

unedited first draft

REV. ROBERT H. OWEN
(The Night Pastor)
REEL I [only]
September 25, 1964

INTERVIEWER: John Steiner
NOTES: Richard B. Allen
SUMMARY: Dan Weisman
TYPING: Dan Weisman

[These are excerpts from a conversation with John Steiner. Notes on the tape box say that Rev. Owen, an Episcopalian, administered to the "night people" along Rush and Wells Streets in the near-Northside, night-life section of Chicago.

[The interview took place at Rev. Owen's office, and chapel, at 30 E. Oak Street, Chicago.]

Actually, my big jump in learning tunes came when I was in Montana.

First...it was in Louisiana when I became a member of the Baton Rouge Jazz Club. I used to play there.

We had a meeting once a month. We used to listen to records for half the meeting, and play for the other half.

I went from there...they used to come in from New Orleans. We had a jazz concert by George E. Girard, the evening before he died. As I remember, Pete Fountain was in that band. I never had anything to do with them, but I knew fellows who did.

The summer before we came here, we were in Philadelphia, and we went to see Louis Armstrong at a...sort of a tent-in-the-round concert.

At intermission...I went back to get his autograph. I asked him if...they ever had any sessions after they were [finished] playing. He said, all the time.

REV. ROBERT H. OWEN
(The Night Pastor)
REEL I [only]
Summary
September 25, 1964

2

I said, I'd give me right arm to be able to play with you.
He said, why don't you play right here?

There were about a thousand people out there. But, I knew the opportunity would never come again, so I took him up on it. This, actually, is what began this desire to be a pastor to some of these people.

Three weeks later, the Dukes [of Dixieland] arrived there. It was called the Brandywine Music Tent. This was in July, I guess it was. They said: well, if you play with Louis, then you have to play with us.

I was coming here [to Chicago]...We came here the first of September - the Dukes played the Butterfield Firehouse in October - and it was a Sunday night.

We were going to go out after youth group, and we were late. They were later.

They hadn't even started to play when we got there. And they started without a piano player. Their piano player got lost on the thruway.

I walked up, and they signalled me up. I played the whole first set. This was the beginning of a friendship, too, that has lasted.

In fact, I played three times last week on Bourbon Street with them. Sunday night, I played with Art Hodes.

REV. ROBERT H. OWEN
(The Night Pastor)
REEL I [only]
Summary
September 25, 1964

3

This all helps [the night pastor program on Rush Street.] Dave Rimington has done this, and Bill Reinhardt have given me a tremendous boost in introducing us...

From that start...[came] some publicity in some of the newspapers, press publications. The [Chicago] Tribune did an article on me, and what we were trying to do.

[JS and the night pastor talk about his joining the musician's union which would be fine with RHO...]

[Louis Armstrong] invited me to play at the Brandywine Music Tent. It was a tent in the round. One summer, they featured just musicians. They booked them in for a week.

[Besides Louis,] the Dukes [played there], and a jazz trio at the time - two man and a girl - that did a lot of singing. Count Basie was there for a week. [The trio] was Lambert, Hendricks & Ross.

We went to see Louis. At intermission, Karen - my oldest child - wanted his autograph. I was in my [clerical] collar, and, you know, the collar does get you into places, at times. I don't take too much advantage of it, but I do once in a while.

We went right back, asked to see him, and was ushered right in. I said...I told him who I was, and said, this is my daughter, Karen, and she wants your autograph. He wrote, "To Karen from Satchmo."

REV. ROBERT H. OWEN
(The Night Pastor)
REEL I [only]
Summary
September 25, 1964

4

Then, we started to talk. I told him, I played the piano, and I'd sure love to play with him. You know, [LA said], why don't you play with us here?

I was replacing [Billy] Kyle. [Also in the band were] Trummy Young, [tb]; Billy Kyle; Barney Bigard, [cl]; might have been Cozy Cole on drums. He didn't even tell the band that I was going to do this.

Toward the end of the program, he said, (imitating Armstrong) I got a young fellow here who likes to play the piano, and plays a real fine piano. We want to call him up. Let's see if we can get him. Father Owen, get up here.

The band...they were looking at him like he was crazy. They'd look at me. They shy away from you. Of course, I was in a state of complete shock. You dream about this. It's something you really dream about.

Trummy Young just couldn't take this. He couldn't walk away from that piano. It was real funny. Beverly [?] said, he just could not walk away from the piano.

When I was all done, I was in complete shock. I said, I can go home, and die now. I just played with the king. And this broke them all up.

But, from intermission until the time I played, I was just white as a sheet. I knew the opportunity would never come again,

REV. ROBERT H. OWEN
(The Night Pastor)
REEL I [only]
Summary
September 25, 1964

5

and it never has, really.

I've seen him a few times, talked with him, visited with him. But, I've never had an opportunity to play with him. He's coming, I understand, next month.

Joe Glaser sent me \$100 for this work [for the night pastor.] About three weeks later, [the Dukes of Dixieland] came in, and the publicity man for the tent...

You see, as soon as the thing was over, I left with my family. Well, then, he spent the next two - or three - days, looking for me. He couldn't figure out who I was, and where I was, and why I was. Because, I guess, they wanted me to go on the radio that week...]

END OF REEL

