

PUNCH MILLER  
April 9, 1957  
Reel I, track 1  
WR's reel I

Also present:  
William Russell  
Charlie DeVore  
Richard B. Allen

Summary: Alma D. Williams  
Check: Richard B. Allen

Punch Miller was born in Raceland, Louisiana, June 14, 1894, [in the January 1949, Playback article his birth date is given as December 24, 1897]. He came to New Orleans after he finished school. [Cf. other interviews.] He left New Orleans to serve in the Army. After he left the Army, he returned to New Orleans where he got married and lived with his wife for six years. He went to Chicago in [19]27, [Cf. other PM reels generally] and stayed until 1951. [Compare third paragraph on date of leaving for Chicago.] After playing in different places and with different bands, he came back to New Orleans.

PM's first job in New Orleans was with Jack Carey. [Compare other interviews on job with Duck Ernest] They are supposed to have invented "Tiger Rag." Some of the boys in the band decided that PM should have his own band. PM, Eddie Morris, George Boyd, Joe Gabriel, and Walter Preston started a band and did well until Lent when they had to get jobs [that is, non-musical jobs?]. [Note that Jack Carey, not Eddie Morris, was the trombonist in the <sup>Carey</sup> band.] All but PM had jobs and when he call<sup>ed</sup> for them to play they couldn't so PM decided to move on. He went on the road and has been on the road until now. [Compare other data.] He worked with carnivals, circuses, stage shows, rodeos, and all kinds of spots in Chicago.

He got his nickname because he was named Ernest Punch Miller and his twin sister was named Ernestine Judy Miller. They were called Punch & Judy. His sister died in 1926 at which time PM left. [Cf. above.] PM never knew his father because his father left when they were young. His mother was a good singer in church. She always thought PM would grow up to be something good. She gave him to his uncle who brought him up.

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PM got his start playing when the old men at a home who had a brass band gave their old instruments to kids when they <sup>Die, the old men</sup> got new instruments. The first instrument PM got was the bass drum. He was so apt on that, that the boys put him on baritone [horn] which he played pretty good. He was then put on the cornet. All the kids were in their teens. PM's first job was with Paul Rosier, who lived 8 miles from Raceland. Next he played with Mike Taylor, who lived about one mile from there [i.e., Raceland?]. Then he played with Bobo [Lewis] of Raceland, who played tuba with Buddy Bolden, who brought PM to play in New Orleans for a while. PM was still very young then.

PM's mother was a member of a Baptist church. She sang hymns such as "Nearer My God to Thee." She was one of the leading singers in her church.

Punch Miller joined the Billy Mack show when it came to New Orleans with no trumpet player. The show was called The Merry Mack Makers. [Compare other sources, e.g., Mack and Mack interview.] The personnel included: PM, trumpet; Wilbur [De] Paris, from Georgia, Miller thinks, [Cf. biographies] trombone; Henry Brown, piano; a man named Jackson from Mississippi. None of the men were from New Orleans.

The show went to Chicago and played for chouruses, tap dancers, singers, and a comedian named Henry Reno. Billy Mack had his own songs such as "Hard Luck" and "Black But Sweet, Oh God." A woman in the show named Mary Evans sang "Bear, Bear Biddlelum" [sp?] with Mrs. [Mary] Mack. Even though the band had music written, PM was no reader. WDP, who is brother of Sidney [De] Paris, was a reader. PM made a run on his horn which WDP

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wrote down and asked PM to play. When PM said he couldn't play it, WDP told him that that is what he makes on his horn all the time.

PM stayed in Houston, Texas [after M & M show?] a long time with Frank Davis, drummer, who had a dance band. [I believe that later data clears up his chronology. RBA, June 28, 1979.] Frankie Gibbs, a good trombone player, was in the band. FG was crippled; he "had one leg shorter than the other." WR says Bunk [Johnson] talked about FG. PM tells story of when they went out. Another band was playing and a lady insisted that FG dance with her. He told her he couldn't dance but when she kept insisting, he tried. The lady then asked him if he was shouting. This is a true joke according to PM.

PM came to New Orleans a couple times before World War I but didn't stay. He had a long stay in New Orleans after he got out of the Army. He stayed until 1926 and then went to Chicago. When he first came to New Orleans, he heard Buddy Petit, Kid Rena, and Louis Armstrong. LA always "played off like" on the Capitol boat. He would play with brass bands sometimes. PM said that LA always seemed above the rest of them as he was hired by big-time people. PM first met LA while he was working with Kid Ory at [the Big] 25. Johnny Dodds was also in the band. PM played one piece with the band, "Over There", a piece he brought back from the Army that the band hadn't heard. They kidded LA about PM replacing him.

PM played with Freddy Keppard at Dreamland in Chicago where he first met him. While in the country, PM caught an excursion [train] from New Orleans to Houma and stood next to Bunk Johnson all day and heard him play. Buddy Bolden was before his time so he never heard him play. PM knew Big

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Eye Louis [Nelson] but did not work with him.

PM worked with Manuel Manetta with his [PM's] band and a couple of times with Jack Carey's band. MM played piano in JC's band. Also in <sup>the</sup> band were: Chinee [Foster], drum; Jack Carey, trombone; PM, trumpet; [Louis] Robichaux, clarinet, who was replaced by Georgie Boyd; Chester Zardis, bass; and usually Tom Benton, guitar, although Lorenzo Staulz played a couple of times. Louis Robichaux was kin to "Old Man" [John] Robichaux [; violin]. In PM's band were: Walter Preston, guitar [or banjo]; Joe Gabriel, [or Gable or Gabel?] bass; George Boyd, clarinet; and Eddie Morris, trombone. [Compare photograph.]

PM says that Lorenzo Staulz was funny, and PM tells of a trip with Jack Carey's band to Birmingham, [Ala.]<sup>62ma</sup>. Each man was paid \$100 and transportation for one night and a day. Staulz joked about Robichaux's playing. Robichaux was young then and looked as if he wanted to cry. PM worked about three years with Jack Carey and about four years with his own band.

PM worked with Fate Marable only once. That was one trip up the [Mississippi] River, which lasted [he thinks] from Saturday thru Tuesday only. He worked with Erskine Tate at the Vendome [Theatre] in Chicago, replacing for a couple of Sundays Louis [Armstrong], who had gone to New York. The first night he played there he was frightened by the spotlight. [See other reels on spotlite story.] At the Golden Lily [nightclub? res-  
taurant?] he worked five years until it burned down. The band there included: Francois Mosley [sp?], leader and drummer; Charles DuCaston, guitar; Fred Howard, clarinet and sax; Al Wynn, trombone, at various times; Fred Reed, piano; PM, trumpet; and Ted[dy] Wilson, piano, after he left

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Bennie Moten. [Cf. TW biographies.].

PM worked with Jelly Roll Morton for two years [on winter tours]. In the winter JRM took bands out on tour. In the summer JRM had a steady band but didn't work much. PM also went on winter tours with Walter Barnes. WB's band toured Florida and different places. During the summer, WB ran his big grocery store in Chicago. PM had a job in Chicago so he missed the fire that burned up WB's band [in Natchez, Miss.]. [Cf. Jazz Journal, ?, (unable to locate); Jazz Information, April 26, 1940, Vol. 1, No. 30, p. 1.] The only band member that PM remembers with JRM is "King" Swazee, first trumpet, in about 1931 - 1932.

PM played with King Porter, trumpet, a stout fellow, on shows. KP is now in Detroit but was from Birmingham, Ala. He is about 58 years old now.

PM worked one night with Earl Hines as a substitute for Jabbo [Smith]. Jabbo returned the next night. PM played with Al Wynn the first time in Chicago. Christmas card from AW to WR discussed.

Punch Miller worked with Tiny Parham at the Dreamland. TP sent Cliff ["Snags"] Jones to get PM to audition. PM got the job and worked with TP at the Dreamland, the one with the glass floor, on State Street. WR adds that there was a Dreamland on the Westside where Jimmie Noone, Freddy Keppard, and Charlie Cook [ Unintelligible ]. After leaving the Dreamland, the band toured, even coming to New Orleans. The personnel of the band included: CJ, d; TP, [p]; PM, [tp]; Eddie Ellis, tb; Lester Boone, as; Jimmy [ ? ], tu, b.

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PM says that his job with Hughie Swift was about his first real job in Chicago. They were supposed to be the first band on the air. HS had a sixteen piece band at Jeffrey Tavern. Baby Dodds was in band also. (Leading here by WR.) PM worked with this band about one year and was featured singing and blowing. Junior [sic] Cobbs [sic], [Junius C. "Junie" Cobb], who was in the band, got PM for <sup>the</sup> band when he heard him play at the Bookstore on 31st Street where he worked with Teddy Wilson's wife, Piano.

On Tiny Parham recordings, according to RBA [who played recordings for PM], PM is in the ensemble on "[The] Head Hunter's Dream", but the solo is by Ray Hobson; on "Stuttering Blues", PM plays solo trumpet and in the ensemble; PM is on "Jogo Rhythm" and "Cuckoo Blues". He plays second trumpet on "Stomping on Down"; on "Scag-a-Lag" RH plays the first solo, and PM plays the last solo; on "Blue Island Blues", Hobson plays, and it is probably Hobson on "Jungle Crawl". PM thinks he plays second trumpet on all records but played solo on some. Hobson plays on "Dixie-land Doin's"; PM solos on "Cathedral Blues". Frisky Foot Jackson, a drummer, is mentioned. Perhaps Frankie "Half-Pint" [Jaxon] is on vocals.

WR once saw Tiny Parham playing organ while WR was at the Savoy Ballroom with Meade Lux Lewis in 1938. WR never talked to him. PM never heard TP mention his hometown.

PM thinks he first saw Louis James, b, <sup>new</sup> while in Joe Gabriel's Band on Bayou LaFouche. [This is not Joe Gabriel, the bassist. RBA, June 28, 1979] Shine, the vocalist, is the only other member of the band PM remembers. White folks loved the band. They played sweet music and read music.

PM played with Jack Carey at National Park mostly, at Third and Willow.

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They also played in Gulfport, Biloxi, and Magnolia, Mississippi. PM's band was the first to play at the Astoria. They worked there for Beansy [Fauria] for a long time. He also worked at Economy, Franc Amis, Cooperators' [i.e., Cooperative], San Jacinto, Frenchmen, St. Elizabeth's Hall above Napoleon Avenue, etc. They played nearly every Sunday at Milneburg for white boys. Joe Gondolfi, an Italian, kept PM busy. PM never played at St. Katherine's Hall. RBA asks PM about working at Million Willows, but PM says it probably is Third and Willow. [The source is the notes on Para CJS 102, 10" LP] They played there every Sunday night. PM played a couple times at Mrs. Cole's lawn parties. He worked at a place at Perdido & Saratoga or Franklin. Louis Armstrong sat in with PM there after LA finished his job on boat. [Napoleon] "Toodlum" [Johnson] ran the place.

When PM first started out [i.e., in New Orleans?], his ideal was Buddy Petit. PM says that he sang the same way [he always did] before Louis Armstrong started singing [as a featured band member?]. He says LA agreed that he was not patterning after him. The same is true for his trumpet playing. He is not imitating LA. PM says his style has changed some.

[END OF REEL]

MILLER, PUNCH  
[Aug. 9, 1957?]  
Reel I, track 1  
WR's Reel II

Also Present:  
Barbara Reid Edmiston  
William Russell  
Richard B. Allen

Summary: Alma D. Williams  
Check: Richard B. Allen

Some of the tunes that Jack Carey played were: "Tiger Rag," "That's A Plenty," "Honeysuckle Rose," [Check date] [Cf. Ed Kirkeby & et al, Ain't Misbehavin', New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1966, pp. 122-124.] "Clarinet Marmalade," "High Society," and a lot of head numbers. One of the head numbers was called "No. 1." Punch Miller scats "No. 1." It does not have any other name. PM says that nobody plays it now, but he wrote it for Sam [Chartres?]. You must have a good clarinetist to play "No. 1" [because] it has breaks all the way through. The clarined does most of the work. It has the last note. While the band played the last part of "Tiger Rag," the people in the audience would sing: "Jack Carey, [had a daughter,] on the water, selling porks chops, two for a quarter." [See below also.] PM says that every Monday night at the National Park, at the corner of Third & Willow, [across the street from the band platform] a parrot at a grocery store would sing "Jack Carey" "as plain as day-light."

PM says it was good in those times. Bands would meet [on trucks?] up on the corner and stay there three or four hours "blowing at one another." Each band would be advertising for a [dance] hall where the band played. Some of the people PM met on the street were Buddy Petit, Sam Morgan, Sidney Desvigne, the Old Tuxedo [the Original Tuxedo Orchestra], Chris Kelly, and [Kid] Rena. At a funeral, all bands would play together.

RBA asks about battle of bands. PM says he won two loving cups. One at the Italian hall battling Chris Kelly and one at St. Elizabeth battling Earl Humphrey. EH had a made-up band with George Washington [both trombonists!!] PM lost one loving cup to Sonny [i.e., Papa] Celestin.

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PM played three battles and won two. Celestin had a 12-piece band, [Cf. recordings on size of band.] and PM had a 6-piece band.

WR asks if "Tiger Rag" was ever called "Play, Jack Carey." PM agrees that it was called this. PM says that all over the dance floor you could hear the audience singing, "Jack Carey, had a daughter, on the water, selling pork chops, two for a quarter, play, Jack Carey, play, Jack Carey." For the part which goes "hold that tiger," the audience sang, "play, Jack Carey."

RBA asks if there is anyone alive that plays like Jack Carey. PM says Eddie Morris plays something like Jack Carey, but trombonists now play trumpet style. PM thinks Morris French, who RBA says is now in LaPlace, played just like Jack Carey. [Cf. Morris French interview.] RBA adds that MF's nephew, Albert French, bj, is now with [the late Papa] Celestin's band which is still playing. The band plays on wharfs where boats are leaving and at private dances. PC's widow "gets a cut" according to RBA.

The first job that PM was paid for was in [Raceland] at a lawn party. PM was paid 75¢ while the others were paid 50¢ because PM did all the work. They didn't have a leader. PM was about sixteen years old. PM tells of how the old men at the home gave relatives and Punch Miller, who had no relatives in the band, their old instruments when they got new ones. PM got a bass drum first, then baritone, then trumpet. He learned to play them all by head. A fellow from another town got PM to play in his band. Paul Rosier gave PM his start on music.

WR asks PM when he was born, and he says December 9, 1894. [Cf. previous WR's reel.]

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PM did not know how to read music at first. He could just whistle something and pick up his horn and play it. He learned to read some in the Army. PM says that he stole his reading. While in the Army, he played with the late Louis "Chif" Matthews (who played trumpet with Kid Ory years ago). PM would have his music up but would watch LM's fingers. Every time LM would touch a valve, PM would touch one on his trumpet. LM told PM that he couldn't make it like that and that he would have to learn some music. So LM started to teach PM how to read. When PM came to New Orleans, he would hang around Joe Howard who helped him. PM also took lessons from [Jim] Humphrey. [A discussion of the Humphrey family. Confusing.] Willie Humphrey, gr., [i.e., Willie E. Humphrey] plays clarinet. Willie Humphrey, Jr., [i.e., Willie J. Humphrey] now with Paul Barbarin according to WR, plays clarinet. WJH's grandfather, Jim Humphrey, played trumpet. PM says Earl Humphrey plays trombone. PM asks about Percy Humphrey, trumpet player, who he met but didn't know.

PM's first job in the city was with Jack Carey on a Saturday. They played on St. Thomas Street at a lawn party in the Irish Channel. That Sunday night, they played at St. Elizabeth's Hall. PM thinks that they were off for a week and then they went to Biloxi, Gulfport, etc. Someone told WR that PM's first job was at a baseball game. PM says that he played at games but that was not his first job. ["They"?] used to dance and play ball at National Park.

When asked about brass bands and parades, PM said that his brass

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band played for [Jefferson City] Buzzards every carnival. He played for them year after year. When one carnival was finished, PM would sign a contract for the next carnival. PM still had a contract when he left town suddenly. Joe Gondolfi was head of this club then. RBA says that the club is still going and that John Casimir ['s Young Tuxedo Brass Band] marches every carnival for them now. They have different bands every Saturday night now according to RBA. PM used to play on the Lake-front every Sunday when there was no parade. PM says that if you sign a contract for an advertisement and for a parade, you get someone else to play one engagement while you play the other.

He says that Buddy Petit sometimes took three jobs in one night and that people hunted for BP with guns. BP used to "fool with some kind of old stuff called 'luck'," and, when confronted about not showing up for a job, he would start to spit and tell them he forgot and would be there in a little while. BP would go and play a little and then leave to go to other job. A musician from over the river had a job at the Royal Garden Hall at Gravier and Rampart when PM and BP weren't working. BP said that he was going to get that job and told PM to come watch. BP started "spitting and talking," and the man told him to come to work the next Sunday and Saturday. BP would put the stuff in his mouth, but PM never knew what it was. Barbara Reid Edmiston read a book with information on luck powder. She says that you can buy it at the Crackerjack store. PM was on a show last year with a man who shot dice. He would put powder on his hands and won all the money all the time. BP used a powder on his hands and chewed black gum.

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PM had a brass band for carnival, but it was not standard like the Old [i.e., Original] Tuxedo. Every year when it was time for a parade PM would have a band ready. PM played parades [and?] funerals with standard bands also. PM played his last parade here in 1925. The last parade he played was in Chicago at the Elk's Convention in about 1948. There were about forty or fifty bands. PM's band did not play marches because they didn't know any. They played "St. Louis Blues", "High Society", and pieces like that. In Punch's band was Lee Collins, trumpet, and other Orleanians that PM can't think of.

PM played with Tubbh Hall, drummer, a couple of times but not steadily. PM also knew Jimmy Blythe, piano player, said to be from Milwaukee. PM says lots of guys didn't tell where their real homes were. Eddie Ellis, trombone, told people his home was New York and Philadelphia, but when he got sick, no one knew what to do. He called his wife, Stella, and told her to call his Mother in Atlanta and tell her that he is dying. EE didn't die but got well.

PM never played in [Henry] Allen [Sr.]'s [Brass] Band. He played dances across the river though. HA's son, Red Allen, went to McDonogh 35 school for half a day and would come to PM's room after school. RA looked old. While playing at the Garrick Bar in Chicago, during the intermission, RA asked PM to confirm his age of about thirty-three to others members of the band. RA, Lee Collins, and Guy Kelly are younger than PM, Chris Kelly, Buddy Petit, Kid Rena, Louis Armstrong, and Sam Morgan. PM knew King Oliver in Chicago but never met him in New Orleans. [Cf. Stella Oliver on KO leaving.]

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RBA asks PM about his earliest memories. PM doesn't remember the Spanish-American War but remembers World War I. As for songs, before he went into Army, all PM remembers hearing were blues. In the Army he learned "Over There," "Alexander's Ragtime Band," and other Army songs. After he left the Army and came here he learned "High Society", "Clarinet Marmalade", "That's A Plenty", "Banana Peeling" which is a stomp number, [PM scats last part of "Banana Peel"), [See "Banana Peel Rag" on R-44 tape.] "Tiger Rag", and "Panama Rag".

PM believes that the first record he recorded was "Black, But Sweet, Oh God" with Mack & Mack. It was probably made on Baronne or Carondelet. RBA thinks that Manuel Manetta recorded [with Celestin] at the same time on Baronne. [Cf. matrix numbers.] Henry Brown, who PM says is a great bluesman, plays piano on the recording. Roosevelt Sykes told RBA that HB is in St. Louis. James Hemingway, from Atlanta, played piano with the Mack & Mack show for a couple of years but died. He was a nice piano player. PM says that he made no records with Jelly Roll Morton. [Cf. Davies, John R. T., and Wright, Laurie. Morton's Music. (London: Storyville Publications and Co., 1968), p. 16.] PM says JRM made his recordings before PM joined him and [PM thinks] JRM died soon after PM and [King] Swayzee left him. [Cf. other data.] PM heard all of JRM<sup>3</sup> records, like "Doctor Jazz".

PM recorded with Tiny Parham, Jimmy Wade, Al Wynn, and Big Chief [Russell] Moore, a trombone player. PM's last recording was

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✓ made with Big Chief Moore in [19]48 in New York city during a big snowstorm. Bunk Johnson was there then. He didn't get out of his house for a couple of days. There were 48 inches of snow in two days time. [WR leading here.] PM also recorded "She's a Truckin' Mother For You" [i.e., "Trucking Little Woman"?] with Big Bill Broonzy, a blues singer, in Chicago. PM made a couple of records with BBB.

He also made a couple of records with "Tampa Red" (Roosevelt according to Punch, Hudson Whittaker according to RBA), who plays harmonica and guitar and still records. TR used to live at 35th & State Streets. WR says that Mama Yancey called him Mrs. Tampa. TR used to record for Lester Melrose who always owed him royalties. PM recorded blues with TR but can't think of the names of any of the tunes. RBA says that they will look them up in Orin [Blackstone's] [Index to Jazz] book.

✓ PM worked on one riverboat from a Saturday through Tuesday. [Cf. above reel.] While working on a show with Charlie Taylor in Wisconsin, they were hired by a man to work on a riverboat where they played all night on a Saturday night.

[END OF REEL]