Searching for “The Gulf Coast Circuit”: Mobility and Cultural Diffusion in the Age of Jim Crow, 1900-1930

“Mississippi. Just the mention of the word Mississippi amongst a group of New Orleans people would cause complete silence and attention,” wrote Danny Barker in A Life in Jazz. Recalling his family’s attitudes towards traveling in the American South during the 1920s, Barker proclaimed, “The word was so powerful that it carried the impact of catastrophes.” In the Barker household, “the states of Alabama, Florida, Texas and Georgia were equally fearsome concerning their treatment of Negroes when the least bit of friction with white folks occurred.” For families such as the Barkers, Chicago was “considered to be the safest place near New Orleans; all other places between these points were looked upon as just visiting points. When it was decided to live any where other than New Orleans, Chicago was the place, and the trip there was preferably a direct one, by the way of the Illinois Central Railroad.” Barker remembered that during his youth in New Orleans, it was the common practice “among the adventurous young men” to suddenly decide to go to Chicago to stay or just to visit relatives. “Sometimes a group on a corner would challenge another...
member of the group to go---that is, hobo their way” Barker recalled, “and always it was in New Orleans, it was the ICRR, never the Southern, or the L&N.” Barker reasoned that the latter railroads were avoided because “they passed through Mississippi, Alabama, and other terrible places, while the IC track ran virtually straight up north to Chicago---not one slight bend or turn along the whole route.”

Danny Barker’s impressions illustrate both realistic and mythical views of the American South held by African-American musicians during the Jim Crow era. They also reflect how Southern musicians in general perceived the North as an economic “promised land,” a place for permanent relocation. While this widespread exodus of Southern musicians to the North is often emphasized in jazz scholarship, few researchers have questioned the validity of Barker’s assertion that the Deep South was “off limits” territory. Barker’s claim is simply not true. Both white and African-American musicians traveled regularly across the Gulf Coast states on organized circuits, informal tours, and impromptu band excursions.

During the Jim Crow Era (1890-1930) the Gulf Coast offered special opportunities for cultural exchange, exhibiting a musical environment in contrast with that of the inland South. Here, rural and urban cultures coexisted and interacted, especially so after 1920 through the increased mobility offered by railroad and automobile travel, as well as the new media of phonograph and radio. Given geographical proximity, the recreational areas along Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida coasts became a steady source of travel gigs for New Orleans musicians. The richness and diversity of the Gulf Coast musical scene in the early years of the century raises questions about its relation as a region to the world of musical commerce.

Did there exist a regional entertainment circuit serving Gulf Coast communities in the early 20th century? Or were Gulf Coast venues part of a larger national chain, similar to the theater circuits common to the vaudeville stage? Or, did Gulf Coast touring simply follow the transportation networks—relying on coastal excursion boats, railroads, and highways? And, finally, was there a distinctive Gulf Coast musical tradition apart from the national impulses dominated by vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley, paralleling the development of New Orleans ragtime and jazz? In attempting to answer these questions, I have relied primarily on the narrative accounts of New Orleans musicians contained in the oral history collection of the Hogan Jazz Archive.

Searching for the Gulf Coast Circuit

Touring along the Gulf Coast meant, for black musicians, geographic mobility in an era of segregation. Examining their travels can offer a view into the more complex

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2 W.T. Francis summed up this view historically with his statement: “…that when the great cities of the north hear the melodic compositions which are so much in vogue in the south, the latter will obtain as great a popularity in the one as in the other. There is another cause which will accelerate this change. The rewards of music are far larger in the north than in the south. In the latter they are regarded as a necessity and paid for, as most necessities are, in small amounts of money. In the north they are classed as luxuries, and are paid for in accordance. Business principles alone will, therefore, soon compel the production of southern music in the north, if merely for the sake of testing its commercial value. When one is heard, I am certain that the northern public will want it a second time. - W.T. Francis: 1890. Quote is from Daily Picayune, June 2, 1890, as quoted in Jack Stewart’s “The Mexican Band Legend - Part II,” Jazz Archivist, vol. IX, no. 1 (May 1994), pp. 1-17.
catering to specifically regional preferences.

Is it possible that there was a distinctive Gulf Coast circuit for jazz bookings, comparable to that of the southwestern territory bands of the 1920s and 1930s? Such questions do not lend themselves to easy answers. Christopher Wilkinson, in his study of the Don Albert Band's tours during the 1920s, cautions against historians viewing tours and circuits as static geographic entities. Keeping his argument in mind, I have examined the accounts of musicians themselves to see if they thought of the Gulf Coast as a jazz circuit. Certainly, the regular travel of urban musicians along the Gulf Coast in the early years of the century brought them into contact with rural music and musicians. The exposure of New Orleans brass bands, string bands, and minstrel and vaudeville bands to rural blues and religious music provided a fertile ground for the gradual genesis of jazz. Testifying to the rural roots of jazz, Sylvester Handy of Pass Christian, Mississippi, proclaimed in 1961: "Jazz comes from the country, not from New Orleans...blues and jazz feeling came from the country." However broad an assertion, one cannot ignore the fact that numerous future New Orleans jazz figures originally came from small towns up and down the river and along the coast. One can site Zutty Singleton from Bunkie,

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Clarence Williams from Plaquemine, Edward Ory from LaPlace, Manuel Sayles from Donaldsonville, Edmond Hall from Reserve, and the Handy brothers, Joseph “Curly” Lizana, and the Dodds brothers from Pass Christian, just to name a few. By the end of the 19th century, railroads had consolidated economic ties between the river towns along the Mississippi and urban centers such as New Orleans. Edward “Kid” Ory described how at the turn of the century bands such as Dave Payton and Charlie Galloway’s would come out to the La Place sugar plantations during the grinding season to play for the workers on payday. Professor James B. Humphrey traveled to plantations such as Magnolia, Deer Range, and Woodland up and down the river to teach various brass bands. William “Bebe” Ridgley’s experiences illustrate well the complexity of cultural interaction at that time. As a resident of the Shrewsbury area of Jefferson Parish, Ridgley cut cane with rural cutters who sang “good old Baptist hymns,” studied music with Professor Humphrey, and played with the Silver Leaf Brass band in uptown New Orleans.

New Orleans also had ties to national culture through the touring acts that came
to the city and the local bands that toured outside the South. For instance, Edmond Hall stated that around 1892 his father traveled with the Onward Brass Band to New York to compete in a band contest. As recent research by Jack Stewart and John McCusker has shown, the Onward Brass Band were in Cuba in 1898-1899 as part of a military unit fighting in the Spanish-American War. Guitarist Johnny St. Cyr claimed that the Olympia Brass Band went “on the road” around 1910, and that in Philadelphia “Big Eye Louis” Nelson was summoned from New Orleans to replace George Baquet.

Brass bands also visited the major Gulf Coast cities for a variety of job opportunities. For instance, John Pope, whose father was one of the founders of the Excelsior Brass Band in Mobile, recalled how New Orleans bands and orchestras visited Mobile during the teens. Pope also remembered that his father’s band traveled to New Orleans by train around the turn of the century. Apparently, the Excelsior was

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6Clarence Williams moved to New Orleans ca. 1906; Edward Ory moved to New Orleans ca. 1907; Manual Sayles came to New Orleans ca. 1915; Edmond Hall moved to New Orleans ca. 1915.
7Edward Ory interview by Nesuhi Ertegun, April 20, 1957, tape recording, HJA; transcript pp. 18-25.
9Baba Ridgley interview, June 2, 1959, transcript p. 1; Baba Ridgley interview by Richard B. Allen & Dave Dutcher, April 7, 1961, tape recording, HJA; transcript p. 9.
hired to play dances and even train excursions to and from Mobile. William Ballariel, also a member of Excelsior in Mobile, remembered that while the Excelsior remained popular in Alabama, other bands included the Pompete Band, the Lipscomb Band and the Eureka Band, which “had most of the work until the Excelsior was formed” in the 1890s. According to Ballariel, a “Creole” brass band from Pensacola, known as the Wise Band, also played in Mobile around the turn of the century.

Ricard Alexis, who grew up in Bay St. Louis claimed that when he was first playing music with his father and brothers (ca. 1910), that many locals considered the Supreme Band to be the greatest band in that town. Sumner Labat, also from Bay St. Louis and the same generation as Alexis, recalled how the Supreme Band played weekends at various society functions, parades and advertising jobs from Bay St. Louis to Mobile, and at times they played the Great Southern Hotel in Gulfport.

Jack Laine, not surprisingly, took advantage of a growing job market for New Orleans musicians along the Gulf during this time. In 1904, he was hired to play in St. Louis, Missouri and he also sent his bands to Chicago and New York. Yet on the Gulf Coast, Laine began taking his band annually to Mississippi after the chairman of the Biloxi Firemen Committee heard him at a political rally in New Orleans. According to Laine, they played every September 19, and he was eventually made an honorary member of the West End Fire Company No. 3 in Biloxi. As Laine recollected, members of that company came to Davey Crockett Fire Company parades in New Orleans.

Laine also recalled that in 1910 he had three bands working in Biloxi. These bands included the Relience, Laine’s Band and the Tuxedo Band. On the Mississippi coast, they played for the West End Juniors, the West End Fire Company No. 3, and the Volunteers No. 1. Within these bands, several prominent and diverse members included adults Dave Perkins, Old Man Joe Allesandro, and numerous kids such as Manual & Leonce Mello, Emile Christian, Chink Martin, and the Kirsch Brothers. While his gigs were only annual, Laine’s connections with the volunteer fire companies of Mississippi, nevertheless, helped in small ways to increase cultural ties between the Gulf Coast and New Orleans.

From the turn of the century through the 1920s, Gulf Coast vaudeville troops also began venturing forth on regional and national tours. Among white musicians, Joseph “Curly” Lizana is perhaps the more famous of Gulf Coast vaudeville and jazz performance veterans. Born in Pass Christian in 1895, Lizana spent his teens traveling throughout the U.S. and the Gulf Coast on the Loews, Orpheum and Ziegfeld Follies Circuits. Around 1920, Lizana joined the Jazz Babies and toured the eastern Gulf Coast. For black musicians along the Gulf Coast, Lawrence Gushee found evidence in the Indianapolis Freeman July 1908 of the Tuxell Orchestra of Biloxi. According to the papers The

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15 Ibid., p. 17.
16 Sumner Labat interview by Richard Allen and Harold Dejan, Nov. 11, 1962, tape recording, HJA; transcript p. 3.
18 Ibid., transcript p. 17.
Tuncel Orchestra played not only for Gulf Coast resorts but also traveled “through many different states of the union.” The band’s principle players included Gene Tuncel, considered one of the best mandolin players of the South, and Manual Holly, the bassist. Both men were originally from Mobile. Gushee has also revealed that Bill Johnson and Freddie Keppard, who played together in the Creole Band, a vaudeville outfit, traveled to California and New York and possibly other northern states during 1914.

During the teens, Mary and Billy McBride, known as the vaudeville team Mack & Mack, were another important group that traveled up and down the coast. Billy, originally from Mobile, and Mary originally from Algiers, began touring in 1908 and traveled to Tennessee, Ohio, Illinois and other states during the teens, eventually helping to form the Theatre Owners Booking Association, or TOBA. With the emergence of TOBA around 1920, vaudeville and minstrel travel among southern cities and on the Gulf Coast became more organized and perhaps more regular. (During this period tours became organized around specific theaters such as the Lyric in New Orleans, the Pike Theatre in Mobile, the Lincoln in Pensacola, the Palace in Tampa, the 81 Decatur in Atlanta, the Dixie in Bessemer, the Douglas in Macon, the Pekin in Savannah, and the Strand in Jacksonville.)

Such famous musicians as Bunk Johnson, Clarence Williams, Sidney Bechet and Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton often played the Gulf Coast as individuals with vaudeville and minstrel troupes during the early part of the century. According to Johnson’s biographer Christopher Hillman, around 1914 Bunk traveled with Clarence Williams to play a sporting house in Alexandria and then left to join the Kit Carson Wild West Show. From 1914 to 1918 Bunk is reported to have played at the Colonial Hotel in Bogalusa, in Baton Rouge, up the Mississippi River, and west to Lake Charles. Bunk also claimed to have worked for various circus and minstrel troupes traveling as far as West Virginia.

Sidney Bechet and Clarence Williams also traveled the Gulf Coast during 1916 as members of Williams’ Stock Company and Creole Orchestra. We learn from Bechet’s biographer, John Chilton, that the company floundered in Texas, after which Bechet lived briefly in Galveston and eventually returned to New Orleans. According to Bechet, after he registered for the draft in 1917, he got “itchy feet” and joined the Bruce & Bruce Stock Company troupe with whom he toured through Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, and Indiana, ultimately arriving in Chicago, where he remained for a year before heading to New York, London, and eventually Paris.

Ferdinand “Jelly Roll” Morton was perhaps the most mobile of all New Orleans musicians in the early part of the century. In an interview conducted in 1969, Zutty Singleton described Morton as a “railroad man” and “a traveling piano.

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24. Information provided by Tad Jones; taken from an advertisement from the *Indianapolis Freeman*, Sept. 14, 1918; p. 5.
man.” According to Morton chronicler Lawrence Gushee, from 1907 to 1911 Morton traveled throughout Mississippi and Alabama, at various times playing piano at road houses, honky tonks and juke joints. Bunk Johnson claimed to have played with Morton in Gulfport and that the pianist played waltzes and rags for the white people at the Great Southern Hotel. Morton told Alan Lomax that he spent a lot of time in Biloxi and traveled to outlying towns along the railroad line north, including McHenry, Hattiesburg, Jackson, Vicksburg, Greenwood and Greenville, to become a “half-hand big-shot” at billiards.

Morton also played many Gulf Coast “sportin’ houses” and honky tonks in this period. One of the better-known establishments in Biloxi was called The Flat Top. There Morton played piano and conned workers from the nearby turpentine industry in the Georgia Skin card game. Apparently, The Flat Top attracted a whole host of regional pianists, including Sad Sam, Brockie Johnny, Frazier Davis, Porter King of Florida, Sammy Davis of New Orleans, and Skinny Head Pete, all of them seeking to take advantage of the market built around the turpentine industry along the Gulf Coast. While no formally organized turpentine circuit existed, it is apparent that Gulfport was only one of numerous towns from Texas to Mississippi where itinerant pianists were attracted to turpentine worker’s money.

The experiences of performers such as Morton, Bechet, and Wingy Manone are important because they illustrate how important the railroad was in facilitating travel and increasing access to economic opportunities along the Gulf. Whereas the steamboats were generally the easiest form of travel in the 19th century for Gulf Coast residents, by the early 20th century, the railroad emerged as the dominant means of travel for musicians and troupes along the Gulf. The railroad provided easy traveling opportunities for musicians such as Bechet and Morton. Eventually, trains themselves became important performance venues for Gulf Coast bands, as train excursions became a popular pasttime. Lawrence Gushee relates that in 1908 a New Orleans band led by Bill Johnson was invited by newspapermen to accompany them on the opening of the first railroad line between Gulfport and Hattiesburg and the first Pullman car to travel on that line. A formative early influence on both Kid Ory and Clarence Williams was their witnessing of Buddy Bolden traveling through their communities on railroad excursions. According to Ory, around 1907 Bolden stopped in LaPlace on the Yazoo and Mississippi railway line and his band played standing in the baggage car.

Later, in the 1920s, Sam Morgan took his band on a long train excursion from New Orleans to Chicago. The construction of the Southern Pacific line from Houston to New Orleans, the Illinois Central line from New Orleans to Chicago, the Kansas City line from New Orleans to Shreveport, and the L & N line from New Orleans to Mobile opened up further excursion routes.

Railroads also served to extend the family ties of New Orleans musicians to Gulf Coast communities, including Creoles and blacks as well as whites. The African-

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American community of Bay St. Louis is especially notable for its familial ties to New Orleans at the turn of the century. According to Billy and Mary McBride, "Jelly Roll" Morton's grandmother ran a rooming house in Bay St. Louis. The Tio family was another Creole family living in Bay St. Louis. Louis Tio recalled that the family moved from New Orleans to Pass Christian at the turn of the century, because Papa Tio thought that race relations would be better in Mississippi. Johnny and Warren "Baby" Dodds were born in Waveland, and lived in Bay St. Louis from 1901 - 1908. Throughout the teens, the Dodds brothers moved back and forth between New Orleans and Waveland quite frequently.

According to trumpeter and bassist Ricard Alexis, around 1896 or 1897 his family left New Orleans for Bay St. Louis, where his father worked as a music professor and multi-instrumentalist. During their time on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Alexis became acquainted with the younger Dodds and Lorenzo Tio, Jr. both of whom went to school with him in Bay St. Louis. Johnny Dodds and Alexis's older brother Joseph, a drummer, were the same year in school, while Baby and Ricard were of the same age. Not surprisingly, Alexis also claimed that Papa Tio used to play music with his father, Professor Alexis, in Mississippi.

Johnny Wiggs' family, the Hymans, was another New Orleans family that made the move to the Mississippi Gulf Coast in the early part of the century. According to Wiggs, his father moved the family to Ocean Springs, Mississippi around 1911 or 1912, where he operated a small farm. During his youth on the Gulf Coast Wiggs was musically active. In the 1970s Wiggs told Myra Menville that he played violin "with every hillbilly band that would let me sit in, way back in the woods." Wiggs also claimed that a man named Kotson, who allegedly played coronet with Sousa, organized a brass band in which Wiggs learned to read music. Wiggs played in both bands until he returned to New Orleans around 1915.

Mobility and Cultural Diffusion

Did Gulf Coast musicians themselves consider there to be a distinct variant of ragtime or jazz associated with the region? Or were they playing a kind of universal New Orleans style, as received from the diffusion of New Orleans culture along the Gulf Coast? At a broad level, southern Louisiana cultural influence, as exemplified by language, folkways, religion and musical idioms, has extended westward along the Texas Gulf Coast at least as far as Galveston and eastward to Mobile and some would even argue Pensacola. When invoking musical idioms as particular to New Orleans, however, one must use caution, especially with regard to drumming styles and the ragging of

33William and Mary McBride interview July 1, 1959, transcript, p. 10. Oh Mister Jelly, p. 343.
36Ricard Alexis, Oral History interview transcript, Jan. 16, 1959, pp. 1 & 11, HJA.
melodies. On the one hand, some musicians from outside New Orleans claimed that New Orleans bands and Gulf Coast bands played the same type of music. Growing up in Pensacola, Billie Pierce recalled that in the late 1910s, "the music they had around Pensacola at that time was 'ragtime' jazz." According to Pierce, the instrumentation or "line up" in Pensacola bands such as the George Douglas Orchestra and the Joe Jesse Orchestra would be trumpet, trombone, banjo, drum piano and bass "same thing as New Orleans jazz." Pierce claimed also that Clarence Nelson was one of the "greatest jazz violins that was in that time." Nelson was from Pensacola. They had jazz in Pensacola since Billie was "old enough to know what music was." Sumner Labat, who was raised in Bay St. Louis, told Dick Allen and Harold Dejan that during the 1920s and 1930s, the "bands on the coast played very much like the New Orleans bands, as the New Orleans musicians worked with the Coast bands a lot, and vice-versa." As Labat concluded, "Everybody played pretty much the same sort of music, Dixieland, ragtime, etc." Many musicians, on the other hand, were impressed by the distinctiveness of the style and "feeling" of New Orleans players. Manny Sayles, from his vantage as a boy in Donaldsonville, remembered that the New Orleans bands sounded different from local bands, especially in their custom of playing impromptu, a marked contrast to the rural bands that played from written parts only. In another example, John Pope of the Excelsior Band in Mobile claimed that Sam Morgan had a different style of music that those bands in Mobile. Specifically he claimed that the Morgan band in the early 1920s played ragtime, or "original jazz." As Pope told Bill Russell in 1959, the New Orleans bands "surely played more ragtime than we did. In fact they put me out of business." Laughing about the New Orleans bands competitive edge, he further claimed that "When they came over in the late years, and played that jazz music, what we called ragtime, we played strictly by music (i.e. reading notation).

Billie Pierce also commented on the difference between New Orleans bands and other bands in the Gulf South. As Pierce told Bill Russell in 1959, the bands she played with and heard during the late 1920s in both Florida and in Birmingham, Alabama did not sound like New Orleans bands. In Pierce's mind, Sam Morgan and Buddy Petit, "had something that the others didn't" and the people in Florida liked the New Orleans bands that came through.

Pierce's comments reveal how during the 1920s New Orleans bands such as Sam Morgan's, Lee Collins', Buddy Petit's and Papa Celestin's actively sought new markets outside of New Orleans. In fact, other New Orleans musicians commented on this market phenomenon. Danny Barker, who joined the Lee Collins band for a tour to Pensacola in 1926, recalled that the local leading band led by a man named "Lazy Daddy," did not "play like New Orleans jazz." Instead the "Lazy Daddy" band played a monotonous "Baptist Beat," which according to Barker had "nothing exciting or a great variety or rhythm tones" and therefore did not have "something you could dance to."

According to Edmond Hall, Buddy Petit

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49Billie and Dede Pierce interview by William Russell and Ralph Collins, April 2, 1959, tape recording, HJA; transcript p. 2.
42Billie and Dede Pierce, interview, April 2, 1959, transcript p. 7.
hired “Lazy Daddy” for some shows in Texas and western Louisiana in the early 1920s. In 1957, Hall recalled that “Lazy Daddy” had “been in the business a long time, cause he was in Mexico playing for shows and singers and all that kinda stuff.”45 While “Lazy Daddy” may have been a Gulf Coast music business veteran and played with New Orleans musicians, his style in Pensacola apparently exhibited no New Orleans elements to Barker.

Barker even argued that the Pensacola bands such as “Lazy Daddy’s” were somewhat annoyed at the arrival of the New Orleans band, because the Lee Collins band “created quite a sensation” and Pensacolans “were starved for a real band.”46 Emmanuel Sayles made perhaps the most emphatic statement regarding the popularity and distinctiveness of New Orleans bands on the Gulf Coast during this time. Sayles talked extensively about the stylistic differences between New Orleans bands and other bands in Alabama and Florida between 1924 and 1927, when he was with the Pensacola Jazzers, which included players such as George Morris on trombone, Thomas Mack on trumpet, Edmund Washington and Edmond Hall on reeds, and Albert Morgan on bass. As Collins recalled, around 1924 a promoter named Joe Wynn from Pensacola came to New Orleans to recruit a New Orleans style band for a full-time gig in Florida. Using Pensacola as a base, the band traveled to Mobile, and other small towns in the area such as Brewerton, Florida and Flomaton, Alabama. The opportunity to travel thus provided Sayles the ability to assess the differences between New Orleans style bands and those in Alabama and Florida in the 1920s.

In discussing the New Orleans sound of the mid-1920s, Sayles told Bill Russell and Dick Allen in 1959 that “New Orleans had that beat, what you call Dixieland now, used to be called that Negro New Orleans beat. People could dance easily to it--like rock n’ roll today. They could dance easily by it; the music was so pleasing; that’s one reason the bands out of New Orleans created such a sensation when they went around. Any body could dance to it.” Furthermore according to Sayles, “when musicians from other places,” like Mobile or Jacksonville “played hot, they just played fast. That’s what people called playing hot.” In contrast, Sayles remarked that New Orleans musicians could “play hot and at the same time be playing in a groovy tempo where you [could] dance or clap your hands or join him. He has that feeling of breaking up his chords with a feeling that the other guys didn’t have.”47

According to Sayles, the New Orleans sound influenced the styles of musicians such as Cootie Williams from Mobile. As he related to Russell and Allen, Williams and other bands from that area “were copying people like Sam Morgan, Punch [Miller], Kid Rena, [and] all the others who come to Mobile.” It seems that Cootie Williams’ particular idol was Punch Miller. Early on, Williams developed a plunger-mute “growl” (later made famous with the Duke Ellington Orchestra) from watching Sam Morgan and Kid Punch. Sayles also felt that musicians from Alabama and Florida had nobody around there that could play saxophone like [Edmond] Hall was playing; nobody who could play clarinet; nobody could play banjo like Emmanuel Sayles could stroke it.48

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46Danny Barker, interview by Richard Allen, June 30, 1959, tape recording, HJA; transcript pp. 16-17.
47E. Sayles interview, Jan. 17, 1959, transcript p. 16.
In Emmanuel Sayles' opinion, the New Orleans sound was extremely marketable in Alabama and Florida around 1925. When the Pensacola Jazzers were first recruited, Sayles claimed that out-of-state promoters “hired New Orleans bands because they couldn’t make money with the local bands, [which] didn’t have the New Orleans beat that people were going crazy about.” When the Jazzers gave up their market from Pensacola to Jacksonville around 1927 (for an undisclosed reason), trombonist George Morris tried to interest the band in the market potential of New Orleans music in South Florida.

As Sayles related the situation, Morris told the members “If we get to Jacksonville, I know if we get to Tampa and Panama [City], Florida we’ll make us some money.” Morris had been down that way working as a cook and knew that “they didn’t have a New Orleans tempo there.” When they went forth, the band played with a local brass band. According to Sayles, “It was a good brass band but when the people heard [the Jazzers] and that New Orleans swing they were playing, they went wild over them.” Once the tour got underway, however, some members became disappointed in the lack of money they were making and opted out. Sayles told Allen and Russell that the decision was “the biggest mistake they made” because if they had gone down there where “they had not heard the New Orleans beat...they would have made a lot of money.”

**Economic Mobility on the Gulf Coast**

Through Gulf Coast networks, a few local musicians did succeed in making it to either New York or Chicago during the 1920s. The experiences of Edmond Hall and Cootie Williams are among the most notable. In 1928, Hall and Williams got recruited in Jacksonville, Florida, for a stint at the Roseland Ballroom in Harlem. Hall had been touring the Gulf Coast since about 1920, when he went to Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, western Louisiana, and then east to Florida with cornetist Buddy Petit, Chinee Foster on drums, Al Morgan on bass, and Earl Humphrey on trombone. Hall claims that the band stayed in Pensacola and Mobile “quite a while,” and that when “things got a little tough” Buddy Petit and Earl Humphrey returned to New Orleans. Hall and the remaining band members then decided to take a standing offer from a small-time promoter from Jacksonville named “Eagle Eye” Shields to play there. After receiving train fare from Shields, the band moved to Jacksonville where young Cootie Williams joined them from Mobile.

According to Hall, there existed a contingent of musicians on the Florida East Coast circuit who were connected to musical networks out of New York City. While playing in South Florida, Hall and his fellow bandmen caught the ear of an RCA Victor agent. He recorded them in August 1927 at Savannah, Georgia, under the name The Ross De Luxe Syncopaters. This recording proved to be a springboard for the band. In 1928, the manager of the Roseland Ballroom, after hearing the Victor sides, hired them to play in New York.

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50 Edmond Hall interview, April 11, 1957, transcript pp. 7-10.

51 Ibid. Hall recalled specifically how a leader named “Broadway Jones” who was taking a Florida band up North. At the same time, a band leader named Alonzo Ross, from Jacksonville, got Hall’s help in recruiting Cootie Williams for his band with the hopes of eventually heading North. Hall convinced Williams’ father that if he sent his son from Mobile to Jacksonville, that Hall would look after him in the band.

Once there, Hall found considerable economic success, while Cootie Williams eventually went on to achieve fame with Duke Ellington. Hall and Williams’ examples were more the exception than the rule during the boom years of the 1920s. Yet, a few musicians and bands did find broader economic success through their gigs along the Gulf Coast. About 1924, a Wingy Manone band playing in Mobile was recruited by Joe Turner, the owner of the Arcadia Ballroom in St. Louis. Turner advanced Manone $300 in travel money to bring the band to St. Louis. At the time, Manone’s crew was playing at Tom Bowen’s Fairhope Casino, where they were known as the Original Crescent City Jazzers. In St. Louis, the band was renamed the Arcadian Serenaders and became quite popular in that city—-at times playing private parties and other affairs for the Busch family.

For many musicians, Gulf Coast communities provided a bread-and-butter existence, but rarely a place to strike it rich. According to Johnny Wiggs, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings “picked up a few jobs on the Gulf Coast” when they returned South and found themselves unable to get gigs in New Orleans. During the 1920s, numerous musicians appear to have taken advantage of the need for music at Gulf Coast resorts and hotels. Three years after the Original Crescent City Jazzers left the Gulf Coast, Wingy Manone returned in 1927 from Texas to get a summer gig at the Buena Vista Hotel and Pavilion in Biloxi. This group, named Joe Manone and the Mockingbirds, included Ray Cordella, Johnny Miller, Joe Loyacano, Mike Ryan, and Steve Brouand. Manone recalled that the young Eddie Miller, later famous with Bob Crosby’s Bob Cats, drove all the way from New Orleans just to hear the band.

During the 1920s, the Goodson sisters from Pensacola (including Billie Pierce, Sadie Goodson Peterson, and Ida and Edna Goodson) made their living by traveling as individuals and on circuits along the Gulf Coast. According to Billie, she and her younger sister Edna played with blues singers such as Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey when they came through Pensacola around 1920. By the late 1920s, Billie and Edna joined the Mighty Wiggle Carnival owned by Jack Schaffer, a show that traveled Florida, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee. They toured with the Carnival in the Florida towns of Miami, Cedar Key, Micanopy, Kendall, Ocala, Wildwood, Tallahassee, Jacksonville, Daytona, and Lakeland. Billie played organ and Edna sang. When Billie toured with Bessie Smith and other shows she never left Florida—when she finished the tour in her

53Edmond Hall interview, April 11, 1957, transcript pp. 11-12.
54Wingy Manone, Trumpet On a Wing, pp. 42-43.
56Manone, Trumpet on a Wing, p.70.
state, she would abandon the Carnival and return home.57

About 1929, Billie left Pensacola to tour as a pianist in Alabama, playing in Dothan, Montgomery, Selma, and Bessemer. In Birmingham, while performing with the Nighthawks, she was called to New Orleans, her first trip there, to briefly replace her sister on the S.S. Madison, which ran excursions to Mandeville. After her stint with the Nighthawks, Billie worked with Mack’s Merrymakers who, in Pierce’s words, “were on the road a great deal,” though they “very seldom played a dance at Pensacola.” As Pierce remembered, “Billy Mack liked Pensacola, found some one he cared for there, so he stayed there, got musicians from around Pensacola, made his band up with home talent.”58

During the middle 1920s, a number of bands played regular but informal tour circuits throughout the Gulf Coast. Out of New Orleans, Sam Morgan generally is acknowledged as having the most consistent tours. As Danny Barker recalled, “Sam Morgan used to have a band that would go from New Orleans to Mobile. If you went on the road with Morgan you would play Bay St. Louis, Pensacola, and Mobile. You would stay in Mobile and play Friday, Saturday and Sunday. You would do the same thing when you came back, when you would go through Bogalusa. I made a couple of trips like that with Sam.”59 As Isaiah Morgan, Sam’s brother, told Bill Russell, “Sam kept the coast hot” and he played Mobile every Monday night.60

57Billy and Dede Pierce interview, April 2, 1959, transcript pp. 3 & 13.
59D. Barker, My Life in Jazz, p. 61.

“Captain” John Handy was another musician who plied an informal Gulf Coast circuit during the teens. According to Handy, his band would play Saturday night in Moss Point, Mississippi. They would then take the 4:30 a.m. train to New Orleans, where they played the Lakefront picnics on Sunday morning. On Monday they would play a dance in Ponchatoula, and on Tuesday they would rest. On Wednesday they would play in Thibodaux, Thursday a jitney dance in Raceland, and on Friday night they would play the Fireman’s Hall in Westwego. As Handy recalled, “we used to play so much, to tell you the truth, we used to send somebody in our place sometime. Albert Morgan was playing bass with us; him and I taken a vacation and went to Chicago—just got tired of working. Went to Chicago, stayed in Chicago a week. And we’d come back; got, we done got about broke. We’d come back to New Orleans.”61

Danny Barker’s impressions notwithstanding, a number of African-American musicians from New Orleans considered the inner South to be fair gigging territory. Lee Collins, John Handy


The Jazz Archivist
and Charlie Love all traveled extensively throughout the South, the Southwest in the 1920s. Collins, in interviews and in his autobiography, *Oh, Didn’t He Ramble*, told of how he took the IC Railroad up to Bloomington, Illinois, and Chicago in 1917, returning to New Orleans after a brief stay. Beginning around 1920, Collins would visit his father in Gulfport, going from there to play gigs as far away as Mobile. One of his Mobile bands included Edmond Hall on reeds, Jelly Roll Morton’s cousin (a “real creole boy”) on drums, Arthur Bond on Guitar, a boy named “Acey” from Mexico on bass, and a “Japanese fellow” on clarinet.  

From Mobile, Collins went to live in Selma and then in Birmingham, where he was booked at the Frolic Theater under TOBA management. When this gig ended he returned to New Orleans but occasionally took spot jobs in Pensacola. Collins entered the mainstream of jazz history when he moved to Chicago at King Oliver’s behest to work at the Lincoln Gardens. This promising career move was cut short when the Gardens burned down six months later and Collins was forced to return once again to New Orleans. By 1926, after a brief period in Dallas, Collins was leading a New Orleans-based band on Gulf Coast tours. For a highly mobile musician such as Collins, then, Chicago was not a permanent “safe haven” but rather an economic market to be exploited, along with such other targets as Dallas, New Orleans, and eastern Gulf Coast cities like Mobile and Pensacola.

In the decade of the 1920s the number of New Orleans bands plying the Gulf Coast musical circuit reached its peak. The automobile was a major factor in increased touring. Emmanuel Sayles remembered Edmond Hall’s Dodge car, which he used for trips along Gulf Coast highways. Jelly Roll Morton, during the heyday of the Red Hot peppers in the latter 1920s, had his infamous Lincoln, which took him through the Midwest and Northeast and provided him with considerably more independence (not to mention prestige) than in his early years tramping on the railroads.  

Danny Barker remembered the increased mobility that Eurreal “Li’l Brother” Montgomery gained with his new Ford: “Little Brother was a master at traveling through the South. I noticed that he never stopped at any place that was owned or operated by white folks.” As Montgomery reportedly reassured Barker’s mother, while traveling in his Ford, “Ah avoids and keeps away from them red-neck crackers. I knows how to get around them.”

While some historians may question the truth of Barker’s travel accounts with Montgomery, Barker’s larger point is not lost. By the 1920s, black musicians negotiated the potential hazards of traveling in the Jim Crow South with skill and care. At the same time, throughout the decade, the growing popularity of jazz throughout the nation helped pave the way for black musicians to travel not only through the South and the Gulf Coast, but out into the Territories where de facto Jim Crow often reigned. In some cases, as with Julius Handy, the brother of Captain John, being a musician allowed one to overcome the social restrictions of legal Jim Crow. As Handy recalled, during the 1920s, some wealthy movie stars visiting the Mississippi Gulf Coast hired him to accompany them

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on a joy ride in their car. At one point, the star paid off the white owner of a cafe on the coast to allow Handy entrance. After initially refusing, the proprietor relented, and Handy joined his patrons in the cafe. While Handy’s story is only an anecdote, it illustrates how music was a profession that blurred the lines of social segregation.66

During the period of the 1920s, musicians traveling on the Gulf Coast often found themselves tied into the western “Territory” Band circuits. To be sure, Louisiana musicians had been exploring Texas since the early 20th century. After World War I band networks began developing throughout the Midwest, and Louisiana found itself connected peripherally to, and hence an extension of, the more western circuits. Don Albert and Lee Collins both represent New Orleans musicians who moved back and forth between Texas and the plains states and Louisiana and the Gulf, along with occasional trips to the North. As Christopher Wilkinson points out, while historians try to designate special territories where certain bands toured frequently, the truth is that most bands traveled constantly between different regions, ultimately defining themselves as national bands based out of particular region.67

During 1928 and 1929, Harry Fairconnateau, from Bay St. Louis, played with Clarence Desdunes Orchestra as they traveled from the Gulf Coast and then became based out of Omaha, Nebraska for over a year. At the time, they toured throughout Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska. Desdune’s band illustrates well the fluidity of movement between the Gulf and Midwestern Territory states. John Handy’s Louisiana Shakers was another band that toured the Gulf and western territory states. According to Handy, he left a job at the La Vida dance hall in New Orleans to form a tour band. From 1928 to 1929, the Louisiana Shakers traveled to Ft. Worth, Beaumont, San Antonio, Houston and Galveston, and then over to Pensacola, Mobile, Biloxi, Gulfport, Pass Christian, and even Franklinton and Bogalusa.68 Thus for bands like Desdune’s and Handy’s the Gulf Coast was a logical extension of the Territory circuit and the two regions often overlapped as far as touring markets during the 1920s.

Charlie Love, a musician who was born in Plaquemine, Louisiana around 1885, also illustrates the ability of jazz musicians to travel throughout the Gulf and the Midwest during the teens and 1920s. Love started out in the teens playing for “Toots” Johnson’s band out of Baton Rouge, and eventually made his way up to Alexandria where he played with Bunk Johnson in Harry Walker’s band at a barrelhouse on the river. From Alexandria, Love toured with Walker’s band to towns such as Shreveport and Opelousas, and he then moved to Shreveport where he joined the Caddo Jazz Band, and made a trip to Chicago only to return to Shreveport where he played the Star Theatre from 1917 to 1920. During 1920, Love had embarked on a tour to Texas, when he decided to join Jim Miller’s band on its way to play an extended period in Tampico, Mexico. Once in Tampico, Love also played clubs in Vera Cruz and Monterrey with black Texan migrants such as S.B. Davis from

66Julius Handy interview by Richard Allen, May 9, 1973; tape recording, HJA; transcript p. 6.
Reflected the 20th century trend within the entertainment industry toward economic consolidation, elimination of competition, and even monopoly. In this respect, the Gulf Coast was like other regions in the industry as a whole. But there was much activity outside of these formal circuits in the 1910s and 1920s. Bands such as John Handy’s and Sam Morgan's played regularly along the Gulf Coast, responding to opportunities conveyed by word of mouth from other musicians, prospecting, or other personal contacts. The more informal circuits developed in this manner meant that for many New Orleans musicians, gigs along the Coast were either one-time “spot” jobs or extended runs during the tourist season at resorts. In this respect, Gulf musicians worked with the seasons, either on the boats up the river or over to the coastal resorts in the summer.

Nationally, the jazz booking business remained an economic frontier where small booking companies such as MCA (Musical Corporation of America) in Chicago began to take advantage of the market for jazz performance in the late 1920s. As far as I can determine, the jazz performance and booking industry along the Gulf Coast remained largely unorganized and decentralized. Such disorganization is not surprising given that Karl Kramer, one of the founders of MCA, noted that the band booking business for theaters and movie houses in large markets such as Chicago was both “casual” and “almost careless,” but nonetheless, “wonderful.”

Secondly, trying to identify a specific Gulf Coast cultural zone becomes difficult after the turn of the century because mass culture made inroads into Gulf communities consistently with regional and national vaudeville and movie house

Conclusion

What conclusions can we draw about a Gulf Coast circuit? It is clear that the Gulf Coast was part of several larger national circuits such as Loews, Pantages and TOBA. Of the regional circuits, the Saenger was perhaps the one that focused most heavily on the Gulf Coast, thus affecting the regional market for live entertainment. The dominance of these regional and national chains clearly


70 Charlie Love interview June 19-20, 1958, reel II; transcript pp. 3-10

chains. By 1923, the Gulf Coast was tied into national circuits including the Loews and TOBA Circuits as the same acts toured all the major southern cities including Pensacola, Mobile, and New Orleans. The formalization of the entertainment booking industry certainly helped tie the Gulf Coast into a more nationalized mass culture, much as the railroads, the automobile, the phonograph and the radio hastened the demise of localism and cultural isolation.

Having come to such conclusions, I find that it is more meaningful to move beyond the mere question centering on the existence of an identifiable circuit. While both formal and less formal circuits existed, the Gulf Coast should nevertheless be viewed as a region that attracted musicians from both within and outside the South. Despite the coast’s relative economic underdevelopment and its lower standard of living compared to the northern entertainment markets, it continued to play an important role in the careers of touring musicians from the Gulf and elsewhere. As northern, western, and European entertainment markets beckoned Gulf Coast musicians such as Sidney Bechet, Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, Cootie Williams, Clarence Williams, and Wingy Manone, many other musicians such as John Handy, Sam Morgan, Clarence Desdunes and the Goodson sisters still plied the waters, railroads and highways of the Gulf Coast to earn a living during the Jazz and Swing Eras. More than ever in the 1920s, Gulf Coast musicians traveled in and out of the South, moving into northern and western territory networks and markets with the unprecedented mobility and independence allowed by the automobile.

Even as the northern cities continued to serve as the "promised land" in both social and economic terms for aspiring musicians, the existence of family ties, the pace of life and perhaps the culture of the Gulf Coast itself all remained important reasons for
Gulf Coast musicians to stay “down south” and take advantage of the less lucrative but, nonetheless, still profitable market that Gulf cities and resorts offered musicians. Thus, while historians tend to focus on the growth of the jazz band business in the larger markets, it is important not to ignore the fact that the Gulf Coast during the Jazz Age provided its own market and remained tied into a national market for jazz in many of the same ways that Territory bands tapped into the peripheral Southwestern, Midwestern, and national markets.

Dr. Charles Chamberlain

Photo credits: Cover photo personnel, left to right, Arthur Joseph, Annie _____, Freddie “Boo Boo” Miller, Octave Crosby, Henry Julian, emcee Sherman Cook, Lee Collins & Percy Daresboung (Al Rose collection); page 3, Danny and Louise Barker circa 1950, photo by Bob Matthews (William Russell collection); page 4, poster of New Orleans-Shreveport Battle of the Bands excursion and picnic at Lincoln Park in 1907 (John Robichaux collection); page 12, The Arcadian Serenaders (1920’s), left to right, Wingy Manone, Felix Guarino, Cliff Holman, Johnny Riddick (standing), and Slim Leftwich (Al Rose collection); page 13, John Handy in 1959, photo by William Russell (William Russell collection); page 17, The Louisiana Shakers, left to right, Roy Evans, George Clark, Lionel Ferbos, Sidney Pflueger, Kid Keifer, John Handy, Edmund Bottley, Benny Clark, unknown, and Henry Kimball (Al Rose collection); Page 18, Frankie Dusen at home with his car circa 1922 (Al Rose Collection).
Just Among Friends: A Celebration of Richard B. Allen

A tribute planned to honor Richard B. “Dick” Allen at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival 2000 was cancelled at his request. We were disappointed that the stellar guests who had agreed to talk about Dick and his career as a jazz historian did not get a chance to do so at a public forum. However, in an effort to let him know that he is appreciated for his many years of devotion to New Orleans jazz, we have asked several of his friends and acquaintances to write a personal tribute to him. The response has been overwhelming. We apologize to the many who were not contacted because of time and space limitations. If you have any special recollections for Dick, please send them to the Hogan Jazz Archive and we will Forward them to him. We feel that a tribute is more fitting than a memorial.

Dick embraced the music and the musicians early on, and he played a vital part in both the establishment of this archive and in documenting and disseminating the music’s history. His rapport with the musicians was such that, in many cases, he was considered as part of their families. In fact, there are many items of memorabilia in the vertical files attesting to the warmth and respect many of the musicians had and still hold for Dick. I consider myself one of his students, since he took me under his wings when he hired me as a Library Assistant more than twenty years ago. He not only introduced me to traditional New Orleans music, but also to many of the practitioners of the genre. Even in retirement, he always makes himself available when I need help with any questions about the music or the musicians. I enjoy our early morning chats about newspaper clippings, co-workers, family and friends, or just life in general.
I will always hold fond memories of him as a supervisor, but even more so as a friend.
Dick, I hope that you especially enjoy this issue and (with apologies to Bob Hope) I want to say “Thanks for the memories.”

Alma Williams Freeman

I first met Dick Allen when I went to New Orleans to produce the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival over thirty-three years ago. Aside from being the complete southern gentleman, along with William Russell, he is as well informed about the history of New Orleans music as anyone in the world, which means that he knows everything that needs to be known about the history of jazz.

He was a trusted advisor of mine from the beginning of my adventure in New Orleans. In addition to his own expertise, I am in personal debt to him. After all, it was Dick Allen who recommended the young man, Quint Davis, who has worked with me since 1970 to create the greatest festival in the world.

George Wein

Most important to jazz were his early efforts, along with William Russell, in getting the Tulane Jazz Archives started and especially his oral history interviews with New Orleans jazzmen covering the early years of this great art form. It is this early recording effort which has added so much to our knowledge of early New Orleans jazz. Further, Dick was always willing to help our Foundation in recording musicians during the early days of the New Orleans jazz revival in the city. He was of great help to me during many of my recording sessions in the 1960’s when we were trying hard to capture the artistry of the New Orleans pioneers before they died. Also, when we need to check on some jazz history facts, Dick Allen was the man we went to in orders to make sure that our information was correct.

Again Dick…Richard Allen…has spent his entire life devoted to jazz and has given so much to the music. The history of jazz is deeply indebted to Richard Allen.

Recordially,
George H. Buck, Jr.

This letter is to thank you for publishing a tribute to Richard Allen. There should be much more given in appreciation for the work he has done for New Orleans jazz. I have been knowing Dick since my first visit to New Orleans, and his efforts to help in any way he could have always been deeply appreciated by me. Dick Allen has dedicated his life to authentic New Orleans jazz, and his knowledge of the music is more than almost anyone else I can think of in jazz. He has devoted his life to research in the field, and there is no other person in the city who has a greater knowledge on the subject.

In response to your request for a tribute to honor Dick Allen, I can say truthfully that in my 50 odd years as a musician I have known quite a few whom I consider very good interpreters of Jazz, but I consider Dick the best in his life long research and quest for the truth.

My great uncle Prof. Manuel Manetta and all of our family musicians held and still hold him in high esteem when it involves the history of our New Orleans Jazz.
Dick is “tops”—may he be blessed with a rich and Jazz full life—and once again, thank you, Dick.

Placide Adams
I moved to New Orleans from "Up North" in March 1962, with the hopes of learning about the city's Jazz and perhaps, someday, being able to contribute something worthwhile to it as pay-back for the enjoyment I got from the music. I was fortunate in meeting Dick Allen early on in those days. We hung out or ran into each other frequently around the French Quarter.

Dick had a considerable head start on me in the years he had lived here, plus his close relationship with the musicians and his knowledge of what was going on and where. In my "retirement" speech several years ago, I mentioned, "Dick Allen pointed me in the right direction." When his turn came to say a few words, he said with his typical humor and modesty, "The only place I directed Don was to the Bourbon House." Such was not so. He took pains to introduce me to the New Orleans Jazz scene. His introductions opened many doors. EVERYONE in that scene had great respect for Dick.

In a few more years I became involved in doing some serious research. Naturally, I headed to the Hogan Jazz Archives. Like many other "scholars" at that time, I attempted to just pick his brain for what I wanted to know. At first, I was disappointed because he was not answering my questions directly, but rather hinting at things. It took a while until the realization came across that he was saying, "There is still a lot of research to do on our music. If you really care, then do it."

It is neat that as Dick and I approach "middle age," we are still in touch as neighbors, still ask each other questions, and once or twice a year go to a Zephyrs baseball game together. My sincere wish is that someone sit down and interview Dick Allen for a book on his career. It certainly has been a life of devotion to New Orleans Jazz.

Don Marquis

I would like it known that giving a personal tribute to Dick Allen in appreciation of being a friend to such a curator and an academic part he played and lived to New Orleans Jazz music is an honor.

And thanks for the introduction to Lars Edegran and the New Orleans Ragtime Orchestra—our association has lasted over 30 years.

Lionel C. Ferbos

When I sat down to write this, the idea of a "tribute" to someone who's been a close friend for half a century seemed a bit awkward. Not that I could dispute for a moment that Dick deserves a tribute for his work as a tireless and meticulous researcher, for his phenomenal memory of dates, places and names connected with jazz and other music genres, and for his work to record and tape interview musicians. That's a given. But what too few people know is the warm person that is behind all that erudition.

I came to New Orleans in 1950 because of my interest in jazz and was fortunate to meet Dick, then a student in the Tulane history program, and Bob Greenwood, a Tulane librarian. Between them they saw to it that I attended concerts, parades and funerals, heard music in clubs, and met musicians. I even met Dr. Hogan! For several years Dick and I wrote the New Orleans Jazz Club weekly radio program. What a learning experience that was for me! Later, when my husband and I had a jazz record shop, jazz record label, and jazz magazine, Dick was there to advise and sympathize.

Everyone agrees that Dick is the dean of oral historians. Why is that? Because he goes to an interview prepared, not just with the already known facts, but with bits about
the musician’s family and friends that makes the interview a relaxed and friendly experience. Before anyone realizes it, wonderful stories emerge to add to our jazz knowledge. It’s called the human touch! We should treasure it. (P.S.—See Dick, I didn’t use the word “expert” once).

Mina Lea Crais

Dick Allen is many things: a gentleman, a scholar, a very witty person and someone who’s really easy to talk to. Dick is also a listener. And those are among the many reasons that both jazz musicians and lovers of jazz love him. He listens to the music and to the folks whose lives revolve around the music.

When you ask him about jazz history he gives you the information you need along with many extras. I suppose the ultimate compliment is that he is someone whose company I truly treasure.

Peggy Scott Laborde
Producer WYES TV12

In the record heat of an afternoon, in the year 2000, I was favored with a short span of time to chat with Dick Allen by telephone, a rare event. We reminisced about people and happenings of by-gone years. Later that evening, in the quiet cool of my apartment five stories above the street sounds and distractions, I reflected on some of those years of our recollections.

Dick had told me he had been in the Navy, stationed in Gulfport, when he read about Orin Blackstone’s Record Shop on Carondelet Street in the business district.
Naturally, he found his way to visit THAT record shop, perhaps in 1949.

I'd learned that music was very important in my life, but New Orleans jazz was the pinnacle! Sessell Pique, my older cousin with a bit of musical talent, told me about the record shop close to his workplace. He worked at the Sewage and Water Board and would go on his lunch hour to check out the records, which he said were great, and they even had live jazz sessions on Saturday afternoons. So one Saturday I shyly ventured into a small back room of the Record Shop, where I can remember first experiencing the soft-spoken cornetist Johnny Wiggs, and I joined the New Orleans Jazz Club.

It was as a member of the NOJC that I came to meet and become acquainted with a youthful, round-faced male member with a chuckling, humorous line of patter. That was one—Richard Binion Allen. I do recall his emphasis on the middle name—Binion. He claimed Milledgeville, Georgia, as his birthplace. He had the qualifications, all right—a drawl and a gait that seems to mark a Southerner.

Dick had been touted to be one who seriously engaged in studious inquiry of musicians and their lives and memories. He could spout out "this and that" about almost any musician or era under discussion.

Before long, Dick had a column in the prestigious publication of the New Orleans Jazz Club's THE SECOND LINE, issued monthly. Dick's column was entitled, "COLLEXICON." Readers would write to Dick with their findings about old records and offering substantiation of their facts. Often Dick would comment concerning the new information, or contrary information would be shared.

Dick would also be present at the NOJC's Wax Wing sessions, held usually at the home of Harry Souchon on Sunday afternoons. Those serious about old and rare recordings gathered to discuss their personnels and any other knowledgeable information about same.

In July 1953, Dick was the speaker at a Wax Wing—his subject being "Skiffle Music." It was an excellent presentation, and capping the climax was Dick's demonstration of the "Tub-O-Phon." This was a home-made instrument comprising a washtub, rope, and a broom stick. It produced a bass fiddle sort of sound. It had been noted that this sound-producing contraption belonged to the epoch of jug bands—harmonicas, mouth harps, kazoo's, and scat singing.

It would follow that Dick became one of the elite small group who planned the NOJC's weekly radio program that was carried over WWL Radio—a 50,000 watt clear channel station, reaching vast territories and even ships at sea.

Ultimately, Dick became scarce in our NOJC circles, as he was chosen to tape oral histories from the older surviving jazz musicians for the Archive of New Orleans Jazz at Tulane University's Howard-Tilton Memorial Library. Dick was consumed delving into this new full-time position.

A wealth of information from the oral histories was captured on tape from who knows how many musicians, old and now gone to their next life, which now comprise the magnificent collection of the Hogan Jazz Archive. For this we can thank Richard B. Allen.

Today with some fifty years of expended action, interest, dedication, wit, effort, and participation, DICK ALLEN, you can feel that you did make a notable contribution in keeping jazz history alive for scholars to study and become informed—from now to eternity! Sit back, relax, and take a bow for a job well done!

Helen M. Arlt
Meeting Dick Allen

After arriving in New Orleans during the summer of 1964, it was only a few days before I made my first visit to the Hogan Jazz Archives at Tulane University. A man who turned out to be Paul Crawford was bent over a typewriter, headphones on, transcribing interviews. “I’m from England,” I said, “and I’ve come to see Dick Allen.” “Well, you wouldn’t want to be disappointed!” he replied. The implication that a 9000 mile round trip would otherwise be wasted was not lost on me, but Paul’s dry wit was certainly unexpected. Paul escorted me to the cafeteria where we found Dick Allen at lunch.

Tour Guide

After showing me around the little room into which the Archives were crammed in those days, Allen suggested we meet the following afternoon, a Saturday, for what he laughingly termed his “French Quarter Walking Tour.” A very personal initiation into a world he evidently loved, the tour took us past sights that had significance only for the avid New Orleans jazz fan. There was the barbershop on Burgundy Street, photographed by Ralston Crawford, which was displayed on the Riverside album (RLP 386) *Kid Thomas and his Algiers Stompers featuring Emile Barnes*. It was cat-a-corner across the street from Buster’s, a soul food restaurant and musicians’ hang-out, where red beans and rice was just 26 cents a plate! Here you could have a beer with “Slow Drag” Pavageau any afternoon of the week and listen to his stories. After one such occasion, we were walking over to Preservation Hall when Drag suddenly announced: “I told Barbara Reid; you want to preserve this music? Call it Preservation Hall!” (Barbara Reid later told me the same story independently.)

Just up the street, sitting on his stoop, was the old retired cornet player Tom Albert who began playing in bands around 1904. A contemporary of Bunk Johnson and Manuel Manetta, he had many stories to tell of Bolden, Perez, and others. Passing by the Morning Star Baptist Church in the 900 block of Burgundy Street, where Drag’s wife Annie Pavageau played the organ and directed the choir, we made our way over to Raymond Burke’s shop near the corner of Bourbon and Dumaine. Little more than a hole in the wall, it was stuffed with every kind of collectible and bric-a-brac, including a few of his 30,000 78s. Raymond used the shop as a place to store his own junk more than anything else, for, like all compulsive collectors, he hated to part with anything he had spent time looking for. He would rather trade than sell. Once, I remember, the local fire chief declared the shop a hazard and had him clean it out. Poor Raymond had to bring everything out of the store and stack it on the street. A modest crowd gathered to look over the treasures that had lain hidden for years, and Raymond sold so much that day that he almost had a nervous breakdown.

Passing through Pirate Alley, where William Faulkner lived and wrote *New Orleans Sketches* during 1925, Dick Allen and I took a short break at the Napoleon House. Originally allocated for Bonaparte himself, it was a wonderful bar that had not changed much through the years. All the while Allen, being the Anglophile he is, delighted in showing off his knowledge of British humor by keeping up a running commentary peppered with lines from Spike Milligan, Tony Hancock, and Peter Sellers. The Goon Show was broadcast locally for several years, so Allen was quite at home with that type of craziness.
We finished the tour with a sandwich at the Bourbon House on the corner of Bourbon and St. Peter. This was the French Quarterites’ nearest equivalent to a local pub. Service by Robert was notoriously slow but the locals loved him for it. Tourists who accidentally wandered into his domain frequently became irate when he appeared to ignore them for fifteen, twenty, even thirty minutes. “Can’t you see I’m busy!” Robert would say. To be in a hurry was a sure sign of coming from an alien world.

That night we went to eat at a neighborhood seafood restaurant on Elysian Fields called Wallace and Raoul’s. We were surprised to find Abbie and Merritt Brunies there and, while talking to them, in walked Emile Christian. “I was in England in 1919,” he told me upon being introduced. “I played for the King and Queen!” Emile went on to say he left the Original Dixieland Jazz Band while they were in Paris, staying over the next ten years. Later I was to play with him in several pick-up bands. He was a well-schooled trombonist who nevertheless retained the same basic tailgate style he had acquired before 1920.

Experience

Through knowing just about everyone in the jazz community, Allen kept up with the news of a variety of musical events from private parties at the homes of musicians to parades and funerals in the neighborhoods around town and across the river. His experience includes the conducting of more than 500 (out of the approximate total of 700) taped interviews of musicians for the Hogan Jazz Archives—the largest jazz oral history project in the world—where he was Associate Curator from 1958 to 1965, Curator from 1965 to 1980, then Curator of the Oral History Collection from 1980 to 1992. In earlier years he learned much by working at the New Orleans Record Shop with Oren Blackstone. This was the man who compiled the first American discography, Index To Jazz, Vols. I-IV, originally published by The Record Changer (1945-48), and then reprinted by Greenwood Press in 1978. “Oren was the most thorough,” Allen recalls. “He was one of the first to list his sources; do other discographers do that today?” Allen remembers: “It was a great place for meeting people, and working there opened my ears to the tremendous variety of music. So many musicians would stop by like Eddie Miller and Paul Barbarin, as well as important record producers.”

However, Allen’s knowledge of the local jazz scene evolved simply out of a love of listening to the music in its natural setting (to this day he refuses to hold a conversation when he could be listening to the band), and of having a great deal of fun in his interactions with the musicians themselves. He even studied trombone with Manuel Manetta. Allen laughs at the memory: “I have always said that I studied trombone but did not play it! I think the only thing I could do is grow!” Allen’s experience gave him a different insight than other “authorities” (Oren Blackstone included) who rarely went out to listen to live music, and it allowed him to function in a very practical way as a “middleman” between the musicians and others. This prompted Whitney Balliett, the New Yorker magazine jazz critic, to refer to Allen in 1967 as “not only the Curator of the Archive of New Orleans Jazz but, in a sense, the ‘curator’ of present-day New Orleans jazz itself.” More recently British clarinetist Dick Cook reminisced: “Dick Allen was like gold! We’d call him up every Friday to find out what was going on at the weekend.”
Jazz Authority?

For someone who knows so much, Allen is very careful to avoid expressing an opinion that could hurt a musician’s career. Neither does he try to define jazz or make judgments about different styles. “My tastes are subject to change without notice,” he chuckles. “In any case, the musicians themselves have different tastes from the majority of their listeners. For example, Johnny Wiggs liked King Oliver and Bix, Louis Nelson liked Tommy Dorsey, George Lewis liked Benny Goodman, Kid Howard liked Louis Armstrong, and Louis Armstrong liked Guy Lombardo!” But Allen did bring up topics like the relative merits of two-beat and four-beat rhythm, pointing out the appropriate use of each at different tempos, on different choruses, and even the variety of their use by different bandleaders. He helped focus my attention on characteristics of New Orleans jazz that I was not listening for at the time. In this connection Allen told me a story about Paul Barbarin, justly famous for his two-beat style of drumming. “Sometime around 1951 or so Paul told me he had switched back to playing two-beat when a lady official of the New Orleans Jazz Club, who was able to get work for his band, told him that four-beat was wrong for New Orleans jazz; he should be playing two-beat! Paul, of course, remembered when the drummers switched from two-beat to four-beat in the early 20s.”

Dick Allen would pass on many such stories and ephemera from time to time. One day we were talking about Bunk Johnson: “I don’t remember who it was that told me,” he said, “but if you want to know how Bunk played when he was young, you should listen to Louis’ solo on Chimes Blues.” It is an interesting thought.

Another time, during a discussion on ensemble playing, Allen made a valid observation: “It wasn’t the same back then (referring to the Twenties). Bands [played for dancing so numbers were shorter than they play them today. A horn man didn’t have to take down so much to rest his lip. Every third number was a waltz and at the end of each set of three numbers they’d take a break.” “That reminds me,” I added. “Emile Barnes told me that if they played for three minutes, they’d rest for three minutes. And if the played for ten minutes, they’d rest for ten minutes. They could play all day like that and still play a lot of ensemble. ‘It wasn’t like today,‘ said Barnes, ‘when they want you to keep playing all the time.’”

Liaison

Allen first visited New Orleans in 1945 while he was stationed at a navy base on the Gulf Coast. Ever practical about obtaining information, Allen tried asking the National Jazz Foundation where he could hear live music. Somewhat by luck he located a little dance hall called Luthjens, where he heard ‘Big Eye’ Louis Nelson, and accidentally ran into a local cab driver named Art Schreiber who tipped him off about some other venues. So it was that he heard Emile Barnes at the Harmony Inn, Kid Rena at the Brown Derby on Canal Street, Harry Shields at the Puppy House on Bourbon Street, and Irving Fazola at the Plaza Club in Jefferson Parish. The drummer Monk Hazel told him of Tyler’s Beer Garden, above Audubon Park near the levee, where the Avery-Tillman band played. Joe Avery was on trombone and Wilbert Tillman played the alto sax. (Interestingly, Tillman was just learning to play the sousaphone at that time.) Hearing and meeting the musicians in person had quite an impact on Allen, whose prior contact with jazz was mostly through record collecting. “We assume too
much about what people play and how they think about the music they make,” he says. “You shouldn’t judge people by recordings. Kid Rena was a much more exciting trumpet player than his recordings would lead you to believe. Elmer Talbert, however, sounds better on the Pax/Paradox session than he did in person.”

When Dick Allen subsequently moved to New Orleans in September 1949 he continued to search out live music and quickly became the best source of information for others. Through working at the New Orleans Record Shop from 1949 to 1951 and then at the Jazz Record Center from 1952 to 1953, Allen met a number of people who came back later asking for his assistance with projects of their own. Among those for whom Allen has acted as a liaison are photographers Ralston Crawford and Lee Friedlander, writers Fred Ramsey, Jr., Bob Campbell (Life magazine), Whitney Balliett (The New Yorker), and William Schaffter (co-author with Allen of Brass Bands). \cite{OrleansJazz}

Unquestionably Dick Allen’s work in oral history has been his major contribution to the world of New Orleans jazz. Yet, his activity as a historian had modest beginnings. He took notes, documenting the bands he heard, as early as his second or third visit to New Orleans in 1946 or ‘47. This work became expanded in scope when Allen began compiling biographical details of the musicians, an experience which proved invaluable for the taped
interviews he was to conduct later. The notes were simply factual, devoid of colorful anecdotes. Sam Charters was allowed free access to some of these notes, but Allen declined an invitation to collaborate on a book. Charter’s subsequent work, *Jazz: New Orleans, 1885-1957* (Walter C. Allen, 1958), paints a colorful picture of the musicians, which no doubt contributed to the increasing attention paid to New Orleans jazz worldwide. For readers like myself, hungry for information and having no reason to doubt its accuracy, the book became our Bible. It was disappointing to discover, after living in the city for a number of years, how imaginatively the history had been written.

Dick Allen’s first taped interview was made in January 1951 at the insistence of fellow French Quarterite Bob Greenwood, who had just bought a tape recorder. Together they interviewed Lizzie Miles backstage at the Mardi Gras Lounge on Bourbon Street while George Lewis’ band was playing on stage. He says: “Frankly, Alan Lomax was our inspiration.” Lomax made the first jazz oral history recordings with Jelly Roll Morton in 1938. In this, Lomax was following family tradition. It may not be well known, but his father John Lomax began making field recordings of
American folk music as early as 1908. These were cylinder recordings of Texas cowboy songs like “Home on the Range” and “Jack O’ Diamonds.”

Shortly after the Lizzie Miles interview, a schoolteacher from the North came to New Orleans with a grant to make taped interviews of old musicians. Allen selected the musicians for her but unfortunately does not remember her name. The historian and musician Hank Kamen, noting Allen’s interest in recording interviews, suggested that he talk to William Ransom Hogan, the Chairman of the History Department at Tulane University, about doing a Master’s degree in Oral History. When Nesuhi Ertegun returned in 1957 with Bob Campbell of Life magazine, hiring Bill Russell and Dick Allen to make some interviews for an entertainment issue, it was the precursor to what was to become a fruitful collaboration. Hogan obtained a Ford Foundation grant for Russell and Allen to do the interviews that now form the core of the Hogan Jazz Archives. The first of these was conducted on April 22, 1958 with the bass player Steve Brown, who happened to be visiting New Orleans at the time. Dick Allen eventually worked on over 500 interviews, some with Bill Russell, some with others such as Herb Friedwald and Marjorie Zander, and the majority with Paul Crawford.

The subject of New Orleans jazz, its origin and early development, is difficult for the majority of us to approach in a detached manner. In the interest of historical accuracy, we are lucky that most of the interviews were conducted by a man with few preconceptions of the music; a man who has taken his position of historian seriously and deliberately practiced a style of interview to elicit the actual opinions, attitudes, and memories (whether accurate or not) of the musicians themselves. Specifically, Allen carefully avoided leading questions to which a musician could give a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response, for he found that there is always a strong, unconscious tendency for the musician to agree with the interviewer. This approach often produced fresh and unexpected stories and insights, giving us a glimpse of the musicians’ own perspectives of playing music in New Orleans, so different from that of the outsider. Dick Allen has written: “The interviews are biographical in nature, yet old musicians have that flair for telling stories which bring bygone eras alive, and one can almost picture places where the music was played.” About the musicians themselves, Allen recalls: “They were generous with their time, helpful and kind; as they always were.” On occasion, however, he made an exception to his rule of avoiding leading questions. “Sometimes you get the most revealing statements from what seems to be a silly question. For example, I had heard that John Robichaux played in parades. So I asked Isidore Barbarin if Robichaux played the violin in a brass band,” Allen laughs as he remembers. “Bill Russell never could understand the value of this method! It was obviously silly, but produced a wealth of additional information and, in this case, Barbarin told us that Robichaux played the bass drum.”

Record Production

While Dick Allen is cautious about expressing his own opinions, some would say even secretive, we can pick up a few clues to what he enjoys most in New Orleans jazz by listening to the recordings in which he has been involved. While never the owner of a record company, although briefly a partner in the original New Orleans Records, Allen has helped to produce several sessions. A listing of these recordings reveals a love of informality and
a desire to allow the musicians to express themselves in their own personal way without attempting to shape their music into a pre-determined mold:

4. *Jazz Begins—The Young Tuxedo Brass Band* (1958), Atlantic 1297 and Mosaic MD4-179;
5. *New Orleans Jazz—Billie and DeDe Pierce* (1959), Folk-Lyric FL110 and Arhoolie LP2016;
6. *Peter Bocage and his Creole Serenaders* with Joe Robichaux (1962), American Music AMCD-93;

The Avery-Tillman sides ("Just a Closer Walk with Thee" and "Fidgety Feet") are the first recordings of Joe Avery, Wilbert Tillman, and John Casimir, and the band was a particular favorite of Allen's. Unfortunately, his inability to be present to supervise the session at Cosimo Matassa's studios resulted in poor fidelity.

Colyer and Allen discussed and prepared for the Ken Colyer session at some length with Emile Barnes. Dick Allen has always been a great advocate for the clarinetist and a fan of exuberant trombone playing like Harrison Brazley's. Not surprisingly, this session turned out to be one of the best examples of their work despite the primitive recording conditions in Emile Barnes' kitchen.

Allen's collaboration with Dr. Harry Oster (pronounced 'Oyster' by the Cajuns!) was quite extensive. They were involved in a number of folk music recordings outside of New Orleans, notably of Robert Pete Williams. Recording 'Snooks' Eaglin came about through Allen. Snooks was recommended by another guitarist, Ed Luckett, who Allen heard playing on South Galvez Street. Allen subsequently introduced Snooks to Oster, who recorded him on several occasions, some of which appeared on his own Folk-Lyric label and the rest elsewhere. These selections of folk music and ballads were Eaglin's first recordings, but Allen remarks: "Snooks can play anything you ask him to. If you ask him to play 'High Society,' he'll play that. He'll play Ray Charles songs or numbers like 'Malaguena,' anything at all!" These recordings contributed to making Snooks' music more widely known.

Dick Allen also wanted to record Billie and DeDe Pierce as singers. Since both of them were sick and out of work, it seemed unlikely they would be able to play. Snooks was supposed to play the guitar but did not show up. Percy Randolph, who had once lived across the street from Paul Crawford, played the washboard.

Crawford, in fact, recommended Randolph for various sessions, including this one with Billie and DeDe, which was held at Crawford's apartment at 818 St. Peter Street. There seemed little prospect in Billie or DeDe's future at that time, so this recording appears to have been a turning point in their careers. Their eventual success with Preservation Hall is now history. Yet, that 1959 recording is still one of my favorites, capturing the sheer joy and exuberance of their music.

When Nesuhi Ertegun returned to New Orleans to record the Young Tuxedo Brass
Band in 1958 he enlisted Dick Allen’s help once again. Allen picked all the tunes but one, “It Feels So Good,” which was Ertegun’s idea. Allen also suggested the addition of Eddie Pierson on trombone and, since Adolphe ‘Tats’ Alexander was sick, to replace him with an alto sax player with the intriguing name of Herman Sherman. Interestingly, Sherman eventually took over the leadership of the band in the Seventies after Andrew Morgan died. Allen pointed out, however, that it was Ertegun’s idea to replace the regular snare drummer Alfred Williams with his friend Paul Barbarin.

Dick Allen and the staff at the Archive of New Orleans Jazz—Bill Russell, Paul Crawford, and Betty Rankin—were able to assist many independent record producers during the sixties. “We would cooperate with anyone who wanted us to,” says Allen. In this he was fortunate to have the active encouragement and backing of his mentor, William Hogan, with whom he shared an interest in jazz record collecting. Allen recalls: “He wanted us to do anything if it would support New Orleans jazz. He gave us a free hand to use the Archive equipment whenever it was needed.” Among those producers were Jack Phelan, who recorded *The Kid Thomas Band with Raymond Burke* (Jazzology JCE30), Tom Bethel (San Jacinto Records), Leonard Brackett (Center), Sonny Faggart (Pearl), and myself (for LaCroix and GHB). In the same way, Allen assisted Barry Martyn on his numerous projects, especially by producing *Kid Thomas Valentine, Volume 2* (MONO) in Barry’s absence. This was the first documentary recording of the band, excepting those made in various dance halls, with no changes or additions made to the personnel. The repertoire is unusual as well, “Bells of St. Mary’s” for example, though typical of a New Orleans dance hall in the Fifties. In addition, Dick Allen and Paul Crawford recorded the Joe Robichaux track, after the Peter Bocage session had ended, to document for the Archives the way Robichaux played piano for his own enjoyment.
Consultant

Not surprisingly, Dick Allen has served New Orleans jazz in many different ways, usually staying in the background.

In 1958 he was a consultant for the Art Ford Jazz Party for National Television Associates, which became available on videotape a few years ago. Allen explains the somewhat chaotic presentation: "Art Ford liked the party atmosphere. I think he spiked the fruit punch with a whole fifth of whiskey without telling the musicians. You can see what happened when Alphonse Picou upstages Sharkey Bonano!" Clem Tervalon told me it was very funny to watch everyone get high without realizing how. Be that as it may, the film contains some superb drumming by Paul Barbarin at his peak and rare footage of Punch Miller, Sweet Emma, and others.

Along with Harry Souchon, Allen was also involved with the production of an eight-part series for National Educational Television entitled "New Orleans Jazz." Produced in 1963, these programs combined interviews of musicians like Papa Jack Laine and Manuel Manetta with live music by a variety of bands, including the Eureka Brass Band, Peter Bocage, the Raymond Burke Trio, Armand Hug, and Billie and DeDe Pierce. (The local PBS affiliate, WYES TV12, is looking for a better copy than they have. If any jazz film collector has a good copy, please contact Peggy Scott Laborde at the station.)

In 1969 Allen was a consultant on the committee to establish the current New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. When the committee asked him to recommend a producer, he conferred with his old friend Nesuhi Ertegun, who said there was only one man for the job and that was George Wein. So it was that Wein became the producer and, through Dick, employed Quint Davis and Allison Miner, who were working at the Archive at the time. Allen was retained as a consultant for a couple of years, but he complained to me that they rarely took his advice. I remember when he was shocked to learn that Paul Barnes, who had played with King Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton, was not hired on the festival, and that the Louis Cottrell Band was playing on one of the riverboat concerts without its regular singer, Blanche Thomas. Allen was told that there was no budget to hire Paul Barnes and Blanche Thomas, so he hired them himself and paid them out of his own salary. Cottrell was delighted, and we were treated to a great concert featuring some wonderful duets and competitive choruses between the two clarinetists.

Today, Dick Allen has retired from the Archive but spends some of his free time doing a little writing and giving lectures. You might run into him one day walking in the French Quarter that has been home to him for all these years, or perhaps see him at the Palm Court Jazz Café. If you want to ask him questions, be warned! As always,
he does not like to talk if there is music to
listen to and, in any event, he is unlikely to
give you the answer you are looking for.
As Bruce Boyd Raeburn, the present
Curator of the Hogan Jazz Archive,
discovered: "When I was working on the
dissertation for my Ph.D. in History I went
to Dick many times with questions. He
would never tell me what I wanted to know
directly but instead would give me vague
clues to where I could find the information
in the original source. Sometimes he would
suggest a new avenue of research in this
way, but always by giving me clues.
Looking back on it, this was far more
valuable in the long run as it forced me to
immerse myself in the subject and
produced a lot of additional material in the
process. I am very grateful to him for
that."

Dick Allen himself points out: "We have
had too much misinformation over and over
again as it is, and besides," he adds with a
twinkle in his eye, "I don’t trust my own
memory that well!"

For their help in providing material, thanks
to Bruce Raeburn and Alma Freeman of the
Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University,
and to Dick Allen himself. This article
appeared originally in New Orleans Music,
vol. 4, no. 5 (March 1994) and has been
updated.

Clive Wilson

3. Ibid.
4. John A. Lomax, Adventures of a Ballad Hunter
5. The Tulanian, vol. 41, no. 3 (1968).

Andrea’s Postscript

Dick Allen’s contributions to the history
of jazz and to the jazz community itself are
invaluable. Co-founder of the William
Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane
University, Dick has conducted many
interviews over the years that have
enhanced our understanding of the lives
and philosophies of many long past jazz
musicians. His every day contribution as a
living resource of stories and memories that
relate to the present as well as the past is
great and deserves appreciation. Imagine
how it would be if Dick had never chosen
to make New Orleans his home and if his
variety of accomplishments had never been
realized. Immeasurable, also, is the extent
to which Dick has influenced the jazz
world beyond New Orleans. Even in
retirement, people from around the world
seek him out because of the reverence for
his reputation and expertise.

Dick Allen has personally touched many
lives, and he has definitely influenced
mine. I will forever think of him in terms
of thanks and gratitude, since some of my
happiest moments of recent years came as
the result of his influence. We met at a
time when my years as a full-time mom
were coming to a close due the fact that
my children were becoming young adults.
I was exploring the idea of graduate school
when Dick guided me through certain
decisions that ultimately resulted in my
becoming involved in the jazz community
and the production of jazz recordings.

The journey began with a CD entitled
"Two Clarinets on the Porch." Dick was
the coach, with assistant coach Les Museutt
and team members Willie Humphrey, Brian
O’Connell, Ernie Elly, and Frank Fields.
Dick contributed liner notes and a relentless
sense of humor throughout the entire
project. On the back cover of the CD
booklet is a photograph of Willie and Brian

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sitting in a porch swing and laughing—it was Dick’s humorous remark that created the emotion of that moment.

Dick’s enthusiastic support gave me the courage to become involved in subsequent recordings and various projects in the jazz community. Beautiful experiences in work and friendship evolved along the way. For example, I was given the opportunity to work with Doc Cheatham and eventually to enjoy an ever-expanding group of friends that continues to enhance my life in ways I could not have imagined ten years ago. I will never forget the importance of Dick Allen’s friendship and influence upon me during these years.

On January 29, 2002 Dick Allen will be seventy-five years old. I hope his French Quarter Postal Emporium mailbox will be filled to overflowing with birthday cards and letters and that he will be forced to borrow a wagon to carry them all back to his apartment. He will probably stop for a rest along the way at Croissant d’Or on Ursulines Street, purchase a Times-Picayune from the vending machine out front before going inside and ordering a diet Coke and a cinnamon roll. After finishing the cinnamon roll, he will probably open up the newspaper and turn to the obituaries (ever the archivist) in his routine of noting the day’s passings.

Dick Allen has been a grand and special friend, sometimes a teacher, sometimes a healer, sometimes a disciplinarian, and always a unique coach. He has encouraged me to meet challenges I would not have volunteered for, leading to some interesting aspects of personal growth. I have benefited directly from the wisdom of his humor and understanding, and I am thankful that this wonderful character shares his life with the people of New Orleans.

Andrea DuPlessis

Alcide “Yellow” Nunez Donation

The job of documenting the New Orleans jazz heritage is an immense one, requiring collaboration between various institutions with limited resources in a race against time. Under such conditions, cooperative agreements permit a sharing of talent and funding to achieve results that benefit everyone, and they can lead to some nice surprises, too.

Take, for example, the oral history partnership between the Hogan Jazz Archive, the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park/National Park Service, and its advisory body, the New Orleans Jazz Commission. The “Jazz Park” and the Jazz Commission have provided the means for Tad Jones, Barry Martyn, Jack Stewart, and others to conduct video interviews with more than fifty informants, ranging from pianist Lady Olivia Charlot to bandleader Edgar “Dooky” Chase and from film maker and New Orleans Jazz Club founder Don Perry to historian Ricard B. Allen. An interview with bassist Richard Payne was made just prior to his death and remains a unique testament to the abiding humor, intelligence, and humanity of this gifted musician. The Hogan Jazz Archive serves as the primary repository for these interviews, preserving them and making them available to researchers. The project is a valuable endeavor in its own right, but it has also generated *lagniappe*.

On February 17, 2000 Dan Meyer, Jack Stewart, and Tad Jones interviewed Eugene C. Nunez, the son of clarinetist Alcide “Yellow” Nunez, whose early tenure with the Original Dixieland Jass Band and the Louisiana Five helped to launch the Jazz Craze during World War I. Mentioned during the interview were several vintage photographs, a diary/scrapbook, newspaper clippings, and business papers relating to Alcide Nunez’s compositions. At the
invitation of Dan, Jack, and Tad, Eugene Nunez donated much of this original material to the Archive and made the rest available for copying.

One photograph that was particularly striking showed Alcide with two friends having their portrait taken in a "balloon" studio set in New Orleans. Nunez (left) is joined by trombonist Tom Brown and multi-instrumentalist Frank Christian (right), with the tag "Flying High in New Orleans" probably explaining what they were doing there. Indeed, the good time spirit that animated so much of early New Orleans jazz is alive and well in this photograph, reminding us once again that not all of the fun to be had was on the bandstand.

Bruce Boyd Raeburn

Call to Friends

With the completion of volume XIV it is time for a friendly reminder to the membership of the Friends of the Jazz Archive to submit new annual dues of $25 to assist with the publishing expenses of the newsletter. We have come a long way together since the early days of six-page issues, and this is our first price increase in fourteen years. We will continue the larger single annual issue for the foreseeable future; the logistics are more manageable and it provides ample time to collect and review the necessary material for a quality issue.

We would like to welcome two new members to the Editorial Board: Alma Williams Freeman has been with the Archive for nearly a quarter of a century and has been working behind the scenes on The Jazz Archivist since its inception. It is time for us to recognize her constant contributions with a place on the Board.

Dr. Lance Query began his duties as Dean of Libraries and Academic Information Resources at Tulane on July 1 and has already brought a new sense of energy and enthusiasm to the library community here. In welcoming Dr. Query, we also want to thank retired University Librarian Phil Leinbach for his many years of service at the library and for his guidance in the production of this newsletter over the course of fourteen years. We suspect that Phil's long-standing love of jazz may have had something to do with it.

Finally, the Editorial Board of The Jazz Archivist thanks its readers for the many years of interest and support they have shown in making this newsletter a success. We share a dedication to the belief that there is always more to learn about the history of New Orleans jazz. In reading through the pieces contained in this volume, one gains the impression that the jazz community takes many forms, but there is no doubt about its vitality or the special bond it creates among its members.