

CHARLIE BOCAGE
Reel I [of 3]--Digest--Retype
July 18, 1960

1

Also present: Herb Friedwald, Richard B. Allen.

The interviewee, Charles Leopold Bocage, lives at 2039 Touro St., where the interview is being conducted. While HF gets a tape copy of recordings made by the [A. J.] Piron orchestra, in New York [in 1923, 1924 and 1925], in which CB participated, RBA asks various questions. CB replies, saying that he was born at 530 Powder Street, Algiers, La., January 14, 1900 (he said, previously, that he was the youngest of the Bocage brothers); his father was named Leopold; there were two sisters, Bertha and Lillian; the other brothers were Henry Clay Bocage and Peter Bocage; there is a cousin, Wilfred Bocage, who plays alto sax.

As the copy tape of the records begins, CB, at second attempt, correctly identifies the tune playing as "New Orleans Wiggle," which was written and arranged by his brother, Peter, trumpet player with the orchestra, which consisted of nine pieces. CB says he thinks "Wiggle" was published by Clarence Williams, that he knows "West Indies Blues" [another of the recordings] was published by Williams. CB says he thinks "Wiggle" was recorded for Okeh, that he knows the orchestra recorded for Okeh, and also for Brunswick [he means Columbia] and Victor. He says the clarinetist heard on "Wiggle" was [Lorenzo] Tio [Jr.]. CB says the critics declared the orchestra one of the best to come to the city during that time. CB says the orchestra

[*He does? UNRELEASED
SESSION POSSIBLE?]

Reel I [of 3]--Digest--Retype
July 18, 1960

played its first New York engagement at the Club DeLuxe (later the Cotton Club), which was owned by former world-heavyweight champion, Jack Johnson, and a fellow named Levy. While the Club DeLuxe was being redecorated, the orchestra played at the LaFayette (one week), was offered a job with George White's Scandals. The offer was turned down, because the men in the orchestra didn't want to stay away from New Orleans so long. They also had an offer to play in a summer resort in Bridgeport, Connecticut. RBA comments that he heard CB take a banjo break on the record playing; RBA then asks CB how much reading the orchestra did on jobs [including records]. CB answers, saying that the men in the orchestra were talented, that they would read a piece several times and commit it to memory; he says they would play a vaudeville show without using any music at all, playing their own numbers. CB says "West Indies Blues" was Piron's number, written in collaboration with someone else [cf. Composer credit on label]; CB says he himself sang the song, and declares that he was the entertainer in the band. CB identifies "Mama's Gone, Goodbye," saying it was written by Peter Bocage and Piron. RBA says Peter told him that he wrote the music, and Piron wrote the words. CB says Piron was more of a lyric writer. CB says he thinks "Purple Rose [of Cairo]" was more [by] Piron than [by] Steve [Lewis, pianist with the band]. [Cf. Sheet music. Jimmy Dupre listed.] HF asks if the tunes [those

being played] were the ones the band played on a job; CB says they were, that that was their style; he says the band was "light," having only 1 trumpet and one trombone, instead of like large bands now, which have all large brass section. RBA says it sounds like Peter Bocage was using a mute on a "Mama's Gone, Goodbye" passage; HF says Peter told him he did not use a mute on it. CB says it was the way it was recorded. CB says he thinks the Piron group was the first colored band to play a permanent engagement at the Roseland ballroom, 51st and Broadway. HF asks about the tryout for the George White Scandals; CB says the men did not want the job because they had good jobs in New Orleans and they wanted to go home; they had plenty of work there. CB says it hurt Piron when the men refused to take the job, because his ambition was to reach the top. CB says the band had all the "prominent" work in New Orleans--New Orleans Country Club, debutante parties, Carnival balls, playing for the Boston Club, Pickwick Club, Stratford Club, etc. CB says that the orchestra played opposite an orchestra from Connecticut, that of Mal Hallett, and that Hallett said he would cut off his right arm to get the job with the Scandals. CB said he himself didn't have anything to do with the decision not to take the job, that he was the youngest in the group and had no power; he said his brother, Peter, one of the main members of the band, was homesick. The band went to New York twice, the first time, in 1923, playing at

CHARLIE BOCAGE

4

Reel I [of 3]--Digest--Retype
July 18, 1960

the Club DeLuxe; the second time, in 1924, they played at the Roseland. Clarence Williams negotiated the jobs. HF asks if CB remembers any of the other bands which were playing in New York at the time CB was there; CB says a band from Detroit, led by Leroy Smith, was there; CB says it was Smith who warned the Piron group about the way some leaders would break up another band, by hiring away the rival band's key men. HF asks if anyone tried to do that to the Piron band; CB says a white band tried to get him, his brother-in-law [Tio], and Peter Bocage, and other bands tried to get men. HF asks if any of the men did play with other bands; CB says not regularly, that he knew, but that some may have played one-nighters when the Piron band wasn't playing. HF asks if Tio played with another band at one time, perhaps later than when the Piron band was in New York; CB says that Tio went back to New York in 1932, with CB's sister [Tio's wife], where Tio died, in 1930 [sic] [Compare Louis Tio interview October 16, 1960]. [Charters' book says 1933]. CB says things were rough in New Orleans, and that Paul Barbarin had come back to New Orleans, and had recommended that Tio go to New York, as there was plenty of work for a man of Tio's type; the next time CB saw Tio was when Tio was brought back for burial, in St. Louis Cemetery [No. 3] (back of Esplanade). CB answers HF, saying Tio had the reputation as one of the finest clarinetists in New Orleans, that his father and his uncle were great clarinetists, that CB

had heard that there were clarinetists in the family back to Tio's great grandfather. [He was actually [an?] 'A One' musician.] The family was Mexican, the mother being French. CB doesn't know what bands Tio played with when he went back to New York; he thinks Tio didn't do very well there, for various reasons. CB says Tio taught [Barney] Bigard, Albert Nicholas and [Omer] Simeon (the last-named from Chicago), and they all became great clarinetists. HF asks if Tio was a good jazz clarinet player; CB says he could play jazz and could play classics, too. RBA asks if [Louis] "Papa" Tio played jazz; CB says he probably played Scott Joplin numbers, but that was before his own time, that he only knew Papa Tio in retirement; CB says that Joplin music was the type the people who worked in the District played--men like the ^[Elder] Tios, Big Eye Louis [Nelson] and [Alphonse] Picou, all older than CB. CB says he did not play in the District, that he worked at Tom Anderson's on Rampart [street] at the age of nineteen as an entertainer, singing and playing the guitar, which he had picked up "by head." He says he and his father and his brother, Henry, all played violin a bit, and that they had a trio which played house parties and affairs like that. CB says he took up banjo after he was married, at the encouragement of Peter Bocage, and that although he didn't consider himself a virtuoso, he held up his part with some of the best bands around New Orleans. CB says he had an

CHARLIE BOCAGE
Reel I [of 3]--Digest--Retype
July 18, 1960

6

opportunity to stay in New York, too. Piron's was the first permanent band in which he played banjo. CB comments about the record being played, saying the title, "Kiss Me Sweet." CB says he sang on the record, doing the impersonation of the woman; Piron sang the male lead on this particular record, but CB says he himself did all the rest of what singing there was done in that band. RBA and HF ask if Steve Lewis did any singing; CB says he was a comedy type, that he would sing a few funny songs, and would sing some at Tranchina's, during the band's breaks. A recording with Esther Bigeou singing "West Indies Blues" is played [OK8118]; the band listed is Piron's. CB says he doesn't know how it got such a listing, that so far as he remembers she didn't make any records with them, and he doesn't even remember her ever singing with the band. He says he made the original version of "West Indies Blues." CB, answering RBA, says he never heard of Lela Bolden; RBA says maybe her records were just supposed to be with Steve Lewis and Piron; HF says he thinks they were with the whole band. HF, playing a record, says the players are the Piron band; CB says it doesn't sound like it, and that he doesn't remember the particular record. RBA asks how much of the drums could be recorded during the time the Piron records were made; CB says the most effective part of the drums was the cymbal, and the drummers used that (and CB agrees with RBA later that the woodblock was also used) all the time. CB

CHARLIE BOCAGE
Reel I [of 3]--Digest--Retype
July 18, 1960

7

says he really doesn't remember the band's making the Bigeou record, that if the Piron band did it, it was done secretly, because he thinks he made all the records with Piron. HF asks if Lizzie Miles ever sang with Piron's band; CB says she did not, that she was appearing at the Capital Palace [theater?] when the Piron band was in New York. HF asks if the Piron band was a success in New York; CB says it was, and would have been greater if they had taken the offers they had, such as one with the Orpheum-Keith [?] circuit. HF asks CB if he once told him that Peter Bocage purposely played badly at one audition; CB says it was the audition for George White's Scandals, and that the men in the band, excepting Piron, didn't want to stay in New York, or away from New Orleans. CB says the men thought they were just going to New York for the one trip, and that when ^{the} other opportunity was offered, they didn't want to take it, but just wanted to come back home. CB says he had no choice, that he came back when the others did. HF asks if Piron wanted to stay; CB says he did, that his ambition was to get to the top, and that he really had the chance with that band.

RBA asks if there were saxophones in New Orleans bands before he began playing banjo; CB says there were, and says he heard that one of the first men in New Orleans to play sax was [Sidney] Bechet. CB agrees with RBA that Louis Warnick took up sax early, because CB says there was a sax in the band when they went to New York in 1923; he

says that Tio took up tenor sax about then, having played clarinet exclusively until then; Tio played tenor, Warnick played alto and had played clarinet. HF asks if the Piron band ever played low-down blues; CB says if the occasion warranted it, such as for colored dances, although most of the band's work was as a society band for whites. CB says the band's style didn't change for colored functions, except that the singing would be different, with blues sung more which were for the common people in those days; he explains that he means blues other than "St. Louis Blues," and blues like that--stomp-down blues, such as a band would play at the Economy Hall and the Cooperators Hall. HF asks how Tio was on blues; CB says he was fine. CB answers RBA, saying he isn't sure who was the best blues player in the Piron band. Then he listens to the record being played, saying it sounds more like the original ["West Indies Blues"], not like the one played earlier, that the violin can be heard [in solo] on this one; HF asks if Piron took a lot of solos himself, and CB says he did. CB says the Piron band had another recording, a number they used to open their vaudeville act, "Bright Star [Blues]". RBA says he has heard it, that it has good Tio on it; CB says it is a beautiful thing. PB wrote it.

CB says he played with Barney Bigard, with Buddy Petit, with other "scram" bands, none of which were regularly organized, and not

CHARLIE BOCAGE
Reel I [of 3]--Digest--Retype
July 18, 1960

9

in the class with bands like Piron's, bands which played mostly for colored functions; when they did play for white functions, it was for a poorer-class group. CB says he played with Petit in Covington, Madisonville, Bogalusa, and went to Hazlehurst [sp?] and Vicksburg, too. He says times were rough about then, 1918. RBA asks what he was playing then; CB says he was playing banjo then. HF asks if Petit was the leader. The reel ends.

End of Reel I

Also present: Herb Friedwald, Richard B. Allen.

RBA asks who was in Buddy Petit's band when CB played in it; CB says he himself played in a lot of little pick-up bands that various people would get together for a particular job. RBA asks if Petit had no regular band [members] then; CB said he didn't, that during those times [some] musicians were not reliable, so men who got jobs would get bands together as needed. CB says that around New Orleans there was no business sense [among most musicians]. CB says men (even a leader) might take two or three jobs for the same time, leaving someone waiting for a band to show up. HF asks if Petit was a good cornet player; CB says he wasn't much of a musician [reader], but he played a lot of stuff by head, like most players in New Orleans. CB says Kid Rena, Shots [Madison] and Louis Armstrong all learned a little bit of music at the Municipal [Waifs'] Home. CB says Armstrong was playing at Tom Anderson's when CB was entertaining there [Reel I, CB says he played at Anderson's when he was 19--in 1919--Armstrong went to Chicago when he was 2¹~~3~~--in 1923--it must have taken him an awful long time to make up his mind. PRC], and that Joe Oliver sent him a telegram every day, begging him to come to Chicago to play in his band. Armstrong finally joined Oliver in Chicago, having been assured by Paul Dominguez that Oliver really wanted him, playing second trumpet with him. He later married the

pianist, Lil [Hardin], and eventually got a group of his own, on Okeh records. CB says everybody in New Orleans laughed at Armstrong's singing, but the records caught on with the public, and finally he turned out to be a nice trumpet player. CB says Armstrong was and is very kind-hearted and generous, helping his fellow musicians; CB says Armstrong has made a lot of money, but he doesn't know that he still has much, as he is very generous and gives money to anyone from New Orleans who may be having a rough time. CB comments that Armstrong was pretty sick not long ago, according to the papers. CB says he had not seen Armstrong in 20-odd years until he came to the Labor Union Hall, where CB was playing one night; Armstrong knew CB on sight; CB figured he had forgotten.

CB says that when Piron's band broke up, he used to go to various night spots and talk with the musicians when they got off work; at the Old Absinthe House, then a jitney dance hall, Arnold Metoyer had the band, and Dwight Newman, piano, and Henry Martin, drums were in the band, Newman and Martin suggested that CB, his brothers [Peter, trumpet and Henry, tuba], [Louis] Warnick [alto sax] form a band with them; Newman and Martin said they would quit the Absinthe House to form the band, because they could do better with the Bocage boys. A band, the Creole Serenaders, was formed, and because of the acquaintance of the Bocage boys with a lot of the moneyed people, the band

July 18, 1960

got a lot of work. The band became "famous" while playing at the Old Absinthe House, where they were playing when they were featured every Sunday morning on a broadcast by WWL radio station. The band also went on the road. The band continued prosperous, but one by one, Newman, Martin and Warnick died; Henry Bocage went to California, where he still lives in Oakland. CB and Peter Bocage continued playing, until CB became ill in 1947, at which time he quit playing. RBA comments that the band had no trombone; CB says the instrumentation was trumpet, sax, sousaphone, piano, drums and banjo. RBA asks if Henry Bocage never played string bass; CB says he did not, he played E^b sousaphone. RBA asks about the tuba player who went to New York with Piron's band; CB says it was Bob Ysegurre [sp?], who was from Belize, ^[City, British] Honduras. Ysegurre came to New Orleans on a ship, on which he was employed as a fireman. CB says Ysegurre was an "A-1 musician", and a pleasant, wonderful person to be with. Ysegurre decided to stay in New York, as his wife, in New Orleans, had died when the Piron band reached Pittsburgh. CB says Ysegurre came back to New Orleans several times, with Don Redman's orchestra; CB says Barney [Bigard] has wound up with Freddie Slack, on the West Coast. RBA says he is back with Louis Armstrong again. CB asks about Edmond Hall; RBA says Hall went to Africa, didn't like it, having quit [Armstrong], and being replaced by Peanuts Hucko. CB asks if the record, "Ambassador [Satch]" was

not made in Africa, or Australia; RBA says it was made in two different places, one of them Germany; CB says he has the record.

RBA asks CB when he played with Barney Bigard; CB says it was with Buddy Petit's band. (CB says Bigard never played with Piron.) RBA says Bigard must have played loud in Petit's band; then RBA asks if Petit played loud. CB says it had to be loud then, that a lot of the work was outside, such as at picnics, and on advertising wagons [, of course, without electronic amplification]; he says wagons with bands would often meet, and that the wagons would then be tied together by the wheels, and that a contest would take place, sometimes lasting hours, until one leader pulled away [gave up]. CB agrees with HF that Petit was a good jazz player. CB says Arnold Metoyer was a fine musician, trained in the classics, one who would double-tongue and triple-tongue; CB says Metoyer traveled all up and down the line, and that he had pictures to prove that he had played with many bands during his travels. CB says that traveling bands did not use piano; the instrumentation was guitar, bass fiddle [these replacing the piano], drums, trumpet, trombone and clarinet. Pianos were used on steady jobs. CB says the cabarets had pianos, which were there mostly because of the entertainers who would perform there.

CHARLIE BOCAGE
Reel II [of 3]--Digest--Retype
July 18, 1960

14

RBA asks if CB ever had a teacher; CB says "I never took music as a profession," [!!! RBA] he taught himself, getting along on mostly "talent;" he says he could read a little bit, but did not consider himself a great musician [in the sense of being able to read]. He could play anything he heard, and sing anything, and sing in any key; he says no one had to make arrangements to accomodate his vocal range. RBA says he heard CB [with Peter Bocage's band] at the American Legion Dance Hall, [American Legion Club Crystal Ballroom, 334 Royal St.] and that CB sang "Anybody Want To Buy My Cabbage?". CB says that was a novelty number, that [some of the] prominent people in New Orleans liked that song.

RBA asks if people in New York danced to the Piron band's music; CB says they did; at the Cotton Club, they would dance between shows. Then, at the Roseland dance hall, they danced. CB says the only difference he noticed in the dancing of New York people and New Orleans people was that the former danced the Charleston a lot, and the tango was also very popular in downtown New Orleans. CB says he doesn't think they danced any faster than the New Orleans people. He says the band played the same stock numbers in New York as they played in New Orleans; he says they may have played their jazz numbers a little different as their swing was different, but that was all. (Ice cream truck passes.)

RBA asks what type music CB's father played; CB says his father was playing in the time when mazurkas, schottisches and waltzes were popular, around 1900, when CB was a child; his father did not play any jazz. CB mentions "Over The Waves" as being one of the popular waltzes; RBA says that tune was the theme of the Mexican Band [at the Cotton Exposition], in 1885. CB says he remembers that Bill Dorsey, of Algiers, a bass player who worked with his father, was considered to be very good. HF asks if CB's brothers got music lessons; CB says both did, but Peter was the most "learnt" of the three; Henry was also a ship-building carpenter by trade, having learned that from his father, and Peter never did learn anything but music [and later worked for insurance company]. CB says his father took more interest in Peter, he being the oldest; CB and Henry had to work. CB says when summer vacations from school came around, he had to go to work in his father's boat shop, and that Henry was working there all the time. CB says he himself was a laborer until he took up music, and when music business got bad, in the 1940's, he had to get some work, so he got a job with the Pullman Company [as a porter?]. HF asks if the members of Piron's band had other jobs; CB says that Louis Warnick worked for the blueprint firm, Eugene Dietzgen, and that Henry Bocage and himself worked, but that Piron, Peter Bocage, Steve Lewis and [Louis] Cottrell [Sr.] just worked at music. CB then speaks of Dwight Newman's son,

Reel II [of 3]--Digest--Retype
July 18, 1960

Joe Newman, playing at this time with Count Basie; CB says he remembers seeing Joe when the Creole Serenaders would rehearse of Newman's house. He says Joe was taking trumpet lessons then, was attending Xavier [Prep], and his sister was taking clarinet. CB says Joe was in New Orleans with Earl Hines, at the Rhythm Club, and that Dwight, then sick, said he was going to hear his boy play; he did, went to the hospital the next day, and in a few days was dead. CB then shows a picture of the Creole Serenaders, a photostat enlargement made by Warnick, from an original by the photographer, Paddio. Three Bocages, Warnick, Newman and Martin are pointed out. RBA says the band must have had an unusual sound, with a sax and a violin; CB says Peter would play the violin only on certain [ballad] numbers, that he played trumpet on the others. CB points out a brake drum, which was used for a part of the effects in the number, "Ring Those [Dem] Bells" [by Ellington]. CB also points out a thing used to make the tiger roar in "Tiger Rag;" it consisted of a wooden washtub with a snare drum head stretched over one end, and a resined cord fastened to the [bottom of the] tub; the player would pull the cord somehow, and the tiger's roar would be produced. CB says the picture was taken on the Old Absinthe House music stand, about 1932. CB says Paddio jumped off the Jackson Avenue ferry and drowned himself. CB answers HF, saying the Creole Serenaders played at the Absinthe House every night. CB says Warnick did not

July 18, 1960

play clarinet any more, only sax. CB answers RBA, saying he did not play lead on his guitar, just rhythm. There is a discussion of what CB played on guitar; he played whatever rhythm he thought suitable at the moment, and played mostly down strokes. RBA says Lawrence Marrero played banjo like that, using all down strokes. CB says he himself played a lot of stuff on banjo, depending on what he thought fitted, but says that it takes talent to do it. CB answers HF, saying he didn't take many solos. He answers RBA, saying he could make all kinds of rolls, strokes, etc. on the banjo. He says that in those days solos were not required of banjos and guitars as they are today, that those instruments were chord instruments, and the bass and drums were the rhythm. CB answers RBA, saying nobody played banjo with Piron, except that Peter Bocage played a "little" banjo with them once [a banjo mandolin at one time? occasionally?] [cf. Peter Bocage, Reel ?], until CB began playing with Piron. CB says that Willie Edwards was playing trumpet when Peter occasionally played banjo; when Edwards died, Peter began playing trumpet, because trumpet players to fit Piron's band were hard to find. CB began playing banjo with the band shortly after Peter began playing trumpet. CB says that Peter also was a good trombone player, played baritone horn in brass bands. CB says Peter gave Eddie Pierson, his god-son, his first trombone lessons. CB says he himself never played anything else, that

CHARLIE BOCAGE
Reel II [of 3]--Digest--Retype
July 18, 1960

18

the only music he played was mostly with Piron and the Creole Serenaders, regularly. CB says that in the old days a person didn't have to be very good to play with most of the bands that were around. He says a lot of the players were iron jaw cornetists and trombonists who would drown you out anyway; he says Manuel Perez and Freddy Keppard could be heard for six blocks. CB says that Lee Collins, now dead, who worked at the Paddock [Lounge] several years ago (where RBA began his acquaintance with him), would get off a job and go to the Entertainer's, on Franklin [now Crozat], and play until 5 and 6 in the morning, and never get tired of having his lip let him down. CB asks if [Collins?] died; RBA says that Punch [Miller] showed him a letter from England, and that [?] died last month. RBA assures CB that Punch is still living, is in New Orleans and living at 1109 Burdette Street [since moved to Fourth St.]. RBA answers CB, saying that Chris Kelly was before his time, that he did not know him; CB says he played with Kelly, Sam Morgan, Kid Rena, Punch--"played with all of them." HF asks which of those CB considers the best trumpet player; RBA qualifies "best" by adding, "real tunk trumpet player." CB says Sam Morgan was the best, a real tunk trumpet player. HF asks about CB's brother, Pete; CB says Pete didn't compare with those mentioned in that style, that Pete was a more-polished trumpet player. He says Lee Collins and those fellows had the penetrating sound that goes with jazz, and that

CHARLIE BOCAGE

19

Reel II [of 3]--Digest--Retype

July 18, 1960

they could really "pump that stuff." CB scats "Panama," saying those
guys could really play that number.

End of Reel II

Also present: Herb Friedwald, Richard B. Allen.

CB is talking about one time he filled in successfully in a show; an entertainer named Danny Small, who usually did a dance routine with a girl named Ida Brown, became ill just before his scheduled appearance; CB suggested to Frank Montgomery, the producer, that he could fill the spot; CB rehearsed with Ida Brown, using the tune "Kiss Me Sweet;" the act consisted of CB's putting his arms around the girl from behind and singing the song to her; CB says the act "stopped the show." Montgomery told CB he was a bigger star than Small. CB says it just goes to show that one never knows [do one?] what the public will like. The Piron band was playing the show, this particular one being staged New Year's Eve, 1924. CB says Montgomery staged a lot of reviews along Broadway in that era; he says [Bob] Ysegurre [sp?] married Montgomery's sister-in-law, a leading lady named Florence. CB says he really liked show business and being on the road, and that if he had his life to live over again, he would be in show business. He says he liked it more than his brother, Pete. CB says that even today he can sing, that he has a falsetto, which most men don't have anymore. RBA says there are a lot of guys who should come back, but they won't do it. CB says he got disgusted, and also had a heart attack in 1947, which caused him to give up playing music. [More or less.RBA] Up until that time, he had been

working at his day job, getting about two hours sleep, and then playing music all night. He took it easy, still working during the day, but giving up music, and finally recovered. He says he had to work, that he had a big family to take care of. He shows photographs of various members of his family, pointing out one son who was crushed by a bridge over the Industrial Canal. He shows a picture of his mother, saying she was an Indian and that his father was French. He shows a picture of his father, one which was made before CB was born, made over 60 years ago. HF comments that the picture of the father looks like CB and Pete, and CB agrees, saying that the father had that [same] big nose [as the sons]. CB's father was 63 years old when he died, in 1925. CB says it is most likely that he had a stroke as he was getting settled on a stage [such as painters work from on tall buildings] while working on a boat; the father fell 50 feet, landing on his head. CB says the fall and the fact that the hospital waited too long to operate caused his death. CB says he wishes he had his father's learning, that the father was a smart old man. CB shows a picture of his grandfather, who came from France, and was also a boat builder.

RBA asks when John Marrero played [banjo] with the Piron band; CB says he never did "permanent," that he was rehearsing with them for the New York trip, but it was decided, at the last moment, to take CB

instead. CB says there never was a banjo player in the band until he joined, except that when the band first started at Spanish Fort it consisted of Piron, violin; Peter Bocage, banjo and a pianist; the band was gradually enlarged.

RBA says that CB must have known some of the trombone players from the Algiers side of the river; CB says he knew the Johnson brothers, Buddy and Yank, and Sunny Henry [cf. SH, reel ?]. . . . He answers RBA, saying he knew of Eddie Vincent, but Vincent was a little before CB's time, and CB never met him. CB says he was a little boy when Pete began playing with those old-timers, and with the Superior Band, and that he, Pete, was only a young man at the time. CB agrees with HF's statement, saying his family was strict. HF asks if CB's parents liked the idea of Peter's being a musician; CB says his father did (in those days most of the old people used to frequent the Old French Opera), and that Peter, who was the oldest in the family, received a lot of affection from the father.

Answering RBA's question, CB says he (when about 16 years old) worked with Yank Johnson in Sam Morgan's band, when Morgan first came to New Orleans [from the country], and later with Johnson with some other trumpet player. Johnson then went to a jitney dance hall, upstairs at the corner of Burgundy and Canal, where he spent most of the rest of his playing career. CB answers RBA, saying that he re-

members Joe Watson, clarinetist, and Georgie Boyd, clarinetist. CB acknowledges the fact that he himself played with Punch [Miller]. CB agrees with HF that the Piron band played a different type of music than the music played by those just mentioned; the rougher type bands featured numbers like "Panama" and "High Society." HF asks if Pete ever played with the rougher bands; CB says [in effect, no,] that Pete worked in the Superior Band, playing violin, when about 19 years old; the band was led by John Marrero's father, Billy Marrero, who had a brother, Simon, who also played bass, John being a banjo player. CB never heard the Superior Band; [he mentions that Pete was playing with people like Manuel Perez?,] but that when CB came up, in the Twenties, the Superior [among others] had disbanded, and Pete had "moved on to higher ground" with Piron. [Papa] Celestin was around, and John Robichaux, a left-handed violin player, whose band played a lot of society jobs, had the pit band at the old Lyric Theater. RBA says he didn't know John Robichaux, but he knows Joe Robichaux, the pianist, who is some relation to John. (nephew, RBA adds) CB agrees with HF that John Robichaux and Piron had [virtually] all of the society work; CB answers HF, saying that he didn't think the two bands were in competition, because when Robichaux took the theater job, it left the field wide-open for Piron. CB answers HF, saying that Celestin, in the early years, didn't play the society jobs, but worked for Jack Sheehan

[sp?] at his old place [?], and at places like the Pelican Roof Garden and the Astoria; it was only in later years that Celestin began getting work with the "prominent" people. [cf. Baba Ridgley, reel ?] CB answers HF, saying he doesn't know how Piron got that type work in the first place, except his band was the best around New Orleans; there were not many white musicians in those days, and the ones who were qualified, like Johnny and Paul DeDroit, worked in the theaters. CB says he knew the DeDroits, and also knew Louis Prima and Sharkey; he says the Primas [Louis and Leon] grew up on St. Peter, between Roman and Prieur, in what is now a housing project. RBA asks if there were many mixed bands in New Orleans; CB says he doesn't know of any in recent years, but that there used to be some mixed bands playing in Carnival parades; he says the [colored] people were of his type [very light-complected]. RBA says that Tony Giardina, a white clarinetist who played in a band the same night CB played at the American Legion Hall [previously mentioned], went over to Peter Bocage and told him they had played a parade together. CB agrees with RBA that in the old days bands used "to mix up now and then," and in cabarets, too. CB says that the whites used to come around to sit in colored bands so that they could learn; CB says Benny Goodman used to do that in Chicago. He says there was not so much of a [consciousness of] color-line with people of his type in the old days. RBA remarks that

CHARLIE BOCAGE
Reel III [of 3]--Digest--Retype
July 18, 1960

25

Arnold Metoyer could play with any band [white or colored], and CB says Metoyer was exceptional. HF remarks that the entire Piron band, with a couple of exceptions, looked very light; CB says [Louis] Cottrell [Sr.] [was not], and Steve Lewis was brown-skinned. HF asks how Lewis got with the Piron band, and CB says he doesn't know, it was before his time, and that Pete could probably tell. CB says he used to go on week-nights to where the Piron band was playing, and when things were slow, Lewis would show him chords on the banjo; CB says Lewis was a good friend of his. CB answers RBA, saying Lewis wasn't much of a reader, but he agrees with RBA that Lewis "had an ear out of this world." RBA says the recordings Lewis made with Willie Jackson singing really show what Lewis could do. CB says that when he was singing at Tom Anderson's, Willie Jackson and a fellow named [Cy? Si?] were also entertaining there. CB tells RBA that Nookie Johnson came along later, and that Jackson and Johnson teamed up; one of the places they worked together was the Cadillac Club, Conti and Rampart, where one of their comic specialties was "Ma, He's Making Eyes At Me." RBA and CB think Jackson died in New York; RBA says John Marrero died there, too, and CB says [Lorenzo] Tio [Jr.], died there, too. RBA asks how many tunes Tio wrote; CB says that he didn't write any music, but he heard that Tio had something to do with writing "Rose Room;" RBA says Barney Bigard says Tio had something to

do with "Mood Indigo." CB says that Tio was a queer fellow, that he didn't talk music, that if he were not pointed out one would not know he was a musician when he wasn't playing; CB says he thinks Tio's not pushing himself was one of his downfalls, that he wasn't one to brag. RBA asks if CB ever heard Tio play in a funeral; CB says he played E^b clarinet in funerals, many days. CB says that once, when Tio was to go to Chicago with Manuel Perez, Louis Cottrell, Jean Vignes and others, his uncle, [Louis] "Papa" [Tio], told him the men in Chicago, having heard Charlie Elgar praise Lorenzo's playing, would be looking for him, so he had better practice; Lorenzo practiced for three weeks, and decided he was ready (CB says to ask [Adolphe] "Tats" Alexander, Jr. who was another scholar and knows about the incident). Lorenzo went to a rehearsal being conducted by Elgar; the first clarinetist had a fine set of clarinets, in A and B^b, for the various transpositions. When the orchestra had played a number or two, Elgar asked the clarinetist to let Tio play some; the clarinetist told Tio he could use his instruments, but Tio said he had his own, which was a beat-up B^b Albert system clarinet, with two or three keys gone, the holes sealed with wax (Tio said he could make the notes another way). Tio played faultlessly, making all the transpositions and cadenzas with ease. The clarinetist told Elgar to come to him, that he wanted him to shake hands with a real clarinet player, Tio. He said he studied under his

father and his uncle. CB says Tio knew the clarinet so well he believes he could have made a clarinet. HF asks if Barney Bigard sounds anything like Tio sounded; CB says he didn't hear Bigard much when he became a professional, that Bigard left New Orleans; CB says Bigard mostly played tenor saxophone when he was here, and just started really playing clarinet when he went away.

CB answers RBA, saying he played some with Chris Kelly; he adds that Kelly played mostly for colored, but that he did play some for whites at the lake, when the area from West End to Seabrook and Little Woods was filled with "camps," and there might be 10 or 15 bands playing on Sunday, from 9 AM until 6 PM. CB says the lighthouse at Milneburg, now on Pontchartrain Beach [and amusement park], used to be about 5 blocks out in the water, and that the train, "Smoky Mary," which traveled out Elysian Fields [Avenue] to Milneburg, would go out on a trestle to where the excursion boats (Camelia is mentioned), which would go across the lake to Mandeville and Madisonville, were moored.

CB says he likes to talk about "olden times." He says that so many men leave, or die, or disappear, that "they get out of your memory." CB says Albert Nicholas left New Orleans, and that he doesn't know what has become of him; RBA says he is in France, and says Danny Barker was to join a band he [Nicholas] was forming; Barker was

Reel III [of 3]--Digest--Retype
July 18, 1960

also trying to get Smiling Joe [Pleasant Joseph], but he didn't want to join. CB asks what has become of Pete Ducongé; RBA says he is in New York, he thinks. CB says Ducongé had a bar in Paris; RBA adds that he was in partnership with "Bricktop," but they broke up. CB says Ducongé's brother, Adolph, was a good pianist; he says that once they [the Creole Serenaders] had to play for a Mexican show at the [Club] Slipper, and that Dwight Newman [the regular pianist] couldn't play the music, so they got Ducongé, who played it easily. HF asks if the Creole Serenaders played mostly for a white audience, and CB says they did.

End of Reel III