

I [of 2]--Digest-- Retyped

November 11, 1962

Also present: Richard B. Allen, Harold Dejan,
Mrs. Carmen Labat, Joe Jackson, Harry Fairconnetue
(Recorded at 309 Easterbrook, Bay St. Louis, Mississippi)

Sumner Labat (husband of Carmen Labat) was born February 23, 1894; in Bay St. Louis; a cousin of his operates a funeral home in New Orleans, and has the same last name; RBA mentions Danny Barker, whose grandfather worked for the Labat funeral home; Barker says even the horses would cry at the funerals; one of the drivers was called "Joe Never Smile," [i. e., Isidore Barbarin, cf. Danny Barker interview] as he looked sad. SL was born at 307 Easterbrook, next door to the recording site. His father played baritone horn in the Promo [sp?] Brass Band, which was a part of the [benevolent?] society of the same name; the band was about nine pieces. SL mentions Lorenzo Tio, Sr., who did not play in the Promo Band; Tio's son, Lorenzo, Jr., played [in the A. J. Piron band] with Peter Bocage in New Orleans. SL thinks the [elder?] Tios were born and reared in Bay St. Louis; they were there when SL arrived in that town. Lorenzo, Sr.'s brother, Louis "Papa" Tio, is also mentioned. RBA says it is rumored that the Tios came from Mexico to study. [Harold Dejan enters.] HD says "Papa" Tio was living in Bay St. Louis when Lorenzo, Jr., was young; Lorenzo, Jr., was about the same age as SL.

SL took a few lessons on clarinet when he attended tailoring school (he is a tailor by trade) in Royal Castle, Virginia, which is about 40 miles from Richmond. He did play violin at one time, but when the clarinetist in his band [Supreme] died, he resumed clarinet. He played in the Supreme Band for allong time; when most of the other members had died, he formed his own band; he used cornet and saxophone players from New Orleans somestimes; some of those were Kid Rena, Kid Howard, Kid Ricard Alexis; [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin filled in one time. Willie [J.] Humphrey, clarinet and sax, also worked with the band at times. George McCullum, trumpet player and son-in-law of [?], was SL's main trumpet player; he played every week with the band. The band, six pieces, could

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fake and also read music, but they played mostly jazz. SL played with John Handy, saxophone player, for years and years. HD says the first job he played there [the Mississippi Gulf Coast area] was with SL. members of the Supreme Band (all dead now except SL) were: Armand Predeaux [sp?], trombone; Babe Bennett, cornet; Paul Maurice, clarinet; SL, violin and leader; Manuel Alexander, drums; Joseph Rosenberg, guitar; Edward Anderson, bass violin. Paul Maurice was an uncle of drummer Norbert Maurice, who once played in Bay St. Louis, but is now in New Orleans. [Emile Maurice, drummer, is also in New Orleans--any relation?--PRC]. The Supreme Band was organized before World War I; SL came to Bay St. Louis just after WWI; he joined the Supreme Band about a week after his arrival. HE mentions the Imperial Band of New Orleans, led by Manuel Perex, and searches for the name of the violinist with that band; those mentioned are [A. J.] Piron, [John] Rowichaux and Peter Bocage, but it was none of them; [Alphonse] Piron played [clarinet] with the band at that time; [Jimmy Palao was the violinist?]. SL returned to Bay St. Louis from Virginia about [1915?]. SL talks about the band and orchestra in Virginia. RBA mentions Ward Pinkett, who was from Virginia. SL mentions Professor [Gaddibadio?], who taught music at the school. All the music there was played from written parts. The Prono Brass Band was a reading band; members were; SL's father, Joseph Labat, Sr. [baritone horn]; Joe Graves, cornet, and later, alto horn; Babe Bennett, cornet; John Collins, cornet; Oscar Collins, trombone; Armand Predeaux [sp?], trombone; John Batiste, bass; Emile Prediaux [sp?], bass drum; Buddy Slickum, snare drum. The band was playing around 1912. SL talks about the rehearsals, which were held at his father's house. The band played as far away as Mobile, Alabama. RBA mentions the Excelsior Brass Band, of Mobile.

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SL says his father was one of the best baritone players on the Coast; often he played with brass bands in New Orleans. HD mentions the Holy Ghost Brass Band, which was named for the hall [part of Holy Ghost School?] where they rehearsed on Tuesdays and Fridays. AT that time Catholics had brass bands at their funerals. HD, a member, says the band played in New Orleans and also out-of-town, such as in Opelousas [Louisiana].

Mrs. Labat said one song SL played years ago was "Eh, La Bas." The sign-off of the Supreme band was "Three O'Clock In The Morning." "Bye Bye Blackbird" was their sign-off theme when playing for Negroes. SL's favorite number was "St. Louis Blues."

(Joe Jackson and Harry Fairconnetue enter.)

The Supreme Band played mostly along the [Gulf] Coast, from Bay St. Louis to Mobile. They played almost every week at the Great Southern Hotel, Gulfport [Mississippi], until it burned. One of the places where they played in Mobile was called Eureka Garden. RBA says Bunk Johnson played in the Great Southern Hotel years ago; SL says the hotel burned years ago. Manuel Alexander, formerly of the Supreme Band, died about a year ago. The Supreme Band averaged about three nights playing per week, mostly on weekends; they played mostly for whites, but also played for societies, parades and advertising jobs on trucks. SL formed his own band before his marriage (in 1921); he had piano players in that band; Miss Nat was the first, and then Grace [Edwards] played a while.

HF says Herbert (related to Paul Gorman, who played with Paul Maurice) was the first on the Coast to play banjo with a band; HF replaced Herbert in the Gogettum Band. Mercedes Gorman, who played [piano] with Celestin, was Gorman's sister; RBA says her name was Mercedes Gorman Fields when he last saw her, several years ago.

Mrs. Labat says that Mercedes was in Bay St. Louis during the past summer, that she is still going strong.

SL says he was with the Supreme Band when he got married, and didn't play with any other band (including his own [which he must have organized later than he stated]) when he was with the Supreme. HF says SL formed his band before the depression of 1929, as he himself worked with SL a long time before he left Bay St. Louis to join the [Clarence] Desdune Band [see Harry Fairconnetue interview].

Sometime after giving up playing, S₁ gave his old 13-key Albert system clarinet to his brother, who has taught manual arts at Xavier University, in New Orleans, for over thirty years, as the brother's son was studying saxophone.

Besides SL and his father, one other member of his family, a sister, played music; she played piano, of a classical or semi-classical nature.

End of Reel I

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Mrs. Carmen Labat, Joe Jackson, Harry Fairconnetue

SL taught tailoring in a New Orleans school in 1951- 1953, He sometimes listened to the jazz bands in the French Quarter; he heard the [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin band; his favorite was the Dukes of Dixieland band. (RBA says their piano player Stanley Mendelson) playing a [special] job now with Raymond Burke and Paul Crawford [at Preservation Hall?], got tired of being away from home, so he quit the Dukes.) Jac Assunto, father of [two of] the Dukes [Frank and Freddie Assunto], now plays banjo and trombone with the band.

SL has played parades in Bay St. Louis only on Carnival day [i. e., Mardi Gras]; he says there are nice Carnivals in Bay St. Louis. Talk about the Indians in Bay St. Louis, and the Indians in New Orleans.

When SL was young, he heard the Imperial Band, led by Manuel Perez, with [Alphonse] Picou playing clarinet, in New Orleans; he says they played most of their jobs at the Francis Anis Hall; HD says they played Cherrie joined that band later. He heard Joe Oliver at the Winter Garden. SL's favorite dance band was Sam Morgan's; There is general agreement from the rest of those present. Sam's brother, Isaiah Morgan, played several times with SL. Sam's trombonist [in the earlier Sam Morgan band--PRC], Yank Johnson, who had a brother, Buddy Johnson [who also played trombone], played a lot of times with SL. Sam Morgan's banjo player, [Butler] "Guye" [Rapp]. is mentioned; HD says he was replaced by Johnny Dave, who was a grown man when HD was a boy. HD mentions banjo player Gilbert Dave, another old-timer and Johnny's brother, and still living in New Orleans. SL says that when Buddy Johnson couldn't come to play in Bay St. Louis, he would send Yank Johnson for the job. The clarinet player [with Sam Morgan's (early) band] was Joe Watson; SL took one lesson from him; Watson

taught SL how to play "St. Louis Blues." The drummer with Sam Morgan was Alfred Williams; SL tells of meeting him in late years at the wake of Ricard Alexis; pianist Grace Edwards, who worked with SL years before, was also at the wake. HD says Alfred Williams went to Texas with Bat Brown. HD mentions Roy Evans, another good drummer who played with Sam Morgan; HF says he practically lived with Evans. HD says Sam Morgan was the first person he ever saw use a slapstick. HF says he never "saw" a band which kept tempo as well as Sam Morgan's.

Paul Maurice, a good clarinetist played with the Supreme Band [of Bay St. Louis--see Reel 10]. SL himself played mostly harmony on clarinet; he says he wasn't good as the musicians who played with him, but he made more money. SL also played some variations, but not like [John] Handy. Picou was 100% better musician than SL. HD says SL played somewhat similar to [Emile] "Mehly" Barnes, brother of Paul Barnes. RBA says Emile Barnes played with people like Chris Kelly, but not steadily. HF remembers hearing Kelly play with Celestin, around Bay St. Louis, but agrees with HD and RBA that Kelly was Guy Kelly. SL had good trumpet players; among them were George McCullum, Ricard Alexis, Kifer, Kid Rena and Kid Clayton. SL recalls a trip his band once made to Mobile, with Kid Clayton in the band; others were: Warren Bennett, SL, Bubba Bush [sp?], Eddie Thomas, Sam Williams, trombone; on the advertising foray before the dance that night, the band was a success because of their rendition of "The Peanut Vendor," one of their specialties; the dance, at the Eureka Garden, was filled to overflowing; they were held over for another night, again to overflow crowds. Bubba Bush played banjo; he now lives in California.

It is mentioned with some humor, that August [Saucier] used mutes in his trombone. SL says Sam Morgan used mutes a lot. HD mentions Earl "Skeeter" Fourche, alto and soprano saxophone player with Sam' Morgan; SL says Fourche was from Mobile; HD says Fourche is now in California; RBA had heard now he had a band with the Sam Morgan beat, of which Fourche is proud, in Santa Barbara. HD ~~has~~ every break he knows from Fourche; HD studied with him every Sunday morning; Fourche; HD studied with him every Sunday morning; Fourche lived on Third Street near Magnolia. HE worked on the [Gulf] Coast a lot with Sam Morgan, whose band was very popular there. Joe Harris, another good sax player, who worked with Dave Bartholomew at one time, also worked a lot on the Coast. Asophe "Tats" Alexander, Jr., another good sax player, is mentioned; he also worked on the Coast. HF says Alexander was good on any instrument he attempted; he played baritone horn in a Navy band with HD. HD says Alexander's father, Taton, was a good baritone horn player. [John] Handy was a grown man when he played with SL. [Lorenzo] Tio [Jr.] is mentioned; he played [with] SLA. J. Piron band?] with Peter Bocage.

SL's full name is Joseph Sumner Labat; his father was Hiseph [Sumner?] Labat, Sr.

The bands on the Coast played very much like the New Orleans bands. as the New Orleans musicians worked with the Coast bands a lot, and vice versa. Everybody played pretty much the same sort of music, Dixieland, regtime, etc, When SL was a child, there were nothing on the Coast but brass bands; when he came back from school [see Reel I], there were orchestras playing; they played practically straight; [i. e., not jazz] music. HD says brass bands would play the trios of brass band numbers [e. g., marches] for dancing. Jazz became popular on the Coast after World War I. Neither SL or HF ever recorded commercially; RBA wishes Clarence Desdune's band had

recorded; HF and HD both played with that band; HD first met SL when Desdune's band played in Bay St. Louis; HF says their big job was at the Hundred Men's Pavillion, which is still in existenge. Talk of the varioys dances popular on the Coast in the early times [around World War I?], including schottische, quadrille, waltz, heel-and-toe, Charleston [later?], two-step, one-step and slow drag. Discussion of food served at dances.

Besides dances and parades, brass bands played for picnics. Besides playing for Carnival, tæe bands played for St. Mary's Feast Day, which was August 15. SL says the brass bands never played for funerals on the Coast.

End Of Reel II