

LAWRENCE MARRERO  
Reel I [only]--Digest--Retype  
January 2, 1959

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Also present: William Russell.

Lawrence Marrero was born October 24, 1900, in the 7th Ward [of New Orleans], around Mandeville and Prieur [streets]. [Check this with old maps. RBA.] His father (a well-known musician, says WR) was William "Billy" Marrero, who died around 1917 at the age of 47. LM remembers his father's bass playing from around 1910, when Billy had the Imperial or Superior (LM is not sure which name) Band; members were: Bunk Johnson [cornet]; Peter Bocage, violin; Richard Payne, guitar; Walter Brundy, drums, Buddy Johnson, trombone; Big Eye Louis Nelson, clarinet; Billy Marrero, bass and manager. [It was the Superior. See photographs and other interviews. RBA] LM says there were no leaders in those days, only managers. [No. See caps in photographs and other interviews. RBA.] LM lived then in the 1200 block of Touro, between Marais and Urquhart. Billy's main instrument, and his first, was bass violin, but he also played guitar; he did not read music. LM's first teacher was his brother, John Marrero. Billy played with other bands, perhaps with Manuel Perez and/or Joe Oliver; he did play ~~with~~ Freddy Keppard, and had him in his own band. Another cornetist with Billy at one time was [Ernest] "Ninny" Coycault [now Johnson]. LM's mother was a good singer and a good guitarist. LM tells of how the family--his father and mother, his brothers [Simon and John?] and LM--would get together in their

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house and play stringed instruments together; the first tune LM learned (he was playing guitar at the time), "Under the Double Eagle," was learned at such sessions. LM learned by ear at first, learning to read music years later, when he formed his own band; other members: Bush Hall [trumpet]; Paul Barnes, clarinet and/or sax; LM's brother, Edward Marrero, bass violin; LM's cousin, Josiah [Cie] Frazier, drums. Paul and Emile Barnes are first cousins of LM; the Barnes men's mother and LM's mother are sisters. LM's mother's maiden name was Jeannette Frazier; the Fraziers' father and LM's mother were brother and sister; the Fraziers are LM's first cousins, too.

LM's brother, Simon Marrero, played [string bass] bass drum and also helicon [a brass bass, forerunner of the sousaphone] in brass street bands; LM began playing bass drum in street bands because of his brother's influence. An uncle, Mitchel [pron. Michel] Frazier, who was a piano tuner and repairman, played bass violin; his son, Mitchel Frazier, was a great "head" pianist.

In the Marrero family were five boys and two girls; three of the children are living today. LM is the oldest, now that Simon and John are dead; Simon was oldest, John was next, then LM, then Eddie (who was a good bass player, but has quit playing). John, who died or was killed in New York around 1940-41, was about three years older than LM. Besides the [Papa] Celestin band, John also

played with Sam Morgan and Buddy Petit; Simon was also a member of the Petit band, and LM played with Petit, too, being in Pensacola, Florida, with Petit for quite a while. LM filled in for Johnny Dave, of the Sam Morgan band, when Dave couldn't make some trips. LM was a regular member of the Chris Kelly band, with Eddie Marrero and Emile Barnes. (Kid Howard, originally a drummer, played with Kelly in later times.) John Marrero, who played banjo (6-stringed banjo were used then) and guitar, was also a good pianist; his wife, still living, was a fine pianist, and still plays in churches. John was largely self-taught, but got some pointers from his father, who taught his children the fundamentals of playing their instruments. LM tried sousaphone a little, but didn't continue; he was also a fair string bass player at one time. Simon played bass, sousaphone and bass drum.

LM's full name, correctly spelled, is Lawrence Henry Marrero.

LM began playing jobs soon after taking up music; his brother John sent him in his place often; LM once played in Sam Morgan's band when Kid Ory was playing trombone. LM played many jobs for John with Papa Celestin. LM began playing professionally when he was seventeen. LM's family practiced a lot at home; Johnny St. Cyr used to come by to practice, too. Billy Marrero played mostly with a bow.

LM says the old-time musicians took more pains with their playing, and that the young musicians of today begin playing jobs when they can play two numbers. In the old days, if a musician wasn't good enough on the job, he might be sent home; also, sometimes two bands would be called for a job; the one the people liked best was kept, while the other was sent away from the job.

LM mentions Albert Walters; he talks about the Monday night "banquets" the societies would have at various halls. LM had one every Monday to play with Albert Glenny. Some of the bands LM played banquets with were: Jack Carey (an old friend with whom LM played shortly before Carey's death); Buddy Petit; Chris Kelly; Kid Rean.

(Other than his brother, John) the guitar players LM liked were: Willie Santiago, Louis Keppard, Richard Payne. WR mentions Brock Mumford, of the Eagle Band. Lorenzo Staulz was a good musician, a nice banjo player; Willie Bontemps was a good banjo player, too. LM remembers Tom Benton.

When LM was a child, around 1910, all the bands he knows about were using guitar, not banjo; use of the banjo became popular around 1915 [Cf other interviews. RBA]; John Marrero switched to banjo (from guitar) about then. LM's first job, around 1917, was on banjo. Sousaphone replaced bass violin some time later. LM