtime sounded like what they call Dixieland today. Papa says no. They ask him what it did sound like. "Sounded pretty good to me." He believes it sounded pretty good to everybody, because when he organized his band, he had engagements made four and five months ahead of time. He played for the Ladies Violets from down below. They used to have Seiferth's [sp?] band, but they came

to Laine and engaged his band six months ahead of time, for their affair.

After Laine was married, in 1894, his wife took charge of his business for him. He was always away from home. She knew the dates he had, but not the dates he didn't have. She kept track of the contracts. Their son Alfred was born in 1895.

Laine never heard a professional band play ragtime when he was eight. There used to be plenty of people whistling it. There used to be an organ grinder who would stop at the corner. He toted an organ on his back. Laine can't remember the name of the tune, but there was one tune that he used to rag the mischief out of. Kids and big men alike would come to the corner; they'd give the organ grinder as high as fifty or sixty cents to stay there and play that tune.

Laine believes he is about the first one to ever have a ragtime band on the street.

Dave Perkins played ragtime. He used to mix the stuff up. That's how Papa came to get Dave in his band. Papa and Dave used to be pretty good friends. Dave used to go see a lady in the same block Papa lived on (2405 Chartres Street, near Mandeville Street. It was a basement house Papa lived in; they used "to rehearsal" in the basement). Dave was always coming by Papa's house. Dave was a wonderful musicianer, could take a sheet of music and read it just like nobody's business.

When Laine married, the men in his band were: Manuel Mello, Leo[nce] Mello, [Robbie? Robert?] Kirsch, Martin Kirsch, Gussie Zimmerman, the Chinaman [i.e., Chink Martin], Veca, Baquet, Shields-- so many of them Papa can't remember.

Papa says he was still a youngster when the police chief, Dave Hennessey was killed [in 1891]. ^{OCT. 1890 JP 12-6-89} His band then was the bunch of ~~kids~~ kids he started out with, playing piccolos and stuff like that.

Stuckey questions him again about the political meeting for which he played when he was about fourteen or fifteen. The band was called simply Laine's Band. They had one piccolo, a clarinet, trombone, cornet, alto [horn], tuba, baritone [horn], drums, of course, and one saxophone. He never knew the names of any of the tunes they played; they did it entirely out of their heads; they made up that stuff. "We'd make up that stuff. Just like if we were playing it for years we'd make it up and we'd fight it out and fight it out until we got some kind of time out of it, good time out of it, regular dancing time, for a dance, perfect. For a march, there's a different time for a march."

Laine says he never had colored players in his band, always all white. He did not know of any colored bands playing that kind of music then. His own band is the first one he remembers coming out on the street and playing that stuff.

Laine says Billy Braun's band played military stuff, marches, sentimental music, all straight stuff. Braun was a musicianer [i.e., reader]. He could turn his band into a good ragtime band, because he knew his business.

Laine says he had been playing for money quite a while before Buddy Bolden became well known. RBA brings out that Laine is older than Bolden, but people always talk about Bolden having been the first. "If he was alive, you'd be older than him." Laine: "Well, of course I'd be older than Buddy Bolden. Sure. If he was alive--even so, he's dead and I'm still older than him."

Seiferth [sp?] had a military band too, playing straight marches. He had a mighty good little orchestra, played all straight stuff.

Stuckey asks how come Buddy Bolden gets all the credit for being first, when Laine was playing ragtime before him. Laine starts talking about those guys going to New York; up there people took what they said for granted. Laine says even if Bolden had been his age and started out when he did, even so his would not have been the first white band organized and playing--it would have been a colored band. BL adds in background, "They had some bands were pretty good mixed up. Gil Rouge was no white man. . . . Baptist Aucoin neither. . . . He has a barber shop." Laine tells why he did not go to New York. Another political parade is involved. Laine had Nick LaRocca playing in his band--"I picked up LaRocca when had hardly [knowed?] anything about a trumpet. I'm playing the music on the street. Some fellow stepped [up]--it was told to me after--and wanted to know who was the leader of the band, they wanted to get a band to go to New York. LaRocca gave him a note; this fellow goes to LaRocca's house and sees LaRocca; LaRocca organizes a band and goes to New York, unknownst to me." [Cf. Laine, other reels; LaRocca, reel (?); Edwards, reel (?).] Of course this was a long time after Laine started playing professionally. Laine started playing professionally in the 1880's; Bolden didn't start play~~ing~~ until the 1890's (according to Stuckey). Laine says he never heard of him, if he did. Laine did know him, and heard him play.

END OF REEL I

*I think ? Obviously
one of the sources
should be Stuckey.*

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Reel II--Digest--Retyped
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Also present: Mrs. Blanche
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RBA asks Papa Laine who was Baptist Aucoin. Papa says first he wouldn't know who he was, but, "When I found out he was a nigger, that's when I stopped hiring him. . . . When I found out he was a colored boy, I stopped hiring him." I never knew he was colored, but he married a white woman; he was married to a white lady. . . . One fine day I passed on Ursuline Street, where he lived, and I saw his daddy and that was enough." Aucoin played violin and alto [horn]. RBA suggests Aucoin should have been from the Seventh Ward, around St. Bernard Avenue, as they call it the "Can't Tell" Ward, because you can't tell if they're white or colored. (Laughter follows.)

RBA asks about Paoletti's band. Paoletti had a big band that played out at Spanish Fort, West End, the lake front. Laine had bands out there regularly, but he never heard of Paoletti. Nor did he ever hear of Armand Veazey. RBA suggests that they were later. [Not so. RBA]

Stuckey asks about colored funerals. Papa says he never went to any colored funerals as a child, that he didn't really know what the colored people were playing as he was growing up. Papa tells about playing for white funerals. His band had one march they used to play regularly, but he cannot remember the name of it. RBA says all the fraternal organizations throughout the country had bands at funerals at that time.

The first titled song Papa remembers his band playing was "Plarine" [i.e., "Praline."] Some of their other numbers were "Meatballs," "Sunlight," "Moonlight on the Shovel." Papa and the boys playing with him made up these names for their numbers. Papa also remembers "A Little Bunch of Whiskers on a Young Man Grew."

Upon RBA's mentioning the title of his favorite, "Kentucky Days," Papa is reminded of a story. [Cf. Jack Laine, Reel]

Papa had three bands in Biloxi one time, one for West End Juniors, one for West End Fire Company No. 3, one for Volunteers No. 1. There was a park right on the other side of Kennedy's Hotel, in which [park] a military band was sitting around the mound, talking. They was a bunch of Papa's kids out, all little fellows, young kids, Papa's son, Alfred Laine, Georg Brunis, Henny Brunies. The kids were in band uniforms. The military bandsmen saw them walking around; one of them passed remarks, "Jesus, . . . this must be a kindergarten band; I'd like to hear them play. . . ." These remarks were carried over to Papa Laine, who was right across the street from the park. The band of soldiers got together, ready to leave on a parade, and struck up, "Any Bones, Any Bottles, [Any Rags,] Today." Laine got all his kids together, told them to play "Kentucky Days," and "When you come to that trio, come down soft." The kids popped loose. "First damn thing you know," the soldiers took their hats off, waved them at that kid band.

Laine doesn't remember anything that happened, any of the speeches at that political rally where he first played for money. He would rather not try to hum a tune he played then, because he might make a stew out of it; he would rather be right. He does not want to say or do a thing unless he is sure he did it; he wants to be right. [He reiterates this philosophy several times during this interview.]

Laine does remember that the parade for the political rally started at Elysian Fields and Dauphine, he believes at Louis Knopp's barroom. There was a big hall upstairs. They paraded all ~~xxx~~ through

the streets all around, met a bunch up by the Elks' Home, where all the different wards met, and went out on a march. The Elks' Home was on Basin near Canal Street, on the right hand side of Basin Street, now Elk Place.

Laine says there was no one in the band older than he was; the others were his age or younger [leading here]. When Little [Georg] Brunis started to play with Laine, he was only eight years old. Papa's boy, Alfred, was only eight when he started playing with the band. Abbie Brunies was a year or two older, as was Richie. Laine says the Brunies boys' father was a good musicianer, a good violin player. He loved music, would get the kids together, buy them old instruments, practice, get out on the street with them and play at corners. If they got nickels it was all right; if they didn't that was all right too.

Laine played the Lusitania Hall, on Dauphine near Elysian Fields, right near [Louis] Knopp's Bar, next to the police station. [See above.] It was at Lusitania Hall that [Dave] Perkins taught them to play [name of tune?]. Perkins pumped away with his trombone at that tune, tore the house down. Perkins played the whole melody, carried the lead [on this tune]. Perkins was the first reader Laine was ever mixed up with. It turned out later that Perkins was a colored man, too. He was even gdng to marry a white girl, in Laine's neighborhood. Perkins had straight blond hair, "fair as a lily," with blue eyes. Perkins was also a good drug clerk, Laine says.

Laine's family was not poor. His father was a contractor. They grew up in a nice home. He thinks the boys in his first band were also from fairly well-off working people. Laine's father rented his

home.

The house on Chartres and Mandeville, the three-story basement house where the band rehearsed, was Laine's home, not his father's. Laine made good money, sent his kids to school, gave them "high" education, all on music. Papa himself went to school, but not so very much. He says he left school after he started playing for money. Mrs. Laine is talking in background about his playing hooky.

In addition to playing music, Laine worked as a longshoreman on the river for his brother-in-law. His brother-in-law was a boss out there. If he had a job at night, he would get off at noon. (Mrs. Laine says this brother-in-law was her sister's husband, [Pete] Smith, who was superintendent of the Puerto Rican Steamship Company. [Correct name?])

When Laine played a carnival parade or carnival ball, he would have a pay list a yard long. (The people loved ragtime at the carnival balls.) Mrs. Laine was his paymaster; all the fellows would come down to the house to get their money. When he wasn't there, she handled all the business.

Stuckey asks about the music at the carnival balls. There was no particular song they liked most; they liked everything. "They didn't care what we played; I don't care how we played it or what we played; we got a big hand. . . . I have no idea [why]. . . . They must have liked the music, or otherwise they wouldn't clap like they did, holler and whistle and clap on the floor and all that sort of stuff, 'Play it over! Play an encore!'" They danced the two-step, the schottische, etc. to the ragtime music. They couldn't dance a waltz to that stuff, a waltz is different time, "6/8 or something like that." [It is 3/4. RBA] You couldn't even play ragtime with a waltz.

The last time Papa played the drum was around World War I, he says. He played on tin pans one day when the Brunieses came to his house. [He recorded with John Wiggs. Check date. Papa Laine talks on Tempo MTT 2084 (also Oriole-English MG 20002), "'Papa' Laine's Children," recorded in New Orleans June 6 and 13, 1951. See also Southland LP 235.] He scats "Turkey in the Straw" and beats on the table for them. They hear it played back, then he plays again with knives for drumsticks.

Papa says he spends his days now sleeping and drinking. He drinks whiskey, milk, beer, wine, anything that comes along.

Papa is asked to what he attributes his old age. "I've been a good boy and a strong boy all my days. I've never been in any kind of serious trouble, nothing of that sorty and I always believed in our Lord, and I brought myself up right. Still, I smoked plenty, I drank plenty. Now whether it was the whiskey that preserved me, I don't know, I couldn't say. . . . I played one night up at Protection Levee for Dwyer [O'Dwyer? RBA] . . . they had to carry me home. When I got home I was almost passed out of the picture entirely . . . drinking whiskey. I must have drank a whole fifth. Emile Christian and that bunch had to carry me . . . to the street car and from the street car home." BL adds that he is an ex-prizefighter. Also adds, "He got good after he [stopped?] playing music."

Papa also passes his time making firehats for the volunteer firemen. He belongs to three fire companies, and he has made the boys about a hundred hats. They have asked him to make some more for them; probably they might use them around the last of May. He saw them at the Spring Fiesta parade. Mama adds that her granddaughter said he will go [until?] he's gotta drop.

Papa still enjoys listening to music, all ragtime stuff. He never worried about all that sentimental stuff. He does not listen to modern music at all. He has only one of his own records here, "'Papa' Laine's Children" [Tempo MTT 2084? Southland LP 235 is called "Papa Laine's Jazz Band"].

Mrs. Laine, at his request, gets his fireman's hat. He has belonged to this company since 1904. Mrs. Laine says he is exempt from [dues in] David Crockett [Volunteer Fire Company].

RBA asks him about his tent show; he had his own tent wshow at one time. It was a regular vaudeville outfit. They sang, danced, did tricks.

Papa Laine says all his musicians were pretty good boys, a nice bunch of boys. They were mischievous, though. They used to come down to Laine's house during the day. Mrs. Laine mothered them all, every one of them. Papa had a place upstairs, over the main floor, had beds in there. The boys used to come there sometimes at night and sleep. The boys' mothers would call or come by the house to find out where their boys were. The boys would break the feather pillows open, throw feathers all around.

Papa spent some time at the time of the St. Louis [Exposition of 1904] in St. Louis. Somebody up there had heard of him, wrote to him and asked him to send some men up there. There were three boys from somewhere else who got a job playing at an artificial palm garden near the fairgrounds, and they wrote to Papa and asked him to sand some men up there. He sent Tommy Otis, [Tommy Alford or Alfred?], and [George Uhle or Euilhet?]. These boys taught the other three fellows a lot about playing music. They played up there

about six or eight weeks. They wrote to Papa. He had a lot of contracts to fill here, but he managed to go up there for about a week. Before Papa sent the men up there, he asked the men there to send their tickets--including return tickets. "Then I asked them forward the tickets and I'll send the men. . . . I wasn't going to send them without they get the tickets, and the return ticket too, mind you. I made that a particular business, to find that out first. To and fro." Papa says he didn't teach them much up there. [Cf. Jack Laine, Reel ?.] There was one fellow, the piano player, Michel something, a funny name, who got so interested in Papa he would hardly play his instrument; kept talking to Papa while he was playing, because he didn't know what minute Papa was going to jump; Papa had to come back here. He had too much work here, was playing pretty near every night in the week.

END OF REEL II.