The Louisiana Phonograph Company.

On January 26, 1891, Tulane University and Colonel William Preston Johnson, its president, hosted the first New Orleans demonstration of the "newly perfected" phonograph at a then downtown campus lecture hall. Keeping with the standard Edison company promotional pattern, H. Lee Sellers, vice president and chief executive officer of the Louisiana Phonograph Company provided a dramatic premiere, by invitation only, of the newly available phonograph that "astonished and delighted" about 200 "ladies and gentlemen ... prominent people," at the Tulane lecture room, according to a report the next day in the Daily States. Sellers started the program by dictating a business letter to Thomas A. Edison telling the master of local interest in the invention and "predicting a booming business." The letter was reproduced on wax cylinder, played back, and typed by an assistant. Then followed further "interesting illustration" in the form of previously recorded cylinders -- six-inch long white objects composed of ceresin, beeswax, and stearic wax that ran two minutes -- which included "concerted music; chimes of bells of St. Andrews' Church, New York; negro dialect songs; violin, violoncello and flute selections." Among these selections, the Negro dialect songs were especially noteworthy. They were among the first locally made and marketed musical cylinders and featured banjoist Louis "Bebe" Vasnier Jr., a local Creole of color, housepainter, and minstrel, in what may well have been the first recordings of black music ever made. Less than two years after the production of the first musical cylinders by the national Edison phonograph company, its officially licensed Louisiana and Mississippi affiliate had begun producing and marketing local artists. Sellers, the local Edison franchisee, with second-floor offices at Room 27 of the Equitable Building at Gravier and Carondelet, also recorded and distributed 43 marches, waltzes, schottisches, polkas, galops, and popular tunes performed by George Paletti's Southern Band, a highly successful New Orleans unit which was active for more than 30 years and which could field as many as 33 musicians for a performance.
Formerly an executive with the Galveston-based Texas Phonograph Company, H. Lee Sellers joined Hugh R. Conynong, brother of Thomas Conynong, founder and CEO of the Texas company, to start the New Orleans agency. Besides those three, original investors included Seller's brother, Robert Henry Sellers of Fort Worth, and local investor Harry T. Howard, a former top official of the Crescent City Sugar Refinery. Sellers graduated from a New Orleans high school, then from Washington and Lee University before moving on to the Texas newspaper business and taking "to scientific pursuits, selecting the practical study of mechanism" as his favorite field. He became involved with the Texas Phonograph Company, rising eventually to a position as Thomas Conynong's assistant. Unfortunately, the Texas company was racked by a series of marketing blunders in 1890, most notably, difficulty in maintaining the leased phonographs and lack of trained agents. The untapped Louisiana region represented an attractive opportunity for native son Sellers. As in Texas, he intended to rent machines for forty dollars a year to local businessmen as a time-saving dictation, notation, and communication device.

The Louisiana Phonograph Company survived from 1891 to 1897, leaving an important, if somewhat unintended, legacy of its brief fling. The company was one of the first (and perhaps one of only seven of the thirty-two affiliated companies) to produce and market musical or special-interest cylinders for national distribution. Furthermore, they were undoubtedly the very first to record New Orleans musicians and music, this despite the stubborn insistence by Sellers and the Conynongs (typical of Edison phonograph executives) that the machines be marketed primarily to serious businessmen for applications in their field. After all, Edison himself, when faced with the amazing popularity of the first musical use of the phonograph in thousands of talking dolls equipped to play nursery rhymes in 1889 and 1890, dismissed such a frivolous distraction as mere "social amusement". Unintended and unacknowledged as the achievement might have been in 1890s America, the Louisiana affiliate apparently became the leading nickel coin-slot distributor nationwide and, as such, needed new, topical, and popular recordings to play on the machines. The national Edison company was slow in providing adequate service due to production and distribution problems, so this naturally led the Louisiana company into producing and marketing its own cylinders. The local market seemed particularly voracious when it came to such musical products. A primitive nickel coin-slot mechanism placed at an unspecified New Orleans drug store reportedly set a national record when it took in the incredible sum of $1,000 during April and May 1891. (Figuring 20,000 plays over a 60-day span, one might expect the machine to have been in operation 12 hours continuously each day!) "The location is suspected to have been one of those rather illegitimate types of establishments from which the latter day 'juke' box derived its name," observed Oliver Read and Walter L. Welch in From Tin Foil to Stereo, an authoritative source on the early phonograph.

Louis "Bebe" Vasnier, born a free Creole of color in 1859 (according to the 1880 U.S. census), probably became the first black recording artist in the world. His "Brudder Rasmus Sermons" and minstrel songs were actively promoted by Sellers and the Louisiana company. A July 1892 "Price List of Musical Records Etc.," which appeared in The Phonogram, a short-lived journal of the affiliated Edison phonograph companies, shows for sale five "Negro Sermons" by "Brudder Rasmus" at $1 each, by the Louisiana Phonograph Company. "All of these are very popular, and good for the blues," reads the small print, "Try them!" Another advertisement from the same source stated that the "Brudder Rasmus Sermons as delivered by Louis Vasnier for the Louisiana Phonograph Company," were "kept in stock and can usually be supplied at short notice." Some of the titles included in these sermons were "Charity ob the Heart," "Adam and Eve an de Winter Apple," "Sinners, Chicken Stealers, Etc.," "Moses and his Tribe," "The End ob de World," and "Why You Are Black." According to one Phonogram advertisement, "These sermons, while very humorous, are characteristic Negro delineations and are faithful reproductions of a dusky style of pulpit oratory that is rapidly passing away." In addition to the Louisiana company and Edison's national North American Phonograph Company, affiliates in New York, New Jersey, Ohio, New England, and Ottawa, Canada, also produced musical cylinder recordings, by
Gimore's Band, Isslen's Orchestra, and the Manhansett Quartet, as well as vocal, banjo, cornet, clarinet, and xylophone solos.

Also available by Vasnier were banjo versions of eight "plantation negro" songs, presumably in the minstrel tradition, including "Black Picklinny," "Coon with a Razor," "Good Bye, Susan Jane," "Hide Away," "Put Away dat Straw," "Thompson's Old Grey Mule," "Rock dat Ship," and "Turkey in de Straw." The advertisement concluded with the comment "The sermons are very popular amongst both whites and blacks and have proved among the most profitable of exhibition records." Vasnier's pieces, obviously, were a prime attraction.

Attuned to a possible marketing coup, Sellers pitched these sermons to Edison in a letter dated August 4, 1892, a copy of which was furnished by George Tselos, archivist at the Edison National Historic Site at West Orange, New Jersey. "Some time ago," wrote Sellers, "the North American Company ordered from us some sample records of our Negro Dialect Series. Our company at once sent out some of our Negro Dialect Sermons which we consider the best we have in this line, and as they were for you, sent them with the compliments of the La. Phon. Co., hoping that you would receive them, and be afforded some amusement by their exceedingly good and realistic efforts." There is no available record of a reply.

Vasnier was about thirty-three years old at the time of the recordings and a housepainter by trade (a fairly common occupation for a musician because of daytime and seasonal hours) and, according to an 1890 census, employed six other painters. He lived with mother Louise (1826-1892) and father Louis Sr. (1820-1891) until their respective deaths. According to the census, Louis Sr. employed at least ten in his carpentry business. The Vasniers were a middle-class family descended from French-speaking Creoles of color free before the Civil War. They lived in a variety of homes east of downtown New Orleans in the 1880s, before settling down at 147 St. Anthony street. The name "Vasnier" was uncommon and listed in various sources as Vannier, Vanier and Vassier. The neighborhoods they settled in also contained German and Irish residents. Sometimes the streets alternated by race and sometimes streets were mixed racially house-by-house. About one-third of the residents of the area that stretched east of the city to St. Bernard parish were classified as non-white by the 1880 census.

A skilled laborer by day, Vasnier participated in minstrelsy at night, as evidenced by announcements in the "rakings" column, a prominent feature of the Weekly Pelican, the newspaper of downtown colored Creole society that carried mentions of community events, parties, and concerts played by the better known bands and troupes. "Johnson and Vasnier's colored minstrel company will give a performance Monday evening, February 14 at Friends of Hope Hall on Treme Street. Admission 25 cts. Performance commences at 8 o'clock," the Weekly Pelican announced on February 5, 1887. (This venue was later known as Cooperators Hall, where Kid Ory and other jazzmen played.) A follow-up announcement on February 12 was placed in the fourth-highest position in the "rakings" column which had twenty to twenty-five announcements ranked from most important to least. By comparison, the nationally-known Billy Kersands' Georgia Minstrels rated the same fourth slot when they appeared locally in November 1887. Johnson and Vasnier's minstrels were playing a colored society St. Valentine's Day and Carnival party and were awarded what passed for praise for a local act by the hard-to-please newspaper. "They gave a credible performance," reported the Weekly Pelican of February 19, 1887. Minstrelsy had reached its peak coincidently with the early formation of the recorded music market concept of the 1890s. Vasnier's songs were typical of minstrelsy which "from its conception, its portrayals of the plantation and of negroes, especially Southern Negroes, had been its greatest asset and its distinguishing characteristic," according to Robert C. Toll in his study of the topic, Blacking Up. Minstrel music performed also as a kind of platform for archaic pre-jazz and development of such jazz-related phenomena as the street parade and social dancing, in addition to being a wellspring for vaudeville.

Vasnier disappeared from city listings in 1897 (the year of a deadly Yellow Fever outbreak, although no link has been made) but the history of the Louisiana Phonograph Company's other entry, Paoletti's Southern Band, can be traced well into the twentieth century. Paoletti's Band, in various guises, was going strong in the 1890s, playing a kind of polished "symphony pops" blend very popular with the middle-class audiences. "Before the curtain rises, a delightful orchestra concert is nightly given under the direction of Professor Paoletti," noted the Southern Buck, the official journal of the local Elks Club, in June 1901. "For many years past Mr. Paoletti has led bands at West End, Athletic Park, Audubon Park and other places." At West End (a resort/entertainment area on Lake Pontchartrain) perhaps the first documented performance by a recorded band with a guest recording artist occurred when, in 1893, Jules Levy, "the most famous and most temperamental of the era's great cornet virtuosi," appeared with Paoletti's Band. Levy had
made musical cylinders in early 1892 for Edison’s North American Phonograph Company. Paolletti’s Band was active at least through the end of World War I. A printed advertisement for Spanish Fort resort in Summer 1919 announced the band’s performance from 5 to 6:30 p.m. on a Sunday. The efforts of Sellers and the Conyngtons to market the Louisiana territory provides an illuminating microcosm of the larger story of aims, methods, and results of the first phonograph companies in 1890s America. Edison executives recognized the appeal of previously recorded musical cylinders, but considered them a distraction from the true utility of the device as a business machine. Moreover, problems, such as reproduction quality, maintenance and placements of rented units, poor distribution, and highly perishable wax cylinders which could only be produced in 200 batch lots, made tough going along the mass musical marketing road. Still, the companies and concept might have succeeded in the 1890s (music marketing had a profound effect in the 1920s) if it had not been for patent disputes and Edison’s 1894 decision to throw the phonograph organization into bankruptcy. This action was taken to avert a hostile takeover by rival American Graphophone Company. It doomed the original investors. The Louisiana Phonograph Company charged the standard $40 a year rental on leased phonographs, as did all affiliates, when it began operations in January 1891. Batteries cost $5 per quarter and provided 70 hours of continuous play. They could be recharged at company offices for 50 cents apiece. Sellers sold representatives from the Daily States and Times Picayune that the evolving technology could render "multifarious" services to the businessman. "It does not supersede the typewriter or the stenographer, but serves rather to simplify their work and to be of immense help to them, besides being a valuable saver of time and trouble to the businessman,” he said in what was described by the Daily States reporter as “quite a long talk together.” Musical cylinders, including one that "gave out an amusing song in the 'plantation negro' dialect with piano accompaniment," were an important part of this preview demonstration for the journalists. Both newspapers buried the phonograph-related articles in the middle of their Sunday editions on January 25, 1891.

Sellers amplified on the advantages of the newly perfected phonograph during his Tulane appearance the next day. He listed these improved functions: 1. letter writing and all kinds of dictation without the aid of a stenographer; 2. phonographic books which would speak to blind people without effort on their part; 3. the teaching of elocution; 4. reproduction of music; 5. the "family record," a registry of sayings, reminiscences, etc., by members of the family in their own voices; and of the last words of dying persons. Also listed were: 6. music boxes and toys; 7. clocks that should announce in articulate speech the time of going home, going to meals, etc.; 8. the preservation of language by exact reproduction of the manner of pronouncing; 9. educational purposes such as preserving the explanations made by a teacher so that the pupil can refer to them at any moment and for spelling and other lessons; 10. connection with the telephone, so as to make that invention an auxiliary to the transmission of permanent and invaluable lessons.

Each of these uses of recording technology eventually became standard features of modern American life, but not nearly soon enough to rescue the Edison phonograph companies of the 1890s. Actually, the 1891 demonstration of the phonograph by Sellers was not, strictly speaking, the first local display of a recording device. Edison's original tinfoil phonograph was played for newspapermen shortly after coming out in 1892. Journalist Andre Burthe, also known as the "Count," sang "in a rich baritone voice a selection from a grand opera, the faithful phonograph reproduced and gave out the song, though the 'Count's' voice seemed to come from a long distance." The Daily States reporter had attended both demonstrations and noted that "Wonderful, amazing, indeed, have been the improvements in the phonograph. Mr. Edison has [so] perfected the phonograph that the instrument brought to mind bears no more resemblance to the present highly improved machine than a plantation negro's banjo does to Paganini's violin."

Early promoters of the phonograph tried and failed to dissuade the general public from a mesmerizing fascination with the machine as an amusement device. Witness Thomas Conyngton's remarks when he represented the Texas Phonograph Company at the well-attended first convention of local phonograph companies in 1890 in Chicago. Early marketing errors had convinced marketing executives, according to the organizer, "that the more entirely we separate the musical machine from the business machine, the better it will be for us," adding that a recently created musical exhibition apart from the business office was "paying very well...." Conyngton recalled, "We made a mistake in Galveston at the onset of giving too much prominence to the musical exhibit and many businessman would leave, thinking that the machine was a very delightful toy but not a business machine.... Our arrangement at present in Dallas is that in our regular office there are no musical cylinders on exhibition under any circumstances, but we inform them that next door there is a young man ready to exhibit the machine for amusement purposes only to all who come and pay him a fee for hearing it. The machine is looked upon with much more favor by those who pay ten or fifteen cents for hearing it than by those who just come in, bore us to death for an hour or half an hour listening to those selections we have."

While this business-oriented philosophy carried over to the Louisiana company, the New Orleans affiliate’s major marketing success came with the primitive nickel coin-slot machine. This legacy as the first recorder and mass distributor of local music makes the failed company noteworthy. Recordings of the day were made acoustically by arranging tiers of recording devices on shelves with several recording horns directed at the performers. The North American Phonograph Company was hatched by Edison on July 14, 1888 and on May 24, 1889 the Edison Phonograph Works began to produce musical cylinders for the coin-slot mechanisms to which some of the local companies had adapted the Edison phonograph. As many as ten master cylinders of each recording were made and each master rendered between fifteen and twenty copies of varying quality. The average run, therefore, was between
one-hundred-and-fifty and two hundred cylinders, and about fourteen hundred selections were recorded by the national parent company between 1891 and 1893. But exorbitant shipping costs, plus the inability of the national Edison apparatus to supply quickly, combined with the relative ease of production (given blank cylinders that were supposedly control-distributed by the national company) to make local production attractive.

Naturally, the Louisiana company jumped at the opportunity to use readily available recording technology to supply the lucrative nickel coin-slot audience with the latest local music. Still, the early duplication and distribution network never had enough time to evolve. Not until the early 1900s, with the introduction of "the gold-moulded process" that could produce more durable, longer, better quality recordings, did a suitable product for a burgeoning market of home users become available. Alas, this development came far too late for the Edison companies which were dissolved by the inventor in 1894. The resulting settlement with the rival American Graphophone Company was handled by bankruptcy receiver John R. Harding in February 1896, thus ending the first era of the recording industry."

The structure and fate of the Louisiana company reflects the turbulent story of the North American Phonograph Company's forced insolvency. Listings in the city directory reveal that the local affiliate moved from its fashionable Equitable Building office in 1894 to 130 Canal Street, also Hugh Conynpton's residence. Company offices again moved in 1895 to 722 Canal, where the partners had also set up a real estate and securities exchange office. They lost control of the company during Edison's hostile takeover fight in 1896 and T. Mauro (a possible relation to attorney Philip Mauro who represented American Graphophone) took over management of the newly rechristened Louisiana Phonograph and Kinetoscope Agency through 1897, after which company listings cease. There is no forwarding address for Sellers; Thomas Conyngton always had his main residence in Fort Worth and Hugh Conyngton had no forwarding note. Robert Henry Sellers, also a Texas resident, moved to New York City. A fascinating chapter in New Orleans musical recording history had quickly closed, but questions remain to be answered through future research.

Perhaps the most dramatic puzzle yet to be unraveled concerns the possible recording of Buddy Bolden, the reputed first "king" of jazz in New Orleans. The magnificent mystery of whether a legendary Bolden cylinder exists has eluded jazz sleuths for more than fifty years. The New Orleans Jazz Club even offered a $100 reward in 1954 to "anyone who is able to produce (with sufficient authentication) any of these will-o'-the-wisps," in their journal, The Second Line. Shortly after, William Russell and Richard Allen doubled the offer, which has yet to be collected. The initial alert in the search for this cylinder came from jazz writer and collector Charles Edward Smith. In a March 16, 1957 article for Saturday Review Smith provided details of a 1939 conversation with valve trombonist Willie Cornish, who played with Bolden in the 1890s. Cornish recalled that the music recorded "was more probably a march than a blues or stomp... made by a 'white' record company." Cornish was "sick, but not senile," according to Smith, who said the musician distinctly remembered the Bolden session, but not the name of the record company that catered primarily to the 'white' trade." Cornish said the cylinder was made between 1890-1898, titled a "novelty" tune, and did not carry Bolden's name. Taking Cornish's statements in connection with what has been revealed about the Louisiana Phonograph Company makes the existence of a Bolden cylinder quite believable, although the possibility of survival of such a relic seems very much less likely.

An answer to the riddle of the Bolden cylinder might surface as more information about the early Louisiana company activities, perhaps more song lists and documentation, becomes available. Certainly, the history of this venture provides insights into the early days of Edison's "perfected" machine, the social and cultural heritage of New Orleans, and the beginnings of mass-marketed recorded music by local artists. Opportunity still exists to add important details to that story as additional sources may come to light.

Dan Weisman.
District Favorites

In November, 1917, Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels ordered the closing of New Orleans' infamous red light district, Storyville, which for twenty years served as a lodestone for musicians perfecting a new style of music: jazz. Now, seventy years later, little remains of the original "District," as the musicians referred to it, except the stories and songs sown in the "sporting houses" and dance halls of that era. In conjunction with the Special Collections exhibit "Storyville," at the Howard Tilton Memorial Library, the Hogan Jazz Archive will offer a display of sheet music and photographs related to Storyville and the musicians who played there.

Trumpeter Buddy Bolden acted as the point man of early jazz in New Orleans, drawing crowds in such District spots as the Masonic and Globe Halls. In Alan Lomax's Mister Jelly Roll, Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton recalled Bolden as "the most powerful trumpet player I've ever heard or that was known...." Morton paid tribute to Bolden with a blues song published under the title "Buddy Bolden's Blues" as well as "St. Louis Tickle." Like so many surviving District songs, the original bordy lyrics were changed for public consumption.

The District's "sporting houses" drew many musical writers and performers, among them Clarence Williams, Tony Jackson, Jelly Roll Morton, and singer Mamie Desdume. In Al Rose's Storyville New Orleans, Clarence Williams claimed credit for introducing and popularizing imported songs like "Alexander's Ragtime Band," "That's-a-Plenty," and "Some of These Days." He learned the last song from famous songstress, Sophie Tucker, who visited New Orleans, ca. 1910. The cover of "Some of These Days," which by the time of this printing had become her signature tune, displays Miss Tucker's photograph. Another female artist, blues singer Mamie Desdume, sang in the "sporting houses" along Perdido Street. She wrote "Mamie's Blues (219 Blues)," which was later arranged and published by Jelly Roll Morton.

Some of the most famous artists to emerge from the District were the Storyville "professors," whose great skill at the piano made them highly sought after by patrons and owners of District establishments. Jelly Roll Morton, one of the greatest of the professors, rated Tony Jackson even more highly than himself. Jackson wrote "The Naked Dance," a fast tune played for a nude stage dance, but his most enduring piece was "Pretty Baby," which sold more than a million copies in its day. The most prolific publisher of Storyville music was Jelly Roll Morton. In his famous interview series with Alan Lomax, Morton reminisced about the District, its artists, and the music of those days. Morton popularized "Atlanta Blues (Make Me a Pallet on the Floor)," "Winin' Boy Blues," and "Mamma's Baby Boy," none of whose original vulgar lyrics made it into print.

Aside from the "sporting houses," numerous dance halls and cabarets flourished, establishing their own style of music. Unfortunately, very little has been written regarding music particular to these establishments. Al Rose refers to song and dance man Willie Jackson, who played in the cabarets and at West End. "She Keeps It Up All the Time" is ascribed to Jackson, but only the lyrics remain in print. Not much is known about the musical preferences of those who actually worked in the District's brothels, although Lulu White, owner and operator of Mahogany Hall, named "When the Moon Shines" as her favorite tune.

These songs and more will be on display at the Hogan Jazz Archive beginning January 13th.

Kahne Parsons

![Image of Hilma Burt's "Mirrored Ballroom," at 209 N. Basin Street. Plelanist is said to be Jelly Roll Morton.](From the Al Rose Collection)
The Local and International Dave Winston -- Part 2.

About the time Winston really began to study music, the New Orleans Rhythm Kings’ records became popular, and they were heard all over his French Quarter neighborhood. But Winston names no influences on his jazz playing, even though Jack Pettis, Don Murray, Charlie Cordilla, and Glenn Scoville recorded on saxophone with the Rhythm Kings in 1922, 1923, and 1925. The saxophone grew in popularity in New Orleans as it did elsewhere during the twenties, but Dave did not hear many of the local tenor soloists since he was too busy playing himself. However, a few like Cordilla, Eddie Powers, Andrew Morgan, and Davey Jones took solos on records, but Dave didn’t mention them. Dave did get every Rudy Wiedoeft record because he was virtually the first saxophone virtuoso. Coleman Hawkins’s style did not develop until the 1924-25 period when Louis Armstrong was in Fletcher Henderson’s band along with Hawkins. Frankie Trumbauer’s solos were well known among musicians, but he played C-melody sax. Even young Eddie Miller specialized in alto sax in New Orleans. Although Dave admired many jazz tenor players, he
had no model, not really playing that much jazz himself. There was always a clarinetist like Pinky Vidacovich or a saxophonist like Nina Picone in the band to take hot choruses.

Dave recorded on tenor saxophone with Sharkey Bonano on 21 March 1936 for Decca, so there exists an example of his early style. Although Dave is quite modest about his playing on the date, his solo on "Yes, She Do-No She Don't" invites comparison with the typical hot New Orleans tenor of that day. Fortunately, the 78 r.p.m. record has been reissued on The Old Masters 40, a 12" LP.

Dave spent the first ten years of his career in French Quarter nightclubs and what were called twenty-five cent clubs or two-bit clubs. At the latter, each item cost a quarter, be it a bowl of ice or a soft drink. Dave chuckled as he tried to recall the name of the "leading girl" at the time at the Shim Sham Club. He thought it was "Dimples" Dalton and that there was a six-girl chorus line (to use the terminology of the times). The band played some jazz, but the management did not want much music as it interfered with drinking. Long breaks were in order. Local people had a regular night of the week to come. Dave could almost tell if it was Wednesday or Friday by who was in the club. During Prohibition, the customers would bring flasks to their favorite club. Dave even led his own band at Pete Herman's, a famous French Quarter club which was run by a retired boxer whose renown as a game fighter lasts to this day. Herman was a former bantamweight champion.

In 1929, Dave made one of his rare trips out of town. He moved to Jackson, Mississippi, to join the band of former Ted Lewis bassist Harry Barth. Unfortunately, the hometown people did not turn out to hear Barth in spite of his success with Lewis, so Dave returned to New Orleans.

Dave also played lead with the Prima-Sharkey orchestra, best known for its work at the Hollywood. This dance hall drew huge crowds in spite of the heat. Dave remembered their uniforms were soaked. In fact, he enjoys the comfort of today's informality. The ten-piece band rehearsed in the Little Club where the well-known photograph was taken. In addition to Sharkey, Leon Prima and Dave, the orchestra had the future star and close friend of Dave, Irving Fazola.

Dave's longest job was with the Dawnbusters, an orchestra which was the result of musicians liking to play. Bassist Ray Benitez organized them into a band. Dave and fellow saxophonist Johnny Reininger wrote some arrangements which the band rehearsed like mad. The sax section might rehearse for six hours and then play a four-hour job without ever getting tired.

Ray got them a job at the Suburban Gardens, a notorious gambling house, and clarinetist Pinky Vidacovich was brought in to front the band. After six weeks, the club collapsed. Dave does not know if the band helped to get this result. The same band became the nucleus of the Dawnbusters under Pinky's leadership. WWL radio station wanted a staff band so they hired this band, adding a violinist. Around 1941-42, Dave guesses, they went on as a 6-9 a.m. feature named "the Dawnbusters" which made Orleanians wake up with a smile due to the band's music and comedy. Pinky Vidacovich is doubtless better remembered for his comedy routines than his clarinet playing. Al Hirt and singer Margie O'Dair, using the name "the Reknits Twins," reported society news at the race track, but all the musicians ad-libbed verbally and musically. The band included many well-known musicians. One of the most respected, both for his reading and improvising abilities, was clarinetist Irving Fazola, who mainly played baritone sax with this band. At the time, Fazola was having health problems, but he always made the job.

As Pinky was so busy writing material, acting, and playing, he turned over the direction of the band to Dave. Incidentally, Dave wrote almost all the band's arrangements except for stocks. The band did play the latest hits; Margie O'Dair of the O'Dair Sisters remembers their singing "Rosie the Riveter" during World War II. Margie, now best known as an actress, joined the show at an early age and recalls the fatherly treatment given her by the musicians.

Today, the Dawnbusters are recalled with deep affection by their listeners even though the program went off the air in 1959. Dave himself did not leave WWL until 1960, having been with the station for twenty-seven years. He, too, feels nostalgic for his happy times in Pinky's orchestra. This band, with some alterations in personnel, played many spot engagements. Dave did not say when they slept.

When Dave was with the Dawnbusters, he also worked all the road shows. He could play anything which he was asked to play and was in the so-called "Clique," i.e. the best musicians in town who always got the best work. They were all sight readers, so a circus or a Broadway show was a snap to play.

There were apparently very few arrangers in the early days of New Orleans jazz. Research might bring forth Jelly Roll Morton; Peter Bocage; Johnny Wiggs; Henri C. "Killdee" Holloway, who is little remembered today; Adolphe "Taton" Alexander, Sr.; Louis Dumaine, and Luis Russell as examples. Of course Russell, a native Panamanian, only lived in New Orleans from 1919 to 1924. Georgia-born Gene Gifford of Casa Loma fame was on WWL'sstaff in 1945, apparently briefly, but his and Russell's influence might have been felt better after they left New Orleans. We need to know more about New Orleans arrangers and, if possible, their actual arrangements. Surprisingly, recent Membership Directories of local 174-496 list many arrangers including veterans like Jac Assunto, Bill Bourgeois, and Godfrey Hirsch, so there is more work to be done than meets the ear.

Dave himself does not remember exactly when he started writing, but it was probably about five years from the time when he started in music. He always liked it, and wrote mostly for the Dawnbusters. He also composed "Mr. Brown Goes To Town," "Blowin' Off Steam," and "Swing! Like A Rusty gate" for Sharkey's recording sessions of 4 December 1936 and January 1937. Dave also sketched out trumpet, piano, and bass parts for dates. He was good at composing numbers which sounded like Dixieland. These examples are on Sharkey's LP The Old Masters 40, which is in the Archive for your listening pleasure.
Dave was first elected an officer of the American Federation of Musicians in 1935. He became president of the union's chapter in 1948, and later International Vice President. His life has even provided him with opportunities to be truly international. He regrets not having worked as a musician in more places, but he has had opportunities to travel widely and learn more about this world. Drummer and former-airline employee Leonard Ferguson tells about looking in a restaurant window in Tokyo to discover Dave waving his arm to catch Len's attention. What a coincidence! Certainly, Dave has become a traveler.

In 1969, Local 174, the white chapter, and local 496, the smaller black chapter, merged -- in Dave's opinion, to the advantage of both chapters. He continued as president, and Louis Cottrell, former president of 496, became Vice President of the combined membership of roughly 1,400. Dave is proud of both the benefits for the membership and the public. The AFM funds many jobs which have no admission, being of a charitable or educational nature. These are in hospitals, parks, schools, and many other places. The best known must be the Performance Tent in the French Market where various bands appear on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. Most people do not know that the musicians' union furnishes so many bands for so many worthy causes. Dave feels that too many people are anti-union or non-union in spite of the fact that the union simply aims for fair salaries and benefits, such as pensions for musicians, and for true professionalism. Dave says that he quit playing in 1964 except for a recording session with Al Hirt. Unfortunately, available discographies list no such session; however, Dave did record with Hirt in 1962. Perhaps, a search through old documents will reveal another Hirt session.

Turning eighty has not narrowed Dave's views. He does not want all the musicians of the revival to be what he describes as dinosaurs. He has kept an open mind and never ceases to admire the virtuosity of Al Hirt and the unique creativity of Raymond Burke, to give but two illustrations. Even stopping performing does not seem to have changed Dave. He is still a true professional with professional standards. He has continued his generosity, as evidenced by his cooperation in obtaining the Local Chapter's business records for the Hogan Jazz Archive, in his own donation, and in his support of worthwhile projects. He is a strong person who knows how to give!

Often listeners, such as musicians who do not improvise much, fans, and relatives, note many details that improvisers do not. Dave, for instance, might have been busy reading a lead alto part (or later a third tenor part), and then he might take a break while the others took hot choruses. He had plenty of time to listen and appreciate the nuances. This, his sharp ear and taste, honesty, and keen mind make him an invaluable observer. These things make for such a rich interview that this article only hints at its content and its feelings in music as well as in life.

Richard B. Allen

A Toast to the Staff

More often than not, articles appearing in The Jazz Archivist are designed to showcase important donations or to highlight recent processing and research projects, exhibits, and the like. In this instance, however, I would like to call attention to one of the greatest of all our treasures -- the staff. From the sage Richard B. Allen, the dean of the Jazz Archive team, to the waves of student workers who stay for a semester or two, all have contributed greatly toward the archive's goal of serving patrons efficiently and making them feel welcome. Such an esprit de corps derives less from stated policy than from the willingness of the individuals involved to become a part of the team, and the archive has been fortunate to attract the kind of people who appreciate what cooperation can accomplish.
Richard B. Allen has, of course, been with the Archive since its inception. Having served as curator to the collection from 1965 to 1990, he continues to expand the oral history holdings through processing and field work in his capacity as resident oral historian. Most recently, he spent a day in Orlando, Florida, interviewing Spencer Williams, the son of Clarence Williams and Eva Taylor, and his synopsis of this session will appear in future issues of this newsletter. Jazz writer Whitney Balliett once referred to Dick as "the curator of New Orleans jazz itself," and for four decades he has earned that title as a friend and confidant to musicians in New Orleans and elsewhere. This experience alone qualifies him as a walking repository of myriad facts and anecdotes, making a talk with Dick Allen a major part of almost any research project undertaken at the archive. Throughout the years, he has made himself available to all manner of researchers interested in New Orleans jazz, and the benefits of his encyclopedic knowledge of the subject are plain to anyone seeking guidance to the collection or a deeper understanding of the musicians and their music. As a writer, he contributes regularly to The Jazz Archivist (see part 2 on Dave Winstein, this issue), crafts liner-notes for various record projects, and is collaborating on several books due for publication. His influence helped to shape the collection at the Hogan Jazz Archive, and he remains to this day a touchstone for patrons of long standing and newcomers alike.

Alma Williams, administrative assistant and associate curator of graphics, has been with the archive for more than a decade and is the very embodiment of continuity, having "broken in" more than one curator in her time. Much of the daily administration of archival business relies on her, as well as responsibility for the organization and preservation of the graphics collection, including film and video. She is a frequent contributor to the newsletter and selects images for the "Picturing the Past" column. Alma's knowledge of the collection is intimate, but she does more than guide patrons to appropriate research materials. For example, earlier this year a researcher from West Germany, Matthias Becker, spent several months in the United States gathering information on jazz vocalists. As anyone who has made such whirlwind trips can attest, the vagaries of research and travel make advance schedules difficult to meet, and Mr. Becker found himself calling from Dallas the day before his arrival without the benefit of local accommodations. Within half an hour, Alma had made all the necessary arrangements for an on-campus location which was comfortable but not expensive, ensuring that Mr. Becker's residency at the archive would get off to a smooth start. Alma's presence at the archive is evident in most of the exhibits on display, in the database inventory of the graphics collection which she created, and in the greeting she extends as she registers patrons. Her interest in sacred music was largely responsible for the organization of the archive's Gospel music collection, which has grown considerably in the last few years. Through her dedication to the archive, Alma has provided a shining example not only for the staff and student workers who come to her for orientation but also to anyone interested in the preservation or illumination of the jazz story.

The most recent addition to the staff has been Daniel Weisman, who oversees the recorded sound materials -- phonodiscs, tapes, phonocylinders, and piano rolls. Dan holds an M.A. in History from the University of Wisconsin and found the transition into the world of jazz archiving a natural extension of research interests developed while practicing journalism and organizing a video production company. An abiding love of music and a curiosity about the conditions which color it has motivated several of his video programs and may also be seen in his piece for the present issue of the newsletter -- "The Louisiana Phonograph Company" -- which grew out of a personal exploration of the background of early recording technology. Dan has also been assisting Dick Allen with the transcription of oral history interviews and has completed an inventory of over five hundred radio programs done by Harry Souchon and donated by his estate in 1984. Like others on the Hogan Jazz Archive staff, Dan has developed an enthusiasm for New Orleans jazz while on the job, an inevitability, it would seem, for anyone working here.

Since June 1987, the archive has been graced with the presence of Kahne Parsons, a native Louisianian, who serves as associate curator of printed and manuscript materials, consisting primarily of the sheet music collection and elements of the vertical files. She is completing an M.A. in History at the University of New Orleans, where she is specializing in social and cultural history, and plans to continue for the doctorate. Her article on the insights to be derived from sheet music cover art in the last newsletter shows how she has combined her academic and archival interests to good effect. Kahne handles all requests for sheet music and has developed an inventory system in database for unprocessed materials which has made them accessible to patrons for the first time. The system she has devised includes entry according to title, author, cover artist, and song-type, providing greater flexibility for patrons working from limited information. Given her value to the archive, one can only hope that her doctoral work will not be of too short a duration, for Kahne has brought stability to her position after several years of rapid turnover, and she has become an important part of the archive team. Her most recent project is an exhibit of sheet music and photography reminiscent of "The District" from 1890-1917 which is scheduled for mid-January, 1990 (see elsewhere, this issue).

In addition to staff per se, the Hogan Jazz Archive relies upon the services of several student workers each semester. Chief among these is "super student" Dirk Van Tuernenhout, who has been with the archive for several years and who functions at the staff level. Dirk, a native of Mechelen, Belgium, is working on a doctorate in Anthropology at Tulane and was referred to the archive by his predecessor, Chris Pool, who is now a visiting assistant professor of Anthropology at the University of Kentucky. Dirk's list of contributions to the archive are almost too numerous to mention. Among other things, he shares responsibility with Kahne for production of the newsletter twice a year; he is currently in the midst of a cross-indexing of oral history transcripts, a huge project; he has assisted with the reading
of the sheet music shelf-list to isolate missing or misplaced titles; and his facility with database operations has made him advisor to the entire staff when problems arise. Furthermore, as an extremely urbane European, he provides an often refreshing alternative point of view on aspects of American culture that are frequently taken for granted. His work at the archive has been very much a two-way street, allowing him insights into one of the more fascinating strands in the annals of American culture, while at the same time offering the staff the benefits of European detachment in his observations. Of course, Dirk's command of languages is yet another of his talents available to the archive. Many Europeans who do not speak English visit the archive annually, and through Dirk the necessary connections and exchange of information can be made without difficulty.

Undergraduate student workers are also an important part of the archive's work force. Most often, they are employed to assist the associate curators with ongoing projects, such as the reading of the shelf-lists, xerographing and filing of clippings, preparation of inventory lists, and fetching for patrons. Eric Jones, for example, has concentrated on sheet music processing and cross-reference forms. Jonathan Thames (who also speaks several languages) xerographs clippings from newspapers, files cross-reference forms, and was extremely helpful in orienting Italian Gerardo Lacoucel, a pianist and choir master whose command of English was limited, during his trip to the archive. Laurie Davidson has been working with Alma Williams on graphics inventories, dovetailing with her personal interest in photography. Nilton Gonzales, a business major whose computer skills are manifest, has expanded the Subjects File Index to list individual folders within general categories. Tyson Daugherty, a devotee of New Orleans music, pulls and files materials for patrons. His studies of Russian were put to the test during a visit from Lev Lebedev, a gifted clarinetist from the Soviet Union, earlier in the Fall semester. Pianist John Royen brought Lev into the archive to listen to recordings of Lorenzo Tio, Jr., Leon Roppolo, Sidney Arodin, and Charlie Cordilla — rare items in his homeland. Lev had no trouble appreciating the music, but had problems communicating with the staff until Tyson became involved, penetrating the language barrier to the extent that a tour to the French Quarter jazz clubs was undertaken the following night.

One can readily appreciate what the staff has to offer the Hogan Jazz Archive — many talents from command of languages and computer skills to that extra sense of application which can always be found in a successful team effort. But the archive reciprocates. For many, especially student workers, their work here provides opportunities to meet patrons from all parts of the globe, a prospect which is challenging and exciting for the entire staff. They also gain exposure to the jazz heritage, some for the first time, and, like many who preceded them, are touched and changed by it. This is something our workers can always take with them, and for what they have given us, we are grateful.

Bruce B. Raeburn.

Picturing the Past.

A 1930 West Coast band led by New Orleanian Clem Raymond, cl, who was a student of Papa Luis Tio and Prof. Jim Humphrey. The only other musicians identified are Wade Whaley, second from left, and Kid Ory, tb. Courtesy of Tom Stoddard.
A Word From The Friends
A Jazz Holiday, 1989

On the night of Tuesday, December 12, from five until ten p.m., the Friends of the Jazz Archive in conjunction with the Louis Armstrong Foundation, the Louisiana State Museum, the George H. Buck Foundation, and the New Orleans Jazz Club presented a special evening of Holiday celebration at the Old U.S. Mint on Esplanade Street. For the third consecutive year, jazz lovers from throughout the city and the world gathered to usher in the holiday season in true New Orleans style. The musical program included something for everybody, beginning with pianist John Royen, then on to the Creole Rice Jazz Band led by Jacques Gauthe, and continuing with the big band sounds of Dr. Karl Koenig’s North Shore Musicum Jazz Antiqua. Permanent exhibits of the New Orleans Jazz Club Collection at the Louisiana State Museum were open for inspection, along with the Mardi Gras exhibit. There was also a "Jazz Christmas Card" display, and several video offerings, including "The Mystery of the Purple Rose" on A.J. Piron, "Jazz Paths," which featured overviews of the collections of the Hogan Jazz Archive and the Louisiana State Museum, and "A Collection of New Orleans Jazz Films" put together by Don Perry.

Other attractions were performances by the McDonough 15 Elementary School Band under the direction of Walter Payton, dance by the Academy of Ballet and Arts with Lisa Draghetti Dixon supervising, and a heartwarming finale by the Holy Hill Singers of St Monica Catholic Church directed by Veronica Downs. Refreshments were served, and local favorite "Mr. Bingle" was on hand to entertain the children in the audience. Given the vast range of entertainment available, it was no wonder everyone found a way to enjoy themselves. To commemorate the event, a special plaque was commissioned listing the names of the numerous donors whose contributions made this celebration possible. In addition, Jefferson Parish Educational Television captured the event on video, copies of which will be used to promote membership in the Friends organization.

The Friends will also participate in the mounting of an exhibit for the annual convention of the International Association of Jazz Educators, to be held at New Orleans’ Hyatt Regency Hotel, January 11-14, 1990. On the opening day, there will be a session in the Poydras Room of the Hyatt from noon until one p.m., entitled "Jazz Research in New Orleans." Bruce Boyd Raeburn and Richard Allen of the Hogan Jazz Archive will join Don Marquis of the Louisiana State Museum and Dr. Karl Koenig to familiarize IAJE members with jazz collections in New Orleans and the surrounding area and to comment on local research opportunities and work in progress. The first day of the convention will be open to the public, who are encouraged to attend.

Eddie Edwards
Chairman, Friends of the Jazz Archive

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