

EDDIE EDWARDS
Reel I--Retyped
July 1, 1959

Interviewer: Richard B. Allen

The tape was recorded at 6 Amsterdam Avenue, New York City, July 1, 1959. [Until otherwise indicated the following is being read by Eddie Edwards probably with interpolated comments]

Sidney Lansfield, the celebrated movie director for Adolph Zukor and who substituted in the Original Dixieland Jazz Band in 1917 when Henry Ragas was ill in New Orleans for two weeks, told me that the most difficult role for an actor to portray was that of a dead man: if he fell to the floor, surely one side would be more comfortable to lie on than the other; if a finger itched, no good--he may not scratch it. And, so with this, "Say a few words," I am told, "into the microphone," but what? What's ever comes to my mind? That's about what it will be--well, here goes:

Interviews usually start with a request for name, place of birth, age, so forth. So here I have Edwin Branford Edwards, born May 22, 1891 at New Orleans. I have one son from my marriage who now has two fine boys, age 12 and 7, and twin girls, age 2, May 8, 1959. I had hoped Bran, a real fine boy, would follow in music, and felt slightly disappointed when I came to the realization that he would not play. You can lead--You can't lead other peoples' lives, and I believe now he has pursued the correct course as he has more of the worldly goods than I had if that is insured--if that is measured as a success.

I had two uncles who played music. My father's brother, I was told, was an excellent flutist besides a marine painter. Some of his works hang in the Louvre and the British Museum. He was a physician. Grandfather Edwards was also a physician, being at one time, 1896 to 1900, surgeon general of the London hospital.

On maternal side, my mother's eldest brother was a fair pianist and violinist playing dance music. He was also clever with his hands and fashioned for me a trombone mute of tin to my specifications. It was conic shaped and patterned after a French horn mute owned by a horn player, in the French Opera of New Orleans along about 1910, 1911, whose acquaintance I made. The mute was false in some positions and had to be humored, that is lipped, either sharp or flat. The French horn mute, while true, was too heavy and, therefore, not practical for dance work which I followed. Besides, one cost three dollars and fifty cents. I used a mute to produce a different sound and not necessarily for soft tones; it was the first mute used by a trombonist in dance work, I still have it. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band frequently played soft and ratty--pronounced by the boys "r a d d y," so that the shuffle of [the] dancers' feet could be heard.

Another uncle on my mother's side was a violinist and pianist. He did not--I did not hear him play. I had some of his compositions and manuscripts which were beautifully written.

Religion: Episcopalian. Although I have studied Christian Science for a number of years, I have not officially become a member of the group.

I had quite a number of day jobs: clerical and salesman. I could not hold any; the urge for music was too strong. My first job was for the Fort Worth and Denver City Railroad in whose office a gentleman, Harold W. Nathan, took quite an interest in me and helped me immeasurably: gave me business guidance, correspondence, and had me quoting railroad rates from New Orleans to Mexico

City and giving travel information of the national lines of Mexico. Often prospective travellers inquired if I had spent any time in Mexico City as I seemingly knew so much about the country, which I learned from the railroad literature. My remuneration for the six day week, 8 to 5:30 P.M., was ten dollars a month. On receiving my first check, I endorsed it and presented it to the paying teller at the Grand--Canal-Louisiana Bank, then situated at Camp and Common Streets. The cashier, I believe with a twinkle in his eye, asked, "How will you have it?" Not being familiar with banking transactions, I replied, "In my hands."

But my greatest story, I believe, from that job, I would like to relate: Each day a carriage drew up to the Common Street entrance of the St. Charles Hotel where the office was situated. Magnificent animals: polished harness, bang tail bays. The driver and a footman both in cream britches, silk hat, ascot tie, patent-leather boots. Along about two o'clock, a beautiful girl appeared, got into the carriage helped by the footman, and was driven to the Grand Opera House a short distance away. She was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. Dressed so prettily and a luscious perfume that seemed to stun everything within its radius. Her parasol was opened and adjusted by the footman. She drove off. This went on for some time and one day to get a closer look, I stood by the entrance of the hotel as she came out. She looked at me and said, "Hello, little boy." And that just about did it; I was limp from then on. But some thirty-five years have elapsed and I'm standing in a delicatessen with my good friend, [Labola Lillian ?], across the street from Carnegie Hall in New York.

An old woman enters. She is difficult to please and finds everything wrong with the merchandise and the prices. I asked [Labora ?] why he tolerated her in his place. Besides being obnoxious, there was a horrible odor emanating from her. [Labola's ?] defence in his own words was, "Do you know who that is? She was one of the biggest actresses in the world, many, many years. Her name is blankety, blankety, blank." I then realized that there was my crush, oh, so many years ago but now so repulsive.

Educated in the New Orleans public schools. My report cards were never very bad--so much so that my dad in censuring me wished to know if I would stop making a fool of myself and attempting to make a fool of him. He followed: "What do you intend doing: continue at school or stop and go to work?" That was to my liking, I said, "Stop." He came back with me now, "Don't blame me in that event." Then the parade of jobs:

Morgan [City ?], Louisiana-Texas Railroad, part of the Southern-Pacific. Mom wanted me to be a railroad man. Pickle works, tobacco house, industrial insurance, Swift and Company where the boss collected can-good samples. On Saturday afternoons when he went to the country, had me lug a heavy grip filled with the can goods from the Magazine and Poydras Street office to the Railroad station at Basin Street with no car-fare. On complaint to the long walk and heavy burden he said, "Well, take this other bag and carry it in your other hand and it will balance you so that you can carry them more easily." But Mom did provide an outlet in music, and when I was about ten I took up the violin under C. A. [Hartrenk ?] which helped me quite a bit. I joined St. Paul's choir when twelve and under Ferdinand Dunkley, a brilliant musician and composer

EDDIE EDWARDS
Reel I--Retyped
July 1, 1959

5

who, late in life, was organist at the Jesuits' Church in New Orleans and taught at Loyola University in New Orleans. Under Mr. Dunkley, I believed I learned and appreciated music more so than any other influence.

About 1907, while collecting for a pickle firm, I found a wallet on Carondelet Street near St. Joseph. Two Negro women carrying a large basket of clothing, which looked like it had been just washed and ironed, passed over the wallet, their basket directly over it. I afterwards learned it belonged to a bartender-collector of the Bartenders' Union. So [there's ?] forty dollars in it besides several checks. I returned the wallet to its owner and was given ten dollars.

That evening I met Gus Mueller, who lived near-by, and with whom I played in a four-piece combination consisting of: Johnny Baumann; Tom Watermeier, guitar; Gus Mueller, clarinet; and myself, violin. We played a number of engagements for pay, averaging \$1.50 a night. The combination was good and played the correct notes and chords. Gus advised, "Get a trombone with it, Eddie from Sears Roebuck." Well I did get the trombone, but from Montgomery Ward: a shiny, B flat slide trombone, professional model for \$9.90 post paid. Now to learn that thing, I bought an Imperial method and got along fairly well with it--self-taught book. However, I wished to play without music, by ear. To play all through the tune, never taking the instrument down to play contro-melodies, obbligatoros, rhythmic beats, licks, breaks, pretty parts, growls, rough passages, tricks, and so forth. The Night Owls,

a baseball team from the neighborhood of Pleasant and Constance Streets, had a great following. We all tried to make the team. They afterwards built a dance floor in the rear of [Augie Famularo's (sp. ?)] home on Pleasant Street ([Soards' 1910--lists a Famularo on Harmony]): a roof and a bar. They gave monthly dances, for which we were paid. We got a trumpet player, George Barth by name, who worked days, and whose parents would not let him out at nights as it interfered with his day job, on which the family was dependent. We hired a drummer, Dede Stevens, or Ragbaby Stevens, both good tempo men, the latter a wild man whose beats, cymbal crashes, stops, and bass drum syncopation were a revelation. However, Ragbaby became so enthusiastic he broke both snare drum heads on the second or third tune and there would be no more side or snare drum for the evening. These boys: Watermeier, Mueller, Barth, Baumann were very patient with me, who knew the notes to play, but I just couldn't find them on the instrument. Believing the notes could be forced, I lipped up, blew all the louder to produce these tones. The boys just laughingly requested that I play more softly. This went on so until I was able to find the correct tones on the slide, a rather difficult thing to do as there are no markings or precision measurements on the slide that would signify the correct positions or measurements on the outer or inner slide.

One of the first tunes this combination played was a march by Abe Holzman, "Old Faithful," which had a pretty obligato for trombone in the third movement, which I was determined to master, even though it was in the difficult key for trombone of two sharps, or the key of D. I can well understand Victor Herbert's answer to a query, "Why did you put a certain number in the key of four sharps?" to which he replied, "To keep the damn amateurs from

EDDIE EDWARDS
Reel I--Retyped
July 1, 1959

7

murdering it."

This Night Owl band frequently played engagements. Lawrence Veca, who passed away early in life, played cornet. Veca in turn recommended me to play with the Reliance Band, which played at the Tonti Social Club on Tonti and Dumaine [Streets], New Orleans. This band was fostered by Achille Baquet, one of the finest men and musicians with whom I was ever associated. He was much hated, yet feared. Said nasty things about him, but whether they could prove it or not I don't know. I wasn't interested in that. The lineup or complement of this outfit was: Lawrence Veca, cornet; Achille Baquet, clarinet; Dede Stevens, later replaced by Tony Sbarbaro, drums; Lawrence "Chippie" Gerosa, [could he mean Joe Gerosa?--see Brunn, p. 13] guitar; Eddie "Blackie" Giblin, bass; Ernest Giardina, violinist, who had a pleasing tenor voice and usually sang tear-jerkers, waltzes which the band played, while the band played. Here was, to my knowledge, the first singer with a jazz band, a dance band. He sang "Won't You Come Over to My House?" and "I Love Only One Little Girl" and others of that type. This engagement at the Tonti Social Club, I believe, was my first steady engagement in music. We played six nights weekly at \$1.25 a night, paid in cash, nightly.

Along about 1907 or '08 I sought out Manuel Guerra [sp ?] a trombone player, whom I met at one of [Sieur Hut's ?] French concerts at which I played. Mr. Guerra agreed to give me lessons on the trombone for one-half hour at 75¢ per lesson once a week. Frequently he was not at home, and I got no lesson. Mr. Guerra came to New Orleans with the Yradier Band, the famous Mexican band which

performed at the Exposition in New Orleans, I believe in 1888.

[Check--date wrong] Mr. Yradier was composer of "La Paloma."

[See D. C. Hardy] I stopped lessons at six or seven because I needed the money for something else. Later I wished to study at Achille Baquet's suggestion and urging, so engaged a Mr. A. Barra who lived in St. Louis and Dauphine Streets, New Orleans. His fee was \$1.50 a lesson. I took one lesson from him, being not in a position to afford others.

If I seem to ramble, excuse me. It's difficult to get things chronologically.

As a two-year old boy, I found a discarded water container, part of a wash-stand set in a garage--in a garbage can and rubbish disposal box, near my home on Royal Street and Marigny where I was born. The trombone fascinated me even as a child. It expressed activity, life, [music?], and harmony which brought goose pimples to my skin on hearing its contramelodies and voice. While this tin bucket was not a trombone type, it did look like a baritone or some military band instrument that I had seen watching a parade. With this I could march up and down the sidewalk, sing into it, and play band. I had it two days and Mom threw it away, fearing I would fall and hurt myself with it.

Emile Tosso's Orpheum Theatre Orchestra and his military band in the summer season at West End or Spanish Fort had a great influence on me, as these two outfits expressed a degree of perfection, in my estimation. New Orleans had great musicians. I learned this playing for traveling shows, which engaged extra musicians in each town where we performed. I believe the New Orleans French Opera had a great influence on New Orleans musicians, their art and culture. Only in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and San

Francisco, were excellent musicians available to play in these shows. Perhaps the Boston Conservatory, Juilliard, Curtis, had some influence.

But jazz: what is jazz? I believe there are less than twenty-six jazz players in the world today. Many pseudo-greats copy a phrase from him, a lick from him, a break, progression, or idea from this one. Put these all together as if mixing a cake with the various ingredients, and you have a jazz style. I wonder. The grim reaper has dug heavily into the jazz men in the past two or three years: Larry Shields, Bunk Johnson, Brad Gowans, to my estimation, one of the greatest, Achille Baquet, the Dorseys, Sidney Bechet, and others. [Off on dates, e.g., Bunk Johnson died in 1949] It is hoped others may take their places. Others usually do in every walk of life, and so with jazz.

But how may jazz be taught? By a textbook, or curricula pattern, or form? There will be some way to do it and Tulane University will find it.

[Here endeth the reading of the Word.]

[Allen:] Well, I know thousands of people have already listened to your records and enjoyed them, and you can hear people copying you. It's a funny thing, today they're still playing your licks. They haven't improved on them.

[Edwards:] Yes, that's so. I guess they use those as patterns. After all, they must. They don't seem much to wish to give us credit for things. That may be because of a little antagonism that one of the members has stirred in the band, and the band in turn has become disliked because of that.

[Allen:] I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about that. I didn't get the instrument that Johnny Baumann played. I might have been watching the machine at the time.

[Edwards:] He played bass.

[Allen:] He played bass. And this--

[Edwards:] By ear, and he was excellent. His chords and arrangements were very fine. Even in those days, those men knew chords; they knew the chord, and one guitar player could call the chord to the bass and he'd make the foundation. Or the bass player could call the chord to the guitar player and he would make the correct change of fingering.

[Allen:] And George Barth. I've always wondered if he was kin to Harry Barth.

[Edwards:] No, no relation.

[Allen:] No relation.

[Edwards:] Go ahead.

[Allen:] Another thing I was wondering about was: when you first started, were there many valve trombone players around?

[Edwards:] Most. Yes. All parades were valve trombone players. Seldom a slide trombone. That gave me more of an urge to try and play a slide trombone, because it seemed to me more delicate, the tone quality was much prettier, and I guess you'd say more soulful. Like I said with jazz, what is jazz? Jazz is not eye music; you don't read it. It is not ear music; you're not playing from ear. It is rather music from the heart, so therefore there can be no set type, because there's so much individuality in jazz music, as performed by the player.

[Allen:] Do you play valve now at all, or do you play only slide?

[Edwards:] Only slide. I did have a valve, and I know the valve fingering. I would like to play French horn once in a while, but that mouthpiece is a little too small for me. French horn players get away with murder, anyhow, because they can make a lot of mistakes and it don't mean anything.

[Allen:] You're going to add something else from that sheet of paper?

[Edwards:] Except that I was in the Army in 1919. I believe all my relatives were in the service, one time or another. My uncle was in the Sioux uprising in 1888; my dad was in the Washington Artillery in 1898; myself in 1918; my son, Branford, three years in the Navy, 1942. I'm a member of Perfect Union Lodge No. 1, F. and A. M., Grand Consistory of Louisiana, A.A.S.R.M., Jerusalem Temple, Shriners, Asian Grotto, New York. I believe the best band, jazz band, I had, was connected with, was Achille Baquet, was clarinet; Mike Caplan was the cornet player; Bob Stein was the drummer; Joe Wolfe, pianist; and myself, trombone. We played mostly for nice affairs. This outfit could read music, improvise, and play jazz, too. And we played at some of the clubs: Boston Club; Chess, Checker, and Whist Club; Louisiana Club; played real--even Tulane University, we played there a number of times for some of the students.

[Allen:] I'll have to tell Mike Caplan hello for you when I see him again.

[Edwards:] By all means, yes. He's one of my dear friends, yes.

[Allen:] I'll drop by the [Jerusalem] Temple there. He's always there, you know.

[Edwards:] You might mention that to him what I said, because he's so retiring, you know, he never comes forward to say anything. There's so many things I'd like to say, but just missed them, you know.

[Allen:] I'd like to ask you one more thing about it.

[Edwards:] Yes, go ahead. Ask them.

[Allen:] Just informally. How were the business affairs of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band managed?

[Edwards:] Well, I did most of their correspondence; I have endless files of it. Any job we ever got, I got it. I booked the original job in Chicago, came to--there was two men, Gus Chandler who was a comedian. He worked at one of the cafes, and he contacted Johnny Stein. Johnny Stein got in touch with me because he didn't know any of the instruments; he was a cafe player, and he played with piano and drums. And I, in turn, tried to get Emile Christian for cornet. Emile--that was on a Monday--Emile had a [Carnival] parade. He made one rehearsal with this outfit. He had a parade for which he accepted an advance of the booking, the Momus parade. That was the first parade in New Orleans on a Thursday night. Paid three dollars, and he accepted two dollars; Emile was a little pressed, and he had to do that. Of course, he couldn't leave that Thursday morning because that's when we left, Thursday morning. Got to Chicago Friday, reported to the Schiller [Cafe] and Saturday night we opened. That was about March 2 or 3, 1915--or 1916. There's so many different dates, nothing chronologically. I had the first scrapbook; I still have it, and I kept the dates from the newspapers which these articles appeared.

[Allen:] It certainly--

[Edwards:] We were to have, like I say, Emile Christian but couldn't

get him. We then got Alcide ["Yellow"] Nunez, played clarinet; Henry Ragas, piano; Johnny Stein was the drummer, and as a last resort, we engaged Nick LaRocca. He was willing to go, couldn't get anyone else who would go in a hurry, and we had to have him. But Nick was a good worker: never complained about working, never took the instrument down. In those days, possibly only two or three trumpets were, musical instruments were, fit to blow in, and we couldn't have them, we couldn't afford them. Today, musical instruments are just like automobiles: they all work.

And, we got to Chicago, I think I had \$7.50 on me. There was never a thought that we would come back, except when [we ?] went into that blizzard in Chicago when we arrived; got off at Wabash Ave. and 12th Street and what a snow storm! My mother wanted me to take an overcoat; I wouldn't do it. It was warm in New Orleans; it was going to be warm in Chicago, and the thought come into you: I'd like turn back and go back. But I said no, better go on. It was awfully cold, and I never experienced any cold like that. Nick, I believe, had about \$20 on him or maybe more, not much more than that, and Stein had a few bucks on him, Ragas had nothing and Alcide Nunez had none. But we did get there, and we started and went to work for Sammy Hare who was afterwards a big cafe and power man in Chicago. He owned a cafe called The Dells on the South Side of Chicago. Crowds attended this Schiller Cafe where we worked; you just couldn't get in there. We worked from nine at night till five in the morning and we worked. So, at the expiration of the three months of the contract, we left. We were lucky we were all together when we left because, when you leave a cafe like that, they don't like it. And they are liable to give you that Joe [E.] Lewis [comedian] treatment like they did

him, Joseph E. Lewis. They beat him up unmercifully; he was in the hospital for about three years. But we consulted a lawyer. One Timothy J. Fell, and he charged us \$20, I think, would be paid \$5 each man. The only thing the gentleman got was the five dollars I paid him. Some friends have still, have since looked him up, and he remembered the incident and spoke about it. He was very kind and won the decision; he cited the case in court of Hal Chase versus the Federal League whereby a performer may be given two weeks notice of release of contract could in turn give two weeks notice himself. And that was the clause that broke the contract. We didn't lose a day's work; we worked at the Del'Abe [check LaRocca scrapbooks], worked there one month, but they had marble and hard walls, and we didn't do so well. We had enough crowds, but not comparable to the Schiller. And we stayed there one month and Mr. Rothschild, the manager, said he had to let us go, he didn't like to do it, and we would have to leave on four or five days notice. In the meantime, I run into Harry James who was managing the Casino Gardens at Clark and Kinzie [check spelling] Street right over the Chicago River, or the Calumet [spelling ?] River it is called. And we opened there the following night of closing at the Del'Abe on Wabash Avenue. We stayed there until January, 1917, when we opened in Reisenweber's [Cafe] January 27, 1917. We stayed there for about two years.

I was then inducted into the army, and booked the band with the [Gifford A. Cochran's ?] Review in London, featuring Sir [?--see Brunn, p. 126] George Roby. And in that show, "Joy Bells" was the name of it, in that show they had a number no one liked-- said it was no good. All authorities; could never be in it, didn't mean anything. Today people have forgotten the show and the

performers, the cast, and the number is bigger than ever--"The Bells of St. Mary." Well, if any of us could foresee what would be popular tune or popular song we would do very well, but we can't. No one can perceive the future.

I believe I mentioned my son was three years in the Navy in 1942.

[Allen:] I was going to ask you about Tony Parenti. He was telling me he didn't remember himself whether he knew you in New Orleans--

[Edwards:] He knew me in New Orleans; we played for several of these bands.

[Allen:] But, he said he didn't remember whether he had--you had come down and given him an offer to go with the Original Dixieland or whether it was Stein--he was uncertain of what the thing was, you know, may be it was after Stein came back from Chicago or something.

[Edwards:] Well, I believe, he seemed to be a nice kid, and I wanted to help him if I could. I said, I asked him, "Well, how would you like to go to Chicago" and I told him we were going to Chicago, the band. "I'd like to very much," Said "Well, maybe I may be able to book you sometime."

[Allen:] So, he did get an offer from you?

[Edwards:] Yes.

[Allen:] Well, that's very nice to have down. And another thing is, I have often wondered when your records came out and when you achieved success, how many bands do you think you influenced that you could name that made records and all that seemed to be copying your style so directly. Seemed to be--

[Edwards:] Well, any number of them, I guess, because after all

EDDIE EDWARDS
REEL I--Retyped
July 1, 1959

16

I guess, those tunes and that style, they had to pattern after. While it was accepted and regarded as a success, naturally they would have to play like it or imitate it and that is what they did. Bands came into Reisenweber's when we were there. Oh, almost daily they were rehearsing and trying out. The--whether Reisenweber management wished to engage them or whether they wished to see what the other fellows was doing I don't know, but a number of the New Orleans boys came there and then they didn't do so well. They'd stay around New York three, four, or five weeks, then come to us for money to go home.

END OF REEL I

EDDIE EDWARDS
Reel II--Retyped
July 1, 1959

Edwards' band's name 17

[Reading again ?]

[Edwards:] We left New Orleans for Chicago Thursday, March 2, 1916, 8:30 A.M. Arrived in Chicago Friday, March 3, 1916, about 9:30, as the train was late, due to a severe snow storm. Mom said take your overcoat. Moms don't know. We couldn't be bothered with those things. Besides it was warm in New Orleans. We did take our new straw hats and walked down Wabash Avenue in zero temperature with them. We opened at the Schiller Cafe owned by Sammy Hare and managed by Harry James, the latter styled as a jas band--"J-A-S" and so advertised in that way. One night at the Schiller a patron became so emotional he twirled a walking cane around his head and let it fly, hitting several people in its flight, shouting, "Jazz her up fellows, jazz her up." We had never heard the term used before in connection with music or a band. And, [seems] from that time on, we were known as a jazz band.

[Allen:] I wondered if you could tell me when the drums changed there?

[Edwards:] After the Schiller Cafe.

[Allen:] After the Schiller.

[Edwards:] Three months in 1916 [Johnny] Stein was with us. He stayed on and got another band. For, I think, three weeks at the Del'Abe [spelling according to H. O. Brunn] we had a drummer, a Chicago boy--[Brunn, p. 41, gives Earl Carter. See LaRocca Reel ?] I don't remember his name now--and then [Tony] Sbarbaro came with us when we went to the Casino Gardens.

[Allen:] And your clarinet changed, too, didn't it, somewhere around there?

[Edwards:] [At the ?] Casino Gardens, later. I had a little trouble managing the band and paying them off. They were allowed--two of them were allowed--we all were allowed, if we wished, to sign tabs up at the bar upstairs. Naturally, some of them abused it. One of them said he didn't owe a certain amount of money, and I was holding the bag for \$4.00, which I didn't like. So I thought and devised a way of getting this money, this \$4.00, back, 'cause I didn't like losing it; [there was] no reason why I should pay for anyone's drinks, particularly when they couldn't hold their liquor. So I thought of paying them in one dollar bills, and as I counted them, I counted "One, two, three, four," passing a dollar bill each time, "five," passing no dollar bill, "six," passing a dollar bill on. In that way I got \$2.00 out of his pay. The following week I did the same thing, counted right before his eyes, and he put it in his pocket. I got my \$4.00 back. It wasn't a nice way to get it, but I was determined to get it. I didn't wish to lose it, especially under those considerations--conditions.

Max Hart came to Chicago. I wrote everybody, trying to get the band to New York. Actors would come and say, "Oh, you want to get to New York. New York is the place." [Larry] Shields didn't like New York; he had come here with [Tom] Brown's band, and they were a failure. He influenced LaRocca. LaRocca wanted to stay in Chicago. He was getting \$40 a week, more than he ever earned in his life, and he wished to stay there. More in fact than any of us ever earned in our lives. He wished to stay in Chicago. But [when ?] Max Hart was the only one that gave us anything concrete. He gave us--I think he offered us for the band a three-week contract, with an option, I don't know how many weeks option, I think it was

three months, if I remember correctly, at \$350 a week for the band. Well, when the option expired, we got more money on that. We got something like \$528 a week.

[Allen:] Who was the clarinet between Shields and [Alcide "Yellow"] Nunez, if any? Was there anybody in between Shields and--

[Edwards:] None. Shields joined at--Shields had been around Chicago and hadn't been doing anything, and we saw him, and I asked him, "How would you like to come with us?" He said, "Gee, I wish I could." So I said, "Well, I think you'll be able to make it, because Nunez, every once in a while, he quits, comes in late, quits. He thinks we can't get anyone else. He believes that he has the upper hand. So, the next time he quits, which will be in a few days, because he does it almost nightly, we'll call you up, and you come right down." So he did. Shields was with us from then on. That was about--at the Casino Gardens, around--it was early summer, June, or July, 1916. Let's see, March, April, May, June--yes, June or July, 1916. July, most likely.

[Allen:] And after you got to New York, you had this same band as we've stated there, at the Reisenweber's [Cafe]. Were there any changes there ever at Reisenweber's?

[Edwards:] No, that was--except when [Henry] Ragas passed away.

[J.] Russel Robinson joined the band, and he left, and they got Frankie Signorelli. I was in the army at that time, when they got Frankie Signorelli to take his place. Then, when they went to Europe, Russel wished to go to Europe, and he did go for six months. He came back, and they got a man by the name of Jones, Billy Jones, to play piano, in London. Then, when they came back, I booked them at the Folies Bergère--that was [at] Fiftieth [Street] and Broadway for the Salvin ^[or Selvin?] [sp. ?] brothers--Salvin father and son, and Russel

came along with us. That's where he composed "Margie" and "Singin' the Blues" and a number of other songs.

[Allen:] I was wondering: when you were out of the band, in the army, who took your place?

[Edwards:] Emile Christian played trombone.

[Allen:] Only Christian.

[Edwards:] That's right.

[Allen:] And did Christian make any records in this country, do you know?

[Edwards:] No. No. He did make some in London. I don't believe they turned out any too well, through no fault of his, through no fault of Emile's.

[Allen:] I have heard them, and it seems to me he plays very close to your parts on them.

[Edwards:] Yes.

[Allen:] He must have listened very carefully to your records. Were there any other changes after Robinson came in?

[Edwards:] Signorelli came with us.

[Allen:] Yes, that's right, you mentioned that.

[Edwards:] And, then, after we left the Folies Bergère, we did some one night stands in Pennsylvania and Frankie Signorelli played those. Then, when we came to New York and worked at the Balconades, Shields didn't wish to come to New York, and he left the band, returned to New Orleans and went to California, I think, where his wife was living. And we got Artie Seaberg [Brunn]. Artie Seaburg played his tone--was almost like Shields, it was difficult to tell them apart, and he played all Shields' style and parts in the recordings. [See ODJB, OK 4738, and OK 4841]

[Allen:] Did [Jimmy] Lytell ever play with the band?

[Edwards:] Lytell, yes, he did, yes. He played when we first went to the Balconades, that was 1922.

[Allen:] And, then, who followed him?

[Edwards:] Seaberg, Artie Seaberg. Artie Seaberg has since passed away, very fine clarinet player. He was excellent musician. I was surprised at him because I afterwards heard him play in the pit in the Paramount Theater. He did some cadenzas. I sat near him. His clarinet work was brilliant. Had a beautiful tone, and he used an Albert system clarinet. Usually they used Boehm system, you see. He transposed, he was a thorough musician, he read beautifully and his tone quality was nice, and he had an excellent jazz tone because he was so full, not loud and not high, but it was like three clarinets wrapped up into one, the tone quality was so big.

[Allen:] I like that Albert System myself.

[Edwards:] You do, yes.

[Allen:] I think it has a better tone somehow, it may not have the facility--

[Edwards:] Well, its a strange thing, they tell me that Jimmy Dorsey used to use half Albert and half Boehm system, [See Edmond Hall, Reel ____], and he was quite a clarinetist. I liked his work very much, and Tommy [Dorsey] could really play jazz, although he didn't play too much of it except that later on all the bands, the big bands and--had a small combination, a Dixieland combination in them, and the men liked the Dixieland style work so much, it got to be five men playing and fifteen men clapping hands, so the bosses come along and say, "Well, let's get rid of these fifteen other men. We'll just engage the five."

[Allen:] Now, who replaced Robinson when he left?

[Edwards:] Frankie Signorelli, and then--

[Allen:] I'm going back to that now--somebody replaced Signorelli. I think I'm confused.

[Edwards:] Yes, Henry Vanicelli [Brunn].

[Allen:] Oh, yes, that's the guy I was trying to think of.

[Edwards:] He was a very nice pianist, too, very good. Henry passed away two years ago along with Seaberg, just about within two or three weeks of each other. Henry was a fine boy; so was Seaberg. Well, I never had any difficulty with any of them. They were all, all had nice qualities about them.

[Allen:] And after you had this band going with Seaberg and Vanicelli what happened?

[Edwards:] Then we played at the Balconades till about 1925, and Nick wished to go to New Orleans. So we did, and then I stopped the band for a while, and I got an engagement at the Silver Slipper where we had shows, and I had eleven men with a jazz band in the big band, within the band. I worked there for two years.

[Allen:] Did you replace anybody, did you replace Nick with anybody in a five piece band, did you have that going for a while?

[Edwards:] Oh yes, recordings. I used Billy Davison [Wild Bill]; there was Max Kaminsky.

[Allen:] But I mean around '25, in that period?

[Edwards:] Johnny Sylvester [spelling ?], yes. [See discographies]

[Allen:] So you still were going.

[Edwards:] Oh, yes, yes.

[Allen:] Even after Nick went back to New Orleans?

[Edwards:] Yes, yes.

[Allen:] [He]
[You] mentioned that he was ill then, and I thought the

band were immediately--broke up, but I'm glad to hear that. Who was he followed by immediately, Nick? Who took his place, immediately after that?

[Edwards:] Well, I used Johnny Sylvester.

[Allen:] Johnny Sylvester. He made--

[Edwards:] Yeah. Johnny was one of these trumpet players with these "five" bands like the Memphis Five or the New Orleans Five and they worked occasionally, didn't work--Johnny didn't happen to be working at the time so he came with me.

[Allen:] Oh, yes.

[Edwards:] Well, I wanted to say something, I neglected it. What are those other questions? You had something in your hand.

[Allen:] All right, well, you were going to tell us something about Columbia [Record Co.] and a suit, there was a law suit?

[Edwards:] Well, Columbia used my likeness and had someone play
[uh ?]
trombone, [I ?] was supposed to be Eddie Edwards, without my consent or permission. I sued them and got judgement against them.

[Allen:] This was on a recording?

[Edwards:] Yes, that was on the "You Are There" program.

[Allen:] Oh, yes.

[Edwards:] Edward R. Murrow.

[Allen:] That's television?

[Edwards:] Yes.

[Allen:] I see. Now, in the thirties did you all work together much, did the band reorganize or anything?

[Edwards:] In the thirties, yes.

[Allen:] Where did you play?

[Edwards:] We did, various places. Not one engagement into the other, but mostly club dates. That was a lot of money in it in those days. We'd work about three, four nights a week or three nights a week. In and out of town and that way we did fairly good even during the depression.

[Allen:] And, who was in the band during the thirties?

[Edwards:] In the thirties, there was Johnny Sylvester--the bass player--Barth was later on, around New York when he played, George Touhy [Spelling ?] played clarinet, ^{Low} Lew Garcia [spelling ?] played cornet, he was a very fine cornet, trumpet player: played nice chords and played without resting so much. ^{d. j. garbata}

[Allen:] This was before you went to Fort Worth [Texas] or after?

[Edwards:] Yes, before Fort Worth.

[Allen:] And who was down there in Fort Worth?

[Edwards:] Well, that was Larry [Shields ?], Nick LaRocca, Tony [Sbarboro], Russel Robinson, at piano, and myself. And [Harry] Barth.

[Allen:] And Barth. And did the band continue on after the Fort Worth Fiesta, that Frontier Fiesta?

[Edwards:] Not that particular group, but I did carry on afterwards.

[Allen:] Seems to me that there was another bass player in there at some point and another trumpet player, I can't remember who.

[Edwards:] Well, I had Billy Davison, I had Max Kaminsky, [Brad] Gowans played trumpet once in a while, he played clarinet, Gowans was a very fine instrumentalist.

[Allen:] When was Sharkey [Bonano] in the band?

[Edwards:] Well, that was 1919.

[Allen:] Sharkey was in the band in 1919. [See H. O. Brunn, p. 141]

[Edwards:] Yes, yes. We played around Keith [Vaudeville] Circuit and played about, I think, about four weeks at the Broadway Theater at Broadway and Fortieth Streets. [Something Falls]--Let it there, ^{stay,} it can't fall any further.

[Allen:] And, did he play with the band any later, Sharkey, ever again?

[Edwards:] No, he went down to New Orleans, and he did some work around there at different cafes, organized his own band.

[Allen:] And never came back with you, not even for recordings, I thought he was on some records?

[Edwards:] No, I believe he did his recordings in New Orleans, I don't think he came up here afterwards, he may have, I don't know. But he did some recordings, and he did them--the Victor Company or some company sent their--

[Allen:] Well, I was thinking about "Put A Nickel In The Slot" ["Drop . . . Slot"--Brunn] and "oooOO-OH Boom!" [Brunn--p. 242] with Lola Bard singing. I wondered who the trumpet player was on those? [See Brunn, p.242]

[Edwards:] Well, that was the big, the big band, that was Nick's idea to have a big band, Nick and Tony. They got a big band together, and they weren't very successful at all. They didn't do anything. They didn't work anywhere.

[Allen:] Was there some guy called Red in on trumpet too, somebody.

[Edwards:] Red?

[Allen:] I couldn't find out his last name, I think Nick told me about it, you know, that they had some guy named Red in the thirties, I believe, just before the war. Some fellow from New Orleans, but I don't know who that would be.

[Edwards:] Red, I can't think--

[Allen:] You were with Katherine Dunham, too, for a while, weren't you?

[Edwards:] Yes, yes. That was an excellent engagement. Played around, played in the pit, played on the stage. That's where I run into these various musicians around the country. You could just tell how good they were.

[Allen:] Who was in the band with Katherine Dunham?

[Edwards:] That was [Brad] Gowans, Tony [Sharbaro], myself. Gowans played clarinet. Bobby Hackett played trumpet.

[Allen:] Piano and bass?

[Edwards:] Piano, we used a piano from the pit orchestra. We just had him play the accompaniment, chords, you know. That's how we got through with that; we did quite well.

[Allen:] I was wondering about the records you made for Commodore, you know, that I showed you the other day. How was that session handled, was there an arranger or what?--

[Edwards:] No. We just tried to play Dixieland band parts as near as they could, which they did with some little deviation. No question Davison made the trumpet parts, he was excellent. His work is excellent, very fine. [See LP notes.]

[Allen:] Certainly got a lot of spirit.

[Edwards:] Yes, yes, he has, very fine man, too. And one of the records, I think, Max Kaminsky and he played for me.

[Allen:] I think that's "When You And I Were Young, Maggie."

[Edwards:] That and oh, there were some others, too, he was on-- Kaminsky was on.

[Allen:] I wanted to know some of your favorite musicians in your early days. Trombones, you were saying--

[Edwards:] Trombones was Sidney Wilson and Al Wickboldt played at the Orpheum Theater. And trumpets, of course, Emile Christian and Lawrence Veca. "Vega" it was pronounced; V-e-c-a. Of course, the others--men who played in the theaters in New Orleans, Vic Fischer and [Fabian ?], the Broekhovens--that's New Orleans musicians; they were very fine.

[Allen:] Were there any hot--

[Edwards:] And Dedroits, that's Paul, the drummer, and Johnny, the trumpet player. Johnny was just young, he was about my age at the time.

[Allen:] What about the violins, were there any hot violinists, fiddle players?

[Edwards:] No, I don't think there really was although they said that Alcide Nunez's nephew, I can't think of his first name, but his name is Nunez, too, he played violin at some of the different places. He played some nice licks, nice parts, and things like that.

[Harry?]
-DM

[Allen:] Clarinetists, were there any good ones?

[Edwards:] Except the schooled men, that was Santo Giuffre and Hernandez who played at the Orpheum Theater. [Leon] Roppolo played around; he was fair; he was a good man, that is, for dance music and for--type of music. You see, the great difficulty, a lot of people think that the more notes you make that's jazz, as a matter of fact, the less notes you make would be more likely to be jazz than the more. Technicians with their multiplicity of notes don't signify anything. They don't get anywhere in the jazz category anyhow.

EDDs he mean the uncle - Elder Roppol
-DM

[Allen:] Well, what about expression and feeling, is there any clue to getting that in your playing, other than--?

EDDIE EDWARDS
 Reel II--Retyped
 July 1, 1959

[Edwards:] Except, like I said, from the heart.

[Allen:] Just has to come--

[Edwards:] Has to come--was suggested, very, very frequently the
 Dixieland Band played soft [say you] [so to ?] hear the shuffle of the feet--
 the dancers.

[Allen:] Did you have many piano players in the early days with
 bands?

[Edwards:] No, it was difficult to have piano players because the
 piano that you would find in a home, they were usually two or
 three, two, one to two tones under international pitch. They
 were never in tune and for that reason you couldn't play. At such
 a time when we did have pianos, Ragas would play for us or Walter
 ["Kid" ?] Ross, he was a piano player around New Orleans at that
 time.

[Allen:] Well, who were some of the outstanding pianists then?

[Edwards:] Well, they were Joe Wolfe, I would say. He was a
 young man, too, and Sidney Wilson, the trombone player, was a very
 fine pianist. He did a lot of work--and those men they could
 always get jobs, they worked in the various picture shows in New
 Orleans.

[Allen:] Were they playing any blues on the piano in those days?

[Edwards:] No. It was mostly Ragtime which was a lot of notes.

[Allen:] I still see Irwin Leclere around there. He's--

[Edwards:] Yes, he's a very nice fellow.

[Allen:] I like his tune "Triangle Jazz Blues," that he wrote--

[Edwards:] I don't know that at all. I know he wrote, yeah, he
 was in on that "I'm Sorry I Made You Cry," I believe, he had some-
 thing to do with that.

[Allen:] There is a fellow can still play part of it. Joe Verges

is still alive [down there ?].

[Edwards:] Yes, yes.

[Allen:] He talks about your band, working with you. He's mentioned that--

[Edwards:] Joe came to New York, he wasn't a success at all. For what reason, I don't know.

[Allen:] You mentioned some of the good drummers already. Are there any ones you'd like to add?

[Edwards:] To get through this--Ragbaby Stevens, he was, he couldn't made a presentable appearance, but he was a magnificent drummer [and ?] the thought and inspiration that he incorporated in his work was marvelous. He would play along, like you say, for one, two, two, two, the first beat of the third bar and stop for two beats of a four beat movement and then come in again, the bass drum, [ba-ba-ba-boom ?] Oh, he was [?], he inspired you; he fired you; he made you work. And Spargo [Tony Sbarbaro] had that, not as loud or as brazen or gaudy as Ragbaby Stevens. But Tony had much more finesse, and Tony's tempos was excellent: never run away and never became excited. It still is, as a matter of fact, he plays continuous as even--even to this day. He beats four beats to the bar, and he plays one tune--you play one tune a night. You start about ten o'clock and you go to four in the morning--no rest. I don't know how he does it, I don't know.

[Allen:] It's phenominal.

[Edwards:] Yes.

[Allen:] I have often wondered about Jack Laine's son [Alfred "Pansy" Laine]. Was he much of a drummer?

[Edwards:] Well, he was a little too young when I was around New Orleans.

[Allen:] I know he played both drums and trumpet. Well, what about the old man, Jack Laine.

[Edwards:] His father used him in street bands, you know, for-- to get that extra pay into the home, but just how successful he was I don't remember, I don't know.

[Allen:] Was Jack Laine an outstanding drummer or was he more of an organizer or what?

[Edwards:] That's what Jack was, yes. See, that's how--he worked with us, he did, we did quite a bit of work, and he'd book the jobs, and all of a sudden he got some name plates made for each man, calling it Laine's band. This was the Reliance Band. That was Giardina, Baquet, Veca, Gibling, and [Gerosa ?], myself. Well, we didn't like that idea at all, and we left him. We worked other places, and we got this engagement at the Tonti Athletic Club, where we engaged Dede Stevens.

[Allen:] Were there any outstanding bass drum players, for example, in the parades?

[Edwards:] No, but that is really interesting because I am reminded of this [Helmecke ?] who was a very famous bass drummer around. He played with John Phillip Sousa, I believe. His contention was that a bass drummer was a musician, and if he was a good pianist and knew the chords and knew the construction of tunes he'd be ever so much better off, but the great difficulty was that most of them went along for the ride. Thought bass drum, all you had to do was carry the instrument and hit it once in a while.

[Allen:] I've heard people mention Emile Gonzales and different fellows. I just wondered if they--

[Edwards:] I didn't know him.

[Allen:] Wondered if they did any fancy drumming in your day on the bass drum in parades?

[Edwards:] We were very, very much annoyed by playboys who would want to come in and sit down on the drums. This we couldn't allow cause it would mess the things up, and it was awful difficult to play five men and have a drummer to beat certain tempos. I guess the only two or three men who did play with us was Charlie Chaplin and the late Vernon Castle and Harold Lloyd. They sat at the drums. They're about the only three men that I can remember who sat at the drums and played at Reisenweber's.

[Allen:] Well, you couldn't refuse those people.

[Edwards:] No, but the difficulty is that they, too, they didn't know too, although Castle was a drummer at one time, and he could follow somewhat of a tempo. And I believe, Chaplin liked it, too. He could play a little.

[Allen:] Did they have any banjos or guitars in those bands that were outstanding?

[Edwards:] No, not until [Paul] Whiteman. Then came the banjo. Had banjos, of course, but they didn't seem to--not with the smaller bands they were more like a solo instrument, I mean. I often think of that chorus that Shields made on "St. Louis Blues."

[Now reading] He was no doubt prompted by disdain and weariness, fatigued from the activities and conditions of the body. It opened in a ribald gross denial. Larry hated New York City or rather put it this way: His love for Chicago was so great there appeared a dislike by comparison. This annoyance is carried on to the fourth

measure, it is followed by a wavering of indecision and inertia,
helpless in its efforts to rise above it. On into blue notes,
characteristic of the [world ?] [word ?] [of varied moods ?] Moods,
lights, colors, and shadows of his urban dislikes and indecisions.
Noises at times, exuberant and pathetic, and lonely. Chaos and all
about. Chaos is all about. It is dismal and gruesome. This is the
first strain of twelve measures. The second chorus of strain follows
with screaming hate and --

END OF REEL II

TULANE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA PROJECT FOR INTERVIEWING
PERSONS WHO CAN CONTRIBUTE TO KNOWLEDGE OF HISTORY
OF NEW ORLEANS JAZZ

I hereby declare that my tape-recorded memoirs may be filed
permanently in the Archive of New Orleans Jazz of the Tulane University
of Louisiana subject to the following restrictions:

1. Not to be used commercially for profit without
permission of E. B. Edwards
- 2.

Subject to the above stated restrictions, I hereby declare that
all or any part of my tape-recorded memoirs may be used without any
additional restrictions whatsoever and may be copyrighted by the Archive
of New Orleans Jazz of the Tulane University of Louisiana.

Place 6 Amsterdam Ave, N.Y.C.

Date July 1, 1959

x E. B. Edwards
(Interviewee)
Richard Binion Allen
(For the Archive of New Orleans Jazz)

