

JACK LAINE, ALFRED LAINE
Reel I--Retyped
April 21, 1951

Present: Dr. Edmond Souchon

[Souchon:] [April] the twenty-first and I'm down at Papa Jack Laine's house at 521 Clouet Street. Mrs. Laine is right along side of us both chaperoning this party. And I wanted to ask Jack a few questions and if you'd be kind enough to answer, Jack, what is your full name?

[J. Laine:] My full name is George Laine, George V. Laine. I was born right here in the State[s], never was out of the State[s] in my life. As further, the furthest I've been was New York, Chicago, something of that sort, but never out of the State[s]. And I've been playing music since I was a boy, I reckon about eight years old. And, of course--

[Souchon:] Wait a minute, you didn't tell us the date of your birth, Jack.

[J. Laine:] Well I was born in 1873 on the twenty-first day of September. And ever since then, why I enjoyed music the best of-- anyone should like it as much as I did.

[Souchon:] Well, you started to tell me that you were about eight years old when you started to play music. What instrument did you fool with then?

[J. Laine:] When I first started, I started playing drum and how I come to play this drum, it was during the time of the exposition, it was up at around the Audubon Park.

[Souchon:] Well, Jack, you know I have a faint recollection that somewhere around December of 1884 the Cotton Exposition was held in Audubon Park. This is purely a guess on my part.

[J. Laine:] And after the Exposition was over there was a couple of old instruments laying around there and my dad brought me home an old drum. And from time on I been playing music up until the first war.

[Souchon:] Jack, what other instruments besides drum did you play?

[J. Laine:] Well, I played a little alto [horn], but I wouldn't crow so much about that because it was very little that I played of it. But I played quite a number of times in the band with it and made out good. And outside of that, I played a little bass fiddle, also. And I kept on my drums, right on. I had--

[Souchon:] What were the drums called? There [was ?] a bass drum and a kettle drum? Is that what they were called in the early days?

[J. Laine:] Yes, they were called trap drums in the early days. And, of course, we had a lot of other traps mixed up with it, sort of like your bells and tom toms and stuff of that sort. Well, we had to use them also in different pieces, different numbers.

[Souchon:] Did you--how old were you when you bought--you were able to finance your own first set of drums?

[J. Laine:] Well, I must have been around about twelve, fourteen years old, when I got my first set of drums.

[Souchon:] And how old were you when you had your own first band?

[J. Laine:] Well, that was during the--when I had my own band that was during the Spanish and American War. I had then, ⁱⁿ the Spanish-American War, I had thirty-five pieces including myself and after that--well, before that rather, I used to play music right on. Play field band music and different kinds of instruments with different kind of musicians; that is, different--members of different organizations that came with me, in the line of [a] lot of children that I used to have, [a] very lot of children, and brought them all in, and ever since

then, why they began a picking up playing music, and they made remarkable good musicians, I'll--

[Souchon:] Jack, was your daddy a musician?

[J. Laine:] No, my father never knew anything at all about any instrument.

[Souchon:] Well, who is the gentleman that taught you how?

[J. Laine:] Well, the man that I first started with was Dave Perkins and ever since Dave Perkins, I went with another guy that used to play, whose name was Meade, Will Meade. He was an awful good professor. Well, now, that's been some years ago. He had a cigar stand on Royal and Esplanade, that's where I used to go to. He was a mighty nice musician, too.

[Souchon:] Jack, how far from this section that we are [in] right now have you lived? Have you always lived in this neck of the woods?

[J. Laine:] Well, Doctor, fortunately I did, right in this neighborhood all my life, from say Mandeville Street which is only four squares from here down to this here, Clouet Street, and all my days I lived just in that same ter--in this same territory.

[Souchon:] Jack, now another interest that you had, too, you've been a member of the volunteer fire association, haven't you?

[J. Laine:] That's right.

[Souchon:] Well, how many years you been in that?

[J. Laine:] Well, fortunately that I've made one or two parades with them when they consolidated into a pay department. I liquidated and went into a pay department.

[Souchon:] I see.

[Laine:] But since then, I joined another company which is Davey Crockett, they're over the river. I'm in there now around about--well, about forty-five years, something along in there, something

[unintelligible].

[Souchon:] Any of the other men still in that have been in that long?

[J. Laine:] Why, yes, I just recently, day before yesterday, when the dedication of the Tulane Avenue Lanes [bowling? street construction?] was open, I met one of the oldest men was in that place--that company and that company is now a hundred and ten year old.

[Souchon:] I see. Jack, can you remember the names of the first
were--
men that/played music with you in your first professional band?
Can you recall their names?

[J. Laine:] Well, quite a number of them, I can, yes. When I first organized--playing string music and into a brass band--we turned into a brass band, I had a man by the name of Baquet, Achille Baquet; Vega, Lawrence Vega; I had Bill Gallaty, Willy Guitar. Now there's a coincidence for you; this man, Willy Guitar, that was his real name, Willy Guitar; he played bass fiddle and he lived on Music Street. Well, he's a mighty, mighty good bass player, at that.

[Souchon:] Paging Mr. Ripley, huh.

[J. Laine:] Exactly. Then I had--[machine off?]

[Souchon:] Jack, would you continue telling us the rest of the men that you played, not necessarily the very first band, but approximately the very early bands. What are the names that come to your mind?

[J. Laine:] Well, the very, in the very first bands that I've organized; Manuel Mello, Leon[ce] Mello, had Frank Christian, Emile Christian, and--I can't think of his other name now, Charlie Christian, that's right. Charlie Christian, Charlie Christian, and I had--also I had Zimmermann, fellow by the name of Zimmermann; he lived on Jackson Avenue. Well, of course, there's quite a number of these men that played--

[Souchon:] Any Loyacanos with you then?

[J. Laine:] Yes, I've had the Loyacanos both, son and father, playing lots of jobs with me when the first time, when I first organized. They played, specially the old man. He was with me, one of my members of the first band. [See Loyacanos' interviews.] Now I had, altogether I used to master seven bands up until the World war, First World War. And, of course, a lot of the men, they went with the--they were drafted and went, of course, in the army.

[Souchon:] [Did] they all have your name, Jack Laine's Band?

[J. Laine:] No, I had [the] Reliance Band, one band named Reliance, the other named Tuxedo, and the other named Laine, different names like that, you understand. And, of course, split bands. Well they'd go out all together under the name of Laine, would be the split band, you see. I wouldn't give them the right name because they were from the different bands, members of the different bands. Well, then we'd carry on from there.

[Souchon:] Jack, what about the minstrels? Didn't you ever have any minstrels?

[J. Laine:] I did. I had a minstrel called Laine's Greater Majestic Minstrels.

[Souchon:] How long did they last?

[J. Laine:] Well, we started out of town with this show and we got as far as Bridgeport when they wouldn't let us go no further on account of smallpox. The money panic was on during--I reckon a great many, many a people today remembers that money panic we had here and the smallpox through the country, and that stopped us. Of course, that stopped me from going any further [ahead ?].

[Souchon:] It's an interesting thing, Jack, my grandfather was president of the Louisiana State Board of Health when that epidemic was going on.

[J. Laine:] Well, unless it was just that time, Doctor. Of course, we had to come back. Well, then I played around town here, oh, different lots all around town and I went over in Algiers, and I made pretty good, but still and all, this smallpox epidemic and all that sort of stuff, I just closed down and went out of that business.

[Souchon:] Jack, can you remember this, when is the first parade that you marched in?

[J. Laine:] Well, no, I really couldn't, but I remember though--

[Souchon:] Approximately.

[J. Laine:] I remember one time that it started to snow on a Mardi Gras Day. That was the first big Mardi Gras parade ever I made. It started to snow one time. But I don't remember just now the year that was in. But that's been, good gracious, some time ago. [Check One Hundred Great Years.]

[Souchon:] Gee, Jack, I don't see how you can possibly remember all those things when I'm springing them on you this way. It just so happens that I accidentally know [that] the only snow that was on a Mardi Gras was the year 1899. You said just about the turn of the century. You're awfully close there. Did you ever play more than one job on Mardi Gras Day?

[J. Laine:] Yes, indeed I did. I played as high as five jobs and six jobs if you want. I played one Mardi Gras Day so much music that the men after they played the ball for the Merry Widows Social Club that they wouldn't come the next day to collect their money. They had to wait a day or two before they'd come and collect their money.

[Souchon:] To recuperate?

[J. Laine:] Exactly, exactly. Now I can remember some of the jobs I played that day. The first job I played that day, it was from seven to half past eight. I think it was for the [it--now ?] Doctor [Cablorus ?]. They had some sort of a pill or something and they advertised it, like an antiseptic [unintelligible].

[Souchon:] Like Hadacol.

[J. Laine:] Yeah, something like an antiseptic pill. And from there we jumped in a wagon and played an hour and a half again for the Merry Widows' Ball. Now this happened all on one day, Mardi Gras--

[Souchon:] Jack, was that before the turn of the century? Or after?

[J. Laine:] After.

[Souchon:] After.

[J. Laine:] Yes. Then I played the advertisement of Merry Widows' Ball and from there we jumped up to St. Charles and Calliope and played the day parade and from the day parade we came all the way down to Frenchmen Street, and we played the view of the maskers on Frenchmen and Decatur [streets]. And from Frenchmen and Decatur, we jumped again in the wagon and finished our job playing the advertising for the Merry Widows' Ball. And from then we jumped up again to Calliope and St. Charles for the night parade. After we got done the night parade, we went over to Lusitania [Portuguese] Hall and played the Merry Widows' Ball. We also played one hour overtime at the ball, an extra hour. [Compare Jack Laine, Reel ?]

[Souchon:] Jack, how many men usually comprised your marching bands for the parade?

[J. Laine:] Well, we used to have from twelve to fourteen, but sometimes I'd have about eighteen in the band.

[Souchon:] I see, now what were you little groups that comprised the dance bands, how many were there?

[J. Laine:] It all depended on what the people wanted. If they wanted six men, well I'd furnish them six men. In them days we used to call the six men seven pieces because the trap drums was in there, see.

[Souchon:] I see.

[J. Laine:] And some would want five and some would want four, some would want eight, some ten.

[Souchon:] Well, what would you consider a regular jazz band? Just exactly the number of pieces? Six or seven?

[J. Laine:] Seven, seven.

[Souchon:] Now did you--do you recall now whether the banjo or the guitar was used at that time?

[J. Laine:] We used both, banjo and guitar. But banjo was mostly used.

[Souchon:] It was, huh? I see. Did the violin ever play with you, Jack?

[J. Laine:] Yes, indeed.

[Souchon:] Up to when?

[J. Laine:] Well, to--well, long before the war. Then I began to keep nothing else but blowing instruments, unless it was necessarily to have such a string instrument as a violin.

[Souchon:] I see. Jack, one thing more I wanted to ask you: We read a great deal in the history of jazz about the colored

musician, Freddy Keppard. Did you know him?

[J. Laine:] I did.

[Souchon:] What about Buddy Bolden, did you ever know him?

[J. Laine:] Well, I heard of Buddy Bolden but I never knew him. But there was a man by the name of Lopez [Perlops Lopez]. He was one, I believe, one of the first colored bands, and I think was in the city, and it was during my time, at that time, he was playing music and I was playing music at the same time.

[Souchon:] I see, now tell me your wife's maiden name, Jack.

[J. Laine:] My wife, God bless her, her is Blanche Nunez, her maiden name.

[Souchon:] It seems to me that name, Nunez, sounds like a musician. Any relation?

[J. Laine:] Well, yes, she has lots of relation. There's two of them that I think played music and especially this Alcide Nunez, I think, he played clarinet with me for years and years and years.

[Souchon:] That was your wife's brother?

[J. Laine:] No, cousin.

[Souchon:] I see.

[J. Laine:] Her cousin.

[Souchon:] Mrs. Laine, would you say one or two words for us, first--don't most of the men down here affectionately call you Mama Laine?

[Mrs. Laine:] Yes, I made every shirt they wore.

[Souchon:] How many, sometimes?

[J. Laine:] I made forty-two shirts when they started.

[Souchon:] And they were dark, weren't they, what color?

[Mrs. Laine:] Dark red.

[Souchon:] Uh-huh. What color helmets?

[Mrs. Laine:] They had white and black helmets. And I made the ties and I made the grand marshal's regalia.

[Souchon:] You did, do you like music?

[Mrs. Laine:] Yes, I do, I love music.

[Souchon:] Well, is there anything you want to say before we sign off?

[Mrs. Laine:] Well--

[Souchon:] Just that you hope things keep going all right.

[Mrs. Laine:] I hope so.

[Souchon:] Okay, all right, Jack. Jack wants to say a few more words in closing.

[J. Laine:] Speaking about the fire company, I organized the Dennis Sheen Fire Company about fifteen years ago. And through the help and assistance of my good wife, we made it a success. It's still progressing today. And we're doing remarkable well. Now, as I said before, we were on that parade up there on Tulane Avenue Wednesday and made quite a number of people look up at the old days. They remember those days, quite a number of them were on the street and they remember those days when the old time volunteers used to parade on the fourth of March. Well, of course, I'm still proud of that, too. And as far as everything that I've went

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through, I kind of made a success of, which I was thankful to God for the help of it.

[Souchon:] I have one or two more words. Jack, many records that the collectors are saving now have been made by two bands, one called the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and the other one, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings. It's my impression that these were both makeshift bands whose name was coined for the record date. Is that so, or did they exist before hand? [No, both working bands. See numerous other interviews.]

[J. Laine:] That--no, that was after the record dates. They didn't--

[Souchon:] They didn't play together as groups before then?

[J. Laine:] No.

[Souchon:] Did you ever get different ones and put them together for a date like that?

[J. Laine:] I sure did. Lots of them.

[Souchon:] I see. Now one--another thing, too, do you remember Tom Brown and Harry Shields when they ysed to play in the old days?

[J. Laine:] Yes, I do remember. I picked them boys up playing with me when they were just small children.

[Souchon:] Does the music we play today sound anything like what you used to play?

[J. Laine:] Well, I'll dare to say there ain't very much change in it. I think the music you're playing today, that you hear now amongst the bands, so-called jazz bands, which they call it jazz today, in my time it was ragtime. Now there isn't--you hardly

can tell the difference. You hardly can. You got to take good notice the way that the tunes are coming out them instruments to detect the difference of those days up until today.

[Souchon:] If you'll read anything about the history of ragtime and jazz, a recent authority made the remark that ragtime died in 1917. It's my contention that no such a thing--that it just gradually changed over into something that sounded just a little bit smoother. Is that the difference, really? [Leading question.]

[J. Laine:] That's correct.

[Souchon:] Well, Jack, I certainly thank you for the interview and it's been a pleasure and I hope you go on living and enjoying life in as good health as you are now.

[J. Laine:] I also pray that the boys keeps up the good work.

[Souchon:] Okay.

[A. Laine:] This is Alfred John Laine. I'm talking by 521 Clouet Street by my daddy right now and he and I was just now discussing and we was talking about things gone by, years ago. Of course, I'm 56 years old today, I'm not a young man, and I was with Jimmy Durante when I was 19 years old. I was in New York playing with Jimmy Durante. I don't think I have much more to say to you but, nevertheless--

[Souchon:] Oh, yes, you do. Didn't you have your own band while your daddy's was called Papa Laine's Band? What was your band called?

[A. Laine:] Oh, yeah. And I had my band: Baby Laine. My daddy got a band for me and he started me out playing so I played with my daddy.

[Souchon:] What instruments did you play?

[A. Laine:] I played a trumpet.

[Souchon:] Any other instruments?

[A. Laine:] Yeah, I used to play an alto, too.

[Souchon:] In which band did you use to play around the prize fights?

[A. Laine:] In my band.

[Souchon:] In your own band? Did you ever play with [Happy] Schilling's or [Johnny] Fischer's?

[A. Laine:] Well, [the ?] Fischers used to play up in here with me.

[Souchon:] Is that so? What year about that was?

[A. Laine:] I gueaa back in ^[1917...] about seventeen, fifteen sixteen something around that time. Yeah, just a second.

[Souchon:] When did you stop playing professionally?

[A. Laine:] Oh, about twenty years ago when I busted a vein.

[Souchon:] You did?

[A. Laine:] Yeah.

[Souchon:] From blowing?

[A. Laine:] Yeah.

[Souchon:] What was your first band after your own called up in New York, what did they call themselves? They had you and Georgie Brunis and Charlie Cordilla and your daddy, who was on piano?

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[A. Laine:] Jimmy Durante.

[Souchon:] Jimmy Durante?

[A. Laine:] Jimmy Durante was the piano-player.

[Souchon:] Well, was your daddy on drums in that group there?

[A. Laine:] No, not in New York, with Jimmy--

[Souchon:] That was called the Dixie Jazz Band, wasn't it?

[A. Laine:] No, up there, they used to call it Alfred J. Laine's Band. I had three other fellows and myself, from New Orleans up there with Jimmy Durante. Jimmy Durante was a piano-player then.

[Souchon:] Did his nose get in the way then, too? (everyone laughs.)

[A. Laine:] I used to call him "Nose."

[Souchon:] Did you? Well, say a few words for yourself, say a few more.

[A. Laine:] I'm glad I was talking to you people and I hope we all see each other for many, many years to come. Thank you all and good luck.

END OF REEL I