

FOSTER, EARL
I [of 2]--Digest--Retyped
March 22, 1961

Also present: William Russell,
Ralph Collins, Harold Dejan

(Interview recorded at 3212 Baronne [Street] New Orleans, Louisiana)

Earl Foster was born December 28, 1904, in Mandeville, Louisiana. His father was minister of a Baptist church in that town; EF sang in that church. EF came to New Orleans in 1922. He began playing drums in Mandeville, having gotten his drums and instructions on how to hold the sticks in New Orleans, from Harold Peterson [still has a music store on N. Broad Street--PRC, January 1966 [Check closing date of store. RBA]. The first New Orleans band EF played with, in 1923, was that of Amos Riley; some members [somewhat confusing]: "Big Eye" Louis Robertson, piano; Sam Dutrey, Sr., clarinet and alto sax; Polk, trombone; Ernest Kelly, trombone; Lib Newton, bass; Amos Riley, trumpet; Joe Harris, sax (HD says it was Willie James, but EF says James played in his band); Willie Bontemps, banjo; [EF, drums]. Polk was not the trombonist with the original band [perhaps later, or a substitute--PRC]; the line-up appears to have been: Robertson, Dutrey, Kelly, Newton, Riley, Bontemps and EF.

In Mandeville, one hall where dances were held was the Sons and Daughters Hall; Buddy Petit used to play there. A Mandeville band was the Independent, led by Isidore Fritz, clarinet (George Lewis has talked about him, says WR). [George] "Sheik" [Colar] used to play a fair with trombonist Dan Moody, who lived in

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Mandeville. Some others in the Independent Band: Leonard Parker, trumpet; Joe Fritz, bass; Louis Fritz, trombone. Isidore Fritz was a great clarinetist; he sounded somewhat like Louis Cottrell [jr.]; Fritz could play sweet or hot; he had his own ideas. EF says Fritz has been dead about six years. Andy Anderson, a first cousin of EF, is from Mandeville; Anderson was the trumpet player in EF's first band. EF heard Tommy Ladnier, who played in Mandeville; EF says he was the great blues trumpet player; he began playing in Mandeville; his brother is named Willie Ladnier. EF remembers Bunk Johnson's playing with Isidore Fritz, about 1915. Ladnier also played with Fritz. Some of Fritz's band were from Madisonville, but EF says Fritz's band was the only resident in that area at that time. The band on the [excursion] boat Camellia, a lake boat, were from New Orleans; among them; George Jones [bass, and perhaps leader]; Walter Preston, banjo; "Wooden Joe" [Nicholas, trumpet and/or clarinet]. New Orleans bands played for picnics in Mandeville in the Twenties, during ["Papa"] Celestin's time, says EF. The Independent Band (with Ladnier) and bands from New Orleans played for parades in Mandeville; there were no bands playing funerals there. Bunk Johnson also played parades with Fritz in Mandeville. The bands rode in the parades there; the vehicle was a truck version of a tallyho. [Compare Wilbert Tillman, reel? December 20, 1966] Bunk Johnson gave EF the name "Brother." Talk of Johnson, mention of New Iberia [Louisiana].

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EF got his drums in 1921, came to New Orleans in 1922, began playing, with Amos Riley, in 1923.

The leading bands when EF came to New Orleans were: Celestin; Kid Rena; Sam Morgan and Buddy Petit.

Original members of EF's first band: Andy Anderson, trumpet; James ["Sing"] Miller, piano; Willie James, saxophone and clarinet; Austin "Boots" Young (who left Sidney Desvigne to join EF), bass and trombone (he remained with EF until his death, six or seven years ago; his brother, "Sport" [Young], sax player, died before that); [EF, drums]. EF mentions that he and HD played together, when HD was small, and when EF first came to New Orleans.

[EF apparently formed his first band about 1932.] EF played with Amos Riley about seven years, until Riley's death; then he joined Buddy Petit, playing drums, until Petit's death in 1932. Some others in Petit's band then: Chester Lizardis [i.e. Zardis], bass; Manny Gabriel, clarinet; Eddie Morris, trombone; Louis Keppard, banjo. Isidore Fritz played clarinet with Petit before Gabriel. Besides playing across the lake [Mandeville], Petit lived there for a while. Buddy Manaday [or Manade?], banjo, replaced Keppard (who went with Celestin); Manaday was in the band when EF joined; Manaday, from New Orleans, moved to Mandeville; he played with Petit until he [Petit?] died. WR says Edmond Hall has a photo of Petit's

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band taken across the lake; in it are Manaday; George Washington, trombone; Zardis, bass; a singer, which EF identifies as himself, saying he hadn't started playing drums then. (HD says the photo was published in EUREKA [British] Magazine; WR says it was also published in ESQUIRE [Jazz Book 1945. Soft-cover edition. Check title.] [U. S. A.]).

Talk of the brother of Ricard Alexis; they were from Bay St. Louis [Mississippi]; they all came there [Mandeville?] to play. The brother [Joseph Alexis] was playing drums with Petit at the time the photo was made. [Joseph] Alexis has been dead about ten years.

EF doesn't think Edmond Hall was in [as a regular?] the Petit band at the time the photo was taken. [Compare Edmond Hall, reel?] EF knew Hall when Hall went to New York; Lee Collins was in the same group with Hall [the group which went to New York?]. Hall is shown in the photo.

EF came to New Orleans after singing with Petit's band; he tells of [BP's and ?] John Robichaux's surprise at discovering that EF was playing drums with Amos Riley (Riley's band worked at Chess, Checker [and Whist? RBA] Club every Monday night), because Robichaux knew when EF came to New Orleans [and hadn't expected EF to be playing drums with a man of Riley's stature?] EF was with Riley until he died, "right there on Jena Street."

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EF hadn't even had his hands on a pair of drumsticks when he got his first set of drums (made by Rudolph Wurlitzer [company], of Cincinnati). EF describes the equipment in his first drum set.

HD mentions [Joseph] Alexis, saying he was always called [only] Alexis.

Buddy Petit was one of the best [cornet players] in New Orleans; he had his own style; he could play sweet or hot. EF says Buddy was featured on the song, "My Buddy," when they played at a place on the Bayou Lafourche, which runs through Raceland [Louisiana]. During the time Petit came over there [that is, Mandeville?], EF thinks he and George Washington had already made their trip to California; they were the first to leave New Orleans. HD says Washington used to do a lot of traveling; EF agrees. EF says Petit returned to New Orleans because he got "Mexican fever." WR says Jelly Roll Morton said Petit joined his band in California; EF says Petit was on tour, and agrees that Petit joined some band in California. WR says Frankie Duson, trombonist, is said to have joined the Morton band when Petit did. [Compare Alan Lomax, Mr. Jelly Roll, Duell, Sloan and Pierce, 1950, pp 163-4]. EF played with Duson; Amos Riley sometimes used Duson (who lived on Valence Street, "by the cemetery" [at Danneel Street?]); EF, as a boy, went to Duson's house several times.

HD asks about trombonist Jack Carey; WR knew Jack's brother, [trumpet player] Mutt Carey.

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Jack Carey was mostly a "Tiger Rag" trombone player [meaning rough?]; MD says he was famous for playing "Jack Carey" (HD scats the theme). WR says Punch [Miller] talked about that, too. EF says Carey was the one who made "Tiger Rag" famous, although he didn't make it [that is, compose it?]; HD says that was Carey's featured number when playing on advertising wagons. EF played a lot of advertising jobs, but not with his own band; his band played mostly for dances; they played at the Plantation Club in Bogalusa [Louisiana] for a long time, and were at the Avenue Lounge (St. Charles and Polymnia) for almost five years. WR says he heard EF's band there about 1944; Austin Young, who played there with EF, told WR about the band. Leaving the Avenue Lounge, EF's band played five years at the Coconut Grove, in Marrero [Louisiana], operated by the Seymour brothers; the place is further up the river than the Moulin Rouge. HD was playing with Willie Pajaud at the Moulin Rouge at the same time; he says they went in there right after Kid Thomas [Valentine] left. When the Coconut Grove closed, EF's band went to the Keyhole, (operated by one of the Seymour brothers), which was father^R up the river, probably in Westwego. The Keyhole didn't do well, as the owner was trying to make it a higher-class place [than his previous ones]; when it closed, EF's band went to the College Inn, in Thibodaux [La.], playing there four years. HD played there [with EF?]. EF mentions

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Willie James [?]. EF played at the Plantation Club in Bogalusa for seven or eight years; the band worked six nights a week (off on Monday). EF made the headlines in the Bogalusa [news]paper. [Why? Ask if reinterviewed.] EF's band played Thursday through Sunday at the Avenue Lounge. The Bogalusa job was during World War II.

EF thinks Ernie Cagnolatti, trumpet player, has another photograph of Buddy Petit's band; EF doesn't know that Edmond Hall is shown in it.

EF agrees that Buddy Petit persuaded him to take up saxophone, when he was playing drums with Petit; EF took a few lessons from Lorenzo Tio [Jr.], who then went to New York. EF took up alto saxophone; Tio was playing alto and tenor saxophones with [A. J.] Piron's band, says HD. EF also studied alto sax with Davy Jones, who also left town, going to Texas. EF says that is when Petit changed him from drums to alto, playing in Petit's band, which then played a lot of fairs in Covington, Bogalusa and other places. Petit then took Abbey "Chinee Bebe" Foster on drums. EF is no relation to Abbey Foster, nor is he related to the brothers, Willie Foster and George "Pops" Foster, although EF played some jobs with them. Pops Foster played a few jobs with Amos Riley, too.

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Buddy Petit lived on Derbigny, perhaps near Laharpe Street. EF, Louis Armstrong and Simon Marrero were pall bearers for Petit's funeral; EF agrees with WR that Armstrong was then playing at Suburban Gardens in 1932 [Check date], on Jefferson [Highway]. There was no band playing for Petit's funeral; EF believes Petit's widow didn't want any music. EF doesn't know whether Petit was Catholic or not. Petit's widow is still living, in Mandeville, Louisiana. EF agrees with HD that the Sons and Daughters Hall, in Mandeville, still exists; [trombonist Dan] Moody lived [in? near?] there. EF says Petit's widow, who re-married after Petit's death, was known as Teresa Gibson before her marriage to Petit. EF's father died in December, [19]29, in Mandeville; his mother died there February 28, 1934; EF still has relatives living in Mandeville. EF's father was minister of the Third [Baptist] Church there until his death; the father took over the church and got it out of debt, although it had been built by another man.

EF played in Amos Riley's brass band. EF also played in a brass band with trombonist Gus Metcalf, for the Jefferson City Buzzards; Metcalf, who is dead, also played with Riley's brass band. EF played snare drum in the brass bands. Riley's brass band was the Tulane Brass Band. For Carnival parades, Riley would get a trumpet player named Nelson, from Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The

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usual bass drummer was from Laplace [Louisiana]; he is now dead;

EF can't remember his name. [Amos Riley died before Petit?]

The Fritz band, named the Independent Band, was based in Mandeville; Leonard Parker [trumpet], had a band in Slidell [Louisiana], but he joined the Independent Band, so his band was really the same as the Independent Band. King Gurley [Spelling?] had a band in Bogalusa; he is now dead; Gurley often used musicians from other towns, too. The time was during the Twenties.

EF didn't know clarinetist Frank Lewis, who played with [Frankie] Duson and others, according to WR; "Wooden Joe" [Nicholas] told WR he saw Lewis in Mandeville, where he is said to have lived in his later years; RC says Dan Moody spoke of seeing Lewis. WR says that Frank Lewis arranged music. Isidore Fritz was the only clarinet player EF knew in Mandeville; he was a fine clarinetist, and also played saxophone. HD says there was a saxophonist in Laplace, Gomer [spelling?], who was also fine. Tommy Ladnier played [trumpet] with Fritz's Independent Band.

EF worked in a band with Willie "Kaiser" Joseph, clarinet, at the Alamo for eight years. Kaiser, Killed by a car, was the brother of bassist John Joseph. Percy Humphrey took [contracted?] the job at the Alamo; Albert French, now leader of ["Papa"] Celestin's Tuxedo Band, was in the Alamo band, also. Willie Pajaud, with Wilhemina Bart[on piano], worked the Alamo before Humphrey and his group took

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the job; Henry Julian, clarinet and saxophone, now dead, was with Pajaud (EF and HD agree that Julian was a good player). Pajaud's band played at the Alamo for about two years. [The Humphrey band?] stayed until the Alamo closed.

EF played a lot of advertising jobs with Buddy Petit. EF also worked with Ernest Kelly [trombone], in Bob Lyons's band, playing advertising jobs. Lyons and Kid Rena had the real advertising bands, although Celestine~~ff~~ played advertising jobs, too. EF mentions playing advertising jobs for dances at Economy Hall, Cooperators Hall, and Francs Amis Hall; HD mentions Jeunes Amis Hall. EF played drums then. Talk of the positions of the various instruments in the motor truck for an advertising job. The truck would stop at corners for the band to play.

EF quit playing sax [on, or since?] the job in Thibodaux [see Reel I]; he hasn't played saxophone in about [two?] years. EF never took any lessons on drums. His saxophone lessons with Lorenzo Tio, Jr., were only for about a month; Tio had been to New York once already, and had decided to go back. Tio lived on Rocheblave [Street] the, right around the corner from where his brother [Louis?] now lives. EF began studying with Davey Jones after Tio left town. Jones was then working at a second-story place on [South] Rampart Street, with Joe Robichaux; both had been at the Pelican previous to their move. Gene Ware played

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trumpet in the band. HD says the place on Rampart was across the street from the Horseshoe. EF says Jones was then living on Louisiana Avenue. Jones was the leader of the band [and tenor saxophonist?]; Robichaux played piano; Ware, trumpet; Theodore Purnell, alto saxophone. After Jones left New Orleans to go to Texas, EF didn't study music anymore with anyone; he continued playing drums, but played his saxophone at home, where Buddy Petit heard him; Petit told him he was playing as much saxophone as Manny Gabriel, and that he wanted EF to play saxophone in his band, and that he would get Chineé Foster to play drums. EF also sang a lot.

End of Reel II