

Also present: William Russell, Ralph Collins.

William J. Foster was born December 27, 1888, in McCall, Louisiana, which is on the west side of the river, 3 miles above Donaldsonville. He went to school in McCall, where he lived until he was 15 years old, when he moved to New Orleans; he learned to play mandolin and to play violin a little bit in McCall. WF agrees with WR that he is one year older than his brother, George "Pops" Foster; WF tells WR that he had two other brothers and two sisters, all who have died. WF answers WR, saying that his father and an uncle also played music, and that he started playing music because of his uncle. While WF was going to school, the uncle got a lot of musical ideas from Claiborne Williams, WF's cousin, whose band in Donaldsonville was "the leading band in Louisiana." WF answers WR, saying he does not know that any of the members of the Williams band are still living, that he hasn't been around Donaldsonville in years. WF learned guitar by picking it up, after playing one instrument and another; he says he didn't have a regular teacher, that he used method books; he was about 12 years old when he began studying guitar. WF says he just learned by playing, and that Pops learned that way, too; they used to play for brulets [sp?] banquets [pronounced bahn-kays] on plantations; they played from 6 PM until sun-up Sunday morning, for which they were paid \$1.50 each. The band would have a couple of fellows from Smoke Bend,

one of whom played guitar, and they would have a valve trombonist from Donaldsonville, Louis "Budda" [sp?]. When WF left McCall, he gave up playing for a while, but took it up again when he was 18 years old; he [and George?] started on Dufossat Street in New Orleans with the Tulane Band, which was a dance orchestra. WF stayed with that band until he became better, and then he moved further down town, and became acquainted with a lot of the "upper" musicians; he played [Rehearsed and sat in?] with several bands, one night here and one night there, playing his violin and learning from the older and better musicians, until he got good enough to be hired with a regular band. WF began playing professionally in 1910, with Frank Ahaynou on piano and Manuel Perez on cornet, at Tom Anderson's, in the District, at the corner of Marais and Customhouse [now Iberville]. He also worked at Tom Anderson's saloon, North Rampart near Canal, with Louis Armstrong; WF says that is where Armstrong first started. WF agrees with WR, saying he thinks the saloon was the Anderson place run by George Delsa. WR asks who the members of the group at Anderson's were; WF says Louis Armstrong played cornet, Ernest Trepagnier (called "Nesesse") played drums, WF played violin. WF tries to remember the fourth player; WR asks if he ever worked with Albert Nicholas or Barney Bigard there (WR says they worked there with Paul Barbarin); WF says he worked with Bigard in Sidney Desvignes'

band when he was playing banjo. WF remembers that Tom Benton played guitar. Both Benton and Trepagnier are dead now. From the Anderson job, WF went to dance bands, playing spots all over town. He says that the Original Tuxedo Band was composed of four players: Ernest Trepagnier, drums; William Ridgley [trombone]; WF [probably banjo or guitar]; Oscar ["Papa"] Celestin [cornet]. WF says they were organized right on his front porch. WF was with the Tuxedo a long time; it later split, with Ridgley having the (Ridgley's ? Original ?) Tuxedo and Celestin having Celestin's Tuxedo. WF also played with Joe Oliver, in the Magnolia Band; Pops [Foster] played bass, WF played violin, Arnold De Pass played drums, Dave De Pass (Arnold's brother) played clarinet, Eddie Atkins played trombone, Oliver played trumpet [cornet] and Louis Keppard played guitar. WF also played with Kid Ory's band, and with Manuel Perez' Superior [i.e., Imperial] Band. In the Superior then, besides WF, were Perez [cornet], Buddy Johnson on trombone, Alphonse Picou on clarinet, Bebe Matthews on drums. When WF left the regular bands to go "gigging," he played with Chris Kelly, and says they had a good little rough band; WF played banjo with Kelly, and just started that instrument when he went with Kelly. WF says he took up banjo because Johnny St. Cyr, the banjoist on the steamer Capitol, was leaving; WF filled in for him for two weeks', during which time he learned to

play it. (He bought a \$150 Vega banjo for the job.) Then WF went to St. Louis, working on the steamer St. Paul one summer. When he returned to New Orleans that September, he traded his Vega in for a Vega Deluxe (\$375). WF answers WR, saying Armstrong had left the boat by that time, that Ed Allen, [trumpet player] of St. Louis, had charge of the band then. Sidney Desvignes [was the other trumpet player]--[Norman] Mason, Bert Bailey and [Walter "Foots"] Thomas were the saxes; Harvey [Lankford, of St. Louis] played trombone; Fate Marable played piano; Arthur "Zutty" Singleton replaced Cason [i.e., Floyd Cason^{2A} ?] on drums. WF says the last time he went to St. Louis, Zutty went with Charlie Creath, of St. Louis. WR says, "He [Zutty] married his [Creath's] sister, Margie Creath." WF says he himself played with Creath quite often in St. Louis. He says Creath "used to play with those boys at the [Chauffeur] Club sometimes." WR says he heard Creath was a good blues player; WF says he was a good trumpet player, and answers WR, saying that he didn't know that Creath read much, unless he memorized his parts, but it appeared that Creath had his own repetoire, which he could play very well. WR asks if WF learned guitar from [written] music; WF says he already knew how to read when he took up banjo, and that he was [became ?, or did he play banjo before he played guitar ?] a top banjo player. When WF left the boat, King Oliver sent for him; he went to St. Louis, then to

New York to the Savoy [Ballroom], where they stayed several months. The alternating band there with them was Chick Webb's; each band would play for one-half hour. WF says he, Red Allen and Paul Barnes went to St. Louis together to join Oliver's band; he says Oliver's band broke up when Oliver turned down a steady job, one which didn't pay as much as some, but as someone said, it would beat walking around New York. WF answers WR, saying Oliver wasn't as good when WF was in the band as he was before he had pyorrhea and the trouble with his teeth. WF says Oliver only played "in-between" [featured solos ?], but that he had a good cornet player to help him [play the lead work]. After leaving Oliver, WF went to Coney Island, where he played about six weeks with a band, for floor shows, etc.; he says the pay wasn't exceptional, but the tips were. He got a telegram from the Streckfus people in St. Louis, offering him a job on one of their boats; he also got one from Sidney Desvignes, working on the Island Queen out of Cincinnati, but he had already accepted the Streckfus offer, and although he wanted to go with Desvignes, he stuck to his word with Streckfus. He went on the boat, the band still being under Fate Marable, and the boat eventually went to New Orleans; he stayed on the boat for two more weeks, and then a change was made. He and Manuel Sayles, working with William Ridgley at Jack Sheehan's [sp?] Suburban Gardens in Jefferson Parish, exchanged jobs. WF says

he had given Sayles a number of lessons; WR says Sayles has told him that. WF says Sayles father was a good guitarist, too, with whom he played; he agrees with WR that the Sayles family came from Donaldsonville. WF says the elder Sayles played with the Albert Batiste band, in which WF played bass. WF says he played with nearly every band in New Orleans; the Eagle Band. WR asks the Eagles' personnel; WF says there was the Eagle Saloon on Rampart and Perdido, with the Masonic Hall upstairs; WR says the saloon is still there. WF says there would be picnics, etc. at the Masonic Hall and the Eagle Saloon, and also at the Fair Ground; WF assures WR that there used to be picnics at the Fair Ground. In the Eagle Band: Frankie Duson, trombone; Brock Mumford, guitar; Bunk [Johnson], cornet (later with the Imperial [i.e., Superior] Band); Henry Zeno, drums; unknown clarinet; Dandy Lewis, bass. WR asks if Willie Humphrey played with him in that band; WF says Willie Humphrey [the younger] played with him in WF's band, which was [long] after the Eagle. In WF's band were Willie Humphrey, clarinet, sax and violin; Willie Pajaud, trumpet, clarinet and violin; [Robert ? Clarence ?] Hall, clarinet and sax; Willie Foster, banjo and violin; Earl [or Percy ?] Humphrey, [trombone and] cornet; Henry Russ, drums and cornet; John Porter, tuba; Walter Decou [piano]. WF answers WR, saying the time of that band was around 1928; he says they didn't have a steady job, but worked a lot

on single engagements. He said sometimes when they played, they would go to the [dance] job Saturday evening and wouldn't get back home until Tuesday morning, because they had to catch the train, "Smoky Joe" [i.e., "Mary"] early Sunday morning to go to Milneburg to play a picnic, an all-day affair. Sunday night they would play at some hall, Economy Hall or Hopes Hall or some other hall; Monday they would probably play at Milneburg or West End for another all-day picnic, then Monday night for another job. WF says there would be picnics all week at the lake; he says various organizations, which would rent camps at the lake for picnics, would sometimes find out which of the clubs at the lake was going to have a band, or which ones had a band already; then they would get a camp close to that club, and people two or three camps on either side of one club with music would be dancing to the same band, without having to pay for it. At WR's request, WF describes the layout of a typical camp on the lake; he says there were rest rooms at the back, dressing rooms at opposite corners, dance floor (with a few benches along the walls), and a screened-in porch around the entire building; the band played on the porch, which was about 8 feet deep. WF explains to WR that there were some camps which had bedrooms for sleeping, for family functions, but that most of them were built for outings; WF says the area was ruined in WPA time by digging and filling in behind City Park; he

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says it ruined the fishing, too. When music jobs got bad then, WF got a job on a steamer [playing music ?], although he kept doing cement work, carpentry and painting, so he could go back to work when music was slack. WF made about 10 trips on a United Fruit Company boat to South America. Then WF was offered a job at the jitney dance, the La Vida, and he also worked at the Alamo and the Music Box [other jitney dance halls]. Because of low pay, he quit playing music altogether in 1935. WF moved to Baton Rouge in 1946; he was working in New Orleans until then; he says he worked for the American Products Manufacturing Company for 14 years, until the company couldn't get suitable solvents (for experimenting with chemical products) during World War II [when a lot of men were laid off], and he went to work in shipyards. Then [living in Baton Rouge] he went to work for Reynolds, doing cabinet work; his last job, before retirement, was with the school board, doing utility work (plastering, painting, etc.); he retired July 1, 1958. WR says WF looks younger than Pops does, that Pops has aged a little in the last [few years]. WF says Pops was here [in Baton Rouge] for Christmas--he didn't go to New Orleans--WF says that their mother is with him [WF], and that is the first Christmas they have spent together in 50 years. WR says Downbeat mentions that the band [Armstrong ?] had a month off, and that Pops was going home, but nobody saw him in New Orleans (because

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he didn't go there). WF answers WR, saying Pops last previous trip to Baton Rouge was in 1955, that he came from New Orleans one night, and went back [almost immediately].

WR asks about McCall; WF says it was the largest sugar plantation and sugar refinery on the river, [larger or] as large as the Godchaux [at Reserve, La.] refinery. Answering WR, WF says his uncle did not have a band, that he played with the Eureka Brass Band (not the New Orleans Eureka) on the Bayou LaFourche, a few miles below Donaldsonville. The uncle also played accordian. The brass band musicians came from all over the area. WF says there were a good many occasions requiring the use of a brass band, although there were only two brass bands around the area; WF's cousin, Claiborne Williams, had all the popular [non-brass band ?] dances. WF says when he was a child, the bands would change music [play different tunes, types of dances ?] by whistle signals.

End of Reel I

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The participants continue a discussion of the use of whistle signals at dances [see Lisa Leskis (sp ?), Caribbean LP in RBA's collection] to indicate the end of a particular dance or movement; WF answers WR, saying whistles were used in the quadrilles, as well as in the other types of dances; WF answers RC, saying the musicians knew what the signals meant, and that they might be long or short, [or multiple ?]

WF says the first music he heard was played on the accordin, by his uncle, and next the violin, played by his uncle. Then, when WF became large enough to go to Donaldsonville, he heard the Claiborne Williams [brass ?] band. WF says Billy Kersands [sp ?] had minstrels then, too. WR says Bunk [Johnson] used to talk about him; WR says the only thing he knows about Kersands was that he used to swallow [put it in his mouth] a saucer, as a stunt. WF says Kersands had a good show; he answers WR, saying Kersands owned the show, and that the troupe traveled on trains; they played in theaters, not in tents; the show carried its own band. WR says Bunk played with the Kersands show in Fate Marable's band once. WF says traveling with shows like that is hard; he made a trip with a show from St. Louis to Charleston, W. Virginia; they played and/or traveled every night for two weeks, and when they reached the eastern extreme

of the tour, took a few nights rest and played two weeks back to St. Louis. WF quit [the same tour ?] in Cairo, Illinois, where it was 22 degrees below zero, in spite of the fact that the tour had many more dates booked; he says when he got to Memphis, it was too warm to keep his coat on, and when he got to New Orleans, he didn't need a coat at all. WF tells of some accidents they had while on tour. WR asks if WF heard any blues on the plantation when he was young; WF says that's where blues came from, and from the railroad songsters [i.e., workers]. He says "Frankie and Johnny" came out while he was growing up, and "In The Good Old Summertime." WR asks if he remembers "Stack O' Lee," and if the song was about a real person; WF says he doesn't know about the real person, but the song was the first thing he played on the guitar. Continuing about the origin of the tune, WF says the song came from the railroad, and that it was the only one that a lot of the railroad men could play on the guitar. RC asks if the railroad men sang the blues when they worked; WF says they did. WR asks if the first guitarists WF heard were on the plantation; WF says they were, and sometimes there might be three or more players sitting around playing. He says they [including himself] had little serenade bands in New Orleans, which would go around at night, stand under someone's window, and play soft music on a violin, a guitar and bass. He says they would go to the policeman's

house, as late as midnight, and that the policeman loved it, and would invite them in for a drink. WF says that if the policeman saw them going to serenade someone else, he would ask them to come by his house first; even when he didn't have anything to give them, he would ask them, because he loved the music. But now they'd put you in jail. WF answers WR, saying that the serenades were discontinued at about the beginning of World War I. WF answers WR, saying that he is a Baptist, and the way he learned to play guitar was by trying to follow hymns sung by his mother, when she was sewing, on the guitar; he says he doesn't remember the names of the hymns, but they were of medium tempo, not fast or slow. He says there were no musical instruments taken to the church; he says there used to be funerals in New Orleans with bands playing, and WR tells him that there still are some. WF says the funerals were hard work, and says the streets were just mud then. They were a hard two and half [dollars]. WF answers WR, saying he played an instrument in a brass band in the army. WR says Jim Robinson has told him how WF taught him how to play the trombone in the army, and he asks WF to tell more about the army band. WF says the band, [with additional soldiers who performed as minstrels, etc.?], would go from camp to camp giving shows. WF says his brother-in-law, (now dead,) John Chandler, would sing the Blues on stage. WF says he himself got cut on the head playing the blues by being hit by a piece

of money thrown to the performers. WF says the band also played for movies at their headquarters; the war was then over. WF played cornet in the army. WF answers WR, saying his company was Company A, 525th Engineers; he says there were quite a few men from New Orleans in the company; he says that there were very few men in the company who were not from New Orleans. WF says two trombone players, the pianist, the drummer, WF, two cornetists, three clarinetists--almost everyone was from New Orleans. Only the piccolo player and one guitarist, both from Arkansas, were not from New Orleans. WF names some of the players: Ernest Himes played 1st cornet; Andrew Bonette [sp ?] was a drummer; Richard Picou played bass; [] Richardson, piano; William T. Bazile was another guitarist. [Jim Robinson played trombone.] Answering WR, WF says the band started with 4 members, at Camp Perkins, and that all the rest were taught; he says there were other good musicians around, but they went to different units. The band he was with played regular dance music, all kinds of jazz; he says it was very seldom that they (as a brass band) played marches. RC remarks that a photograph of the band shows lettering on the bass drum reading "Jazz Band;" WF says that is all they had, a jazz band. WF answers WR, saying the French people liked the music, which was new to them; the American soldiers had heard jazz before, even though

they were from various sections of the country, but the Southerners, including Texans, responded more enthusiastically. They understood that "rock-bottom" rhythm.

WF answers WR, saying that when he first moved to New Orleans, he lived in the 17th Ward, on Adams Street, in the Carrollton section [Adams Street is now in the 16th Ward]. WF says he went to New Orleans before his brother, [George] "Pops" [Foster]; WF moved there October 12, 1904, as a valet to a Mr. [McCall?]. Next he gives the date as 1904, August 12. WF answers WR, saying he remembers hearing Buddy Bolden's band; Bolden's band played at Johnson Park, and [John] Robichaux' band played at adjoining Lincoln Park. WF says Bolden had a rough band; Robichaux had a nice orchestra, but when Bolden would stick his cornet out and blow, all the people would go where he was. WF says Lincoln Park was at Oleander and Carrollton; he says they used to go there in mud up to their knees. Answering WR, WF says he didn't know any of the members of Bolden's band, of whom there were seven. WF says Robichaux's band played all written music, standard orchestrations of 1st and 2nd parts, and that special arrangements didn't come to be used until after World War I. WF answers WR, saying the Claiborne Williams band played in about the same style as the Robichaux band, more classical. The Williams band could play some blues, but did so only on request. WF says the bands

had good swing, but they played classical music, and didn't play any rough music. WR asks about places in Carrollton where dances were held; WF says that besides Lincoln Park, there was St. Dominic's Hall, adjacent to the school of the same name [then at Cambronne and Burthe]. The Eagle Hall was near the Protection Levee, almost in Jefferson Parish. WF remembers that there were a lot of clubs in that section--the Merry-Go-Round Club was there then, the Carrollton Club, the Jefferson City Buzzards [not in Carrollton, but below Audubon Park about 10 blocks, and near the river]. WF says he led brass bands for the Buzzards and played violin while leading! At that time he had seven pieces in his band, so he had those pieces to make standard brass band number. WF remembers the Lyons Club, mentioned by WR. WF says the bands he played with made most of their parades on trucks, or horse-drawn wagons. When contests are mentioned, WF says that he had a good jazz band, and liked those contests; he played jazz violin, and remarks that some said his violin playing sounded like a clarinet. WF says Big Eye Louis [Nelson], having hired WF for a job, would perhaps come to the job late, and would remark that WF's violin playing sounded like a clarinet. WR answering WF, says he knew Big Eye Louis, and recorded him; WR says Big Eye has been dead 10 years.

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WR asks WF his favorites [in what style? RBA] on various instruments: Armand Piron was the best violinist (John Robichaux was a left-handed violinist, not Piron); Johnny St. Cyr was the best guitarist. WF, answering WR, says he knew Lorenzo Staulz; answering WR, he says Staulz' name was spelled Staul. WF says he worked with Staulz in Ridgley's Tuxedo Band, and that Staulz played with [Kid] Ory. WF says Ory's band and Joe "King" Oliver's band were the bands that bucked [the first or the most and/or best ?]. WF agrees with RC that these bands played about the same styles. Mutt Carey was playing cornet with Ory. WF says that's how he got started getting up in music by following Mutt's brother, Jack Carey, in the old Crescent Band. WF answers WR, saying that [Oscar "Papa"] Celestin played cornet with the Crescent Band. WF says Punch [Miller] played (later) with that band. WF says [the Crescent Band ?] that was Jack Carey, Charlie Moore on guitar, Sam Dutrey [Sr.] and his brother--there was another brother, Honore, who played trombone (WR says he made some records with Oliver)--Jimmy Johnson, bass--WF agrees with WR that Johnson played with Bolden, too, and WF says he played with the Crescent Band. WF, asked by WR, remembers Johnny Dodds and Baby Dodds. WF had said the Dodds were both drummers, but retracts when prompted, saying he remembers that Johnny was the clarinetist; then he says, "Just like the Barbarins [Louis and Paul], they're two

brothers, they're drummers." [Perhaps confused with Hall brothers, Minor and Freddy.] WF remembers Jimmie Noone, the clarinetist, saying he heard him a little bit. Answering WR, WF says he likes a cornetist he taught, Andy Anderson. WF says most of his pupils turned out good--e.g., Son Johnson, saxophone. Asked about his other pupils, WF says he taught Jim Robinson, Manuel Sayles, and others he can't recall. WF says he has taught drums and cornet to the same person, getting him good enough to put in a band.

When WF first went to New Orleans, working for Mr. McCall, he was living on State and Prytania [Compare p. 14]; then WF's mother moved to New Orleans, along with his brother, and they moved to Octavia Street. WF and his brother got with the Tulane Band, under the direction of Amos Riley, and from there they went to other bands and places; at that time, WF was playing violin. WF likes banjo best of the instruments he has played; he likes banjo in a band better than guitar, because he says more rhythm and support can be produced on banjo. WF talks about waltz time and tremolo. WF answers WR, saying that the banjo came into popular use about 1923, that before World War I only the guitar was used. WR asks if everybody changed to banjo then; WF says no. . . .

End of Reel II

