

JOHNSON, MAUDE
I [only]-DIGEST - RETYPED
January 6, 1959

Also present: William Russell
[Compare WR's note on BJ]

Maude Balque Johnson was born August 21, 1908, in New Iberia, Louisiana. She thinks her father, John Balqué, was the uncle of the father of George Baquet [sic], clarinetist. The Baquets lived in New Orleans, but all of them [Balques and Baquets?] originally came from Opelousas [La.]. MJ's sister, Georgia Balque Dickson [spelling?] is still living, in New Iberia, as is Georgia's husband, "Candy" Dickson. "Candy" [apparently has been ill] is doing pretty well, can talk. MJ met Bunk Johnson [her husband, deceased] through "Candy"; MJ and family were living in Lake Charles, Louisiana in 1929 (she thinks as there was high water in New Iberia in 1927, and they had moved to Lake Charles); MJ would attend dances; she met Bunk at one of them, where he was playing with Tony Babin's band, the first group he joined in Lake Charles. Bunk had just come from Electra, Texas, where he had been working at an undertaking place. Bunk got "Candy" Dickson, an old friend, to introduce him to MJ; Bunk got MJ to launder some shirts for him; he liked her work so well that he continued his courting. MJ and family moved back to New Iberia in 1932, and MJ and Bunk were married after they arrived there. Bunk was with the Babin band about 1 1/2 years; he played 2nd trumpet in that group; Charlie "something" [Secou?, Seger?] was playing 1st trumpet; Nellie Lutcher's father, Skinner Lutcher, was playing bass in the band; Nellie played piano; Charlie Babin (she thinks) played drums; Jimmy Davis played guitar and banjo;

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MJ doesn't remember who the trombonist was (it was not Gus Fontenotte [Spelling?], who was in New Iberia, in the old Banner Band, which is lately called the Carlton Royal; MJ thinks that band is still operating). After about 1 1/2 years with the Babin band, Bunk went to Texas with that group and remained; he sent for MJ, but they remained there only about 3-4 months because MJ didn't like Texas. They returned to Lake Charles, but Bunk was not with a band then. He played in Texas, however; they were living in Port Arthur while in that state. The man who sent for Bunk to play in the Port Arthur band was named Minor Brown, but MJ doesn't remember the name of the band. After their return to New Iberia and their marriage there, Bunk went to Kansas or Missouri, with a circus. (WR says Bunk told him he played once with a circus band in Sedalia, Missouri, but just casually, as he was with a minstrel show at the time.) MJ reconsiders, says she thinks Bunk was in Kansas with the particular circus. Not doing so well with the circus, he worked his way back to New Iberia, playing with small bands in various towns enroute. Arriving in Crowley, La., he played a couple of nights with the Evan Thomas [Black Eagles] band; when he arrived back in New Iberia, he informed MJ that Thomas had been killed [in a brawl] and all the band instruments had been destroyed. The year was about 1933. Bunk continued playing for a while, using a battered instrument he borrowed from a man named LeBoeuf; he worked with Gus Fontenat [Check spelling] this time. Then Bunk and his uncle Henry (Jefferson?), who came to New Iberia, began playing together, with one other person in the group. (Bunk's mother was named Teresa Jefferson [MJ thinks] Johnson.) The year was 1934 or 1935.

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The trio played at little night clubs around New Iberia. It was during this time that Bunk lost his teeth (he actually dropped a bridge out of his mouth one night) and gave up playing music, going to work in the rice fields, remaining on that job 2 or 3 years. WR says he first wrote to Bunk in 1939. Louis Armstrong saw Bunk in New Iberia in about 1938; WR says he spoke to Armstrong that year, and Armstrong said he had seen Bunk recently. Bunk wasn't playing then, as he had no teeth. Bunk was working for Frank Dautrive's furniture store then. Bunk sometimes worked for Weeks Hall [at the plantation home, "The Shadows"], but only when called to do so. Bunk was working in the rice fields when Armstrong came by. Bunk got some teeth. About the same time, he received permission from Lloyd Porter, of the local school board, to start bands in the Jeanerette [Louisiana] school, and one each in the New Iberia high school and the New Iberia elementary school. He taught those bands until 1942; Gene Williams came to see him then, and he went to San Francisco that year.

Addresses of the various places Bunk and MJ lived in New Iberia: first, their [the Balque family?] own home--526 Lafayette Street (MJ's sister lives there now); next, 5122 School Alley, where they were living 1938-39 when WR began corresponding with Bunk (School Alley was previously called "Shirttail Alley"); they then moved to 515 Providence; while Bunk was in San Francisco, Maude was forced to move, and she went to 638 Franklin Street (now called ^{Mulain} [Milan? Marlin?] Street), where they lived until Bunk's death [July, 1949--PRC].

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In her younger days, MJ heard the music of Jules Babin's band, which came to New Iberia occasionally; the Banner Band of New Iberia, an old band, was the standard band around the town, and she heard that. There were no Negro brass bands there then. The Georgia Smart Set, a minstrel show in which Bunk played at one time (MJ didn't know Bunk then), would come to New Iberia at times; it was a tent show; there was a parade before the show. There was also another minstrel show which played New Iberia. WR says Bunk put on his own act one year he was with the Georgia Smart Set; Bunk played some special music as his act, or as part of it. WR mentions drummer Weejee [spelling?] Payne, who (according to WR) played in the Banner Band with Bunk; MJ remembers him, but knows nothing about him. Some in the Banner: Gus Fontenat [check spelling]; William Williams, piano; Dennis Adams, drums; his brother, Beauregard Adams. When Williams died, Fontenat's daughter replaced him. (WR says he saw a picture of the Banner Band which Lawrence Duhé had; in it were Bunk, Evan Thomas, others.)

MJ took piano lessons for 3 or 4 months when she was in school; she learned the notes pretty well. She helps Bunkie some "on his notes." [Bunkie (check spelling) is BJ's grandson. RBA] She tried a little bit to learn trumpet, using Bunk's instrument.

The Black Eagle Band was a long time ago; Evan Thomas' Black Eagles came much later.

In MJ's earlier life, there would be dances held about twice a month; the local bands, usually, played them; in later years, larger

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bands, from out of town, would come in; other than the Banner and Jules Babin, most of the bands playing dances in the earlier times would be from New Orleans, bands like that of Papa Celestin. The small group Bunk and his uncle, Henry had played night clubs around the area; Beauregard Adams and a banjo player, Minor, worked with them [it was a trio earlier--PRC]. Bunk also played with a band [same as one just mentioned?] at parties Weeks Hall would have. MJ and Bunk worked for a Russian family who lived in New Iberia; their names were Bronstrow, or something like that. They had the old delaHoussaye house, which is almost directly across the street from Weeks Hall's house. MJ describes Bunk's work in the rice fields; he worked in the cane fields after the rice season was over.

MJ went to a lot of dances in her youth. Bunk never did dance, except when the mood seized him in a bar room.

Bunk was without a trumpet to play only about 5 years. After he got his teeth back, he played bass horn (borrowed from the school) a bit with Gus Fontenat, until he got a trumpet. Others in the band then: Donald Morris, Rufus Smith, Mercedes, Harold (trumpet), husband of the pianist.

MJ says Bunk doubled on clarinet [and trumpet] in Texas, before his marriage to Maude.

End of Reel I

