

SIDNEY BROWN

I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped

May 27, 1960

Also Present: William Russell, Ralph Collins

This interview was conducted at the home of Sidney Brown (also known as "Jim Little" [and "Little Jim"]), 1833 St. Ann Street, New Orleans. SB was born in Deer Range, Louisiana, which is on the Mississippi River and near Magnolia Plantation; Jim Robinson comes from Deer Range, and Sunny Henry, among others, was from Magnolia Plantation; there were a good number of musicians from other plantations nearby. Magnolia Plantation is [was] down-river from Deer Range. SB says that the [some of the?] first music he heard was from the band in rehearsal at Deer Range; the band would also parade on Sunday. An uncle of SB, "Dee Dee" [Spelling?] Taylor, bass drummer, played in that band, sometime earlier than SB began his music study. SB explains to WR that Deer Range, like Magnolia, was a plantation, not a town, and that it is now an island [having been cut off from the bank by effects of the hurricane of 1915]. SB talks about the railroad which ran along the West Bank of the river, and about the crops grown in the area and the crops grown there now. SB worked in the [plantation?] grocery store. SB was born July 19, 1894. Jim Robinson is SB's uncle (SB's mother's brother). SB says there is a little town about a mile from the old Deer Range plantation; the town is Deer Range. The next place down [river] is Junior, the next is Woodland. SB was a [plantation] water boy before he worked in the store. He taught himself violin during the period he worked in the store. When he "went down further," to Buras, he would play

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violin in a group which played Saturday and Sunday nights for Adam Nunez, at a place across the river [East Bank] where there was an "oyster factory." SB also learned mandolin and guitar "by head."

In the Deer Range brass band were SB's uncle [Dee Dee Taylor], bass drum; SB's step-father on trumpet, and Alec Taylor, Ben Cole, Ben Kelly, Chris Kelly and Walter Johnson (a good tuba player), among others. Chris Kelly was three or four years older than SB; Ben Kelly, Chris' brother, played alto [horn], SB thinks. The band was ten to 12 pieces; the band paraded along the road on Sunday, and would meet the Sunday afternoon train at the station. There were no [or not many?] funerals with music; not many people died, because there weren't many people; the funerals were all "hurry up," as no one [in that area] was embalmed then. SB moved to New Orleans about 1912-13, which was before the Deer Range area was flooded [1915]; Jim Robinson moved to New Orleans about the same time. Robinson played guitar at the time, learning trombone in the Army [World War I]. SB, on violin, began working in a six-piece band with Sam Morgan just after he moved to the city. When he attained his full growth, he got a string bass from another uncle, ^{Exie} [Ethel? Ethea?] Robinson, (Jim's brother) who had quit playing. SB learned string bass [Check] and tuba from Sunny Henry. Then he went with Sam Morgan "for true," and remained with him until Morgan became crippled. SB played with the original Sam Morgan band

alternating between the two. SB says not many musicians could do that in those days, as most bands had definite personnel [he infers that not many musicians were equipped technically to play with an assortment of bands. PRC. Compare many other interviews on instability of personnel. RBA].

SB talks about the exodus of musicians, etc., from the Deer Range area; he says they all left about the same time, shortly before the flooding, and that most came to New Orleans. SB has always lived in the Tremé[section] after moving to New Orleans. Chris and Ben Kelly were among those coming to New Orleans; Ben is still living, in the Lafitte housing project. Ben didn't play Ben didn't play any more after the Deer Range brass band, but Chris organized a band in New Orleans; SB played several jobs with him. All the men in Chris' band could "spell" music. SB remembers only "Duck" Ernest [Johnson, bass] and Jimmy Brown, clarinet of the men who played with Chris. Chris was famous for playing the blues; his featured blues was "Careless Love." CK didn't play blues in Deer Range, just brass band music. When SB was with Sam Morgan, the band played at various halls, including the Economy Hall, Hopes Hall and St. Teresa (in the Garden District); they played St. Teresa Saturday nights, the Astoria Hotel Sunday nights and Economy Hall Monday nights. They also played sometime at the Sans Souci Hall, on [old] Howard Street [now LaSalle], which is in the same block as the Dew Drop Inn [owned by Frank Panial]; some discussion follows about the connections [physical

and proprietary] of the Dew Drop and Sans Souci [Sans Souci has been demolished since this interview]. The personnel of Sam Morgan's band: Sam Morgan, trumpet; Yank Johnson, trombone; his brother, Buddy Johnson, trombone [but at different times? as a substitute?]; [Butler] "Guyé" [Rapp], banjo; Alfred Williams, drums; Joe Watson, clarinet; SB, violin and later bass--and some bass player before SB took up that instrument. The band broke up when Sam had his stroke; later Sam went into his brother Isaiah's band, and the Young Morgan Band became the [new] Sam Morgan Band. Jim Robinson came into the Sam Morgan band later than SB [probably only in it when it merged with Young Morgan?]; the drummer in Sam's band, even before World War I, was Alfred Williams. [Compare Andrew Williams, reel?]. SB got into a band which formed in his outfit overseas; the band was in Paris, France for several months, playing at several hospitals nearby; then SB became ill and was in a hospital himself for several months; he didn't rejoin his outfit until their return to the United States. SB was in the Army a total of about two years.

End of Reel I

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Also present: William Russell
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The band SB was in in France [small combo] played to entertain soldiers and nurses in hospitals; they didn't play blues or jazz; the instrumentation was violin, guitar, trap drums and trumpet.

SB learned tuba while playing [string bass] in Sam Morgan's band; he says bands were not using string bass then, so he learned tuba; he and one of Sam's brothers, Albert Morgan, then with Fate Marable on the [Streckfus] boat, began learning tuba together, both studying with Sunny Henry. (SB and WR reminisce about SB's playing tuba for a recording for WR, with Bunk Johnson at San Jacinto Hall in 1944; Slow Drag [Pavageau] played string bass on the same session.) SB hadn't played with any brass bands until he learned tuba; then he worked a lot in the street, playing with John Casimir's [Young] Tuxedo [Brass Band], with Ernest Trepagnier, with George Williams and others. SB toured with Sam Morgan's band, making a regular run of one-nighters in Pensacola [Florida], Mobile [Alabama], Biloxi, Gulfport and Hattiesburg [Mississippi], returning to New Orleans each weekend; the routine of travel became too tiring for SB in 1928, so he quit and went back to work at the Longino and Collins meat packing company, where he remained until 1945, quitting when he became crippled. He did not play much music during those years, returning to music full-time only in 1948, when he joined Papa Celestin's band, with which he remained until July 5, 1959, when he again quit, because of arthritis. Eddie Pierson, who died around Christmas of 1958, had the Celestin band after Celestin died [1954]. SB heard that Celestin had two bands, one to work

at the Paddock Lounge (with Ricard Alexis, bass player), the other to play the casual [spot, club dates, whachacallem] jobs, but SB doesn't know for sure. [Correct. RBA.] SB worked some at the Paddock, but mostly played the outside dates; he was at the Paddock a little more than a year. He also worked at Dan's Pier 600 [with PC's band, then lead by Eddie Pierson or Albert French].

The recordings of the Sam Morgan band were made in New Orleans, in the Godchaux Building [in the 500 block of?], Canal Street. SB traveled with the band to Chicago, too, around 1925-26. SB heard that he was the first to play [string] bass that could be heard on recordings [Steve Brown, with Goldkette earlier or later?]. Others in the band (besides SB) at that time were Jim Robinson, Sam Morgan, Isaiah Morgan, Andrew Morgan, Roy Evans (drums), Johnny Dave (banjo) and Earl Fouché (sax). [Compare discographies]. The band seldom used a piano, because pianos were scarce on the road, and also pianists; when they did use a piano on the road, George E. Parker would be the pianist; he would be a doorman [taking care of the money] at places where there was no piano. For the recording session, Sam Morgan picked the numbers. Sam played slapstick when he was not playing trumpet; SB says he used it to keep time, being a stickler for steady rhythm.

SB was given the name, "Jim Little," by his grandfather, George Robinson, who also gave Jim Robinson [real name, Nathan Robinson] the name, "Jim Crow"; SB was called Jim Little to

distinguish him from Jim Crow.

SB says he learned string bass from playing violin when he was a little boy [also lessons from Sunny Henry?--see earlier part of interview PRC. Or on tuba?RBA]; he first learned guitar and mandolin, and then violin, given to him by his mother. He plays all the string instruments by "head", having learned only the tuba by written music. SB has not played violin in years, but still has one; it is not a real Stradivarius, only that model. SB was in Italy during World War I, as the combo he played with went to several hospitals to play. Coming back from Europe in October, 1919, he immediately joined Sam Morgan. He didn't like anyone's bass playing but his own. He says old man Billy Moran [that is, Marrero] was playing then and said he would[n't?] teach him, so he got a bass and taught himself.

The participants look at some records SB has, ones on which he plays--with Celestin, with Sam Morgan, with George Lewis and with Eddie Pierson.

End of Reel II

