

JOSEPH "RED" CLARK  
January 13, 1959  
Reel I--Summary--Retyped

Interviewers:  
William Russell  
Richard B. Allen

Red Clark was born February 12, 1894. His father, Aaron WarrenC Clark, was born in 1876. He died September 14, 1894. The father was a musician, born in Louisville, Kentucky, but moved to New Orleans when he was very young, went to school here, got his musical training at Straight University. Red's father took sick before Red was born. He told Red's mother never to let Red play a wind instrument. His mother tried to obey this injunction. But as he began to grow, Red had a feeling for music. As a very small boy he used to follow bands; his mother used to whip him for this.

Red was born at 2816 Josephine Street, in uptown New Orleans. His first school was Fisk, at Perdido and Franklin <sup>streets /</sup> [now Loyola] <sup>streets /</sup> [Soards] Directory, 1901: "Fisk School (boys and girls) (colored), Arthur P. Williams, prin., 507 S. Franklin". Red attended four terms there; then his mother took him out and sent him to Straights Junior, which was around the corner from Straight University, on Canal. The Junior school was around on Tonti Street. He went there two years, left there and went to Southern, which was a private school, but not a Catholic school. Red quit school when he was thirteen years old and went to work to help his mother, who was making cigars for a living. It was too hard for her, to try to feed and clothe him and send him to school and give him what he wanted.

Red's father played baritone in the old Onward [Brass] Band in the 1880's. He also played with the Pickwick Band and the Excelsior Band. "After he passed [on], why, different men in that band began to pass--he taken sick and died." His last parade was a Tenth of May parade. He came home from that, went to bed, and never got up again, although he lived until September. Tenth of May was always the Oddfellows' Day; they celebrated regardless of what day of the week it was. In later years they changed their celebration to the second Sunday of May.

The thirtieth of May Memorial Day was another big day when Red was a little boy. They didn't have parades, but they would have a big encampment at Chalmette. People would go down in the morning in carriages, take basket lunches, spend the day down there. They would have ceremonies, have the band to play. Now just a few of the old ones come, I "and when the old ones are gone, there'll be no more Memorial Day, not for New Orleans." The younger people don't care about it, are not interested. They will come, listen to the band, stay a while, and then go. But those people used to stay all day long, almost X until dark. This celebration took place at the cemetery, off the highway to the right about a quarter of a mile beyond the monument. WR mentions going to a Memorial Day dance at Fazendeville, where they had two bands. Clark says he knows that village, but Fazendeville is the other side of the cemetery, farther down the road. WR has not been to the cemetery services on Memorial Day, RBA teases Red a little about John Casimir having had the job at Chalmette Memorial Day. Red says the Eureka Band had another job in sight; that's why they didn't get it last year. But Red thinks the Union is going to send the Eureka Band this year. The bands would play marches at Chalmette when Red was a boy.

When Red was a boy the brass bands didn't play orchestration dance <sup>?</sup>orchestra numbers like the bands on the streets do now. That is why "we" the Eureka Brass Band fight so hard to keep the brass bands like they should be. The boys kid Red, saying that he would walk ten miles to get a march. He writes to music publishing houses, trying to ~~XX~~ get marches. He has been trying to get the music for two funeral marches, "Cedar Mound" and "Hazel Grove," two beautiful funeral marches that the Original Tuxedo Brass Band, under Papa Celestin, used to play. The bands used marches on the street, rather than dance? orchestrations. They would get the marches from the different music publishing houses, such as Pepper, Barnhouse, Jenkins, and

Southwell, Delby, (WR suggests Jacobs); Delby is closed now. It was right across the river from Omaha, Nebraska [Council Bluffs, Iowa].

*close*  
Clark thinks the difference between the old brass bands and the brass bands of today is in the instrumentation. The Eureka Brass Band tries to get up to the old standard, but they can't. None of the young fellows want to play the baritone, or the alto (which they called the peck horn), or the E flat clarinet. Red suggests as the real line-up for a brass band: E flat clarinet, alto, baritone, two trombones, bass, three cornets, snare drum, bass drum. Red doesn't know why the fellows today don't want to play the baritone; sometimes he wished he had taken it up.

He knows of two E flat clarinet players in New Orleans now: Alphonse Picou and John Casimir. There may be some more youngsters coming up in the union, but he hasn't noticed them, and he has not seen any E flat clarinet ~~pi~~players in the school bands. He has seen a lot of B flat clarinets, but no E flat clarinets. Red thinks they are afraid of the E flat clarinet, <sup>like</sup> ~~like~~ they are of the oboe. The fellows say the oboe jars their heads, but Red doesn't know why. The mouthpiece of the oboe is different, looks like a cigar holder. Red remembers seeing quite a few oboe players when he was young here. They did not use saxophones in the old bands. They used clarinet, alto, and baritone instead.

The alto gives accompaniment, just like the banjo in an orchestra. The reason they call the alto the peck horn is that the player makes the same note almost all the time. Now and then he will change his note.

When Red came into the Eureka Brass Band, the band had E flat clarinet, alto, and baritone. Red was playing trombone then. They had three cornets. They used eleven men. Red joined the Eureka Band in about 1934. He was not one of the founders, but it had not been organized very long when he joined. He remembers when the Eureka Brass Band was organized, because he was playing in a concery band at the time. Henry Pritchard set up a concert band of 30 pieces. (Red says he is still alive, here, but doesn't fool with bands any more because of advanced age. Pritchard's address is 1712 St. Louis Street, near St. Louis Cemetery. He is a tailor, has a tailoring shop at 222 1/2 South Rampart Street.) [Henry Pritchard is still listed in the telephone book at 1712 St. Louis Street, but we have no record of interview with him--BBR].

Pritchard's band was called the Tonic Triad. He took the band to Hot Springs, Arkansas, in 1929 and won every prize there was.

Mr. Allen asks about how often the old brass bands played by ear. Red says the bands he used to follow used music. They would play an occasional hymn by head, like "Nearer, My God, to Thee," or "What a Friend We Have in

Jesus," when they were bringing a body out of a house or out of a church. Sometimes they would play ["Over in the] Gloryland" coming up to a house or a church, about the way the Eureka Band does now. [See M. T. Zander thesis.] But then, they would stick to written music ("in those packs") until they got to the cemetery. They had a book of hymns they used too, that they called "The Little Red Book." It had "Church in the Wildwood," "Lead Kindly, Light," and such hymns in it.

The bands have gotten away from the books now, gotten away from the music.

Mr. Allen asks when the bands started playing ratty in the streets. Red says they started this way back in the nineteenth century. The Onward Band, the Excelsior Band, and the Tuxedo Band didn't do this, except by request of the organization. If the organization did not ask for a ratty number, the band would play marches coming back from the graveyard. They would be playing good marches, reading the music, "Stars and Stripes," "National Emblem," "Under Fire," "Under Arms," and "Rifle Rangers."

Now and then they would play "[Oh,] Didn't He Ramble," but they have gotten away from that now. Red hasn't heard a band play that in a long time. They haven't played "Gettysburg" lately because they have about worn out the music. The cards they play from have faded, changed color. If the fellows

make a stop and eat, their hands get greasy, get the card greasy. Mr. Allen suggests that the Archive could make copies of this, or any other no longer obtainable music. [Could this suggestion be followed up with Percy Humphrey? Anyone else who might have old band music?] Red thinks "Gettysburg" is still available from either Barnhouse of Fillmore.

Red says "Gettysburg," "American Soldier" [called "Bugle Boy March"] and "Panama" were standards played when he was a boy. They were written, but the fellows got so used to "Panama" that they don't use the music anymore. Red does not know who wrote it. Red never saw any music for "High Society." (response to question from Mr. Russell. Mr. Allen suggests that a part of "Panama" has been added to the original written music. Red says he doesn't know about this. Mr. Allen says a tuba player he knew <sup>from</sup> the West Coast told him the part where the trumpet hits a high note and then goes down has been added [Manuel Manetta says he wrote this strain of "Panama." RBA]. Red remembers that when Louis Armstrong was playing in the Tuxedo Brass Band here he used to make that high note in "Panama."

Red says he has known Louis Armstrong practically all his life, but he never played with him, just wasn't up to it. Red started playing his first instrument, the trombone, about 1921. His mother didn't want him to play, but when he



was grown, she could not stop him. It had been his father's wish that he never play a wind instrument, but he didn't like stringed instruments. He talked with his teacher about this. The teacher had known his father, and explained to him that it was different now. In his father's day, the instruments were all solid brass; now they were plated, coated inside and out, so that even if you inhaled from the instrument you would not taste that brass. [See above: Red's father had complained when he was ~~16~~ of tasting brass.] Red remembers when all the instruments were solid brass. There was a fellow named Pierre who had an upright bass, one they called the "monster." It was an E flat, a big one. The bell was almost as big as the bell on Red's instrument. They used to call it "the monster E." Red says when he shined that thing you couldn't look at it if he walked in the sun.

Red says "tasting that brass" meant that if you had a cough, you could taste that brass. His father tasted it every time he coughed. It gets into your bronchial tubes some way.

Red was taught never to breathe in the instrument, to get his breath from the corner of his mouth. His teacher was Dave Perkins who has been dead over 30 years. Dave Perkins told Red his father was a wonderful baritone player. Dave said he played trombone with Aaron Clark sometimes in the Pickwick Band.

Perkins was mostly an orchestra man. He played all

the instruments: bass, baritone, trombone, trumpet, clarinet, saxophone, xylophone. He taught all these instruments and played them all. Mr. Russell asks if Red ever saw him play drums. Red says no, no drums, but he saw Dave play all the wind instruments. Mr. Russell thinks he has seen a picture of Dave Perkins as a drummer. Mr. Allen says Dave Perkins taught Francis Temonia drums.

Red took lessons from Dave Perkins only about a year and ten months. Perkins took sick and couldn't teach anymore. Red didn't have confidence in anyone else's teaching, never took any more lessons. Other teachers taught the fellows "to pat jitney" [pat their foot on every beat]. Perkins taught his students to pat their feet on only the first beat of each measure. Red demonstrates with both 4/4 time and 3/4 time. On 4/4 time, he had them come up on the fourth beat.

Perkins used the Otto Langer [sp.?] book.

The boys who were taking lessons under Dave Perkins set up their own little brass band. He would have them play in his yard Sunday evenings, almost every other Sunday. There were about ten of them. Some continued with their music, some didn't. Anderson Minor was taking bass at that time; they called him "Goulië [sp.?]". Another was Joe Harris, who is dead now. He was taking trombone [not the saxophonist, he is alive, 1902]. Jefferson Butler, a trumpet player, is



dead now. Henry Williams, trumpet, is a minister now, doesn't play anymore. Felix Goff, clarinet. There was another boy with them who played E flat clarinet, Stewart. Red doesn't know what happened to him; he dropped out of the picture all at once. It was not Georgie Stuart [sp.?]. Stewart was his first name. Their drummers were boys by the names of Jumonville and Dedeaux. Dedeaux is dead now; he was the snare drummer. Jumonville was the bass drummer.

This group worked together until they had built themselves into a band. They had no name, did not work professionally.

Dave Perkins lived on Sixth Street between Dryades Street and Baronne Street. Red says the old house is sitting there yet. "When I pass there many a time I say 'That's the house I was called a numbskull many a time in.'" Mr. Allen says this house is near Willie Hightower's ice cream parlor. Willie Hightower, a trumpet and cornet player, had an ice cream parlor. Used to tell about Dave Perkins walking by his place.

Clark says Perkins used to take a walk every night after he would get through teaching, even if it was as late as 10 or 10:30. Perkins had a lot of students, both white and colored. Perkins had trombones, trumpets, drums, banjos, all kinds of instruments in his loft, would rent them to students.

Clark bought his first trombone from a man who played in the Shrine Band. Dave was teaching Red at that time, Dave bought the trombone from the man who played in the Shrine Band for Red. Red only paid \$40.00 for it. He kept it about eight or nine years, when he saw a trombone he liked in a catalog from H. N. White, who built the King instrument. He ordered a trombone from this catalog; it had a five and a half inch bell. It cost him \$225. He kept this horn until he went on the bass.

Red was forced onto the bass overnight. They had a funeral for the Young Men Olympians. Dominique Remy, whom they called "'Ti' Boy," was leading the band at that time. They had hired Professor Dalmas to play bass, but he didn't have a bass, so they borrowed the bass from their regular bass player, Pete Blanchin, who was sick. The professor didn't show up at the hall, so "'Ti' Boy" told Red to get the bass and carry it, even if he couldn't play it, so the band would look full. When they got back from the funeral, 'Ti' Boy told him to take the bass home, go to Werlein's and buy a chart for the fingering. He already knew the music, it was the same [as for the trombone in bass clef]. 'Ti' Boy said he would tell Pete he had lent the bass to Red; he would be responsible for it.

Red brought the bass home and tried it. He has never taken a lesson from anyone on the bass. All the help he had was the chart from which he learned fingering. END OF REEL I