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August 30, 1960 Also present: Richard B. Allen, Marjorie T. Zander

(Interview recorded at 2527 Lincoln Court, New Orleans)

Noah Hayward Cook was born July 30, 1879, in Livingston Parish; he was raised in Baton Rouge, where he moved when he was about six years old; he explains that his father died when he was three years old, and that his brother took care of him then; he moved to East Baton Rouge Parish when he was six, going to the city of Baton Rouge when he was eleven years old, where he remained until 1899. He trained to be a jockey in Baton Rouge for one year. He was sworn into the service [U. S. Army] in New Orleans, on July 15, 1899, and sent to Texas; on October 1, 1900, he was sent to the Phillipines, arriving in Manila October 29, 1900; he served in the Phillipines until June 15, 1902, when he went back to the U.S., arriving there July 26, 1902. After doing carpentry work for six years, in Baton Rouge for a short time, he re-enlisted, going to a barracks in New York, where he remained a little over three years. When he was discharged, he returned to Baton Rouge for a short time, then moved to New Orleans, arriving here January 1, 1913; he married Carrine Foster on July 12, 1918, and is still married to her. He has been in New Orleans ever since.

NC discusses games and work.

NC talks of a song which is about seventy-five years old; he wanted his daughter to record it, but she said it was too old-fashioned; it was featured by Billy Kersands, the first Negro minstrel man [i.e., star?] in this country; the song is called "The Old Mule;" NC heard Billy Kersands in Baton Rouge. NC says Kersands sang the song about the time when he went to England and made Queen Victoria laugh. NC tells about a fake Kersands whom NC saw in Texas in 1900.

NC talks about some [racial? RBA?] trouble some soldiers had when he was in Texas; Teddy Roosevelt was president at the time.

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NC talks about the Army. He talks about his family, and the deaths of his siblings. Talks about education when he was young; there were no colored teachers at first, and no colored schools. NC got most of his education in the Army; he figures he has about the equivalent of an eighth grade education. NC was a corporal in the Army.

NC talks about non-commissioned officers' school, and about the reason the Army assigned white officers from the South to command Negro regiments; the reason was that the white Southerners understood the Negroes better, and got along with them better.

MC says his memory is so good because he is a teetotaler. Discussion of drink, soft and otherwise, and prices.

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NC tells of his encounter with a bear, when NC was a youth. NC tells of training to be a jockey, of being thrown from a horse and injured, of not going back to racetrack work when he recovered; he mentions part of his Army service again [see Reel I].

NC talks about his religion, and religion in general; NC is a member of the Methodist church. There were not hymn books in the church when NC was a boy. NC speaks of changes; he says things change every twenty-five years.

NC talks about the Spanish-American War veterans; NC is the only one of his group still able to get around.

Although NC went to dances, he never danced. The dances NC remembers seeing were quadrilles, waltzes, polkas and breakdowns. [i. e., square dances?]; breakdowns were fast, and a man would call figures for the dancers to execute.

NC tells of "Christian collations;" people would get together in someone's house; they would lock arms, march around singing hymns; they never danced.

NC talks about some changes in funeral customs. He talks about the funeral which were priached a year after burial.

People used to go in the woods to get religion; they would stay there all night, praying, not eating, trying to get religion; NC says that years later it was discovered "It didn't take all that to get religion." If a person trying to get religion in the woods convinced the deacons of the church that he had got religion, he was taken in as a member of the church; if he failed, he had to go back in the woods. NC says, "The black people come from a long ways, and the white folks was just as bad as we were when I was a boy; there wasn't no difference; all of 'em was kinda half cracked." Black and white lived together, in the same way, until 1898, when

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John N. Pharr [sp?] was beaten by [or Beat?] Murphy J. Foster in the gubernatorial race in Louisiana. NC always votes Republican in presidential elections, but he didn't vote for Ike [D. D. Eisenhower], as NC figured any man who stayed in the Army sixty-two years didn't have sense enough to be a president. NC voted for [Adlai] Stevenson.

End of Reel ~~DI~~

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Also present: Richard B. Allen, Marjorie T. Zander
Mrs. Corrine Cook

NC has been going to Chalmette National Cemetery since 1928, when the last of the Civil War veterans died; NC and his colleagues [veterans of Spanish-American War] have had charge of the Cemetery ever since; NC is the "head dog" there now. NC shows a photograph of his Spanish-American War group; all but four of these pictured have died. NC points out [George] Dr. Nelson in the photograph; Nelson was the father of Louis Nelson, mail carrier and trombone player; RBA thinks Dr. Nelson has died. NC tells of burying a man standing up, because there was a tree root in the way in the grave that the caretakers wouldn't cut. NC mentions General Logan, Commander, Grand Army of the Republic, who, in 1868, designated May third as Chalmette Day. Discussion of funeral ceremony and book used in it.

NC first married when he was in his thirties; his first wife died; he has been married to his second wife, Corrine Cook, for forty-two years.

NC mentions Roland Brown, head jockey at the Fair Grounds and a white man, who taught jockies how to ride when NC was learning. NC's experiences as an exercise boy were all in Baton Rouge,

The first brass band used at Chalmette National Cemetery was in 1941; the people who had charge of it until then would allow only fife and drum. NC saw regimental bands play for funerals in the Army. He had seen bands play funerals in New Orleans; he says the societies used to have the funerals with bands, and that they are dying out. He has not seen a band funeral within seven or eight years. NC was a member of the Knights of Pythian; he was an officer in it and has been an officer in every society he has belonged to. He has been a member of the Inseparable Friends Benevolent Association since 1935,

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the society own a hall at 1407 St. Philip Street; NC has been president of the society bought in 1878. The society is the oldest in New Orleans; there are only twenty-eight members now; insurance companies have taken over the function of societies; the society is trying to sell the hall now.

Talk of quarantine and quarantine. Talk of fashions and how they return again and again.

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Also present: Richard B. Allen, Marjorie T. Zander,
Mrs. Corrine Cook

Corrine Foster Cook is not related to any of the musician Fosters. She was born February 6, 1889, in New Orleans. She is a member of the church choir; they sing a lot of the same hymns that were sung when she was a girl, although there are new hymns sung also. One of the hymns she learned when a girl was "I Am Thine, O Lord;" she sing it. She has been a Baptist all her life. She was born across the Bayou St. John, near City Park. She has lived downtown all her life, with one short exception, when she lived uptown with a friend; she doesn't like living uptown.

NC has belonged to four different societies in his life; thwy are the Pythinans, the Masons, the Tabernacles and the Inseperable Friends. They were all male societies, except the Tabernacæ, which was mixed. NC also belonged to a short-lived society, the Knights of the Honor of the World, in Baton Rouge; the head of the group absconded with the funds. MC tells of the only times he himself ever stole anything; he says he does everything right now, because he would get caught if he did wrong.

The [former] president of the Inseperable Friends spent all the money of this society.

The Knights of Pythians went out of existence because so many of the members died that the others, including the head man, F. W. Green, couldn't pay the death claims of five-hundred dollars each; the Pythian Temple, on Gravier was lost because of financial difficulty. Insurance companies have taken over the function of the organization. NC says some people are trying to tevive that society, but he won't join because he is over the age limit, although one of the re-organizers would enter his age as being within the limits. The age limits to join [any?] society are eighteen to fifty years old [the senior division?].

NC remembers when Manuel Perez played on the Pythian Temple Roof Garden; he says [F. W. ?] Green had the roof put on the place.

The Old Southern [brass] Band played at the balls, parades, and everything in Baton Rouge, when NC lived there; it was the only band there; there were about ten men in it; all were settled men. The band played for the Odd Fellows parade, on March 6, and for the Fireman's parade; they played for white parades, also. They didn't play much ragtime; they had a few ragtime pieces; the only one NC remembers was "Here Comes My Long-tailed Monkey." Teddy Williams, the best baritone [horn] player around, was featured in the number. Some of the words of the song were not fit to be sung. The band played the number from music. Eddie Brahill [sp] wrote all the music for the band; Brahill was a schooled musician.

NC was raised with "Toots" Johnson; Johnson had a band; he worked only as a musician. RBA mentions trumpeter Kid Victor, and the Hill City Band [both of Baton Rouge]. NC mentions Ebenezer Young, who played kettle drum [i.e., snare drum], bass drum, guitar and harmonica simultaneously, and played for balls [i.e., dances]; he could play any type dance tune; he was self-taught; His brother, Willie Young, was an end-man in minstrel shows. Minstrel shows which came to Baton Rouge were all male; NC says women only went on the stage in the last twenty-five or thirty years; fifty years ago there were no women on the stage. Ma Rainey came on the stage long after that [NC's time limit]; from the time NC was twelve years old until he was twenty, there were no minstrel shows with women which came to Baton Rouge. The first woman NC saw on a stage was an imitator of Black Patti; the original Black Patti had been dead for years. NC tells again about the imitator of Billy Kersands; he talks about the feats of the real Kersands, who came to Baton Rouge, where he was very popular.

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NC mentions ten cent shows, where admission was ten cents; he mentions street fairs, which came to New Orleans also, with regularity. He mentions the ["woozy"?] .

NC heard no organ grinders until he came to New Orleans; RBA mentions Nicodemus, an old-time organ grinder in New Orleans. NC mentions the songs, "Casey Jones" and "Stackolee;" he says Casey Jones was a white engineer, and that Stackolee was a Negro, a great gambler, who came to Baton Rouge sometimes. Casey Jones wasn't a great engineer at all; he could make the whistle on his engine spell his own name; the engineer about whom a song should have been composed was John 'Tuscon [sp?], who "killed more people and sheep on that Valley Road when I was a boy than any other man; he pulled that Memphis mail from here to Memphis, Tennessee." Casey Jones's widow never got any money from the song about her husband. NC used to see Casey Jones in Baton Rouge.

End of Reel IV