

see also interview on R36 coop 1973 cover reel #13,
Sept 19, 1965 1

HARRY SHIELDS
I [of 3]--Digest--Retyped
May 28, 1961

Also present: William Russell
Johnny Wiggs

INSERT JW says HS probably played more with Emmett Hardy (Hardy and HS worked together in [Norman] Brownlee's band; JW [replaced?] Hardy in that band.) [cornet] than anyone else. HS agrees that he played in Hardy's first band, which was organized to play at Midway Park; up at Harvey's [i.e., the Harvey?] Canal (across the river). Hardy played very well and in an original style. He lived in Algiers at the time. Hardy was quite young then.

Harry P. Shields was born in 1899. His paternal family were all non-professional ^{club, buck and wing etc.} dancers; his maternal family (except his mother) were all musicians, string players. Besides his brother, [clarinetist] Larry [Shields], HS had two half-brothers, John and James Ruth; James played all the string instruments, plus cornet. ^{His mother married Tom.} All are dead [including Larry]. Larry was six years older than Harry. Between Larry and Harry [in age] was pianist Eddie, or Edward, Shields; he played with Sharkey [Bonano], and also with Hardy. ^{White Hat Shields, R36, see R36, reel #, Sept 19, 1965.} HS says they had a little band once, with Eddie on piano, Charlie Leach on drums, Donald Coleman (president of the Times-Picayune [circulation director, according to 1965 paper--PRC]), violin; they would rehearse at Leach's house. Ted Earhart [drummer] was always at the rehearsals; Frank "Red" Mackie [piano and bass] was also at the rehearsals (JW says Mackie was in everything).

Emmett Hardy was also in the band. The band went on a convention trip to Kansas City [Missouri] once, when they were quite young, for a Shrine organization; in the band: Leonce Mello, trombone; Eddie Shields, piano; Donald Coleman, violin; Charlie Leach, drums; HS, clarinet; Emmett Hardy, cornet. HS says Monk Hazel claims to have a copy of a picture taken of that band. It was taken by the [Kansas City] Star photograph [who?] gave them a nice write-up. HS thinks he was about sixteen years old, and Hardy was a couple of years younger than HS. ^[Four!] That occasion was before the organization of the band which opened the Midway Park. The [convention] band did play

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Concert on Saturday night at the Young Women's Christian Association

a few jobs around New Orleans, but when the Midway job came up, Hardy organized another band, using no piano. ^A Eddie Shields died in 1938. ^{2/28}

lc)

HS was about eight years old when he first took up clarinet (his first instrument); his brother, Larry, taught him a few simple tunes on his own instrument, HS not yet having one. A few years later, when Larry was in Chicago, HS decided he wanted to play clarinet some more, so Larry sent him his old clarinet. Jimmy [James Ruth] figured out the fingering and taught it to HS. HS later got a method and taught himself how to read a little. ^[ba?] The first band he played with was that of Alfred "Pansy" Laine; they played for prize fights, advertising, etc., and later at the Pup Cafe, on Iberville. After that, HS, with ^{2/28} Eddie Shields on piano and Willie Rich on drums, went to work across the street from The Pup, at ^{to Charles Corbitt's Took Shields' place} [Raleigh ~~Roy~~ Rye?], HS then quit playing, going to work for his father, a painting contractor.

HS was born at 2319 First Street; when HS was five to six years old, the family moved to Third and Clara, where they remained until 1928, when they moved to the Broadmoor area, where HS still lives. HS's brother, Jimmy [Ruth--half-brother] (who died a year ago at the age of seventy-one or seventy-two), knew Buddy Bolden, who lived two doors from the Shields' home [on First]; a half-sister of HS (now in her eighties) knew Bolden, his sister and mother. Jimmy said Bolden was a fine cornet player. When Bolden was released from a mental institution [confined about 1907], he played fine trombone, according to Jimmy; HS says Bolden returned to the institution, where he died. (WR says in 1931). ^{FF} HS listened to Johnny Dodds a lot; Dodds played a lot at ^{to} [Nolte's] Hall, on Josephine between Magnolia and South Robertson, not far from where HS lived. HS would sit outside the place, or anywhere else a band was playing, and listen all night. Dodds

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worked with Joe Oliver at the time [of with Ory and Oliver's Jazz Band? RBA];
HS thinks they worked at the place two or three nights a week. The time was
before, during or after World War I. ^[Time in Chicago before end of WWI, 1917 - check over dates] HS also went to the National Baseball
Park, two blocks from his home; there were dances on Monday nights with three
or four colored bands. The dances were not open to whites, but HS would sit
outside, on the banks of the Claiborne Canal (sometimes Emmett Hardy would
come to listen, too), and listen. HS heard Sam Morgan, Kid Rena, Punch
[Miller] and others there. ^{People danced on sections?} The park took in a square ^[block] of ground, at Third
and Claiborne.

Larry Shields played with various bands in New Orleans; besides playing
with Nick LaRocca, he worked with Jack Laine. ^{only} HS thinks he played one job
with Jack Laine (who was on bass drum), [Compare below, reel III, p. 9] although
he thinks the job was Alfred Laine's; the job was a parade--Georgie Brunis
played trombone on that job, and Emmett Rogers played snare drum. HS says
he imagines Jack Laine "just about gave all these guys their first start in
the music business." Many musicians, including Nick LaRocca and Larry, have
told HS this. ^{FF} Larry Shields worked with marching bands; he also worked with
Joe Ellerbush. HS has a picture, taken in 1907, of Larry with the St. Francis
de Sales [church] Band; Clem Camp (clarinet) was also in the band. ^{FF} WR
mentions "Yellow" Nunez and the Louisiana Five and their recordings; HS
says Nunez was a fine clarinetist. He played "C" clarinet when he played
for a short time in Brownlee's Band, when JW also was in it. ^{FF} HS played sax,
^{B-7a} besides clarinet, as did Larry, who played with a few big bands in California,
such as that of Hal McDonald, playing sax and clarinet; he also worked in
a show, in a fourteen-piece band. Larry was fifteen or sixteen years old
when he began playing clarinet; he bought his first clarinet from Freddy
Burns, who played in a band with Jimmy Ruth, [Alex] "King" Watzke [violin,

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see release] and Buzz Harvey, bass, working house parties, picnics, etc.--
Larry had a self-instructor (like a method book.)
only on weekends, as they all had day jobs. Larry also played with Jimmy,
and with King Watzke. Larry did not read much.

HS's mother, who died in 1948 at the age of ninety-four, was the youngest
in her family; when she first married, age eighteen [i.e., 1872] her brothers
played for her wedding; "Pea Knots" [spelling?] played flute; others: bass,
violin, mandolin and two guitars. They played ragtime, or jazz, but could
also play *and schottisches* mazarukas. The flute player drove a dump cart for the sanitation
department. None of the mother's brothers could read music, nor could her
mother. [*Check again. The mother named Tony?*]

HS says Larry, a very truthful person, told him the Original Dixieland
Jazz Band were first to use the word, "jazz" [as applied to music]. The
band was working in Chicago's Casino Gardens, doing well, making thirty-five
dollars a week, in 1915 or 1916; some *half-brother* man came in, said, "Jazz her up;" Nick
LaRocca decided that the word, which they had never heard before, sounded
good, so they made it a part of their name. [Compare H. O. Brunn, The Story
of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band.] The spelling changed from "jas" to
"jass" to "jaz" to the final, "jazz." HS thinks the style of the Original
Dixieland Jazz Band was a little more modern than that of Jack Laine's bands.
HS confirms that the ^{other} bands ~~before~~ ⁵ the ODJB played tunes such as "Tiger Rag"
[copyrighted by the ODJB]. HS says he doesn't know which tunes Larry actually
wrote, but that he and [Henry] Ragas [original pianist in the ODJB] were
supposed to have written "Clarinet Marmalade," and that he and Emile Christian
were supposed to have written "Satanic [Blues]." JW says he, Larry and
Stanley Mendelson put together is called "At The Races" (the name Larry gave it);
it has never been published or recorded.

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HS thought Larry was the greatest clarinet player of all. Larry's recordings do not do full justice to his tone quality. Larry's chorus on "St. Louis Blues" is mentioned. (JW asks if Larry didn't make two recordings of that tune; HS says he doesn't know of any but the one). Larry said that he made up the chorus ^{in a corner} at the recording session. WR says now everybody plays the chorus; HS says he plays it, and is about the only one who plays it identically. Larry used a wooden mouthpiece in his playing, and a Fournier reed, which he could buy only in one place, on the East Side in New York.

He bought them by the gross.

End of Reel I

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Also present: William Russell
 Johnny Wiggs

HS tells how Larry Shields solved his reed problem; he was with the [Original] Dixieland [Jazz] Band then, playing at Reisenweber's in New York City; he found a reed he liked at a little shop on the East Side; he never used anything after that but Fournier reeds. Talk about clarinets. HS prefers Albert System because he gets a better tone. Kenny Davern, Benny Goodman, Tony Parenti and Pete Fountain get "big, fat tones" from Boehm system clarinets. HS plays the improved or "full Albert system," same as Bill Bourgeois.

HS has worked with Johnny (Wiggs) Hyman, in [Norman] Brownlee's Band [and later]; with Sharkey Bonano, in the same band. The first recordings HS made were with Brownlee, for Okeh, in 1924 or 1925. Brownlee composed the introduction, HS the verse and chorus of "Peculiar Rag," one of the tunes made at the session; Sharkey wrote "Dirty Rag;" it was decided to use all three composers names on the label on both tunes. Sharkey later recorded "Peculiar" with Sidney Arodin and Monk Hazel ^(the latter's band) [under another title]. Talk of Brownlee, who lives in Pensacola, Florida. Talk of places the Brownlee band played; the main job was at Midway Park. The band worked seven nights a week, at various places. Talk and description of Midway Park; talk of location. The only facility at Midway Park was a ^{big} dance floor, which was roofed but open on the sides; the park was [actually similar to] a cow pasture, says JW. HS describes the park as it was when the band he was in opened it; some others in the band: Emmett [Hardy], Joe Loyacano, ^{an} [Chink?] ^{J. Martin}. The operator of the park was Everett [Check spelling] Thomassie.

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HS says that when he was with [Alfred] "Pansy" Laine, Jimmy Durante wanted ^{Harry Shields} him to join his band, (HS also had a later offer from Frank Christian). Laine [cornet] did join the band; so did Jack Loyacano, trombone and Arnold "Deacon" Loyacano, bass; HS, however, did not join, as his mother said enough of her boys were away from home already: Larry was with the ODJB; Eddie was in Chicago, working with Emile Christian and (HS thinks) Yellow Nunez. Eddie later worked with the ODJB for about two weeks, replacing [Henry] Ragas, who had died; returning to New Orleans afterwards (perhaps because he was homesick). He was replaced by Sidney Mansfield [Check] now a movie director in California (so HS understands). Mansfield was replaced by Frankie Signorelli for a while, who was replaced by [J.] Russell Robinson. Robinson had to leave the band in England; he was replaced by Englishman Billy Jones (who operated a pub ^(in London) and is still in ^(London) England). [Compare H. O. Brunn, The Story of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band]. ^{Larry wrote to his mother and Harry often.} Talk about first released recordings of ODJB: WR mentions editorial in New Orleans newspaper which was unfavorable to jazz, and which deplored the claim that jazz started in New Orleans; HS says he thinks the general public was proud of the fact that the ODJB made the records; his father was on hand to get some of the first ones sold in the city. HS doesn't think his family had a phonograph until the ODJB records came out. He doesn't know who might have influenced his brother Larry's style; perhaps it was Freddie Burns, who was at Shields's house a lot. JW says that everyone has an inspiration. HS says there were a lot of parties at his house, and that "King" Watzke and Buzz Harvey usually played at them.

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HS doesn't remember pianos in bands around New Orleans (before the ODJB), but he heard that the bands back of Basin Street used pianos. HS worked one job in a club in the District; he says he was too young to be there. He played clarinet, with drums (Buck Rogers) and piano (Rene Chaix). That job was some time after the ODJB had gone to Chicago. HS says Larry Shields worked in the District, at the Tuxedo (WR supplies Dance Hall); HS doesn't know who he worked with; it might have been Emile Christian, or Nick LaRocca. Larry went to Chicago before Nick LaRocca, HS thinks; he thinks Larry went with Tom Brown, and thinks the year was 1913 or 1914. HS understands that the ODJB was originally drummer [Johnny] Stein's band; Larry replaced Yellow Nunez; Stein was later replaced by Tony Sbarbaro; LaRocca was already in the band. It was after Stein left that the band was named the Original Dixieland Jazz Band.

549 JW says HS's clarinet style is completely different from Larry's, and different from that of any other clarinetist; JW compares HS's style to that of Bix Beiderbecke, in that both are lyrical. HS thinks his own style may have just come to him. Talk about Larry Shields' tone including reference to radio broadcast. WR mentions the clarinet rooster crow on [ODJB] "Livery Stable Blues"; WR says Raymond Burke doesn't like the tune because he can't do the rooster crow. HS says when he was young the clarinetists would imitate various animals, birds, etc. on their instruments. JW says the violinists did this in vaudeville. JW comments on HS's ability to play note-for-note harmony, regardless of the pattern of the variations set by the lead. He says that to his knowledge only HS had done this!!! Comment on HS's knowledge of the right notes to play in particular passages.

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Also present: William Russell
 Johnny Wiggs

HS tells how he learned the names of the pitches on his clarinet; his brother Ed [Shields], pianist, told him the names as he played them; HS learned the names of concert pitches, not of the [transposing] clarinet pitches (he later learned that fact from Emmett [Hardy]). HS figured out harmony by himself, being able to hear it in his mind and then play it on his clarinet. He thinks of the clarinet as a harmony instrument and understood it is such. There was always music in HS's home; his brother Jim [Ruth] would play his violin in the evening after work, and the other brothers played too [including chord instruments]. Jim was a house painter by trade; HS's father was a painting contractor; HS worked as a painter some, as did Larry. LS also was a salesman. HS later worked for a railroad, as an electrician.

HS played quite a few parades, with [Jack "Papa"^{or} Pansy ?] Laine [Compare above, reel I, p. 3] and others; the bands were about ten or eleven pieces. The bands played ragtime [i.e., in a raggy style--PRC^{in a 12/32 style--RBA}]; they used no music; played the popular tunes of the day such as } "Pretty Baby" } "The Tiger Rag",
 "High Society"; no heavy marches. *Wiggs added*

"Happy" Schilling is mentioned. HS was told he heard Achille Baquet one time.

HS's father wanted his sons to be painters, not musicians, because they would not want to get up and go to work painting after a night of playing music. Larry had been to Chicago and New York with Tom Brown's Band from Dixieland (Ray Lopez, trumpet; Billy Lambert, drums; Arnold Loyacano, bass and piano), but the band had been a flop in both places; the father figured Larry should stay home and be a painter after that. Larry stayed home for

a while; then Tom Brown came around again, and Larry went to Chicago with him again. In Chicago, Larry later swapped jobs with Gussie Mueller; Larry went to work at White City [amusement park? Check Jazz Men, The Story of the O.D.J.B.], while Mueller joined Brown at the College Inn. Dissatisfied with the big band at White City, Larry accepted an offer to replace Yellow Nunez, then working with Nick LaRocca [probably in band led by Johnny Stein at the time; ^[no, see photos] see Reel III]. ^[Compare H. O. Brunn, ibid.] Larry made all the trips with that band, remaining in it until 1924 or 1925. He returned to New Orleans, gave up playing until 1936, when the band was reorganized; when it broke up again (several months later), Larry permanently quit playing. [Compare H. O. Brunn, ibid.] He retired to California, where he kept in touch with music by listening; Joe Rushton [bass sax], with Red Nichols band, is mentioned. Larry and Joe Frisco talked a lot in California; ^{WR says} Joe Frisco took Brown's Band to Chicago the first time. WR says Steve Brown [brother of Tom] showed him a letter from Frisco to Brown, intended to prove that Brown's Band had gone to Chicago before LaRocca's. HS says Frisco was working at Fabacher's Rathskellar in New Orleans; he heard Brown's Band, perhaps advertising a prize fight; he liked the band, so he got them to go to Chicago with him. HS heard Ray Lopez (who was with Brown's Band) play at the Shields's home, when HS was a child; Lopez played with Jimmy [Ruth] and with "King" Watzke also. Johnny Lala is mentioned.

HS has played saxophone (mostly tenor), but likes better to play clarinet; he likes to hear saxophone played well, by men like Eddie Miller (the greatest, says HS) and Lester Bouchon. HS thinks there was only one saxophone player around New Orleans when he was growing up; he was a Mr. ^{Ramos} [Florencio? See Soards' 1918] from Mexico; he played a "double octave" ³² saxophone. HS's first saxophone was a C-melody; he later got an alto, which he played a little with Brownlee's Band; he also played baritone saxophone some with Brownlee. [Compare discographies and record.] ⁽⁻ⁿ⁾ When he joined Sharkey [Bonano], he played

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tenor saxophone; Sidney Arodin, clarinet only, was also with Sharkey. Sidney was one of the finest clarinet players HS ever heard., JW says HS and Sidney worked together very well at the Ringside (once the Orchard, now Pete Herman's); both played clarinet there. The rhythm section in the band: Joe Capraro, banjo; "Chink" Martin Abraham [Sr.], bass; Freddie Neuman ⁽ⁿ⁾ piano; Augie Schellang, drums. JW would like HS and Raymond Burke to do the same kind of two-clarinet playing. HS says Burke is a very fine clarinetist, one of the best.

The Original Dixieland Jazz Band is mentioned; Larry Shields's low-register clarinet playing on some recordings ^{including Tom Finner Blowing Bubble} made by that band in England is mentioned.

HS's recordings with Brownlee's Band [about 1925] were the only ones he had made until he recorded [around 1950] with JW [he had recorded with Sharkey and others since then]. He wrote another tune, recorded when he was with [and by] the Dukes of Dixieland; it was called "339 March." Talk of his recording with JW of "St. Louis Blues": HS says he never plays any other [than his brother, Larry's] chorus on that tune, because he loves it so.

HS has just returned from playing at Nick's, New York [City]; he was there about two and a half months, although the band remained about another month. Roy Liberto was leader of the group. Liberto was using a trombonist from St. Louis, Jimmy Haislip, twenty-four years old, and very fine, according to HS. The Metropole [New York City] is mentioned. ^{Shields likes to play the Blues; he finds} Liberto's recording of "Tiger Rag Stampede" is mentioned; fast when HS recorded it with Liberto, he says Liberto plays it twice as fast now. HS emphasizes the need for showmanship today.

^{Shields discourses that musicians played for "profits" because they liked to play.}
The W.P.A. Band (white musicians in this case) is mentioned. HS knows a couple of members.

Very inspiring.

