NICK LAROCCA INTERVIEWS

June 2, 1958: Reel I

Place: 2218 Constance Street, New Orleans, Louisiana

Voices: Dominick James (Nick) LaRocca; Bartholomew (Buddy) LaRocca; Richard B. Allen

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[LaRocca:] I forgot certain incidents that places like we played in London; and before we came back to America we were asked by the British government to play at the Savoy Hotel; that was the celebration of the peace victory ball. There we were to play the dance music and--uh--we went on over there after they had all day parades and all kind of ceremonies in the street. All day people were kissing one another--men were even kissing you on the street, they were so happy. That night we went over to the Savoy Hotel and we mounted the stand. They had fifty-piece band in the United States Marine Band and probably about the same in the English band, and they both bands got up and played the "Star Spangled Banner" and "God Save the King." Now, we were pointed out to get up and start the dance program; instead of that, just a handful of musicians got up and played the "Star Spangled Banner," and when we played that number and finish with it--just a three blowing instruments, a piano and a drums--those people were amazed at the amount of music that could come out of them few horns. The house came down. In the audience was the King and Queen of England, the King of Belgium, General Pershing and his staff, and--uh--Marshal Petain and his staff, General Foch, and many notables of the--of Europe, and when we played--uh--after the "Star Spangled Banner" and--uh--the applause subsided, we went into the "Tiger Rag" which would be the first number, and when them people got up and danced you'd didn't know what you were looking at, it was just a dazzle of jewlery. They had tiaras on 'em; they [had] all kinds of beautiful clothes which I had never seen before; and the uniforms of the men just sparkled with all kind of brass epaulets and different things like that. We looked like we was in a--in a land of some story that I had read when I was a child. Great things! We looked around there and even the King applauded!

All of 'em applaud for us! We went into the second number, and we ain't never did stop playing, one number after the other until the ball was over. We were the greatest hit there. And the when--and that finished that night. When the NC-4, the NC-4 was flown over by Commander Reed, they had a private reception for him. Again the English Government called on us to play for them--and at Marble Arch--we entertained Commander Reed and the English nobility again there. That was at Marble Arch. That was when the NC-4 flew from America to England. I don't know which port they came from, but I have, in these clippings of mine, autographs of Commander Reed. Now, those are the two things that I forgot.

Now, when we came back to America, we got--taken Edwards back in the band, and I was to take Christian and have him play bass violin because he had known a little bit about it, about bass violin. All of us piddled around--all the fakers--we always piddled around different instruments. Like I used to play guitar; sometimes I'd try to play bass. I didn't play bass good, but nobody would know it, because when I start slapping on the bass there's nothing but the sound of slapping tempo would come out of it. So Emile played bass. He may have played better than me, but--he woulda filled in until he learned, but he wanted to go back to England. He had other things that he wanted to attend to over there.

So I bought Emile's share out so he could get enough money to go back to England. What I mean by share, when we played royalties for concerns, we got an artist royalty, the same as like Caruso would get--and I don't mean the two cent that you get for the copy, which two cents went to the publisher, and one cent come to us. We got fifty percent. Well, we got two cents royalty plus

the money for setting--for instance, a nominal fee which would pay about $150 for the date--plus a two cents royalty on every record that would be sold. Well, I bought his share out so he could manage then to go back to England. Well, when he got back there it was around September, or--ah--oh, I couldn't exactly tell you the date, he was asked to form a band over there for Mr. Mitchell, the man I had just left that want to sign us to another year contract before we left England--but I didn't want to stay in England no more; I had various reasons, that I can't tell, why I had to leave England--I wouldn't wanta tell, but maybe someday someone may find out but right now I wouldn't tell them--and uh--, we came back to New York. Emile went back to London, and he asked me to get him some men. Well, at this time we had many Orleans musicians that was out of work in New York. I wanted to send him New York men. He didn't want New York men; he wanted, Philly Napoleon and Johnny Costello, and men that knew the Dixieland style of music. I have his letter here, if someone would care to read into it, which if I read it they'll say that I'm telling an untruth. Will you stop the machine?

[Allen:] Surely.

["Buddy" LaRocca:] Not New York.

[LaRocca:] I may have made a mistake. I've been corrected by my brother. Emile did not want New Orleans men. He wanted men from New York who knew the Dixieland style and the numbers. I hope you'll be able to erase the first part, if I did make that mistake, off, but I'll have someone to read that letter in there so when you hear this man speak, he may speak different today, because everybody's wants to claim as creators. You want to look at it?

[Allen:] Yes, that's right. We'll keep it now. This is a letter from Emile

Christian, and it says: "I would like Philip Napoleon on cornet and Johnny Costello on clarinet, the boys I was working with, because they have more of the idea what I want, and they can play all the Dixieland numbers because I'll know we'll get some requests for them." It's signed on the back here, "Sincerely, Emile Christian, 2 Bagley Street, Tottenham Court Road, Dept. 1, London, England." and I don't see the date. It's on the first. The date is "September 6, 1920."

[LaRocca:] Now, from this letter you will see this is a New Orleans man; I coulda had him Sharkey, I coulda got him Gardena, Giardina--Tony Giardina was around New York doing nothing--and I had contacted these men for 'em. But he wanted men who copied from the Dixieland records. It'll go to show you that even the New Orleans boys didn't want the boys from New Orleans because they didn't know the rhythm. That is the truth that I am sitting here and telling you, that no New Orleans band played the rhythm that was in the--that was contained in the Original Dixieland Jazz Band recordings. They had to acquire it by listening to it. Well, the New Orleans boys was set in a way of their own. They couldn't see, and they couldn't feel. The same as the negroes that came, they thought they had the rhythm; they were making [scats]. Well, this is an ending I make on many of my pieces played eight years before that, [scats]. Now--they say we were not ahead of the rest of 'em; there's a New Orleans man will tell you we were ahead of 'em. Well, Emile went back. We open the Folies Bergère, and were a great success in New York City. We signed to make records for Victor Co. We didn't know that pressure had been brought on the Victor, otherwise I never woulda made these records with a saxophone. They forced us to use a saxophone because throughout the country they was a uh--something about

eliminatin' jazz because it was ruining the morals of the girls. Well, we made these records. They sold, sold in the millions, but they were not the same as the other records. You take a man playing from the North, who had not copied the style. Although he is, he was a technical man--there was no better saxophone player than him--yet he couldn't fit in the band properly. It broke up a sort of the rhythm of the band. A lot of people says the demise of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, we was dead. No, we were forced to the wall by laws. John Rhodes [?] Stratton went to Albany, New York in 1921, and passed laws prohibiting jazz bands from playing on Broadway. We were the only jazz band playing on Broadway, and we hada give up the contract with the Folies Bergère because we were to play there the following winter. That was when they put Gilda Grey in jail for doing the shimmy. And they stopped the band at twelve o'clock.

[Allen:] I hate to interrupt you in that story, but I missed out a couple things. I didn't get the--who was in the band at the time. I know Edwards was back; he replaced Christian.

[LaRocca:] Yeh, Edwards was back.

[Allen:] And I didn't get the name of the others.

[LaRocca:] Well, now I'll tell you the names of the men: Robinson joined us as piano player; which he had been first piano, steady piano player after Ragas's death.

[Allen:] Yes.

[LaRocca:] We had Shields, myself, Sbarbaro, Edwards, and what's his name, Robinson--that made the five of us.

[Allen:] Yes, and that's immediately upon coming back from London?

[LaRocca:] That's right.

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[Allen:] What was th' name of the saxophone player? I want to get that, too.

[LaRocca:] It was Bennie Kreuger.

[Allen:] Bennie Kreuger.

[LaRocca:] One of the most versatile men in New York at the time.

[Allen:] Yes.

[LaRocca:] But he was not a jazz man.

[Allen:] Now, back to Gilda Grey and her shimmy---

[LaRocca:] Well, Gilda Grey did the shimmy in her act, and I think she stayed there about, oh--maybe two weeks. They put her in there as a sort of show case so she could get a job. He wanted big shows. Well, I tell you who Gilda Grey was. [She] was the wife of Gil Boag. Gil Boag, Jimmy Thompson, and Mr. Salvant owned the this Folies Bergère at the top of the Wintergarden; they were the owners of it. Sam Salvant operated as the manager of it, but these other men were the partners, and they only brought Gilda Grey in there to do that dance with us for a show case. Right after that she got a big part in the Ziegfeld Follies.

[Allen:] Now, what did people object to in the dance?

[LaRocca:] Well, they said that we had a sexual music--that we were ruining the morals of the girls. They--uh--people would get out there and they'd forget they were dancing and stand in one spot and start moving around. In other words, the great masters tried to move 'em, but they didn't succeed. I guess ours was like wine--or good wine--when the people would get interested in our music they'd stand there; some of 'em would dance around, stand there, and then just moving themself like worms. And, uh--many of the times we sneak off the bandstand we'd play low, very low, very low, and one by one we'd sneak off the bandstand. They

was nobody on the stand and these people with their feet were keeping the rhythm, perfect rhythm on, on--you know, with scraping o' their feet on the floor. All of a sudden some one would look at the bandstand and there'd be nobody there, and you talk about a howl. Well, to begin, let me tell you about a certain psychology I used to use. Course, I'm stupid, but I know it takes one monkey to start clapping or hollering and the rest will follow. In my horn I had a way that could imitate a woman's voice hollering. [Does imitation.] Just like that, and nobody'd know where it would come. It would come out the horn; look like it was a hundred feet away--before they'd know [where] it was come from. Mr. Schultz many times would put people out and they didn't do a thing; [it] was that hollering. I'd get 'em so they'd be in ecstasy; they'd wouldn't know where they'd be hollering and stomping. More, more, more. And they'd be dropping ten, twenty, and fifty dollar bills in the sugarcan. And the more I'd holler, they wouldn't leave the floor. They'd hafta take us out the bandstand and get us away so the people could go buy refreshments. That was both at Reisenweber's and this place. [In] 1922 we were relegated to a dancehall. Wentwick and Healy's [Healy's Golden Glades Restaurant] [?] was turned into a dancehall for Sixti Busoni. I worked there about five weeks--wait, I'm ahead of my story. Before we went to the dance place, I wound up a series of one-night stands, where we made as high as $2,000 some places--not all places--and many the places we had return engagements. From my files you'll be able to see the offers of jobs we had. And all the New Orleans boys was not working. And if I'd a had a thousand men that could play our music, I coulda been a millionaire today, because I had jobs for all of 'em. But they was none of 'em could fit the bill.

In this one night stands we came back; and it was a tough job--riding all

night to go to another place. For instance, you jump from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, it was almost a whole twelve hour ride. Pennsylvania's a big state; it ain't like New Orleans and Baton Rouge [where] you could make it in a coupla hours. But over there it took a train; if you went by car it would take you all day long. Maybe day and a half to get there. So we used to go in on an $850 or $750 guarantee, plus fifty percent of the take over the $800 and some odd dollars. I'd have a man stationed at the door with one of these little meters. The admission was $1.10 for ladies and [women?]. When they went in there, each time one passed through the door, this man would click this little machine what he had in his pocket. The man in the office didn't know that we were keeping tab. At eleven o'clock I'd come down to find out how much money we had. I wasn't worried about who come in after eleven o'clock. All I was worrying about gettin', getting what I had coming to me at that time, and I didn't care if they let 'em in free after that. So we played in places like armories [where] some of these rubber lip men without electrical equipment they couldn't be heard fifty feet. You had to have power and lungs made of steel to filla place almost a half a square long, and a square, a square wide, or a square long and a half a square wide (either way you put it); and as many as five to eight and ten thousand people would be in there--jammed in there. They had alternate bands. They had eight, ten, twelve pieces would play on the opposite side of us, and when we played everybody got up and dance. When they played, nobody danced. Sometimes our shift would go for half an hour--as long as they'd applaud. I'd stay there pouring it at 'em, because we wanted to come back. Eleven o'clock I'd go pick up this money like I told you, check up with the man. Some men were honest; some would try to cheat me.

Well, I didn't mind if they beat me out of a $100 because they had little extra expense, we had nothing to put out, just come there dry with our instruments--no music to carry, no sound equipment--[I] only [had] to pay this man [on the door]. If it was a question of a 100, $150, I wouldn't open my mouth. When it come to almost four, five hundred dollars, I'd squawk for my end of it. I'd take $400 and I shove it in my pocket. I take the rest of it, whether it was $1,200 or $1,800--I had a money belt made that fit around my waist--and I'd take this money and shove it in my belt all around like that. None of the boys would walk with me; they were afraid that someone might hold me up and kill me. They would run off; some of 'em would stand around watching. But I had to go get a cab and ride to a hotel, and hold that money in my possession all night until the bank opened the next morning, [so] that these boys would get money orders and send them to their--wherever they wanted to send 'em. This money was split five ways. I never got a dime extra, outside of expenses like telegraphs and different things. It was a cooperative band, and everything I did was cooperative. Today many of the boys say they kept books for me, but it's untrue because if they're gonna look through these papers, and [they will] find out that they got the best break. I didn't get the best break. I did the work. I did the brain work. I composed all the numbers. I did everything in the band. I knew it was my only opportunity in life to make a success; working from a boy fifteen years old you'll know what it is when you see something in front of you, that you can make money out of it. You're not going to let that opportunity pass you, and that was my motto: opportunity knock once. [When] we came back to New York we was tired. We went to work and signed a contract with Sixti ~~Bazoni~~ Busoni. I think that's S-i-x-t-i ~~Bazoni~~ Busoni. He was a man that run a lot of

dance schools. He musta had about eight or nine dancing palaces around New York. I'm going ahead of my story. After we finished these one-nights, Shields had given his notice that he intended to retire from the music business. I had already changed the piano--I forgot to tell you that, too--at the Folies Bergère. When Robinson failed to come through with his agreement--he was to give us a thousand dollars, for the band, for pluggin' "Margie" and making "Margie" a hit song--up to this time Robinson never had a hit--I'm all mixed up on this thing, but if you listen you get these things, you'll be able to get 'em right.

[Allen:] Right.

[LaRocca:] And I plugged "Margie," and "Singing the Blues," and many other of Robinson's numbers, and I was instrumental in getting this thing to be recorded by Victor in 1920. When Robinson got his first statement, they had sold about a million and a half records; he musta got about eight, nine thousand dollars o' money for himself. They was three men interested in that. Three of 'em was to pay this money and they reneged on it--the thousand dollars. That was uh--can't think of the other man's name, but the names are on the song, you'll see. Robinson was in the band, and I give Robinson his two weeks notice and replaced him with Frank Signorelli. At this time Frank Signorelli, and then, and Johnny Costa and them had a little band they called the Memphis Five. They were copies of the orig--they copied off the Original Dixieland Jazz Band recordings and stuff, and this boy had not much time but only go over a few little other numbers that he had known our arrangements on. In the afternoon I'd play 'em over, showing him different parts, where to make the break and all, and each night we'd

add a different number and all so it wouldn't be too hard for him to remember. And that was the band that we went to Atlantic City [with] before we went on the one night stands. That's something I forgot to tell you that, too. It was here that we worked with Sophie Tucker, too; we was billed over Sophie Tucker. Our billing was in lights on the outside of the building. It remained there for a year after, and we weren't playing there. There was Katz's place. I don't remember the name now, but I can--if you could look up my pieces of paper that's in there, you'll find a contract of Katz, the amount of money we got from him, and we got room and board with this contract--that was agreed--that we were to get room and board. Then we went on the one night stand. It was this time that Shields give his [notice]; it was getting too hard. Shields had already married before we went to London, and his wife couldn't travel with him, and he was away from his wife, and from this money he was making--almost a thousand dollars a week for about eight-nine weeks--he thought he was fat, [that] this money would last him forever. I don't know where he went. Whether he went to Chicago or California I wouldn't know, because I never correspond with him. He didn't correspond with me. Now, we go to the Balconades. Jimmy Lytell, which played with Signorelli in the Memphis Five when they first formed as young boys in Brooklyn, joined my band. After five weeks I went down with influenza. I pulled the band out rather than put substitutes in there. When I pulled the band out that's when they formed the Memphis Five and brought it into the Balconades. And this is the beginning of the notoriety of the Memphis Five. He had learned the numbers and the arrangements by playing along with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band which I had taught this Signorelli and Lytell. And it was easy for them to have Miff Mole and a drummer sit in and play with 'em, because

that was the nucleus of their band; it was--They had two men right there; all they needed was trombone and the drums to fill out their band. They made many records for Sam Lanin under Ladd's Black Aces. Some of the arrangements they taken that Frank Signorelli--one, especially, and "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate." Armand Piron in 1917 sent me this music and asked me if I could set this music for a recording. I had never known Piron but I heard him play. He used to play most all the white society dances--he and [John] Robichaux. They had all the society dances. Very few white bands ever played for society--always these two negro bands. Now they played conventional ragtime music, the music of that era, which was played by white men also.

[Allen:] Were they reading or were those?--

[LaRocca:] They were note readers--absolutely note readers.

[Allen:] Could they fake at all?

[LaRocca:] No, I don't know I wasn't allowed in the place, understand?

[Allen:] Oh, I see.

[LaRocca:] Now how I come--you see, I used to be a electrician in my early days, and many times I was sent to DeSoto Hotel to do work over underneath there--you know on the electrical equipment. Or some light line would go out and I'd have to pull through new wires for it. I worked for Marks Construction Co. [spelling?] at that time. That was down here [at] 531 Iberville Street. That was the biggest elect--largest electrical construction [company] in the south. These people wired places like Monroe Electrical Power places--all through Louisiana. Zimmerman Lumber Co. run their auxiliary wire from Zimmerman, Louisiana into Monroe, which is about ten, fifteen miles. I climbed every pole in there, and put in the high power line that was ever put in Monroe in the

beginning. I worked on all that. And that's how I used to hear the colored bands, because whenever I went down there, and they had some function in the DeSoto Hotel is most for all where they used to give 'em, and I could hear them playing. Now--

[Allen:] Did Robichaux's band and Piron's band have a hot tone; would you say they had a jazz tone, or a legitimate tone, or what?

[LaRocca:] Well, I say they played the same. I think they recorded; I have never heard their records, but from people I've heard they didn't have jazz. Now I'm not quoting myself, because, because what I heard, I heard the same music in white bands.

[Allen:] Yes.

[LaRocca:] They mention many bands, but they don't mention Bohler's, the Christian's, the Dedroit's band, deCordy's band; they don't mention none of the white bands; only negroes has cultured Louisiana music. That's not right, because the culture of Louisiana music--it was because of so many parades, so many affairs that was given. Let me start in the beginning. I told you about the string bands that I played in, and let me tell you some of the of places where I went. On July 4th, they celebrated--that was American Day--July the 14 was Bastille Day; some places Southern Park, sometimes other places; at the different, great, big places they'd give these affairs. That'd last sometimes two days. Then they had the Volkes Fest which was German; they'd have three, four bands. They'd have a whole German band there, and plenty of other bands that they don't mention in none of this stuff here that they have here. They had men like Santo Giuffre [who] played in the French Opera; Peppitoni--some men that these negroes and many modern men couldn't even touch. They were men

that come from the conservatory that learned their music away from here. They had Germans. There was an old man here used to play at Kolb's restaurant--Schutt, Mr. Schutt--and he used to bum down the alley, too, where I used to go as a young boy. You don't hear 'em mention none of these men but negroes, but they don't tell you what they played. They say what they played. But they don't have no proof [that] no white man played music. In the French Opera they'll tell you the Italians didn't have nothing; mostly it was Italian opera, and Italian singers. They had other plays there. You gonna ask me why? I worked on the French Opera stage as a boy. I attended two arc lights on there and many o' the ideas I got from listening to the songs that they used to play--like playing counter-melody. Two songs going at one time, which it became counterpoint, in my case. You listen to "Livery Stable Blues;" you'll see what I mean. Take each instrument alone, and you got three melodies in there. That's what old timers called a fugue. We didn't know what to call it. We didn't call it anything until they named it for us in Chicago; we didn't know what it was. But we played it, that's all. Now there was the father of this Dedroit: Johnny Dedroit's father had a band--a very good band. There was Mr. Bohler had a band.

[Allen:] Mister who?

[LaRocca:] Bohler. [Spells B-O-H-L-E-R] There was this fella--ah, I don't mean Schilling; they had ragtime bands. There was Johnny Schiller, Chingomana [?]

["Buddy" LaRocca:] ~~Schinkomotta~~ Cinguemani [?] had a band.

[LaRocca:] Who?

["Buddy" LaRocca:] ~~Schinkomotta~~ Cinguemani [?].

[LaRocca:] Yeah, oh ~~Schinkomotta's~~ Cinguemani's [?] band. They were all playing by notes, and they played in carnival parades. Jack Laine played the carnival parades; he

hired some men who played by music and he had some fakers in his band, and he also had some men who didn't play at all, which they were call "potato" men. When you ask Jack Laine--when you go there, ask him about the potato men--how he made his money on unfortunate men. He'd have seven men playing. He played a bass drum; I'd be blowing my guts out on the cornet, and he had his son with a potato in an alto horn, blowing to the ground--blowing the dust off the floor--no music was coming out; he got paid for the parade. Then he'd have one or two boys that was hangers on, and there'd be seven men playing where there shoulda been ten playing; that's the kind of music he put out. He didn't look for music, he didn't know music; he wasn't even a musician. Yet this man's believed in many things. That is the kind of people they give cups to at the Jazz Club. Then they had Tom Brown's band; it was a ragtime band. These boys went to Chicago before I did. I want to tell the truth about everything, because if I tell you that I went before them, someone else'll fi-- But before these boys left, New Orleans was like a clearing house, and they had many men that was recruited out of the alley like--

End of Reel I
June 2, 1958

NICK LAROCCA INTERVIEWS

June 2, 1958: Reel II

Place: 2218 Constance Street, New Orleans, Louisiana

Voices: Dominick James (Nick) LaRocca; Bartholomew (Buddy) LaRocca; Richard B. Allen

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Reel II
June 2, 1958

[LaRocca:] Do you want me to go back to Piron, and--A. J. Piron and uh--"Shimmy Like My Sister Kate?"

[Allen:] And what happened there?

[LaRocca:] Well, let me tell you the beginning then, because I'm repeating some of this stuff. When we were at Reisenweber's we were the big hit. Piron sent to me a bundle of music to try to play for him. This is before [Clarence] Williams had joined his farm--firm, and amongst them was "Sister Kate," and "I Wish I Could Shimmy Like My,"--no, "I Wish,"--"Mama's Baby Boy," and "Brownskin, Who You For?", which they later placed and--with Will Rossiter of Chicago. This arrangement that we made on "Sister Kate" became famous around New York. Everybody wanted "Sister Kate" because it was a good number for them to play, and fit in good jazz. Now you ask me about what kind of music Piron played? Well, he played the same as any other band that played from notes. I see no difference in the music that he played and what white men wh--, that is, white men were playing at the time. They were Robichaux's band; they played too. Now whether they played by fake or by notes, I can not attest to that because I was not in [the room?], but to me it didn't sound any different than the music that I heard white men play at the different dances that were given at different picnic grounds and other places of that era.

[Allen:] Now, what about Lytell and Signorelli, and their recording of "Sister Kate?"

[LaRocca:] They took the whole arrangement in toto and recorded it; that's what they did. And they made "Sister Kate." Now I had correspondence with A. J. Piron--I just can't find it at present--I would like to include that in there to show you that Piron and I correspond[ed] before Francis Williams ever came to New York.

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[Allen:] Before who is this came to New York?

[LaRocca:] I mean Clarence Williams. You got me right that time because I'm making a mistake. I'm just telling you, I'm reading,--I'm not reading, I'm telling you from my mind. Clarence Williams came to New York around 1923. The first white man he met on Broadway was me. With an introduction from A. J. Piron, which you'll find in them books, too. And this negro is supposed to have heard Buddy Bolden play. Now let me tell you about this man, who he is, where he come from, and if any of your serious scholars doubt me (pause). I was just speaking about Clarence Williams when he came to New York. Now if any of your serious scholars doubt what I say, you look up the history of Clarence Williams. He was supposed to have heard Buddy Bolden play. Buddy Bolden, according to the statistics given out by the New Orleans Jazz Club, was incasserated [incarcerated] in the crazy house--that's Jackson, Louisiana--in 1906, or he was put in jail and held there a year before they put him in the crazy house. That was 1906. This would make Clarence Williams about six years old, or seven. Because at the age of eight years old he lived with his grandmother in an alley in Plaquemine, Louisiana, where he was a shoeshine boy for a gentlemen by the name of Ferdinand H-E-R-B-E-R-T, Herbert, who ran a barber shop in the city of Plaquemine. Now this negro didn't come to New Orleans 'till his late teens. He could have never heard Buddy Bolden play. This same thing applies to little Louie. Little Louie heard the records of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, but I can tell you he never heard Bolden play. Stop the machine, will you? Wait now. Little Louie, the man I'm talking about, is Louis Armstrong, who styled his playing off the "Ostrich Walk." If you serious scholars get down and listen to his records "Sweet Little Papa" or "Little Pa," you'll see what LaRocca's talking about. I want you to read a letter from

Mr. Fowler--just that paragraph where it comes in and talks about Louie's young life in New Orleans.

[Allen:] All right. This is a letter dated May 27, 1958. It's from Don Fowler, 9441 S.W. 8th Drive, Portland 1, Oregon. It's to D. Jas. (Nick) LaRocca, at 2218 Constance Street, New Orleans 13, Louisiana. And here's the paragraph that Mr. LaRocca would like for me to read. "The other day I ran across an interesting statement by Louis Armstrong in his book, Satchmo [My Life In New Orleans]. He is discussing his life in New Orleans in 1918, and this is the paragraph: 'One day when it was raining like mad, Daisy and I were in the front room listening to some new records I had just bought--new releases of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, which we were playing on an upright victrola we were proud of. The records were "Livery Stable Blues," and "Tiger Rag,"--the first "Tiger Rag" to be recorded (Between you and me it's still the best)'."

[LaRocca:] Now read down where he says [about] the others stealing the music of the Dixieland Jazz Band, the Louisiana Five.

[Allen:] "I have a record of 'Virginia Blues' by the Louisiana Five in which they play the third strain of 'Skeleton Jangle' as a part of the tune." It's signed, "Sincerely yours, Don Fowler." Is there anything else you want me to read?

[LaRocca:] No, that's all. Not only the Louisiana Five, but everybody--it was a field day for 'em to all steal the music and different things off the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. Now they say these negroes didn't hear these records. Joe heard 'em; if this man heard 'em, Joe Oliver heard 'em, because Joe, in his thing, that's what he bases his rhythm on, cause he didn't know no better. He was just an ignorant negro that didn't know no better, like these ignorant white

crumbs who [are] supposed to be historians around New Orleans. They can't be honest people. I have a statement in one of The Second Line about Miss Myra Menville. She says: "It never rains, but it pours. Marshall Stearn is in town with his Guggenheimer Foundation." Well, this ain't a laugh; this is a laugh. She says, "Whenever they come to find out of this jazz, I see that they go to see the right people." Now here's a woman, maybe forty years of age, interesting herself to be pro-negro. Marshall Stearns, who was a pro-negro, and is the cause of integration of bands, and is the cause of softening the morals of the integrated people of the South--this man belongs to a society, Young Men's Christian Hebrew Association. He has it on his letter; I'd like to read that letter to you, or have someone read it for me.

[Allen:] All right. We got it going.

[LaRocca:] To bring you up to date on this thing, this happened in 1936, when I was to reorganize the band, and this Tom Brown had given a lot of information that was untrue. Said he had the first Original Dixieland Jazz Band. But he didn't make no claims at this time of composing any numbers. That came later, when he got mixed with [Dr. Edmond] Souchon; that all came up later--about the numbers that he had composed. But I want you to read that, uh--

[Allen:] The letter here from?--

[LaRocca:] Yeah.

[Allen:] Let me see, I'll give you the full letter head. It's a letter from "Marshall W. Stearns, Yale Hot Club, 6 Lynnwood Place, New Haven, Connecticut. M. W. Stearns, President, Charter Unit of the UHCA. January 11, 1937, Mr. D. J. LaRocca, Earle Theater, Washington, D.C. Dear Nick: I have all your records

from 'Livery Stable Blues' to the recent discs. I like the earlier ones better. Between you and me, our last argument should furnish you with plenty of publicity. I do think, however, that you failed to give colored musicians a break, and that is why I exaggerated the other extreme since the public is inclined to believe you, and musicians of your opinion. There is nothing I should like better than to see your scrapbook. However, I'm still in school and will be teaching next year. If I ever get the chance I shall certainly drop in and say hello. Let's keep up the battle. Sincerely, Marshall W. Stearns;" that's the signature, and it has "M. W. Stearns, President," typed underneath, in--initials are given "M. W. Stearns" and "mjl" as his typist.

[LaRocca:] From this article many other articles was copied. This is a work--you got to be either pro-communist or a communist to work this way. There's a letter to keep me quiet. I'm a working man, trying to support a family. This man has not stopped writing about negroes, yet he knows different. Now here's Brown's letter. To show you Brown was lying, I wanta show you--I wanta have you read this in there--what the name of his band--was in case you ever read Downbeat of 1936 and see what they have did to a man who has did nothing to anyone but try to make a living and be honest in his ways of life. Would you read this letter here?

[Allen:] This is dated, "New Orleans, Louisiana, 10/21/36. Dear Friend Nick: Received your letter and was very glad to hear from you. Was glad to hear that you are in good health, as this letter leaves me the same. Was also glad to hear that you are doing good and hope you will continue to do so. If I remember correctly, the billing of the band, when we were in Chicago playing at the Lamb's Cafe, was Brown's Band From Dixieland. We opened an engagement there on--"

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[LaRocca:] May the fifteenth.

[Allen:] "on a short time after May the fifteenth. Sorry I'm not able to furnish you with any exact dates, as all the clippings I had were destroyed by fire since returning home. We were billed at a theater in Hoboken, New Jersey as Brown's Band, Kings of Ragtime. That was during the latter part of 1915, I think. Also, played an engagement at the Century Theater in New York, and played Loew's--

[LaRocca:] Loew's Theater [?].

[Allen:] It says, "Loew's time, as the The Musical Rubes. Give my regards to Larry, Tony, and any of the other boys I know. My wife sends her best regards. Wishing you the best of luck and success, I remain your friend, Bill Lambert."

["Buddy" LaRocca:] That's the drummer.

[LaRocca:] That is the drummer of [Tom] Brown's Band. Now, you historians--all you historians, including the great Mr. Souchon--go look up and see if you see any billing of them. But you're willing to print that they were the first Original Dixieland Jazz Band. You not only ought to be ashamed of yourself, you should go to the top of the new bridge and jump off--that's where you belong. Because if you were an honest person, as you say you're intelligent--you have an education which I have not got, but I have more truth in my little finger than you got in your whole body. You have lied to the people; you have told untruths. I'll not suffer by it; you will. And Miss Menville will go down; she deserted the sinking ship after I sent her a few letters. That will go down in history. If the honest scholar will listen to my letters, they'll know what they did to me around New Orleans. They not only persecuted me, they made little of me. They was not ever a man ever lived since the time of Jesus Christ that

they ever put so much lies against. For what, I'll never know. They say I was trying to take the credit for everything. Now if you were leader of a band, and you were out there before others, and you know they didn't play that?-- you wouldn't see Al Jolson say that Eddie Cantor was Al Jolson? No, that's different. But me, I'd have to say they did play what I played and I know they're liars. I'm not going to say it, because I'm going to tell the truth. They didn't play what I played. And the fact is, it's not only one number that I composed, but I have about twenty of 'em published already, and I got at least thirty of 'em home, and I could make another thousand before I die if I want 'em right now, because I know how to compose a tune; I know how to arrange it. They didn't have that, and that was the beginning; what we did was the beginning of all name bands. Came special arrangements, came all what you want, but the Dixieland showed the way--the Original Dixieland. I want to come to a part where we played the "St. Louis Blues." Course, this'll bring me back into 1920 again. But this is the only way I can get it on as I come to these things.

[Allen:] Didn't Mr. Urquhart read that? A letter from Handy, is that it?

[LaRocca:] I believe he did. See that's why I don't--

[Allen:] Well, I think I got to it.

[LaRocca:] I admitted to you that Brown's band went to Chicago before we did. The people didn't notice 'em any different; they made no success, so I can't see where they introduced anything. They had many bands, like I told you before. New Orleans was a clearing house.

["Buddy" LaRocca:] Now read them that letter where you asked him--you wanted to meet him before the Jazz Club.

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[LaRocca:] Oh, yeah, I'll get to that.

["Buddy" LaRocca:] And you understand he was afraid to meet ya.

[LaRocca:] And uh--he's got me all mixed up now--this guy.

["Buddy" LaRocca:] That's all right.

[LaRocca:] And uh, see, stop it a minute. When Brown went to Chicago the members of his band was not as he gives 'em in the later part of, the latter part of his band. The band consist of Billy Lambert, drums, Gus Miller [Mueller], clarinet, Raymond Lopez, cornet, this fellow Loyocano, Arnold Loyacano, guitar, and Theo Brown, bass. This Loyacano says he had a taken music by some professor--he learned more in one lesson than kids learn in three years today. Now to tell you the truth, I don't wanna knock this man, but I never heard him play piano outside of chords like I play; maybe he plays 'em a little better than me, because he has been playing longer, and more steady than I have played, but I always know him to be a guitar player. That's all I ever seen him play in New Orleans. Now, if he played piano--in every band he played with he played bass. He may have played, in Brown's Band, piano; maybe that accounted for their failure: I don't know. But they didn't have the rhythm. Because if they did--and they went before us--it would [have] been to their glory and not the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, who came after them, as they say. Because no one noticed their music; no one noticed their music of being anything different but ragtime, as they billed themself. Now I was trying to tell you about New Orleans being a musical town, when I was interrupted by my brother. New Orleans was a place--when the men came here and they want to recruit a band, they'd come into Exchange Alley; and they had men that traveled all over the United States, maybe Mexico, and any place that circuses or road shows would go. This is before Brown ever

went to Chicago; cause I happened to be in the Alley and know, and spoke to many of the old timers in there like, fellows like "Richy" Toms [spelling?]; he had bands that went out in circuses, traveled all over the United States, through Chicago and all. He played ragtime; played like the rest of 'em played around here, by notes, ragtime. But Brown's band was part fake and part readers; Lopez could read and so could Miller [Mueller] read, and the rest of 'em were fakers. Tom Brown was a faker. Now--

[Allen:] How did his trombone playing differ, say from Edwards?

[LaRocca:] Well, he never played any kind of trombone until years after. You heard--You'll have to verify that by the records he's supposed to have played with different bands. Edwards was the daddy of all modern trombone players. There's nobody could compete with Edwards on a trombone; although he and I are enemies today, I'll give him what he's due. The man was the greatest trombone player of his age. He invented many tricks on the trombone, which was to be followed by men like Miff Mole, Teagarden [Jack Teagarden], and all of 'em, which they improve. Now you'll say, well why didn't he do this, and why didn't he do that? And let me tell you something: you must have a starting point for everything. We had no records to fashion ourself behind. They had our records to fashion behind. The only record I ever played was like I told you: against marches, Sousa's marches, and all. And from the noodles in there I built my own tunes. Well, they may say they're no good. Other men have did the same thing; it's not only I did it, the great masters did it. And modern men did it; I seen tunes like "I'm Sorry I Made You Cry," and all that, and they reserve it, and put the chords a little bit different, use the same chord construction, and it's "Who's Sorry Now." It's the same chords' construction, but they're

modern and they're not Nick LaRocca--but if Nick LaRocca did that, that would have been wrong. That woulda been all wrong; he done took somebody else's tune. But two other different guys that didn't have nothing to do with jazz did it, [so] it's perfectly all right. Now, on the chord construction of "Tiger Rag," you can put in that, that what you call this, this parade you got there--"Bourbon Street Parade;" it'll fit it. And "Washington and Lee Swing," or "Tulane Swing," whatever you want to call it, it'll fit it. And "Over the Waves" will fit it too. So therefore, if they want to get technical, call it all "Over the Waves," and give the dago a break, or the Italian. Call it that, if they want to go back to where they want to build up the chord construction, that's where the tune came from. ["Sombre Soles"?], that's the right name of it; that's some of the tunes I played in my early days, and that's what they played around here in the early days. They had no American music, hardly any American music then. Most of the music was imported from away from here. Oh, they may have started around 1900, they start; and the first man that put rag-time in music was Scott Joplin, and I think he was from Texas. And many of the tunes that he played--I didn't copy from him--but he had three parts like all the rest of the people of that day, and you'll find most of our tunes had three parts--had a trio to it--which was copied by other people. I copied from someone else, but in a different rhythm. When we played the rhythm of our band, it was entirely different than the rhythm that had preceded us; it was different entirely. Because if it wasn't different no one would have noticed us. We would have been like Tom Brown, or "Richey" Tom, or anybody else; we'd have been just passing through. But wherever we went we were a success. I don't care if we in a played in a dive, we were a success; we jammed the place. All they had to

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[do is] pass and hear us and they'd come in; it was something that appealed to 'em. Today they don't play jazz the way we played it. You'll ask me why? Well, they got a bunch of rubberlip men; they good for one chorus. If I had to play one chorus maybe I could have straightened the bell out. The horn wouldn't stayed still; it would have stretched straight out. When they play the one chorus, they're finished; then they come in on the last chorus. They don't play the tune through in unison the same way we did, and play a whole night. Some nights we played as high, long as seventeen hours a night. They couldn't even begin to start; in less than one hour they'd have layed their horn down like I made Richard Brunies lay his down in Biloxi. He was--this man came over there, he was gonna show me up, show me what kind of lip he had. Jack Laine hired him. I had told you about this parade. Came over there before the day was over. He said, "Let me take the high C." "Go ahead, take it, Richie." I know what conversing a lip is; I know when to blow hard and know when to blow easy. I never take the horn from my mouth. Once it's up there it stays there from the beginning to the end of the tune. I never went in for high notes, but at my command I could make a high C any day--that is, a high, a high, uh, B on the piano, that's a high C on the trumpet. I could make it any time. And I could have went above that. But when you're playing alone, after you make your high C and D, what comes after that? Nothing? Not with the Original Dixieland Jazz Band; it hadda keep moving. And I was always there driving--in the driver's seat, driving that band. Whenever I played, I constructed the thing. Larry put the lace on and Edwards sewed it up. And they was no band that ever came behind us ever played like us. I've heard bands try. They've tried to copy these things down in notation; can't be done. You can't play another man's

style it's got to be [without it's being] stiff. Just like Joe thought he had the rhythm,[but] he was stiff. You want to listen to his record good and you'll change your mind. If you are a musician you got to change your mind. But if you just pro, and you don't care, and you are biased in your opinion--well, you stick to your own opinion; that ain't gonna hurt me any. But as the people know, or are beginning to find out, since they reissued--the Victor wouldn't reissue the records; I tried to have 'em put them out when this controversy came up, but there's different hands that's running the Victor today than were running the Victor Company when I was a young man. But through some influence, the Columbia put these records out. And these records have sold all over the world, and they are beginning to find out. How could these men play so better than these negroes, and they eight, nine ahead of 'em? How could they do that if they copied the negro? How could they do it? I'll leave that to Dr. Souchon, and Miss Myra Menville to explain me that rhythm came from Africa. Now rhythm is not necessarily music; I don't say--but I never heard that rhythm in Africa. The only place I heard it was in the records of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. He heard it in Africa, Africa, Africa, because he read Marshall Stearns' book, who is pro-negro, who is trying to give the negro culture. I don't say the negro don't play better today than he played then, but look what he has. He has a school that teachs 'em. Many are taught by white men, music. I had nobody to teach me; I taught myself. I'm not here trying to sway anybody to what I tell 'em, but only a man that couldn't read would have to make up such stuff to fake, like [Makes br-r-r-r sound.] through a horn, and different other little things that he didn't know the tune--would add different little things which later became known as jazz licks or jazz idioms. It was just like a faker or bunch of

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gypsies--didn't know nothing. And not knowing the tune, we'd fall back on them. Now I can tell you: many of the fellows, they put 'em all together, these tunes, these idioms. They'd start (doodleoddldoo) all together. Well, when they finished that one chord construction, with that tune, let me see 'em play another tune behind it. Well, I didn't do that. I coulda played the same way, but after I finished one tune in that same chord construction, they were all alike; they became all alike, there was no difference. So I was a limited man; I limited my licks. I limited the different little things that I put into it, saving it for somewhere else for a little novelty. [They] say, "He played straight." That's true; I stuck to the melodic line. You knew what I was playing. But did you know what the negro who followed me were playing? They said they built it on chords. That's a lie; he built it on my tunes. In the marches that I played around the streets, that they heard me play in the carnival parades--cause no negro played carnival parades; they may have played in marching bands. And I don't remember in my early times playing in the marching bands; and as far as the funerals, they never played them in my days. That's all only lately since the Jazz Club, to give credits that these people buried 'em by--this marching business, of march, of burial, came in with the military first. Then come the societies. Then come the different other people like the volunteer fire department, which I played about three or four different funerals for them. Jack Laine had the job, but I was the leader of the job, and they'd have a few men that read. I was a faker, but once I heard a tune I could play it. And if I didn't play it, what I played never went against what the other men was playing, because it would be either harmony notes or another note that would coincide with what he's playing. Many of the tunes, like "Flee As A

Bird"--this fellow Papite, that this, this is of the man had bands out on the road, too. He would be the cornet player, and he'd play the melody and I'd play along with him. He had Brock on baritone, he was a reader; old man Alexander on helicon tuba. He was an Italian, schooled in the old country. Today they got him down in the Cabildo as one of the first jazz men; they got a picture of him in a great big thing down in the Cabildo as the first jazz man. This man played no jazz, but he did play with Jack Laine on these funerals.

[Allen:] Did he play by ear at all?

[LaRocca:] Oh yeah, he could fake. Any good reader could fake just bass parts--common, common chords. Look: if you were, if you were a musician (imitates a tuba), what does it take to, to, to, to fake a common chord? All the chords are in, in the common tunes are almost all identical; they had no accidentals in 'em. And if you knew one tune, it had to change after so many bars. The chord change would go from a, say for instance you were in say, take the key of B-flat: then you go to F seventh, from F seventh you go back to B-flat, then B-flat seventh, then the top chord, E-flat; then you come back to the major chord. Who the hell could--who the devil couldn't play that? You wouldn't have to be a note reader to play that; faker could play it. Note reader could play it along with a fake band--all he had to do was play it. And those men played by music, and they could not play anything jazz. They played ragtime; like, they were playing off the music, and it was a different rhythm. Ragtime had a jumpy rhythm, and jazz was a smooth rhythm. It may be a cousin to it, but it has no part of it. In other words, when you play jazz you smooth it. You can write ragtime, but you couldn't write jazz. When we had our pieces to be taken down in notation, Miss

Klern couldn't put 'em down, and the men in New York couldn't put 'em down the way they were. But today they have signs to put over 'em, and the men, they know what they are. Why did they know what they are? Cause they heard 'em on the record by some one before them. I see the reel is near out.

[Allen:] Yes.

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