THE MEXICAN BAND LEGEND: MYTH, REALITY, AND MUSICAL IMPACT;
A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

When the origins or history of New Orleans jazz are discussed there is quite often a reference to "the Mexican Band." The Mexican Band referred to is ostensibly the Eighth Cavalry Mexican Band under the direction of Sig. Encarnacion Payen, playing at the World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition which opened in New Orleans on December 16, 1884. Various connections between the presence of this band and the ultimate development of jazz in New Orleans are often cited.

The following assertions are the accepted "facts" used to support such connections: 1) Surplus musical instruments discarded by the band were available at bargain prices at the close of the fair; 2) The band introduced a plucking method of playing the string bass which became the predominant jazz mode of playing that instrument; 3) Sobre las Olas (Over the Waves) was first introduced at the Exposition by the Band, and ultimately became a permanent part of the New Orleans jazz repertoire even though it was a waltz; 4) Its composer Juventino Rosas was the concert master of the band; 5) Rosas was also the son-in-law of Band leader Encarnacion Payen; 6) The band broke up in New Orleans and many members of the band remained in the City and became part of the first generation of
jazz musicians. It was often thought that Luis and Lorenzo Tio studied at the Conservatorio Nacional de Musica in Mexico City and came to New Orleans with the Mexican Band (They did neither, but the Tio family history, with its New Orleans-Mexico-New Orleans odyssey, is more fascinating than the legend). Bunk Johnson had a Mexican music teacher named Wallace Cutchev. Chink Martin played string instruments in a Mexican band and remembers the whole northeastern part of the French Quarter as being inhabited by Spaniards, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans. Also, Eddie Edwards remembered one of his music teachers, trombonist Manuel Guerra, as being Mexican. Louis Tio, Jr. noted a close family friendship with "Mexican Band" member Louis Chaligny, who remained in New Orleans. Florencio Ramos is also supposed to have arrived with "the Mexican Band" and to have been New Orleans' first saxophone player. When speaking of "the Mexican Band," Monk Hazel mentions a cornet player named Lopez who came with the band and remained in New Orleans for a few years. Finally, Jack Laine and Jake Sciambria remembered three musicians who played with the Mexican band: Vascaro, a saxophonist; an uncle of Alcide "Yellow" Nunez; and Ramos's father. (Sciambria's reference to Ramos's father is an enigma. However, it is not a personal recollection, but rather second-hand information which he got from Charlie Wagner. As such there is a good possibility of some degree of error having crept into the account. Also, earlier in the interview Laine corrected Sciambria concerning Nunez's uncle rather than his father. Additionally, it must be noted that this was not a formal interview but actually a casual conversation.)

Although I initially accepted these specific connections (as unproven as some were) as fairly reasonable, I finally decided to address them and several of the other influences that are the most important long-term consequences of the Mexican Band's visit. This article containing the initial findings of my research is presented with the hope that more information may surface as a result.

The surplus instruments story has Jack Laine and Dave Perkins raising a considerable amount of money, going to an instrument sale after the fair, and purchasing all the surplus instruments left by the Mexican Band. (Al Rose recalls this as being told to him by Laine, but he thinks that one should put more credence in other accounts given by Laine on several different occasions.) This story conflicts with a more reasonable version that Laine relates in several interviews, that his father went to a general sale on the fairgrounds after the Exposition and came back with a field drum for him, and that he was eleven years old at the time.

The perennial story of the pizzicato string bass technique being introduced by the Mexican Band is not very feasible if the band is Payen's, since their photographs show that that band did not have string basses. Also, this connection or derivation is not mentioned in either of two articles dealing with New Orleans string bass playing. However, this story becomes more probable if the use of the term "the Mexican Band" meant, among New Orleans musicians, several Mexican Bands, visiting and residing in New Orleans over a thirty-five year period. Peripheral to this (but definitely on the subject of Mexican lineage of New Orleans string bass playing) is a biographical entry on
Paul Dominguez, Sr., whose father Rafael came from Mexico in 1864. It notes that Dominguez was "a classical musician who frequently played jobs with jazzmen. Did not pluck, but bowed the string bass. Frequently seen with John Robichaux in the early 1900s." However, since Dominguez, the musician, was not from Mexico, this is largely irrelevant, although in need of mention.

*Over the Waves* may have been introduced by the Mexican Band at the fair, but it would have had to have been in manuscript form, since it was not published (and usually not considered to have been composed) until 1891. It was more likely introduced in New Orleans later by another Mexican musical group with Rosas as a member. However, under any circumstances it was definitely a New Orleans favorite. It was Henry Brunies's theme song, and was recorded and played extensively by both Sharkey Bonano and George Lewis. An early waltz folio from the Johnny DeDroit repertoire shows it to be a well used favorite.

According to local tradition Rosas came with the Mexican Band as its concert master. This is neither confirmed nor denied by a short biographical sketch of Rosas that states that he did briefly join a military band but gives no details relating to New Orleans. The same biography also has Rosas as being unmarried until his early death at age thirty in 1894. However, he did experience a tragic romance which could have possibly been with Payen's daughter as he quit the referenced military band before his enlistment terminated. References in other more complete biographies tend to identify someone else as Rosas's tragic love interest, but there could have been more than one.

I have not yet uncovered any hard evidence that Payen's band broke up in New Orleans. In fact, the only reference to a Mexican band breaking up in New Orleans concerns the Mexican band that played at West End Park sometime after the fair. In an interview conducted by the Hogan Jazz Archive with Jack Laine, he states that the band is the one that was led by Vascaro, who later worked with Laine and played clarinet and saxophone; beyond that, the band is not identified in a specific manner. There are, however, many New Orleans musicians who are thought to have played with Mexican Bands. Even if one recognizes only Payen's band, these two seemingly irreconcilable facts are easily handled if one looks at the size of that band and realizes that a six month long performance schedule would possibly have required at least some local substitutes. Given the success and popularity of this band, to have been even a substitute player with it would have been a
structure similar to a "flying horse" or carousel enclosure, used to exhibit minerals from Mexico. The other was a very large, ornate barracks building measuring approximately one hundred fifty feet square and at least two stories tall over one third of its size. This building was used to house the Mexican personnel for the fair. Because of the size of this structure it could accommodate many people, and it surely did. Some of the occupants appear to have been the members of a succession of Mexican musical groups. The most evident was Payen's Eighth Cavalry Band. Even before the Exposition formally opened on December 16, 1884, the Eighth Cavalry Band was playing at the Exposition grounds in front of the Mexican Barracks. On December 1, they played to celebrate the inauguration in Mexico on that day of President Porfirio Diaz; the performance was visually depicted in Leslie's Illustrated. This band was also featured in two published photographs connected with the Exposition, one in a book entitled View Album, World Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, and another on the cover of a series of "Mexican" sheet music put out jointly by two New York publishers. There were also published descriptions of the band's performances.

The prominence of this band in photographs and news accounts has obscured the fact that there were other "Mexican Bands" in New Orleans both during and after the Exposition. In a fairly detailed biography of Juventino Rosas, reference is made to Rosas's visit to New Orleans with La Orquesta Tipica Mexicana, a fourteen piece orchestra of which he was co-director. Rosas and the Orquesta came to New Orleans during 1885 as one of several stops on a tour of Mexican and southwestern U. S. cities. The book's author, Jesus Frausto, believes that, while in New Orleans, Rosas - predominantly a violinist - probably joined the Fortieth Battalion Band as a trombonist, along with his friend Norberto Carillo who also played trombone. Over the years, Carillo and Rosas were members of both the Orquesta Tipica and a small group led by Jose Reina which was of similar size and instrumentation to early New Orleans ragtime and jazz bands.

La Orquesta Tipica Mexicana also appears to have toured the United States before and after playing at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. My guess at this stage of preliminary research is that Over the Waves was introduced in New Orleans during part of that tour.
When Monk Hazel talks about Florencio Ramos, he says "he came here with the Mexican National Band, Mexican Government Band". The Mexican band that came to New Orleans for the Armistice Day parade in 1920 was known as the Mexican National Band and Hazel may be calling the earlier band by the name of the later band; but a Junius Hart music publisher's flier circa 1890 advertises their Mexican Music series noting that "these were a part of the Repertoire of the Great Mexican National Band." Either Payen's band was often referred to in this way or the reference was to another band that played at the Exposition.

The Mexican Band that played at West End Park is possibly a still different Mexican group. Laine says that the band played there for a year after "the fair" and that the band broke up in New Orleans. The circumstances of the breakup of the Mexican group that Rosas played with on tour and in Chicago are unknown, so perhaps it occurred in New Orleans, making this the group that played at West End for a year, and then disbanded.

Another band that may have a direct connection with these others is a group that played in West End Park led by musician and musician's union official Ralph Chabao (later supplanted by Emile Tosso's Orchestra), which may have been put together partially from members of the dissolved "Mexican Band." Again, the musicians described could be from any of several "Mexican Bands."

When Eddie Edwards discussed Manuel Guerra, one of his music teachers, he also mentioned that Guerra had come to New Orleans as a member of the Yradier Band. He then goes on to explain that this was the band that played at the Exposition in 1888, and was led by Sebastien E. de Yradier, composer of the big hit "La Paloma." His 1888 date is probably an error, but perhaps not. The group could have come to play at the North, Central and South American Exposition which followed the Cotton Exposition running from November 10, 1885, to April 1, 1886 and toured in the area a while longer. Alternatively, it could have been a touring group on its way to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago or any number of other events in the United States.

Chink Martin recalls large numbers of Mexicans in the northeastern section of the French Quarter at the turn of the century. Apparently there were musical groups that had members who were Mexicans, Spaniards, and Puerto Ricans, mixed with local musicians of all descriptions. Martin also recalls playing guitar - his first instrument - with many such groups, and his vivid recollection extended to singing two of the songs which were played by these bands. These musicians played together in many combinations, and some of these were surely known as "Mexican Bands."

Additional musical groups continued to come to New Orleans in the early twentieth century. In 1907 the Mexican Artistic Quintet, from the National Conservatory of Mexico City, played in New Orleans on a regular basis over an extended period of time. The group achieved enough local success to gain repeated appearances at social clubs and a daily engagement as well. In September of 1919, the New Orleans Industrial Exposition was put on under the auspices of the New Orleans Teocalli, Order of Ancient and Modern America. This eight-day exposition was presented by the New Orleans chapter of a group of representative men of...
North, Central, and South America. It had a music committee headed by the New Orleans composer, publisher, and music printer Henri Wehrman, and featured music by the Exposition Concert Band with vocal solos by various Latin-American Artists. With New Orleanian’s penchant for simplification, this too could have been thought of as another “Mexican Band.”

The last Mexican band to visit New Orleans and to have possibly influenced the vernacular music of the time was the Mexican National Band mentioned earlier. This one-hundred member band, under the direction of Malquiades Campos, came to the city to play for the Armistice Day parade on December 11, 1920. It found an extremely receptive audience among New Orleanians and stayed to play concerts and dances. Even though it was predominantly a brass band and marched in parades, it also had several string bass players that may have affected the still evolving sound of New Orleans music. The band had been organized in 1916 and was reported to include several who had been members of Payen’s band in New Orleans “thirty years earlier.” (If the reporter of the Times Picayune was correct, Payen’s band may have stayed in the city for several years following the Cotton Exposition.)

Although the extent and cause of the Mexican influence on New Orleans music has yet to be sorted out, at least one observer confirms the multiple “Mexican Band” situation that I have found. In 1960, Camille Duchesne Gilbert was interviewed by D. Clive Hardy at Tulane University. She had moved to New Orleans at the turn of the century, but had lived in Natchez, Mississippi, in her youth. One of her remembrances was hearing “the Mexican Band” play on a showboat on the river in Natchez. In identifying the band, she said that it was “the Mexican Band” that played at the Cotton Centennial Exposition, the first Mexican band to play in New Orleans.

Obviously more research needs to be done for a clearer picture of the Mexican Band(s) and their influence in New Orleans. This additional work falls into three categories: 1) Extensive newspaper research in New Orleans; 2) Research in Mexico regarding the bands, orchestras, and individuals that came to New Orleans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and 3) Research and analysis of the Mexican music and the subsequent New Orleans music which it may have affected. I am currently pursuing all three approaches and will present additional findings when I reach them.

However, at this time it seems safe to draw one conclusion - that the single “Mexican Band” theory cannot begin to account for the sustained and multifaceted influence of Mexican musicians on the New Orleans music scene in the period 1884-1920.

FLORENCIO RAMOS

For a detailed biography of a person associated with “the Mexican Band” legend, I chose Florengo (sic) Ramos, for several reasons. He was supposed to have come to New Orleans with “the Mexican Band.” Also, he was immediately interesting because his first name was so similar to Lorenzo Tio’s and his last name was the same as the famous gin fizz. As a jazz musician, he was fairly obscure even though he has a photograph and an actual date of death in New Orleans Jazz, A Family Album. As a saxophonist myself, I was particularly intrigued by the often asserted but undocumented claim that he was the first saxophone player in New Orleans.
In addition, there was the question of "Sou Sou" Ramos, the guitar and mandolin player. Even less was known about him, and it was suggested that possibly he and Florencio were one and the same.

Florencio Ramos was born in Cadereyta Jimenez, Nueva Leon, Mexico on February 23, 1861. He emigrated to the United States from Monterey, by train to Laredo, Texas, arriving August 13, 1884. It is not completely clear why he came to New Orleans. Legend has it that he came here with "the Mexican Band" (generally assumed to be Payen's Eighth Cavalry Band) in 1884; however, there are several things concerning this legend that still remain in doubt. First, there seems to be no real proof of his arrival with the band. Second, in a joint interview with Jack Laine, pianist and attorney Jake Sciambra mentions that Ramos's father came to New Orleans with the Mexican Band. Third, two very different photographs of the Mexican Band, one from a sheet music cover, and one from a book of views from the fair, do not positively reveal Florencio Ramos as a member. In the book there is a young musician at the top of one photograph who may well be Ramos; also, another man, considerably older than Ramos would have been at the time, has enough of a resemblance that he could be Ramos's father.

However, there are things that confirm Ramos's arrival at the time of the Exposition and he may have come with a Mexican Band other than Payen's. Family members attest to the fact that he arrived in New Orleans with "the Mexican Band." Drummer Monk Hazel's recollection that "he came here with the Mexican National Band, Mexican Government Band," is based, he claimed, on first-hand knowledge. "The only reason I happen to know about it was from old man Ramos himself, and that had been several years after he'd settled here, with that band." Dave Weinstein, current president of the AFM Local 174-496, remembers Ramos well, and remembers the story being that Ramos came here for a concert with the Mexican Band and that, with immigration laws less stringent at the time, he decided to stay.

The government documents and the information extant on his early life in New Orleans also tend to confirm that Ramos came to New Orleans at the time of the opening of the Exposition. He arrived in Laredo, Texas, from Mexico in August of 1884; the Exposition opened in December of the same year. While there is no entry in the Board's city directory for Ramos until 1893, there is evidence of his presence in New Orleans between his arrival in Laredo and that first city directory listing. In 1886, Ramos published in New Orleans a mazurka for piano entitled Dorados Enseños, or Golden Dreams (a local archive has a copy inscribed to his niece Sahara Ramos Cadesayta on February 5, 1886). The earliest known photograph of Ramos was taken in New Orleans at the Walter Sherburne Photographic Art Gallery, No. 195 Canal St. City directory listings show this firm in business at that location from 1884 to 1887. The 1900 Census has Ramos arriving in the United States in 1890, although his Declaration of Intention in 1907 and his Petition for Naturalization in 1912 both mention the earlier arrival in 1884. A logical explanation of this apparent contradiction is that Ramos played with the Mexican Band in and around New Orleans until some time just before 1890, and then perhaps even went back to Mexico. He then permanently settled in the United States, probably New Orleans, in 1890.
From 1893 through 1895, in his first listings in the city directory, Ramos lived at two addresses in the French Quarter in the general area that Chink Martin remembers as being Mexican and Spanish. In 1894, Ramos married Adelbertha Weiner Reagan, a widow with three children. Together they had two additional children and eventually resided at 1043 Carondelet St., which Mrs. Ramos operated as a rooming house. Prior to 1909 Ramos played 2nd flute for four seasons with the orchestra at the French Opera House; he also played flute for ten years with the Tulane Theater Orchestra. He played four short seasons with a symphony orchestra directed by Ferdinand Dunkley, and additionally spent some time with a military band on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, which may account for his absence from the city directory between 1902 and 1906. During 1909, he traveled with the Innes Band as it toured the American West. After the tour was over, he seems to have returned to New Orleans. While with the Innes Band, he wrote to Walter Rothwell, Director of the St. Paul Symphony Orchestra, requesting a position as flautist, bass clarinetist, or saxophonist. On December 9, 1912, Florencio Ramos became a naturalized U. S. citizen. He may have left New Orleans again in either 1912 or 1920 although perhaps these years are just omissions from the city directory. During his life in New Orleans, Florencio Ramos, like most musicians, played every type of job imaginable. He played for the circus, and he played salon music with a quartet in an alcove at D. H. Holmes Restaurant. He continued to play at the theaters, and was a member of at least two jazz band/dance orchestras. He led a small group at Fabacher’s Restaurant on Royal and Iberville in 1913. In a photograph taken November 27, 1923 during a Musicians Union concert in Lafayette Square, he is playing tenor saxophone. He was at the La Vida nightclub with clarinetist/proprietor Tony Parenti, and later he played alto saxophone at the La Vida Ballroom with Charlie Fishbein’s orchestra, a group which included among others, drummer/music dealer Harold Peterson and banjoist Stalebread Lacombe. Notices in the Prelude show him substituting for other players at the Loew’s State Theatre in June and December of 1928, and in July 1929 he played saxophone in Emile Tosso’s Concert Band in Audubon Park.

During the late 1920’s Ramos was semi-retired as a musician and seems to have developed a reputation as a notable music teacher. Members of his family remember him as Professor Ramos and he had a music room and studio in his final residence at 4505 Dryades St. Guitarist and bassist Al Hessemere remembers him as a teacher of piano and accordion. Florencio Ramos died at the age of 68 on July 5, 1931. Ramos, a founder of Local 174, was specially honored by the Union at his funeral. By order of John DeDroit, President, and R. L. Chabao, Secretary, the burial committee of Local 174 was notified to appear for the funeral service.

There has always been some confusion about the two Ramos’s, Florencio and “Sou Sou,” and there are enough excellent red herrings to convince even a fairly conscientious scholar that they are one and the same.
In *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album*, Florencio is listed as a saxophone player and "Sou Sou" is listed as a guitarist. In the picture of "Sou Sou" playing with Stalebread Lacoume and an otherwise unidentified group, "Sou Sou" is playing the mandolin, not the guitar, which probably indicates that he played both. Florencio also played both the guitar and mandolin. The picture of Florencio from the 1880's shows him to have many physical similarities of size and build with the "Sou Sou" in the Lacoume photo. In the casually dressed Lacoume band, "Sou Sou" has a cigarette or small cigar in his mouth, and Florencio was known to be an obsessive smoker. Florencio's father's name was Jesus and Florencio's middle name was probably Jesus; given a Spanish pronunciation of Jesus, "Sou Sou" seems a logical nickname. Finally, both men were associated and photographed at one time or another with Stalebread Lacoume. Nonetheless it is clear that Florencio and "Sou Sou" were not the same person (see attached biography of Joseph "Sou Sou" Oramous).

According to family members, Florencio Ramos played the mandolin, guitar, banjo, piano, bassoon, and saxophone. His letters and papers indicate that he also played bass clarinet and flute. Recent interviews with Dave Winston and Harold Peterson also corroborate some of these; Al Hessemmer adds the accordion to the list. The instruments which Ramos played (keyboards, strings, and woodwinds) plus his compositional and teaching skills make him a prime candidate for having studied at the Conservatorio Nacional de Musica, because of both his wide range of expertise and the curriculum at the Conservatorio at the time. Attendance at the Conservatorio was, until recently, thought to be part of the Tio family story, but since both the Ramos and Tio legends were extremely similar, they may have overlapped and become confused over the years.

The final question left in doubt is whether Ramos was, in fact, New Orleans' first saxophonist. Both Winston, himself a saxophonist, and Peterson feel that he was. Winston said that he was a fine legitimate saxophone player. Peterson even went so far as to say that "he brought it here with him, wherever he came from." Monk Hazel said that "when he originally came

Ramos (fourth from left, sitting) with the Innes Band in 1909. Courtesy Adele Ramos Salazar.
Ramos Orchestra at the Original Fabacher's Restaurant in June 1913. Ramos is sitting at the far left. Photo courtesy of the Russell Levy Collection.

Musicians Union Band in Lafayette Square, November 1923. Ramos (middle row, second from left) with Tony Parenti (top left) and George Brunies (trombone, top row). Photo courtesy Al Rose Collection.
here he was the only saxophone player in New Orleans..." Jack Laine recalled a clarinetist and saxophonist named Vascaro who led a Mexican band that played at West End after the Exposition, and who later played with Laine; however, he does not seem to have remained on the local scene very long since there is no other mention of him by anyone else. While there were probably saxophonists playing here (in such bands as Gilmore's and Sousa's and, of course, the Mexican Band, as well as for performances of works such as Bizet and Gireaud's L'Arlésienne Suite No. 2), there seems to be little evidence uncovered as of yet that identifies any known resident saxophonist(s) earlier than Ramos. Peterson, whose father also played in the Tulane Theater Orchestra-and probably at the same time as Ramos-said that people in New Orleans just seemed to like clarinets. Hazel concurs that "in those days, that far back they always used clarinets, no saxophones." So, it appears that Ramos, definitely playing saxophone in 1909 and somewhat earlier (perhaps as early as 1884 if Peterson and Hazel are correct) was probably the first resident saxophonist in New Orleans.

JOSEPH "SOU SOU" ORAMOUS

Joseph "Sou Sou" Oramous (pronounced "o-ray-mus") has to my knowledge no association with "the Mexican Band," but his biography is presented in this context for the purpose of answering the question of whether he and Florencio Ramos (pronounced "rah-mos") are one and the same.

"Sou Sou" Oramous was born in 1879, in lower St. Bernard Parish, immediately downriver from New Orleans, and was part of the first generation of New Orleanians associated with what was or was to become jazz music. He was the son of Bernard Oramous and Matilda Baldo and had six brothers and two sisters. While all his male siblings were musicians of some sort, he and his brother James (known as Jim) apparently pursued music to a greater degree than the others. They had a musical group known as the Oramous Band that included Jim on string bass, "Sou Sou" on guitar, and Joe Gasephi on fiddle. "Sou Sou" also played in the Sonora Orchestra with some of the musicians associated with Jack Laine. In addition to Oramous on guitar, the group included Eddie Benton, trombone; Joe Husson, fiddle; Manuel Mello, cornet; Leonce Mello, string bass; and "Ragbaby" Stevens, drums.

"Sou Sou" Oramous apparently also played with musicians who became members of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band. In a joint interview with ODJB drummer Tony Sbarboro and ODJB trombonist Emile Christian, Sbarboro offers "Sou Sou" as one of the names that Christian is trying to remember, although it is not the name Christian is looking for. ODJB cornetist Nick LaRocca remembers a band from 1902 to 1906 which included himself, Willie Guitar on bass, Harry Nunez on violin, and Susu Raymos (sic) on guitar. The band "played in the downtown section, that is, way down below Elysian Fields Avenue." Even though LaRocca drops the "O" from "Sou Sou's" last name, as does the listing in the Family Album, he is almost surely recalling "Sou Sou" Oramous because the rest of the last name is pronounced as the family pronounces it. Also, in all of the city directory listings from 1889 to 1927, the members of the Oramous family live in the area below Elysian Fields Avenue.

The only available picture of "Sou Sou" in a band shows him playing mandolin in Stalebread Lacoume's group for a family picnic at West End in 1906. He played with Lacoume between 1904 and 1908. However, he was also photographed playing guitar in a large municipal type band led by Leonard Broekhoven. Another bandleader that Oramous may have been affiliated with was Alex "King" Watzke.

Like many other musicians in the city at the time, all the men in the Oramous family (with one exception) were employed in the manual trades, ranging from laborers to longshoremen and mechanics. "Sou Sou" also seems to have spent some of his time as a peddler, probably of coal and firewood. Joseph "Sou Sou" Oramous died on December 2, 1925 at the age of 46 and is buried in St. Vincent de Paul cemetery, in the same area of the city where he lived all his life.

While members of the Oramous family are scattered around the entire New Orleans metropolitan area, much of the family lives in St. Bernard parish, which is where Bernard Oramous lived before moving his family to the lower part of New Orleans during the 1880's. Interestingly enough, the family musical tradition is carried on by saxophonist and actor/comedian John Larroquette, a native New Orleanian who is "Sou Sou's" great nephew.

Dr. Jack Stewart
Note: In addition to those interviewed, the author wishes to acknowledge the assistance provided by Dr. Bruce Raeburn and Alma Williams of the Hogan Jazz Archive, Marielos Hernandez-Lehmann and Guillermo Nañez-Falcón of the Latin American Library, Diana Rose and Sylvia Metzinger of Rare Books and Manuscripts, and Joan Caldwell of the Louisiana Collection, all at Tulane. He would also like to thank Dodie Platou, Dr. Alfred Lemmon, and John McGill of the Historic New Orleans Collection for their help with photographic resources, as well as Colin Hamer and the staff of the Louisiana Division at the New Orleans Public Library and D. Clive Hardy of the University of New Orleans Archives. For assistance with Spanish translation, the author is indebted to Jana Napoli, Victoria Martin, and Shael Herman. Finally, he wishes to thank Dr. Lawrence Gushee of the University of Illinois, Charles Chamberlain and Tad Jones for their many suggestions and provision of source materials. For those who would like a footnoted version of this article, please write to the Hogan Jazz Archive.

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Letters to the Editor.

Dear Sirs:

I was saddened, but hardly surprised, by Bruce Boyd Raeburn's report on the dispute over the importance of the Original Dixieland Jazz band's contribution to the music at a recent conference.

Whatever the case, it is simply not true that it became the first jazz band to record only because of the "racist bias of the recording industry at the time." It is no doubt true that many, if not most, recording executives of the day were racially biased, but it is also true that, as has always been the case, they would record anybody they could make a buck on.

By the turn of the century there was in the United States a vogue for black entertainment which would reach boom proportions by the late 1920s, when a dozen all-black shows were in the works. Black entertainers like Ernest Hogan and Bert Williams were very popular with white vaudeville audiences in the early years of the century. The black bandleader Wilbur Sweatman cut a limited edition recording of the black composer Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" in 1903 or 1904. Bert Williams recorded his famous "Nobody" in 1913.

James Reese Europe recorded his hit "Too Much Mustard" for Victor in the same year when, as leader of the back-up group for Vernon and Irene Castle, he was one of the best-known bandleaders in the country. In 1919 he made 24 sides, and would have gone on to be a major figure in the dance band world had he not been killed.

Sweatman started recording in earnest in 1916 and went on recording regularly until the Depression killed the industry. Lucky Roberts, like Europe a popular 'society' bandleader, recorded piano solos for Columbia in 1916. Ford Dabney, yet another well-known society leader, began recording in August 1917, only a few months after the first ODJB sides were made, and over the next five years cut some fifty sides, including eight 'blues' made before Mamie's Smith's hit, "Crazy Blues."

In sum, black entertainers were being routinely recorded years before the ODJB sides were cut, many by the very Victor company that issued the ODJB's hits.

I am hardly denying that America was generally racist; but it is demonstrable that blacks had wide acceptance as entertainers. The ODJB was recorded in 1917 because it was having a great success at a New York 'lobster palace' where it attracted the attention of recording executives.

Some jazz historians clearly feel that it is more important to support certain political positions than to present the history of the music with accuracy, and perhaps this is laudable. But then they must accept the fact that their work is not history, but propaganda.

Cordially,

James Lincoln Collier

Curator's response:

We thank Mr. Collier, who is a controversial and prolific writer on jazz, for his commentary, which provides detail on a point mentioned in "Jazz and the Italian Connection." We might also mention that in New Orleans, and as early as 1892, the Louisiana Phonograph Company had a bi-racial recording policy, offering the "Brudder Rasmus" sermons and "plantation" melodies of Louis "Bebe" Vasnier, a Creole of color, in addition to the repertoire performed by George Paolletti's large concert orchestra. Advertisements for that company claimed that the sermons, in particular, are very popular amongst both whites and blacks and have proved to be among the most profitable of exhibition records."
A Note to the Friends.

Our apologies for taking so long to get this issue to our readers. The retirement of oral historian Richard B. Allen and the resignation of Daniel Weisman have increased the work load for the rest of the staff, occasioning delays for special projects like the newsletter. In the future, we will try to meet our May/December schedule as best we can, but until conditions improve patron services must come first. Members of the Friends should note that annual dues of $15 are now payable for 1992. All payments and related correspondence should be addressed to the Hogan Jazz Archive. Efforts by the curator to reorganize the Friends Board are progressing slowly but surely. Hopefully an announcement of the new Board members will be included in our next issue. The contributions of the Friends membership (along with support from the University Librarian, the Archive General Fund, and the Department of Music) are essential to the continuance of the newsletter, especially with the expansion of the mailing list from 400 to 600 in the past two years. For those who have recently renewed their membership, and for new members, we thank you for your support.

Picturing the Past.

A 1955 Southland recording session of The Doc and his Patients (Southland SLP 218), with, left to right: Al Rose; Blue Lu Barker, vocals; Harry Shields, cl.; Sherwood Mangiapane, b., and Joe Mares, Jr. Seated is Chink Martin (nee Martin Abraham, Sr.), tuba. The passing of Joe Mares in August 1991 and Sherwood Mangiapane in January 1992 has saddened us all. This feature is respectfully dedicated to their memory.