

JOE ROBICHAUX
I [of 4]--Digest--Retyped
March 19, 1959

Also present: William Russell

[Joe Robichaux died January 17, 1965, in New Orleans.]

Joe Robichaux was born March 8, 1900, at St. Mary and Camp [Streets], near the old Magazine Market, in the Irish Channel [section] of New Orleans. He became interested in music, especially piano, in about 1907; his mother had a piano in the home, and a pianist named "Game Kid" would frequently come to play it. Another pianist, "Cooney", played the piano every Sunday, at Hilda Santamack's [spelling?] parties; JR would go around with "Cooney", listening to him play. Although he was required to study piano a little when he attended New Orleans University (on St. Charles Avenue) (as all the students were), he was more interested in playing baseball [apparently professionally] and he didn't become really interested in learning to play until some time after he graduated from that school. Then he began learning blues; he says an Irish Channel blues pianist, Lawrence Cook, was one he listened to. (Cook was not the same [J.] Lawrence Cook who [later] made ~~some~~ piano rolls and did ~~some~~ piano transcriptions of ~~some~~ Jelly Roll Morton tunes for Roy Cares; the Channel Cook was from a musical family--his brothers and sisters all played piano; they were [Mona?], Minor, Willie, Julia and Lee Cook.) JR hung around the Cooks' house; when Steve Lewis came along, JR began to follow him; JR says Lewis, a very good pianist, showed him everything that he, JR, knows now. Lewis was playing with [A. J.] Piron at the time; Lewis composed quite a few songs, also made a couple of piano rolls. [Later], JR went with the O.J. Beatty tent show, a carnival, where he played in a "49 Camp", which was a taxi dance in a tent, for about nine months. JR then went to

Chicago; the first band he played with there was led by a trumpet player, "Tig" Chambers, and had in it other New Orleanians Jimmy [Strokes?], Joe _____?, drums; and Roy Palmer, trombone. The year was 1918. Returning to New Orleans for about two months, JR then joined the Washburn [spelling?] and Weaver show; he later went with the Tom Morse show. He returned to New Orleans, and then joined the Black Eagle Band, led by trumpeter E[van] T [.] Thomas, of Crowley [Louisiana], with whom he remained about two years. (JR got married while with Thomas) Others in the Black Eagle were Lawrence Duhe, clarinet; Robert Gaubert [spelling?], C melody and then alto saxophone; _____?Casey, bass; Walter Thomas [brother of Evan?], drums; "Kudu" [spelling?], guitar. [JR is about to name other members, perhaps, but is interrupted]. JR knew trombonist Gus Fontenet [spelling?], leader of the Banner Band (the Black Eagle and the Banner were the best bands in that section then); the two bands would meet on the road frequently. Although JR had heard of Bunk Johnson before, he didn't hear him play until 1923, in Houston, Texas; JR playing in a band that was advertising a dance, and Bunk was in one advertising for a theater. JR says Bunk was playing very nice then--powerful, good tone, good execution. He was much better than in later years. After meeting Bunk, JR returned to New Orleans, playing at the Music Box (Canal and Carondelet), La Vidⁱda, with Lee Collins and Davy Jones, and also at the Astoria [Garden] with the same band, which made recordings for Victor, the session being at Italian Hall on Esplanade Avenue. Then JR, with his own six-piece band, played at the Entertainers. From there, he went to New York, recorded for Brunswick (issued on Vocalion). He then formed a fifteen-piece band; in it were Joan

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Lunceford, Earl Bostic[s], Van Dyke, Freddy Kohlman (drums), Willie O'Conner, Jeff _____?, Sam Dutrey[clarinet-saxophone], Clement Tervalon, [trombone or bass] Waldron "Frog" Joseph, [trombone] Henry [Spelling"] "Kildee" Holloway (died recently, fine trumpet player and arranger), George "Turkey" Girard, trumpet (still around Thibodeaux, Louisiana) (not the young, white player of same name), Eugene Ware, trumpet. The band played a lot of [special] arrangements, played with all the big bands--Jimmy Lunceford, Duke Ellington, Count Basie (several times), Claude Hopkins, Andy Kirk. The engagements were on the road--Birmingham with Hopkins, Kirk: New Orleans with Kirk, (twice with) Basie, Lunceford at the Pelican ("Beansy" [Fauria] booked bands then). Don Redman, writer of "Chant of the Weed", had a band then; in it were two men who had played with JR--Eugene Porter and Earl Bostic. Bostic, from Tulsa, Oklahoma (or from near that city), came to New Orleans to attend Xavier University; he began playing here, joined Sidney [Desvigne], made some trips on [one of] the [Streckfus] boats, then joined JR. Bostic later went to Toledo or Cleveland [?] Ohio, playing a job the entire JR band was to have played. JR tells about it; it was promoted by Miss [Bess] Grundmann [booking agent in New Orleans]; the JR band, in Galveston, Texas, missed getting a telegram because of a mistake, confirming the job, so another band was hired. The other band needed a trumpet player and an alto saxophone, so Henry Franklin, who had played with the other band, left JR to take the trumpet job, and Bostic went up on saxophone. Bostic went on to New York, had a tune of his ("Let Me [Off] Uptown") recorded by Gene Krupa's band (using the same arrangement JR's band played), and went on to fame and fortune. JR says his own band was very fine, traveled all over the United States, went to Cuba (Havana and

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surrounding towns) for three weeks. JR has a scrapbook. The band traveled through Florida and Georgia with the Mills Brothers. The band had a fine singer, who was given the name Joan Lunceford (real name, Daisy Lowe) by JR; also, a fine female tap dancer, "Baby" Briscoe [spelling?]. JR also had a female trumpet player, Ann Cooper, very good; she came to New Orleans, was supposed to work with "Papa" Celestin, apparently did not, came to work with JR. She was a dependable high-note trumpeter. She worked with JR over a year, leaving because she thought she was being cut out of her place in the band, when really she was being promoted to a feature spot. She left, went to Detroit, then to Chicago, where JR heard, from "Bubba", a pianist he had known before he himself began playing, that Ann Cooper was playing in the Loop [area]. Her style was like that of Louis Armstrong; she could hold her own in jam sessions. JR tells of first playing Oklahoma City; guitarist Oscar Moore invited the band to a jam session; JR thinks Benny Goodman was in town; Ann Cooper played at the jam session, doing very well.

JR tells of other jobs [not specific ones], and says he went to Europe in 1958-59 [with George Lewis's band]; he comments about the musicians he heard in Europe, expressing amazement that they were so good, and that they knew tunes of Sam Morgan, Joe Oliver, the first colored singer on records [probably Mamie Smith], and others. JR talks about the jazz clubs overseas, and the youth of the players and listeners. JR mentions going to jazz clubs, one in Scotland, Ken Colyer's [in London], one in Liverpool. He said the bands sounded like the ones in New Orleans. The band JR was in played only concerts, except in Copenhagen, Denmark, where they played at a newly-opened night club [The Montmartre? RBA] for dancing; they also played for television. The band played in Stockholm, Sweden to a turn-away capacity house, in a very large concert hall. JR mentions the enthusiastic reception to their music,

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and says that the band was playing at places where Louis Armstrong had played
five or six days before.

End of Reel I

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Also present: William Russell

JR talks about the nice treatment he received from musicians of the countries he toured with the George Lewis band in 1958-59. He first tells about the nice treatment he and the other musicians received on the trip over to Europe, aboard the ship Corinthia; the Lewis band played a few numbers for the crew and passengers on New Year's Eve, as a gesture of appreciation. In Liverpool, where the ship docked, the band was greeted by the Chris Barber band, playing for them on the dock, although the weather was cold and it was snowing; the Lewis band went to the Barber band's place of employment that night; JR says the Barber band really played well. Then the Lewis band went to London, where they were greeted at the railroad station by a multitude of people, including a 12-14 piece brass band, led by Ken Colyer, which played tunes associated with New Orleans brass bands, and in the New Orleans style. The Lewis band visited Ken Colyer's club that night, most of the men sitting in with the Colyer band; JR tells of going from there to a club called The Cottage and sitting in there, then on to a place where he played with Alan [spelling?] Yates, and then going a distance of about fifteen miles, to a club where he played with a band which had Orleanian Rudy Marsalis in it (Marsalis said he was a cousin of a fine pianist-saxophonist-ecteteraist [Ellis Marsalis] from New Orleans). Rudy, who did not play when he left New Orleans, with a ballet company, learned how to play guitar and sing blues in England. The Lewis band played four concerts with Ken Colyer's band and three concerts (JR thinks) with the Chris Barber band, which later came to the United States in exchange for the Lewis band. JR mentions the great popularity of the Barber band's (actually, a quartet on the record--clarinet [Monty Sunshine] and three thym) recording of [Sidney] Bechet's tune,

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"Petit Fleur"; he says it has made a bigger hit in the United States than it did in England, where it was pretty big. The Lewis band tour went to England, Scotland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany; the manager was Miss [Dorothy] Tait. The band was asked to play in most of the other European countries, but George Lewis had already been booked to play three weeks with Ken Colyer, in Germany, so the extra bookings couldn't be accommodated. In Sweden, the Lewis band was welcomed in the cold by a "band" of three young musicians, who played banjo, clarinet and soprano [saxophone]. JR continues talking about the reception the Lewis band received in the various countries. He says again that the band didn't play a bad concert [i.e., there were good crowds at all their concerts], although they were playing the same places Louis Armstrong had played about a week before, and Count Basie was due to arrive four or five days after the Lewis band played. JR says the audiences liked the Lewis band better than the Armstrong band because the music of the former was "traditional." GL's band drew larger crowds in many places. JR comments about the knowledge of the jazz fans overseas, saying that they told him about people that even he didn't know about--e.g., Joe Petit, trombonist and step-father of Buddy Petit. JR continues talking about the trip, the people they met, comments on some of the customs, etc. JR mentions the food they had, saying they had red beans and rice only twice, and that Joe [Watkins] cooked it. JR continues his tour. He mentions a [British] pianist, Graham [Patterson^{*}-RBA] whose wife, Mollie, also a pianist, took him to Mme. Tussaud's [spelling?] wax works.

End of Reel II

*[correct according to Jon Marks, English pianist, July 23, 1970.]

JR says his father, Joseph Robichaux (JR being Junior) was a friend of Alphonse Nix, owner of the [Tammany?] Club, which was at Perdido and Dryades. [His father Nix] told him about Buddy Bolden, Bab Frank and other old-time musicians; when he was about six or seven years old, his father took him [several times?] to Lincoln Park, where a fellow named [Buddy] Bottley [spelling?] (he thinks) would make ascents in a balloon, and where a band, which he was told was that of Bolden, was playing. JR says he never was aware of hearing Bolden at all, and that he didn't hear Freddy Keppard until they both were in Chicago. The elder Robichaux, who died November 23 [1958?], at the age of eighty-three, played trombone in an amateur "symphony band" in Chicago; he didn't learn trombone until he moved, with his family, to Chicago, when JR was sixteen years old. Professor John Robichaux [orchestra leader] was JR's uncle, his father's brother; his orchestra sometimes rehearsed at JR's home, then at Eighth and Franklin [now Loyola], when JR was quite small. John played various places--the exclusive restaurants, Lincoln Park, St. Katherine's [Hall], and the Lyric Theater for a long time, almost until the time the Lyric was closed and demolished (sometime in the early Thirties, JR thinks). JR played in his uncle's band several times, especially on a lake boat making a run to Mandeville; he replaced Margaret Kimball, whose husband, [Andrew] Kimball, played trumpet in the orchestra. JR also played several times for movies [at the Lyric], replacing Buddy Christian, who usually played those jobs. JR says Christian has died. WR says that when Bunk [Johnson]'s band was in New York in 1946, they saw him at the [Musicians's] Union. When Christian went to New York, a Miss LaVerne

[spelling?] took over the movie-playing job; an organ was installed in the theater, and Miss LaVerne, who didn't know how to play it, took lessons from Professor [William?] Nickerson; Mrs. Kimball also took lessons, and JR listened to the lessons and picked up a lot of knowledge about playing the organ; he says he got pretty good on it. The Lyric was torn down when JR had his own band and was touring.

John Robichaux, a left-handed violinist, also played bass drum in brass bands; he was a very good writer [i.e., arranger], too. JR tells of the disposal of John's extensive music library, some [the bulk] of which was acquired by Dave Frank [of Werlein's, now retired--PRC, 1965] [The Frank portion has been acquired by Tulane]. Maurice Durand, WR, Peter Bocage and Kid Howard also acquired some. After the Lyric job folded, John played some casual jobs, and then he became ill. JR was out of town when John died [1939?]; John lived then at 611 Dauphine; JR tells about the illness, death, etc. JR, who could get off from his regular job at the Rhythm Club, took about three weeks' engagements in various towns in Florida; his uncle died when JR was on that trip. JR says his uncle lived most of his life on Camp Street, moving downtown when his first wife died; he remarried, and when he died, his wife moved to 920 Ursulines, where she later died. John has two daughters still living, in California. JR says the daughters may not know very much about their father, as John was quite often away from home for long periods; JR explains that the Lyric Theater job kept John busy, that sometimes he would write music for some of the acts there and would be up all night copying, getting home with time only to change clothes. JR's female cousin has a photograph of John Robichaux. JR says John was a very nice man, and agrees that he had the best band around New Orleans for many years.

JR says there are many fine jazz musicians in Europe, but they [some] still consider the New Orleans musicians better, saying that they themselves are imitators, whereas the New Orleans men are the originators. JR talks about the European musicians, mentioning a female blues singer named Beryl Bryden, and saying she sounded like Mamie Smith or one of that type. JR mentions a Viennese guitarist, who was with a trio which worked a [Sudwestfunk] TV show with the Lewis band at Baden-Baden; there was a drummer in the trio, and bassist Oscar Pettiford completed the group. JR speaks of Pettiford's automobile accident. JR also met tenor saxophonist Stan Getz, who had made his home in Copenhagen [since returned to the United States--PRC]. JR also met trumpeter [Beeny] Bailey, ex-Hampton sideman, who lived in Sweden then. There was also a white pianist from New York, Hines or [Dick?] Hyman. JR told them about [Santo] Pecora and Sharkey [Bonano], and others. JR says Sharkey is "just about the oldest Dixieland trumpet player", one of the originals, and a really good one, although not many people pay much attention to him because he doesn't play high or very loud. (WR mentions that people have told him Sharkey at one time played like Kid Rena). JR says "Tig" Chambers was another good trumpet player, popular around New Orleans until he went to Chicago. Chambers had a style like that of Buddy Petit, and like Sharkey. Two of JR's uncles (by marriage, he explains, as their older brother, Willie, married JR's mother when she and her husband separated), Johnny and Baby Dodds, also went to Chicago; JR says they weren't playing anything when he first knew them, but Baby decided to play drums and Johnny decided to play clarinet, so their father, living in Waveland, Mississippi

(where the Dodds brothers were born, incidentally, not in New Orleans), bought the instruments. They practiced, and one day [Kid] Ory heard Johnny and hired him to play with his band, playing in various places, including Spanol's [spelling--check], or some other uptown honky-tonk [Leading by WR on location]. Joe Oliver, also in Ory's band, went to Chicago, formed [or took over] a band and sent for Johnny, who never returned to New Orleans. WR mentions Baby's death of a month past. JR says Johnny has a son in New Orleans, (Rudolph, says WR) who drives a Morrison cab, and there is a nephew, Lawrence Dent (who plays good clarinet, and with the Gibson Brass Band, says WR). JR continues talking about Dent, and Baby and his terminal illness. According to JR, the Dodds siblings died in this order: sister Hattie, sister Rosie--Rosa?, older brother Willie, Johnny (age forty-eight--WR) and finally, Baby (64--WR). JR comments on the temperate habits of Johnny, as compared to dissipations of Baby, who lived longer than any of the others.

JR says youngsters ten to twelve years take up playing jazz in Europe, but the young people in the United States do not, and that it seems that eventually "we" [the people of the United States] are going to have to go to Europe to hear jazz.

End of Reel III

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Also present: William Russell

"Game Kid" was a blues pianist; he also played a few rags; he was from the Irish Channel, and was very popular uptown; he played at parties, fish fries and honky-tonks, places like that; he didn't read music, but he made his living playing it. He played solo. He wrote a couple of numbers, one called "Game Kid" and another, a blues, called "The Kid's." When JR was ten years old, Game Kid was about twenty-four years old, the [approximate] age of another pianist of the time, Oscar Desdune, [Spelling?] who read music. WR asks if that Desdune was the same as, or related to, the Oscar Desdune, trombone, who once played with "Little Brother" Montgomery, or if he were related to Mamie Desdune [check spelling], mentioned by Jelly Roll [Morton]. JR says the old-timers around New Orleans don't remember her. WR says Bunk Johnson talked about her some.

Of the old-time pianists, those who worked in Storyville and during that era, Fred Washington was great (WR says he and [Manuel] Manetta saw Washington during their recent trip to California [1958], and that he was completely paralysed); he was playing the so-called "modern" chords of today during the time JR was growing up. When Washington was playing, none of the other pianists, Jelly Roll included, would attempt to play. Steve Lewis adopted Washington's style of playing. Another fine pianist was Louis Wade, who played solo and in bands, although he didn't read. Albert Carroll [spelling?] was a great pianist, too, and also "Nooney", some relation to the Cayeux [spelling?] family, of whom one, Red Cayeux, was a very good pianist who went to California, where he died. Red was around the age of JR.

[Summers LaRouche--Rouse?] was another good pianist, who played as well as most of the rest, but only in the [more-difficult] keys of F#, B-natural and E-natural; he couldn't play in the more-common keys. Another good pianist was "Big Eye" Louis Robertson [Check Spelling] (JR thinks that was his last name. [Compare Clarence "Little Dad" Vincent, reel] [Dwight] Newman, father of [Joe] Newman, trumpeter with the Count Basie band [at that time], was a good pianist in his younger days; the last band he worked with was the Creole Serenaders, with Peter Bocage. JR remembers a good pianist, Alfred Wilson, (not to be confused with Udell Wilson, originally of Kansas City) of Algiers, who worked at the house of Countess Willie Piazza. JR agrees (with Manuel Manetta, via WR) that Gussie O'Neal [spelling?], who stayed over the river [probably Algiers] was a good pianist. Tony Jackson was also good; JR heard Jackson, Louis Wade, Fred Washington, and another good pianist alternating at the same house one time. Jackson was not only a good entertainer, as some people prefer to think, but he was a wonderful pianist as well; JR heard him later at the Elite in Chicago. Another good New Orleans pianist, who later went to Chicago, where he died, was Arthur Campbell; WR says he made one record, with Freddy Keppard. There was a good white pianist, a relative of Larry Shields, the trumpet player [actually, clarinet]; JR says bands on advertising jobs used to stop at the Shields's house, Third and Clara, and there would sometimes be Sunday afternoon jam sessions there. Another good pianist was Willis, who played at the Shields's home often; Willis later went to California, where he died. The Shields's relative played Storyville. JR didn't know the white pianist, Kid Ross, who played at Lulu White's, according to WR; JR knew Lulu White's nephew, Spencer Williams;

although Williams lives in Sweden, he comes to New York once or twice a year; JR saw him at Mills [music company] in New York. JR knew "Lazy Daddy" Fillmore, of Galveston, and also Mimmy Pry, another pianist from that section. JR says the non-reading pianists used to listen to a show on which [Ray] McNamara, pianist, played, because they could get tunes from him, and he used a lot of harmony: JR thinks he played over radio station WDSU [actually, WWL], and with the Dawn Busters show, when Al Hirt was on that radio program [McNamara is perhaps still at the Jung Hotel--PRC, 1965]. JR knew Richard "Myknee" Jones in New Orleans and in Chicago; although he and Clarence Williams wrote a lot of good tunes, they weren't good pianists. Neither was George Jones [or possibly he means George W. Thomas], another pianist who wrote some tunes with Williams, and who also went to Chicago. Williams first played drums, then piano, and was a comedian; he oper~~d~~^{ed} a show, the Rosebud, [Soards'] which was on Dryades near Philip [in New Orleans]. (WR says Manuel Manetta mentioned having worked there). JR first heard Bechet at that place. Williams had Emily Hines playing piano for the show, in which he was the comedian. JR would hang around the place, attending the rehearsals. Others who worked at the Rosebud around that time were Sweetie Matthews and [Octave--Octavie?] Summers. JR says Bechet played his first saxophone when working at the Rosebud; Williams, Bechet, and others were playing on an advertising wagon, Williams playing C-melody (JR is fairly sure of the horn's pitch) saxophone, and Bechet playing clarinet; JR was on the wagon [playing piano?]; Bechet fooled around with the horn on the advertising job, said he could learn to play it; Williams let him take it home, and Bechet, at the Rosebud next day, could play a tune. Bechet progressed rapidly; he later went to Chicago, and other places; JR says the next time he saw him, Bechet was playing soprano

saxophone. JR says that at the time of the Rosebud job and Bechet's learning saxophone, there were very few saxophones in New Orleans; he is fairly sure that only Williams and Charlie McCurdy, of the colored people, had saxophones then. [Compare other interviews, e.g., John Joseph].

JR was a regular member of the Jones-Collins band which made the recordings [Jones-Collins Astoria Hot 8]; the band was working at the LaVⁱonda cabaret, and then they moved to the Astoria [Roof Garden]. The rest of the personnel was regular, with the exceptions of Albert Morgan, bass, who was working on the [Streckfus] boat with Fate Marable (another good pianist, says JR), and the white clarinetist, Sidney Arodin. Most of the tunes were written by JR; everyone but Arodin had [rights to] a tune, so JR, who had give^d a tune to Lee Collins and another to Theodore Purnell, gave Arodin one and kept one for himself. [Compare composer credits on label]. JR says the bandsmen had royalty contracts, and that they collected royalties around the time the records were first released; however, since the records have been released again, about thirty-five years later, and on several other labels, and since there was no memorandum of the royalties contracts in the offices of the original company [Victor], and since none of the musicians kept a copy all those years, they don't receive any more royalties. JR agrees with WR that the copyrights have probably expired, too, as JR didn't renew them. JR's own [later] band recorded for Brunswick-Vocalion, in New York City, in 1932 (also JR's first trip to New York). The band recorded JR's tune, "King Kong Stomp", and "After the Sun Goes Down", Duke Ellington's "Ring Them Bells", and was the first to record the tune, "You Don't Love Me". JR tells about the tune and its different names: Paul Gayten recorded it as "True" [in 1947, Deluxe 1063, 3063]. A fireman's son, attending Tulane, was the

composer; he told [Papa] Celestin he could have the song. John Porter, bass player, took down the melody. The band (under the leadership of Celestin and [William] Ridgley at the time) began playing the tune. The band split up, Celestin taking some men and Ridgley taking others; Ridgley hired Don Albert, [Louis] Cottrell and others to work with him. After they left, going to Texas and forming the Don Albert big band, they began playing it; when JR recorded it, Albert and Cottrell found out that nobody owned the tune, so when the Don Albert band recorded it, after JR's recording, they copyrighted it. Paul Gayten worked with Albert for a short time, learned the tune and later recorded it; the recording became a [small] hit; Gayten thought the name of the tune was "True", the title he recorded it under. JR says Gayten didn't claim ownership or try to collect royalties. There was a lawsuit, but JR doesn't know the outcome.

JR's recording band was six pieces; Ward "Bucket" Crosby who lives in Chicago played drums; the others were Eugene Ware [trumpet], Eugene Porter [tenor saxophone, trumpet, ^{clarinet}] Alfred Guichard, [alto saxophone] Walter Williams, [guitar] and JR. There were no bass and no trombone. The reason the recordings sounded like more than six men playing is that the tenor saxophone player also played trumpet and clarinet. The JR band also made some recordings under the name "Levee Loungers", with Chick Bullock; two of the numbers [all?] were "Shave and a Haircut" and "Swingy Little Thing". In Europe, the JR band name was on the record, ["and they had it "Bob Crosby""]?. The Bullock records were issued on Perfect. Brunswick wanted to hire the JR band as staff band, even going so far as leasing an apartment for them for a year, but the union wouldn't let the out-of-town band take the steady job [usual union ruling--PRC]. JR says Brunswick wanted them because they learned tunes so fast, while their regular band was slow.