

McCULLUM, BERTHA (MRS. GEORGE McCULLUM, SR.)  
October 16, 1960  
Reel I--Digest--Retyped

Also present: William Russell, Harold Dejan, Mrs. Charlotte  
Botney (daughter of George McCullum, Sr.), Ralph Collins, [Kid Sheeler (son)]  
[George McCullum, IV].

George McCullum, Sr., <sup>[actually I.]</sup> played a C. G. Conn cornet. BM  
spells McCullum. GM, Sr., was born July 27, 1884, and BM is  
eleven months [younger?] than Sr. He died November 14, 1920.  
George McCullum, Jr., <sup>[actually III.]</sup> was with Harold Dejan in [Clarence Desdune's]  
band. Many people confuse the two men. Jr. was born  
February 22, 1906, and died March 21, 1938. Mrs. CB says that  
her father was one of the "original founders of jazz." Manuel  
Manetta and Sr. were friends. Sr.'s grandson was musical.  
Apparently this is in a newspaper article. Mention is made  
of a photograph of McCullum's Jazz Orchestra banner, the  
first <sup>\* 18</sup> New Orleans marching band, organized in the nineties.  
Mention of the Armed Services edition of Jazzmen, a copy of  
which was given to BM in France. BM offers WR a photograph  
of GM with his short cornet. [Do we have a copy of this pic?  
Where?] <sup>Yes</sup> To be catalogued RBA Oct. 15, 1969

Sr. was "born and raised" in New Orleans. He was taught  
by BM's uncle, Thomas R. LeBlanc, who lives in a California  
convalescent home. <sup>[mentions his children?]</sup> He is over ninety years old. TRL played  
in Henry Allen [Senior]'s Brass Band. WR has a photograph  
of Allen's band in which TRL appears. TRL, Sr., HA, John  
Robichaux played together. TRL, JR, and possibly Dave Perkins  
were the leading musicians of their era.

\* [cf. other interviews e.g., Lidere Barbarian, and  
other documents - RBA]

Discussion of photograph of (doubtless) GM with his ~~Σ~~.  
C. G. Conn short trumpet [i.e., cornet, see above]. Joe "King"  
Oliver used a [Conn?] cornet. Sr. taught him. JO played in  
Sr.'s brass band. When Sr. had string band jobs, JO would  
come along. This was how JO learned to play <sup>the</sup> string band  
instruments. The other musicians would chip in to pay JO. At  
this time BM's children were small. GM taught JO how to  
play [in a "string band (i.e., dance band) or a string instrument?].  
Manuel Manetta was called "Hoss." When MM and Sr. returned  
from a job on the lake to Gravier and Rampart streets, Sr.  
[and MM] would fall asleep on the ~~XXXXXX~~ Louisiana Avenue  
streetcar; they would be awakened and would get off at Franklin  
and Louisiana } on the return trip. GM would walk to the ferry  
with MM, then MM would walk back with him; they would walk so  
long until ~~XX~~ it was so late they would be afraid to come in  
the house.

Honore Dutrey and Eddie Atkins played trombone with Sr.  
Pete Dutrey also played with Sr.

Sr. played for the Jefferson City Buzzards' Carnival parades  
almost until his death. Sr.'s ~~last~~ <sup>last</sup> job was the Bulls' parade.  
He was already sick, got out of bed to play the Bulls' parade,  
came home and got back into bed. Monday ~~was~~ <sup>he had</sup> the Odd Fellows  
parade over the river. CB's godfather, [?] Brown, } who played  
in Sr.'s band } then begged GM not to play the Bulls' parade,  
offered to pay GM \$10 out of his own pocket, but GM said his  
word was his bond. He told Bertha Monday he knew it would  
be his last parade, insisted on going. He came home and got  
back in bed. He took to his bed in July and died in November.

[Unclear here. Was the Bulls' parade a few days before the Odd Fellows? If so, and if he played for the Odd Fellows, that and not the Bulls' was his last parade.]

BM's uncle, Thomas R. LeBlanc, Kinchen, and Dave Perkins had a brass band made up of youngsters which included Sr. TRL played alto, and Kinchen played also. The band's first parade was in May, possibly for the Odd Fellows [therefore, May 10--RBA]. There was an eclipse that day in 1912. BM then lived on Seventh ~~XXXXXX~~ Street between Rampart and Dryades. [Chief? identified as Laura's husband, a man who had one eye] was in the band. Edward Clem was in TRL's age group. Sr. was the youngest cornet in the Indiana Brass Band [which included?] John Robichaux, Edward Clem, Kinchen, TRL, Dave Perkins.

BM married Sr. XM on April 27, 1905. She moved into his mother's home on Liberty Street between Sixth and Washington. He lived no further down than Second Street, where she thinks he was born between Liberty and Howard [now LaSalle]. Sr. did not play with Buddy Bolden as they were not in the same class [musically?]\*. BM knew BB and his family. BB did not play music long.

BM was not allowed to go to dances, but she went to picnics.

TRL would have made a nice interview, but now is too old. He had a symphony orchestra of boys and taught music in California. He "rattles off" about the past.

\* POSSIBLY BECAUSE THEY  
BOTH PLAYED THE SAME  
INSTRUMENT?? G. DARRAH  
4-9-89

Sr. wrote arrangements for his brass band and "string band." The latter had a cornet, clarinet, bass violin, trombone, and sometimes a guitar. HD suggests that it was called "string band" because the brass band had no strings at all.

WR mentions string trios, and this reminds BM that people wanted soft music. In this case they would hire Sr.'s pianist, Naomi Franklin (later Verrett [spelling?]), or another lady who played with Sr., a violin and a bass

When Sr. would play an advertising job, he would have the wagon or truck stop in front of their house so the family could hear his band. There was constant music in the home. Sr. always had rehearsals there.

Sr. did not compose as far as BM remembers. She did not keep his music, giving it to Jr. although Sr. had made her sort out all his music, and advised her to keep the valuable pieces [???--RBA].

CB comments on Jr.'s ability to hold a note. HD says that Jr. ~~worked~~ played with fine clarinetist and saxophonist Henry Julian at the Music Box, a taxi-dance hall at the corner of Carondelet and Canal. He worked days also. CB says that Jr. recorded "Milneburg Joys" in New Orleans, according to her oldest sister. She doesn't know who has the record. [Some discussion of his wife?] The recording was made at the time when standing up by sections and singing in turn began. Jr. could not sing or dance. He was a small man.

Reel I--Digest--Retyped

HD has a picture of Jr. with Desdune that he will try to blow up. WR says he will get it copied, hopes it will be big enough to see.

Sr. did not make any records.

Jr. taught Alvin Alcorn.

HD characterizes Jr. as a "powerhouse of a man." There would be one trumpet and one trombone against three reeds; the trumpeter had to be a man.

Sr. worked in the Cotton [Exchange Building?] every day, played music every night. He was a cotton sampler. WR recalls that GM got some other musician a job there. He used to play in the Vieux Carré, in a big restaurant. One night they made some jokes about the bass player, Dandy Lewis. Manuel Manetta was not in on the jokes, did not know what it was all about, but the bass player was going to kill him. Sr. stepped between them, and fired Dandy Lewis. MM told this story to WR. Sr. had a terrible temper. He would take that little short cornet of his and fight [with it?].

CB tells a story which shows that Sr. did not believe in giving to blind beggars.

Sr. played with the Ringling Brothers Circus band for two months only since he did not like traveling. He arranged for BM to send him a telegram to ~~return~~ return home. CB comments that all the white people knew him and loved him. ~~XXXXX~~ At this time CB was one year old.

He loved CB. When he was "dying almost," CB and he sneaked out and made the rounds, going to all the places he used to go downtown, including [the bookmakers?] and [Tarrentellds?], a place he used to go to with Manuel Manetta.

Sr. played music from the age of fourteen. He was only thirty-six when he died.

Sr. went to Chicago, but not to play. Joe Oliver left for Chicago with his wife. Discussion of their separation later. BM knew him before his marriage. Most of the young musicians were not married.

Sr.'s string band played at the [New Orleans] Country Club, the Halfway House and West End. His brass band played for colored parades and, at carnival time, for the Jefferson City Buzzards. WR says the Buzzards now have two bands sometimes. Discussion of Carnival Marching Clubs. HD says he played the last parade of the [Eleonore Club?] before [World] War ~~XXX~~ [II] when [Mardi Gras?] parades stopped.

Sr. played no other instrument but cornet.

End of Reel I

Also present: William Russell, Harold Dejan, Ralph Collins,  
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ [George McCullum IV?],  
George "Kid Sheik" Colar, Mrs. Charlotte McCullum Boutney

GM [Sr?] 's first and only involvement was cornet.

GM Sr's father was a musician too. His name also was George McCullum. [Therefore Sr. is actually Jr., and Jr. is III, etc.] He played cornet too.

BM's uncle, Professor Thomas R. LeBlanc, and a man named Kinchen started GM, Sr., and other young boys out in a band.

LeBlanc and Kinchen taught the boys. <sup>Ed. King Oliver's band + Little Dad Vincent, Reel 2]</sup> James Holtry and "Chief"

were in it. LeBlanc played alto in Henry Allen, Sr.'s band in Algiers. WR has photograph of this band. LeBlanc went to California years ago. He also lived in Chicago for a while.

His first wife died in New Orleans; he has been married twice since then. BM does not recall that TRL ever ~~played~~ <sup>played</sup> in a dance band, but she believes he had a concert band of children <sup>there in California]</sup>. He did more teaching there [than playing?].

GM, Sr., believed in having music written out, made his <sup>although some pieces were played by ear</sup> boys learn music. He taught [Oliver?] Alcorn and Joe Oliver.

GM, Jr., taught Alvin Alcorn. BM feels it unfair that people give so much credit to Joe Oliver, when George, who brought him out, is not credited. WR says reason Joe Oliver is so noted is that he made the first really important [jazz] records.

[Dr. Edmond Souchon said he and his friends hired GM ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ (Sr.?) as he was cheaper than (and not as good as) JO.--RBA]

BM seems to feel the difference is not because JO made records and GM did not, but because JO went away from home, GM left home only briefly. The older band would take JO along on jobs, especially when they were playing out at the lake, let

him play with them, pitch in and make up the money for him.

Mention of Manuel Manetta, old friend and contemporary of GM. MM had trouble with high blood pressure two years previously, but looks pretty well now. BM repeats what she has said several times on Reel I of this interview, that she sure would like to see MM.

Discussion of Louis Warneke, whether he played alto sax or trombone, and when he died. WR thinks he heard him at Luthjen's Big Eye Louis <sup>Big</sup> [Nelson Delisle]. [Perhaps confused with trombonist Albert Warner.] HD says ~~Warneke~~ Warneke used a slap-tongue technique on the alto sax. Mention of Eddie Atkins and his friendship with Joe Oliver. Warneke and Lorenzo Tio were the two saxophones in Piron's orchestra; LW played alto sax; LT played tenor sax and clarinet. HD does not remember seeing LW much after he left Piron.

Jr. played with the Excelsior Brass Band. BM says either Jr. or Sr. could play as the lone cornet in a brass band. HD names as powerhouse trumpet men: George McCullum, Jr., Manuel Perez, Kid Howard on some days (at that time).

Joe Howard taught Jr. Jr. started playing when he was just under fourteen years of age. Jr. was taught by Joe H<sup>U</sup>ward for less than a year. JH did not charge GM. HD says that JH <sup>[JH + Kid Sheehy were in Bogalusa together during the depression.]</sup> played trumpet and bass. WR heard him on tuba. [JH?] played

in the Indiana Brass Band with GM, Sr. GM, Sr., was the youngest member of the Indiana band; the others were older men. This band was established about 1905, and it lasted for a while.



It played for parades and funerals. There were five bands for [Henry] Allen [Sr.]'s funeral. BM forbade music for Sr's funeral. She was a lifelong Catholic; he became a Catholic during their marriage; the children were all raised in the Catholic church. Discussion of BM's health.

Mention of photo of GM, Sr., holding cornet. Earl Joseph made this photo. It was made to put in the paper. The boy from the printing company gave the family the cut, but they do not know where it is now. <sup>[see below]</sup> BM thinks this is a good photo of GM, Sr.

HD says he never heard Sr., but Sr. must have been a genius if he was better than Jr. BM says Sr. could hold a note. HD says Jr. was not a first-class "get-off" [jazz] man, but was a first-class reader and could play all the "Dixieland" numbers. He had a good lip. HD played in a brass band with him. They traveled on the road a long time together. BM says he played in the WPA band. The last time she heard him was when [the WPA band?] played for some people from Washington, at the Hughes center. He lived on Rocheblave Street.

[CMB?] finds the cut mentioned above. It is copper, about four by two and a half inches, in good condition. [GM IV?] speaks. Mention of another photo of Sr., in his ~~XXXX~~ circus uniform, which has braid [on the coat and pants?], a hat with plumes, etc. This large photo was made in 1911. CMB was born in 1910.

Young George [GM IV?] was in the Army, is still in the Reserves. His mother wouldn't let him keep up the music. He has two saxophones, a cornet, his father's last cornet. HD

says the reason musicians switch from cornet to trumpet is that the cornet is harder to blow than the trumpet. GM<sup>6</sup> [IV?] has his father's last cornet. Louis Armstrong wanted to buy Jr.'s gold Conn trumpet. It was stolen from Jr.'s car. BM has Sr's cornet still. Directions are given to get to ~~XXXXXXXX~~ an address in the Lafitte Project on Rocheblave near Orleans.

[Is the cornet there?] [Cornet given to New Orleans Jazz Museum, October 31, 1963--BBR]

BM and CMB say the band uniforms were solid blue with braid on the side of the pants, with a mandarin collar and brass buttons.

CMB says Papa's banner was given to the <sup>[local one?]</sup> Jazz Foundation, then the Cabildo. It was displayed at the Newport News Jazz Festival [probably means Newport, Rhode Island]. It is now displayed at the museum [Cabildo].

Jr. was in the WPA band. Before this, he played at the Entertainers' cabaret and the [Pythian Temple] Roof Garden. At a place near Jackson Avenue on Saratoga or Liberty where Jr. <sup>introduced in the instant apartment</sup> played with Steve Lewis in his band, Jr's gold watch was stolen. It was a rough place.

~~XXXXXX~~ [A.J.] Piron had formed a new band, and Steve Lewis was no longer in ~~XXXXXX~~ Piron's band.

BM didn't visit Buddy Bolden's sister and mother much. This was right after Bolden lost his mind (that she knew them). Her mother-in-law knew them well. BB's family lived on Second Street between Franklin and Liberty.

Raymond "Big Gut" Brown was George "Little Gut" McCullum, Jr.'s bosom buddy. RB lived in Carrollton. [CMB was sister of Jr.]

Jr's wake was huge. The line [to view the body] was two blocks long and two or three [people] across, <sup>and lasted</sup> All night long. \* The line stretched from Rocheblave and Conti back to Broad Street. When the steamer President docked at the foot of Canal Street that night, all the musicians from the President came to the wake. Both white and colored came. Jr. had quite a following from Algiers, as he played a lot of funerals there. He played for the Eagle Eye [Benevolent Association] over there. And he played with Red Allen over there.

CB is trying to establish a date for her father's picture.

End of Reel II

\* It was something like Chris Kelly's wake according to AD.

McCULLUM, BERTHA (Mrs. George McCullum, Sr.)  
October 16, 1960

Throughout the interview made on October 16, 1960, Mrs. McCullum's husband is referred to as Sr., her son as Jr. During the interview she states that her father-in-law was also named George, ~~XXXX~~ hence he was Sr., her husband was Jr., her son~~X~~ was George III, and his son, referred to in the interview as "Little George" or George III was really George IV.

See also article by Edmond Souchon, "Long-Gone-But-Not-Forgotten," The Second Line, Vol. XV, Nos. 5 & 6 (May-June, 1964), pp. 13-16, 22. A photograph of George McCullum holding his short cornet ~~X~~ is printed with this article. The article also ~~XXX~~ mentions a photograph donated to the New Orleans Jazz Museum in 1963 showing "George in the full regalia worn by members of the famous circus band." This photograph ~~XX~~ ~~XXXX~~ sounds very much like the one described in our interview, although Souchon states that it was made in 1909.

BBR  
October 2, 1969