

June 3, 1958

Chicago

Russell: Okay, it's going, if you want to give your name and tell where you were born, and when.

WH: You ready?

Russell: Yes, it's all right.

WH: Well, my name is Willie H. Hightower. I was born in Nashville, Tennessee, on President Polk's Hill, in eighteen eighty-nins [1889], October the 23rd, 7:30 in the morning. My mother and father left Nashville, Tennessee, when I was six years old, and went to New Orleans, La., which my uncle was livin' there, my mother's brother. And from time to time why, I grew, and I worked for the New Orleans Ice Cream Company, my onliest place that I stayed as long as I did, from the date that I started to work was somewheres around 1908, and I left there in 1915, as I started to playing music, and ah after I started to playin' music, then I went to my boss one day and told him, Mr. Brown, and told him that I thought that I was gona' play music and he got mad and sore with me and told me that I couldn't quit him, I'd been there too long.

Russell: Was this the Brown Ice Cream Company?

WH: Yes, Brown's Ic-----New Orleans Ice Cream Company

Russell: uh-huh

WH: I drove a wagon after they got up-and ah after 1915, I quit.

Russell: Oh, if this light is too bright in your eyes, you can turn it off.

Hightower: No, it's not too bright. And after 1915 I decided that I wanted to play music.

And

Russell: Oh, can you tell me about when you were a boy and worked on Magazine Street there and

Hightower: Yeah

Russell: And you and Joe Oliver

Hightower: Yeah, well we come along and Joe, me and Joe Oliver came along and he worked across the street from me, I went to Thomy Lafon's Number six school, Thomy Lafon's number six, I forget the name of the school that Joe went to. But every evening we would play one another with the hose, and his madam would holler at him, and my madam would holler at me, and we had to just pump the street hose across the street from one another. And ah, we were

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WH: both in short pants at that time.

Russell: Yeah.

Hightower: I was going on ten years old, around ten. And after we grew up, we stayed in New Orleans. And he started to playin' music first. Well, when I got into music business.

Russell: What was your first instrument, did you start on cornet?

Hightower: Well, no, I didn't, I started on the cornet, but I put it down, I started to playin' bass--that was a one string bass. I had one bass made out of a soap box. We have a original guitar and a original madolin, Rob Smith was the guitar player's name, and the mandolin player I forget his name, but ah I made me ah ah bass out of one string, out of a cat gut--one string. It went so good, until I changed from the soap box and got a bass with one string on it. And we played that for awhile, well that didn't last long because in those days back in the early days, it was the greatest thing in the world for a musician to go around to his friend's houses and serenade them at night and get something to drink or something to eat.

Russell: Yes, I heard that.

WH: And so, we'd wait until ever'body got sleep at night, and then we'd sneak up under their window, and we had a waltz. The waltz was "Merry Widow", wasn't it. [Now Hightower hums "Over the Waves"] and we'd play that, and when they'd all see us, and they'd let us in, and they'd get up and put on their clothes, and they'd give us something to eat and give us something to drink, and we'd go on to somebody else's house until maybe some policeman like around my neighborhood we had an Irish officer by the name of Pat Kennedy and he'd just get mad with us, and naturally he would run us in and tell us to go on off the street with that fuss, and we'd run from him and go on and get out, but that's how I started.

Russell: What part of town did you ah

WH: That was 6th and Rampart around 6th, where I stayed at the most of my time. And after then I grew up and after I got up in age, I ah was seventeen years old and I went in business. I opened the New Orleans Ice Cream Parlor at 6th and Rampart across from Bazile's Saloon.

Russell: uh-huh

Hightower: See. And I was on Rampart Street, two-story building and Bazile was right on

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WH: the corner. Well, after I stayed there a little while, I made such a good business there, until Roy Palmer got in connection with me. And I told him, I say, well I don't know about playing music but I had a piano in the place, and I had met [Richard M.] "My Knee" Jones used to come there at night and play and I used to give him a dollar--something like that to play, see. Well, after that got to goin' so good, then I bought a saloon from Smith at 4th and Rampart. He went to Los Angeles and sold the saloon to me.

William H. Smith  
2633 Rampart  
1910-1911

Russell: Yeah

WH: I even had a saloon and couldn't go in it, I was too young, Police wouldn't let me. I had five servants in that place at seventeen years old and run the New Orleans

Russell: You owned that one.

WH: That's right. Ice Cream Company. New Orleans Ice Cream Parlor we called it.

Russell: uh-huh.

WH: Then, at that time, I got so popular I got me a horse and buggy. Well, in those days, I that was around 1910 I was popular, I got a horse and buggy and ah every--had my hoss' tied out in front of the place and ah bought a saloon and even couldn't go into the saloon and had at that time, had a "Chinee" [Chinese] Cook.

Russell: uh-huh

WH: Well, that went on all right, then I sold the saloon. I was asked to sell the saloon, well I sold it to a feller I don't know whether I got any money out of it or not, and then I had a feller by the name of Bab Frank that played piccolo in New Orleans.

Russell: Yeah--piccolo---I've heard of him.

WH: He was sellin' crabs up and down the street at night with a white coat on and a basket.

Russell: uh-huh

WH: And he asked me, he say, you a business man, he say, I wanta' talk to you. He said, 'bout "how would you like to open up a business with me," and I says, "what sorta' a business", he says "a lawn ground." "Oh", I says, "that would be alright." And he was playin' with Excelsior band [orchestra ?] from down town, he played piccolo, and sell crabs in the daytime, you see? And so, I opened up a business, we opened up a lawn ground at 6th and Rampart was called the 6th and Rampart Lawn Ground right in back of Plummer's Horseshoe Shop. Had a horseshoe, shoe horses in the front and in the back of his place was a lawn ground. I went to work and put in

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WH: a platform there built a bandstand, and my first band that I hired in there was Freddy Keppard.

Russell: Oh, yeah

WH: He got Freddy Keppard

Russell: Was that the Olympia, or what did they name it?

WH: That was, yeah, I think that was the Olympia Band, Frank was leading the band. But Freddy Keppard was the main man, and they supposed to have a guitar player in the band was the greatest that we ever was in New Orleans. And ah, I forget his name now, he was a dark brown skin, all them boys lived down in the French part town, see. And ah,

Russell: It couldn't be Bud Scott, was it?

Hightower: No, it wasn't Bud Scott, no, Bud Scott, no, it wasn't Bud Scott wasn't join---it was this older man than Bud Scott.

Russell: Oh, older man

Hightower: Yeah, he was an old fellow, very sensible fellow, great man.

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: Can't think of his name.

Russell: It wasn't Brock

Hightower: No, huh?

Russell: Brock, Brock Munkford. He played with Bolden and Frankie Duson, I don't know those guitar players.

Hightower: Well, I don't know this guitar player either, because he was a very sensible feller, he didn't drink and he didn't smoke, see, and he tried to carry the band on straight. Well, I kept that place goin' for two summers. [? Giggly Williams?]

Russell: uh-huh

Hightower: And after then, I started to playin' music---Roy Palmer brought me a horn, and the first thing that I did, Roy brought the horn by there about eight o'clock that night and it was brass and the greatest thing that I wanted to see that horn shine. So, I just waited until the next day and bought me some of my brass polish for my horsees on them that I used, my mules

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: On the polish. And I polished that---come home and polished that horn up, and run

WH: some water through it, and fooled around with it a little while, after awhile I commenced to gettin' my--suscessible to it, see.

Russell: Did you have any lessons when you started? Had your father or mother or anyone played any---

WH: My father was a musician and my mother was a musician, she played harp and my father played E flat cornet, in a brass band. He was a barber, he was everything, he was ah a barber and he was a sport man. He run dog fights and cock fights in Tennessee, in Nashville, see, and he had a barber shop on Church & Hill in Tennessee

Russell: uh-huh

Hightower: with eleven Negro barber and hissself white, I mean hissself made the twelve.

Russell: He was a barber

Hightower: Yeah, nothing but white trade. He stayed there, I forget how many years. Now that it was. But at the same time, we'll get back

Russell: Well, one more question, where did your mother play harp, did she play in---

Hightower: No, she didn't bring a harp away from, no she didn't, cause it was

Russell: Can you remember the earliest music you ever heard, was it that of your parents playing or--

Hightower: Did I hear

Russell: Or was that the first music.

WH: Oh, yes. Yeah I---

Russell: Did you hear any music in the churches when you were young?

WH: Well, at that age I didn't go to church that much, see, I go

Russell: Which church did you go to?

WH: I don't remember that, I can't remember that

Russell: Were you Catholic or Protestant?

WH: We were Protestants.

Russell: Protestants.

WH: Well, we gona use Protestant same as Methodist.

Russell: Yes. Methodist is what I

WH: Yes, that's right. And ah, I didn't hear my father play. But I had pictures up until the

WH: time I left New Orleans, and I lost all of, most of that stuff, see, thought I was going back to New Orleans and never got back. But my mother played a harp and she didn't bring her harp to New Orleans, out there in New Orleans, after she got in New Orleans she got a piano, and she played the piano a lot. And after things, my grandmother died then she got ah a guitar, and she played the guitar. Well, all three of the instruments were practically the same, see.

Russell: Yes

WH: But my father was an E flat trumpet player in a Brass Band, see. And I have his uniforms, I think I got a picture now somewheres with him with his uniform on see.

Russell: Can you tell the first job you played then in music?

WH: In the music?

Russell: Yes, was that with Roy or

Hightower: Yeah, Roy brought me a horn, I shined the horn up cleaned the horn about an hour after I cleaned the horn and was sittin' down in the back there wasn't much doin' that night and "My Knee" [Richard M. Jones] wasn't there, I didn't use him until late at night anyway, Roy come in. And I said, "Yeah man, I'm foolin' with this thing, I'm gona' play it." And he was showed me then how to blow and how to play on the instrument see. But seems like I had so much ambition I didn't want even Roy to show me, I liked the trumpet because my father played a trumpet.

Russell: Yes, yes.

Hightower: But this instrument that I played wasn't a trumpet. It was a C. G. ah York

Russell: York, a little short

Hightower: Cornet.

Russell: A little short cornet about

Hightower: Had about a six and a-half or seven inch bell on it, big as a trombone now,

Russell: great a big bell on it, and a little short

Hightower: Yeah, a big bell, see, that's what I had. Well, I just thought it was the greatest thing in the world.

Russell: Yeah, they were wonderful.

Hightower: And ah Roy talked to me awhile, he sat down and he had some ice cream, and went on out about his business. I fooled around, kept on foolin' with that ever evenin' as I come in,

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WH: about I guess it was about three weeks after I had this horn Roy come by there and said we gonna form a band together. Say, I'm gonna teach you know to play and if I don't teach you how to play he say with your backing, we can get somewhere else.

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: See, you got the business and he says to me, use the idea of your business for the music business.

Russell: Yeah headquarter or--

Hightower: Well, that went on that way. Now I stayed--I can't think of the number of the place but it was on Rampart near Washington. You see that's 6th, that's 5th street, ther's 4th, then it's Washington, then it's Sixth Street.

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: Goin' uptown, see. And ah this man had been passing there every night and he looked like a white man, but I never paid much attention to him and naturally I guess he heard me back in there playing at night, and this man was Dave Perkins

Russell: Oh, yeah, yeah

Hightower: --the first trombone player in the French Opera House, is-am I right, Naw Tulane Theatre

Russell: He played with the white musicians too, I know

Hightower: He didn't play with nothin' else but the white, see. But he was livin' 6th and Baronne.

Russell: Oh, really, up in there, yeah.

Hightower: See, he was livin' 6th and Baronne, so one night he heard me in there, and he come on in.

Russell: uh-huh

Hightower: And ah the person that I had in the store asked him what did he want anything. He said naw, I want to see the man that's--the person that 's blowing that horn. And he is a very swell fellow, see, very swell, and ah he spoke to me and tole me who he was. He says, "Are you takin' music lessons", I says "No, sir, I don't want no music lessons," I said, "all I want to do is play like Freddy Keppard and Joe Oliver."

Russell: (laughs)

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WH: See, and he laughed, he said, now, he says, "Now Joe Oliver is alright, Freddy Keppard is alright, he said, but you wants learn music. Well, I said, "I'll learn alright." He said, "You'd better watch yourself". And he couldn't talk, and he went on down the street. Well, every evening he passed by there going home ah not late at night, but it would be the early part of night, I'd see him maybe three and four times a week. So, Roy knew music, but Roy never coax me with the music end of it, Roy to teach me how to play; he'd bring his trombone down there, see, and he'd tell me to follow him. Now the music he figured I could pick up that when I got ready, but I liked music, I liked the idea of music so after about a week's practice me and Roy had, Freddy Keppard give Roy a job, back Tulane avenue somewheres. Somewheres around Tulane and Laparona, somewheres back in there, ses, and 'twas a concert and a dance afterwards.

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: And ah at them times as I learnt in later years that dance bands hadn't been out very long. You see that was around 1909 or 1910. Well, they hadn't been out very long. And ah Roy got the band together, we got a man by the name of Pep Wallace <sup>(see Love)</sup> on bass, Roy Palmer on trombone, myself on cornet and didn't even have a case for it, I wrapped it up in newspaper and carried it on the job that night, and I couldn't blow it, I didn't take no chance of blowing it because I guess I have more of a idea of clowning, and something the people hadn't never seen. And I always did believe in playing like you see Lionel Hampton and them do now, say something when they (murmurs) just like <sup>["Baby"]</sup> Dodds uses now, Dodds sits behind drums and say like that all night long, see. Couldn't tell what he was doing. Well them was my idea.

Russell: Is that the drummer?

Hightower: "Baby" Dodds, yeah.

Russell: Oh, "Baby" Dodds.

Hightower: Yeah

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: I got "Baby" Dodds on drums, Peps Wallace on bass, Rob Smith on guitar, Roy Palmer on trombone, myself on cornet, didn't use no piano.



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Russell: Yeah

Hightower: Seven pieces [6?]. And ah Sidney Bechet on clarinet. Well we got him a pair of long pants, see, because we decided, all old musicians that was in long pants went into play, we'd get long pants for the youngsters. So many of the youngsters, I had to get long pants for "Baby" Dodds, I had to carry his drums, see, because he was very small, and ah whenever we went anywheres on a job, I had to carry his drums, because his drum was about that high, you know how high the brass band drums with the ropes on it, put them on and pull them.  
(Russell's talking here not understandable)

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: Well, that was his first drum. And to eliminate the load, we didn't use no snare drum. We used a banjo head, broke the head off the banjo and tied it in a chair

Russell: uh-huh

Hightower: And "Baby" Dodds played on that. That's what he played on. And the pedal was a floor pedal, the Ludwig--the Leedy's wasn't out

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: The Leedy's I think was the overhead pedal was the last pedal was out. And with the drums up

Russell: Yeah, I

Hightower: Did you see the

Russell: I've heard of them, I

Hightower: Did you see the Ludwig pedals was on the flo'

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: Well, the Ludwig pedals only come up just to the beater.

Russell: Yap, yep. About to there

Hightower: And the cymbal 'tached on the bass drum, you don't see, you don't see things like that now

Russell: Yeah, you don't see

Hightower: Well, we had cymbal [at] tached on the bass drum.

Russell: Yeah. I remember that

Hightower: Well, that's what we had. That's what I hated to carry, was that cymbal.

Russell: Yeah

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WH: And that flo' pedal, I think was a Ludwig, Leedy had, you see Ludwig, Leedy come ahead of Ludwig in later years when they come up with that overhead pedal

Russell: Yeah

WH: You---down here they'd have a piece of wood. And it'd come from a spring from the top. And the cymbals set on the top of your drum, you understand, huh

Russell: ✓ I've seen pictures of them anyway.

WH: Yeah, we went out there that night and played that concert. They had ah a girl playing the acts, and then it got so good until all the boys in the band and Roy, we went and set in with this girl was playin' this concert, and the people just admired the band. After then there was nothin' I could do. I couldn't play, so I just held the horn in my hand and walked on the music stand in front of the band and clapped my hands, the rest of the bands played. Now that was Freddy Keppard's job. That was a man-they had been used to Freddy Keppard's band. So from the strength of that job, we got three more jobs, two or three more jobs, that we practically made good on. And then about--well it took me about somewhere along about six weeks and I practically got in the band, and played on, don't forget whatever I couldn't play long, after I-ruined my lip. You can't see it now, because I been off it, but I started in the center of my mouth.

Russell: Yeah

WH: And foolin' with Joe Oliver it went to the side, because the first big job that I played I played the Police Ball downtown, and all those policemen knew me, they knew Joe Oliver, and they'd kid Joe Oliver on one stand, and they'd kid me on the other. And I had a couple of crips, I knew about when I played that Police Ball I knew about five numbers that I could play, "Panama" was one, and "Harmony Rag" was two, and ah one was a soldier song we played, I can't think of it now. But we had crips that we played, and no matter what the band played that I couldn't play I'd let the band play and then when I could play

Russell: What did you call that-crip, crips.

WH: We called them crips, yeah.

Russell: What do you mean, I never heard that before.

WH: That's ah numbers that we knew

Russell: uh-huh

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WH: by head. All numbers, musicianers used to play in those days they, all bands had a crip, and no matter where he went to play, he'd never play that crip until they jammed him. Just like ah, we'll say "Panama".

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: (scats out intro:) well, that was our crip, see. That number won me five hundred dollars, between me and Joe Oliver.

Russell: Oh, you won the contest, huh.

WH: Oh, yeah, yeah, it was Mr. Groshell (sp.), he was determined, because I'm working at one corner and he's at Pete Lala's at the next corner.

Russell: Yeah

WH: See. And Joe they'd all you know pet and kid one another at night.

Russell: Yeah!

WH: And if he'd see my boss out there, he'd tell him say "You'd better get a band in there, he'd say turn that feller out there, say he cockeyed, he can't see, he can't play, he can't blow, nothin' in him, you know. Talk about Kid' one another,

Russell: Sure.

WH: Now he's got one eye hisself, he's cockeyed hisself, see. But yet and still he was just a feller like to play the dozens [an insulting game], you know, see.

Russell: Yeah

WH: Talk about you.

Russell: Cause I've heard that he used to kid everybody alot.

WH: Yes, kid everybody, put everybody he met, in the dozens.

Russell: uh-huh.

WH: See

Russell: Yeah

WH: Well, we went on with those numbers like crip numbers that I played, until the band got so good, until Roy got to a place where he spent a little of time with me. He'd come down in the evening, and show me, how to play different numbers, and bring in two or three numbers.

Russell: You learned to read those alright then, you learned to read.

WH: Beg your pardon.

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Russell: You learned to read music then.

WH: Not then, right away, no, I'm trying to learn, see.

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: But seems like I couldn't make it, under Roy. And at the time everything was crowding me and ah seemed like I was gettin' famous and couldn't play. See, I can't play nothin'. But, at the same time, I kept on with that band, ah, I had ah most of my band, there wasn't hardly anyone in the band read anything but Roy. Roy was the musicianer from the beginning.

Russell: uh-huh

Hightower: But as he sat in the band and played, he'd never criticize us because he didn't want to read no music or do nothin, I don't know where he learned his music at, or how he knew so much, but he come run around the band, and he set out and he wouldn't try to teach us how to play too much, he'd take his trombone, and everything somebody did something and he thought it was good, he'd say, that's wonderful, that's great, that's it, and he'd, that's how we got by, well Roy got the most of the jobs, and time by time after I played about----oh, I guess oh, I don't know how long, I guess about six dances I played, I'll tell you, what got the most of the white people. The most of the white people in New Orleans they had never seen Negroes dress up in white, so I went to work and for my job, I bought all the boys white duck pants.

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: Band caps, brass band caps,

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: brass band coats, white duck pants.

Russell: What color were the coats?

Hightower: Blue. You know like brass bands.

Russell: Yeah, sure.

WH: And white shoes. Well, the shoes didn't cost but about 75¢ or a dollar in those days, see.

Russell: Yeah

WH: the white shoes, canvas shoes, see. And the first job that we went on was in Aubudon Park. And when we went up there, they had the servant to come to the door and tell us say, "Oh, my God, go to the back, don't come in the front, go around the back", and they have us to come in

WH: the back, she say, "Oooh, you liked to crabbed everything", say, the madam say she don't like so and so. She don't like colored people to come to the front door, say you should know better than that, and we explained to her that we didn't know, and to help the job, to git was we got one man that went up there and we did think nothin' of it, he didn't have a coat on, he had the white pants on

Russell: Yeah

WH: But, then she got her husband's coat.

Russell: uh-huh.

WH: And put on him afterwards.

Russell: uh-huh

WH: Now, they give us credit for that job. I don't know how we got away with it, or nothin' like that, but we just commenced to playin' music. Just got so, until the band to my idea, didn't keep up with me. Well, why? Because I come right back and went to Mr. Perkins. He charged me 50¢ a lesson--I went over to his house, and he taught me the routine of the music, and I commenced to learnin' how to go down and see Mr. Eckert (sp) at Orunewald's Music Store, I thought it was the greatest thing in the world to go down there and buy a orchestration 15¢.

Russell: 15¢

WH: 15¢. And I'd buy an orchestration. Get Mr. Eckert to tell me, he was the sales man, a clerk in the place, and I'd come back and Mr. Perkins got so that after I stayed with him a little while that didn't do me no good. I quit him. Luck would come on, I don't know how it was, but I got to bumming in the district one night and got in contact with Zue [Robertson] and Zue told me that he wanted me to come over to the Cassino. I went over---

Russell: Zue Robertson?

WH: Zue Robertson.

Russell: Robertson, trombonist.

WH: He lived up in my neighborhood, see. But I had never paid much attention to him, then as I did after he found out that I could play. He say that he heard that I had been playing music. So, I followed him the next night there I went down there and went over to the Cassino. And they had a trumpet player in the band that had been in the band, I think somewheres along about two years with Armond J. Pirons

Retyped.

Russell: uh-huh

WH: His name was Arnold Metoyer.

Russell: Oh, I've heard of him.

WH: He was part Spanish, I don't know what Arnold was, he spoke about ten different languages. You know that, didn't you? He was--and he played with Ringling Brothers Band.

Russell: Yeah.

WH: Big band.

Russell: Looks a little bit like, his pictures look like Peter Bocage almost.

WH: huh?

Russell: Some pictures I have seen of him he looked a little bit like Peter Bocage.

WH: Yeah, well, he wouldn't know, you wouldn't know, you wouldn't know whether he was white or what he was, see. But at those at just around that time he was turning, he was turning to that wine--that drinking. See.

Russell: Oh, uh-huh.

WH: One of the greatest trumpet players that ever was, he played with No. 1 Ringling Brothers Band, the white band.

Russell: uh-huh,

WH: He set in his band. And ah Zue carried me there, oh he says a trumpet player, so and so's the case, and he pats me on the shoulder and he says, come on sit down, here is my horn. That just give him a chance to go walk around then, get his bucket together, see. So all musicianers that didn't hold up had a bucket you know. And they drink that claret wine, Take a dime, well that's where Arnold was goin' down at. See, that was during that time, see.

Russell: Yeah

WH: But at the same time, he was one of the greatest I've ever seen, because, he could take his horn, and hang it up by the valves and hang that horn straight, test it for time after time, and he could put his lips up to that horn.

Ruasell: Somebody else could do that, too.

WH: And let you take a piece of thread and pass through that horn, and you'd never hear the blemish of that tone. So, I played down there one night in his place, practically all night,

Russell: uh-huh.

Retyped.

WH: So, after then it looked like he got set on me. Mr. Groshell told Pirons that it would be better to put me in the band because half the time they couldn't never see Arnold, they didn't know where he was at. And he had a wife, and I think four children, four

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Retyped.

Russell: Okay, it's going again.

WH: He-he went along in the district for a little while afterwards, he didn't play many more places, just he just played around, he'd just come in a place and never lost friendships with me. And an idea come to my head that I wanted to take lessons from him. So, I went down to his house and ~~he~~ taken lessons. And I found out that I got more out of Arnold Metoyer than I did out of the rest of the people that had showed me anything in the music business. So I learnt, I rapided so fast in playing in in the Cabaret at night and all those white shows come in there we used them shows in there. All the acts and things from the Crescent Theatre and all them places, used to come.

Russell: Was it a regular Cabaret, or what was it like?

WH: Yeah, it was a Cabaret, but we at those times, they use floor shows and choruses.

Russell: What corner is that on?

WH: That was on the downtown, back of town, by the corner downtown, downtown side

Russell: On Iberville or Customhouse

Hightower: Customhouse, on Customhouse.

Russell: Well, what other street, Marais, or?

WH: Well, it was, you know where John Lala was, John Lala was

[135 N. Franklin - 1913 SOARDS]

Russell: Franklin Street

WH: Franklin Street--naw that was two blocks from the station.

Russell: Yeah

WH: You know where the new station was they built

Russell: Yeah, yeah

WH: Well, course they tell me that's not there now.

Russell: No, it all torn down.

WH: No. no. a feller was telling me the other day everything was up by Lee Circle

Russell: Yeah, yeah, Union Station.

WH: Union Station. All trains come in there.

Russell: Yeah.

WH: Well this was the cat was the--when you come off Canal Street and walk one block downtown.



Retyped.

Russell: Yeah

WH: Then you could look toward the lake and see his sign.

Russell: About two blocks from that side.

WH: Yeah, from that side, see. That's where that was. And

Russell: Was that a Cabaret for white or colored?

WH: All whites, strictly whites.

Russell: Well, what was the name again, Grosall?

Hightower: Grochelle's Cassino. Grochelle

Russell: Grochelle. Eddie Grochelle's Cassino.

[Edward Grosshell (Nagel & Grosshell) residence 1461 Iberville, 117 N. Franklin, - 1913 Soards]

WH: Eddie Grochelle Cassino. You can put that down if you wanna. He had his partner was Del Peter. *Peter*

Russell: uh-huh

WH: And his manager was a German Jew, Mr. Huntz. [Arms Nagel]

Russell: uh-huh

WH: Huntz was his name. And everything was run through transportation of the Theatres and all the sporting people that came in town in shows like. Every show like that would come to the Crescent Theatre or Tulane, I don't care who it was, these two theatres sat right together, Crescent and Tulane, and the [French] Opera House, I don't care what kind of a show it was, we'd go get those people at night and bring them there, and have parties for them. And all the acts that we used in the place was white. Well we got so, in a little while after I was there, that we played practically all the white acts. Don't care what sort of music they brought in there, if I thought I couldn't play it, if there was a man that thought he couldn't play--we had an eight piece band--if we thought we couldn't play it, we'd lay down low, or play low where they couldn't get by with it. In the band, it seemed like had "Baby" Dodds, Roy Palmer, and all those, that's where a little bad feelings come in at, because I left that band and went into an organized band, well the boys wanted me to help them. Well, I couldn't take "Baby" Dodds, and them because this Armond J. Piron had a band before I went there, see.

Russell: uh-huh

WH: And naturally, they put me in the band and commenced to giving me charge right away, and teaching me and everything about the band. That band--that was my second band. That band

Retyped.

WH: consist of eight pieces. There was Armand J. Piron on violin, George P. Anderson on piano, Archie Walls on bass, Wade Whaley on clarinet

Russell: Yeah, I knew him in California.

WH: Willie Hightower on trumpet, Alvin "Zue" Robertson on trombone. Wade left that band and went to Oakland, California.

Russell: uh-huh. Play with Ory and Mutt Carey and some of them

WH: Yeah, that's right. He played with Ory, and Mutt Carey then. But he didn't depend on music too much, because he was a decorator.

Russell: Yeah

WH: He decorated--but he was a very independent little feller, he bought a home there, see, in New Orleans uptown up by the Protection Levee, see, and ah that band I stayed with that band two years, and seven months. Armond J. Piron's band until Piron got a job at the St. Charles Hotel. And he took ah four pieces or five pieces over there, and turned this band over to me.

Russell: uh-huh

WH: But he didn't take no men out of this band--he used all string.

Russell: oh!

WH: in the St. Charles Hotel. I forget now whether it's the Gold Room or something.

Russell: Yeah

WH: Gold Room I think it was that he played in. Well, I kept that band for two years and seven months. And what upset the thing was somebody come into New Orleans for performers, scouting around, and they heard of me, and they wanted to hear me play. And that man was his name was Alexander Toliver. He was with the Smart Set. Mr. Parks, what was Park's name?

Mrs. Hightower: hum-----

Hightower: Can't think of ole' man Park's initials, but anyhow it was afterwards---C. W. Parks,

Mrs. Hightower: Yeah, yeah,

WH: C. W. Parks. Then we got together and I signed a contract to take a band, on this show. With the backin' of Arnold Metoyer. See, I told you I had been takin' from him,

Russell: Yeah

WH: And I agreed to take the show out if Arnold would go on the show because I couldn't handle it because the show was to have a hundred people on it.

Retyped.

Russell: Oh, a big show.

WH: And ah he promised me up until the last minute we started rehearsal. Now we rehearsed in the Lapeyrouse Arena that was downtown, that was where

Russell: I don't know that street.

WH: That was where Harry Wills and all of them fought at down there, prizefighters

Russell: oh, yeah.

WH: That was a great big place. The show in there. And the first day I went to Arnold's house to get him to come, he wouldn't show up.

RUSSELL: Oh, that's too bad.

WH: So, after I'd done signed the contract, they wouldn't stand for me to back down. They told me if I had never played a show that they would show me everything and help me out and everything so I just stayed and scuffled along with it.

Russell: uh-huh .

WH: And as I went along, in rehearsal, they sent off and helped me out with musicians. The first musician they got in my band, now I've got Alvin "Zue" Robertson from New Orleans, Eddie Robinson--call him "Rabbiy" on drums,

Russell: Oh-yes.

WH: You heard of him, huh.

Russell: I've heard of him, yeah.

WH: Yeah, well he was a good one. He come he's the one that Robichaux's drummer taught how to play drums, Robichaux. Walter Brundy.

Russell: on, that's

WH: that was Robichaux's drummer.

Russell: Oh, Robichaux, yeah.

WH: Then he taught Eddie Robinson how to play drums. "Zue", Eddie Robinson, myself, John Porter,--you've heard of him he's from New Orleans--born in New Orleans, bass; and Dave, Dave Jones was the melophone player.

Russell: Oh yes.

WH: Dave Jones melophone

Russell: On the boat for a while.

WH: That's right. One of the sweetest melophone players you ever want to hear. Well I brought away a brass band and all the men that I couldn't get to build a band like reed men I could get a got plenty of reed man in New Orleans, like Bechet and all of them, but I got to the place then where I carried my music with me, see. Well, I kinda put on airs a little bit with them fellas.

Russell: Yeah

WH: You know, well, we sent off the first man we got was Fred Quelee (?sp) a clarinet player. He had only been in the United States of America eight years when I hired him. He come from somewhere in South America and had never player around, you couldn't understand nothing he said, and after we got him, then we was lucky about two weeks after- to get King Phillips. He was the clarinet player.

Russell: Clarinet player

WH: You've heard about him.

Russell: No, I don't think so.

WH: He was from North Carolina, or somewhere. King Phillips.

WR: uh-huh

WH: Well, the two of them was just as great as you ever want to hear. I kept on until I formed that band to eighteen pieces. And then we hit the road. And I stayed on the road from 19-- the end of 1915 until-what year did we come here? Cause we were arguing about that tonight how old my oldest boy was.

Mrs. Hightower:

WH: But I don't think it was '21 when we come out, Willie wasn't born in '21.

Mrs. Hightower: He was born in '22.

WH: '22, naw. Well we'll let it that way. We come in to Chicago about that time.

Russell: About '21 or '22!

WH: Yeah, we came here to Chicago about then.

Russell: When your oldest boy was born.

WH: Yeah, when my oldest boy was born, see. Then I'd done had just about as much soaking as I wanted in that line of business. When I came here in Chicago I had offers from Charlie Cook, he had a band at Paddy Harmon's Dreamland, here on this west side. I had a offer from Dave

Retyped.

WH: Peyton, had the band in the Grand Theatre. I had offers from two, three bands. What was the drummer's name that had the band at

Mrs. Hightower: Ben Shukes.

Russell: Bertrand Mrs. H. Shukes

Hightower: Naw, at the Entertainers.

Mrs. W.H.: Oh.

Hightower: Naw, they died. Can't think of his.

Mrs. W.H.: Wycliff.

Hightower: HUH?

Mrs. W.H.: Wycliff.

Hightower: Yeah, that's it. Yeah I had all

Russell: What's his name again? The drummer?

WH: Yeah. What was his name?

Mrs. W.H.: John Wycliff

Hightower: Wycliff.

Russell: Oh, Wycliff, oh yes, John Wycliff, that's right. I've heard of him, yeah.

Hightower: Yeah, okay. He was a great-----

Russell: Oh, he's a drummer, I didn't know he played drums. I thought maybe

Hightower: Yes, yes, he's the first man to have a set of gold drums.

Russell: He, oh really

Hightower: People used to go over there at night just to see those gold and pearl drums that he had. See, he built the reputation--while I played in Chicago and around and

Russell: There's one thing, excuse me for interrupting again, but since your talking about your wife coming up here with you and all, when were you married and

Hightower: Well, I was with Toliver's Smart Sets

Russell: uh-huh.

Hightower: When I met her.

Russell: uh-huh.

Hightower: She had the band on the No. 1 show and this show that I was with was no. 2

Russell: uh-huh. Where does your wife come from?

Retyped.

Hightower: Charleston, South Carolina

Russell: Charleston, South Carolina.

WH: She was born in Charleston, South Carolina. And she's been playin' piano since she was, what was you--twelve years old?

Mrs. W.H.: Yes

WH: She took lessons from her teacher in Charleston, South Carolina when she started twelve. And she kept that up until I don't know when your mother, your father decided to send you to Boston, but she went to Boston Conservatory and she's got a sheepskin of her music.

Russell: uh-huh. I knew that. I had always heard that Mrs. Hightower was a wonderful pianist.

WH: Yes, oh yes. And she played at the Dixieland Theatre in Charleston, South Carolina, see, her father was a railroad man, I don't think he played any music, but he sang.

WR: uh-huh.

WH: And ah she kept up that music and got professional and ah it was a great thing for me to ah for people tell me on the show about her band and for her to write to them and tell her about our band on the show. Well, it got to the place where her friend, one of her friends, got my picture and sent to her.

WR: uh-huh.

WH: I had never seen her picture. And then she wanted to meet me, and meet her, so finally we the two shows met in Charleston, South Carolina, and that's where I had a chance to meet her. And 'twae just like you see it, for forty some odd years from the first day I met her she has never been away from me.

Russell: Well, that's wonderful, and you can both work together then.

WH: Yes, well, that's what they claims hurt me in the music business. They say after I--I'd been better off if I had never married my wife. But I don't know--it was just one of these things that when I started out in the music business I couldn't see a woman piano player. And I swore to everyone that a woman couldn't play music.

Russell: Yeah, lotta people used to think that.

WH: Yeah. I didn't want no woman to have nothin' to do with no music. And I practically sewed up left my horn at home, until we come over to rehearsal, when we come over to rehearsal she came in. So, I opened the briefcase and handed her the opening chorus. And the opening

Retyped.

WH: chorus was named "Boy and Girl".

Mrs. W.H.: Excuse me, Willie.

WH: Yeah. And when I come to find out she's the one made the manuscript.

WR: Oh, yes, that's pretty good. (laughs)

WH: And I asked her if she could play it. And when she sat down at the piano and I put the music up on the piano for her, and I say, hit the introduction of that, she hit the introduction and turned the head off. (W.R. laughs) play see.

And my boy friend of mine, that knew her before he knew me, he's the one that bought the ring you see on her hand, and the marriage license. And we got married, in two three months afterwards.

Russell: After you meet her, huh?

WH: After I meet her. Three months afterwards. And ah we've been goin' ever since. Now when we got here in Chicago I had decided to stay here in Chicago about nine weeks, and then I thought I would go to New York and stay about nine weeks, because her father wanted me to open business--I wanted to go in business I wanted to taken up arranging and I wanted to arrange, I thought I could arrange and I was goin' back to Charleston, South Carolina to open up business, but after I got here, after all the offers that I got, well "Baby" Hall, he's another drummer, probably you knew him

WR: Yes, I did, I knew him.

WH: You knew him.

WR: He played with Natty Dominique.

WH: He had a brother by the name of

WR: Minor Hall, I know him, too.

WH: You know him, too. He lives in Los Angeles.

WR: He's with Kid Ory now.

WH: Kid Ory, he was with Kid Ory and them

WR: Yeah, I knew both of them.

WH: Yeah, well "Baby" was workin' with me at the Entertainers, well he got me the job over there, see, with Carroll Dickerson. See. Well, I didn't care for it very much, so I just quit that altogether and just com---I wanted to build me my band, myself. So, I just went to work

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Retyped.

WH: and bought a car and went out on all sides and went around places advertising the band, finally we got out of my work of it, we got six years and a-half work, of the band on the Gold Coast, and over Chicago.

WR: uh-huh.

Hightower: With the band under her name, it wasn't under my name. After I

Russell: Lottie Hightower

WH: And her Nightha--- Eudora Nighthawks. Eudora came from a dancing class, it was at 40th and State. That was the Mason Hall. And the man that run, used to run dancing classes here in Chicago every night in the week there was a dancing class somewhere. Well, he had shows, he put on shows, and he would get jobs like at the Congress Hotel, Edgewater Beach Hotel and all those places he'd take forty-five and fifty people, he was like Jones's with the choir around here you know. Take a big bunch.

Russell: Oh, yeah.

Hightower: Yeah, and then he built the band right along with it. And they helped both him and what we did, we named the band Lottie Hightower and her Eudora Nighthawks Band. Coincidence that happened after we had been having that name going Joe Sanders and Del Carlton Coon came in here with the Nighthawks.

Russell: Oh, sure,

WH: Yeah, they come from St. Louis, and he says that he had had the name for a long time, well we didn't squabble over it at all, we met out here at 35th and State St. one night and went in a restraunt and sat down and talked. Well, Joe Sanders was kinda a hard feller to talk to, but Del Coon was alright. Del Coon was a drummer, see. Well, he was a pretty good feller, Joe Sanders was a piano player.

Russell: Yeah

WH: So, ah

Russell: We used to hear him on the radio.

WH: Yeah, so we got the greatest band you wanta hear, that was a really a good band, they were really great. And ah we got along pretty good, but the most of those fellers as we would get back to my self about recording and numbers recording I'm somethin' like Freddie Keppard was if you ever heard about it,



Retyped.

Russell: I've heard about it.

WH: You've heard. He wouldn't play or nothin' if there was anybody around gonna catch anything, he'd lay the horn down and he'd say, go on about your business, you ain't gonna steal nothin' from me. See.

Russell: Yeah

WH: Well, that's the way I was. Anywheres that we'd go at night, somebody would say so and so and they'd ask her, they'd ask my wife tell your husband to play so and so, and I say there ain't gonna be no playing, I lay the horn down. See. Until they're gone, when they're gone, well then I play. Well, that's the way Freddie Keppard was. I doubt whether Freddie Keppard made over one number and that number was can't think of it right now, but he wrote, he published. he let 'em publish that number with Charlie Cook's band in Paddy Harmon's Dreamers it's one number, the other side, they had to put another number on it even, he just had one number.

Russell: Oh, yeah, one was called "Messin Around ",

Mrs. W.H.: "Scissor's Grinder".

WH: Huh?

Mrs. W.H.: "Scissor's Grinder".

Russell: Scissor's Grinder"

Mrs. W.H.: Yes.

Russell: Sure, yes, I have that.

Hightower: Yea, what is that.

Russell: "Scissor's Grindar", you know

[6M 5374: Scissor Grinder Joe, Cook's Dreamland Orch]

Hightower: "Scissor's ----- that was it, that's it, that was it.

Russell: Yeah, I remember that.

WH: And he got a little more genial because they told him he would have to get out of it, but he died before he ever played any more, and they wouldn't change his style for nothing. Well, I knew back in all the times that I was coming along, that the time was changing. Well up until 1918, up until oh 1918 they haven't never a change yet, see because still the white musicianers was still criticizing the Negroe musicians for playing music because they said that it would never last nowhere. That puttin', they say, a beer bucket over a trumpet or somethin' like that will never work. And every time they'd see me and I'd reach down and come in the place

Retyped.

WH: AND I'd take my beer bucket or something and put over that and commence bom-bom-bom like that and makin' the horn talk like me and Freddie used to play because a that's what we feel like doing, like whatever your name was. If we knew you, I could call your name on that mouth-piece just the same as I could out without saying anything, see, we talked on horns.

Russell: That's what I've heard.

WH: That's right. We played "Chicken Reel" and numbers like that why we'd play (hums out melody) and you'd hear me say (produces sounds like a laying hen) <sup>then</sup> he say (produces more sounds like a laying hen) then afterwhile I'd say (produces sounds like flapping of chicken's wings), then (more chicken crowing) people just dancing on. And all those kind of things. Well those was things that we had an idea that they had to catch off us to beat us playing. But as I come along, I told the most of the boys, regardless of what you know, the freak, that you can plan on an instrument, learn how to read music. That's the greatest thing. And I'm so glad that I did succeed, even I met my wife, and the teacher's that I went with--went to taught me how to read. And it helped me so, that men like down in Chicago theatre those men down like that, when I went off, I didn't know how much my music meant to me, until I left here and went on the Orpheum Circuit and met them different white bands, playin' on the stand. We left here with fourteen pieces and without a word of doubt I wouldn't tell you a story, every where we'd go, we'd open them first shows and then white band would sit down there like this and start lookin' at us like this. And when the show was off, they'd say, I want to meet your first trumpet player.

Russell: uh-huh

WH: And that's how I got my credit. It all come down, I meet my greatest band, 2 of the greatest bands one was in ah Pas---ah, where did Dominique,--where did Dominique

Mrs. Hightower: ? ✓

Hightower; Where--no--Where did I tell you Dominique the boy cut Gominique's wrist about the girl.

Mrs. Hightower: ?

WH: California. We had Lee Dominique [or Dominick] there. We left Dominique there until we got to Long Beach. They kept him in the hospital two weeks. Ah, I can't think of that band leader's name now. One of the greatest men there was. Then I had the pleasure of shaking

Retyped.

WH: HANDS with the man that made C. G. Conn's first wonder horn.

[see below]

Russell: Oh.

Hightower: That was ah the man that had the band in Long Beach.

Mrs. W.H.: ? /

Hightower: Yeah, can't think of his name now. But he is the man that made the wonder horn.

Russell: Yeah. What kind of a horn do you like best? That you've used.

Hightower: Well, C. G. Conn.

Russell: Conn, mostly

Hightower: Yeah, but I had my Conn stolen from he here.

Russell: Oh, ah

Hightower: So, I'm using El ah ah

Mrs. W.H.: Selmer

Hightower: Selmer now.

Russell: Selmer.

Hightower: Yeah.

Russell: Did you always use cornet or did you change to trumpet?

Hightower: Oh, I changed to trumpet.

Russell: When did you change about?

Hightower: I changed--I changed ah when I ah got here, yeah. Didn't I?

Russell:

Hightower: I was using the Wonder Horn.

Mrs. W.H.: Yeah

Hightower: The wonder was Herbert L. Clark was his name

Russell: Oh, yes, sure, Sousa's band.

Hightower: Yeah, he had the band in Long Beach. He made a horn the tuning slide was in the back called the Wonder. You could hold it, and if it didn't suit your ears, all you had to do was touch it.

Russell: Oh, yeah

Hightower: You see.

Russell: Yeah, I've seen that now.

Retyped.

Hightower: Well, that was a cornet. Now I changed to a Holton during the time I got a Holton, a brass Holton. I didn't keep that very long. But I bought two C. G. Conns cornets.

Russell: uh-huh.

Hightower: I've never had a C. G. Conn trumpet, until I had this Selmer. And ah after this horn was stolen from me, I had a chance to luck upon this horn, cheap and I bought it in a pawn shop down here on State and Van Buren. See, and just before you go out I'll show it to you, I keeps it locked up

Russell: Oh, yes.

Hightower: Yes. I keeps it locked up, see. I don't leave it out, so affaid to keep it in the house almost, see. .

Russell: Yeah.

Hightower: So, ah I haven't had my hands on it, but up to we got here and playin on and looked like I made, I guess it is like one of those things, you make too much money and haven't got the schooling or the knowledge to do what you would like to do with those things, and ah nobody to help you and you start out with just money and no brains---I bought a flat building, and after I bought that building, I turned around and bought another building, two flat buildings, 4914 Forestville, and 450 east 50th Street. Then I bought 37 lots at a 115th and May in that was just lots.

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: Well, we lost all of that.

Russell: I was just going to say, I hoped you didn't lose it all in the depression.

Hightower: Lost every----in eighteen months.

Russell: So many people did that, all over the country.

Hightower: And we didn't have a dime. After eighteen months I didn't have a dime. Everything closed down after 1928, and musicians around here just like whenever you say Preston Jackson, I always think about it, because the boy was just in his primes of comin' up, see. And he's got a wife, and I don't know how many children he's got now, but--

Russell: I don't know eipher.

Hightower: He's has three or four then. And ah the boy was just comin along see, and it just

Retyped.

WH: upset everybody see, you couldn't get nethin'. It was musicians around just doin' anything,

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: See. Well that's what persuaded the most of the musicians in '28 because when things did open up back in '32 and '33, they didn't open back up in the music world.

Russell: No.

Hightower: They opened in somethin' else, they went to work like we did, now May's Sugar Place out here they had a lot of boys in there from New Orleans too, they had Mays in there, you never heard of him did you?

Russell: No.

Hightower: He was a violin player. May's Sugar Factory out here in ah Commercial Avenue

Russell: No, I don't know about it.

Hightower: Well, he was born and raised in New Orleans, Mays was, and he, after he got out there, he formed a union and he got the boys from local 208 out there, see. And he formed a band out there, well, I used to play out there for them. I was going to work out there with them, but in later years, he made so much money, he built a home right out there, see, and he give up workin' see, and he's sittin' down now. But at the same time, why I don't know it just afterwards, it's just one of those things--I'm here now, I moved in here with pretty good spirits that I would make good. Soon as I moved in here, she got sick, and I had started me a house. Last--just before it got cold. I got the roof and everything on it, I got everything on the exterior finished, just got to finish the interior, she's worrying me now about goin'. I tell her I can't move out there because I need just about a thousand dollars to finish the place

Russell: You have to finish it up, so you can move in.

Hightower: But, the house is built, everything is paid for, I don't owe a dime on it.

Russell: Yes

Hightower: See, I'm building a colonial style house, a twoOstory house, five rooms,

Russell: How far, where is it now.

That's at

Hightower: 9239 South Parnell Avenue

Russell: uhO-huh

Hightower: 9339 South Parnell, I don't remember, I don't even remember my own house.

Retyped.

Russell: (laughs)

Hightower: But at the same time I've got that going pretty good, I guess.

Russell: Oh, yes that is the front, that is very nice, two stories.

Hightower: Yeah

Russell: Oh, yeah, that's--a nice house.

Hightower: That's the way it looks.

Russell: uh-huh. Yes

Hightower: Everything paid for.

Russell: Yes.

Hightower: All I want now is just I'm tryin' to get my heat in there, and the wiring, and I get the wiring and heat in there and I can move out of this place, I get cramped up--it just worries me nearly to death. But I'm doing the best I can for my age.

Russell: Yes, you'd better not try to work too hard at all.

Hightower: That's the onliest trouble I been. And I'm sixty-eight years old, so you know, I see got kinda take it easy.

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: That's the onliest trouble, and my work keeps me going, see. I get up in the morning about quarter to four and ah I leave here just about four-thirty

Russell: uh-huh.

Hightower: And I don't get back in the house until four thirty or five o'clock in the evening.

Russell: uh-huh---that's long hours.

Hightower: When, I workin' eight hours. Now when I work ten hours or twelve hours, I don't get back in the house until about seven or eight o'clock at night.

Russell: Yes, I want to try to finish this up so that

Hightower: Yes, yes

Russell: You can get some rest.

Hightower: Yeah

Russell: I wanted to ask a little bit about the records you made and there's hardly room on here but we can start it here and I'll run it another five minutes, and then we'll be through.

Hightower: Yes.

Russell: Ah, did you make some records with Richard M. Jones, too?

Hightower: Yeah

Russell: Do you remember which company, or what the titles, who else was in the band or

Hightower: hummmm---no---I know the band, because I used all my band. Ah, just Richard's on piano.

Russell: Yeah

Hightower: And he used me, and he used ah my clarinet player, that was Fred Parham, and he used John Lindsey, my trombone player, he was from New Orleans, he was from over in Algiers

Russell: Oh yeah, he played bass, too.

Hightower: That's right, played bass

Russell:

Hightower: That's what you knew him as because in New Orleans he played bass when he

End of Reel I, Track II

6/3/1958

1

Interview with Willie Hightower, ~~May 29~~, 1958, reel II (on Al Wynn interview tape)

R: We were talking about John Lindsay, when he played bass.

H: Yeah, well, you see, when he went to the army he was a bass player.

R: He carried a box around, or...?

H: Yeah, well, that was in New Orleans; his daddy was a violin player. His brother lives here now.

R: Oh, his brother's still here?

H: Yeah, his brother's here, he's a violin player.

R: Oh, I didn't know that.

H: Joe Lindsay's his name. Where is he living at, somewhere on Prairie, wasn't it?

[Lottie Hightower responds from just out of earshot]. Yeah, somewheres around there.

Joe Lindesy. [Lottie says, "Joe is the one that's living."] Living, yeah. John is dead. And when he [Joe] came back; he left here with the Eighth Regiment Band, to the Army, and when he came back around, Sergeant [sounds like "Pepper"] had the band.

R: He was a good trombone player then?

H: He was an a-number-one trombone player, but if he could get out of playing trombone, he wouldn't play it. You want him to play a job, no, he wanted to play bass. He always wanted to play bass, but I made him play trombone.

R: He was on the records, then, too?

H: Yeah.

R: He played trombone on the record?



H: Yes, and he played trombone on all my records that I made. Because, that's the only way, if you wanted a man out of my band at that time, the onliest way you could get him is to hire him or to hire me, else get permission from me, because he wouldn't play with you. John was, the whole time, up until I lost my home, he lived with us. him and his wife. We lived together. He lived with us after he come here. And the clarinet player was a mail carrier, and he didn't depend on music for a living.

R: What was his name again?

H: Fred Parham. E flat saxophone player. And he'd tell you, say, "If you want me to play a gig with you tonight, you call Willie up, and if Willie says I can go, I can go." And you'd have to call me, then I'd call Fred and tell Fred to go play. And I had another man from New Orleans that probably I don't know if you know, that I used in the band here. His name was, what's the drummer's name? [asks Lottie, whose response is unclear] Rudi, Rudi Richardson [?]. You didn't know him.

R: [Is not familiar with him]

H: Well, that was the man who was practically inspirational to Lionel Hampton for playing xylophone. This boy played xylophone. And all those men, we used only. Mariney's [or Myknee's; i. e., Richard M. Jones'] job, we used, well I didn't use whatchacallem on drums, I used what's the boy's name, just died, Ernest Parker. I used him. He's from Minneapolis. He was a good drummer, too. And on all the records that Mariney made, that's when he didn't use, what did you say the cornet player was that you went to see last night...?

R: Lee Collins?

H: Lee Collins. See, he switched between me, and when he'd get mad at me, he'd tell me, "I should have gotten Lee Collins anyhow," to play, I'd say, "Well, you get Lee Collins."

R: Artie Stark [?], I believe he was a, wait a minute...

H: But we cut, I cut, I think, four numbers before I made, I recorded the "Boar Hog Blues" and "Squeeze Me." "Boar Hog" on one side and "Squeeze Me"'s on the other.

R: And that was on the Black Patti...

H: Black Patti. Now, the other records that we made was for Melrose. We made them at Chicago, Chicago Avenue and the lake out there, [ ], that's where we made them. But, Mr. Melrose's brother was over there. The old Melrose...

R: Walter Melrose.

H: Yeah, Walter was the oldest one, wasn't he?

R: Yes.

H: The young one...

R: Lester.

H: Yeah.

R: Then there was a piano player, Frank Melrose.

H: We did business with the heavy-set one, the kind of blonde haired one. Mr. Melrose was a little thin. Well, that's who he made these last records with. Until, went down there to cut four numbers, two records, and that stuff is all in storage, I couldn't give you that, because, I made manuscripts of it all. And then, we was talking about it last night: and in making these numbers, he had a four-bar introduction on one. And that's the number he wanted to cut first, his own music, and I told him in rehearsal, we was rehearsing over

here on Prairie and Fifty-Second Street, and I told him, I said, "You'll have to change that trombone note." And he got sore with me and said that it was his music and he wanted it like he wanted it. So, we went down to record this, so he went with us, played with us and went on, so-and-so with us, until he told us to hit. Well, we hit, and made the introduction, we went on and started the first strain of the number. And after we started. the man seen, he knew what we had; he stopped us. He said, "Well, to save time," he says, "You boys are going to have to change that trombone note in there." And Mariney got mad with him. And they had a fuss. And the man went and got a sheet of paper. pencil, and come back; Mariney got up from the piano, grabbed his music and left the room, said, "All of you pack up." And we came on out of the studio. And we didn't make those records...

R: You didn't make them?

H: No, and he had some nice numbers. Lee Collins made them, whatever they was. because I met somebody on Forty-Seventh and State there, Michigan Avenue out there. and they told me Lee Collins, and I think he had Dominique. Dominique and Lee Collins is the ones who made them.

R: Well, that "Boar Hog Blues" and the "Squeeze Me," do you remember just who was on that, was that the same group you told about, with John Lindsey?

H: Yeah, that's the same group.

R: That's on the "Boar Hog?"

H: Yeah. That's, that wasn't the same group that made the number. because she was...

R: Your wife played on the record, too?

H: No, not on the record. That was the same band that played the number, but she didn't play on the record. No, Mariney played on the record.

R: He played on the "Boar Hog Blues" and "Squeeze Me?"

H: Yes, that's right, and "Squeeze Me." And since I lost all my stuff, see, when I come out of 4914 Forrester, I was practically stranded, and all that stuff was lost in storage, and I've been trying to get a record, and I haven't been able to get that Black Patti yet, and I've sent all the way to New York. I lost all that stuff in storage. Now I think Baby Dodds has got one. There's two or three of the musicians that's got them around here. And they wouldn't let me get my hands on it. They wouldn't let me even see it. If Baby has got it, he wouldn't let me see it.

R: [Tells of his encounters with the Black Patti 78 in question and says he will make Hightower a copy of it]

H: Well, this company went out of business. This company was out on Madison Street.

R: Madison?

H: Yeah, west on Madison, I think around [ ] or somewheres out there.

R: And that's where you made the records?

H: That's where we made the records. And that's one of those records that I was telling you, where the instruments did the talking. Johnny played on his trombone this thing like a hog grunting while the band was playing [gives vocal demonstration of Lindsey's trombone hog imitation]. See, that's what made the number. And "Squeeze Me" wasn't my idea. Now, the "Squeeze Me" number, I don't know who that number was, that wasn't my original number.

R: No, it was I think it was Clarence Williams and Fats Waller.

H: Yeah, Fats Waller, I think Fats Waller and some of them got together on it, Clarence Williams and some of them got together. And I got the number, and I had been down to the dancing class down here, and, what was the piano player's name that was at the dance. that got me the job down there, Clarence Williams, piano player. Clarence Williams, he left here and went to New York City. You've heard of him.

R: Yes, I met him...

H: You met him personally. Well, he's the one that wanted me to record all this stuff. And I guess he had somewheres long about eight or ten numbers, said he wanted me to record, because he said that he'd never heard nobody play them numbers like us. So you see, when I come in Chicago, I was to go to work for him when he was downtown at Bechet's [?] place. see. But, I didn't go down there. see. And when he come up on [ ]. you know he stayed out here a long time, he had a band there, too. Clarence Williams.

Lottie: Clarence *Jones*.

H: Clarence Jones.

R: Oh, Clarence Jones.

H: Yes. And he, Clarence Jones? Clarence Williams...

Lottie: Clarence *Williams*...

R: He ran a publishing house down on Thirty-Fifth and State Street for a while [finally resolved that they are in fact talking about Clarence Williams].

H: Yeah Clarence Williams, he had six people working for him in that place.

R: One time Clarence Williams had a publishing house.

H: Yeah, Forty-sixth and State. And he had six people working for him. And most of them were arrangers. And you'd be surprised to think of the business that he did in that

place. Those people were selling music, just mailing music all over the country. Ain't but the one thing, he had a little bad luck, mishap along with it. Now he's gotten back on his feet again, last time I heard from him...

R: He's in New York.

H: Yeah, he's doing good.

R: One thing I wanted to ask you, in New Orleans, I don't want to keep you any longer. Roy Palmer, I heard that he lived near you, up at Sixth Street, around there.

H: He stayed up Protection Levee.

R: Around Carrollton?

H: Around Carrollton, the other side of St. Charles.

R: Did he move down to your neighborhood?

H: No, he stayed up in that part of the country, that part of the city. Because the most of the work that he got was at, there was two lawn grounds up there that we worked at up there. That was what helped us a lot. He knew the people up there, see. And after we got straightened out, and, as I told you, could play, that's where we made our greatest reputation at, up there. Because, then, most of the time, I hadn't come down in the District, where I met Wade Whaley on clarinet. We was using Bechet up there then. see. And we put long pants on [Bechet] and used him up there, because Bechet was in short pants still. But outside of that, why Roy never did come down, he never did stay down town.

R: Well, one more question, did you ever play any parades very much in New Orleans?

H: Yeah. The most, the first parades that I made in New Orleans was from, what's this trumpet player's name? I can't think of nobody.

R: Freddie Keppard, or...?

H: No, no.

R: Manuel Perez?

H: Henry Allen.

R: Oh, Henry Allen.

H: From over in Algiers.

R: Over in Algiers.

H: You've heard of him.

R: Right. Young Henry Allen's father.

H: Yeah, his father. And his son, the one that's playing now, used to walk between us and hold both of us' horns under his arm. He would hold his daddy's horn in the one hand when he wasn't playing, under his arm, and he'd hold mine under the other. He was about nine years old then, see. And after I played over there, and then we got all that work from Shrewsbury, Protection Levee, all up there, see, and all the summer long we would, just playing parades up there for different lodges. Then, after I got in the District, as I told you, Zue was playing trombone in Piron's band, and most of the musicians from downtown, they didn't like; Creoles, they didn't like nobody stayed uptown, because I didn't speak French, see. And Manuel Perez, that's the trumpet player?

R: [yes]

H: Manuel Perez. and the Excelsior...

R: [Onward]

H: Onward, Onward Band, and we had Joe playing trumpet with us. And he [Perez] was playing cornet. And Zue was his trombone player. Zue was one trombone player and

Freddie [?] Atkins was the other. Two good men back there. You've heard of Eddie Atkins. And they put me in the band. So that made me the third trumpet player in the band. Then I got all the "rat" work with that band. And then I found myself, after I got in that band from down there, I found myself playing in the District at night and just taking my horn, and taking my band uniform and go right on and play in the parade all day long. Just every day some different parade we had. Either that or somebody dead. You see, around then we...

R: They still have those funerals.

H: Yeah, they played for the corpse, see. That's right, any time, they do that yet?

R: They still do. Every Sunday they still parade, in the summertime. A few weeks ago, before I came up, there were three parades that Sunday.

H: Is that so? And they still bury with the band yet?

R: Yes. Not so many, but maybe one a week there'll be a...

H: The lodges and things?

R: Lodges...

H: And clubs, they bury with a band. You see, I belonged to the Tammany Social Club, and I belonged to the Bulls.

R: Oh yes.

H: The Bulls uptown.

R: They started out under the Elks.

H: Started out under the Elks...

R: That's down there on Danneel...

H: And the Lions is downtown yet?



R: I'm not sure about the Lions.

H: They were French. They were downtown, I think they were down there in Economy Hall, down there.

R: Yeah, down there on Dumaine or something.

H: Dumaine, somewheres down there, see.

R: There's an undertaking...

H: Claiborne, somewhere around there.

R: Claiborne and Dumaine. There's an undertaking parlor. Oh, and one other question: did you hear Bunk Johnson, did you ever hear him play?

H: Bunk Johnson, why Bunk, why he started to play. Bunk started to playing when Buddy Bolden had a band.

R: Yeah. Did you ever hear Bolden play?

H: Oh, yes. But, I was so small then, see. And his [Bunk Johnson's] mother didn't want him to play. So Bolden and them begged his mother, and they took him on a job. And Bolden used to bring his clothes for him to dress him, and take him back home and put him in his knee pants and send him home. He lived in my neighborhood, at Felicity and Carondelet.

R: Bunk did?

H: Yeah. When he was little. And he'd make his mother mad when he was out there playing, she'd make him come in. We'd be out there playing marbles in the street, and he'd have to sit on the step and look at us, see. And he kept on, kept on until after he grew up, he still stuck to that horn. And so, his mother got so that she let him go, so he didn't stop uptown at all, seeing it wasn't no musicians, he went downtown. He got in

with some band downtown, and I don't know what that band was named. But Bunk came in and went out so quick until, as I finally figured, the music world has gone so far today that I didn't hardly realize that Bunk had been in the music business. Until, you just forgot it. Because he come up so: all of a sudden. Bunk was the greatest trumpet player in the world.

R: You really thought he was great...?

H: Then he went right down. And he left New Orleans and went to somewheres in Mississippi on a rice farm, and stayed down there until *Esquire* got him. Now, I was to make that concert he made, the *Esquire* made, see, in New York.

R: Oh yeah?

H: Yeah. They wanted me there. but I wouldn't even go. Because. they had set up. now they went down there and bought Bunk I think a set of teeth. And waited until he trained himself to them, see...

R: Well, how did Bunk...?

H: Bought him a suit of clothes.

R: How did Bunk play when he was young?

H: Young?

R: Yeah.

H: Well he was, at the time that he was, he just flew right on up there. He was just great. Just great...

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also present : Wm. Russell  
notes: Richard B. Allen  
transcription: Ralph Adamo  
check: RBA

[BOLDEN EXCERPT]

WR: Oh, one other question, did you hear Bunk Johnson -- did you ever hear him play?

WH: Bunk Johnson?

WR: Um-hum.

WH: Why, Bunk -- why, he started to playing -- Bunk started to playing when -- when Eddie [i.e. Buddy] Bolden had a band.

WR: Yeah. Did you ever hear Bolden --?

WH: Oh yes, But I was so small then, see.

WR: Uh-huh.

WH: And his mother didn't want him to play. So Bolden and them begged his mother, and they took him on a job. And Bolden used to bring the -- his clothes for him to dress in and take him back home to dress his-- put him in his knee pants and sent him home. He lived in my neighborhood at -- at Felicity and Carondelet [Streets].

0079 WR: Bunk did?

WH: Yeah, when he was little.

WR: Yeah.

0082 WH: And his mother's make -- he'd make his mother mad or something when he was out there playing [and] she'd make him come in, and we'd be out there playing marbles in the street and he would have to stand [up?] on the fence and look at us.

WR: Uh-huh.

WH: See. And, uh, he kept on -- kept on till after he grew up,

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he still kept to that horn. When his mother got so that-- let him go. So he didn't <sup>stop</sup> Uptown at all, fool with no musicians; <sup>ERS</sup> he went Downtown. He got in with some band Downtown. I don't know what that band was named. But Bunk come in and went out so quick until as I try to figure the music world. As it's gone so far today that I don't har -- didn't hardly realize that Bunk had been in the music business until we jus-- just forgot it because he come up so -- just all of a sudden, Bunk was the greatest trumpet player in the world.

0139 WR: Really -- he really sounded great.

WH: Then he was right down and he left New Orleans and went somewhere in Mississippi on a <sup>m</sup> nice farm. And stayed down there until Esquire got him.

0143 WR: Yeah.

WH: Well, now [then?], I was to make that -- that concert he made that Esquire made, see, in New York.

WR: Oh, yeah.

WH: Yeah. They wanted me, and I wouldn't even go because they had set up -- Now they went down there and bought Bunk, I think, a set of teeth, and, uh, wait until he trained hisself to them teeth -

0163 WR: How did Bunk play when he --

WH: [They?] bought him a suit of clothes.

WR: How did Bunk play when he was young?

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WH: Young?

WR: Yeah.

0167 WH: Well he -- he was -- [was?] the time that he was he flew right straight on up there. He was just great. Just great. But as suddenly as it looked like that -- just was a flash -- it just look like he come up and play all of a sudden and everybody in New Orleans just went crazy. Then after a while we ain't got no Bunk.

0184 WR: Uh-huh.

WH: It was a funny thing --

WR: [           ?]

0186 WH: And he never come back. No more.

WR: Never came back --

WH: And he never come back. But, uh, this time, they tell me, they took him to New York -- when was that, that was about five--

0197 WR: Oh nineteen forty-five, I --

WH: Yeah before -- before he [dead?] Just before he died.

WR: I was there in New York when he was there.

WH: Yeah, yeah, well they tell me he was all right. Well, what he wanted to do -- he was kind of fanatic, he was very thin at the time that he was coming up, and he was kinda flighty-like, see.

WR: Uh-huh.

WH: He wanted certain musicianers, I guess that he had come in with, so, seemed like after that concert was that he got an agent.

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I don't know who booked him in New York, but they got Bechet for him -- formed a band and went to Los Angeles, see --

0221 WR: I just wondered how Bunk played when he was real young -- did you ever hear him play parades, how was he on parades?

WH: Well, I don't know about parades. The most I knew about him was that dance band and most of those men were old men.

WR: Yeah.

WH: And he played at the Carpenters' Hall downtown.

0235 WR: Oh, the Carpenters'--

WH: Yeah, yeah, [see?], they always play -- he didn't play uptown at all.

WR: Uh-huh.

WH: All he -- And all that band stayed downtown, see--

WR: Yeah.

WH: And as I said, they were all French, see, uh --

0244 WR: It was Superior Band, I think.

WH: Yeah, Superior Band was the name of the band. That was the band.

WR: Do you remember anything about Bolden? Then I'm going to stop talking to you, I'm not going to make you talk anymore if you can just tell a little bit about Bolden if you remember when you heard him [or?] --

WH: Just enough to know that about, I don't know how long it was, but just about the time I got -- I wasn't old enough to play with

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him, see. But he was playing at a place called the Lincoln Park--

WR: Uh-huh.

0267 WH: --That's around Carrollton Avenue --

WR: Yeah --

WH: They used to have Buddy Bolden used to go up in a balloon.  
Man used to go up in a balloon and cut it loose.

WR: Buddy Bottley that was -

WH: Buddy Bottley, that's - that's what it was -

WR: I've heard -- I never saw it, but -

WH: Yeah -- Well, uh, he was playing an advertisement for that  
Lincoln Park for that Sunday at Melpomene and Dryades, right by  
that -- what's that a market, used to be a market --

WR: Yeah, the old Dryades market, it's still there.

WH: Still there.

WH: Still there?

WR: Still there, yeah.

WH: Yeah, well, on Melpomene.

0294 WR: Uh-huh, Melpomene and Dryades.

WH: Well, he blew his brains out right there.

WR: Playing an advertisement for the Lincoln Park.

WH: Yeah, in the furniture wagon.

WR: In a wagon?

WH: Yeah, that's the way they used to advertise in [those days?]

WR: Yeah, that's right.

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WH: In the furniture wagon, horse and wagon. And he never was no more good - he had taken sick and they take him to the hospital -- never was no good and shortly after that, he died.

WR: Uh-huh.

0309 WH: But, I didn't realize, but they said all after Freddie [Keppard] come up and started to playing, they said -- they, we trying to say Freddie was great, but they say he was the greatest one that they was.

0318 WR: Bolden--?

WH: Bolden. That's right.

WR: Yeah.

WH: Said he was the greatest. He could make the highest notes.

WR: You think Freddie Keppard was about the greatest you ever remember hearing there now?

WH: Yeah. That is, for playing ragtime music.

WR: Yeah, ragtime.

WH: Yeah, rag -- we didn't call it no "jazz" then, you see, because everything was Scott Joplin then.

0332 WR: Yeah.

WH: See, and all --we played all Scott -- anytime any musicians could play Scott Joplin's -- I got the books.

WR: Oh yeah, I have [ ?]

WH: I got twelve numbers in the books, isn't it? Well, everyone of Scott Joplin's numbers, from "Maple Leaf Rag" to "Cascades" [i.e.,



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"The Cascades" ]. And any musicianer could pl-- any trumpet player could play "Cascades" he was a musicianer of mine.

WR: Yeah.

WH: And that's what Freddie Keppard would play.

0349 WR: Did you like Keppard better than Joe Oliver [unintelligible]?

WH: Well, it's just like one of those things that -- that I figured that although that me and Joe turned out to be the best friend, and, uh, when he got sick here on his last laps, I held his job down at the Plantation for him--

WR: Uh-huh.

0364 WH: --for about six months. And did my work too. Because he was unable to work. You see, he had a drummer in there by the name of -- his drummer, went back to New Orleans.

0372 WR: Oh, Paul Bar --

WH: Paul Barbarin.

WR: Yeah, I know Paul --

WH: They was racing one day --

WR: --he's a good friend of mine.

WH: Yeah, Paul Barbarin was racing, and they was -- had rehearsal, and they come out back on Calumet Avenue and run and Joe fell.

WR: Oh, really --

WH: And that's the cause of his death today.

WR: How'd the -- how --

WH: I don't know -- yeah, him and Paul, they were running. And

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he wasn't able, so he called my wife up and asked me to come down,  
and I held the job over there for --

WR: Uh-huh.

0391 WH: --him and Joe Glaser. Joe Glaser had the place.

WR: Yeah, [that's right. Joe [had it?]

WH: That's right. And so I held the job for Joe, and me and Joe  
was good friends because Freddie was only friends, I feel like, on  
business associations with Freddie--

WR: Yeah.

WH: -because he did work in my lawn grounds for me, see--

WR: Oh-huh.

WH: I owned the -- uh, uh-- pleasure grounds and dance and lawn  
parties and things, and I give their band more credit of bringing  
0411 people in the place, see other than that. And, after we come here, why,  
then we -- I found out he was with Charlie Cooke and so I knew Charlie  
Cooke from TEXAS, see, before he ever come into New Orleans. And  
he stopped in New Orleans a while, then he went on back to Texas  
and then he come on this part of the country and made good, see.

WR: Yeah.

WH: But, uh, other than that, why, in playing, why, I think Freddie's  
just about as great as they come.

WR: Sorry I never got to hear him.

WH" Yeah.

WR: I don't want to take more of your time because I know you have

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to get up early --

WH: Yeah, yeah --

WR: So I certainly appreciate your interview and taking all  
this time --

[END OF EXCERPT AND REEL]