

"POPS" FOSTER
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Also present: Nesuhi Ertegun, Robert Campbell

NE and RC explain that the purpose of their interview is to get information from which paintings of the scenes connected with jazz in the old times may be made [use in Life magazine].

PF talks about the Sunday railroad excursions, to Houma, Louisiana, and to Thibodaux, Louisiana. Picnics were held under the trees; people danced on ground from which the "clods" (PF says clod is Creole for hard lumps of dirt [!!RBA]) had been removed. Excursion trains began at Esplanade Street [i.e., Avenue] and the river, crossed the river on barges (there were no bridges then), were hooked to engines and pulled to Gretna, Louisiana, where more passengers boarded. The time was about 1910. Passengers could board anywhere along the line; the charge for round-trip was \$1. The band PF played in for the excursions consisted of: violin, guitar, drums, bass, clarinet, trombone and trumpet. PF says it was a large band. There was no piano; if a piano player wanted to play in a band in those days, he had to learn to play something other than a piano, such as drums. PF used his bow and picked his bass in those days. PF says it is said that he was the first to pick the bass; he says he wasn't, but he made the style famous; bass players have been picking their instruments as long as PF remembers, but they didn't play a fast four [beat], as PF does; PF doesn't know where he got the style, but thinks he was doing it when he worked in the red light district. PF says that after he went to New York, everyone began playing four beat, and that the music publishers had their arrangements issued with four beat bass; some of it was so fast that tuba players couldn't keep up, so they took up string bass. PF had always wanted to play tuba, so when he went to Los Angeles, California in 1927 with [Kid] Ory, he was playing tuba; one of the valves broke, so the [manager

of the place where they were working?] told him to bring his string bass; so many were interested in PF's playing that the manager told him to continue using it; PF later demonstrated his string bass technique at music stores in Los Angeles.

PF was born in McCall, Assumption Parish, Louisiana; McCall is about sixty-eight miles from New Orleans, toward Baton Rouge. He was born May 19, 1892. He became interested in music because his [maternal? paternal?] uncle played music; in fact, all his mother's people played; his uncle played for the Cajuns; PF says Cajuns are not white, nor are they colored; they are half-and-half. PF also played for the Cajuns. The bands were small, sometimes consisting of guitar, violin and bass, or mandolin, guitar and bass. PF's sister played mandolin; his brother [Willie Foster?] played guitar, but on a "big, hard job" would play violin, with a guitarist hired for the job. Sometimes a valve trombonist would be added to play picnics. PF says he misses a lot in school because he played music when he was young; he doesn't advocate missing school and examinations to play music.

With the string groups, PF played ragtime music, the same music known today as Dixieland music; they also played honky tonk music, which was slow blues. Rumbas were slow [the same as?] polkas; tangos were [the same as?] mazurkas. The slow drag, a dance, was danced to slow blues. PF speaks about "tunks" and barrel-houses; he describes the interior of a tunk; he says there was a piano in the back room, where people would dance; the piano player who played the blues the best got the biggest crowd. Girls weren't taken to the cabarets in those days; there were girls there, working for the house for commission on drinks only,

except for the good cabarets, which paid about fifty cents per night to assure themselves of getting good girls.

The cabaret where PF worked was at Customhouse [now Iberville] and Liberty; the name was Huntznagel [Huntz and Nagel's?]; ~~HANS NAGEL~~ + Eddie Groshell was one of the owners of the place. He discusses the girls, their dress and their legs. It was King Oliver's Band; the year was around 1907-1908. The band got a small salary, but made a lot more from tips. PF talks about the red light district; he says a section in Hamburg, Germany, is just like the old-time New Orleans red light district, except the Germans don't have slow blues music.

PF was born on a farm; his father gave dances, to which people from neighboring plantations would come. After a while, people began hiring [bands for] dances; when PF and his brother became big enough to play for dances, they would get all the crowd, causing their uncle, who might be playing at a dance nearby, to become angry. PF's father wanted him to be musician, although PF did not want to. PF's first instrument was cello, when he was six or seven years old. He has played on home-made instruments; he describes a flour barrel string bass his brother made for him. The instrument had three strings. A lot of the old-time bass men, including Ed Garland (who is now in his seventies), played on three-string basses. (PF says Kid Ory is up in his seventies, but won't admit it; when PF was a little boy, Ory was already a man, playing music.) PF tells of playing with kid bands; when they would get a job, some would have to get adult substitutes, because they couldn't play well enough. The paternal uncle of PF taught PF's brother, who in turn taught PF and his sister. PF has tried to play guitar, but he has mostly played bass. The first regular bass PF played

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was one his brother bought him about 1907. (George Wein has entered; there is a short exchange of words; Wein leaves.) PF says he had been playing since about seven years before then. His mother took him to New Orleans in 1902 to see the Mardi Gras; he was playing before that. PF's brother moved to New Orleans about a year before PF and his mother went [moved?] there; his leaving broke up the band he and PF played with.

End of Reel I

Also present: Nesuhi Ertegun, Robert Campbell

PF's brother [Willie Foster] bought a large bass for PF between the years 1907 and 1909; the brother had left McCall [Louisiana] by that time, and was working with Rozeale's [sp?] Band; Roy Palmer (later a trombonist) was on trumpet; Joe Johnson was the guitarist. When Johnson learned to play trumpet, Palmer began playing trombone; both were good; Johnson is dead. PF says Johnson was one of the trumpet players nobody ever hears of; he was better than Freddy Keppard; "Freddy Keppard was just a loud trumpet player--Loud, very loud." When he was a child, PF heard [Buddy] Bolden. PF recalls that Eddie Garland sent him on some jobs [as replacement for Garland?] with Freddy's brother, Louis Keppard; Louis and others wanted to start a kid band, so PF fitted their plans. PF says Freddy Keppard always wanted to fight anyone who wanted to hire PF, who substituted for Johnny Lindsay [PF says he and Lindsay looked so much alike it was hard for people to distinguish their difference] in Freddy's band. Sometimes Manuel [Perez], [or?] the Imperial Band, wanted to hire PF; Freddy would be ready to fight. King Oliver wanted to fight about PF once.

PF didn't begin walking until he was about five, as he had "typhoid malaria." He began playing when he was six or seven, although he didn't want to, as he preferred riding horses. He doesn't remember much about the first Mardi Gras he saw, in 1902; he says that was about the last one he saw, as shortly afterwards he began playing in the parades instead of watching them. PF tells about the old Mardi Gras custom of having a band ride around the city in a wagon, stopping at houses, bars, etc. and playing; everyone held open houses in the old times. PF says barroom owners would call good bands off the street to have a drink; this would occur anytime of the year, when the band was doing advertising.

PF first played cello, which his brother had bought for \$1.50; PF played it with the bow more than he picked it. PF began picking the bass after his brother bought one; PF was at a lawn party when he began picking. PF talks about clothes, cosmetics, etc., in connection with lawn parties. Lawn parties were held in the open air, on any lawn large enough; a tarpaulin might be rigged over the band's place.

When PF began playing music professionally, he was a member of the Magnolia Band, managed by Louis Keppard; PF's brother, Willie Foster, was leader and played violin; Eddie Atkins or [Honore] Dutrey [played trombone]; King Oliver [played cornet]; [Alphonse] Picou [played clarinet]; Chris [Minor?] was the drummer; PF [bass]; Keppard [guitar]. [Cf. Walter C. Allen and Brian Rust, King Joe Oliver.] PF says the band was so good ^{took} they all the work away from the older bands, such as the Imperial and the Superior. PF talks about the uniform of the band; all the bands wore high-necked military uniforms in those days. [Cf. Louis Keppard photo] PF mentions playing one Easter at the Come Clean Hall, about 1910. The Magnolia Band was sent by the Superior Band to play for them one night at Huntz and Nagel's, Customhouse [now Iberville] and Liberty; the manager liked the Magnolia Band so much he kept them [on the job, releasing the Superior?]. PF says Huntz and Nagel's was a little larger than the Hangover Club [San Francisco]. He describes the interior. The finest sporting women cost one dollar. The band also played jobs away from the cabaret; one of the places was Lincoln Park, for a colored audience. Talk about Creoles, skin coloring, etc. PF says his mother was a full-blooded Indian, from the same tribe as Pee Wee Russell (from Oklahoma);

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his mother was from Virginia. PF says a lot of his white friends would sometimes come to Lincoln Park.

Original reel 2 by: [unclear]
Discussion of a record: [Bad Blood Mama" ?].

PF began playing on the riverboats in 1918, the same year as the flu epidemic; he had been playing at Tranchina's [Restaurant] at West End, with the following: Peter Bocage [trumpet and violin?]; [A.J.] Piron [violin and leader]; Arthur Campbell [piano?]; Johnny St. Cyr and Tom Benton, guitars; Steve Lewis, piano. [Cf. Peter Bocage, reel ? and Johnny St. Cyr, reel ?]. PF quit at Tranchina's a few days before the rest of the band quit. A little later, Peter Bocage and Captain Johnny Streckfus, of Streckfus Steamers, came to get PF to play on a Streckfus boat. (The Streckfus brothers were Joe, Roy, Johnny and Verne [in chronological order of birth].) The band consisted of: Frankie Duson, trombone; Peter Bocage, trumpet; probably Charlie McCurdy (one of the best clarinetist as far as [written] music was concerned in the city; Picou was also a fine musician, but no jazzman; the best jazz clarinetist was ["Big Eye"] Louis Nelson~~, clarinet~~; Alexander Lewis, drums; Fate [Marable], piano; Johnny St. Cyr, guitar. Sometimes later, a succession of trumpet players began; first, Andrew Kimble^{ALL}, but he would not leave town; then, Manuel Perez, but the man [captain?] didn't like his playing; then Joe Howard, the man who taught Louis Armstrong how to read. Then PF took the captain to hear Louis Armstrong, then playing with [Kid] Ory. PF also tried at one time to get Papa Celestin for the job, but without success; PF says he got Celestin his first job at the Tuxedo Dance Hall, taking Celestin away from his good \$1.25 per day job working on the railroad. [Cf. Manuel Manetta reel ?] PF talks about some of the boats, including the President (currently operating)

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and the Sidney (operating when PF began playing on the boats). PF describes the routine of a nighttime dance excursion trip; he says the boat went upriver past the Westwego ferry, or about where the Huey P. Long Bridge is now located [trip now is to about State Street, not much shorter than earlier ones--PRC]. The regular trips were every night; the band began at eight P.M., quitting at eleven P.M., with two ten-minute intermissions. There was a matinee dance trip on Saturday, from two until six P.M.; there was also a matinee Sunday. Occasionally there would be an all-day ride on Sunday; the boat left at nine A.M. The boat was not supposed to carry more than five-hundred [passengers?] but sometimes did. Weekday fare was fifty cents, weekend fare was one dollar. PF made trips away from New Orleans on boats; he and Louis Armstrong left New Orleans in that manner; they left New Orleans aboard a train, arriving later at Paducah [Kentucky], where they joined the musicians union (PF says there was no union for Negroes then in New Orleans, although there had been one years before; when he returned to New Orleans in 1925 there was a Negro local, which he joined); they remained in the Paducah local only one night, then transferred to the St. Louis local. PF explains that the entire Fate Marable Band went to Paducah, where they played that one night; the steamer Sidney, on which they had been playing, remained in New Orleans. They went to St. Louis after the one night job; then they boarded a train which took them to Rock Island, Illinois, where they boarded the steamer St. Paul; they arrived there on May 5, and cruised upriver as far as Dubuque, Iowa; they returned to St. Louis by May 30, and began working out of that city, playing every night. [Cf. Louis Armstrong, Satchmo, chapter 11.] There were two bands

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on the St. Paul; Marable had the night band; "Eddie Allen had the band at night [sic]." There were two white bands on the other [Streckfus] boat [operating out of St. Louis], the J.S. Colored passengers were allowed on the St. Paul only in Monday nights; many whites took the trip, but it was for colored; the band and the deck hands looked forward to Monday nights.

End of Reel II

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Also present: Nesuhi Ertegun, Robert Campbell, *Darnell*
Howard (late, see p. 11, bottom)

When PF was in Fate Marable's band they played "ragtime", the same music that is today called Dixieland; they played tunes such as "Maple Leaf Rag." They read the music; PF says he always could read a little, but not much. Instrumentation of the band: trombone, two trumpets, clarinet, melophone (played by Davy Jones), guitar, bass, piano and drums. PF played string bass; he says tuba didn't come out [i.e., into dance hands] until 1920 or 1921. PF played tuba later. PF doesn't agree with NE that he was a good tuba player; in fact, he says he doesn't consider himself a good string bass player; NE disagrees with PF on that point.

When the Marable band first went to St. Louis, in 1919, they played from nine AM to eleven PM; the next year, however, they played only at night. They were the first colored band to play for whites in St. Louis; Streckfus hired a lot of guards to protect the musicians, because the white musicians threatened them. There were no Negro big bands there before then. PF talks about the daytime excursions; the boat went upriver as far as Alton [Illinois], arriving there about one or two PM. Monday was a good day. The legal capacity of the boat was five hundred persons; when there were many passengers attempting to board, the crew--deckhands, roustabouts, band, cooks, etc.--would board from the rear of the boat, because the checkers for the insurance company could see only the forward ~~gnag~~plank. The boat stayed [i.e., operated from] in St. Louis four months out of the year, in New Orleans eight months. When the boat left St. Louis to return to New Orleans, they would play at various towns all the down the river. On the way upriver, they would go into the Ohio River below Cairo, Illinois, and play at Paducah [Kentucky], in West Virginia, in Cincinnati, Ohio, and as far up

the Ohio as Pittsburg [Pennsylvania]. They also went as far north on the Mississippi River as St. Paul, Minnesota. PF tells of playing at picnics at the mouth of the Mississippi, [proving his statement that he has played from one end of it to the other]. PF talks about the various types of pilots required on the river. PF worked with Fate Marable in 1918 and 1919; he worked on the boat off and on until 1925, with bands led by Dewey Jackson, [cf. discographies] by Charlie Creath, by Eddie Allen and by Sidney Desvigne. PF also worked on the Island Queen, out of Cincinnati; he says they had a better band on their boat than Fate Marable had on his boat.

PF says that in 1922 Bix [Beiderbecke], [Frank] Trumbauer and Pee Wee Russell were playing at the Arcadia Ballroom in St. Louis; Bix was playing piano, Trumbauer [and Russell?], sax. NE says the band was called the Arcadian Serenaders. [Cf. discographies and Beiderbecke's biographies.] NE tells PF that Trumbauer had been dead about a year; PF says Trumbauer played with Paul Whiteman one time. NE suggests that Wingy Manone played in the same band at a later time; PF says it was much later, because Manone couldn't play with any bands then; he couldn't read, and a musician had to be able to read to play with big bands; Manone couldn't make it with Joe Venuti, who had a good band then. PF says the lead, or melody instruments had to know how to read; most piano players couldn't read much then.

PF went to the West Coast to get away from his first wife; it was in 1922; (he mentions "Papa Mutt" Carey); [Kid] Ory had sent for him [to join his band]. PF says he quit Fate Marable's band in 1922 to go to California. (Darnell Howard enters.) PF says he would always go back to the boat; he went west two times, but went back to the boat. He would stay in St. Louis or in New Orleans, depending

upon where he was when he was fired from the boat job. When PF was with Mutt Carey, in 1927, he played at the Liberty Dance Hall, which was on Third between Los Angeles and [?] [in Los Angeles?]. The first time he went to the West Coast was in 1922; he played at the One Eleven Dance Hall, in Los Angeles, on Third between Main and Spring. Kid Ory had a good band in 1922; personnel included: Billy Butler [clarinet?], ^{Bonner?} "Bomber" [drums?], PF [bass], Mutt Carey [trumpet], Bud Scott [guitar or banjo], Fred Washington, piano [and Ory, trombone]. [Abrupt change in subject. Machine apparently off.]

"...Eddie Allen band and hired me back that Friday; fired me on pay night, you know, and hired me back that Friday." The last time PF worked on the [Streckfus] boat was in 1954; he went to see the owners; they have another boat, better than that one, in St. Louis; it is named Admiral. The New Orleans - based boats used to go to St. Louis [for part of the year]; the present New Orleans boat remains there year-round. (George Wein has entered. Darnell Howard is taking photographs.) PF says a photograph was taken for Life [magazine] of George [Wein], Sidney Bechet, Vic [Dickenson?], and PF; they were all lying on a bed in a hotel; Wein says, "Please tell 'em we had our clothes on, though, Pops." (Wein departs.)

PF tells about being in Magnolia [?], of hiding from the paramour of a girl he was seducing, of having the paramour accidentally urinate on his head as he, PF, hid under the steps of the house, and of the successful conclusion of the seduction in another location. PF tells a story of himself and Louis [Armstrong]; in Paducah [Kentucky] one time, just before retiring to bed with two girls, they each bought a can of buttermilk; Louis had to forego the pleasures of the flesh

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because his buttermilk gave him diarrhea. PF tells of playing tricks on trombonist [Jimmy] Archey [in later years]. PF tells of a trick he played in Mobile, Alabama. PF tells of a trick he played on Paul Barbarin in Philadelphia [Pennsylvania]. He tells of another trick he played on Barbarin on the road to Boston [Massachusetts], involving a cemetery, a sheet, and night; "Nick" [no doubt Albert Nicholas] and Red Allen were in the band at the time.

End of Reel III

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Also present: Nesuhi Ertegun, Robert Campbell,
Darnell Howard

PF continues telling stories about tricks he played on Paul [Barbarin].
PF mentions Louis [Armstrong]. Darnell Howard mentions [Albert] "Nick" [Nicholas]
and Barney [Bigard].

PF tells stories about Ernest ^{Kelly}~~Keyyy~~ and himself and one other person in
Franklin, Louisiana. He mentions Buddy Petit and Sidney [Bechet?]. [No doubt
B.P., S. [B.]. E.K. and PF were in the same band.]

End of Reel IV