

"WOODEN JOE" NICHOLAS
November 12, 1956
Reel I, Track 1-Digest-Retyped

RESTRICTED

ALSO PRESENT: William Russell, Charlie DeVore,
Wooden Joe's daughter, Mrs. Morrison, possibly
and grandchildren. (child and mother).
[Recorded at 2138 Painters Street]

Nicholas forgets date of birth. Probably September 22 [no years given]. Born at Frenchmen and Rampart Streets. Brother used to play guitar, bass, piano. Albert Nicholas was nephew, son of one of [this brother.] Had two brothers, two sisters.

Took up flute first, wooden flute and tin flute, too. Then piccolo. Then clarinet three, four years. Playing clarinet good, playing with Joe Oliver right across from Pete Lala's, at Abadie's. Oliver was kind of lazy, didn't like to play too much, offered to let Nicholas try his horn. Just four pieces playing, so Nicholas decided to try, with just three. Oliver went out, stayed a long time. Nicholas played one tune first, then five or six numbers; people liked it. It was the second time he had tried the cornet. Didn't have a horn; bought a little brass one. Lent it to Bunk [Johnson]; finally took it back, went to playing. "First thing you know", put the clarinet down, played the cornet [almost exclusively]. Bass player was manager of band.

In band at Abadie's with Joe Oliver: "Myknee" [Richard M.] Jones. Ernest Rogers was drummer. (Died September, 1956.) Charlie Love playing cornet at Luthjen's, even though he had his teeth pulled out in spring, [of 1956]. Pete Bocage was playing there, but must have given it up.

Nicholas took about ten lessons from Bunk. Never could find him at home. Bunk lived then on Villere Street, between Touro--between Frenchmen and [?] Streets. Bunk would never come home. That's why they called him "Bunk", he'd "bunk" down anywhere, drunk as a fool. He'd have a bottle; he'd never bother to fool with anybody, just so long as that bottle had something in it, and it was a big bottle, not a little bottle.

One time Nicholas went to Beaumont, Texas to stay two weeks. Bunk and the Banner Band came after. Bunk hadn't seen him for three or four years. Surprised Nicholas was still playing, and vice versa. Bunk said he was "most gone".

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He looked good, but couldn't play much any more. Had lost his teeth at this time. Had a big bottle, offered Nicholas a drink; Nicholas took drink of whiskey, but not much, as was usual. Finally came out that the reason two bands were hired was that Bunk didn't show up half the time, when he took a job. People didn't know until they saw him whether he would turn up or not. Nicholas wanted to let Bunk play; Bunk wanted to let Nicholas play. Nicholas played. House was packed, jammed. Bunk played there the next night. Tuxedo Band mentioned.

"Lazy Daddy" Fillmore, piano player from over in Beaumont. Nicholas heard him; he was good. Fillmore now dead.

Nicholas says Bunk had a good band; he was the worst one in the band, the Banner Band. He could play, but he wouldn't play half the time. Never was a loud trumpet player; played soft and sweet. Had good fingers. Beautiful tone, "would take you off your feet."

Oliver was most powerful cornet player in New Orleans. Used open horn, not mute. Freddy [Keppard?] didn't use mute, either; "could make some stuff", to beat Joe. Never did play soft; had a good tone, though. Only one he was afraid of was Bunk. But Bunk never bothered nobody; he had his own stuff. Freddy was the same way; he had his own stuff.

1/19/56
Good about 1930
Nicholas used to hear Bolden play (that's how he learned to play)--was playing flute at that time, used to go listen at the Globe Hall, or Economy--he didn't play at Economy much, but at the Globe. Perseverance Hall, on Derbigny Street. He didn't play there much. *[Music pt!]* Globe Hall was right where the Auditorium is now. Had to be torn down when they built the Auditorium. It was a great big place, and Bolden used to blow them down there. He was a strong cornet player, all the way through; never took his horn down. *BB was tal endation.*

In Bolden's band then: Willie Cornish, tb; Frank Lewis, --

Nicholas saw Lewis across the lake a few years ago. Though he was dead, or had quit playing, or something. Lewis recognized him first. Lewis had just come from playing; Nicholas went over and got himself invited to play--picked up a few dollars, and got warm besides. It was nice and warm in there. This was at Mandeville, a couple of blocks from the boat landing.

That place in Mandeville was where Nicholas met Bunk, before Bunk started playing in New Orleans. Bunk used to stay over there. He taught a lot of fellows. Had a good band, too. WR says Tommy Ladnier learned from him over there in the band. [Nicholas named another man who learned from Bunk, whose brother, a drummer, died recently--couldn't remember his last name; first name is Klebert [sp?]. His brother [possibly Ernie Cagnolatti] plays cornet; Klebert played drums. ⁴²

Nicholas used to like Bolden better than any cornet player in the world, followed around wherever he played to hear him, Lincoln Park, Johnson Park, all over. When he played against other fellows, he always had the crowd. He never sat down, always stood up. Nicholas used to live at Lapeyrouse and Prieur Streets, and when Bolden was playing at the Fairgrounds Nicholas could hear him as plainly as if he were in the same room. If he didn't feel like going out to where Bolden was playing he would sit down at the corner; Bolden would "shove out every number" so that people in the distance could hear.

He played all kinds of numbers, blues more than others. Nicholas believes Bolden made up "Careless Love." He played everything, though, every piece that was out. He played "Tiger Rag", too, though it was called something else then. "Make Me a Pallet on the Floor", all kinds of songs. Never saw him with music; doesn't know whether he could read it or not. "He'd bust right on out, everything, right up to the top" [had high range]. Never saw him with a mute or anything like that.

Globe Hall was upstairs, had a balcony, where the musicians sats, way up high,

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like Artesian [Artisan's] Hall, all the halls here, Economy, Cooperators'--
Cooperators' Hall had a balcony on each end. Cooperators' Hall is now a church,
spiritual church, on Liberty Street. It was called Hopes Hall also at one time.

Nicholas played in all the halls, believes that he was picked more than any
other musician to play in the halls. Cooperators', New Hall, Perseverance, Autocrat,
Francis Amis, L'equity, Jeunes Amis, Most of the halls were downtown. Didn't
play much in Longshoremen's, which was way uptown. He played in Old Providence Hall,
uptown on Philip Street. The Sans Souci was another hall, uptown on Howard Avenue
[now La Salle Street].

Used to see Bolden most of the time out on Perdido Street, at [Kenna's and
Kegler's ?] Hall. Masonic Hall was up there, too. Masonic Hall, also called [Cagers,
or Kegler's, or Kegger's?] Hall was the one they used to call Funky Butt Hall. It's
still there, but has been added on to, to make it nicer, a church now. It was on
Perdido, close to E Liberty. [WR has picture of it]. One man owned a number of
halls, used to have good crowds; everything was packed. That's where Nicholas first
saw George Caldwell, clarinet player. ~~Been~~ dead a long time now; was a tall, brown-
skin fellow.

Only clarinet player Nicholas really used to watch was Frank Lewis. He was
better than [George] Baquet and all of them. He heard the Tios [Lorenzo, Sr., and
Jr.] too. Lewis was better than all of them. Never puffed his cheeks out at all;
looked as though he weren't playing. George Lewis plays something like Frank's
style. George Lewis doesn't talk about his father; Nicholas believes George is
the son, possibly illegitimate, of Frank. [George Lewis' last name is Zeno; his
father was Henry Lewis Zeno.]

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Charlie McCurdy was great on clarinet. Played strictly [written] music.

Played with all the bands, including Peerless, with Bab Frank, who played piccolo.

Piccolo part was just like clarinet. Used to be good in a band.

Nicholas played in all the brass bands, in many parades.

End of Track I

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ALSO PRESENT: William Russell, Charlie DeVore,
Wooden Joe's daughter, Mrs. Morrison, possibly
and grandchildren. (Child and mother).
[Recorded at 2138 Painters Street]

All the trombone players Nicholas used to play with, about forty or fifty, are dead. Ambrose Powers, George Washington, "Booger Bear", Harrison Barnes, Frankie Duson [didn't play with Frankie but once; didn't want to play with him; he was crooked; tried to cheat the other musicians out of their money.]

Buddy Petit was crooked, too. He and Frank worked together a pretty good while-- they were two of a kind, both crooked. Buddy Petit borrowed a horn from Joe when his own was broken--Joe kept two or sometimes three horns. Buddy wanted to borrow it for one night; Joe said he could have it for a week. Couldn't get him to give it back, kept renewing the loan. Sent Billy Marrero, Lawrence's father, to get the horn; Buddy talked him out of it again.

Long story about a bar-room meeting between Buddy Petit, Billy Marrero, and Nicholas. When Nicholas left, he picked up a pocketbook on the "banquette"--had eighteen dollars in it.

Buddy Petit lived Derbigny Street. Joe Petit lived on Derbigny Street, too, across from Artisan's Hall. Cornish was good valve trombonist, but Joe was the best valve trombone player in the city. Had the worst horn in the city. Could play any horn he could get his hands on, even if it was leaky. Had ~~gone~~ tooth in his head when he died, but was still playing.

Buddy Petit's real name was Joe Crawford, but old man Joe Petit brought him up like a son. Joe Petit was staying with Buddy's mother when Buddy was very young. Joe Petit sold sandwiches and other things.

Buddy Petit played all styles of cornet, everybody's style.

Nicholas once had a job back of Gentilly, at a big hall, [Stone's or Storm's ?] Place. Tom Albert was playing violin. Nicholas was playing clarinet then, not yet playing cornet altogether. Buddy begged to play out there with them. Nicholas asked

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Tom Albert if he needed a cornet player; Albert had been looking for one; Nicholas brought in Buddy Petkit. Big Eye Louis [Nelson] was playing there with them, too. The man was well satisfied, wanted to keep this band. They played about a month, every Saturday night. [Buddy decided to quit because he had found a better job. But the new job didn't call for Saturday work, and the Gentilly job was for Saturdays only, so they continued a good while until he quit again.?)

Tom wanted to keep the group together. Buddy wouldn't tell Tom he wanted to quit; he'd come tell Joe about it, wanted Joe to go to another job with him. Joe refused. Joe went out and [got the Kelly boy?], Al~~x~~bert liked the replacement better than Buddy. Buddy wanted to come back, but couldn't get back. Buddy tried to borrow the boy's horn. Couldn't get it. Tried to borrow horn from Joe.

Joe once bought a horn just to lend it to Buddy. He trouble getting it back from Buddy. If he went by Buddy's house, Buddy's wife would claim Buddy wasn't there, even when Joe knew he was there, and the horn too.

End of Reel I

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Also present: William Russell, Charlie DeVore

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Discussion of some friends
Nicholas first heard Freddy Keppard when he was playing violin. Freddy Keppard was a little fellow and didn't look like he was going to be a big [fellow?]. His nickname in later years was "Whale Mouth". Freddy Keppard was about sixteen or seventeen when he started playing cornet.

WR says Louis Keppard doesn't work for Maison Blanche any more; he showed Nicholas that he was playing the bass horn.

Freddy Keppard really played good and in about four or five months he was cleaning up all the fellows. The second time Wooden Joe played with Freddy Keppard was at the Economy Hall with Bab Frank ~~and~~ *in CFK's place including* ~~and~~ *and* ~~and~~ *and* decided to stay with them regular for a while. Freddy Keppard stayed with them for a year or two. His name was going all around. He was ~~so~~ powerful as Joe Oliver and perhaps more powerful. He never would blow soft; he didn't look like he would puff much, but he'd make everything. He didn't use any [music or mutes?]. Keppard played with Joe Petit [trumbone?] and [Alphonse] Picou [clarinet?] and Charlie McCurdy playing saxophone. They didn't use the saxophone much in the old days; Picou had one but he didn't play it too well. Picou played clarinet; he had different kinds of which one had a bell on it. The first time Nicholas saw Picou play was at the Odd Fellows Hall on saxophone on Perdido Street. Nicholas doesn't like the saxophone much even though he can play it. George Lewis asked him if he was going to bring his saxophone and [he told GL no?]. He took his alto when he first played with Lewis. GL used his alto.

* In the old days in the brass bands in the street they used two cornets and alto, baritone, bass horn, two trombones, somethimes one, and sometime they would have only one cornet and he would have to play the whole parade. Wooden Joe was not tired even though he was the only #cornet. They did not used saxophones and the parades sounded better then with the alto and baritone horn. The parades in the old days were about the same length as they are today. They used to get three or four dollars.

For dances they would be paid a dollar-and-a-half, sometimes two dollars, and they got good tips. *By the way, you should...*

Nicholas played in the District at the Tuxedo and the Blue Goose. They didn't have music at the Big 25; it was mostly for gambling. There were jam sessions there! Pete Lala's place and the Entertainer's Club on Franklin [street--now Crozat] which was called the 101 Ranch at one time and [also the 25 before that?]. Then there was the 28 across the street. *Unclear.* [Cf. other interviews]. Nicholas also played at George Fewclothes right across from the 25.

Sidney Bechet used to play with Nicholas when SB was a child. Sidney didn't know how to read at all; he would't go to school and Nicholas said he was the same way. Nicholas would be out in the woods all day long; he didn't like school at all. He got the name of Wooden Joe because he was out in the woods all the time. At that time he lived on Rampart and Frenchman [Streets] and he lived on Prieur and Lapeyrouse [Streets]. His present residence was all woods then and swamps.

Sidney Bechet played clarinet always until recently he started playing the soprano saxophone which is just like the clarinet. He plays clarinet well. He also played cornet one time. They were playing in a night parade for the Lions. Bechet wanted to buy some liquor. He and Black Benny [Williams] got drunk. It rained so much at that parade that night that it saved them. They went into a house, out of the rain. Stayed there about two hours; it was pouring down. They wanted to break up right then, but it was raining so hard they stayed there. Sidney suggested changing up on the instruments; he wanted to play Nicholas's cornet; have Nicholas play clarinet. Took the cornet and started playing. Played as loud as Wooden Joe did, and kept playing the cornet till they knocked off. Nicholas kept his cornet clean.

Nicholas used to play every Monday night at the Merry-go-round [Club]. Chris Kelly had played there now and then ~~later~~ earlier. They liked Nicholas better, so

they kept his band. Chris used to play for the Buffalos, not so far from there in Carrollton. They both advertised on Sundays for these dances on Monday. On one Sunday it looked as though Chris Kelly and his band were looking for a bucking contest with Nicholas and his band. Kelly's band hung out in a bar for three or four hours, waiting for Nicholas's band to show. When Nicholas and his band came that way, they recognized Giardina's truck, the truck Chris always used to play from. Nicholas stopped at the corner and played. Lots of people showed up. After they finished several numbers, they pulled off and went into the bar to get a drink. Chris came running up from somewhere else, started playing. Nicholas told his driver to drive his truck up closer to Kelly's while Kelly was playing. Chris started playing blues - his best numbers were blues. As soon as Chris knocked off, Nicholas started playing immediately on some "wa-wa" blues, with a mute. That Monday night Chris Kelly didn't show up for his job. When Nicholas saw him and asked him why, he said he couldn't ~~xxx~~ play against Joe, that his band couldn't buck him. [Cf. other interviews on outstanding trumpet men.RBA]

Nicholas asked Manuel Perez to show him how to play the cornet. He already played the clarinet well by ear. Perez let him try a new cornet he had just bought. Perez told him he could play it. Wooden Joe says he could play better clarinet than George Baquet even though Wooden Joe couldn't read.

[TAPE SPEED VARIABLE FROM HERE TO END OF TRACK]

End of Track I

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Also present: William Russell, Charlie DeVore

Napoleon "Toodlum" [Johnson] came from Buras, Louisiana. Did well in New Orleans, he has a bar-room or two in town.

Miss Betsy Cole had lawn parties [according to WR] at Josephine and Willow Streets. Nicholas played them. They were held out in the yard. Used Kerosene lamps and flambeaux to light the yard. They danced right on the ground, danced so frequently they had packed it into a good dancing surface.

At some lawn parties[?] wooden floors or tar paulins were used. Saturday, Sunday, and Monday nights were the nights for lawn parties. Monday was once the best night.

There were many places [with music?] near Miss Cole's.

Louis Dumaine led the W.P.A. band [after George McCullum?]. GM was better than Louis Armstrong "and all of them" at times. RESTRICT.... Wooden Joe played against GM in a contest; GM was with Manuel Manetta.

Wooden Joe discusses and demonstrates trumpet playing. "Blues was always ahead" [more popular in New Orleans?].

He started with the Primrose Band playing piccolo and clarinet. Jimmy Wright played accordion with the Primrose. He first played cornet with the Camillia Band.

The Silver Leaf^F Band was led by a trumpet player nicknamed Bebé who also played with the Tuxedo. Ernest Rogers, [drums], Pete, and Valteau, violin, were in this band. Violin played lead [i.e., melody] then, Manuel Manetta was a good violin player. Also played piano and other instruments.

Wooden Joe played with Kid Thomas in a band which had been the Primrose. Kid Thomas and Wooden Joe played together in a brass band. The manager, "Tit" [Rouchon?, bass?] got lots of work but could not play much.

Blues singer Ann Cook is mentioned; there were many blues singers around the [Big] 25, 28, and Spanol's [sp?]. He heard Louis Armstrong [at Spanol's?]. He

SPANNOL'S ?
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also heard Kid Rena when he was young.

Pianists were used in three or four piece bands. Manuel Manetta was the best pianist here. Wooden Joe heard Tony Jackson, who was good. He also heard Jelly Roll Morton.

Wooden Joe never practiced except on his flute and fife. He had no lip trouble. His lips are not marked by the mouthpiece. [He used the non-pressure system. RBA].

End of Track