

WILLIE PARKER, JR.
 I [of 3]--Digest--Retyped
 March 29, 1960

WP told [Alphonse] Picou, a friend of his from playing in the streets [parades, etc.], and Picou got him a clarinet from a pawn shop. WP played clarinet in the Magnolia Orchestra until the Hobgoblins [band for the club of the same name] were formed; he quit that band to form his own band, the Eureka Brass Band [See also WP, reel II, March 29, 1950]; WP's daughter, then a little girl, christened the band; she was the band's godmother; WP remained in that band until he got tired and couldn't play anymore. RBA says the daughter said she was eight years old when she christened the band (Moses McHenry says he can find out the date, as the daughter is his wife; RBA mentions "Jim Crow" [Jim Robinson]). The godmother (who enters at this point), whose name is Annie May Jackson [married to McHenry?], says she was eight years old around 1920, being born in 1912, so the band must have been christened then. WP says that the Eureka Band came out of the Hobgoblins band, which played for the functions of the club of the same name; WP was made manager of the band when he joined it; when the club broke up, he formed the Eureka. [Compare ^{WP}~~WP~~, reel ? Was he kicked out of the Hobgoblins? Did he then rename the band? RBA] The Hobgoblins club paraded on Halloween, wearing silk gowns and caps.

(DE speaks here mentions Spanish Fort.)

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WP worked as a truck driver, hauling cotton for the Crescent Forwarding and Transportation Company, for thirty-five years; when he first came to New Orleans, he did that work and played music besides; he went to work for that company before his daughter was born [1912]. He was taken off that job because of his responsibility for accidentally injuring another driver; after that he never worked again, only playing music for a living. He had other jobs before he got the CF&T job. [Compare above]

When WP first moved to New Orleans, he and his family lived at Frenchmen and Touro [streets--N.B.--these streets, one block apart, are parallel--PRC].

WP heard Buddy Bolden, cornet player, many times; WP says Bolden was killed over in Algiers. [!!!RBA] Bolden brought "ragtime" [i.e., jazz] out.

WP played "ragtime", among other types; he played all kinds of music; he "was under" [i.e., studied under? in a band under the direction of?] Professor [Paul] Chaligny (now dead), and one had to play [from written] music in it. "Ragtime music was made-up stuff; . . . didn't have no ragtime written. Had marches, mazurkas, polkas, schottische, quadrille--all that was music, you see. Well, all bands played that."

There once were many more parades, bands and musicians than there are today; there might be as many as four parades

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on a Sunday. WP mentions "bucking" contests; valve trombones, not slide trombones, were in use then. Slide trombones came later [in New Orleans jazz bands, not historically; slide trombone was in general use many years before valves were adapted to musical instruments--PRC]; Buddy Johnson was the first WP saw with a slide trombone; then Frankie Duson had one, and then Vic Gaspard (of the Onward Brass Band) [Leading by RBA. RBA.]

There were many parades on Firemen's Day, Labor Day and the Tenth of May; The Excelsior Brass Band played Firemen's Day; the Excelsior, the Pickwick, the Onward and the Tulane [Brass] Bands had their own different clubs to play for. Colored brass bands played for white organizations; WP's band played for "the slaughterhouse bunch" [of Arabi?] every time they had a parade; WP mentions [Albert Dees?]. There was much less concern about segregation and intergration in those days.

WP tells how bands would play on the galleries of the halls where they were playing, to ballyhoo the ball that night. WP mentions Cooperators Hall (which was Hopes Hall before, and a church after [and no more now; destroyed by Hurricane Betsy, September 9, 1965--PRC]), Perseverance, Screwman's Hall, The balls began at eight and ended at four in the morning.

Light-skinned [Negroes] and mulattos, played with white bands; Oscar Ducongé was one who did; Ducongé was a good trumpet player. Street cars were segregated, even when WP was a boy. [Compare written documents.]

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WP attended the Crescent Theater; he never attended the Tulane Theater, which was next door to the Crescent, or the French Opera. He liked the Crescent because it had all colored performers. Each troupe had its own band. Lizzie Miles sang there. WP never heard Ma Rainey, but McHenry heard her at the Lyric Theater; MM also heard Bessie Smith. [WP heard Bessie Smith?] The Crescent Theater was on Dryades Street, where the Shell [Oil Company] building is now located.

Dances in the time when WP began playing music were the waltz, the mazurka, the polka, the schottische and the quadrille; McHenry says, "And the two-step." Talk of the dances. WP says some place(s?) had a committee which would eject a person for lifting his feet too high while dancing, as they wouldn't allow any "ratty" dancing.

Odd Fellows's Day, on the Tenth of May, was a big day; they would go to the soldiers's graveyard [no doubt the one at Chalmette], with a band; the old Grand Armies [GAR?] would turn out. [Confused on date? RBA] The Grand Army had a picnic at the Fairground later; one could dance all night.

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Also present: Richard B. Allen, 6
Marjorie T. Zander, Dorothy
Eagleson, Moses McHenry

On Labor Day, there were not enough bands to furnish all the parading units; bands from the country would be called in to augment the city bands.

WP played in brass bands at Heinemann Park, for baseball games; he also played every Sunday [for a period] at Charity Hospital; Willie Wilson, now dead, was leader [of the Eureka Brass Band] then.

Although the brass bands had regular, and different, uniforms, they didn't have all regular personnel, so any extra men, or substitutes would be in different dress. The Pickwick, Excelsior, and Onward bands and their uniforms are mentioned.

Answering RBA, WP says he heard of the Oriental Band, but never heard of them. ~~al~~ Dorothy Eagleson asks, "What about Occidental? Was there an Occidental Band?" WP says, "No. A white band, eh?" DE says, "No, I don't know, I don't know." [Compare New Orleans Negro newspapers.]

The Pickwick Band and the Onward Band were old bands, but the Excelsior Band was the oldest, says WP; he agrees with RBA that Peter Bocage, violinist and trumpeter, would know when it started; RBA says Bocage led the Onward after George Moret did. [Or the Excelsior. Compare other interviews. RBA]

"Wooden Joe" [Nicholas] had his own orchestra, but he played in the Eureka Brass Band with WP; Nicholas was a strong trumpet player. McHenry says he thinks there is a song about "Wooden Joe."

WP Played in the Hobgoblins band before he formed the Eureka; he was in Hobgoblins band a good while before he organized the Eureka. The Hobgoblins were a secret organization when WP joined [and also secret later? RBA] WP mentions George [Hampson?] a great musician, who now has a barber shop on Claiborne at St. Philip. ("Jim Crow" [Robinson] gets his hair cut there). The Hobgoblins wore blue silk gowns and caps, and paraded only at night, on the Tenth of May.

WP played many funerals when he first came to New Orleans. WP was in the Terminal Brass Band at one time. WP didn't play funerals in the country before moving to New Orleans, as there were none with music there at the time. Every person [in the city] who belonged to a society had a band for his funeral; members of big societies had two bands. WP belonged to the Hobgoblins and to the Tulane Club. When asked if he ever played a funeral for a woman, or if he had ever heard of a woman having band music for her funeral, WP replies, "No, indeed!" He and McHenry talk of a woman, "Muddy," who was buried in her Indian costume, at her request.

WP has played many times in churches, with brass bands; they played only hymns (no "ragtime", [i.e., jazz tunes]) such as "When The Saints Go Marching In", "Nearer My God To Thee", and "What A Friend We Have In Jesus."

Some of the best dance halls in that time were the Cooperators and the Economy; Jim, the elder of the church [occupying old Economy Hall?] was once a "musicianer" [i.e., one who could read music?], playing tenor horn with the Deer Range Band (Jim [Robinson] comes from Deer Range). WP says he broke Jim Robinson, George Lewis and Sam Morgan in. WP never played with Buddy Petit. Joe Petit, trombonist [and foster-father -- step-father of Buddy Petit?], played with WP in the Terminal Band. The Security Band was from across the river [Compare photograph of Joe Petit in Jazzmen]; WP played a funeral with that band in Freetown, which is in Algiers near McDonoghville.

WP hasn't heard of Americus Hall; he has heard of Geddes Hall [old 218 or 220 Erato--see Soards, 1884 and others--PRC], which was uptown; he hasn't heard of the Planters Hotel.

Bands played for cornerstone layings in the old days; WP talks about some of the ceremony. Talk about big days for parades. There were parades every Sunday. Everyone had a union [i.e., club group or some sort of organization?]; McHenry names the Shoeshine Boys, Jolly Boys, Jolly Bunch; each would try to appear satorially more splendid than the other; there would be parades every Sunday after Lent, when there would be none [through the summer? RBA].

WP went to the parks. Buddy Bolden played at Lincoln Park; Johnson Park was across from Lincoln Park; Bolden could get all the people from Johnson Park to come to Lincoln Park just by playing. Bolden was as tall as McHenry, who is five feet, eleven inches; Bolden was brown-skinned. Nobody copied Bolden. Bolden and Wood^e, Joe Nicholas were perhaps equal in volume. Besides dances, there were balloon ascensions from Lincoln Park; sometimes the rider would parachute to earth. RBA mentions Sunshine Money [i.e., Casmir L. DesLonde (check spelling)]; WP says he was a preacher, that he never saw him go up in a balloon. Buddy Bottley was the balloon rider WP remembers. Both Lincoln and Johnson parks were baseball parks; there were halls there for dancing. Satchel Paige [of Mobile] started in those parks, say WP and McHenry. McHenry says Paige got his nickname because he carried a little satchel everywhere he went. WP never played at christenings or wakes.

WP was brought up Baptist, attending St. Joseph's church in St. Sophie, Plaquemines [Parish]. The congregation sang; sometimes there was a piano. WP says the sanctified church near him has a band; he says the bass player, Sidney "Jim Little" Brown, plays there; Brown is to be baptized Easter Sunday; he has quit playing in [dance] orchestras; he used to play with [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin. The rest of the church band comprises piano, drum, guitar, tambourine, cymbals; they have also had saxophone.

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Moses McHenry was a laborer for the railroad until World War II; he tells how he became a cook for the railroad about that time. He remembers hearing railroad gangs singing, but no particular tune; WP remembers that the gangs would sometimes sing "What A Friend We Have In Jesus", which brass bands now play. Hymns sung in earlier times were the same as the ones sung today, says WP; bands played the same music for funerals as they do today. WP says, "Music is five lines and four spaces." The bands always played "ratty" music which was their favorite, on the way back from a funeral. McHenry says bands used to play funerals all the way to the graveyard, at the graveside, and back, but the second line became so boisterous through the years that occasionally someone would be killed, so the band just goes part of the way now. [Or it is because the graveyard is so far in some cases? RBA] WP says a fellow [second liner?] wanted to break the horn of Kid Howard (a cousin of WP) at a funeral about a year and a half ago (RBA says it was two summers ago, and that Joe Robichaux was in the second line). WP says second lines are the same anywhere in town. [The Trem^l section second line has the worst reputation. RBA]

Girttown is the section around the waterworks [Water Purification Plant], off Jefferson Highway and above

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Carrollton [Avenue]. [Compare article in Louisiana Weekly, c. 1963. RBA.] Zion City is near the river, around Fig and Apple streets [Fig and Apple are further from the river than Girttown--PRC. Compare old maps. RBA]

Talk of various churches [denominations] that brass bands play funerals for; Catholic church apparently the only one which prohibits the use of a band. Bands played for Baptists and "sinners." Also sometimes for Methodists and "sanctified churches." Talk of collecting money to have band for the funeral of a person who didn't belong to any club; RBA says he saw the son of Joe Avery, trombone player, collecting money for that purpose, in Waggaman [Louisiana].

WP has played in a brass band with as few as seven or eight men in it instead of the usual twelve. RBA mentions the [E.] Gibson Brass Band, which played a job on the previous Sunday with no snare drum; Dave Bailey, the bass drummer, kept the beat [for marching between numbers] on his drum. (RBA mentions that Bailey is the brother of "Duck Ernest" [Johnson]).

Talk of mourning practices, including length of mourning period; the second mourning period, during which the participants wore checkered black and white, is mentioned; they wore black during the first period. McHenry says the practice of second mourning dates back at least to slavery times; his grandmother was sold twice during slavery; she met her husband [to-be] after one of the sales.

Talk of segregation in churches. M. McH says that a Catholic must take communion in his own parish. [Check this. CMF].

McHenry's mother, Ophelia Batiste, who lives at 1317 St. Philip across the street from WP, was one of fourteen children, three of whom are living. McHenry was born in 1908. McHenry said second mourning continued until around 1928, he believes; there are still some old people who observe the custom.

Use of bands for funerals decreased during the Depression, around 1932, McHenry thinks, as there wasn't money enough to pay the musicians. People were existing on W.P.A. salaries. There were more bands after the Depression than there are today, but a lot of them broke up during the Depression, and a lot of musicians quit playing then. Manuel Perez's Onward Brass Band broke up a long time ago; Buddy Johnson played trombone in it; it was good; Bunk [Johnson], trumpet, now dead, played in that band, too.

WP mentions the practice of string bands serenading people late at night. There were also bands at weddings; orchestras or brass bands played for them; the bands would go into the church, but they would play hymns inside. Blues, George Lewis, the Eureka Brass Band, "I Ain't Gonna Give Nobody None of My [i.e., O' This] Jelly Roll" and "I'm Confessin'" are mentioned.

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Talk of what was located in various places on and near Canal Street; Tom Anderson's was where the parking lot is next to the [New Orleans] Athletic Club [Basin near Iberville]; Anderson's went out of business. [Compare city directories and other interviews. RBA] McHenry talks about "Bowlegs", who would deliver three trays of food, etc., from Anderson's to various places in the District; he would put one tray on his head. WP played in the District with Lemont Dauphin, at the [Big] Twenty-five; WP played clarinet; others were "Wooden Joe" [Nicholas, trumpet] and trombonist Buddy Petit [i.e., Joe Petit?].

End of Reel III