

MARRERO, EDDIE
I [of 2]
October 11, 1961

Also present: William Russell,
[EM's daughter?]
Interview conducted at: Eddie Marrero's home,
1822 Annette Street
New Orleans, Louisiana

Edward Joseph Marrero, born August 4, 1902, is about one year younger than his brother, Lawrence Marrero, was. The family lived at 1327 Spain (between Urquhart and Villere) when the father, Billy Marrero, died, at the age of 47, in 1920. EM learned bass (his original instrument) from his brother Simon Marrero, ^{Says Peter} five years older than EM; then, Lawrence, followed by EM and William Marrero, who was the youngest of the brothers. (William never played any musical instrument at all). EM began playing bass a few months after the death of his father; the family had by then moved to Urquhart and Marigny [streets]. EM, with Bush Hall [trumpet] (now deceased), [Lawrence Marrero?], Josiah Frazier [drums], Harrison (sax), ^{had} Raymond Brown [trombone?], Earle Fouché [sax], and Dwight Newman (piano), formed a band. [Compare RBA's notes on Lawrence Marrero and Josiah Frazier, reel [?]]. (Tommy Copeland, who had played bass with Sam Morgan, got Billy Marrero's bass at Marrero's death; Copeland, who died about 10 years ago, was a good friend of Billy ; Copeland worked at a slaughterhouse). Billy Marrero never did anything for a living but play music. WR mentions that he was manager of the old Superior Band; EM says he was manager of the Imperial Band and of the Olympia Band also. [Compare other interviews] The last band Billy organized, about 1916, had Sam Morgan on cornet; when Billy became ill, Morgan took over the band, which became Sam Morgan's first band. EM says "Jim Little" [Sidney Brown, bass or violin] and "Jim Crow" [Jim Robinson, ^(or sister?) trombone] were in that band; he can't remember the name of the bass player, a little, red fellow, now dead. [Compare SB, reel ? and JR reel].

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John Marrero learned guitar from his uncle, Henry Major; John went to live in the country, with Major and his wife; when John returned to New Orleans, he was able to play guitar. Major played guitar and sang in bars, at fish fries, etc.; he never played with a band.

EM's mother, Jeannette [spelling?], born Frazier, played guitar. WR mentions having talked to Josiah Frazier [about the relationship of the Marreros, Fraziers, Barnes et al], and also to Emile and Paul Barnes. (1st cousins of EM). PB is in California. Talk of Emile Barnes and his bad health. EM says he and Emile worked together in the Twenties, with Chris Kelly.

EM just picked up bass, with the help of his brother, Simon; he didn't learn to read at first. His first job, for a house party at Music and Villere, was with the Golden Rule Band; players: EM [bass]; Lawrence Marrero [banjo]; Bush Hall, leader [trumpet]; Josiah Frazier [drums]; Harrison [sax]; [one other]. [Compare above, p. 1] EM's second job was with Buddy Petit. EM wasn't with the Golden Rule for long; he went to Pensacola, Florida with Petit, in 1921. Others in Petit's band that trip: Lawrence Marrero; [Philip] "Pill" Coycault [clarinet]; George Washington, trombone; Ernest (of Jacksonville, Florida), piano. Bush Hall played good, clean jazz on cornet, on the order of Petit, although he didn't play as jazzy as Petit; he did play peppier, however. But he was not "a real ragtime cornet player." He had a good tone, achieved

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after he was persuaded to shift his embouchure from one side to the center. (EM says [Papa] Celestin played on the side of his mouth, too.) When EM returned from playing with Petit, he rejoined Hall; after Hall's embouchure was straightened, the band went to work at the New Orleans Country Club, remaining at that job for 5 years. EM's stay with Petit was mostly in Florida, but they got around the South. While playing the Morrison Hotel, Montgomery [Alabama], they got a wire from Kid Ory, in California, wanting the band to come out and play block dances; Petit, Ernest and George Washington answered Ory's call, but EM and Lawrence returned home. [Other personnel in band? RBA] Petit was taken sick about a year later, returned to New Orleans, died; EM says Petit was in his early forties. EM says they all [i.e., many] died young; his oldest brother, Simon, died at 47 [Therefore about 1932. RBA]; he was playing with [Mills?] Blue Rhythm Boys, at New York's Cotton Club, at the time of his death. [Check discographies] [Compare below, reel II, p. 7] EM says McKinney's Cotton Pickers wanted Simon to join them, but he remained with the Blue Rhythm Boys; he later toured with Joe Oliver, at the same time Paul Barnes was in the band; they got stranded in Wichita, Kansas. Simon returned to New Orleans, went to work with Fate Marable on the [Streckfus] boat [must have later returned to New York and Blue Rhythm Boys, to be able to die there while playing with that band--PRC]. EM worked with Chris Kelly about one year, three months; he left Kelly, worked with Emile Barnes.

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In Kelly's band: Ike Robinson, trombone; [Eddie] "Face-o" [Woods], drums; Emile Barnes, clarinet; Lawrence Marrero, banjo; EM, bass; [Kelly, cornet]. EM says Kelly's tone was one of the best of any, including Louis [Armstrong]. Kelly played mostly blues and drags. The band hardly ever read music; Kelly could spell a little, but was not proficient at reading. He used mutes, was the originator of the ^{rubber} plunger style, in 1925. Two of Kelly's feature numbers were "Careless Love" and "If You See Corinne, Tell Her to Hurry Home" ["Corryne, Corinna"]. (WR says George Lewis still plays that latter number); Buddy Petit originated the latter tune. Kelly's band played a variety of jobs: Lawn parties, balls [i.e., dances], picnics, excursions, etc. They played at several of the old halls: ^{~ E - Capetain ~} Cooperators, Economy, Perseverance, the old New Hall, Sans Souci, Artisan. Cooperators' Hall, which earlier was known as Hopes Hall, was renamed because two [or more?] societies merged, or took over operation of the hall together; the sporting people went to Cooperators. The France Amis and the Jeunes Amis Halls were for [Creoles of color] society; the Autocrat Club was also classy. Every second Sunday, the Kelly band played a T[exas] and P[acific] Railroad excursion, sometimes to Donaldsonville, sometimes to Houma, other places. Kelly's band the first and fifteenth of every month at the Young Friends' hall in Algiers; the jobs were dances for the Southern Pacific Railroad. Emile Barnes was with the Kelly band then; EB was the leader [?]. EM,

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Lawrence Marrero and Emile Barnes left Kelly at the same time; they formed a band, adding Bush Hall and [Josiah] Frazier [and others?].

"Sugar Johnny" Smith was a ^{3rd} cousin of EM; he was from the Frazier side of the family. Smith, a native of South Carolina, came to New Orleans as a young man (EM's mother and her people come from South Carolina, also). If Smith were living today, he would be 68-69 years old. Smith's style was something like that of Chris Kelly; Smith also used mutes. Smith had a soft tone, was a smooth cornet player. As far as reading, Smith was about "a third grade scholar" (i.e., could play written music after going over it quite a bit). He played mostly low notes. WR mentions that Smith worked with [Freddy] Keppard and Ed Garland, among others; EM knows Garland, who is now [and has been a long time] in California. Arnold Depass [drums] and Dave Depass, clarinet, also played with him [Smith, or Garland?]. EM mentions that they [the Marreros] had pictures of every band in the city, but Sidney Desvigne (now dead) took the pictures in 1952 to put in a book, and never returned them. WR says he has one picture of the Superior Band, showing Billy Marrero, Bunk Johnson, Walter Brundy, Big Eye Louis [Nelson], Buddy Johnson (brother of Yank Johnson, with whom EM played--the Black and Tan Band, bot up by Paul [Barnes?]). The Black and Tan played at the Pelican, on Rampart Street.). EM, Lawrence, Josiah Frazier and Emile Barnes stuck together, from one band to another, until EM quit playing, in 1928;

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EM played only about nine years. WR mentions that he heard EM play at a lawn party on Touro Street, when Bunk Johnson was [back] in town. Ricard [Alexis] was playing bass on the job, (EM says so) Ulysses Jean (now living in Mobile [Alabama]) was on trumpet; Lawrence was on the job, as was George Lewis. EM came to the party, played bass some. [Check Jazzways] When EM got married, he continued in music for five years, holding another [daytime] job in a cleaning plant [after which he gave up music]. He sold his bass to [Pechet? ?] (now dead). EM mentions Gus Green, who played string bass--an old, old-timer, now dead. Johnny Prudence was a friend of Billy Marrero (WR says Paul Barbarin knows about Prudence, and that Albert Glennly talked about him); Prudence was the oldest of the old-timers. ^{WR:} Glennly said Prudence was the first he ever heard pick the bass. Billy Marrero bowed mostly, was one of the best bowlers in New Orleans. EM thinks Simon Marrero was a better bass player than their father. EM agrees that his brother John was about the best banjo player around New Orleans. WR says George Guesnon learned from John. The first band John played with was that of Buddy Petit; in that band: Petit, cornet; Sidney Bechet, clarinet; Simon Marrero, bass; "Little Mack" [Lacey], drums; Leonard Bechet (a dentist), trombone; [John, guitar]. The year was about 1916. EM says Sidney Bechet was not as old as reported in the paper [at the time of his death]; EM says Bechet had to put on long pants to go into the hall [where Petit's band played for that first job of John Marrero].

End of Reel I

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Also present: William Russell
[EM's daughter?]
[Others?]

Louis Armstrong is mentioned.

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Sidney Bechet was quite young, in 1916, when he played a job with John Marrero [John's first with a band]; Sidney started on flute [i.e., tin fife?] which he played until someone bought him an old clarinet. John played guitar then; he took up banjo about 1924. EM describes John's guitar technique. WR mentions Johnny St. Cyr; EM says St. Cyr played the guitar-banjo, that he never could play tenor banjo, only 6-string banjo. EM remembers when St. Cyr and Louis Armstrong went to Chicago; Armstrong went to join Joe Oliver [St. Cyr already there?]. EM played that [?] dance, at the Fairground; he worked with Kid Rena, who was "the greatest." Rena was better than Freddy Keppard. "Ain't nobody could pick up a cornet around Rena." EM relieved Simon Marrero on the Rena jobs; Simon was sick, so EM went along to help him out. He would play any advertising jobs (on trucks) for Simon. Simon got help on learning the bass, in later years, from his father, but when he first started (the family were then living on Bourbon [now Pauger] and Marais), he made his own bass, from a canned milk case (Albert Murphy, a friend, made a drum from a cheese box). About a year later, the father got Simon a regular bass; Simon was about 17 years old when he started. Simon played with boys from the neighborhood; none of the others (excepting John Marrero) became musicians. The boys played for penny parties on someone's lawn. Simon played in various New Orleans bands; he began with

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Buddy [Petit], remaining with him about twelve years. After that, he joined Kid Rena, remaining with him a long time. Leaving Rena, he joined [Papa] Celestin's Tuxedo Band, with whom John Marrero already played (was also assistant manager of the band). John began playing a little bit before Simon did; John had learned guitar from an uncle, Henry [Major], who lived in the country; at that time, Simon was working on a furniture wagon. EM says it wasn't Celestin's band, actually, that it was [William "Bebé"] Ridgley's Tuxedo Band; Ridgley was manager, John, assistant. When Ridgley and Celestin split up, each had his own Tuxedo Band; John went with Ridgley, Simon with Celestin. Paul Barbarin (then with Armstrong) tried to get Simon to go to New York. Simon went to New York, but he played with [Mills?] Blue Rhythm Boys. EM says Simon went to New York even before John Marrero; Simon was first with King Oliver, on the road; he returned to New Orleans, then to New York [and the Blue Rhythm Band]. [Compare above--reel I, p.2.] Paul Barnes was the leader and arranger of the Oliver band when Simon was with that group. EM sat in in Celestin's band, and filled in for Simon when Simon was sick for about three months. EM also worked for Ridgley, in Ridgley's pressing shop, even before EM took up music. (Ridgley died last year.)

Bunk Johnson was the third [chronologically] cornet player (and next to last) in Billy Marrero's band [the Superior]; Sam Morgan was the last. When Johnson first came from New Iberia, Billy got him from South Rampart Street. Freddy Keppard was the first cornet player, then Joe Oliver, then Bunk. [Lawrence Marrero

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also named Ninny Cozeourt^{Cozeourt} as a Superior Band cornetist to RBA.]
Keppard played something like Rena--high, above the staff. He
was not sweet. Bunk played sweet, something like Buddy Petit^{and}
Armstrong. "Bunk partly learned Buddy Petit everything he
knowed." He helped Armstrong, too. ^{WR says:} George Lewis said put Bunk
behind a curtain, and sometimes you wouldn't be able to tell
Bunk from Buddy Petit. EM agrees. EM says, Jimmy Palao, his father
worked with violinist [and later, sax--PRC], and Richard Payne,
guitar. Walter Brundy, drums, also worked with Billy. ["Big
Eye"] Louis Nelson also worked with them; it was in the Superior
band. Billy was manager of Superior, Imperial [and Olympia,
according to Reel I]. The Superior Band played most of its jobs
at the Globe Hall (near the Basin [near present-day Municipal
Auditorium]). Superior worked at France Amis when there was a
big occasion there. Billy Marrero was called Billy Morand because
people didn't know any better; ^{Billy never corrected them.} Simon, John and Lawrence Marrero
corrected the ignorance when they began playing music.

[cf. first draft.]
WR says Red Allen, in New York, told him that a musician
from New Orleans was working in a drug store there; it was John
Marrero, who died in New York in 1942. (EM says "we" got Red
Allen started.) WR did not get to meet him, ^{E.g. John Marrero?} Discussion of
fortune: Lawrence got all the breaks (radio, TV, etc.). Simon
was to go overseas with Noble Sissle's orchestra, because Sissle's
bass player, a Frenchman, wanted to replace Simon with the Blue
Rhythm Boys, so he could get his wife over from France. Swap
didn't come off. EM says Simon must have recorded with the Blue

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Rhythm Boys; WR says they made some records with Lucky Millinder. Simon died November 28, 1935. The family keeps a record book. Simon became ill about two years earlier; he was working with Fate Marable, on the steamer Capitol, was taken off in St. Paul [Minnesota] and sent to New Orleans. That was his last job.

Billy Marrero liked fun; he would have musicians come to his house every Monday for something to eat. There would be rehearsals at the house two or three times a week; neighbors, both white and colored, attended and/or listened. EM comments that race relations were more amicable in those times downtown. Billy Marrero's regular band would be at the rehearsals, but any outside musician was welcome to sit in. Talk about Monday night dances; talk about Monday afternoon (and rarely, Monday night) banquets. Various societies held the banquets, which were free to anyone who could get in.

WR mentions something EM told him at a rehearsal of the Barnes-Marrero Band, held at the Autocrat Club: EM said that years ago most of the bass players bowed their basses, rather than picked them; he bowed his bass a good bit of the time. Talk of ^{Walter, Schickel} three-string basses: WR says [Albert] Glenny played that type of instrument. Billy Marrero always used four-string bass.

Bass players EM liked, other than those in his family, were "Jim Little" [Sidney Brown] and Albert Morgan; the latter and EM studied with Simon Marrero. EM sometimes sat in for Jim Little, with Sam Morgan's band; unlike the other bands of the city, Morgan's

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bandsmen didn't like to have anyone else touch their instruments (EM explains that musicians could go to where almost any other band was playing and sit in, using the instruments already on the stand). Sam Morgan wouldn't even let his brother [Albert] sit it, although EM was allowed the privilege. EM says Albert was one of the best bass players, the last time he heard Albert was in New Orleans, when Albert was with Louis Jordan. EM says Albert became the best musician of any of the Morgans; he became able to work with any type band. He worked with Cab [Calloway] a long time. Jimmy Brown, who worked with Manuel Perez, was classed about the same as Billy Marrero; he was extra good. "Old man" [Henry] Kimball was good, too. Jimmy Brown was as good as any of the bass players, although EM's father had a more well-known name. Johnny Prudence, long dead, was a good friend of EM; Prudence was the rough type bass player [i.e., probably played without much actual knowledge of music; just played by instinct. PRC].

"Wooden Joe" [Nicholas] is mentioned; EM played with him, as did Lawrence Marrero. Lawrence "Toca" [Martin] played with him, too. Lawrence Marrero played with more bands than EM did; Lawrence played for over thirty years than [EM] [EM played about nine years--see Reel I].

End of Reel II

