The Mexican Band Legend: Part III

by

Jack Stewart

This Mexican Band played on the steamboat Stella Wilds in and around Natchez. This may be the steamboat or showboat mentioned in an interview with Camille Duchesne Gilbert, noted in Part I of this essay (courtesy Gandy Photograph Collection, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.).

This is the final section in a three-part series on the various Mexican bands and musicians who came to New Orleans for the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in 1884-1885. The first two installments covered the accomplishments of the Eighth Cavalry Band led by Encarnacion Payen, the most prominent of the Mexican
This photograph of the Eighth Cavalry Band at the World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893, is probably close to how they appeared when they played in New Orleans in 1891 (courtesy Special Collections, Monroe Library, Loyola University, New Orleans).

musical groups that played in New Orleans during the time of the fair. They also included biographical sketches of saxophonist Florencio Ramos, composer W. T. Francis, publisher Junius Hart, guitarist Sou Sou Oramous, and bandleader Juventinos Rosas, who authored the landmark composition “Over the Waves.”

This third and final installment includes information on the Mexican bands found since the first two articles were published; a biographical sketch of clarinetist, saxophonist, and music teacher Leonardo Vizcarra; and finally, a discussion of the direct musical effect and influence of the Mexican musicians and their music on New Orleans vernacular music of the pre-jazz, proto-jazz, and early jazz periods.

**Music in Mexico**

The early Indians of Mexico believed that music was taken from the Sun when the god of the phenomenal (or spiritual) world, Tezcatlipoc, besought the god of the noumenal (or material) world, Quetzalcoatl, to use his (Tezcatlipoc’s) three servants to entwine themselves to form a bridge to the Sun and then ask the Sun “for musicians and ... bring them back to earth to delight the souls of men.” Although the Sun forbade his musicians to speak to Quetzalcoatl, one of them finally agreed to accompany Quetzalcoatl to earth, where he gave the pleasure of music to mankind. In 1843, the wife of the Spanish ambassador to Mexico noted that, to Mexicans, “music is a sixth sense,” and even today, in village bands such as the one in Tlayacapan, Morelos, “almost every child... is taught to play a band instrument as soon as he or she can hold it.”

Mexicans’ appreciation of music has survived the ethnic influxes of Spanish, African, French, and German peoples, as well as invasions, occupations, and wars,
and the musical enthusiasm of the Mexican bands that came to New Orleans over a thirty-five year period profoundly impressed the population and the musicians and had a lasting effect.

**Musical Impact**

While the stories of legendary performances and individual musicians are relevant, the most important contribution of the Mexican bands was their effect on the music of New Orleans. My research shows that there was a profound and varied effect of Mexican music on vernacular music traditions in New Orleans. These effects run from small and simple to large and complex. The musical connection starts in 1884 and continues until the middle 1920s.

**Music Publishing and Composition**

Because of the performances of the Mexican bands in New Orleans, a lot of new topical and thematic sheet music was published. The most visible effort was the "Mexican Music" series published in New Orleans by Junius Hart, much of it arranged or composed by Alabamian-turned-New Orleanian W. T. Francis. While one researcher has disdained the Junius Hart series as no more "Mexican" than other Latin pieces published at the time, it was nevertheless an important landmark.

First, the seemingly weird combination of danzas, schottisches, waltzes, mazurkas, and polkas contained in the series is representative of Mexican music of the 1880s, which (along with the rest of the nineteenth century) is often referred to as the operatic period, where the styles were European but were infused with local content. Second, the New Orleans compositions in the Mexican mode are interesting music in and of themselves; for instance, editor Francis’s own "El Nopal (The Cactus)" (1885) represents a significant milestone in New Orleans music. While much of it bears similarities to the earlier compositions of Louis Moreau Gottschalk, it is both later in style and lighter in musical density; in other words, more “popular” and less classical or romantic, and an obvious parlor-music forerunner of ragtime. Pianist and composer Roy Carew (who published Jelly Roll Morton’s last compositions) lived in New Orleans in the early twentieth century. Carew noted that “W. T. Francis... wrote a tune called The Cactus... and it had a ragtime treble and a Spanish bass.” (In fact, some of Francis’s other pieces, such as “127 March,” are even closer to ragtime.) Third, the growth of Hart’s sheet music catalogue, fostered by the inauguration and promotion of his Mexican series, grew to 1,688 titles by 1888. It can be reasonably concluded that the publishing “opportunity” created by the Mexican bands and the Mexican series, both Hart’s and the others, stimulated musical composition and publishing activity, attracted people such as W. T. Francis to the city, introduced new elements to the mix, and ultimately pushed along the development of the New Orleans vernacular sound.

**Elevated Musicianship and Dramatic Music**

New Orleans music historian Al Rose held the position (based on his conversations with older New Orleans musicians) that the Mexican bands represented a kind of watershed in New Orleans band music. In Rose’s opinion, their technical excellence, commanding performance, and novel repertoire all made a lasting impact on local bandsmen who began to absorb these elements into their own playing.

An example of this influence may be “Pasquila” (1895), W. J. Voges’s (c.1866-1922) interestingly eclectic medley of syncopated local pieces. These were prob-
ably either heard on the street, or inspired by music heard on the street. Published in New Orleans in 1895, this medley represents the next stage of pieces that show evidence of a Mexican influence - those written by local people not specifically connected with the Mexican bands or the various Mexican series of music. Included in the medley is a grand march done in a very grandioso style, similar to Mexican marches of the time such as “Zacatecas” (1891), often referred to as Mexico’s second national anthem, and also similar to the French-style marches with Spanish nuances and German “enthusiasms” that are included in “Aires Nacional Mexicanos,” a medley of popular pieces compiled in 1893 by Miguel Rios Toledano and published in 1895 under the aegis of Mexican President Porfiria Diaz, which invokes the same feeling as parts of “Tiger Rag.”

Musical Figures
When one culture is repeatedly influenced by another over a long period of time, one might expect a certain amount of verbatim influence. A good example of this is the identical melodic figures from Juventinas Rosas’s “Mexican Dances” being put to use by New Orleans ragtime composer J. A. Verlander in his excellent ragtime piece, “Ragology” (1901).

The Saxophone
The saxophone, a mid-nineteenth century invention by Adolph Sax, became a mainstay of twentieth century jazz and popular music. It offered a sound that was brassy and fluid at the same time, and which allowed easy tonal variation and volume, both of which were welcome additions to the pre-jazz New Orleans vernacular sound.

While the saxophone was played in New Orleans before 1884, the Mexican bands seem to have finally established its permanent presence. Two of their saxophonists, Florencio Ramos (1861-1931) and Leonardo Vizcarra (1860-1923), left the Eighth Cavalry Band and remained in New Orleans for the rest of their lives. They spent their time here playing with local groups and teaching music.

Tonal Characteristics and Harmonies
The tonal characteristics and harmonies in the Mexican music of the time seem to have directly contributed to the establishment of the unorthodox characteristics of the New Orleans sound. Hart’s “Mexican Series” publicity stated that its pieces contain “all of that weird, sweet nature which characterizes the music of Mexico and have become justly popular.” Series composer W. T. Francis spoke of “the music of the Spanish nations, which in many cases is inexpressibly beautiful. In Mexico, for example, there has been developed a school which combines, so far as I can see, the tendencies of the Spanish race on the one hand and of the Aztec and Tolteca on the other. This school has expressed itself in hundreds of songs, zarzuelas, dansas, masses, sonatas and operettas. Not more than a score of these have been heard in New York, but hundreds of them are household words in New Orleans.”

Slightly “dissonant” harmony achieved through slavish adherence to thirds combined with the attendant minor intonation discrepancies is the norm when this is pursued; this is probably the “weird, sweet nature” that Junius Hart mentioned in his advertising; it is also likely to be what W. T. Francis was describing the Aztec or Totec Indian-derived characteristics of Mexican tonality. Good examples of this are found in “Aires Nacional Mexicanos,” which contains tonal colorations in both the trumpet
and saxophone parts that later carried over to the jazz tradition. This sound is one of the main identifying features of mariachi bands with trumpets. Two revealing examples of this mariachi sound in New Orleans music are found in the harmonies of the first and second cornets on both King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, “Snake Rag” (Gennett 5184, Richmond, Indiana, April 6, 1923), and Anthony Parenti and His Famous Melody Boys, “12th Street Blues” (Victor 19647, New Orleans, March 24, 1925).

**Three-Over-Four Syncopation**

Three-over-four syncopation is a “de facto” form of syncopation in which three notes are repeated several times over a four-beat, underlying rhythm. The rhythmic variation occurs because, as the notes are repeated, they change from upbeats to downbeats, and since musicians play upbeats and downbeats differently, the attack and duration given to the notes tend to change, creating a syncopated effect. This type of music is extremely common in Mexican music of the late nineteenth century, and there are various examples of it in “Aires Nacional Mexicanos.”

New Orleans ragtime in 1897 (the first year of published ragtime) was in some ways about ten years ahead of ragtime elsewhere, especially with regard to varying or contrasting types of syncopation. Mexican-style “three-over-four” syncopation, sometimes called “secondary rag,” is included in New Orleanian Paul Sarebresole’s “Roustabout Rag” (1897). Use of this rhythmic device does not appear in rags from elsewhere until Charles L. Johnson’s rag hit “Dill Pickles” (1906), and its popularity is not fully established in the mainstream ragtime genre until George Botsford’s successful “Black and White Rag” (1908). It is also in “Come
Clean” (1906), also by Sarebresole, an obscure Gallo/Celtic-American composer of only four known pieces. It also appears in “Happy Sammy” (Cable Company, New Orleans, 1906) by H. C. Schmitt and in Bunk Johnson’s 1942 imitation, or demonstration, of Buddy Bolden’s playing style. The example Bunk uses is the Mexican march “Zacatecas” (1891), with three-over-four figures thrown in as embellishments. “Happy Sammy” has similar if not identical phrasings to Bunk’s imitation of Bolden’s embellishments.

Later examples of three-over-four appear in and dominate “Fidgety Feet” (1919) - also known as “War Clouds” - by D. J. LaRocca and Larry Shields. It is a standard part of the jazz repertoire which is itself reminiscent of the earlier “Roustabout Rag.” Three-over-four figures also comprise the melody line of Kid Ory’s composition “Musk Rat Ramble” (1921-1923), which Ory wrote while noodling around on the saxophone which he had just recently learned how to play (a double “Mexican moment” for Ory?). It is also in Louis Armstrong’s 1926 Hot Seven recording of Eudy Bowan’s (1887-1949) extremely popular “Twelfth Street Rag” (1914), showing both Armstrong’s choice of the piece and his very deliberate variations on the three-over-four figures, which push them to even further rhythmic complexities.

**Hemiola**

The trio, or lesser-heard, “real-pretty” third strain of “Over The Waves” presents a special case of rhythmic variation, with figures that are somewhat related to a habanera rhythm. Hemiola, simply put, involves the relationship of three beats to two beats (although the earliest definitions also dealt with pitch), but in reality it is anything but simple. The argument persists as to whether this strain qualifies as an example of hemiola, which some feel is a motherlode of sophisticated syncopation. With alternate definitions of hemiola seeming to be currently recognized, it is arguably hemiola or not hemiola.

**The Ultimate Chord Progression**

The Mexican band presence may have also helped imprint New Orleans’s favorite chord progression on the local vernacular music of the time. “Over the Waves” (1889) and “Zacatecas March” (1891) both contain the same chord progression as many other pieces, all of which are New Orleans favorites or important milestones. The list in-
cludes, but is not limited to, “Bill Bailey, Won’t You Please Come Home” (1902), “Come Clean” (1906), “National Emblem” (1906), “Washington and Lee Swing” (1910), “Tiger Rag” (1917), “Snake Rag” (1923), and the more recent “Bourbon Street Parade” (1950). In fake books, it is sometimes called the “blues progression,” which it is not, but it has become the traditional jazz “default” chord progression.

**Leonardo Vizcarra**

Although Leonardo Vizcarra was briefly mentioned in the second installment in this series, new information calls for a recap and expansion of his life story. Leonardo Rojas Vizcarra was born in Mexico in May 1860. He came to New Orleans with the Eighth Cavalry Mexican Band to play for the World’s Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition in 1884. He was featured in a program at the Washington Artillery Arsenal as the principal soloist on a piece billed as “‘La Favorita,’ Variations for Saxophone Soprano By Prof. Leonardo R. Vizcarra [sic].” establishing him as probably New Orleans’s earliest soprano saxophonist. After the fair and its successor fair closed, the band toured the surrounding region in the interest of Junius Hart Music and its Mexican Series.

Vizcarra was back in New Orleans in 1889 and in 1891 was living at old 246 North Villere Street, listed as a musician. By 1894 he was living in the French Quarter at 173 Bourbon. In 1895 he was at 812 St. Peter; in 1896 he was listed as a music teacher living at 717 St. Peter, where he remained until 1901. From 1902 through 1904 he lived at 521 Royal Street. He then moved across Canal Street to the Lafayette Square district, where he lived at 741 Carondelet for two years. In 1907 he moved around the corner to 857 St. Charles Street, where he stayed until 1911. He then moved to 3419 Canal Street in Mid-City for one year. Then he...
The Mexican National Band at a bandstand in a New Orleans park. In later years, this band replaced the Eighth Cavalry Band as Mexico’s official musical ambassadors, with some of the same musicians (courtesy of the Louisiana State Museum).

went back to St. Charles Street, this time at 862, for three years. The next year, 1915, he was a few blocks away at 719 Howard Avenue, where he remained for three years. These were all good locations for a musician and music teacher, especially if he was playing at the theaters. Vizcarra was at 1617 Jackson Avenue in the Garden District in 1918. In 1919 he moved to 1214 Soniat Street, where he seems to have lived for the rest of his life.²⁸

Vizcarra was in Maestro H. Lenfant’s West End Military Orchestra when they played for the summer concerts at West End Park in 1890 and 1891.²⁹ He not only played in Jack Laine’s bands but was in Laine’s earliest bands. Laine hired Vizcarra after Lenfant’s band broke up - whether for the first summer or after two summers. This documents the fact that Laine started as a bandleader at a young age, and makes Vizcarra one of the musicians that may have played with Laine for the “legendary” stag party on a barge towed behind a showboat in 1892.³⁰ Vizcarra appears to have played in Laine’s band for about twenty years, because he started with Laine circa 1890, and was still playing with him at a time when the much younger Alcide “Yellow” Nunez (1884-1934) was in the band; during a 1960
interview Laine picked up a photograph taken of his band during a Mardi Gras parade and identified both Vizcarra and Nunez in the line-up.\textsuperscript{31}

Leonardo Vizcarra was married to Librada Calderon.\textsuperscript{32} They had two sons, John J. Vizcarra, a railway clerk,\textsuperscript{33} and Henry L. Vizcarra, a banker;\textsuperscript{34} and a daughter, Guadalupe Vizcarra Daniel.\textsuperscript{35} Leonardo Rojas Vizcarra died in New Orleans on July 1, 1923, and is buried in Metairie Cemetery in the Calderon family tomb.\textsuperscript{36}

**Conclusion**

This is the third and last part of the Mexican Band series begun in 1991. In the first part, I identified the legends that had built up concerning the Mexican Bands and then tried to separate fact from fiction, based on documentation of the bands, the musicians, the sheet music, and the publishers. I also included information on violinist, orchestra leader, and composer Juvenito Rosas; saxophonist and composer Florencio Ramos, and guitarist and mandolin player Joseph "Sou Sou" Oramus.

In the second part, in 1994, I gave additional information about the various Mexican Bands, a discussion of "Over the Waves," and a history of the saxophone in New Orleans. I also presented biographical sketches of publisher and music house owner Junius Hart and composer, arranger, and orchestra leader W. T. Francis.

In this third and final part I have attempted an analysis of the Mexican influences on New Orleans vernacular music, including pre-jazz, proto-jazz, and early jazz. This was perhaps the most difficult of the three parts, because it explores things often alluded to, but never actually stated or explained. I have tried to pick out the uniquely Mexican elements and demonstrate their presence in and influence on New Orleans music between the middle 1880s and the middle 1920s.

Finally, while this is the final installment of the series, there is still additional work to be done concerning Mexican music in New Orleans. First, Mexican bands continued to come to New Orleans after 1920. Second, the information presented in this series needs to be organized into a cohesive, less fragmented whole, which will probably come in the form of a book chapter. Third, a comparative study of the influences of Mexican, Cuban, Haitian, and other Gulf and Caribbean musics on New Orleans music needs to be undertaken in order to show the similarities, differences, and cross-fertilization that occurred.

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Stewart, Part II, *passim.*


11 Since this arrangement was found in a local repository, there is a better than average chance that it was performed in New Orleans.


14 See discussions of early New Orleans saxophone in previous installments of this article.


16 W. T. Francis interview, *Daily Picayune,* January 2, 1890, p. 3.


19 “This Is Bunk Johnson Talking, Explaining To You The Early Days Of New Orleans,” American Music LP 643.


21 Euday L. Bowman, “12th Street Rag” (Fort Worth: Euday L. Bowman, 1914).


23 See Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, second edition, 1969), p. 132. This argument recently occurred at a New Leviathan Oriental Fox-Trot Orchestra rehearsal. After playing the piece and posing the question, a twenty minute discussion followed, accompanied by questioning of music education credentials, musical demonstrations, and definitions from Wikipedia downloaded from Blackberries. The definition given in the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* also points out the discrepancies between the many definitions that have developed over time.

24 U. S. Census, 1900.

25 Program for concert and dance at the Washington Artillery Arsenal (Louisiana Division Collection, New Orleans Public Library).


28 New Orleans City Directories.

29 *Daily Picayune,* May 18, 1890; July 13, 1890.

30 Al Rose, in an unrecorded conversation with Jack Laine, said that Laine told him he played for a job in 1892 on the Mississippi River on a barge towed behind a showboat. The job was playing music for a stag party on the barge, while the women and children were attending a performance of *Othello* on the showboat. Rose concluded that this was the first performance by a jazz band, and that 1892 was the beginning year for jazz. However, he could not provide names of musicians who were old enough to have played the engagement. Rose related this story to many people, including the author, around 1900, and said we should prepare to celebrate the 100th anniversary of jazz in 1992.

31 Jack Laine interview, May 23, 1960 (Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University).


35 “Died;” Tablet, Calderon family tomb.

36 “Died;” Tablet.
Society Halls in New Orleans: A Survey of Jazz Landmarks, Part I

By
Ann Woodruff

Introduction

Fraternal associations were familiar institutions to nineteenth and early twentieth century Americans. In an age marked by industrialization, the growth of urban centers, and population expansion, these organizations provided individuals with a sense of belonging, while helping to mitigate the harsh realities of capitalism. Nineteenth century New Orleans, an immigrant city with a vibrant port economy, ethnic mix, and frequent epidemics, was home to many such associations, especially those offering mutual aid. A report published in 1888, condemning the widespread practice of society medical care, estimated that four out of five people in this city were under the protection of a benevolent society, either as a member or as part of a member's family.

Fraternalism is a broad term, encompassing diverse organizations which share the goals of fellowship and solidarity. While it is difficult to classify these different societies, for the purposes of this survey I will distinguish the following six types: 1) fraternal lodges, such as Freemasonry, whose members join together in the pursuit of fellowship and truth, while employing secret rites; 2) benevolent or mutual-aid societies, which are similar to fraternal lodges but provide insurance benefits to members as well; 3) trade unions, which developed out of the benevolent society tradition of mutual aid based on professional affiliation; 4) charity organizations, which seek to improve the lives of others, not the members themselves; 5) social and/or aid and pleasure clubs, which evolved out of earlier benevolent societies and emphasize fellowship and parading while maintaining aspects of informal aid; and 6) marching clubs, which are a remnant of the benevolent society tradition of street parades accompanied by brass band musicians.

This series will concern itself with only the following four categories: Masonic lodges, benevolent societies, social and/or aid and pleasure clubs, and marching clubs. All of these societies focused their activities around a hall or lodge (some consider this an essential component of fraternalism) when economically feasible. Today, their halls can be found throughout the city, from Uptown and Algiers to the 7th Ward. Their important role as centers of community activity has been largely forgotten. Although their historic facades are often altered, many structures are still located in working-class neighborhoods, close to the shotguns and Creole cottages which once housed their members.

Fraternal societies arranged funerals, dances, picnics, and parades for their members on a regular basis. These events usually required musical entertainment or accompaniment. Societies which owned a hall or lodge secured additional revenue by renting their space to other groups for events. Many even had their own house orchestras or bands. It is easy to imagine how music from a ball or banquet would have traveled.
throughout a neighborhood in a time before air-conditioning, television, electronic recordings, and automobiles separated us. Society halls contributed to the growth of many local musicians, both pre-jazz and jazz performers, while serving as "de facto" community centers. Danny Barker remembered that, when he was little, his mother would take him with her to balls and banquets, since they did not have babysitters. Young mothers would simply check their children along with their coats and hats.¹

Most, if not all, of the society halls presented in this series could be considered jazz landmarks based on their significant contributions to the development of New Orleans music. This survey is not meant to be exhaustive nor the final word on any of these subjects. The preliminary information provided here merely gives an indication of the diversity, geographic distribution, and significance of fraternal organizations in New Orleans.

**Historical Background**

Freemasons, perhaps the oldest type of European fraternal society, trace their origins back to the medieval revolt against European building-trade guilds. Originally formed as secret organizations of "free" masons, they developed into societies comprised of educated middle and upper class men who employed secret rituals in their meetings as a means of creating solidarity. Fraternal organizations like the Masons seek truth and brotherly love through moral and spiritual development. They were brought to the United States by British and French immigrants in the eighteenth century.

Benevolent societies evolved out of British friendly societies, of which the eighteenth century Odd Fellows are the earliest documented.² In exchange for a monthly fee and occasional taxes, benevolent societies granted members, and often their immediate family, certain benefits such as funeral funds, burial in a society tomb, visits from the lodge doctor, pharmacy prescriptions, financial assistance when ill, and aid to widowed mothers and orphans. Additional rewards were their many recreational and educational activities. Societies organized dances, picnics, dinners, lectures, parades, and many other events for members and their families.

These mutual aid associations are often confused with purely fraternal lodges, or so-called "secret societies," such as the Freemasons. Misunderstandings stem from the fact that many nineteenth century benevolent societies adopted familiar Masonic customs and paraphernalia, including secret rituals, the lodge structure, and degrees of membership. Masonic organizations, in turn, might adopt the benevolent society practice of mutual aid when faced with a pressing need or disaster, establishing a relief committee or lodge for this purpose.³

Benevolent societies were the most popular type of fraternal organization in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. People of various racial and ethnic backgrounds came together to protect themselves out of necessity: reliable commercial insurance did not exist in modern form until the end of the nineteenth century, and national welfare programs did not arrive until the early twentieth.⁴ Communities developed along diverse lines. Some people created associations which reflected their national, cultural or ethnic identity, such as German immigrants or French-speaking Creoles of color. Others came together out of a sense of shared religious beliefs. A great number
of societies were formed by members of specific trades or professions, essentially the precursor to the modern trade union. Mechanics (engineers and builders), printers, cotton yard workers, coachmen, waiters, butchers, and bakers all had their own benevolent societies in New Orleans. Since most societies were established by men, women often formed auxiliary chapters or entirely independent associations.

The third type of fraternal organization surveyed here are social and/or aid and pleasure clubs (sometimes called just social and pleasure clubs or aid and pleasure clubs). Starting mostly in the early twentieth century, these organizations developed from the declining benevolent society tradition. After social and economic changes rendered benevolent societies fairly obsolete, remnants of these groups apparently reinvented themselves by focusing on parading activities while still maintaining minimal aspects of mutual aid on a more informal level.

Marching clubs comprise a fourth type of fraternal association, originating in the late nineteenth century. Extant groups like the Jefferson City Buzzards, the Corner Club, and the Lyons carry on the city’s historic parading tradition. Although most now focus their activities on Carnival, these clubs do still parade at other times.

One benevolent society practice which strongly influenced the development of musical history in New Orleans was the ritualized brass band funeral march. Following the tradition of British military funerals, musicians would play a mournful dirge to the grave and festive music upon leaving the cemetery. In the second half of the nineteenth century, such funerals were fairly common, especially for members of fraternal and benevolent societies in England and across the United States. In fact, they became so frequent (burdening members who were required to attend every funeral parade) and attracted so much unwanted attention, that decorum-conscious, middle-class societies abandoned the practice toward the end of the nineteenth century. Now called “jazz funerals,” the tradition has been sustained by predominantly African-American, Protestant groups, since the Catholic Church prohibited secular music at religious events in the early twentieth century. Today, funerals with music have become celebrated symbols of New Orleans, having lost their historic association with benevolent societies.

The sites examined in this series encompass over a century of New Orleans architectural styles and vary from modest, one-room halls to elaborate pleasure palaces. They range in date from the 1820s to the 1960s and include Greek Revival, Italianate, Queen Anne, Spanish Mission, Neo-Classical, and post-war Modern. Despite stylistic differences, however, they share certain aspects. Most society buildings included at least a hall, a long, narrow room punctuated by windows. This would have been suitable for meetings, balls, or banquets. Many also featured a raised balcony or mezzanine used to keep musicians safe from energetic dancers and to help project sound in a pre-amplified era. Although these balconies were probably removed when halls were later converted to new uses, a few have survived. In addition, halls often included an office, kitchen, dining area, and lodging.

Fraternal Masonic Lodges

*Perseverance Masonic Lodge No. 4*
Location: Armstrong Park, formerly 907 St. Claude Avenue at the corner of Dumaine Street (Treme).
Masonic lodges usually differ from benevolent society halls, which were often simple, wood-frame buildings. Masons were typically middle and upper-class men who could finance the construction of more substantial, two-story buildings. Fraternal lodges did, and still do, often rent their first floor hall for outside events while reserving the second floor for secret membership activities.9

Perseverance is a Scottish Rite Lodge founded in 1806 in Santo Domingo and chartered in New Orleans in 1810. Portions of the current building were constructed around 1820 and 1850. Although not the state’s oldest chapter, it is probably the earliest surviving Masonic building in Louisiana. Perseverance Lodge was a predominantly white organization for much of its history. The hall was used for social functions and dances that would have employed early musicians. It retains a mezzanine area which could have been used for Masonic rites or by musicians.10

The two-story, Greek Revival masonry building has a three-bay façade decorated with pilasters, a simple entablature and pediment. Its double-paneled front door, with its Eastlake segmental arched transom, is more ornate than the rest of the structure and was added in the last half of the nineteenth century. In a 1961 photograph by William Russell, the cast iron gate leading off to the corner of Dumaine and St. Claude is visible.

In its original location at St. Claude Avenue and Dumaine Street in Treme, Perseverance was surrounded by cottages of the period. Around 1970, the city demolished several blocks of Creole cottages and shotguns in Treme to make way for a proposed cultural center which was never built. With Perseverance included in the demolition plan, members sold their building to the city and relocated. Thankfully, the historic hall was eventually saved by a heroic effort led by the New Orleans Jazz Club. Today, it sits enclosed in Armstrong Park, along with a few other early structures. Current plans call for using the building as the future New Orleans Jazz National Park’s visitors’ center in Armstrong Park. Perseverance Hall is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Etoile Polaire (Polar Star), Lodge No. 1
Location: 1433 N. Rampart Street between Esplanade Avenue, Kelerec Street and St. Claude Avenue (Treme).

Etoile Polaire was founded on this site
in 1794 as a Scottish Rite Blue Lodge and is the state's second oldest Masonic hall building. In 1804 it received a charter from the Grand Orient of France. The current lodge was constructed around 1840, replacing an earlier wooden hall which faced St. Claude Avenue (then called Good Children). Musicians provided entertainment at dances and other social events for this prominent Creole association. Members included W.C.C. Claiborne, first governor of the state of Louisiana. Masonic rituals were conducted in French until 1957. *Etoile Polaire* still functions as a Masonic Lodge.

The exterior of this striking Greek Revival building is rich with historic details, including an 1880s cast iron fence and a gate decorated with masonry symbols. The two-story, three bay, masonry structure has two levels of pilasters with cornices. Its hipped roof is hidden by a flat parapet. Grill work with acanthus leaves covers the second floor central window and a lamp illuminates the entrance. Free-standing rusticated columns, blue tinted windows and the blue star on the roof add to its visual impact. (Blue lodges confer the first three degrees which are essential to Masons.) The interior includes a large hall on the ground floor, suitable for social events, and a winding stair leading to the second floor and the private chambers.

*Etoile Polaire*'s appearance has changed little since it was photographed by William Russell in 1961. It stands on a mostly empty block at the intersection of Kelerec and N. Rampart Streets. In the nineteenth century, the corner of Esplanade and N. Rampart was occupied by several Ursuline Convent buildings. These later became St. Aloysius College and were eventually demolished. A post-Katrina trailer park now occupies the vacant lot along Esplanade Avenue. Restoration efforts are currently underway at the hall.

**Benevolent Societies**

*Odd Fellows and Masonic Lodge Dance Hall*

Location: 401-403 S. Rampart Street and 1116 Perdido Street (Central Business District).

Today called the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, this society originated in England among working class men seeking fellowship and mutual aid. After the Masons, the Odd Fellows were the second fraternal order and first benevolent society to enter the United States. The Grand Lodge of the United States was formed in the 1820s, and the first Louisiana lodge followed in 1831 in New Orleans. In 1849, the order
established the Odd Fellows’ Rest Cemetery, at the intersection of City Park Avenue and Canal Street. The parallel African-American organization is called the International Order of Odd Fellows.

The building at 401-403 S. Rampart Street in the Central Business District is one of the few sites remaining in what was once a flourishing entertainment and commercial area for African Americans, Jews, Alsatians, and Chinese. Now located in a sea of parking lots amid office buildings, the first floor of this historic structure contained the Eagle Loan Office and later the Eagle Saloon. Two African-American fraternal organizations, the Odd Fellows and Masons, shared a lodge in the now-demolished 1116 Perdido Street wing of the L-shaped building where their complimentary activities – one Masonic, the other benevolent – could serve the same population. In what is an historically confusing situation, the ballroom for the lodges was on the third floor of the remaining wing of the building, although it appears to have been entered from the Perdido Street address.

Buddy Bolden and his band played at dances in the third floor ballroom as did John Robichaux and Bunk Johnson. In 1908 musicians who had performed in Bolden’s band congregated at the Eagle Saloon, naming themselves the Eagle Band after the name of the saloon, which, in turn, had taken its name from the loan office or pawn shop.

This three-story, brick building was designed in the Neoclassical Revival style, its stucco scored to resemble stone. Restrained ornamentation includes a balustrade and splayed lintels above the windows. The former lodge dance hall has been owned by the Meraux family and its estate for years. At the current time, the site is under a purchase agreement with Jerome Johnson. Since this photograph was taken in 2002, a small rear section of the Perdido Street side of the building has been demolished due to a structural failure.

**Frances Amis Hall**

Location: 1820 N. Robertson Street, between St. Anthony and Pauger (7th Ward).

La Société des Francs Amis (roughly translated as True Friends) purchased this lot in 1861. According to early twentieth century accounts, the society was comprised of wealthy and light-complexioned Creoles of color. Homer Plessy, whose challenge to segregation resulted in the infamous 1896 Supreme Court decision bearing his name, was an officer of the organization. In 1927, Frances Amis sold their hall to
Mamie Depass and her husband Henry Reason. Ten years later, in the 1937 Sanborn Atlas, it was identified as the Helping Hand Spiritual Church. The heirs of Mrs. Depass sold the building to its current owner, Genesis Missionary Baptist Church, in 1963.

Frances Amis was a popular venue for musicians. “Wooden” Joe Nicholas, Hypolite Charles, and the singer Lizzie Miles performed here. According to Ricard Alexis, who played with Kid Rena, musicians who worked at the hall’s banquets earned $2.00 and ate and drank free. Manuel Perez’s family belonged to the organization. Musicians noted that, in the early twentieth century, darker Creoles were discouraged from attending events at the hall.

The hall’s Eastlake or Queen Anne detailing reflects its late nineteenth century origin. Saw-tooth cornice trim, brackets, and window cornices decorate the building. Today, the façade and its brackets are partially obscured by a brick veneer. The gothic arched windows were probably early twentieth century additions. In William Russell’s 1961 photograph, the hall’s front yard, now used for parking, was enhanced by several trees and an iron fence.

**Perseverance Society Hall**
Location: 1644 N. Villere Street, between Annette and St. Bernard Avenue (7th Ward).

Perseverance Society Hall is one of the more important landmarks in this survey due to its historical significance and the fact that it has escaped modernization. The oldest parts of the building date back to the 1880s, with 1920s additions to the front and rear. Perseverance Benevolent Mutual Aid Association (La Société de la Persévérance) was organized in 1853 and reincorporated in 1892. Its members came from the Creole-of-color elite. As early as 1868, the association was listed in a city directory at this general location.

Perseverance B.M.A.A. apparently encountered financial and/or organizational difficulties in the early twentieth century. In 1913, the property was sold by the city for non-payment of taxes to James Lewis Jr. for $23.75. He sold it back to the society in 1923 for $200. Then, in late 1927, the hall was mortgaged to the Service Building and Homestead Association for $6,300. This transaction may have served to finance the façade and camelback renovations of the late 1920s. Or, it may reflect the society’s financial burdens caused by meeting insurance obligations to its members. Five years later, in 1932, the society transferred its
property back to the Homestead Association, perhaps in an attempt to liquidate its assets due to society debts or declining membership. In 1935, the hall was purchased by Cecile Cagnolatti (probably a relative of trumpeter Ernie Cagnolatti), chairs and moveables included, for only $1,400.32

Despite changes in ownership, the building probably continued to function as an event hall in the 1930s and perhaps into the 40s. In the 1937 Sanborn Atlas, it is identified as a hall with a printing shop in the rear. It is even possible that Perseverance B.M.A.A. continued to meet there (a 1942 photograph of the building records the society’s historical information still clearly painted on the sign board built into the facade.33) Its history as a “dance hall” is still remembered by some of the older residents of the neighborhood. In 1949, the building was sold by Cagnolatti’s heirs, the Fauria family, to Holy Aid and Comfort Spiritual Church of Eternal Life, led by Mother Conrad.

Perseverance Society Hall played a central role in the community and was often mentioned in musician interviews at the Hogan Jazz Archive. The hall frequently hosted society banquets and hired musicians to play following dinner, from one until six in the afternoon.34 Musicians who performed here included “Wooden” Joe Nicholas,35 Buddy Petit,36 Isidore Barbarin,37 Joe “King” Oliver, Sidney Bechet, Big Eye Louis Nelson,38 Chris Kelly39 and Sam Morgan.40 As a child, drummer, composer, and bandleader Paul Barbarin, son of Isidore, lived behind the hall on Urquhart Street. According to his interview summary at the Hogan Jazz Archive, Paul Barbarin “could hear bands playing for Monday banquets at that hall; one Monday his mother told him Buddy Bolden was playing that day, and she remarked further that one day Bolden would ‘blow his brains out’ on the horn, as he played too loud.”41

Unlike nearby benevolent buildings, Perseverance Society Hall retains its historic facade from the period when it was an active society and dance hall. Its original appearance consisted of an 1880s hall with a rear two-story service wing and galleries.42 Around 1927, the society added the current facade, a Spanish Mission style arched parapet, and extended the hall’s front about ten feet toward the street. The society probably replaced the service wing with the camelback at the same time. Period details on the facade include colored glass windows, a recessed entry with double, paneled doors, and a commemorative stone plaque.
A round, colored-glass window below the parapet, as seen in the 1942 photograph, was later replaced with a rectangular ventilator.

The building’s interior also retains its historic appearance from the 1880s and the 1920s. The hall section is decorated with wainscoting dating from both decades. Significantly, it includes a rare musicians’ mezzanine which is located in the beginning of the camelback. The mezzanine is separated from the front hall by a wall erected by the church (the only substantial post-1920s change). This mezzanine most likely dates from the 1920s renovation. The rear section of the building, including the camelback, was almost completely covered with beaded board. The camelback itself was constructed in an unusual manner, with a central stair hall or atrium flanked by two stairs leading to the second floor. This upper story consisted of two small rooms and a large open stair landing. The rear section dating from the 1920s, as well as the two-story wing it replaced, would have provided kitchen, dining, office, and lodging space.

When I first visited the church in 2002, the camelback was showing signs of deterioration, probably due in part to its weak atrium design and delayed maintenance. Several areas were unusable, including the stairs which led to the musician’s mezzanine, and the rear kitchen. The atrium, which functioned as a dining room, had lost sections of plaster. At the time church members reported that they lacked resources to prevent further deterioration. Now, a year and a half after Hurricane Katrina, the camelback is in the process of collapsing, and the building is targeted for demolition by the city. However, the original front hall remains in good condition. As of this writing, preservationists and local organizations have helped the church’s pastor acquire a partial demolition permit, and are saving the original hall and mezzanine from demolition.

**New Lusitanos Benevolent Association / Lusitania Dance Hall**

Location: 2204-12 Dauphine Street at Elysian Fields (Marigny).

This hall is an example of a white society organized along ethnic or national lines. The Lizardi family, commission merchants from Mexico City, erected this building sometime between 1844 and 1857. From 1881 to 1920, it served as the hall of the prominent New Lusitanos Benevolent Association, incorporated in 1858. Although its name is Portuguese, the society’s numerous members were actually drawn from all nationalities within the white
community. Their motto was: “We nurse the sick; we bury the dead; we protect the widow and the orphan.” The New Lusitano society sponsored large anniversary parades requiring several bands and regularly hired brass bands to play at members’ funerals until this tradition fell out of fashion in 1890. Their magnificent Greek Revival society tomb in the now-demolished Girod Street Cemetery was erected in 1859, its opening celebrated with a city-wide march accompanied by three brass bands.

According to one source, in the early twentieth century, the building may have been called the Lusitania Dance Hall by musicians. Bands would play a little music on the gallery to advertise the dance before performing in the second floor hall. Both white and black musicians played here. The list includes Christian’s Band, Papa Jack Laine, 'Pantsy' Laine, and Tony Parenti. Emile Barnes played at Lusitania Dance Hall with Buddy Petit’s “Boys in Blue” Band. According to Barnes, even Louis Armstrong played here once. Johnny Lala remembered performing at the hall when it was called a “dancing school”: women were let in free, but men had to pay. Tony Parenti recalled that jazz was played at the hall before it became acceptable elsewhere. Performers could earn $1.25 per night. The hall’s musical days ended in the 1930s.

The two-story, plastered brick building was designed in the Greek Revival style popular in mid-nineteenth century New Orleans. Period ornamentation includes Greek/Egyptian “key-hole shaped” surrounds on the Dauphine Street doors and windows as well as a cast iron gallery that wraps around two sides of the building. Dominating the Elysian Fields façade is a massive parapet, intended for signage. Today, the former Lusitania Dance Hall looks rather dilapidated due to its roofless gallery and altered windows. The building was renovated for commercial and residential purposes in the mid-twentieth century.

Deutsches Haus
Location: 200 S. Galvez Street at Cleveland Avenue (Mid-City).

Deutsches Haus represents another important cultural group in New Orleans: the German-Americans. The nineteenth century German community, augmented by high levels of immigration, supported many cultural and social activities in the city. Immigrants founded churches, German-language theatres, newspapers, schools and benevolent associations. Deutsches Haus was incorporated in 1928 as a benevolent and social organization. It evolved from a number of earlier societies, including the Turnverein (the local branch of this national German men’s organization was called the Turner’s Society), several German singing clubs, and the Deutsche Gesellschaft von New Orleans (German Society of New Orleans). The latter was organized in 1848 to provide relief for the thousands of immigrants who arrived destitute in the 1840s and 50s.

Deutsches Haus is now dedicated to celebrating the language, culture, and musical heritage of Germany. It was, and still is, the site of many musical events. Luke Schiro played here with the Sun Dodgers and broadcast weekly from this location. Today, Deutsches Haus offers language classes, lectures, social events, and musical activities. Each fall, New Orleanians of all ages and ethnicities attend the organization’s popular Oktoberfest, enjoying German cuisine and beer while dancing to German music and jazz bands in the Beer Garden.
The two-story brick structure dates from the early twentieth century and originally served as an early telephone exchange. It has little decorative treatment except for a row of dentils underneath the cornice, an unusual overhang above the main door, and an eagle mounted on the building. The second floor houses a typical lodge meeting room with a raised stage at one end with windows at three sides. During Hurricane Katrina, the first floor was inundated with three or four feet of water. Although much of its original woodwork was lost, *Deutsches Haus* reopened in time for the 2006 Oktoberfest.

**Benevolent Knights of America Lodge**

Location: 2223 Banks Street near S. Galvez Street (Mid-City).

The Benevolent Knights of America of Louisiana describes itself as fraternal beneficiary. It was chartered in Louisiana in 1903, shortly before benevolent societies began their decline, and has served a white working and middle-class population. At its peak, the organization had several thousand members. Although the B.K.A. has diminished in size in recent years, it continues to provide insurance benefits to members. It is one of only two local, Louisiana benevolent societies still regulated by the Louisiana Insurance Commission. The other is an African-American organization in Ruston, called the Modern Disciples of Love, Inc. (A third, the Catholic fraternal order of the Knights of Peter Claver, is a national organization founded in Mobile, Alabama, but now headquartered in New Orleans).
The B.K.A. held parties at the lodge at least twice a year, for the annual convention dance and their anniversary party. Bands which played here included the Satisfiers and the Dixieland Saints. The B.K.A. continues to engage in social and charitable activities. An annual Christmas party and May Convention are two of its regular events, held at their Mid-City headquarters before Hurricane Katrina interrupted lodge activities.

Erected in 1959, the hall’s architectural style reflects post-war Modernism. Decorated with minimal ornamentation, the one-story building is constructed of brick with metal framed windows. During Hurricane Katrina, the lodge was flooded with about five feet of water. After a period of recovery, the B.K.A. recently decided to sell the hall where it has met for the last half-century. It has temporarily relocated to a rented facility in Jefferson Parish, where events will soon resume.

This was not the first B.K.A. hall in New Orleans. In 1912 their lodge on South Street boasted a gymnasium and baths. The society organized picnics and dances for its members where musicians performed. The B.K.A. must have achieved a good measure of success quickly. In 1916 members erected a substantial new headquarters at a prominent address: 627 North Street, on Lafayette Square, near the then city hall (now Gallier Hall) in the Central Business District. This six-story building included a roof-top terrace and ballroom, doubtless the location of frequent musical entertainment, which they rented for events. Less than fifty years later, however, the hall had fallen into disrepair, and the neighborhood was becoming unfashionable. Around 1959 the B.K.A. sold their downtown headquarters and relocated to Mid-City. Their hall on Lafayette Square was demolished in 1961. A high-rise office building stands on the site today.

Young Men’s Olympian Junior Benevolent Association Society Tombs
Location: Lafayette Cemetery No. 2, Loyola and Washington Avenues (Central City).

The Young Men’s Olympian Junior Benevolent Association is an African-American mutual-aid society, organized on September 3, 1884 and incorporated in 1885. It began as a youth chapter of the Young Men’s Olympian Benevolent Association. It appears to be the second oldest benevolent society still in existence in New Orleans.

Young Men’s Olympian Junior offers benefits which include burial assistance, funerals with musical accompaniment, and some form of medical care or aid when sick. In exchange, members pay a monthly fee and occasional taxes. As late as the 1970s, the organization’s fee schedule indicated that attendance was compulsory for monthly meetings, funerals, and parades. In addition, the society sponsors two parades each fall, one marking their anniversary. Members are careful to distinguish Young Men’s Olympian Junior from social aid and pleasure clubs, referring to themselves as “main-liners,” as opposed to the “second-liners” who now join their parades. According to President Norman Dixon, “We go through hard times as far as when people get older and sick and die. This causes a closeness, a family tie that’s hard to break. If we were just out here second-lining, when the music stopped, the relationship would stop.”

Historically, Young Men’s Olympian Junior seems to have rented meeting space from other fraternal societies, rather than owned their own hall. This arrangement...
was probably typical of the many smaller or mid-sized societies found in New Orleans. For a number of years, the organization met at the Elks Lodge on Harmony Street, formerly the Bull’s Club. Their annual parade began and ended here as recently as their 116th anniversary in 1999. Since about 2003, Young Men’s Olympian Junior has occupied a building at 2101 S. Liberty Street in Central City which it uses for meetings and funeral repasts as well as community functions.69

Remarkably, Young Men’s Olympian Junior keeps alive the historic tradition of providing a society tomb burial for members. It owns two large, oven-style tombs, constructed of plastered brick, in Lafayette Cemetery No. 2 in Central City. One was first used by the senior Young Men’s Olympian Benevolent Association. Like other cemeteries, Lafayette No. 2 is home to many sizeable society tombs, a testament to the important role benevolent societies once played in the lives of many New Orleanians. These tombs are now abandoned and in various states of disrepair.

Social and/or Aid and Pleasure Clubs

Bulls’ Aid and Pleasure Club / Elks Winter Capitol Lodge
Location: 1913 Harmony Street, between Dancel and Dryades (Central City).
Note: This building has suffered severe damage since this photograph was taken in 2002.

This wood-frame building dates from the second half of the nineteenth century. It was once home to two African-American fraternal organizations. Originally a raised, center-hall Italianate cottage, the two-story structure was later updated with a Mission-style, stucco façade. The remaining double staircases give some indication of its history as a vibrant social hall where meetings and large parties took place regularly.

According to a newspaper account from 1916, the Bulls’ Aid and Pleasure Club was organized on June 30, 1913, and incorporated on December 15th of that year. (It probably moved to the Harmony Street hall shortly thereafter.) The Bulls reportedly had a membership of 900, making it “the largest Negro club south of the Mason Dixon Line, if not in this country.” Attached to the hall was a large parade ground – presumably this was where their pet bull, named Peter Flick, roamed “at large.” The reporter was impressed by the organization: “If only we had a number of these clubs scattered throughout the country and run as this one is run. I think it would help the race a great deal, as
they not only take care of their own members, but help churches, old folks’ homes, etc.”

In addition to their good works, the Bulls sponsored popular parades and dances. The club’s annual parade took them through the city’s business district where city hall was located. They traditionally marched in front of the Times-Picayune Building on Lafayette Square so that their floats could be judged by the staff. In 1924, several hundred marchers, twenty floats, and three brass bands “in full regalia, cream white uniforms, and white fez caps” followed behind the club’s mascot, described as “snorting in his pride.”

At the Bulls’ Club on Harmony Street, musicians reported that often two or even three bands could perform at the same time. One would play in the yard facing Dryades Street while the other would perform in the yard fronting Daneel. A third band could play in the hall’s downstairs dancing area. Bands that played at the Bulls’ Tuesday night events include those led by Papa Celestin, Louis Nelson, Kid Rena, Chris Kelly, and Sam Morgan. Kid Rena’s band played Saturday afternoon advertisement jobs from a wagon for the club. Isidore Barbarin, Punch Miller’s band, Jack Carey’s band, and John Robichaux also played for the Bulls.

In 1938 the Bulls sold their hall to the Winter Capitol Lodge of Elks for $20,000. The Elks continued to use the hall for events. Although the lodge was still in existence in 2002, its elderly members had difficulty maintaining and repairing the building. Since then, the structure has continued to deteriorate. During Hurricane Katrina, the hall suffered severe damage to its cornice, walls, and large sections of the roof. Fortunately, a new owner is in the process of repairing this jazz landmark, but much of its historic fabric has already been lost.

Marching Clubs

Jefferson City Buzzards Club
Location: 5213 Annunciation Street near Bellecastle Street (Uptown).

The Jefferson City Buzzards Club is the oldest established marching group in New Orleans. The club was founded in December 1890 by three brothers and a friend who lived in what was then Jefferson City. The group probably took its name from the buzzards which circled the slaughter houses and meat packing plants located along the...
river around Napoleon Avenue. The name could also have been inspired by a club called the French Market Buzzards, or be a combination of both.78

Historically, the all-male, working-class Buzzards held Carnival balls and annual picnics in addition to their Mardi Gras parade (for many years they marched in blackface, a centuries-old form of masquerading which also suggested the black color of buzzards79). This tradition of parading through the streets early on Mardi Gras morning, accompanied by a brass band, continues. The Buzzards’ path begins at Laurel Street and Audubon Park, near the club house. It then meanders past a number of “watering-holes” where members stop for refreshments before meeting up with the Lyons and the Corner Club at Magazine and Napoleon. Eventually, all three marching clubs join the main carnival route at Napoleon and St. Charles. A “wet” run is held a weekend or so earlier in the Uptown area.

Musicians who have marched with the Buzzards include Punch Miller’s Brass Band and John Casimir’s Young Tuxedo Brass Band.80 The club’s own Jefferson City Buzzards Brass Band as well as Wolf’s Brass Band and the Olympia Brass Band, played at their early events. Band fees ranged from $12.50 in 1896 to $33 in 1904.81 The club house served as a dance hall and even retains its elevated musicians’ bandstand over the entrance foyer, now enclosed as a storage closet.

Papa Celestin’s Band was the last to have played at the hall. Today, its limited size renders the hall economically unfeasible as a venue for musical events.

The Buzzards moved into their current building, known as the Buzzard’s Roost, in 1907,82 ending their reliance on rented halls. One hundred years later, the Buzzard’s Roost continues to serve as a community club; a small, vernacular building erected close between neighboring residences, much like the African-American benevolent societies of the 7th Ward. The structure’s façade has been altered with a perma-stone veneer, dating from its 1955 renovation.83 Attached to the façade are letters spelling the club’s name and a jaunty image of its namesake, a buzzard.

Armories with Marching Military Bands
Naval Brigade Hall / Grunewald’s School of Music - Now Demolished.
Location: 827 Camp Street (Lafayette Square Historic District, Central Business
Naval Brigade Hall does not fall under the umbrella of a fraternal association, but it played a similar role as a meeting area for social and professional purposes. It was owned and operated by the New Orleans Naval Brigade, a forerunner of the Naval Reserve. They had their own musical director and a large musical program. The Naval Brigade Band was directed by New Orleans composer, violinist, and bandleader William Braun. This three-story building was constructed in 1903 to serve as an armory. It was designed by architect and builder Julius Koch and cost $20,000. In addition to a dance hall, the site included a large drill and recreation ground to the rear. The structure was decorated in brick with pilasters, window trim, urns, and a parapet.

Following the Second World War, the building was converted to a new use when the Grunewald Music Company opened a music school here. Many well-known musicians, both black and white, were taught at this location under the G.I. Bill.

During segregation, black and white teachers and students managed to interact and share ideas with some degree of freedom despite the restrictions of the day.63

Sadly, Naval Brigade Hall did not survive the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Its owners were in the process of renovating the long-unused structure when the storm (perhaps a tornado) destroyed most of its top floor. Before the building could be restored, an overzealous group of volunteer firemen from Chicago tore down the entire structure in late September 2005, ignoring protests from neighbors who had remained in the area.

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Note: I do not know whether this 1888 estimate, when the city’s total population was 242,039, is accurate or a gross exaggeration. By comparison, Harry Walker, in “Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans,” estimated that there may have been as many as 600 African-American benevolent societies active in New Orleans on the eve of the Depression (pp. 20-21). At this time the city’s population had grown to 458,762. From 1890 to 1930, the African-American segment of the population remained at about 1/3rd of the total. Drawing conclusions from these figures, both the ca. 1890 and ca. 1930 estimates seem rather high but not impossible.


3 Danny Barker interview, June 30, 1959, p. 10, Hogan Jazz Archive.


10 National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form


20 See New Orleans Conveyance Office records.


23 See New Orleans Conveyance Office records.


25 “Wooden Joe” Nicholas interview, November 12, 1956, p. 4, Hogan Jazz Archive.

26 Hypolite Charles interview, April 13, 1963, p. 17 & 21, Hogan Jazz Archive.

27 Lizzie Miles interview, January 18, 1951, Hogan Jazz Archive.


29 Harold Dejan interview, October 14, 1960, p. 16, Hogan Jazz Archive.

30 Andrew Bailey interview, September 16, 1959, p. 6, Hogan Jazz Archive; Archie Martin interview, September 3, 1960, Hogan Jazz Archive.

31 These dates were documented in signage above the door in a June 1942 photograph by William Russell, housed at the Historic New Orleans Collection. Photograph reproduced in Jason Berry, “Churches: the Missing Link in Jazz History,” *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, Fall, 1988, p.54.

32 See New Orleans Conveyance Office records.

33 See William Russell photograph at the Historic New Orleans Collection.

34 George Lewis interview, November 14, 1958, p. 4, Hogan Jazz Archive.


36 Bailey interview, p. 6.

37 Isidore Barbarin interview, January 7, 1959, p. 36, Hogan Jazz Archive.

38 Joe Darenbourg and Vacher, 1988: 14, 117-118; as cited in *Jazz-Related Sites and Structures*, p. 287.

39 George Lewis interview, October 21, 1968, p. 35, Hogan Jazz Archive.

40 Bailey interview, p. 9.

41 Paul Barbarin interview, March 27, 1957, p. 1,
Elie, Ibid.

Elie, Ibid.

“Alex Toller’s Big Show,” Indianapolis Freeman, January 22, 1916. (Courtesy of Lynn Abbott and Doug Seroff).


Louis Nelson interview, April 18, 1960, p. 9, Hogan Jazz Archive.

Ricard Alexis interview, January 16, 1959, p. 4, Hogan Jazz Archive.

George Lewis interview, October 21, 1968, p. 34-35, Hogan Jazz Archive.

Isidore Barbarin interview, January 7, 1959, p. 36, Hogan Jazz Archive.

Archie Martin interview, September 3, 1960, p. 1, Hogan Jazz Archive.


Punch Miller interview, August 9, 1957, p. 3-4, Hogan Jazz Archive.

From the Jefferson City Buzzard’s Record Book, 1892-1906, located at the Hogan Jazz Archive.

Conversation with Mr. George Luft Jr., June 11, 2007.


Unpublished manuscript, Jack Stewart.
Kid Ory was born on Christmas day 1886 on the Woodland Plantation in St. John the Baptist Parish, Louisiana. The Woodland was a sprawling 1882-acre sugar cane farm on the east bank of the Mississippi River, twenty-five miles upriver from New Orleans. Its main house, a raised cottage with a modest tin roof, a cistern, and a few stained glass dormer windows, was built in 1839.¹ About two dozen buildings, many of which had been slave quarters, ran along a dirt road behind the main house.² Ory’s family lived about a half mile behind the main house, through the cane fields, next to the massive, multi-story sugar mill where his father worked.

At least three sets of railroad tracks ran through the cane fields between the main house and the sugar mill. Two lines, the Yazoo and Mississippi and the Union Pacific, ran on to other places like New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Chicago, and California. A spur line curved through the fields, back to the mill. The overland route was the River Road, an often murky thoroughfare that followed the Mississippi River down to New Orleans and up to Baton Rouge. Most folks simply called it “the road.”

In the 19th century, most of the population of St. John Parish lived close to the river, on the plantations and farms daisy-chained along its banks. An earthen levee hemmed the waters in, providing some small protection from the spring floods that were responsible for the rich soil that made farming possible. The fields fanned out like thinly cut pie slices originating at the water’s edge; large wedge to the river, thin to the swamp.

Just upriver from the Woodland, the village of Laplace was little more than a few homesteads, some rental property, and a
store. Further upriver was Reserve, which had more of a town feel, including stores, social clubs, and the only Catholic Church for miles, St. Peter’s. The church was about four miles from the Woodland sugar mill, so the Ory family would have needed transportation to get there. They would have traveled down the red dirt road that crossed the railroad tracks until arriving at the River Road, and then headed upriver, winding and turning until arriving at the simple wooden church. Built in 1867, it sat some distance off the road, allowing parking space for dozens of buggies. Out back, surrounded by a wrought iron fence, was the cemetery that took over as the burial location for east bank Catholics who previously would have been buried across the river in Edgard, at St. John the Baptist Church.

Parishioners paid a fee for the right to a pew at St. Peter’s, and the seating placement broke down solidly along lines of pigmentation and prosperity. The rich white folks were up front, nearest the altar. Somewhere in the middle were the Creole of color families. Toward the back were the darker and ultimately poorer folks who couldn’t afford to jockey for salvation.³

Father Etienne Badoil was the Ory family’s priest from the founding of St. Peter’s until his death in 1905. He baptized most of the Ory kids. A contemporary account noted that Father Badoil made ministering to people of color a priority. He was out in the community and could often be found playing euchre, a card game, at the Planters and Merchants Social Club hall down the road from St. Peter’s.⁴ Apart from the Latin he spoke during mass, he always conversed in French, as did most of his parishioners.

Across the river from Reserve, also in St. John the Baptist Parish, is Edgard, comprised largely of the parish courthouse, St.
John the Baptist Church, the Caire Store, and a few other businesses. Apart from a couple other villages up and down river, the rest of the parish was sugar cane fields and swamp.

Sixty percent of the population of St. John the Baptist Parish was of African ancestry, though one would never get this impression from the names on the 1860 census. A puny document compared to its postwar counterparts, the 1860 census lists the white planters and a few free people of color. The 1870 count would present a very different view. The nameless masses that had been noted merely as numbers on the 1860 slave census had become a political force. Men who had not been considered men in 1860 now helped run the parish. St. John had black elected officials, including the sheriff. Even after the federal forces withdrew in 1877, black politicians held on to power. For the better part of a generation former slaves enjoyed, if not a radically changed life, the promise of one and the assurance that the American democracy might at last embrace them as full citizens.

But, for the most part, the lives of everyday people of color remained largely unchanged from the days of slavery. White men still held the property of the parish and black laborers did most of the backbreaking work. Many still lived on plantations in much the same manner as before. On the 1880 census, long lists of black families who are, more often than not, noted as tenant farmers and laborers often follow the names of large landowners.

The agricultural economy based on slavery was gone, and some wondered if crops could be produced at a profit in the South without a free labor source. Many large landowners whose money was tied up in slaves prior to the war lost a big chunk of their capital with emancipation. They had land, but little money, and loans outstanding. As late as 1869 few fields in the parish had crops in the ground apart from what was needed to eat. Through foreclosures and auctions, many small farmers who owned few or no slaves before the war took over former plantation lands. Other owners tried to hang on to their land by letting it out to sharecropping.

Sugar cane had always been the number one cash crop in St. John, and production slowly increased after the war. By the time Kid Ory arrived, production levels were outstripping those of the pre-war period, though the method of growing and harvesting had changed very little. The late summer and early fall marked the busiest time in the parish. It was called grinding season, in reference to the process which yielded molasses, cane syrup, and sugar from the freshly cut cane. The process began out in the fields, where laborers grasped the cane by the stalk with the left hand while swinging a machete, sharply and precisely, with the right. The field hands expended just enough effort to cut the cane cleanly, no more. Inexperienced hands quickly learned how to conserve their energy for those long summer days under the searing Louisiana sun. The cane was then loaded onto trailers that traveled along the cane rows, then transferred to rail cars and hauled to the sugar mill. There the sticky sweet juice was ground from the cane stalks and cooked until it crystallized. The process gives off a sweet, to some sickly, aroma that can be smelled a mile away. The leftover stalks, reduced to a stinky pulp called bagasse, were piled up in mounds around the sugarhouse.

People living nearby would have smelled little else. For the Orys, who lived across the dirt road from this industrial operation in the middle of a cane field, the odor was accompanied by a cacophony. The roar of boiling
caldrons of crystallizing cane juice, the hammering shut of barrels, and the clang and boom of uncoupling railroad cars would have filled Ory’s ears with a din not usually associated with such a rural setting.

**The Family**

In Louisiana the term Creole is a tinderbox of controversy. Some say only the descendants of the early French and Spanish settlers are Creole. In his book *The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and Creoles of German Descent*, J. Hanno Deiler sought to apply the term to Germans who settled St. John and St. Charles parishes at the behest of the French. There are others who argue that the term Creole applies to *Gens de Couleur* and other people of color of French cultural reference who practice Catholicism and speak, or spoke, French. They say Creoles are the original result of white men participating in exploitive relationships called *plâlage*.8

In the wake of emancipation, the distinction of having been a free person of color meant nothing legally. Among the Creoles of color themselves, however, a social distinction still existed. They were an in-between people in a world that saw things in terms of black and white; French speakers and Catholics in a nation of English speaking Protestants. Whatever it meant to be Creole, it was not going to mean that much longer.

Kid Ory’s Creole heritage spanned both French and German settlers, as well as people of color. His father, Ozeme Ory, was known to his friends as John. He was white, a child of the plantation and slave-owning Ory family of St. John the Baptist Parish.9 Born on September 9, 1850, Ozeme “John” Ory and his extended family lived in a tiny village called Terre Haute, on the east bank of the Mississippi River, near Reserve. The family had been there for several generations.10

The family patriarch was Nikolas Ory (1705-circa 1775), who had come to America from the Alsace-Lorraine region of France in 1736. Nikolas lived in Berwick Township, York County, Pennsylvania, until around 1750, when he moved to Frederick County, Maryland, with his wife Anna Strasbach and their children.11 Anna died there in the 1750s, and Nikolas later married Christine Michel, a native of German-held Lorraine, born in 1728. Nikolas had several more children with Christine.12 Ozeme’s paternal great grandfather, Jean Mathias Ory, born circa 1749, was a son of Nikolas’ first marriage, while his maternal great grandfather, Louis Ory, born in 1763, was a son of the second marriage.13

The Orys’ decision to move to Louisiana was rooted in the immigration of the Acadians from British-controlled Canadian territories in the aftermath of 1763 Treaty of Paris, which ended the French and Indian War. After France ceded Nova Scotia to Britain, the French Catholic Acadians were forced out, and many came to French speaking, Spanish controlled Louisiana. There they were welcomed by authorities such as Governor Antonio de Ulloa, who liked the idea of having colonists with anti-English sentiments. Other Acadian exile communities, including the one in Frederick County, Maryland, heard favorable reports from their countrymen in Louisiana and soon joined their people there. The Orys and other German Catholics threw in their lot with the Acadians and relocated to Louisiana, as well.14 They set sail in January 1769 aboard the schooner Britannia with 100 passengers, including 56 Germans, 32 Acadians, and 12 British sailors. Sailing in a heavy fog, the ship missed the mouth of the Mississippi River and went on to Galveston, arriving in February 1769. There a perplexed Spanish authority, apparently unaware of Ulloa’s
feeling on the matter, held them in detention. The Spanish had trouble understanding why a group of Germans would want to relocate to Louisiana. That they were traveling on a British ship with soldiers no doubt contributed to suspicions that they were spies. Their property was seized and they were detained until September when they at last received permission to head to Louisiana, where they eventually settled in the established German Catholic colony. St. John and part of St. Charles Parish had become known as the “German Coast.” By 1724 there were 330 Germans farming upriver from New Orleans.\textsuperscript{15}

In the generations between Nikolas Ory and Kid Ory, the German language gave way to French. German surnames such as Heidel, Zehringer, and Traeger became Haydel, Zeringue, and Tregre.\textsuperscript{16} French-speaking census takers and bureaucrats who wrote down subjective spellings of German names on population rolls helped eradicate the German language. Over time the settlers married into French families, becoming Creoles like the French around them. In many cases the language disappeared in a generation.\textsuperscript{17}

**Ozeme**

By the early fall of 1850, when Ozeme was born, the Orys were a prominent and successful family. Ozeme’s parents were Edmond Ory and Marie Irene Tregre.\textsuperscript{18} They were first cousins, both descended from of Nikolas Ory, and they had grown up as neighbors in Terre Haute. Edmond, spelled Edemon on his baptismal certificate, was born in 1811, Marie about 1816.\textsuperscript{19} They married around 1834 and had the first of seven children in 1835.\textsuperscript{20}

Edmond was a planter in partnership with his older brother Omer. The pair bought property, grew sugar cane, and thrived. Edmond and his family lived with his wife’s grandmother Margarethe Vicknair Ory and mother Marie Ory Tregre.\textsuperscript{21} Edmond did not own many slaves, but his mother-in-law owned twenty, and Omer owned dozens. These were the slaves that did the back-breaking work in the sugar cane operation.

Ozeme, the youngest of the seven children, never got to know his parents. They died when he was three.\textsuperscript{22} Their deaths coincided with a devastating Yellow Fever epidemic that killed about 10,000 people in New Orleans and turned the state’s largest city into a virtual ghost town. The fever eventually spread to the outlying areas and proved just as deadly there, wiping out entire families.

The Orys’ movable property, including a steam engine and a sugar mill, was liquidated, and the children were divided among Edmond’s siblings and friends. Each was to receive several thousand dollars in inheritance, a sum that grew when Ozeme’s great grandmother Margarethe Vicknair Ory died in 1856. Responding to a petition from Omer Ory, the court made Evariste Triche, a neighbor, the guardian of three-year-old Ozeme.\textsuperscript{23} Triche owned a plantation that included nearly 200 acres wedged between the properties of brother Edmond Ory’s future in-laws the Froisys, Ozeme’s brother-in-law and godfather Elisse Williams, and cousin Lezin Ory, Sr.\textsuperscript{24}

Evariste Triche was white, but his wife Adel and their numerous children were free people of color. While a white family giving over a child to be raised by a multiracial family may seem at odds with notions of the Old South, in Louisiana, where American cultural practices were far from prevalent, a family like the Orys could do this with little fear of social reprisal. This was still a French culture, rooted in the old ways that included plage.
Through his early years, Ozeme probably would have been closest to the Triches’ son Benjamin, who was about his age, and with whom he surely shared a room throughout his childhood. The Triches’ older kids were sisters, and no doubt the boys shared equal doses of mothering and teasing. The Triches continued living in Terre Haute at least until 1870, when they appear on the parish property tax records downriver near LaPlace.25

Little is certain about Ozeme’s childhood. All of his siblings owned property at one time or another. He did not. He is not on the 1860 census, though the Triches are, and he did not fight in the Civil War, though his brother Edmond did.26 In the summer of 1867 Ozeme stood as godfather for the baptism of Edmond’s daughter Marie.27 A year and a half later, Edmond became Ozeme’s new guardian.28 This was probably a legal formality necessitated by the death of Evariste Triche. At any rate, Ozeme continued living with the Triches. According to the 1870 census, 20 year-old Ozeme was a journeyman. Benjamin Triche was also listed as a journeyman. The man listed on the census after Ozeme was a cooper, as were several other men enumerated before and after him. They probably made barrels to transport sugar, molasses, and other products produced on the Triche plantation. One of these cooperers was named Jacques Thomas. He was the son of a free man of color and lived with his mother and sisters in the LaPlace area. In the summer of 1869 he had a son, Charles Octave Thomas, with a Creole woman named Octavie Devezin.29 They never married and apparently did not live together.30 A year later Octavie Devezin bore the first child of Ozeme Ory.31

Octavie

Octavie had light brown, reddish skin and straight black hair that “shined like polished ebony in the sunlight.”32 She was born between 1848 and 1852, and she worked as a washerwoman.33 French was her first language, and she sang to her children in French when she rocked them to sleep.34 She spent most of her life having children.35 Joy Lodrigues, a granddaughter of John L. Ory, one of the partners who owned the Woodland Plantation, remembered hearing tales about Octavie as a child. She was well loved on the plantation. She watched the owners’ kids during the day, and her children, Lodrigus suggested, would have played with John L. Ory’s youngsters in the plantation yard. She said that this was the way it was when she grew up, and from what she could tell, this was the way it had always been. The respective John Ory families were both large and comprised largely of daughters. Octavie would have played a part in raising all of the children.

Octavie met Ozeme Ory no later than February 1870, nine months before their first son Simon Leonce, or Leonce, was born.36 Ozeme lived with the Triches that summer and apparently not with Octavie.37 Ozeme and Octavie had two more children, Nellie and Louisa, in 1873 and 1874. Strangely, there is no record of either girl’s baptism at St. Peter’s Church, though all of Octavie’s other children were baptized there.

Ozeme had turned 21 in September 1871, two months before the birth of Simon Leonce. He may have received his inheritance and left St. John with Octavie and had the girls while he was away. Or the money could have been lost in the war. Just as likely, Ozeme may have been cut off and forfeited his legacy. The 1869 tutorship certificate certifying Edmond’s charge of Ozeme is the last known link between the two. Fate played a hand as well when Omer Ory, Ozeme’s rich uncle, died in 1870.
Brother Edmond died soon after. The Orys were a prominent family with political connections and Confederate sympathies. Certainly they were not pleased with Ozeme’s new common-law wife. 

Plaquage relationships and sex across the color line were uncomfortable relics in the Reconstruction era racial politics. It was Uncle Omer who had placed Ozeme with the Triche family. While this had been considered a proper arrangement by 1850 standards, it was not in keeping with postwar sensibilities. French customs and language, already under assault before the war, were on the wane. A Frenchman’s birthright was now thought nothing more than cross-racial concubinage, a step above prostitution. French communities that had once tolerated and even legally validated relationships like the Orys’ were caving in to American sensibilities. Cross-ethnic families are less common on the 1880 and 1900 census returns than in the pre-war period, though a ban on interracial marriage was not codified into law until 1894. Some of the Ory family likely felt that the placement of Ozeme in a racially ambiguous situation with the Triches had opened the door for Octavie. It was the chickens coming home to roost. This was probably not the bride that the family had envisioned for Ozeme.

A Large Family

Be that as it may, Ozeme and Octavie lived together for thirty years and raised a large family. The 1880 census found them living upriver near Ozeme’s ancestral home. The Thomas family, including Kid Ory’s half-brother Charles Octave, had also moved upriver. It appears that Ozeme did not stay on track with his apprenticeship, as he is listed as a farm laborer, not a journeyman. Perhaps the prospect of sharing a workshop with Jacques Thomas did not appeal to him. Of course, Kid Ory went on to do carpentry, masonry, and stone work. He must have learned that from somewhere. His father may have become a handy man of sorts, or filled a position at the mill rather than working as a field hand.

By the time Kid was born in 1886, Ozeme and Octavie Ory were back downriver in LaPlace, living on the Woodland plantation. Edward Ory joined his 13, 12, and 7 year-old sisters Nellie, Louisa and Lena, respectively, and his big brother John, 3. Within the family he was known as “Dutt,” which he said was Creole for “Dude.” Eventually, it caught on, and many of his early friends called him Dutt. After Dutt, the Orys had two more children, Maria Lesida, or Lizzie, in 1889, and Annie in 1893.

In 1895 Dutt’s sister Louisa married Victor Bontemps, a native of Avoyelles Parish in central Louisiana. Victor’s parents had been free and owned property in Louisiana and Oklahoma. He and his brother Louis had set up residence in St. John Parish in the 1890s. Victor worked on the farm, while Louis bought property and eventually moved to New Orleans. After their marriage, Victor and Louisa lived next door to the Orys at the Woodland.

Later that year Nellie married a man of similar station. Clay Haydel was the fifth of nine children. The Haydels owned land on the west bank of St. John near the town of Edgard. Like the Orys, the Haydels had family on both sides of the color line. The Caucasian branch of the Haydel family owned Whitney Plantation, one of the biggest in the parish. Clay Haydel’s family grew rice and cane and later operated a store near Edgard. By the time of Dutt’s tenth birthday in 1896, Lena, 15, was the oldest at home, followed by John, 14, and the little
sisters Lizzie, 7, and Annie, 3. Dutt took stock of his childhood days:

*Up to between the ages of seven and eight, I led the normal life of any plantation child. During the fall, winter and spring seasons, I attended classes after I reached school age. In the summers, I was around the fields and woods of the plantation and the surrounding countryside, fishing in the Mississippi River from the banks of the levee and doing all of the hundred and one things that any child of that time could and would do.*

The Fourth Ward Colored School in LaPlace was the only public school available to the Ory kids. Ory said he attended school until about the fifth grade, and at other times an after-hours tutor was paid to educate him. Unlike the white schools, which ran for nine months, the black schools only ran for five. Ory placed little value on his education and said he never thought he needed more than he got. He said he “would have been a dumbbell anyway.” Copies of his writings, devoid of the editing that was often provided by his well-educated second wife, reveal a man functioning on an elementary level.

Of life on the plantation, Ory said there was always work to be done and that everyone was “pressed into service when not in school.” The kids worked alongside the adults in the fields and the mill, and Ory freely admitted that he “hated it.”

The poor Orys found themselves working for, and living on the land of, the rich Orys. In 1898 a partnership made up in part of the sons of Ozeme’s cousin Lezin Ory, Sr., bought the Woodland plantation. The Ory brothers, Lezin, Jr., Emydye, Felicien and John L., pooled their money with other partners including Louis Keller and Augustine Lasseigne, and bought up a succession of plantations after the war. The Woodland went for $45,000, lock, stock, and sugar mill. John L. Ory, a member of the parish police jury (city council), took over the Woodland as on-site manager, while Lasseigne and Keller operated the Woodland Store.

Born in 1846, John L. Ory had worked as a smuggler for the Confederacy while still a teenager. In the 1870s, he farmed under the tenant or sharecropping system and worked odd jobs until the brothers’ partnership bought the Ingleside Plantation on Bayou Lafourche in 1878. Golden Gate Plantation in Iberville Parish was added a few years later and then sold to buy the Woodland. In 1904 the San Francisco and Union plantations, both in St. John Parish, joined the family holdings. John L. Ory’s father Lezin had been the property assessor, a powerful position in Louisiana parish politics. Unlike other states where assessors are appointed, in Louisiana the position was, and is, an elected one. It was in the best interest of candidates to pledge to keep assessments low, and political contributors could often count on a return favor. No one would be more sympathetic to this view than the Orys, who owned thousands of acres. Conversely, enemies of the assessor could find themselves politically marginalized come tax time.

John L. Ory managed the Woodland until he died in the “big house” in 1920. A school still carries his name in LaPlace, on the former grounds of the Woodland property. The two Ory families were similar in make up. John L. and his wife Victoria Chauff had settled down about the same time as Ozeme and Octavie. Most of their children, including the oldest, were girls. Their only son, John Daniel, was two years younger than Dutt. The mothers of both
had probably been attended to by the same traiteurs, or midwives, usually black women experienced in birthing children.55 "People didn’t go to the hospital [to have children]," Harold Ory, son of Kid Ory’s brother Johnny remembered, “If you went to the hospital you’re gonna die. Babies were born at home."56

Dutt and John Daniel played together as kids around the Woodland big house under the eye of Octavie, who was one of seven servants in the house. “He was Octavie’s son, they were good to him,” Joy Lodrigues said. “He would have worked in the wash house at an inside job. We [the white kids] played with the servants’ children. There was no babysitting, children were brought [to work] and accepted. We made mud pies together.”57

The Plantation Life

Working on a Louisiana plantation compound in the 19th century was a rough existence, filled with harsh labors, long hours, and punishing heat. Drinking water at the big house was stored in a cistern that collected water from the gutters. For families without a cistern, or in times of drought, water had to be hauled from the river and boiled.58 Of course, the river would sometimes come to them. During the spring the snow up north melted and caused the Mississippi to rise. There was a levee system, but it sometimes failed. Major crevasses occurred every few years. The largest in Kid Ory’s day was a break around Reserve in 1893.59 The flooding destroyed homes and crops, leaving a foot deep layer of silt behind. Eventually, the water would drain away from the river to the swamp and on to lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas, but not before agitating the alligators, snakes, and muskrats, which often came wandering into populated areas. It did not take much effort from Mother Nature to reduce the parish to a near primordial state.
Hurricanes brought similar strife during the summer and early fall. Late season storms could play havoc on the sugar cane harvest and the larger economy of the parish and region. Many farmers, particularly tenants, took crop loans against the anticipated revenue of the harvest. Storms could reduce the size and quality of the harvest or, in some instances, destroy it altogether. A farmer, weeks from harvest, could find himself broke and deeply in debt. Every year was a roll of the dice.

Many plantation houses were surrounded by rough-hewn picket fences made of driftwood and scrap lumber. The goal was to keep the chickens in the yard and the deer and other pests out. Pears, figs, and plums were grown in orchards, and sliced cane was chewed as a snack during the harvest. Breakfast consisted of grits, bacon, eggs, boudin (sausage) and lost bread (French toast) with cane syrup. Mattresses were stuffed with Spanish moss, which was first boiled to free it of parasites.

The places where the farm laborers lived were described in writings of the time: “Down the dusty country lanes were the Negroes’ quarters with rows of identical cabins. The yards out front with constant pounding of barefooted playing children looked like cement. It was living at the poverty level. Many worked on the plantations. The children would go crawfishing and pick blackberries to sell to village people.” Ory also recalled doing these things.

In addition to cane, rice and corn were grown for commercial and feed purposes, as well as for home consumption. During the harvests Dutt was picked to be the water boy, which meant he was responsible for hauling water barrels by mule cart out to the fields for the workers. He described a typical day:

I stopped for the mule I would be driving all day and led him over to the cart. It took some coaxing and pushing to convince that old mule that he should go between the shafts of the cart. That didn’t bother me, I just kept whistling and working and finally, there he was... all ready to have the hitching finished. Then came filling the buckets and loading them in the wagon and I was ready to sit on the seat and take up the reins.

They paid me 60 cents a day. You had a wagon with a barrel on it and a mule to pull it around and every morning about 7 you’d pick up the laborer’s breakfast and take it to them in the field getting there about 8 or 8:30. The water had to be hauled from the well to the field and the farthest stop was about 45 minutes from the well, as the mules didn’t go very fast. We made two trips a day in the summer time, with a break for midday dinner, and three in the winter when we gathered up the sugar cane at grinding time and we had no midday return to the farm then.61

Ory earned points with the white overseer by keeping a separate dipper for his use so that he did not have to use the same one as the workers. Along the way he picked blackberries, which grew wild in the brush that surrounded the manicured fields and crawfished with nets deployed throughout the irrigation canals and swamp that ran across the backside of the plantation.

By the age of eleven, Dutt was big enough to go with his brother Johnny to the west bank to help Nellie and brother-in-law Clay Haydel on their rice farm. He said he went there three times to help harvest and process the rice. He painted a difficult life of endless work:

To begin with, I’ll tell you it was hot as hell. The sun was shining very bright and the heat was intense as it always is in
August when the rice harvesting begins. It lasts for four to six weeks and the heat right along with it. At times, there would be a big rain shower and the workers would have to hide under the trees or get a little shelter if they had anyone living near enough to be able to get under roof. Usually the rain would pound down very hard for about five or six minutes then the sun would come out again and we’d all just steam.

The fields of [rice] just looked like level ground, some of it green, some of it off green and some of it yellow. When they cut it, in a few days all of it would turn yellow. They cut it with a rice maul by hand. The cutter would stoop, gauging the distance very nicely and when he finished cutting, the shock would be just as level as the field of growing rice had been, and the rice would pike up on top of the stubble. Then the next worker would come along and bundle it, taking just about an armful each time, and tying it. Then he would set it up right there for the gatherers to come along. They would take the bundles and put them in enough bags, like a kiln, you might call it. They would let it dry there for a few weeks until the wagons and carts came to take it up to the riverbanks where they always did the threshing. When it went through the thrasher the rice would go in a bag and there was a big crane that would take the straw out and throw the straw right into the water. The straw would float down the Mississippi River for miles and miles from there, all you would see was straw, just floating down. It would finally rot and disappear.

I went over there in the rice fields and gathered up the broken stalks while the wagons were being loaded with the shocks. The Creole name for these was “Gropp” and at the end of the season my brother-in-law, Clay Haydel, would see that it was loaded on the steamboat and dropped off at Woodland Plantation across the river for me and I’ve always felt grateful to him for that. (These stalks would be the seconds not fit for market that the family consumed. In other words the Ory’s had a year’s worth of rice, free) But, this was only the beginning of the work because after the sacks were home, then we had to cut big logs and hull them out to make mortars. We’d make beaters to pound the rice to get the husks off but by adding some corn shuck it would break off the husks quicker and easier. After pounding awhile we’d empty the mortar and hold it up and the wind would blow the chaff away and the rice would drop into the container below, that’s why it was always best to work this on a windy day.

**The Woodland Store**

Free time on the plantation was sometimes spent hanging around the Woodland Store, which sat a short distance from the main Woodland house by the river. According to Ory, the Woodland Store had the only liquor license for miles. A rural superstore, it featured a blacksmith, wheelwright, groceries, tobacco, medicines, lumber, coffins, carts and carriages. Everyone, regardless of race, went there for supplies. As early as 1895 the store became the place to learn news of the outside world, when the area’s only telephone was installed. LaPlace got a little closer to the rest of the world.

“Every plantation had its own store,” remembered John L. Ory’s grandniece Maria Ory Levet, “The company store. I remember it at San Francisco [plantation]. Every month they [the workers] settled their bill.” Among the black workers it was known that the best way to guarantee continued employment on the plantation was to maintain a debt at the store. Such a debt would insure that the bosses at the Woodland would hire you back.
if for no other reason but to make sure the debt was paid. Institutions like this were links in the chains that kept blacks confined to the plantation in the post-slavery dynamic. There were few retail options in a rural setting like this, and it would be a few more years until non-plantation stores came to the fore.65

A New Kind of Equal

Through the 1890s and beyond, laws were passed restricting the rights of people of color to a level not seen since before the Civil War. Prohibitions on access to facilities, voting, and property snuffed out political and economic gains made during Reconstruction. Numerous states, particularly in the South, had passed laws that came to be known as the “black codes,” designed to circumvent the rights of black people. There were rulings in which juries gave signals that they felt the freedom to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness did not necessarily translate into a black person being allowed to stay in a hotel of his choosing.

Like jazz, the doctrine of separate but equal had origins in New Orleans; but this contribution came from a courthouse, not a dance hall. In 1890 the Louisiana legislature passed a law requiring that railroads provide separate but equal accommodations for the races. Shoemaker Homer Plessy ran afool of the law when he sat in a whites only car, and his case finally climaxed in the US Supreme Court ruling Plessy vs. Ferguson. The case is sometimes called the post-war Dred Scott Decision; a wrong-minded law that maintained bold-faced injustice. It set the double standard for race relations that endured through most of Ory’s life.66

Back in St. John Parish, the new reality manifested itself in specific ways. Since the war, blacks had controlled many parish offices, including the sheriff’s. They managed to hold on to those positions until a wave of Reconstruction deconstructionists succeeded in reclaiming political power by fiat. Emboldened by a “militia” sent by Francis T. Nicholls, the whites stole the ballot boxes from the 1896 election.67 When the boxes were located and the votes counted, the white ticket had won. The defeat of Sheriff John Webre at the 1896 election meant that whatever checks and balances blacks had held were gone. Black voter rolls were purged, and poll taxes and intimidation did the rest. Blacks would not return to elected office in St. John Parish until the 1970s.

There were cultural shifts underway as well. In the 1890s, French was still the common conversational language in St. John Parish, though English had been the legal tongue since before the war. Laws requiring legal documents to be in English did not stop Frenchmen from writing their wills and contracts in French. But language was becoming a “hot button” political issue. Children in many parishes were being chastised for speaking French at school, though it would not be discontinued as the language of instruction until 1920. Even St. John’s steadfast French language paper started publishing some articles in English (a French-only features section would continue well into the 20th century, however). Many of the early bilingual items were parish legal ads that, by law, had to be printed in English. Still, traditions held on more stubbornly in some arenas. At St. Peter’s Church, Fr. Badoil’s sacramental register is written in French. He consistently used Francophone spellings of given names, such as Edouard rather than Edward. Conversely, census enumerators after the Civil War leaned toward Anglicized versions of names.68

The eventual domination of English was
a foregone conclusion. Like the Creole culture from which he came, Kid Ory’s first tongue would soon be an anachronism. But English would not be the only new language he learned.

1 St. John the Baptist Parish Mortgage Index, 1898, St. John Parish Courthouse, Edgard, Louisiana. Woodland Plantation sold to Ory Partnership by Emile Legendre for $65,000, house and 1882 acres.

2 Author interview with Joy Lodrigue, granddaughter of John L. Ory, September 1999.


4 Elida Millet Caillouet, Lions on the River: a Popcorn: St. John the Baptist Parish (Tuscon: Alphagraphics, 1989), p. 106. Euchre is a card game that was particularly popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. Like many of the people in St. John, it is said to have origins in German, Spanish and French cultures.

5 1870 census, St. John the Baptist Parish. Population 6782, of which 2718 were white, 4044 black.

6 1869 St. John the Baptist Parish assessment rolls, reel 1, 1863-1865; reel 2, 1869-1881, St. John Parish Library, LaPlace, Louisiana.

7 J. Hanno Deiler, The Settlement of the German Coast of Louisiana and Creoles of German Descent (Philadelphia: Americana Germanica Press, 1909). Deiler argues that the Germans adopted the French language, eventually modifying their names to French-like pronunciation (Tregel to Tregre).

8 Placage was a practice going back to the founding of the Louisiana colony. Women of mixed French and African ancestry were often brought to balls where they were matched with white men who would support them as mistresses, or maîtresses.


10 Lions on the River, pp. 15-16. The area was later known as Lions, named after postmaster Frank Lions.
13 Ibid.
15 Deiler, p. 74.
16 Deiler, pp. 119-124.
17 Deiler, p. 119.
20 1850 Federal Census, St. John the Baptist Parish, p. 270, line 17, visitation 373.
21 Ibid.
22 St. John the Baptist Church, Edgard, Louisiana, Funerals, Book V: Edmond died September 27, 1853, and Marie Irene died March 17, 1854.
23 Succession of Edmond Ory and Marie Irene Tregre Ory, Fourth JDC, St. John the Baptist Parish, Act 537. Succession of Margerite Ory estate, May 17, 1855, Fourth JDC State Court, St. John Parish Act 161.
25 1870 census, St. John the Baptist Parish, Fourth Ward, p. 21, line 36.
27 Baptismal Register, St. John the Baptist Church.

28 St. John the Baptist Parish Index of Oaths, Parish Court, Guardian Appointments, microfilm roll GS 48-132, St. John the Baptist Parish Library.

29 Baptismal Register, St. Peter's Church, Reserve, Louisiana, bk. 2 FPC, 1864-1884.

30 Charles Octave Thomas, Ory's half-brother, is listed as illegitimate on his baptismal certificate. 1870 Baptismal Register, St. Peter's Church, Reserve, Louisiana, bk. 2 FPC, 1864-1884. 1880 Census, St. John the Baptist Parish, Fourth Ward, ed. 162, p. 41, line 13. Marriage: 21 JDC marriage book, St. John the Baptist Parish, 1895.

31 Baptismal register, St. Peter Catholic Church, Reserve Louisiana. 1880 census St. John, 12th census 1 sup dist, ed. 63, sheet 18.

32 Ory autobiography (unpublished manuscript, courtesy Babette Ory).

33 1880 Census, St. John Parish, ed. 63, line 59. 1900 Census, ed. 63, line 59. Octave Ory burial certificate, St. Peter Church, Reserve, Louisiana, Funerals book, 1864-1901, p. 282, act 44. Author interview with Joy Lodrigues. Octavie is listed in the sacramental register of St. Peter Catholic Church as being 48 at the time of her death on September 5, 1900, suggesting she was born in 1852. She was 30 in the 1880 census. The 1900 census lists her birth in December 1848.

34 Ory autobiography.

35 Years later, Kid Ory told his daughter Babette a story about Octavie and her family living among Indians. The family, he said, was killed and missionaries somehow brought Octavie to St. John the Baptist Parish. This may have been true, but it may also have been a fanciful yarn for the child's consumption. On the baptismal certificates of her children she is listed variously as Marie Octavie, Octave Devezin, Octave Devesin, Octavie Ory and sometimes just Octavie. On her son John's death certificate her last name is given as "Madere." There is no Octave Devezin on the 1870 Louisiana census but there is an Octavie Madere a few entries away from Octavie Ory and Jacques Thomas. There were free people of color in St. John parish named both Devezin and Madere prior to the Civil war but there is no definitive record of Octavie prior to 1869. Since Octavie is listed as native to Louisiana she may have been a slave, which would explain her absence from the 1860 census. There were slaves and free people of color going by the surname Devezin in St. John as early as 1829. White planter John Olivier-Devezin in his will and succession freed a Creole slave named Francisco, or Francois, in 1829. This was probably Olivier-Devezin's son by a placee. There were slaves going by Devezin on the Berthelet, Sorapuru and Balvet plantations around the time Octavie was born. The 1850 census lists a five-year-old girl named Octavie living with her parents Joachim Fonteneau, age 53, white, and a mulatto woman Rosette, age 27. On the census they lived in the Sixth Ward, next door to Omer Ory's family. A Rosette Devizin shows up on the baptismal roles at St. John the Baptist Church in Edgard, as do several other Devezins. It is most likely that Octavie came from one of these families and that she was born and raised in St. John. If the daughter of Joachim Fonteneau is indeed Octavie, then Ozeme certainly would have known her growing up. The Triches lived in Reserve next door to the Orys, while the Fonteneaus lived on the other side of the property. Jacques Thomas lived there, too.

36 Baptismal Record, St. Peter's Church, Reserve, Louisiana.

37 1870 Federal Census, St. John the Baptist Parish, Fourth Ward.

38 No marriage record has surfaced, and the children are listed in the baptismal records as being illegitimate.

39 1880 Census, St. John the Baptist Parish.

40 1880 Census, St. John the Baptist Parish, sup. dist. 1, ed. 63, sheet 18. Ory autobiography says brothers died before he was born. The Orys had three other children who died before reaching adulthood. Leonie, born in 1870, died after the 1880 census, but before 1886. Joseph Fortune, born 1877, and Marie Antionette, 1879, both died before 1880.

41 Baptismal Register, St. Peter's Church, Reserve, Louisiana.


43 1900 Census, St. John the Baptist Parish, sup. dist. 2, ed. 63, sheet 18; visitation 384. The Orys are on the same page, a few lines away.

44 1880 Census, St. John the Baptist Parish, Second Ward, p. 675, sup. dist. 1, ed. 150.

Ory's great niece.

46 Ory autobiography.


48 The Fourth Ward Colored School is mentioned in the St. John the Baptist Parish newspaper Le Meschacebe in 1896.

49 The unedited examples of his writing are recipes that he wrote down to share with others. Personal collection of Arthur GaNung, stepson of Kid Ory. Ory eschewed the printed word, and few examples of his writing, apart from these recipes, exist. After his tours of Europe in 1956 and 1959, Ory was inundated with reams of fan mail, none of which he ever answered.

50 Ory autobiography.


53 1900 census, St. John the Baptist Parish, Fourth Ward, vol. 38, ed. 63, sheet 17, line 63.

54 Lions on the River, p. 43.

55 Author interview with Harold Ory.


58 Lions on the River, pp. 41-42.


60 Lions on the River.

61 Ory autobiography.

62 Ory autobiography.


64 Advertisements in Le Meschacebe, August 8, 1900; March 23, 1895.

65 The Woodland Store made the transition to general store even as the Kellers and Lassiegnes bought into the Woodland Plantation partnership in 1898.
We Got Mail

Comments on Jack Stewart’s article in our last issue, “The Original Dixieland Jazz Band’s Place in the Development of Jazz,” included the following:

To the editors:

I was very interested in Jack Stewart’s discussion of the undergirding of the two-beat marches and rags with 4/4 to create a swing feel. I think there is something to this, but it happened long before the Original Dixieland Jazz Band was in Chicago. Jelly Roll Morton says specifically that he was the first to do it, and dates it from 1902. Others have spoken of this effect. I have discussed the whole matter at some length in “The Making of Jazz,” pages 65-67.

Cordially,
James Lincoln Collier

Jack Stewart responds.

To the editor:

Mr. Collier was indeed one of the first to note in print that ragtime transitioned into jazz by changing from two-beat to four-beat (both music writer Virgil Thomson and ODJB trombonist Eddie Edwards said it earlier). The problem is that the context Collier presents - including the age of the musician cited (Jelly Roll Morton), the reasons for the change (varied and speculative), and the date of the change (1900 or 1902) - is not credible; therefore, his whole argument falters, dragging the one good conclusive point down with the bad supporting ones.

Jelly Roll Morton, the “inventor” of jazz, was twelve years old in 1902. This is substantiated by: 1) his baptismal certificate, 2) Anita Gonzales’s insistence on using 1890 on his gravestone, 3) historian Lawrence Gushee’s timeline of JRM’s life (demonstrating the five-year distortion), and 4) a recently-discovered application for a visa signed by Jelly with his 1890 date of birth. Furthermore, dance and dancers drive rhythmic change in popular dance music, which jazz was before the advent of its modern variants. Popular dance music was nowhere close to the threshold point of jazz in 1900 or 1902, but it was in 1915 or 1916.

Sincerely,
Jack Stewart
Remembering Dick Allen

Gone is that cherubic grin. Gone are the morning phone calls about something a long-gone jazzman had done that still amazed him; or being instructed to send on a bit of information to this or that researcher who had contacted him at home. Gone is being given some insignificant little tidbit about my hometown that would make me wonder how—or, better yet, why—did he know this information (which always proved to be true). Even after he left New Orleans, we continued to chat from time to time, though he never answered the phone himself and sometimes seemed to have problems with lucidity. But, on my last call, not only did he answer the phone himself but he immediately recognized my voice, and we chatted on about the Jazz Archive, New Orleans, jazz musicians, and my new station in life in Wichita, Kansas.

When I received the notification that Richard Binion “Dick” Allen had passed on to the great beyond, my whole world seemed to come to a stand-still for a few moments. I could not comprehend that my mentor, my buddy, my friend is no longer.

As I stated several years ago in The Jazz Archivist (“Just Among Friends: A Celebration of Richard B. Allen,” vol. XIV, 2000), Dick is the one responsible for introducing me to the Jazz Archive and the world that it encompasses, so I am forever indebted to him.

Because he was a larger-than-life individual to me, I expected the Times Picas-yune online guestbook linked to his death notice to be overflowing with entries from people whose lives he had touched. But, then I think about the Jazz Archivist article and its sentiment that a tribute is far better than a memorial, and I am pleased that Dick had a chance to read for himself accolades by some of the people who held him dear. A review of the above-mentioned article will give background information on Dick and his love for New Orleans music, but it would take volumes to do justice to his dedication to the perpetuation of America’s musical legacy. He shall be missed.

-Alma Williams Freeman
Curator’s Commentary

New Orleans is a city still very much expanding its threshold of loss, and this year the Hogan Jazz Archive has not been exempted, losing two valued members of its extended family in the space of a few months. On January 1, 2007, Tad Jones was found dead at his home, the victim of what was apparently a fluke accident. He was only fifty-three years old and had spent the past nineteen years working on a study of Louis Armstrong in New Orleans that everyone knew would contribute mightily to the field of jazz studies. On April 12, 2007, Richard B. Allen, a founder of the Archive of New Orleans Jazz and its second Curator, passed away at a veteran’s home in Dublin, Georgia, near his birthplace of Milledgeville. He was eighty years old. Tad and Dick were related in many ways. They both devoted their lives selflessly to the documentation, interpretation, and preservation of New Orleans music, and Dick was a mentor to Tad, as he was to me. They were both quirky, what most would consider to be New Orleans “characters,” Dick being a denizen of the French Quarter, and Tad a face that everybody knew (whether they had met him or not) Uptown. Dick’s home away from home seemed to be the Freret Street bus, while Tad’s was his bicycle—neither owned a car. But when it came to New Orleans music, they were ubiquitous.

I met Tad for the first time in late 1971, while I was working in a band with bassist Reggie Scanlan (now of The Radiators), a neighbor and friend of Tad’s since childhood. Tad was a student at Loyola University and pretty much ran the radio station there, which gave him a base of operations for producing not only radio programs but also oral history interviews with New Or-leans rhythm and blues and jazz musicians (such as Irma Thomas, Earl King, Professor Longhair, and Roosevelt Sykes) and recordings of pet bands such as ours. Along with Reggie and me, Clark Vreeland and Becky Kury (later to found The Rhapsodizers with Ed Voelker and Frank Bua) were in the band, as were Steve Cunningham and Tim Youngblood (the guiding lights of The Mechanics, a late-seventies punk band). Tad played piano and drums, although he didn’t broadcast it, but at a Mardi Gras party at an apartment in the Irish Channel where Reggie was living in 1973, I found out just how good a drummer he was. Mac Rebennack’s Gumbo album was all the rage, and Rupert Surcouf (Al Hirt’s nephew, who soon became the manager of The Meters) decided we should do a Dr. John Creaux drag performance at the party, with himself as the Doctor, Tad and me on drums, Reggie on bass, Clark on guitar, and Becky as backup vocalist. All I remember is Tad dressed up in lots of feathers and glitter that night, a departure from his usual uniform of button-down collar oxford cloth shirt and khakis. The rest is a blur, but it sure sounded good.

In 1977 Tad managed another band that I was working with, the Kurt Kasson Band (featuring the Wheeler Sisters), and produced a session at Allen Toussaint and Marshall Sehorn’s SeaSaint studios that included a young Tommy Malone on guitar (now of The Subdudes). A deal was struck to release the material, but when Marshall told Tad that he wanted 50% of the composer credits and upfront money, it fell through. While all of this was going on, however, Tad was consistently busy interviewing New Orleans musicians, many of whom became very close friends—espe-
cially Earl King—and he eventually sought out a relationship with the Hogan Jazz Archive to serve as a repository for that material, effectively expanding that facility's collection parameters to include New Orleans R&B as well as jazz. Tad's relationship with the Archive predated my curatorship, including donation of his fabulous collection of New Orleans rhythm and blues 78s and 45s, but after I took over he was there at crucial intervals to assist with the oral history program. Especially after Dick Allen's retirement in 1992, after which there was no longer an oral historian at the facility or resources to continue fieldwork, Tad's generous intervention made all the difference. He offered to set up a 501C-3 non-profit to raise money to continue the collection of oral history, essentially offering his services as an interviewer gratis, with copies of the interviews going to the Archive. Under the auspices of The Oral History Project, Inc., interviews were conducted with noted New Orleans DJ and MC George W. "Tex" Stephens, trumpeters Wallace Davenport and Milton Batiste, producer/engineer/A&R man Cosimo Matassa, saxophonist Alvin "Red" Tyler, drummer June Gardner, bandleader/arranger Wardell Quezergue, and many others. When the New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park became involved in collecting video interviews in 1998, Tad became the administrator of that program through his non-profit, and copies of those interviews came to the Archive as well. Of course, Tad was a
familiar face as a researcher at the Archive throughout the decades, especially after contracting to write a biography of Louis Armstrong’s New Orleans years for the University of Illinois Press in 1989. His personal collection will eventually be donated to Tulane, but for the immediate future all notes and writing related to the Armstrong project are restricted until a determination can be made regarding the state of the manuscript vis-à-vis potential publication. A small group of Tad’s friends and associates have met several times to discuss the issue, and there is reason to believe that the Armstrong book can be published under Tad’s name in some form. Needless to say, if his friends succeed in this endeavor, it will be slight compensation for all that Tad gave to us during his lifetime.

I knew who Dick Allen was long before I met him. When I first came to Tulane University in 1971, I would invariably see a white haired gentleman almost any time I rode the Freret Street bus (connecting the university to the French Quarter), and having heard about Dick from Professor of History Hank Knen and others, I formed the impression that this could only be him. Sure enough, when I finally did visit the Hogan Jazz Archive in 1975 (everything moves slowly in New Orleans), my assumption was confirmed. Al Rose’s step-son, Forest, was taking a U.S. history course from me and showed up one evening with pictures of my father and Al together in Philadelphia with instructions that I was to go to the Jazz Archive because Dick Allen had some more material on Boyd Raeburn waiting for me. When I arrived and introduced myself, Dick dropped what he was doing and offered his full attention. He had already pulled a number of Down Beat magazines with Boyd on the cover for me to see, and I must have spent an hour with him, just listening to what he had to say. We became friends, and he asked me to write a letter on his behalf, attesting to the good service I had received. As it turned out, there was pressure being put on him as the Archive’s second Curator because he did not have advanced degrees, despite the fact that the very idea of a jazz archive had originated with him, growing out of a master’s thesis topic that he had proposed to William Ransom Hogan, chair of the Department of History at Tulane. Hogan’s grant proposal to the Ford Foundation in 1958 enabled Tulane to spend $151,000 on oral history fieldwork, which became the core of the Archive’s collection and continues to be the primary attraction for most jazz scholars, with William Russell and Dick Allen working mostly in tandem. After Russell’s departure, Dick took over as Curator in 1962, at which point the collection was opened to the public. Allen’s success as an oral historian was based on his knowledge of New Orleans jazz, a wicked sense of humor, and the trust he inspired among musicians, combined with a real dedication to the study of oral history methodology. He approached the musicians as friends, enabling him to effectively get inside their world, and the results have fuelled numerous monographs and dissertations on the history of New Orleans jazz. I would rank him as one of the foremost oral historians of jazz, a man at the top of the field. Ironically, the university did not seem to recognize his achievement. My addition to the staff of the Hogan Jazz Archive came in 1980, when the administration brought in a new Curator (with a library degree) and demoted Dick to a half-time position as oral historian. Apparently, my letter of support had not been enough, and Dick was somewhat bitter about the coup that ousted him.
Nevertheless, he continued to generate new interviews (he kept his “eye on the prize”), and I was assigned to assist with the transcriptions, as well as to serve as the “go between” with his replacement. He became a mentor, and whatever insights I have been able to share about jazz history (based largely on what I learned by going through the interviews), I owe to Dick Allen. When asked a question, he would never give a simple answer but instead suggest a series of possible strategic steps that would eventually lead to pay dirt (after considerable effort). In short, he taught me that research is never easy and that it is never finished.

When I became Curator in 1989, Dick was already thinking about retirement, which occurred when he turned sixty-five in 1992. But we had some fun before he left the Archive, and I’ll give just one example. Reed man Pud Brown was celebrating a birthday on January 22, 1989, which happened to coincide with a trio gig he had booked for a lingerie fashion show at Yvonne Lafleur’s You Boutique uptown in the Riverbend section, beginning right after we got off work. We stopped at the McKenzie’s Bakery on Oak Street and bought a chocolate cupcake and jammed about 60 candles onto it (Pud was actually much older than that, but Allen didn’t want to “overdo” it). Pud was so touched by Dick’s thoughtfulness that he almost forgot for a moment about the lingerie models, who seemed to be everywhere one turned, and I thought I saw him tear up a little—or maybe he was just cleaning his glasses so he could get a better look. In any event, it was a great
In 1957-58, Don Ewell accompanied the Jack Teagarden Sextet on a State Department tour of the Far East, covering eighteen countries in four-and-a-half months. This photo finds them at an airport somewhere in mid-tour. Teagarden is second from left; Ewell, second from right.

way to inaugurate my tenure as Curator, which I think may have been Dick’s intention, the equivalent of a jazz archivist’s bachelor party. Like I said, he had a wicked sense of humor, but everyone loved it. For the next eleven years, Dick Allen resumed full-time status as a French Quarter “character,” and the fact that the balcony at his Gov. Nicholls Street apartment overlooked the Palm Court Jazz Café across Decatur Street was certainly no accident. Dick’s primary commitment was always to the music, and it brought him full circle. Before returning to Milledgeville in 2003, he donated his personal papers to the Archive, a final gesture of generosity from a man who gave his entire life to jazz.

We’ve had some gains this year, too, of course. Thanks to the good offices of his biographer Eugene Kramer, pianist Don Ewell’s collection was given to the Archive by his widow Mary, just before her own passing. Timely transport of the materials from DeFuniak Springs, Florida, was accomplished with the assistance of Norman Vickers of Pensacola, drummer George Neidof of DeFuniak Springs, and Assistant Dean for Special Collections Bill Meneray. Although not extensive, the collection includes numerous photographs, unreleased recordings, clippings, and letters to and from various jazz musicians. New Orleans Jazz Club veteran Helen Arlt also donated photographs, books, magazines, and clippings related to her life in New Orleans jazz.
Thanks to the special attention given by The Grammy Foundation to personal audio archives threatened by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, digital transfers of the oral history collection of researcher David Kunian, who has done radio documentaries of James Black, James Booker, Earl King, and Guitar Slim, were also added to the Archive’s holdings. With the expectation of making his interviews available and providing greater security for them, Jeff Hannusch gave over 100 of his interviews on cassette tape with various New Orleans rhythm and blues musicians, providing further depth on the New Orleans rhythm and blues heritage. Professor Harriett Ottenheimer (Cousin Joe’s biographer, recently retired from Kansas State University) gave her oral history interviews with Cousin Joe (aka Pleasant Joseph), Roosevelt Sykes, and others. Ellis Marsalis donated a fine personal collection of jazz 78s, from George Shearing to Charlie Parker. From the collection of Al and Doris Kershaw, we received artist’s portraits of several New Orleans jazz icons, including George Lewis, Jim Robinson, and Lawrence Marrero, all handsomely framed. Finally, The Grammy Foundation provided $40,000 to enable the Archive to complete digital transfer of its oral histories on open reel tape, a project that will commence in October. All in all, some very significant additions to the collection occurred in FY2006-2007, and we are thankful to have so many friends who share our vision of giving scholars interested in the history of New Orleans music (broadly defined) the materials needed to tell the story accurately and in detail.

Among the musicians who played dates with Don Ewell at the Golden Nugget Tavern in Toronto during the 1960s was the great New Orleans guitarist Lonnie Johnson, who sent him this admiringly inscribed keepsake photograph dated September 2, 1968.

Finally, my usual pitch for renewal of Friends dues ($25 payable to the Hogan Jazz Archive) brings this issue to a close. We appreciate the support that the Friends of the Jazz Archive make possible, and we hope the quality of the articles and essays contained herein will justify that support as we intend that it should.

Bruce Boyd Raeburn, Curator