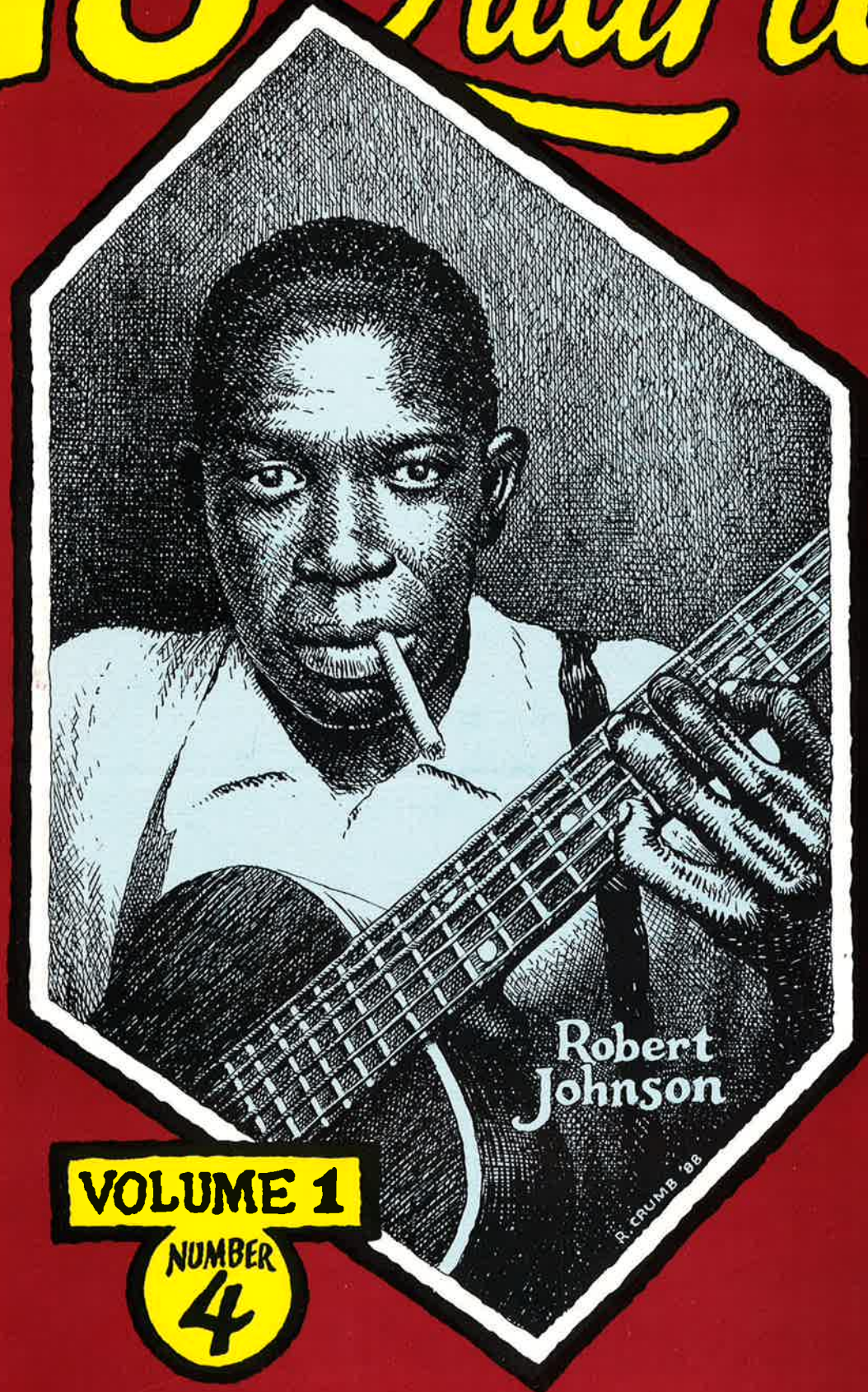


# 78 Quarterly



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for  
unpublished  
photo  
of  
Robert  
Johnson

**VOLUME 1**

NUMBER

**4**

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# 78 QUARTERLY

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LETTERS  
 TO  
 THE  
 EDITOR

*Hospital gardener  
 digs up human  
 handl.*

Dear Editor—Thank you for the copy of *78 Quarterly*. My "Pit Bull" immediately locked onto it. Speaking of durable covers—It has proved to be such a great teething toy for our little pup that I'd like to order a year's subscription immediately. Recordially yours—*The Desmonds, Grain-gerville, N.Y.*

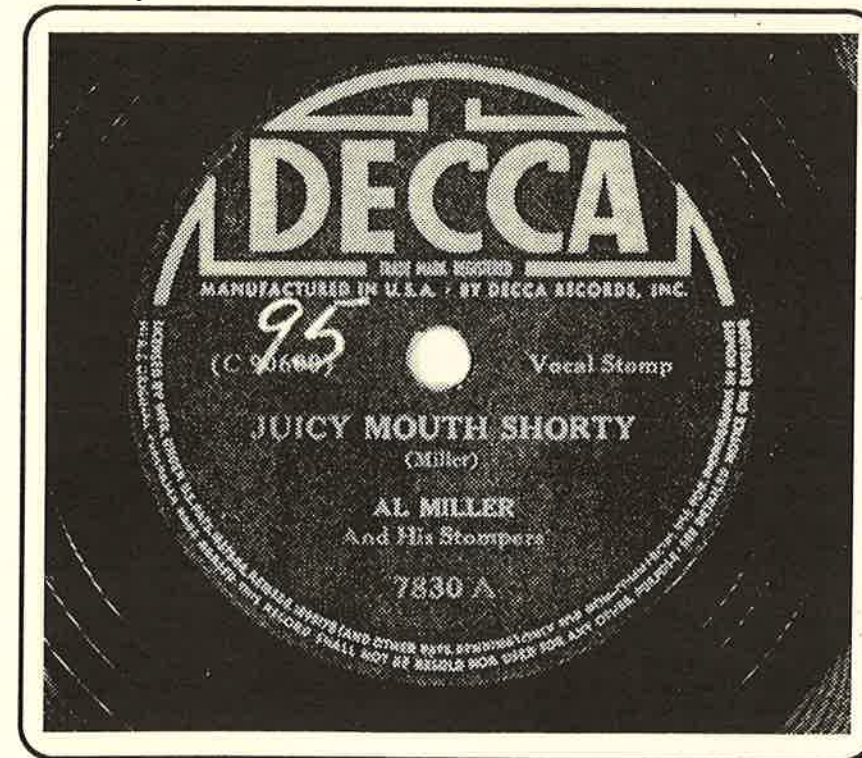
(Editor's note: *78 Quarterly* is sold on a per-issue basis)

*Alive in dumpster!—  
 mother of 5 ate cats  
 and dogs!*

Hey Dom Vinci from Patterson, N.J.! I don't know why you compare



singer/mandolinist Al Miller to Donald Duck. The performances you refer to are, I'm sure, the very rare *Mister Mary Blues* on Gennett 6875 or *No Fish For Me* on Gennett 6782. You will notice that the nasal tenor heard on his later work, *Truckin' Old Fool* or *Juicy Mouth Shorty* on Decca does not exhibit these debilitating peculiarities. I think Gennett's matrix-making turntable was off-speed that Tuesday on February 12, 1929. Mr. Vinci, try slowing down your turntable. You will hear the glorious voice of a Mel Tormé (not a Mel Blank), the delicate phrasing of a Frank Sinatra (not a Frankenstein), and all the verve of that excitable exercise host, Richard Simmons. The sad story about your eight-year old being attacked by a Pit Bull is a bit meaty, but well-done. Police grilling is too good for a dog like that. Besides, the breed is "macho," too much gristle for my tastes—*Mrs. Joan Gray, Bayonne, N.J.*





# Letters To The Editor...

(courtesy of William Brockway)



*Wanted—sexually active young women to train as nuns!*

I am a housewife in my thirties, raising four sons. Ever since we got married, my husband has left all the housework to me. All he does after work is drink, watch TV, and play old phonograph records.

We never have any intimate conversations because he ignores me. On his days off, he gets up at noon, goes off "junkshopping" for old 78s, and comes home late at night. We hardly ever have dinner

together as a family.

I have been saving money steadily for eight years in order to buy a house someday, but my husband spends \$500 to \$600 a month on drink and old records. When I complain, he tells me it is only natural that I should do all the housework, and he shouts, "Who do you think is earning your bread?"

I wonder (sadly) how I could have married a person like my husband, who only indulges his own interests. So many fathers work just as hard as he does, but also play with their children when they get home. When I think about these things I become irritated, am unable to sleep

at night, and unconsciously take out my anger on my children.

I dream about divorcing my husband and living alone with my children, but when I think about the financial problems this would cause, I can't make up my mind.

Do you think I should just divorce my husband rather than raise my children in such a gloomy family? Or, for the sake of my children, should I play the role of the "household employee" that my husband considers me? Please give me some advice. Yours—*Mrs. Y, Xenia, Ohio.*

(Note from 78 Quarterly's Panel of Advisors: You are the only woman among five men. You should be proud of your role as "queen" of the house. It is actually you who controls the household. You are dissatisfied because you don't like the role of "household employee," which is really a precious role, full of dignity.

It must be difficult for a man like your husband, who has an overwhelming interest in collecting rare and valuable 78s—and who, apparently, has been brought up to believe he has no responsibilities to the house or the children, to understand your dissatisfaction. He must find it humiliating to hear you complain every time he puts a record on the turntable. This is what keeps him out of the house.

The worst thing you can do is to get irritated and gloomy and take your anger out on the children, because you will soon start detesting yourself. What you should do is—enjoy housework, take care of the children, and save money—instead of blaming your husband for not helping with household duties. You should remain secure in the knowledge that your husband's hobby will "pay off" someday—that those 78s he so diligently collects will keep increasing in value.

And you should make your children proud of their father by telling them good things about him and his healthy activity of record collecting. A father tries harder if he gets respect—*The Panel.*)

## *Rapist's diary features bizarre new health cure!*

I am deeply concerned by this magazine's obsession with record labels. Your interest in beauty should apply only to the music. Visual beauty involves art and rare women, not 78s. The cultivation of a woman's face (not to mention the breasts and thighs) has far greater promise. I don't get a thrill every time I see the strutting peacock of Black Patti, or Electrobeam Gennett's pretentious "Old English" typeface (invoking some non-existent royal emblem), or the Art-Decoed-out Timely Tunes. Maybe if the "war-weary" Victor dog "took a poop" on "His Master's Turntable," I'd sit up and take notice. As it is, I'm underwhelmed by lassitude when I glance through your tiresome pages. Cordially—*Antoine Vieux, Paris.*

We note with interest your "rare 78s section." We have been carefully checking all these out with the Bob Hilbert book, WINNING BIDS—very interesting indeed! We wonder about a lot of things. Who are the people who pay money for those 78s? Where does the money come from? The sellers of these records should be made aware of the fact that they must pay a capital gains tax on their profits—and, if they buy and sell for a living, they must accurately declare and pay their income tax. Penalty for failure to declare and/or fraudulent misrepresentation is punishable by a fine of 22 percent and/or a one-year jail term for a first offense. A second penalty for fraudulent misrepresentation is punishable by a jail term of up to five years—plus a fine of 400 percent. Your fiscal responsibility as a citizen doesn't end with your April 15 payment. You should, for example, examine the legality of 78-record swaps that use Section 1031 of the Federal Tax

Code. You should be watching the would-be felons who expect you to pay their taxes. Very truly yours—*Adolph Smith, Assistant to the District Commissioner, Internal Revenue Service, Cincinnati, Ohio.*



*School lunch discovery!—rodent hairs in chicken soup deemed high in protein!*

I note that on page 75, Volume One, No. 3, you published a letter from my outspoken wife suggesting that copies of your magazine "grace," as she put it, the waiting room of my dental office. My patients are *not* interested in reading about jazz or blues. In fact, I doubt if any of them could pass a standard New York State literacy test—my wife included—let alone a Crouse-Benet psychopathic evaluation. So, let's each stay on our side of the fence. You print your little stories on musicales, and I'll do the dental work—dental work on your big mouth, sewing it shut for you—permanently!—*Dr. Samuel A. Kratzner, DDS, Queens, N.Y.*

Mr. Barry Schwabsky, Editor  
ARTS Magazine  
23 E. 26th St., Suite 1114  
New York, NY 10010

July 13, 1988: How cute, you poked fun at my cover note. You spent your precious time in love with your pretty wit. It is funny that you missed the point of my article.

*La Demoiselle d'Avignon* comes alive (viewed left to right) as one woman seduced in five successive poses. But then—what do you know about seducing a woman, clever boy?—*Art Kara*

(Editor's Note: obviously, this letter found its way into our computer by mistake. However, we publish it in the hope of encouraging more active participation from our readers. This is the kind of letter we want from you.)



(courtesy of William Brockway)

*In 1914 this man was a failed house painter!...*



# PHOTO PHILE

by Dr. Solomon  
Natsy, M.D.

irreverent...  
outspoken...  
embarrassing...

Two months ago we taped part of a conversation with Dr. Natsy. The Harvard-trained psychiatrist provides these tantalizing glimpses of blues and jazz musicians who appear in early photographs.

"An 18th century Frenchman, whose own name and face are long forgotten, once said 'God gives us our face; after the age of 40, we make our own.' I know about blues and jazz musicians, and as a practising psychiatrist, I can see what's going on with faces, even those in old photographs. I can tell if you are unhappy, desperate, murderous—calm, delirious, smug. Some mask the fear of death with their faces. Others coat them with laughter and lies."



## BIX BEIDERBECKE AND THE WOLVERINES

"A star is born..."

(familiar 1921 photo of Bix holding cornet in *Jazzmen*) "With that 'All-American' look, that slightly swollen upper lip, he is a predecessor to Denver Broncos' quarterback Elway, and the Wolverines are a local '20s version of The Beach Boys. So it began: the white influence, the decadence, Dixieland. These people diluted jazz until it just disappeared."



BUDDY BOLDEN

"Gone With The Wind..."

(the famous 1904 band photo from *Jazzmen*) "A suave, personable early-day Clark Gable who is putting on weight. Bolden says something, a joke, to the photographer, then smothers a smile as the camera clicks."



## ISHMAN BRACEY

"Brushing after meals pays off..."

(photo appearing in the Victor Race Supplement of 1929) "He is a woodchuck with a faint, brush mustache. A parting of the lips reveals rodent-like incisors."



JAYBIRD COLEMAN

"Sad but true..."

(photo in Pat Cather's *Musical Memories*) "A reputed genius/idiot-savant, he took the worst life had to offer, and translated it into an eerie cry, a distant train at night."



SAM COLLINS

"Debut at the Met..."

(only known picture: a line drawing in a 1927 *Black Patti* flier) "Solid. Dark. Chunky, like fudge cut in squares. The most underestimated tenor in the blues field."



DUKE ELLINGTON

"The victim of a psychiatrist's put-down..."

(page 2, *Black Beauty, White Heat*) "You tell me he looks like 'an immaculate Spanish pimp.' I quote further: 'From pencil mustache to princely threads, he carries an aura of vague distaste. He began as a '20s innovator and ended as a 'master of the middle-class put-down'. These are your unpleasant words, not mine."



BUNK JOHNSON

"The sun shines brightest just before the..."

(photo holding trumpet in *Jazzmen*) "Sometimes, new dentures force a grimace like this...Perhaps the lips purse in disapproval. He looks like Ethel Waters' father, a real 'Mr. Stormy Weather,' or a Lloyd Nolan (in *Hannah And Her Sisters* featuring an 'old man's anger and prudishness')."



ROBERT JOHNSON

"Life is short, Baby, and I'm here..."

(Famous Steve LaVere photo appearing on the cover of *Rolling Stone*) "Doe-eyes and coppery teen-age skin. The delicate hand bones seem inner-illuminated and belie a hard, hobo existence. Spider fingers end in spatulate tips. Only a few years are left, a couple of recording sessions. Soon, these fingers will drum the guitar stings with the urgency of Tarantula legs."



TOMMY JOHNSON

"Endangered species..."

(from the Victor Race Supplement of 1930) "An incredibly smooth profile. He resembles an otter who, dripping wet, climbs up a river bank and looks around. The vestige of a

mustache adds to the effect of animal whiskers."



FREDDIE KEPPARD

"Lots of brass..."

"He possessed a remote elegance in this pre-1911 photo of the 'Creole Orchestra from New Orleans, La.' (*Jazzmen*). That was before he became a fat man. Keppard was an early-day Jackie Gleason—in personality and as a pear-shaped giant. Unlike one-time rival, King Oliver, Keppard carried his weight well. By the mid 1920s contemporaries began noticing his front. It was corporate headquarters—from chin to toe, rounding out from the tie stickpin, peaking at the belt buckle, then elipsing down to spats. His rivalry spanned three generations of cornet players, and he was not to be intimidated by the likes of either Buddy Bolden, King Oliver, or, ultimately, Louis Armstrong."





## JIMMY MOONE

"Heartbreak Hotel..."

(inside cover *New Orleans Jazz* Decca album) "By the late 1930s he was projecting ill-health. (An almost nauseous pallor emerges beneath tan skin.) He appears to be an old-fashioned, 19th century man who lives in desolate hotel rooms and wears suspenders and garters; he radiates a private, lonely dignity."



## KING OLIVER

"Heavyweight King..."

(photo, *Jazzmen*) "Approaching the fat fifties... A depressing testimony to the combined ravages of age and overeating. All the fire of 50 years cannot burn off the fat of 50 years. Stuffed and glazed, the body slows until the last spark winks out, leaving a Budda mask."



## CHARLIE PATTON

"The right voice...the wrong body..."

(Paramount supplement photo of 1929) "An uncomfortable-looking man of indeterminate age (13 or 70?) stuffed in a tuxedo. He has a child's body and cute mouse ears. He may look like Mickey Mouse, but he sings like a bull (i.e., *Bull Cow Blues*)."



## HENRY THOMAS

"A face in the misty light..."

(Face on a 1927 Vocalion sleeve) "The image of this 19th century songster is so incredibly garbled, he looks like an automobile accident victim—or the survivor of a hotel fire."



## HENRY VINCENT

"Forever a bridesmaid..."

(1911 photo with Original Creoles in *Jazzmen*) "Like Willie Cornish, he was tall and stately, a remote pioneer, who maintained longtime ties to Freddie Keppard. From the Original Creole Jazz Band in 1910 through two Keppard Paramount sessions in 1926, he was destined for the background."



## THE ANATOMY

from the collection of Max Vreede (photo by Max Vreede)

## OF A "RACE" LABEL

## PART II—by Stephen Calt





Photo courtesy of Stephen Galt

MAYO WILLIAMS (1921)—“The first black executive in a white recording company, he became one of the most successful producers of blues talent.”

## THE MAYO WILLIAMS ERA

“The big companies wouldn't touch it,” Paramount's one-time employee Fred Boerner said of the “race” record, “so we got the jump on 'em.” Indeed, when Paramount began its “race” recording program in the summer of 1922, only one record label—Okeh—had established a “race” series, and its catalog ran to only 50-odd items. The idea of recording blacks was still something of a novelty; less than three years had passed since Okeh had launched the recording vogue for black music by issuing Mamie Smith's *Crazy Blues*.

The general exclusion of blacks from the recording studio prior to Mamie Smith's appearance was partly due to their invisibility to northern record executives as consumers. In the year of her debut, 85.2% of the nation's black population lived in the South, and 74.7% of them lived in rural areas. Before the advent of cheap portable phonographs, which first appeared in the First World War as a novelty intended for soldiers, blacks could not afford to buy victrolas in appreciable numbers. To the extent that the industry was aware of black performers, it was no doubt hostile towards them. Cultural chauvinism and even imperialism pervaded the phonograph industry; in a speech delivered in June of 1919, Okeh president Otto Heineman had said:

*“Thanks to American talent, it is possible for a music lover in Zanzibar to entertain his guests with ‘Yankee Doodle.’ Thanks to the progressive American record manufacturers, it is possible for the Eskimo mother to*

*put her babe to sleep with ‘Mighty Lak A Rose’ ... The king of Zululand can learn the fox trot to the tune of Hindustan; and the caravan can step under the Pyramids for lunch and turn on the ‘Beautiful Ohio.’”*

No one would extol the recording industry for making it possible for various ethnic groups to enjoy their own music, or for exposing whites to the music of alien cultures. In June of 1922, when Paramount was on the verge of producing its first “race” record, the *Milwaukee Journal* smugly reported that the tastes of its readers ran to “high class talent” rather than to “the decadent African rhythms” of jazz. Within record company circles, “race” records were viewed as a blot on the industry; as Ray Kornblum contemptuously said of the “race” records he wholesaled for Okeh in St. Louis in the 1920s: “It's a completely different world. The singing is terrible, the music is junk; it suits *their* tastes.” No doubt his was a conventional industry opinion; in February, 1924, the *Talking Machine Journal* bitterly noted:

*“... hundreds of ‘race’ singers have flooded the market with what is generally regarded as the worst contribution to the cause of good music ever inflicted on the public. The lyrics of a great many of these ‘blues’ are worse than the lowest sort of doggerel and the melodies are lacking in originality, lilting rhythm and any semblance to [sic] music worth.”*

It was only because recording policies of the 1920s were increasingly dictated by a new breed of salesmen who were willing to set aside their own musical tastes in the interests of commerce that “race” music became a fixture of the decade. Such was true of Paramount, a faltering label whose “race” recording orientation was decreed by its sales manager, M. A. Supper.

*Supper converted Paramount to a “race” label...*

At the same time, Supper's decision to convert Paramount to a “race”

label was boldly speculative, for he did so without offering trial balloons in the company's pop catalog. “It is against our policy to manufacture a product before we know that there is both a dealer and a consumer demand,” a Brunswick sales manager declared in February of 1924. “... That demand must be in evidence on both the part of the retail merchant and the public before there is a capital outlay for extensive production.” The demand for “race” records that Supper perceived was largely gleaned from the pressing figures of Black Swan. Before its “race” program began in the summer of 1922, Paramount had dealt with only two black artists. Between February and July, 1922, it featured six sides by New York's Lucille Hegamin, two of which were apparently leased from Black Swan, and two from Arto, a small West Orange company that had fallen into receivership the previous December. The company had also recorded W. C. Handy's daughter Katherine, whose records had not appeared on the market.



*Paramount's original catalog relied on Alberta Hunter, who billed herself as “Drown Sugar”*





MAYO WILLIAMS c. 1924

Paramount's initial investment in the "race" market was conservative: only 20-odd such records appeared in the first year. As the company did not have a fixed budget for recording, its slow start can be laid to difficulties in lining up talent and developing distributors, and perhaps, a wariness about encroaching upon Black Swan, whose failing business it continued to cultivate. Paramount's original catalog relied heavily on Alberta Hunter, who had inexplicably vanished from Black Swan's recording ledgers after doing well for them in her debut in the spring of 1921. Fourteen of the company's first 20 releases featured Hunter, who then lived in Harlem and billed herself as "Brown Sugar." At the time of her debut record for Paramount, which was advertised in the August 19, 1922 issue of the *Chicago Defender*, she had established herself as the second most popular blues singer in the North



HARRY PACE, c. 1921

and held a franchise at Chicago's fanciest black cabaret, the *Dreamland*. "She was a flea in Ethel Waters' collar," said her one-time accompanist, Eubie Blake, who recalled she had the unusual ability to record a song in a single take.<sup>1</sup> Her *Down-Hearted Blues*, the company's fifth "race" release, became a "race" hit. The company garnished its second hit with its 35th "race" record, the Norfolk Jubilee Quartet's *My Lord's Gonna Move This Wicked Race*, which was announced in the June 30, 1923 issue of the *Defender*. Later, Paramount would puff up its "race" catalog by reissuing most of the 90-odd releases of Black Swan, which forfeited its masters to Paramount when it was unable to pay the latter's pressing bills.

*Black Swan owner, Harry Pace, preferred "insurance" to the "record business"...*

"I don't think Pace was as dedicated to the record business as he was interested in insurance," Mayo Williams said, referring to its owner's main profession.<sup>2</sup> Lacking a sales force, Pace put his wife on the road as a traveling record salesman. By the spring of 1924, Black Swan was defunct. Paramount, however, had moved into the black for the first time. "Race records put us over," Otto Moeser would recall. Afterwards, its executives never considered putting out a racially diversified product, and the company became the only label of consequence to specialize in black music.

If "race" records put Paramount over, it was J. Mayo (Ink) Williams who put "race" records over for Paramount. Williams, the first black to hold an executive position in a white recording company, was one of the most remarkable figures in the early recording industry, as well as the most successful producer of blues talent.

Williams' accomplishments were all the more remarkable because they went against the grain of his background, which was what would now



(from the collection of Sherman Tolen)

### The Transition

be termed "upwardly mobile." In an age when indifference or even antipathy to blues was characteristic of educated blacks, Williams held the heretical belief that blues represented an important aspect of his racial heritage. When his friends sneeringly referred to him and his retinue of blues singers as "Mayo Williams and his dogs," he replied: "My dogs are thoroughbreds."

His appreciation of blues resulted from his strong attachment to his mother, an uneducated woman who relished the music, which he had first heard during his own childhood in Monmouth, Illinois. "Because of my mother I couldn't be what they used to call an 'uppity nigger,'" Williams recalled. It was to visit his mother (and a brother in prison) that he came to Chicago in 1921 after graduating from Brown University, where his chief interests had been football and philosophy, in that order. Though he had shared his enthusiasm for the early records of Mamie Smith with an older frater-

nity brother, Joe Bibb, a Yale student whose sister had married Harry Pace, music was not one of his early interests. "Nobody who had ever gone to school was interested in music then," he recalled.

Hoping to prolong his stay in Chicago, Williams played football with the all-black Hammond, Indiana *Pros* (then in the National Football League), sold bathtub gin to the *Grand Terrace*, a swanky jazz club on 35th and Calumet, and wrote sports articles for Joe Bibb's newly-established *Chicago Whip*, a militant black weekly located at 34th and State Street. As Pace's brother-in-law, Bibb had obtained a position as Black Swan's executive treasurer. When Black Swan began faltering, Pace foisted a local distributorship on Bibb, who in turn appointed Williams as his collection agent. To add to the company's difficulties, he put most of the proceeds from Williams' collections into his own struggling newspaper.

### Black Swan collapsed..

None of Williams' various side-lines interested him so much as the prospect of becoming a banker in the fashion of his friend and mentor Fritz Pollard, the celebrated black athlete who had sponsored his admission to Brown after Williams (who met him at a track meet in 1912) had written him a letter asking for career advice. With starting bank salaries at twenty-five dollars a week, he looked about for a more lucrative line of employment. As an infant industry, "race" music gratified his organizational itch: "I wanted to go into something where I could be the organizer; show people how to do it." The collapse of Black Swan did not dampen Williams' interest in the industry, although he felt that it deterred moneyed blacks from afterwards investing in independent record companies.<sup>3</sup> "Black Swan was a variety company," he noted. "They weren't concentrating on blues. If they'd stuck with blues they would have been more successful."

Learning of Paramount's acquisition of Black Swan's masters, the twenty-eight year old Williams decided to pay company executives an unsolicited visit in Port Washington in hopes of securing a job. "I just jived my way into the whole situation," he recalled. He thought he was hired because of Paramount's ignorance of the "race" field: "They didn't know anything at all about this 'race' business until they got hold of Black Swan, and then they didn't know anything but what was selling—why it selling, they didn't know ..." In presenting himself to Paramount, he was undaunted by the fact that he knew nothing about music and next to nothing about "race" records. "I believed that a college man could sweep a floor better than anybody, and on the basis of thinkin' that I went on," he recalled. Although Williams inflated his credentials in order to better impress his would-be employers, he had to do a minimum amount of bluffing to talk himself into a job. "They knew that if I had *any* experience at all, I had more experience than they did."

Williams' visit to Port Washing-



ton probably occurred in the spring of 1923, shortly after the last Black Swan sessions were held in New York, by which time Paramount had placed about 50 items on the "race" market.<sup>4</sup> Luckily for him, it followed upon M. A. Supper's creation of a music publishing company, and it was this venture that provided him with an entrée into the organization. The impetus behind the new company arose from Supper's futile attempt to sell the rights to Alberta Hunter's *Down Hearted Blues* (which had recently become an enormous hit by Bessie Smith) to the New York publishing firm of Bernstein and Shapiro. Dissatisfied with the money he received for its rights from another New York publisher, Jack Mills, Inc., Supper decided to form a publishing company that would automatically acquire the rights to all Paramount material. Thus was born Chicago Music, the earliest example of a record company publishing satellite, a device that would (in the 1950s) ultimately deliver a death blow to Tin Pan Alley publishing. It was founded on a shoestring capital stock of \$1200 on January 17, 1923, for the avowed purpose of "owning and dealing in copyrighted musical

selections and issuing licenses for their reproduction." Supper acted as its president and treasurer, his wife Viola as secretary, and his brother-in-law Frederick W. Boerner as "director."

*Williams became a "quasi-employee" at Paramount...*

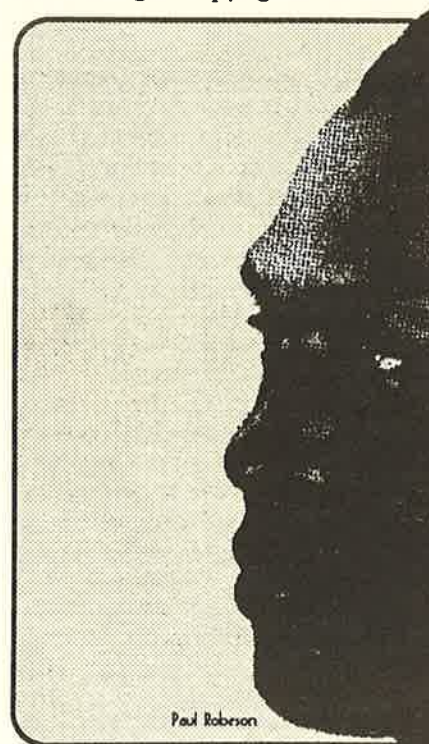
Williams emerged from a meeting with Supper, Moeser, and Bostwick with a loose understanding that he was to supervise whatever recording sessions the company would hold in Chicago, which then represented new territory for it. He was formally offered only a position as "manager" of Chicago Music, in which capacity he was hired to administer copyrights of Paramount material. This basically clerical task consisted of arranging to have songs scored for publication and registering them with the copyright division of the Library of Congress. For his work he was to earn half of the 2¢ fee per record sale that was allotted to music publishers. For his involvement in Paramount's blues recordings he would receive no salary, but a "talent" (as he put it) or sales royalty from those artists whose sessions he produced.

In extending Williams its offer of quasi-employment (he drew no salary from the company and held no position with it) Paramount was probably seeking someone who appeared to have contacts in the black entertainment world. It was a misguided article of faith among contemporary record executives that success in the "race" field depended on the use of "name" talent. As the *Talking Machine Journal* put it in 1926: "Selection of artists is one of the fundamental steps to succeeding in the race trade. The artists must be known to the Negroes and must be one of themselves." A few months after Williams went to Port Washington, Okeh enunciated the same policy in the *Journal*: "Every effort is made to release promptly the latest hits that have the greatest appeal to those who buy Negro records. These hits are recorded only by colored artists whose fame and popularity

are unquestionably established." Yet even the best-known black entertainers of the period were obscure to white executives, who were not disposed to educate themselves by frequenting black entertainment circles.

Williams doubted that another company of the period would have taken on a black employee. At the same time, it is doubtful that any other black employee could have succeeded in Williams' position, which required consummate skill as a job politician. Where Perry Bradford (the songwriter who promoted Mamie Smith to Okeh) was confrontational and abrasive, Williams was tactful and circumspect. Although he was better-educated than his superiors at Paramount, "I never made any attempt to show it," he said. Nor did he attempt to advance his own hobby-horses at the expense of Paramount's interests. His own tastes in music ran to cultivated singers like his ex-fraternity mate Paul Robeson, whom he considered far greater than any blues singer.<sup>5</sup> Once, in the hopes of justifying company expenditure on operatic singers, Williams solicited public suggestions for talent in the *Chicago Defender*. When (to his dismay) 90 percent of the respondents recommended a blues singer, he discarded the notion of elevating Paramount's catalog.

Like many gifted corporate opportunists, Williams translated his largely unspecified job into a mandate to create his own corporate niche and enlarge his role. Almost immediately upon being hired he silently undertook the responsibility of producing Paramount's "race" catalog by finding and recording talent. His strategy succeeded because he was able to turn out best-selling records, to the amazement of his friend Fritz Pollard, who recommended Jelly Roll Morton and other musicians to Williams in an effort to assist him in his new career. "He didn't know a damn thing about music," Pollard (himself an amateur pianist and slide trombonist) said of Williams. Yet he quickly eclipsed Art Satherley, whose New York studio thereafter saw so little activity that it was finally closed in 1926. Although not formally an employee



"As a college student, Williams introduced Robeson (above) to sex at a brothel." They remained friends.

Certificate of Newly Elected Officers

Chicago Music Co.

STATE OF WISCONSIN }  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE }  
Received and Filed

JAN 19 1923

Secretary 1923-24

**Certificate of Newly Elected Officers**

of the Chicago Music Co.

Location: Port Washington

STATE OF WISCONSIN, }  
Ozaukee County, } ss. I, Mayo Supper

(President or Secretary) do hereby certify that at a meeting of the Board of Directors of said Chicago Music Co. duly held at Port Washington on the 17th day of January, 1923, the following officers were duly elected:

Title	Name	Street and Number	City, Village or Town
Pres.	<u>Mayo Supper</u>	<u>1336 Grand ave</u>	<u>Port Washington</u>
Vice Pres.	<u>F. W. Boerner</u>	<u>1316 " "</u>	<u>" "</u>
Treas.	<u>Mayo Supper</u>	<u>1336 " "</u>	<u>" "</u>
Sec.	<u>Viola B. Supper</u>	<u>1336 " "</u>	<u>" "</u>

In Witness Whereof, said corporation has caused this instrument to be signed by its Mayo Supper this 17th day of January, 1923.

(This certificate should be filed with the Secretary of State within 20 days after change made in corporate officers. (If corporation has no corporate seal, so state.)

We do not have seal at time Mayo Supper (Corporate Seal)

*Supper created Chicago Music Company in 1923 (the first record company publishing satellite). Chicago Music owned all Paramount material, and Mayo Williams was "hired" as "manager."*



of the Paramount organization, Williams became, for all practical purposes, the director of its "race" recording program from mid-1923 through mid-1927. In this period he personally approved nearly all of the company's "race" talent, monitored all of its Chicago recording sessions, and designated the records Paramount released from the sessions.<sup>6</sup> Later he would be at a loss to explain his role with the company: for want of a better description, he likened himself to an "independent producer" for the label. Despite his lack of corporate credentials, he considered himself subordinate only to Moeser and Maurice Supper, who, unknown to Williams, held the actual title of Paramount recording director and drew a weekly salary as such.

Williams received no formal mandate from Supper to involve himself in scouting. His original motive for doing so was to fatten his publishing fees. Supper, who operated out of Port Washington and was preoccupied with both sales management and a private mail order sideline in hair goods<sup>7</sup>, never even bothered to listen to Williams' finds. "Anything that sold was all right with him," Williams recalled, "and these blues were selling." Once Williams began turning up talent, Supper gave him carte blanche to record artists with a single qualification: only the artist whose sales reached ten thousand copies would be eligible for a follow-up session.

Though sales ledgers dictated Paramount's recording policies, its sales and recording branches were completely divorced. For his part, Williams knew almost nothing about the company's sales markets. So complete was Williams' isolation from his employers that he did not even know that Paramount was primarily a "race" label, in which he was the principal player; he rather thought of the company's "race" division as but one of its successful branches.

Despite Williams' general feeling of independence as a record producer, he felt constrained to observe at least three disagreeable conventions he attributed to his employers. He never openly ques-

tioned the propriety of labelling black music as "race" music, although he considered the existence of such a separate retailing category to be demeaning to blacks. He made no attempt to ferret out white talent: "They didn't want me to be identified with the white records, or the white side of the situation at all." Mindful of an often-expressed industry assumption that blacks could not sing white material, he would not knowingly record non-blues compositions, even though he had a decided taste for ballad-style singing and considered it commercial. If an artist submitted a pop-styled ballad to him for consideration, he recalled, "I would very quickly say: 'Well, we can't use it ... write me a blues.' In doing it that way I'd save a lot of embarrassment for myself, the company, and the person."<sup>8</sup>

Williams' relations with both his superiors and subordinates would resemble the arm's length stolidness with which Paramount's hierarchy treated him. In the interests of preserving his indispensability to the company, he never volunteered any information about his working methods to M. A. Supper. He kept similarly aloof from subordinates: "I didn't tell *anybody* all I knew—there are very few people you can trust in this business; very few. From the top to the bottom everybody's trying to screw everybody else; get in on the 'pie'."

After setting up Chicago Music in an office on the second floor of the Overton Bank Building at 36th and State Street (which rented at 25 dollars per month)<sup>9</sup>, he drew his operational model from his wartime experience in officer's training school at Augusta, Georgia. "I knew that generals surrounded themselves with assistants and subordinates. I didn't know anything about music, so I used assistants, and I never relied on any one person too much for anything."

His chief subaltern was his enterprising secretary Aletha Dickerson, the pianist and booker for the *Indiana Theatre* at 43rd and Indiana, five blocks west of her apartment on St. Lawrence Avenue. "She was a pretty good hustler herself," Williams said of Dickerson, who was

listed only as a stenographer in the local city directory. (Her sidelines included a record store at 31st and State Street.) It was Aletha who performed the actual clerical chores Williams had been hired to do. Occasionally she would recommend talent to Williams. She sometimes worked as a session pianist, but never recorded in her own right: "Aletha's touch was too light, and her voice was not good enough to record," he recalled. Although Williams considered her an excellent songwriter, he made a point of rejecting most of her compositions (as well as her attempts to have him record her husband, Alexander J. Robinson) as a calculated means of discouraging her from overestimating her importance. Because he neither wanted her to appeal to any higher-ups in the Paramount organization on any practical matter nor to become qualified to succeed him, Williams took pains to ensure that she would learn nothing about Paramount operations beyond what she could infer from his laconical correspondence with Supper and Moeser. He never discussed business matters with her.

*Tiny Parham— "He was a hell of a piano player, but he couldn't get 'down to earth' on blues."*

The desire not to depend on a single employee necessitated Williams' hiring several arrangers to score Paramounts for publication and to teach artists material. Although he chose them less for their musical facility than for their professional demeanor, the musical aptitude of his arrangers greatly impressed Paramount's traveling salesman Harry Charles, who recalled: "He had three or four in there, you know, was the best musicians you ever saw; to *write* (i.e., transcribe). But you'd have to make it (the song) up ..." Most of the arrangers he used were not themselves recording prospects. Of Strathdene (Tiny) Parham, who sometimes did session work for Paramount, Williams noted: "He was

a hell of a piano player, but he couldn't get 'down to earth' on blues."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, one of his arrangers, Tom Dorsey, eventually became a successful recording artist.

Unless a Paramount artist was given prepared material to record, the arrangers would transcribe songs from test-pressings of records Williams had already approved for release, earning three dollars per lead sheet. The varying ability of his arrangers to replicate the uncertainties of blues phrasing was another reason that Williams employed several of them, where one could have sufficed. He remembered that only a single transcriber, Kid Austin, had the ability to transcribe a song exactly as it had been performed by an artist. The demands of writing lead sheets, however, entailed no more than a rudimentary depiction of the melody line of the song, sufficient to make the work recognizable in the event of a copyright infringement.

Because Williams was absorbed with a variety of ventures, such as playing football (a sideline his employers were unaware of), bootlegging bathtub gin to waiters at the *Grand Terrace*, and furnishing local speakeasies and brothels with nickelodeons<sup>11</sup>, he did not attempt to create a publishing empire of Chicago Music. Unless a composition struck him as suitable material for a particular Paramount artist, he had no interest in purchasing it. Though Chicago Music lacked a single songwriter who was known to the record industry, it became the most successful black publishing house of the era. Thanks to its connection with a record company, Chicago Music prospered while black-owned publishing firms run by W. C. Handy, Clarence Williams, Maceo Pinkard, and Perry Bradford floundered in the early 1920s.<sup>12</sup>

At no time did Williams employ a songwriter or staff composer. Although he never advertised for material, he was deluged by compositions by amateurs who shared the old conceit that everyone has a song in his heart. "Some of them weren't worth the paper they were written on," he recalled. Like most Tin Pan Alley song publishers, he would not

accept a so-called "song poem," or composition without accompanying melody. Most of his material thus came from working musicians, and not songwriters as such. Instead of buying merely the publication rights to songs he bought every song he published outright, paying independent songwriters \$50 or \$60 for material that was passed on to Paramount artists, and paying Paramount artists between five and 20 dollars for their material. The musicians and songwriters he worked with had no objection to selling their songs outright in this fashion; their credo, he said, was: "Give me mine now, Mister Williams; whatever you make beyond that, that's yours." On occasion he would give himself partial composer credits for a song he retouched (he was usually wont to correct the grammar of songs he published), sometimes using the pseudonym "Everett Murphy" (the name of a friend) because, as he put it, "I didn't wanna appear *too* much in the picture."

Artists who trafficked in sexual material, he recalled, did not know how to make their allusions implicit rather than explicit. If a song seemed too risqué to record, Williams would suggest euphemisms to convey the same meaning, thus creating a "double entendre" blues song. Considering them undignified, he placed a strict ban on the "coon songs" that were still in vogue among black entertainers.

Although Williams never shared his educated friends' contempt for musicians, he discovered that blues music was more appealing than the people who performed it. In time, he came to expect erratic behavior as the norm of blues singers. "Everyone's goofy in this business," Williams would say, without exempting himself from his axiom. "If you're not goofy when you get in it, you are by the time you come out of it." Unlike the ingratiating modern record executive who seeks "rapport" with musicians, Williams felt that any social contact—even to the extent of having dinner with an artist—would subvert the business relationship he sought to establish. His introverted personality and relatively exalted social status were further

barriers to fellowship with blues singers. However, the artists he worked with were less guarded and deferential than they would have been with white executives. Often prospective artists who arrived at his office were openly incredulous to meet a black executive and would demand to see a white official. In 1927 the blues pianist Little Brother Montgomery actually refused to record for him in the belief that he could not be a bona fide record executive.

Unlike white executives of the period, Williams was forced to concoct social strategies for dealing with blues artists. Early on in his career he discovered that blues singers usually had ulterior motives for fraternizing with him. If a blues singer invited him to dinner, he discovered, he was expected to pay for the meal. If a blues singer invited him to a party, it was in the interests of borrowing money or persuading Williams to record a friend. After a few such experiences, Williams began shunning the company of blues singers altogether. "I trusted them about as far as I could throw an elephant," he said. As a practical business matter he felt that he would compromise himself unless he kept every artist at an equal distance. To fraternize with some musicians would be interpreted as favoritism and arouse resentment from less favored artists. "It's better to avoid the contact and avoid the conflict," he said. Sometimes artists with an imagined "in" with him would represent themselves as his personal talent scouts, and charge other musicians a fee for the privilege of auditioning for Paramount.

*Williams was unreceptive to sexual propositions—Some female blues singers began asking for white Paramount executives by name...*





Ethel Waters: "she demanded that Williams buy a \$700 Locomobile for her boyfriend!"

Female blues singers often tried to parlay their physical assets into recording contracts. "Some of them had more overtures than they had talent," he recalled. One Paramount reject tried to blackmail him with a threat to falsely tell Williams' wife that he had fathered her child unless he not only recorded her, but bought her a fur coat in the bargain. When it became known that Williams was unreceptive to sexual propositions, some female blues singers took to calling at his office and asking for white Paramount executives by name in the (sometimes correct) belief that they would be more receptive to couch casting.<sup>13</sup> Other singers tried to ingratiate themselves with Aletha Dickerson in the hope that she would

pressure Williams to record them.

Even when artists were not manipulative, Williams remained wary of them. Contact with blues singers meant exposure to their life styles, which invariably involved intemperate drinking and ungrammatical speech, two snares to which he felt personally susceptible. Blues singers frequently badgered Williams to drink with them, even during recording sessions: "I like a damn fool would," he said, of his early days at Paramount. Having taken pains to shed his speech of colloquial mannerisms, Williams did not enjoy bantering with musicians who spoke in an uneducated idiom. He would ultimately marry a school teacher.

It was thanks partly to his aloofness that Williams would ultimately acquire a reputation among artists for dishonesty. Such disgruntled Paramount properties as Alberta Hunter and Big Bill Broonzy created cameos of Williams as a crooked conniver.<sup>14</sup> So did the propaganda of competitive music "purists" like Alan Lomax and the late John Hammond of Columbia, who aspired to be revered as the Great White Father of blues and jazz.<sup>15</sup> Although Williams' accomplishments in the blues field were doubtless more considerable than his larcenies, he had no desire to make others aware of them. He never sought favorable publicity for himself, even to the extent of not listing himself in the black *Who's Who* of the period. The criticism he received, he said, with genuine equanimity, "went in one ear and out the other." When interviewed in 1971 for a prospective biography he made no attempt to exalt himself as a patron saint of blues singers. "I've got a good bit of Shylock in me," he said matter-of-factly. Without this quality it is questionable that Williams would have been employable in a rapacious industry; as he himself recalled, an industry axiom of the period was: "Screw the artist before he screws you." The Paramount label institutionalized such cheating by writing a provision in its standard recording contract calling for a sales royalty computed as one cent for each "net" record sale. "That one cent 'net,'" Williams said, "covered a multitude of sins." The "net" sale was computed after various expenses, most of them figments of bookkeeping, had been deducted. Nine out of ten Paramount artists, Williams recalled, received no royalty, regardless of their record sales.

Whereas bureaucracy enables modern record executives to insulate themselves from fraudulent bookkeeping, the brunt of dealing with artists (and thus becoming subject to their disaffection) fell directly on Williams' shoulders. It was Williams who paid them personally, deducting their fees from expense accounts he freely padded before passing them on to his superiors. It was Williams who ensured that the lowly Paramount "race" artist did

not create trouble for the company; when an artist would ask for a copy of his Paramount contract, Williams would glibly promise to mail it. Most artists never received their requested contracts

To his recollection, only Alberta Hunter was openly disaffected by his sharp business practices. "She said I screwed her out of publishing money," he recalled. The artists he was likely to short-change were the ones who borrowed money against future recordings: "You made up with one hand what you paid out with the other." One artist who got the upper hand in this low game of mutual chicanery was Ethel Waters, whose defection from Black Swan probably hastened the end of that label.<sup>16</sup> As a condition for recording four sides for Williams in April of 1924, she demanded that Williams buy a \$700 Locomobile for her boyfriend. Soon afterwards Williams was contacted by Columbia Records, which had placed her under exclusive contract shortly before her Paramount session and threatened to sue in the event that Williams used her material.<sup>17</sup>

"I was better than 50 percent honest, and in this business that's pretty good," Williams said of his dealings with blues singers. He noted that Gennett Records never paid its artists anything beyond a net sales royalty, which he doubted that most of its musicians actually received.

His unflattering self-portrait notwithstanding, it would be inaccurate to castigate Williams as a ruthless opportunist who routinely "cheated" talent. Because the terms of the "race" recording contract were inherently exploitative, there was little scope for outright cheating on the part of individual record executives. Most artists were paid according to the custom of the day, receiving a flat recording fee and waiving their rights to their compositions. In later years, following Williams' departure from the company, it dropped even the pretext of a sales royalty. The chief means by which dishonest recording officials of the era cheated artists was by filching composer credits for their songs in order to draw a publishing royalty. Of the 700 odd titles Williams pro-

duced for Paramount, only 14 bore his name as a composer. In 11 of these instances, he was listed as a co-composer. In no instance did he appropriate credit for a hit record. Owing to M. A. Supper's financial interest in Chicago Music, it would have been inadvisable for Williams to claim credit for Paramount hits, even had he been inclined to do so.

*Williams' office was located in "The Stroll"—Chicago's black night-life district...*

The ambitiousness of the average blues artist was such that Williams' success was not dependent on his ability to make a favorable impression on his artists. He felt that he could even afford to reject a recording prospect on social grounds. "There was more talent than any one company could handle," he recalled of the 1920s. "I could have missed a whole hell of a lot of good singers because there were more artists than there were places to put 'em." Artists were so plentiful that he found little reason to leave his South Side office, which was open from ten until five, to ferret out musicians. For the most part, he expected aspiring artists to visit him on the basis of his reputation as a record producer. This sedentary scouting system was practical because he was virtually the only "race" scout in Chicago, and because his office was situated in the heart of the black night-life district. Its surrounding neighborhood, ultimately displaced by the Illinois Institute of Technology and high-rise housing projects, was called the "Stroll": "Friday night to Monday morning that place was just like an Easter parade, or a promenade down the boardwalk in Atlantic City."<sup>18</sup> The denizens of the "Stroll" would become the subject of Ma Rainey's *Shave 'Em Dry*.

*If it wasn't for the powder and the store-bought hair*

*State Street women couldn't go nowhere.*

On 34th and State, two blocks south of Williams' office, stood a

celebrated three-story brothel known as Mecca Flats, which was commemorated on a 1924 Paramount recording by Priscilla Stewart:

*Mecca Flat woman, stings like a stingaree*

*Mecca Flat woman, take your teeth outta me.*

At 35th and State lay the *Dreamland Cafe*, a 500 seat cabaret whose owner Billy Bottoms was a sporting colleague and fellow football player. The *Deluxe Gardens*, where Williams sometimes recruited jazz talent, stood on the same block.

*South Side brothels were too dangerous to look for talent...*

Thanks partly to his proximity to such black entertainment meccas, Williams had no desire to acquaint himself with the scruffier blues culture that permeated the Black Belt, whose black population of 100,000 was exceeded only by that of New York, Philadelphia, and Washington. On countless street corners were to be found vagrant blues guitarists, "playing for chickenfeed." Williams rarely gave them more than a passing glance. Although Williams heard talk of proficient blues musicians who played piano in South Side brothels (called "buffet flats") or lived in local "kitchenettes" (the subdivided single bedroom apartments that housed recent southern emigrés), he considered such places too dangerous to frequent in search of talent. Once he paid a visit to a "kitchenette" apartment to audition a blues singer: the unsettling sight of ten names on its mail box deterred him from ringing the door bell. He gave up attending the local house parties known as "chittlin' suppers" or "funky shakes" (then a disreputable phrase) after finding himself besieged at such affairs by would-be recording artists who wanted to cadge auditions, drinks, and hand-outs from him.

Despite his limited orbit, his inexperience, and his distrust of blues singers, Williams became the most successful "race" producer of his time. It was through Williams' ef-



forts that Chicago would loom as a center of blues recording, which position it retained until the music waned in the 1950s. By the venal standards of A&R work he may have been the most successful recording scout of all time. Half of the 40 odd blues and gospel singers he recorded in three years at Paramount (at a clip of one new artist a month) sold well enough to justify at least one follow-up session. Four of his artists became company mainstays whose work sold consistently in the tens of thousands and who became blues legends.

Although Williams would have been satisfied had only a tenth of his finds produced hits, he expected all of his discoveries to become stars. He did not recall ever using a cut-and-dried musical yardstick to evaluate talent, and put no conscious premium on the theatre singers who dominated Paramount's catalog between 1922-1926. Indeed, he did not even perceive them as a distinct category of blues performer: he considered each artist unique, and felt that labels (such as they existed, in the 1920s) were of importance primarily to whites who rarely purchased "race" records. He believed that the consumers whose tastes he tried to anticipate paid little attention to blues accompaniments. Rather, he believed that the impact of his artists depended primarily on their lyrics, with the quality of the singer's voice having secondary importance.

His inadvertent emphasis upon theatre singers of the Mamie Smith mold would seem to have been largely a by-product of the kinds of places he patronized in search of talent, as well as his mild preference for established names. "The artist with a reputation in show business like the T.O.B.A. was always welcome at Paramount," he recalled. Although his early productions were imitative of the day's "race" recording trends, which favored female singers using band accompaniment, he doubted that he listened to as many as ten "race" records in the course of his scouting career. He was, in fact, generally scornful of singers whom he recognized as imitative, or who had previously

recorded for other companies.

If he was impressed by a singer he heard in passing Williams would request that he or she visit his office for a formal audition. Any singer who put in an unsolicited appearance would be granted an audition: "We never sent anybody away, though a lot of 'em could talk better blues than sing them." His auditions would usually entail a half an hour of evaluation. He would begin each audition by asking the aspirant to sing the piece that seemed most popular with his or her audience. About half the artists who auditioned for him were accepted.

The personal impression created by an artist was as important to Williams as his style of musical performance. His chief reasons for rejecting aspirants were that Paramount had more artists than it could handle, or that the artist in question struck him as unprofessional or unstable. If a prospective artist arrived at an appointed audition with friends, Williams would whisk him out of his office at the earliest convenient pretext and write him off as undesirable. In his early years at Paramount, he refused to record any singer who struck him as illiterate: "You didn't have a chance with me if you split a verb, even if you were one hell of a singer." A stickler for grammar, Williams never tired of correcting the speech of his artists. On the other hand, he had nothing against slang, which often figured in blues songs, remarking: "There were very few black slang expressions that I didn't understand."

*Williams disdained "high yellows"—90 percent of the good blues singers were black, jet-black."*

In the course of evaluating talent Williams developed an ideal physical image of a blues singer. For example, he believed that artists with wide mouths tended to have strong voices. "Those robusque (sic), stubby short artists could get more volume

than those thin, willowy girls—you never could get a singer like Priscilla Stewart to do a song like Ma Rainey." Possibly owing to his own distaste for the "high yellows" of his race who invariably scorned blues, Williams took pride in the fact that most of his best singers were black in hue. "I found that those deep contralto voices made the best blues singers ... and 90 percent of the ones that were good were black; jet-black." He found that there was a racial backlash against singers who were extremely light-complexioned, such as Thelma LaVizzo, a New Orleans Creole he recorded in 1924. "She was very good," Williams said of her, "but her records never made it over the top: her complexion counted against her."

*Williams singled out "runner-ups" in blues-singing contests...*

On tips from his arrangers or by following the theatrical columns of the *Chicago Defender* or *Whip*, Williams frequented local vaudeville houses in search of talent. Often he stood backstage to monitor the crowd reaction to an artist. One of his gimmicks was to attend blues singing contests held in Chicago theatres and seek out the runner-up contestant in the belief that the singer in question would be less demanding and difficult to deal with than the winner. (Using the same strategy, his assistant Aletha Dickerson col-lared Priscilla Stewart and Jimmy Blythe in St. Louis.) Besides visiting theatres, he also sought out talent at the Columbia Hotel on 31st and State, where out-of-town T.O.B.A. artists boarded.

The black vaudeville theatres of the day were cluttered with performers whose stock in trade was their looks and costuming. "I never looked for any beauty in my blues singers," Williams said. "None of my blues singers were chosen because they were good-looking or made a beautiful stage appearance. I never found one of those stage artists who could do anything if she looked too good." From the outset of his scouting career Williams recognized that



*Ida Cox—"She stood flat-footed and sang."*



*Trixie Smith—"The upper crust went to the Grand."*





(courtesy of Stephen Galt)

theatre singing was inimical to the kind of delivery he sought to capture on recordings. "In recording they had to sing from the soul, instead of just shaking and dancing," he said. "There was a great deal of difference between playing for a theatre and playing for records, and I spent a great deal of time explaining this to the artists."<sup>19</sup> One popular theatre singer who was never able to make the transition was May Alix, who was famed for her acrobatic splits while dancing. "May Alix appealed to theatre-goers, but she just could not sing," Williams recalled. "In a lot of instances she kept jobs just by dancing. I never could do anything with her." Unable to coax a successful recording from her, Williams did the next best thing: he used "May Alix" as a pseudonym for Alberta Hunter and Edmonia Henderson.

It was her lack of histrionics that most impressed him about Ida Cox (1896-1967), a Georgia-born, Knoxville-based vocalist who was one of his first and most successful discoveries. Her debut in 1923 marked the first recording of a theatre singer

with an understated vocal delivery. "Ida Cox was more queenly than you'd imagine," Williams said. "She stood flat-footed and sang; she didn't need any motion at all to put her song over." Her regal stage bearing led him to dub her "Queen Of The Blues," a title he also concocted in the interests of stimulating racial pride. Williams discovered her at the *Monogram* theatre, a seedy T.O.B.A. outlet located two blocks from his office at 3453 South State Street, near the old El. Throughout the early 1920s, the *Monogram* was Williams' best source of theatre talent. In its rickety setting, it illustrated his conviction that blues was humble music. Ethel Waters wrote of it: "Of all those rinky-dink joints I played in, nothing was worse than the Monogram ... the walls were so thin you stopped singing—or telling a joke—every time a train passed."<sup>20</sup> Williams, however, found it more suitable for his purposes than the elegant *Grand Theatre* on 31st and State, where he discovered Trixie Smith in 1924. "Nothin' but the lowlife people went to the *Mono-*

*gram*," he recalled. "The upper crust went to the *Grand*." Williams was kept abreast of its acts by Lovie Austin, who played piano for the theatre's three piece pit band and worked as one of his arrangers.

His prize *Monogram* plum, Ma Rainey, became Paramount's best-selling blues singer of the early 1920s and the most successful theatre singer besides Bessie Smith. Rainey had been scouring the South for some two decades before Williams discovered her in December, 1923, and her popularity had probably long since peaked before its rejuvenation via record. On the eve of her discovery, the *Chicago Defender* only saw fit to mention the *Monogram* engagements of Ethel Waters and Edmonia Henderson, a Jackson, Tennessee native who made her debut around the same time as Rainey and probably headlined the bill on which Rainey was discovered. Williams' astuteness as a judge of talent is demonstrated by the fact that Rainey's debut session ran to eight sides, as against the two or four sides that his previous discoveries had been allotted on first sessions.

*Ma Rainey—“What do you want, good grammar or good blues?”*

Rainey, Williams discovered, had an ample fund of recording material, most of which she worked up herself. It little bothered him that she was illiterate and unable to recite songs from a sheet, as did most of his discoveries. "What do you want, good grammar or good blues?" he later joked. In dubbing her "Mother Of The Blues" he hoped to enhance her stage appeal, which would in turn, he thought, make her records sell better.

Rainey's studio debut marked the summit of the theatre blues vogue. For another three years, theatre blues singers would retain their stranglehold on the "race" market, but none of its later exponents achieved stardom. The theatre blues genre was approaching exhaustion when Williams found





Rainey: in all likelihood record companies had tapped most of its limited talent by 1923.

*"He was a hell of a banjo player."*

It was Williams' flexibility and receptiveness to off-beat sounds that made him the pioneer of a new recording genre, that of the self-accompanied dance musician. In August of 1924, while walking through the market district of a racially mixed neighborhood called "Jew Town," he encountered a middle-aged New Orleans Creole named Papa Charlie Jackson singing on the corner of Maxwell and Halstead Streets. Jackson impressed Williams as a novelty act: "I was lookin' for somethin' like that," he recalled. "Somethin' different. He was a hell of a banjo player."<sup>21</sup> Jackson, a six-string banjoist, became the first male blues recording star in an industry that had been previously almost completely given over to female blues singers.

In retrospect, Williams' promotion of Jackson was a greater testament to his genius than his discovery of Ma Rainey, for nothing but his own intuition could have commended Jackson as a recording prospect. Although Jackson was a small-voiced baritone with only a street corner reputation, Williams felt that his uniqueness would commend him to record-buyers. An avid tap dancer, he was particularly taken by Jackson's beat: "I could just see myself dancing to Papa Charlie, but not to those other artists," he said. "If you follow Papa Charlie, you find that he had good rhythm—you could dance by nearly every song Papa Charlie made. He was a one man band." Jackson became the first black recording artist to perform dance music, which most city musicians and street singers did not play. On the strength of his fifth and most successful record, *Shake That Thing* (a quasi-blues that celebrated a dance of that name), Williams presented him to the Mardi Gras of 1926 and afterwards at a T.O.B.A. theatre in New Orleans.<sup>22</sup>

Jackson was one of the first



blues recording acts to rely primarily on his own material, and the first blues singer to record happy-go-lucky, uptempo music, instead of the ponderously slow, sorrowful blues that glutted the "race" market of the period. Nearly a third of his 66 recorded titles had echoes of vaudeville, minstrelsy, or pop music. Regardless of his métier, his approach was basically frivolous. "He did lean towards comedy," Williams said of him. The virtues of Papa Charlie Jackson were among his favorite song subjects. *Jackson's Blues* (1926) voiced the reaction of an imaginary listener of his music:

*"And he's wonderful, he's just as wonderful as he can be"*

*Say the reason I know the Paramount people was tellin' me."*

But Jackson received no such accolades from Williams. Fearing that artists would either become complacent or get (as he put it) "the big head" if he displayed enthusiasm for them, Williams affected nonchalance towards their work. If musicians touted themselves to him (and inevitably, he found, they were braggarts), he would respond coldly: "We only know how good you are by what the sales figures tell us."

*"The more he drank, the more he showed off."*

It was when drunk, which was often, that Jackson became most enamored of himself. "The more he drank, the more he showed off," Williams said of Jackson. "You couldn't tell when he was gonna 'tear his drawers' (make a fool of himself)." Although Jackson showed a remarkable ability to appear sober during his drinking bouts, drinking made him erratic: "You might say to him: 'Why don't you come by and record?' and he might show up today or tomorrow or the next day; just disregard everything. He'd get out on a drunk, and wasn't physically able to make it." His alcoholism (which, Williams thought, led to his death in the late 1930s) also made him pleasantly pliable: "If you got a few drinks in him he'd do anything you wanted." In time, he would learn that Jackson was typical of the male blues singer: "I never had any male singers who didn't drink, and that was one thing you had to guard against."

## The New Paramount

*Just Out*

BE sure new now on These are ords of t Papa Cha O'Bryant's

and other of your favorite art hasn't the ones you want, send

### Latest Charlie Jackson

12281 - The Faking Blues Thing, Papa Charlie Jackson and

### New Instrumental Blues

12287 - Clarinet Get Away and Back Alley Rub, Jimmie O'Bryant's Washboard Band.  
12288 - Blue Eyed Sally and Washboard Blues, Jimmie O'Bryant's Washboard Band.  
12400 - Alabama Bound and Hot Hot Hot-tentot, Jimmie O'Bryant's Washboard Band.

12287 - G A  
12288 - B B  
12400 - J A

### Vocal Blues

12284 - Army Camp Harmony Blues and Explaining the Blues, "Ma" Rainey and Her Georgia Band.

12285 - M M  
12284 - O A  
Sp

### Get Them From Your Dealer

If he hasn't the records you want, check the numbers on the coupon at the right and mail to us. Records are 75 cents each, plus small C. O. D. fee. We pay postage and insurance on shipments of more than one record.

Mail the Coupon

THE NEW YORK RECORDING LABORATORIES INC. 15 PARAMOUNT BLDG. PORT WASHINGTON, N. Y.

Paramount

The Popular Race Record

Chicago Defender 27 June 1925





The process of recording blues singers was difficult, regardless of their state of sobriety. Because singers were competitive and quarrelsome, Williams made a point of never scheduling two artists on the same date.<sup>23</sup> Prior to recording them, Williams rehearsed his artists in his office, which was equipped with a piano. Most of the singers drank freely during their rehearsals, and typically, Williams found, overestimated their ability to perform while intoxicated. Although Williams found it necessary to indulge blues singers' drinking, he refused to permit them to bring friends and family members to the recording studio, as most of his artists attempted to do.

Although Lovie Austin would sometimes act as an informal musical director, ensuring that musicians were in tune and singers on pitch, Williams did not concern himself with these niceties, which he felt were of no importance to the public. He himself could only detect gross deviations in pitch. He ordinarily spent the first half hour of a session involving a new Paramount act explaining recording procedures, which he himself had learned from M. A. Supper. Before recording formally began test waxes were cut to determine whether the music was being adequately recorded and to gauge the proper distance from the conical recording horn that was employed in the pre-microphone era; singers like Rainey typically stood a foot from the recording horn. Williams generally recorded three or four takes of each song, selecting the best one for issuing. The use of multiple takes also served as insurance lest some accident befall the delicate wax that was used for recording masters.

The sessions Williams conducted generally ran for three hours with three or four songs constituting a complete day's recording. This low total was largely attributable to mistakes made by artists. Most of the artists Williams recorded had difficulty abiding by his routine cueing instructions. A system of lights would cue the artist to begin recording, and (at the approach of the three minute limit of the 78) to record the last

verse of each song. The typical artist would either ignore the cue to complete the song, or would overreact and stop playing altogether at the onset of the warning light. Often artists would leave out the title verse of their song, thus necessitating a retake. Except when Williams or his engineer became impatient, a proven talent like Rainey or Jackson would be indulged in as many takes as were necessary to satisfactorily complete a song. An untried singer, on the other hand, was allotted only about three bad takes before being dismissed.

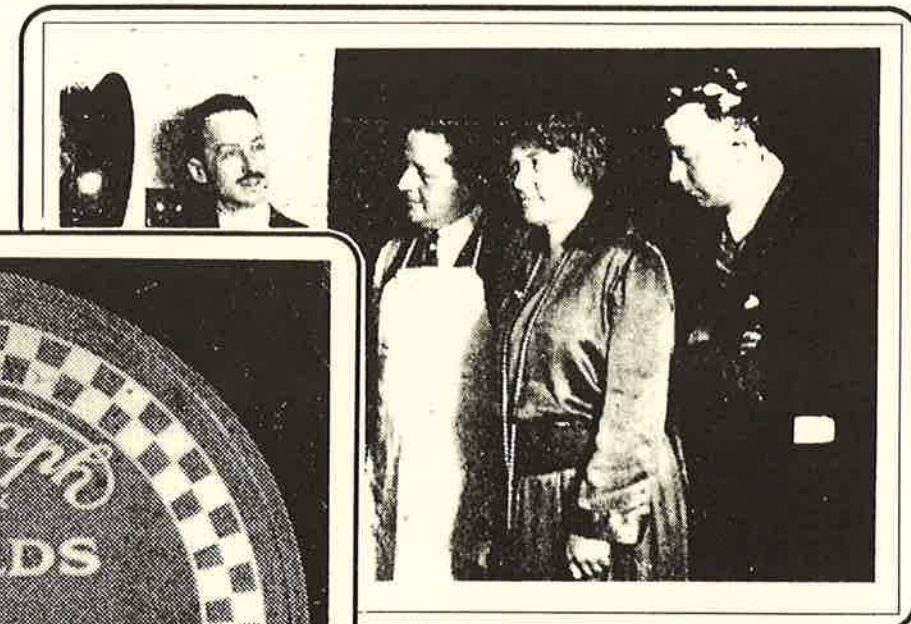
*Paramount used  
Marsh Laboratories  
on South Wabash  
Avenue...*

Save for occasional sessions at its New York studio, Paramount did all of its "race" recording between 1923-1926 in Chicago. Most of its Chicago sessions were held in a



Maroon and gold—Marsh was best known for reproducing a pipe organ without an acoustical horn.

studio operated by Orlando R. Marsh (1883-1938), a native of Wilmette, Illinois, who had incorporated his *Marsh Laboratories* in 1922. Marsh was apparently first recruited by M. A. Supper and worked on a contract basis, charging a flat fee per master. His studio stood on the sixth floor of the Lyon and Healy Building (formerly, the Kimball Building) on South Wabash Street, 35 blocks from Williams' office. "Marsh was a general recorder," Williams said. "You could go there, I could go there; anybody could go there." Originally he had been an employee of Essanay Pictures, a Chicago film company of the pre-Hollywood era that had featured such stars as Charlie Chaplin, Gloria Swanson, and Bronco Billy Anderson (its co-owners).<sup>24</sup> In addition to acting as Paramount's engineer, he recorded air shots for the original *Amos n' Andy Show* on WMAQ. His work was sufficiently novel to merit a contemporary feature by the weekly newsfilm Kinogram, which filmed one of his recording sessions. Within the recording industry at large he was



courtesy Stephen Galt

ORLANDO R. MARSH (1883-1938)—  
Third from right in white apron.



"Recordings at the Trianon Ballroom—before a live audience."

JELLY ROLL MORTON (c. September, 1924)—The fact that "the label sold for \$1.50, or twice the prevailing price of records" made it exceedingly rare.





best known for his claim to be able to reproduce a pipe organ (by a mysterious process that did not employ an acoustic recording horn), for which purpose he founded his own Autograph label in late 1923.<sup>25</sup>

*Marsh—a careless engineer...studio mice ruined the wax masters...*

"He had a (sic) old machine," Harry Charles said, "you couldn't hardly get a voice through it." Although Charles considered Marsh "good as there was, then" in the recording field (his *Times* obituary hailed him as a "leader in the field of electrical recording"), his tendency to under-record artists gave his productions poor presence. Because of the studio's proximity to the El, recording had to stop whenever trains passed. Its lack of controlled room temperature caused recording wax to melt in hot weather, for which reason Paramount did little summer recording. Williams considered him a careless engineer; once studio mice ran amok in a box containing wax masters, scratching the discs and ruining a session involving six artists.

Sometimes Williams imported a Gennett engineer from Richmond, Indiana to record Paramount artists. "We used him to cross people up because many leaks would get out from Marsh about what we were doing..."<sup>26</sup> We had to be very careful about every move we made. If you got some advance information on an artist, you'd make an effort to get hold of him." These recordings were made in various other Loop studios: "In this one block on Wabash there, Jackson and Wabash right up to Adams and Wabash, there were about two or three other recording studios on each side of the street," Williams recalled. Williams also periodically favored rival studios in the interests of improving Paramount's sound: "It wasn't advancing as rapidly as others in the business," Williams said of Marsh's studio.

Williams, who kept informal ledgers of the sessions, paid his artists \$25 or \$50 per side, a figure he arrived at without investigating the prevailing "race" rates. Featured accompanists were paid \$10 per side; other sidemen received \$5, and some, nothing at all. It was Williams' policy to issue all of the recordings he produced because he considered it unfair to suppress the material of an artist bound by contract. Half of the material he recorded was intended as filler: "We didn't give a damn what the 'B' side of a record was—we would throw anything on the 'B' side. We didn't want two hits on the same record."

One of Williams' most ingenious methods of scouring up new material for Paramount artists was to take a blues singer to the studio to record his entire repertoire at random. If one of the songs that emerged from the session seemed more appropriate for another Paramount artist, Williams would then buy the song outright from the performer for \$10 or \$15 and have an arranger teach it to the second artist. He used this method both with established Paramount attractions and singers who struck him as having promising material but no ability to execute it. Some of Paramount's most successful artists would acquire material in this fashion, which became widespread in the early days of rock and roll.

*Williams had "to use the freight elevator" to get to Moeser's hotel room...*

It was thanks largely to Mayo Williams that the Paramount label became a profitable enterprise, earning \$100,000 in its most successful year. Trusting to Williams' judgment, M. A. Supper never attempted to interfere with him or question his decisions. "My word was final in anything that I wanted to do," Williams said. "They (Paramount's hierarchy) didn't challenge it because they was makin' so much money ... but I never asked for anything that

was out of proportion to what I was earning for them." Although it indulged Williams' tastes, and provided him with such perks as a company automobile, the company did not greet him on an equal footing. Otto Moeser, for example, never set foot in Williams' South Side office; when he summoned Williams to business meetings at the Palmer House in Chicago's Loop, the latter was obliged to use the freight elevator to gain access to his hotel room. Although he considered himself a semi-welcome member of Paramount's wedding to "race music," Williams did not regard either Supper or Moeser as outright racists. To Williams, status was less important than the size of his royalty statements, and on this score he found nothing to complain about. "Supper was a slick one; as far as I know he was straight with me," he said. If anybody was pitchin' a curve, I was pitching it in padding my expense accounts."

Despite such finagling, Williams became the consummate company man. He identified with Paramount to such an extent that he would buy his home furnishings from the Wisconsin Chair Company and his wedding ring from J. M. Bostwick's jewelry store. On the advice of Moeser, he would purchase stock in the Milwaukee Building and Loan Association with his record royalties, which accumulated too fast for him to spend. In turn, the Paramount product became so identified with Williams that the suffix of the trademark appearing on every record he produced read: "de Mayo 1923."

*Paramount—and "its guiding genius" became invisible...*

An outsider scrutinizing Paramount in the early 1920s would have beheld a bizarre series of charades. Its guiding genius was a man who was not even recognized as a company employee because of his race. While most of its products were recorded by free-lance studios, each of its records bore a legend solemnly

**New-Sensational-Different-Dream Blues**

**Ma Rainey's Souvenir Record**

**Nothing Like It Ever Made Before!**

Ma Rainey wants you all to have a souvenir record with her picture on the record. The famous Mother of the Blues doesn't want you to ever forget her—that's how much she loves her friends! So we put her picture on her newest record "Dream Blues". On the other side is "Low Wandering Blues" by "Ma". Accompaniments by Frazz Tarron, on those guitars that made Kansas City famous. Ask for No. 12098.

**Only Paramount Can Offer You An All-Star List Like This!**

12098—Dream Blues and Low Wandering Blues, "Ma" Rainey's Souvenir Record. Arr. by Frazz Tarron.

12100—Mystery Rascal and Honey, Where You Been So Long, "Ma" Rainey. Arr. Lovell Austin's Blue Strippers.

12102—Chicago Monkey Man Blues and Worried Anyhow Blues, etc. Con.

12103—Hateful Blues and Mama Don't Want Sweet Man Any More, Edna Mae Henderson.

12104—Gee Ma That Old Slow Drag and My Max Rocks Me With One Steady Roll, Trixie Smith and the Jazz Masters.

12105—Red River Blues and Honey Blues, Let's Be Bad, the Kismet City "Devil Boy".

12106—Down on the Lower Side and Lonesome Woman Blues, Edna Mae Henderson.

12107—The Ain't Nothin' Me and The Blues, Pacific Blues.

**Inspiring Sacred Songs**

12108—My Love's Come More This World Round and Father, Please Be Merciful, James D. Quinn.

12109—When All the Saints Come Marching In and The Old Time Religion, Paramount Jubilee Quartet.

**Send No Money!** We supply you with the Paramount records and wax, under direct from us, with the records on the right. Records are sent by parcel post and insured against loss. C. O. D. is never made. All records are guaranteed. (All the records listed above are issued in 1923.)

**AGENTS WANTED**

Where we have no dealers, agents can earn big money selling Paramount records. Write for proposition.

**Get the Big, New Paramount-Black Swan Book of the Blues!**

Put your name on the coupon, and we'll send you, free, the new Paramount-Black Swan Book of the Blues—the biggest collection of Race music ever published. All the popular Blues, Dance Hits, Classical and Religious records by the greatest Race Stars. Send Now.

**THE NEW YORK RECORDING LABORATORIES**  
12 Paramount Building, New Washington, D.C.

**PARAMOUNT**  
[Including Black Swan] REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.  
**The Popular Race Record**

attesting to its production in "our own laboratories." With singular audacity in the recording business, the company feigned official non-existence as soon as "race" records made it profitable. On its annual corporate reports Moeser falsely

reported that the New York Recording Laboratories had transacted no business during 1923 and 1924. For failing to file an annual corporate report for 1926, the company formally forfeited its corporate status. By so doing, New York Recording

Laboratories had no official existence except as a trade name (the exclusive rights to which it would automatically retain for the next 20 years). Apparently Paramount resorted to this ruse to avoid paying taxes and to discourage lawsuits against it.

Mayo Williams, who considered himself a master of the sneak curve, was unaware of Paramount's fraudulent machination, and the fact that Supper had dissolved Chicago Music on July 1, 1924, in the apparent interests of making the company less accountable for its royalty statements. If it appeared that Paramount had taken the lowest ethical road available to it, its executives might have retorted that such was to be expected of a company that had already taken the lowest musical road available to it by specializing in a product that disgusted most record executives.

**FOOTNOTES**

1. She became the first black singer to use a white accompanist when she recorded with a Miff Mole group in February of 1923, and the first recorded blues singer to feature an unadorned piano accompaniment, drafting Blake in July of 1922, because, the latter thought, his rich bass compensated for a lack of or-





chestration. Blake rehearsed with her a half-hour before recording two sides, for which he was paid \$60-70.

2. After leaving the record business, Pace would obtain a law degree from the University of Chicago.

3. In September of 1922, Pace's one-time partner W. C. Handy announced the formation of The Handy Record Company, which was to be capitalized at \$25,000. Nothing came of this venture.

4. It was not for another year, in the spring of 1924, that Paramount reissued Black Swan's catalog under its own banner.

5. As a college student, Williams introduced Robeson to sex at a brothel, and continued his association with him during the years of Robeson's political activism, which sometimes caused the pair to be followed by FBI agents. His own political leanings, he declared, were left of Booker T. Washington's and right of W. E. B. DuBois'.

6. On occasion Paramount dispatched Williams to New York to supervise "race" sessions. "I never could figure out why they had this studio in New York," he said, unaware of the fact that it had been the company's original recording site.

7. Supper's product (probably a hair straightener) was called "Black Patti," a name suggested by Williams in honor of the black opera singer Sissieretta Jones. To obtain her permission to use her name in the venture, Williams called upon Jones in Providence, Rhode Island on Supper's behalf.

8. This policy inhibited such singers as Alberta Hunter, of whom he said: "She could sing as many popular numbers as blues." The prescription against black crooners still existed in the 1930s, when Williams unsuccessfully championed ballad singers to Jack Kapp at Decca Records.

9. This building later became known as the Overton Hygienic Building.

10. Harry Charles said of Parham: "You could sing it (a blues) one time; he could play it back; he'd write it the next time."

11. "I went in two-three houses of prostitution, put my own jukeboxes in there, and spent my money right in the place," Williams recalled.

12. Clarence Williams, whose publishing company (Williams and Piron) stood on 31st and State, was his only local rival as a talent scout. "He would get just as many artists as I did," Williams said.

13. It was not only blues singers who pressured Williams in this fashion. After he resisted the overtures

of Aletha Dickerson in the 1930s, she reported him to the musician's union for using non-union talent at Decca.

14. Broonzy complained in his autobiography that he only received 50 dollars for recording two titles for Williams in 1927 "because they told me that I had broken one of the recording machines which cost 500 dollars by patting me feet on it." This figure was the going rate Williams would have paid a performer of Broonzy's stature. His accompanist, Broonzy reported, "told a lie and got a hundred dollars. He told them his father had just died and that it would take a hundred dollars to bury him." (*Big Bill Blues*, Oak Publications: New York: 1964: p. 46.)

15. Lomax's 1950 biography of Jelly Roll Morton (*Mister Jelly Roll: Grosset & Dunlap*: New York) made scant mention of the fact that Williams had been the first person to record Morton. Instead, it dismissed him with a passing mention of his "catalogue of thousands of tunes, one of which he composed ..." (p. 182), a criticism one could level at Lomax's father John Lomax, who copyrighted the "folk" songs of artists like Leadbelly as he collected them. Though Hammond made a miniscule contribution to the blues genre, he derived more publicity for having recorded Bessie Smith at the end of her career than did the recording director (Frank Walker) who discovered her.

16. In July of 1923 she signed an exclusive contract with Vocalion, but never recorded for them.

17. In her autobiography *His Eye Is On The Sparrow*, (Pyramid edition, New York, 1967, pp. 190-192), Waters angrily recounted the wreck of "my big beautiful Locomobile," with which her philandering boyfriend visited other women. She failed to mention the circumstances under which she obtained the car.

18. The black residential population was then wedged between 33rd Street and 39th Street, and was bounded to the east by Grand Boulevard. Williams himself lived at 4946 South Michigan, three blocks south of Jack Johnson's apartment. Although Johnson had appeared in vaudeville as a bass fiddle player, it never occurred to Williams to record him, or any other black celebrities. "We just weren't on the alert," he said.

19. Harry Charles, who brought talent to Paramount in the late 1920s, encountered the same difficulty. "I recorded the best girl on a stage I ever saw," he recalled, "but she wouldn't go on a record for nothin'. And I went to Port Washington ...

Old Moeser said: 'What the heck you recordin' that girl for?' I said: 'Why, she's good!' He says: 'Well, you musta went with her!—She ain't worth nothin.'"

20. Waters, *His Eye Is On The Sparrow*, p. 77.

21. Williams was probably the first recording executive to discover a blues street singer. In the later 1920s he frequently auditioned such artists: "I'd get in the crowd just like any other onlooker," he said. When the musician was finished with a set, Williams would ask him to visit his office. "A lot of them would think you're foolin' ... they didn't believe you."

22. At the prompting of Jackson's sister, Williams then visited Algiers, Louisiana "like a damn fool ... In Algiers, they drink anything! I went over there and didn't know what I was doin' for two or three days and when I came to I got myself outta Algiers and got myself outta New Orleans." In the late 1920s, Jackson lived a block from Williams, at 4847 South Michigan Street.

23. The wisdom of this precaution was illustrated by a brawl that ten-odd blues singers waged in a Decca studio in the midst of a 1930s session. This incident so angered recording director Jack Kapp, that he vowed never to record another blues singer, a ban he finally rescinded.

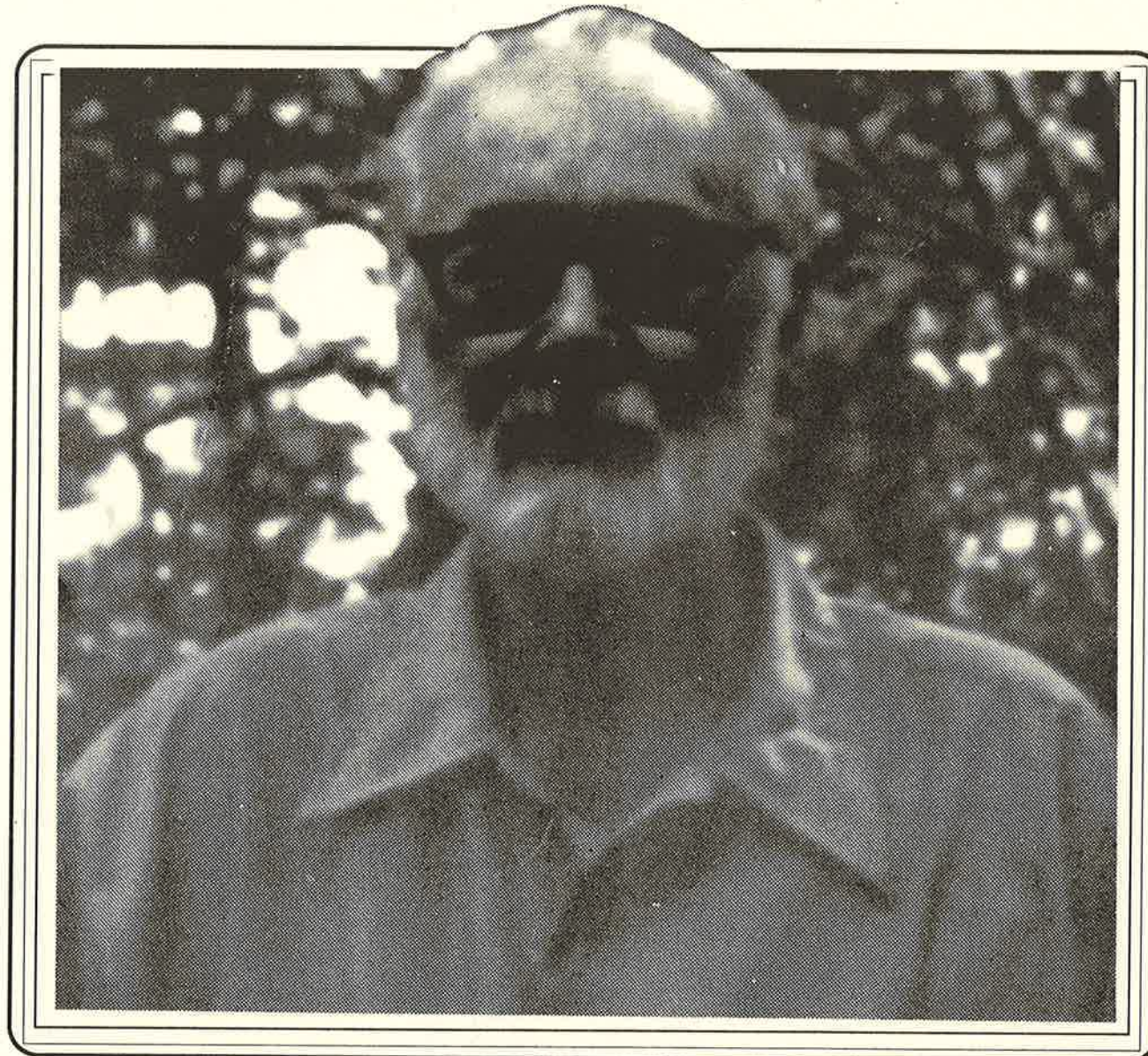
24. In 1911 Essanay had produced an all-black film, *The Dark Romance Of a Tobacco Can*, the plot of which the *Negro Almanac* summarizes thusly: "Man horrified to find girl he proposes to is Negro."

25. In the spring of 1924, Marsh began retailing his records on a nation-wide basis; the label sold for \$1.50, or twice the prevailing price of records. In February of 1925 he garnished local publicity by recording a dance orchestra at the Trianon Ballroom before a live audience, offering each patron one free record. Soon, however, his record company went the way of its leading attraction, Jessie Crawford, who wandered off to Victor.

26. Williams blamed Marsh's leaks on his employees. The Gennett engineer, he recalled, had a real relish for blues and would party on the South Side after conducting sessions.

Part 3—"The Making and Selling Of Paramounts"—by Stephen Calt and Gayle Dean Wardlow will appear in the next issue (Volume Two, No. 1) . . .

A special note of thanks to Sherman Tolen and Max Vreede for sending us photos/or the actual Paramounts .



(Stockton, N.J.—July, 1988)

FRED RAMSEY  
SPEAKS  
OUT!



An  
interview  
with the  
historian,  
writer,  
photographer.

by Pete Whelan  
(the editor of the  
first jazz book is at  
work on a 30-year  
project about the first  
jazzman—That's  
right...Buddy Bolden,  
his friends, the  
musicians—and New  
Orleans in the early  
1900's.)

July 28, 1988: This summer I have come North to renew an old adolescence. At least for a few hours. I stop at Solebury School in New Hope, Pa, then, like George Washington, cross the Delaware over to

New Jersey and call on Fred Ramsey, Jr. He is the famous historian, the writer and photographer of blues and jazz musicians. He lives in Stockton, N.J., a few miles west of New Hope.

Venus is far and away the hottest planet in the solar system. Today it is venus flytrap weather, sticky-wool hot. That's the flytrap. The earth radiates heat. Bushes and trees seem hot. The whole continent of North America is a big frying pan. The handle travels up from the Florida Keys to the Hudson Bay, where it is 95 degrees F.

Route 18 runs west from Trenton and narrows into an unpredictable road that curves along the Delaware. Long lines of cars crowd one another; their drivers maneuver the hairpin turns at 50 mph, thinking they are still on the wide Trenton straightaway. As traffic thins, the road widens back to a highway.

Now, we are beyond Stockton. To the right, an unpaved road plunges vertically up the side of a mountain. The sign no longer exists, but the road is still known as "The Federal Twist." A steep drive and a dozen mailboxes, then a weathered mailbox appears on the right. "C. F. Ramsey," it says modestly. Just beyond this mailbox sits a towering bush that hides whatever lies beyond. The bush expands wildly in all directions, boiling, spilling over, like a grenade explosion. But wait...Is that a house?

On the other side of the bush a wooden house peers out from the camouflage. Its unpainted, pastoral style could be "Adirondack—1908," or "1920s Lake Tahoe." A path curves to the left and leads to a screened door. The screen is concave, blown in once by a sudden gust. Another door beyond opens to a kitchen.

"Hello," I say. "Anybody home?" (My voice sounds unsure. It has the high-pitched flatulence of a man selling subscriptions to *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar*.)

A tall figure with grey hair comes to the door and looks out. "Who are you?" he says.

Fred Ramsey, Jr. is over six feet, thin, raw-boned (he played football

at Solebury), a man in his 70s, who could be 50. He has alert, bird-of-prey eyes. Now, they peer down at nervous quarry. But just for a moment.

"Do I know you?"

"It's Pete Whelan," I say.

He opens the door. "Yes," he says, "Come in."

I follow him through the kitchen and into a living room. Inside, the bright afternoon light shifts to movie-theater gloom. One can make out the outlines of other rooms. They appear utilitarian. Two rooms contain desks, chairs, file cabinets, record shelves, and unadorned walls. These chambers have never felt the sensitive touch of a New York interior decorator. There are no concessions to summer. No touch of the tropics here. No hint of pastels. The walls and furniture are stained and varnished, not painted. They are ready for winter. Soon, snow will cover the windows, then ice, followed by long nights at the fireplace.

I take a seat at a large, round dining room table. Today, the dead heat of afternoon is inside.

"Try a beer," Fred says. "Nothing fancy." He goes back into the kitchen and returns with two beers. "It's hot," he admits. We sit and talk for a while. What became of Sam Charters, we wonder (he is teaching)—and the New Orleans writer, Tom Sancton, an early researcher on local jazz pioneers (he wrote a book called *Stella By Starlight*)—and Edmond "Doc" Souchon, the New Orleans physician and musician whose sudden death in the late 1970s ended publication of *The Second Line*.

Only 2 years out of college—Fred Ramsey edits the first U.S. book on jazz!

In his second year out of college, Fred Ramsey was to become the editor-author of the first U.S. jazz book, *Jazzmen* (Harcourt, Brace, 1939). (One book—*Le Jazz Hot*—

by the French critic, Hughes Panassié, had already appeared in the '30s, but was a rambling critique with little biographical information.) *Jazzmen* set the stage for the Jazz Revival of the '40s and '50s, creating a new stage for the Country Blues Revival of the '60s and '70s, and a third spin-off—those "people's concerts," which somehow got tied in with "student unrest" and Vietnam War protests.

"How did you get the idea to do the first jazz book, anyway?"

"There's an interesting story behind this book and how it came right out of the Depression..." A jazz enthusiast since the age of 11, Fred Ramsey was a scholarship student at New Hope's Solebury School and at Princeton, from which he graduated *cum laude* in '36 (also receiving a *prix France-Amerique*—unlikely survival training for the streets of New York—Fred was cast into the middle of the greatest Depression the country had ever known).

By 1936, the Depression had become a permanent part of the American landscape. New York changed to a Third-World city (it was to become one again in the '80s). However, more men were without jobs, lines of the homeless waited for food, shelter, handouts. The "Dead End Kids" lived in the "Hoity-Toity" (Upper East Side.). Major parts of New York's "blue-collar" population lived in Central Park or in a permanent hobo town under the Pulaski Highway. It took a world war to change it.

Fred found a job clerking at a Putnam bookstore. "While I was at the bookstore, I watched the want ads every day, every week. One day, an unusual ad appeared. Harcourt, Brace publishers wanted someone to write direct-mail sales letters. I thought, well, I don't want to sell books, but I'll take a crack at it anyway. So I wrote them a letter. They read it and said 'can you come in for an interview?' At that point, I called up everyone I knew in New York, anyone I thought would be a good reference.

"One of those references got me in. Roger Baldwin (founder of the American Civil Liberties Union)

was a close friend of one of the editors. On the strength of a Roger Baldwin letter, the educational department head said, 'Well, we're going to hire you' (they said they had gotten over 150 letters)."

"This was a terrible time. I had been making 15 dollars a week. Now, I was making 25. I thought I was rich. As a matter of fact I *was*, compared to a lot of other people in Manhattan. First, I worked in the textbook department. My first job was to write sales letters to teachers, persuading them that our textbooks were the best. I wasn't cut out for this. I never complained, but one day they said—'you know there's an opening in the Manufacturing Department. Would you like that?' I said, 'you bet I would.'" (Manufacturing is responsible for production—printing, design, typesetting.)

"One day, a manuscript on jazz came in. While I was there, Cap Pierce, the Trade Department head, heard I was interested in jazz. He said, 'Well, Fred, give us a reading.'

"So I read it carefully and wrote an editor's report. The manuscript was miserable. I proved it by showing what the guy had failed to do. Out of 'sheer modesty,' I wrote in the last line 'I could make a better book on jazz.' And Wham! Cap Pierce called me up and said, 'Come to the office.'

"How are you going to do it?" he asked.

"I said 'Well, this is the way it is: this country hasn't published a good book on jazz. Let's do it first. I can assemble the guys who know what they're doing and edit the book (I was thinking of Charley—Charles



Charles Edward Smith (1940)

Edward Smith—as a co-partner from the beginning). We'll give you a book.'

"He said, 'O.K., do it. I'll give you a contract.' And that was how the book went through the press."

Charles Edward Smith signs on as Co-Editor...

"The contract was signed in the fall of '38, and the publication date was October 5th, 1939. It got fantastic reviews. That was the beginning of a career, not only for me, but for Charley, who was well-versed in jazz. He had been working on a WPA Federal writers' project in Washington, editing children's books, which he did well, but his love was jazz."



(photo by Virginia Whelan)

William Russell (violin) plays on the streets of New Orleans, June, 1981

Enter William Russell—he becomes a major contributor...

"Steve Smith (the author of *Collecting Hot*) and his wife were running the Hot Record Society then. Bill Russell and I had been working with them. Bill was with an oriental dance projection group called the Shadow Dance Players. This group projected images onto a screen, and Bill, who could play almost any musical instrument known to man, had a whole assembly of oriental instruments. He played all the music, just one guy. I used to go to the shows. But, Bill had also got hooked





Steve Smith (MRS president) in 1940

on jazz. That was, I think, quite logical. Bill and I got to be good friends."

Edward J. Nichols comes in... "a really neat talent."

"You know, it's funny. I knew Eddie Nichols who did the *Jazzmen* Bix article. He was a Professor of English Composition and a master stylist. I remember him saying he had assigned one of his girl students to go over and interview Bix's mother."

"Yes. Eddie taught at Penn State. That was another thing. You know, the Junior Editor (all the editors at Harcourt, Brace were interested in the book, which is unusual) said 'You know, you've discovered a really neat talent in Eddie Nichols.'

Otis Ferguson... "brilliantly talented"... killed in World War II...

"Then there was Otis Ferguson (*The Five Pennies*), who was killed in the War. He was brilliantly talented; he was writing for the *New Republic*, and was dying to do something for a book on jazz. You know, he was killed in the War. He was on a boat that was sunk by a submarine."



Jazzmen

Roger Pryor Dodge was "the first true intellectual to write about jazz..."

"He was a little older than the rest of us. Roger was a trained and disciplined musician. He was a professional dancer. He wrote articles on jazz dance, trumpets, and harpsichords in one of the *avant garde* reviews (*Hound And Horn*) before *Jazzmen* was published—long before it was even a flicker in our eye. I got in touch with Roger and his wife, who was a gifted harpsichord player. They came down to the apartment, and we talked about a lot of things. I realized that this guy was way ahead of us in many ways. First, in his academic background. He would have to be credited with being the first true intellectual to write about jazz. He was well-informed, musical. He could write about it, and he had already done it. All of this was before we got the contract.

"As soon as we got the contract on *Jazzmen*, I said, 'Look, do you want to come aboard?'"

"He said, 'Of course I do.'"

"I said, 'Anything you want to do?' And you know what he did?—a review of previous jazz writings with all their different approaches to that music. We were delighted to have him on board."

In 1942, Fred co-edited Charles Edward Smith's *The Jazz Record Book* (Smith & Durrell). He is the author of *A Guide To Longplay Records* (1954), *Been Here And Gone* (1960), and *Where The Music Got Started* (1970). He also did stints as music editor/reviewer for *The Saturday Review Of Literature* and *Charm* (later, *Mademoiselle*), then was writer/consultant for Time-Life books. His field recordings, Folkways' *Music Of The South* series, ran to nine LPs.

The faces in his photographs stare out at you like *hard times*. They can be as bleak as the Jacob Reiss/Carter-Bresson "School Of The Stark"—but kinder. They also resemble the Walker Evans photos in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.—(the Depression-poor whites, the eagle-countenanced Anglo-Saxons of the '30s South); Ramsey's people live in the 1950s. They are segregation-poor blacks from Alabama and the Mississippi Delta—portrayed with something akin to tenderness.

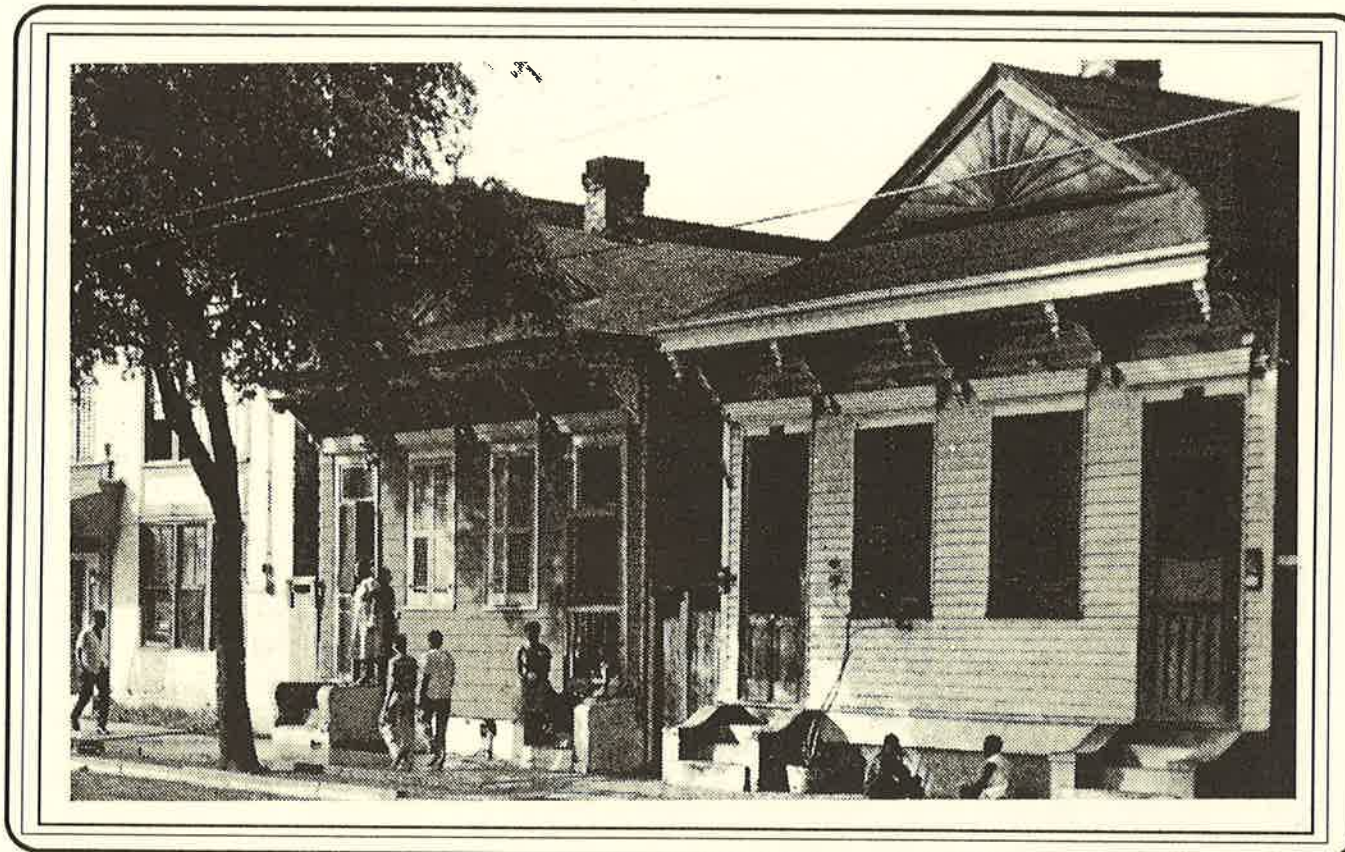
Through the 1950s and '60s came the brilliant film documentaries: *The Evangelists* (1957), *The American Revolution of '63*, *Anatomy of Pop* (1966), *Mississippi: A Self-Portrait* (1966), *The Songmakers* (1967), and *Image Of America* (1967).

After 30 years...the book, the life and times of Buddy Bolden, nears completion!

"I'm really curious to know about the book you're working on.—Buddy Bolden and early New Orleans, which, I understand, will be published by Oxford University Press."

"It's been the love of my life. I've wanted to do this book all of my life., But for many reasons, family, and not being very well to do, I've had to put it off. Now, finally, I'm able to complete it.

"We spent I don't know how many months, how many trips over



Jackson Avenue in the 1950s—(from *Been Here And Gone*, photo by Fred Ramsey, Jr.)

a period of three or four years just gathering the material, and then, Amelia, my wife, became very ill and died of cancer. It was 1979, a New Years' morning. That one really knocked me. That just blew me away. I'm just now beginning to put it together again, and getting to writing."

"I've always had this theory that Bolden and Freddie Keppard overlapped. They might have been rivals for three or four years before Bolden went insane. They must have sounded a lot alike. Keppard's playing seems to have sounded like descriptions of Bolden's playing."

"Yes. Keppard was terrific. I didn't explore him, because I had to stay within my subject, but what an excellent subject for someone to do a book about. Keppard and the Original Creoles would be a great book. That's a book that's crying out to be done."

Ramsey meets Louis Jones on Jackson Avenue...

"The biggest break I ever got on the Bolden book was when I was on a Guggenheim in '54. That scholarship had a wide target. We had already done a lot of country music. I said 'Here we are in New Orleans. The really interesting man here was Bolden, and I'm gonna try something no researcher has ever tried before. I'm going back to the neighborhood he lived in before and ask questions, even though he's long gone. So, the first day out, I sat on the porch with this old couple who remembered all sorts of things. I took manuscript notes about Bolden. He had only lived a block or so away. You know, there was that rumor about Bolden being a barber. Somebody said, 'There's a barber over there on Jackson Avenue. His name is Louis Jones.' So I went over there and ran into him."

"Louis Jones?"

"He was there. He was alive. He was a goldmine."

"When Don Marquis wrote about Bolden, Jones was already dead. He was Bolden's best friend, I imagine."

"Yes. They bummed together. (It's all on tape.) Jones said, 'Now, look,

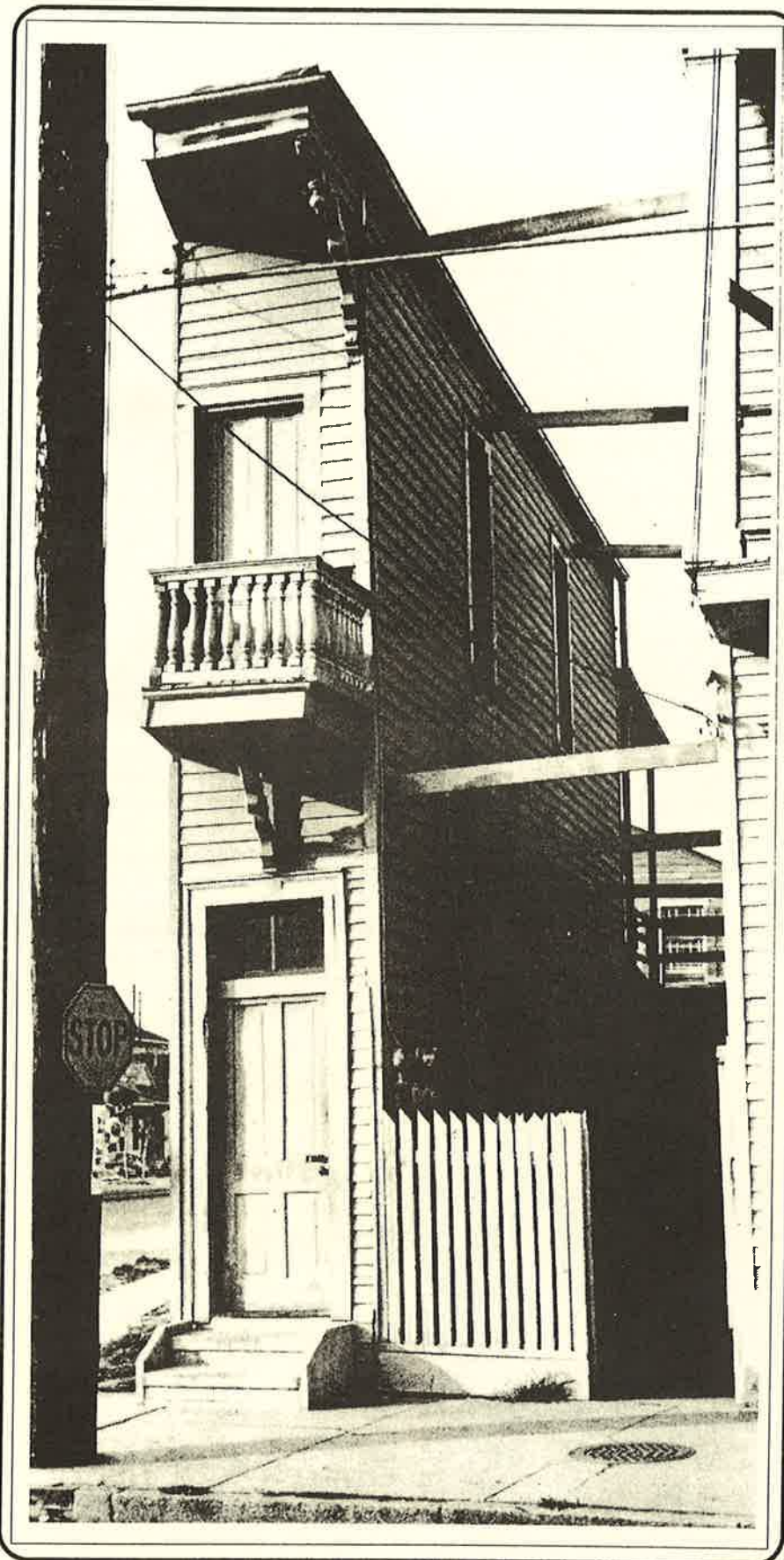
you come back tomorrow. (I had an old beat-up car.) You can drive me out to (what's the name of that little suburb? Wayuptown). I want to take you around to some of the old folks who knew Bolden."

Most of Bolden's followers had been prostitutes...

"So he got all togged out. He was dressed like the Mayor of New Orleans. He was a real dude—(and very, very intelligent). We rode up in my beat-up car, and he introduced me to those people who knew Bolden. I began taking notes. This was the first time I was to encounter those older women who refused to talk about Bolden. They would say, 'Well, I'm in the church now' and 'I've given all this up now.' Most of them had been prostitutes, which is why they didn't want to talk about it. They had been Bolden's followers."

"Were they amateurs or professionals?"





(from *Been Here And Gone*, photo by Fred Ramsey, Jr.)

"The houses were only about a yard apart."

"Well, both. The line was crossed back and forth easily in those days. This one lady. (she's in my manuscript notes)—well, if I could have spent more time with her—maybe silvered her palm a little bit, I probably could have gotten more out of her, but I was at the end of the trip and running out of money. (I don't want to seem to making excuses). It's going to be in the book, and it's quite thorough."

"Will most of the book be about Bolden?"

"It is a book about Bolden—and that period. The working title is *Buddy Bolden And His New Orleans*. I might just call it *Bolden*. But the publisher...usually, you come in with a title...and the publisher says try two or three more."

"I wanted to ask you about the famous photograph of the Buddy Bolden band. Do you know the story of how that photograph was found?"

"Charlie Smith got it. I've got it in a 'Smith correspondence'—and whoever is credited—Willie Cornish."

"There are a lot of stories we got from the police blotter that no one has got into. No one has done this thorough a job (I'm not boasting—it's just that nobody has ever done it this way). This is a social history as well as a musical history. By the way, I made an announcement at a meeting of The Institute of Jazz Studies—against my will. They were very anxious to have me state that I was involved in a project. I said, 'Well, I'll do it, but I'm damned sure if I announce I'm doing a book on Bolden, somebody else is going to come along and do it.' And that's exactly what happened. But there've been so many years involved—it goes back to '54."

"That's when you first started gathering material?"

"That's when I had the opportunity to go down there because of the Guggenheim (which I never would have had any other way). There's an awful lot that will come out in this book that isn't in any other book or article about Bolden. That I can guarantee."

At this point we get up from the table, and Fred leads me into a sec-

ond living room containing file cabinets and desks. "Come on in here and I'll show you the methodology..." (we enter a third room). "That's one file cabinet. This drawer is full of police blotter data." He pulls open a drawer. "And here's the material on Louis Jones..."

*What really sent Bolden to the asylum?...*

"One of the stories Jones told me was this: I had asked, 'What was the cause of Bolden being put away? There must have been some act that made it possible for the authorities to come in and send him out to East Louisiana.'

"And Jones said, 'He threw a baby out the window.'

"Then he said, 'The crazy thing about it is that there was a woman right in the opposite window (the houses were only about a yard apart) who caught the baby.'

"I said, 'Can you take me over there and show me where that window was and where that baby went from?'

"So I took pictures of every aspect of that house. Inside, the people...the current residents...let me take photos of every room. That was one of the events in Bolden's life. Of all the people we have on tape who knew and heard Bolden, I'd say Louis Jones was the most interesting, the most enlightening, the most revealing."

"You know what would also be interesting?...A description of what you imagine Bolden really sounded like, knowing the march band/rag-time era in which he played...say in 1903. There don't seem to have been any recordings of black blues or jazz until much later."

"I wouldn't risk it. I wouldn't risk it. I don't know music well enough. I would be faking. What I concentrated on was getting descriptions by living musicians who had heard Bolden, and that's better that I can do."



The Buddy Bolden files ...

*A risqué word appears in print for the first time...*

(looking through the files)—

"Some of those homicides in New Orleans are social history to the nth degree. You wouldn't believe it. Here's one example: There was a dance at Masonic Hall. During the the dance, a man was shot by another man. (I have the police log of all the people who were arrested that night. It's a *Who's Who* of the Bolden group.). I got the names of the musicians. They don't arrest the musicians. Bunk Johnson, for example, was there, but he didn't play in the Bolden band. Since he wasn't playing, he was booked. See, he wasn't there as a musician. That established it. You see the picture? Most of the Bolden coterie was there.

They weren't necessarily prosecuted, but they wanted to be sure they had all the witnesses they could get. The part of the thing that blew my mind was—(This, of course, was a murder. It came to trial. And the prosecuting lawyer didn't seem to be getting anywhere.) He put a 19-year old girl on the stand and cross-examined her. He was looking for the motive, you know.

"He said, 'Why did this man get shot?'

"The girl kind of hesitated.

"Well, there must be a reason,' he said.

"She said, 'Well, he called him a name.'

"The lawyer said, 'What was the name?'

"She said, 'Motherfuyer!'



"This is the first time (I'm interested in language) this word appears in print in the English language—this is in the early 1900s. I think it was 1903. That's in one of those folders."

*"A drayman?... something clicked in my mind!"*

"I used to wander around the streets when I'd get tired of going through the archives. I went to all the houses where the Bolden family had been known to have lived (Bolden's father had been a drayman), and in one of them, this guy asked me what I was doing. And I told him.

"He said, 'Well, I was a drayman, too.' He started telling me all about what draymen had to do. Then, something clicked in my mind.

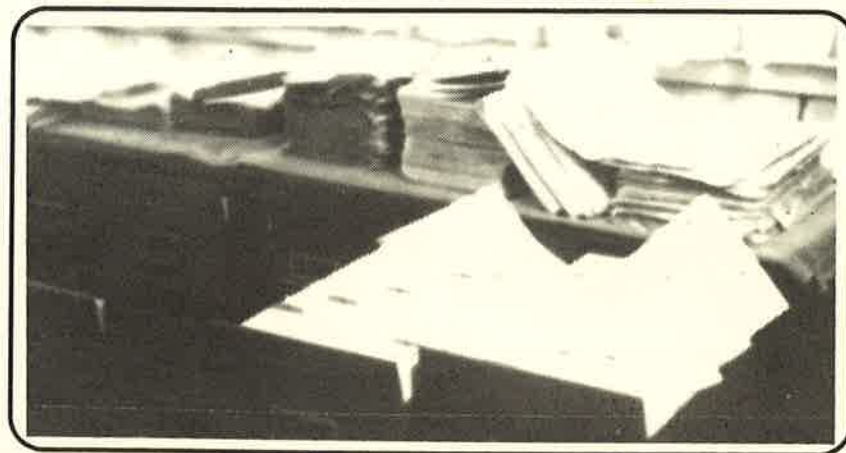
"He said, 'Most of us kept our horses in the backyard. And the man who lived here did that.' Well, I knew that Bolden had lived there. But the important, the significant thing about this is, the disease occurs when a family is living near a stable. The germ is communicated through an orifice by horseshit, which acts as a seedbed. And Bolden's sister died of that."

*"What disease is that? Something like cholera?"*

"No, it's something else. And I'm afraid the name escapes me now. No, but it will be on the card. Anything about anybody we came across was put on a separate card."

*"What was your impression of Louis Jones?"*

"Louis Jones was intelligent, a fine man, a professional barber. Of Bolden, he said, 'We ran buddies.' He was very close to Bolden. He admired him greatly. And when he started talking about Bolden, he broke down. His voice faltered. He was on the verge of tears, and he said, 'He was a good man.' And I'll take Louis Jones' word for it. He had nothing to gain or lose by saying it. And I never heard anybody else make a statement that would contradict that statement about Bolden.



The Bolden file cabinet

*The disease that really made Bolden insane!*

"The trouble came when Bolden went off his rocker. That was different. Then he was out of touch with reality. And the thing that might interest you is that I went into detail about the origin of an ear infection—about what a heavy ear infection could do. What Jones had said was, 'His ear began to ache. He had an infection in his ear, and he kept on playing.'"

*"That is all unknown."*

"I researched that. A friend of mine, a specialist in New York said, 'Well yes, if he was playing a horn like that, it's quite understandable that it could have killed him. It would have upset the infection.'" (Editor's Note: *otitis media*—an infection of the middle ear—from the middle ear, bacteria travel to the spine and enter the spinal fluid, causing chronic *meningitis*. This, in turn creates high fever and the mental symptoms experienced by Buddy Bolden.)

"Now, here are the frustrations of research: for years, New Orleans has had an eye, ear, and throat hospital. So I went down there and they said 'We lost all the records in the flood of...' When I went back again, I double-checked, thinking they were just too lazy and didn't want to bother. No, they were firm on the story. There *had been* a flood. That was it. We lost what would have been a total verification. But I'm willing to go with Louis Jones on this thing. The guy had nothing to gain. He loved Bolden."

*"Did you get photographs?"*

"Of him? Yes."

*"Of the girls?"*

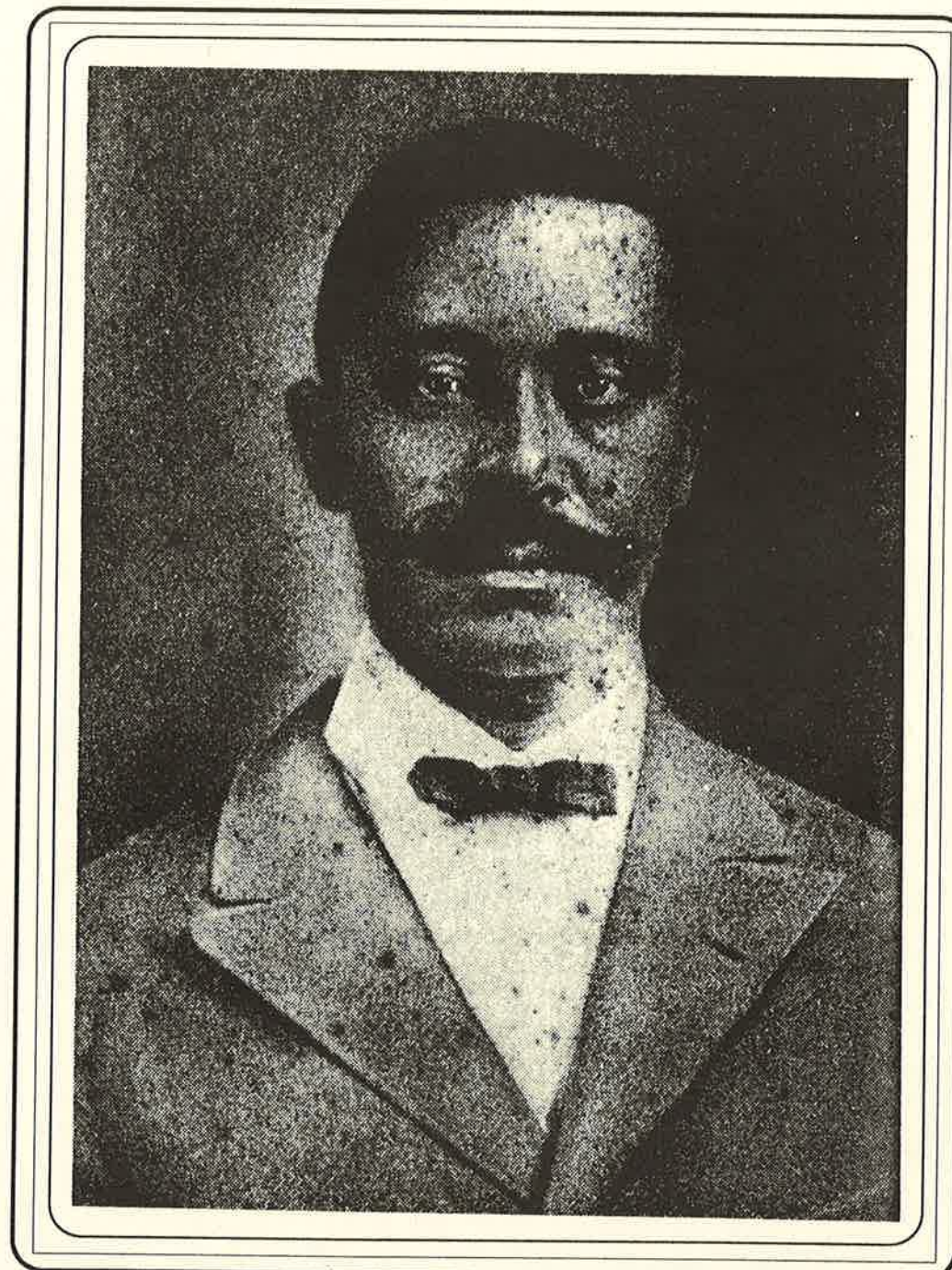
"No. They didn't want it. You had to respect that. They had been prostitutes and they were in the church now. And if I had published any one of those photographs, I could have been sued, although they didn't know that, but more than that, I respected their privacy."

*"Do you manage to work on the book every day?"*

"No. I try. Too many distractions. These cards... there are thousands and thousands... I don't know how many thousands of cards... they're the basic bank data over the years. With us it wasn't going to just be about Bolden the hero, it's also about all the people he lived and played with in New Orleans."

Fred and I talk some more (we had both gone to Solebury, a few miles away, and we talk about the eccentricities—and the expertise of its founders and principal players), but it is late. It is starting to get dark and I head for the car. Outside, it's getting cooler; it will be a long drive back, and then, I'm in the car pointing toward Route 18 and Trenton.

Most of *Jazzmen's* contributors are gone now, I think. We have become casualties in a war—but at life's slow pace. The New Orleans jazz pioneers were the first to go. Then came the Mississippi blues singers. Now that they are gone, it is the turn of the critics, writers, editors, the recreators, and, one by one, the record collectors.



(photo courtesy Mrs. Carrie Jones and Donald Marquis)

LOUIS JONES  
(1874-1958)—  
photo taken  
c. 1905





This studio portrait of Robert Johnson is available as a poster from Pomegranate Publications, Box 808022, Petaluma, CA 94975, \$5 each retail. Dealer inquiries welcome.

Robert Johnson  
(1911-1938)

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# ROBERT JOHNSON

by Stephen Calt and  
Gayle Dean Wardlow

Leadbelly, Sonny Terry, and Big Bill Broonzy to the general public, its promoter John Hammond wrote:

*Robert Johnson was going to be the big surprise of the evening. I knew him only from his blues records and from the tall, exciting tales the recording engineers and supervisors used to bring about him from the improvised studios in Dallas and San Antonio. I don't believe that Johnson had ever worked as a professional musician anywhere, and it still knocks me over when I think of how lucky it is that a talent like his ever found his way to phonograph records. At the concert hall we will have to be content with playing two of his records; Johnson died last week at the precise moment when Vocalion scouts finally reached him and told him that he was booked to appear at Carnegie Hall on December 23. He was in his middle twenties and nobody seems to know what caused his death.*

Already a legend was in the making: Johnson died four months before the concert took place, and it is inconceivable that he did so "at the

precise moment" he had been informed of it.

*"...Conspicuous...for his seediness, facial disfigurement...black derby."*

More audacious and enduring legends about Johnson have since sprung up around the fact of his youthful and reputedly violent death and the melodramatic aspects of his song imagery. The customary portrait of Johnson drawn by blues writers is that of a doomed genius who expressed his tortured psyche in the title couplets of *Hellhound On My Trail* and *Stones In My Passway*. Yet during Johnson's lifetime (which such writers have never taken pains to examine) he was less conspicuous among his acquaintances for his blues lyrics than for his seediness, facial disfigurement (he had a damaged eye and long scar running across one cheek, the apparent re-



sult of a slashing), and fondness for a black derby; his protégé Johnnie Shines once privately described him as "a bum who was always getting drunk and pissing in his pants." His neighbors like Elizabeth Peterson Moore never heard him perform either *Hellbound* or *Stones In My Passway*, or mention anything out of the ordinary in his conversation, which tended to reflect a preoccupation with achieving musical success. Only in his music did Johnson project anything but a prosaic figure. As a guitarist, however, he barely stood out among the native musicians around Robinsonville, an upper Mississippi Delta town that numbered, Elizabeth said, "just so many old guitar-pickers I don't know what their names were." Neither she nor her husband, both of whom knew Johnson well, even thought to mention him when first asked to recount local blues guitarists.

### Johnson used three aliases...

He was all the more obscure because he bore several names while living near Robinsonville and Commerce, the unincorporated hamlet four miles east of it where Johnson was raised. (He was born between September, 1911 and August, 1912 at Hazelhurst, a town in South Mississippi.) "He had three names," Elizabeth reported. Besides his rarely-used given name of Johnson, he was variously known as Robert Saunders, Robert Dusty, or Robert Saxton (generally clipped to "Sax", the name by which he introduced himself to both Willie and Elizabeth Moore. "...Sometimes they used to call him 'Dusty,' but most of the times looks like they enjoyed callin' him 'Sax'..." Willie said. Johnson, too, preferred the name "Saxton" and eventually disavowed "Dusty" altogether.

"... He'd be out there on the levee from Robinsonville," Elizabeth Moore recalled. "... Some of 'em there call him 'Robert Johnson'... We lived back yonder at Lost Lake, and we know him as 'Robert Dusty'... he changed it up (to "Dusty") his own self. But then he told the people to quit callin' him that (i.e., "Dusty") for

the time bein'... I asked him why... He say: 'See, I be out on the road so much, girl,' say: 'I might tell folks I'm named Robert Dusty,' say: 'and there might be a man goin' on down the road there done *done* somethin' (illegal), and I'm just wearin' that name ...' I wouldn't call him that anymore ... You don't know: a person could be wearin' the name of somebody else done killed a thousand people."

Possibly, the hypothetical criminal "Dusty" whom Johnson did not want to be taken for was himself. According to Johnnie Shines, Johnson was prone towards petty thievery, as one of his own couplets indicated:

I know she's gone, she won't come back

I taken her last nickel, out her 'nation sack.

(Come On In My Kitchen)

In dubbing himself "Dusty," Elizabeth said, Johnson was assuming the name of a local motorcycle patrolman, not a mass murderer. "... At that time, 'twas a old highway patrol in this country, and *his* name was Robert Dusty ... He's glad of him (Dusty), the way he talked: 'Yon go that Dusty man, look at him, *look* at him! Now that's the way I like to get off!' ... Them highway patrols *would* get off fast. He enjoyed that."

Johnson played harmonica at school lunch recesses...

Johnson's musical development proved nearly as swift as Dusty's motorcycle; within a period of two or three years he appears to have become an accomplished blues guitarist. His death certificate indicated that his musical career began around 1928; were this so, it referred to his early harmonica playing. Son House's wife Evie recalled that Johnson liked to play the instrument during lunch recesses held outside the one-room Methodist church schoolhouse near Robinsonville both attended (on a three month basis) in the late 1920s, along with 60 or 70 other pupils. "When he's blowin' the harp, folks called him 'Sonny Boy' then," Willie Moore said. "I wasn't playin' with him then." (The nickname applied a mock compari-

son with Sonny Boy Williamson, Rice Miller, which was almost a trade name for any skilled harmonica player.) Perhaps because he never became an outstanding vocalist, Johnson sometimes supplanted his singing in the mid-1930s with harmonica, placing the instrument upon a rack attached to his guitar.<sup>2</sup>

Although Son House knew him as a harmonica player rather than a guitarist when he met him around 1930 (at which time Johnson lived with his family on the *Abbey and Leatherman* plantation two and a half miles west of Robinsonville), Johnson did not, as House later maintained, "learn (guitar) between my knee and Willie Brown's." As early as 1929, Elizabeth Moore recalled, "... he just learnin' how to play."

### A 19-year old arrived on the plantation...

Elizabeth met him that year as a nineteen-year old arrival on the *Robert Coxer* plantation near Robinsonville. "We lived out on the same plantation," she said. On making the acquaintance of the Johnson family, she learned that they had been Tunica County residents for some eight years. Evidently their arrival at *Coxer* roughly coincided with the 1927 Mississippi flood: "They claimed they had been there two years," she said, "and I heard the bossman say 'two.'"

As a beginner, she noted, Johnson would tap any available local fund of musical knowledge: "He'd go from house to house, you know, where the old folks is: he just get an idea about music, you know, playin'..." From Elizabeth's husband Harvey (Hard Rock) Glenn, a blues pianist with a one-tune guitar repertoire, Johnson acquired one of his first pieces: "He'd come out to me and my husband home in Robinsonville ... He'd come there to get that tune all the time—old blues about: *I'm Gonna Sit Down And Tell My Mama* ...

"... Lord, I'd get *sick* of them! I'd say: 'Fella, why don't you put that guitar *down*'?"

"Oh, oh!... Miss Harvey, don't say that! Let him learn!"

"... I said: 'Well, you-all worryin' me.' I go to bed and leave 'em sittin' up there. And he be up there plunkin' on the guitar: plunka-lunka! Plunka-lunka! My husband couldn't play but one old tune he learned in the hills, but he *played* it ..."

Johnson did not, at least to the satisfaction of Harvey Glenn. "... My husband told him, 'I'm a-buy you a harp; I think you can handle a harp better ...'"

"He say: 'No, sir!'... He wanna learn the *guitar*."

"I said: 'Boy, you let that boy go home to his folks!'"

"He said: 'I ain't gwine till I learn!...'"

"I say: 'Just look at that!'—I was makin' fun of 'im then, sittin' up there, but eventually dis Robert learnt how to play... got so he could strike a few strings so folks could know what he's doin'."

Son House's earliest memory of Johnson stemmed from a slightly later period, when Johnson lived on another plantation near Commerce, *Richard Lattimore's*. At that time (probably 1930) he was not an entertainer in his own right, but was impatient to become one: "... He used to slip off from his parents and come to where me and Willie (Brown) were playing for Saturday night balls ... His parents just didn't want him 'round those kinda places, but when he get a chance, he get out the kitchen window after he think they gone to sleep and he'd come to where we was."

### Johnson's departures resulted in beatings from his stepfather...

According to Elizabeth, Johnson's departures from home often resulted in beatings at the hands of his stepfather Robert Saunders, who wanted him to assist the family with farm work. "... He didn't *wanna* work. He didn't have that on his mind. And he tell me or anybody else, he say: 'I don't wanna work; I'm tryin' to learn how to make my livin' *without* pickin' cotton.'"

"... He was young, he couldn't

whip the old man nohow," she added. "The old man was pretty stout. Every time he'd beat him he'd run off ... Well, he's gone two or three weeks 'fore the old lady would see him again." After fleeing from his house, Johnson would seek accommodations from sympathetic neighbors.

*"Beat it kid, you'll get stepped on!"*

Johnson's parents were not alone in contesting his presence at local house "frolics": due to the fact that he liked to station himself right at their feet, House and Brown would tease him by shouting: "Beat it kid, you'll get stepped on!" Though House himself had only three-years playing experience when he came to Lake Cormorant, and could play only one-chord bottleneck motifs, he never viewed Johnson as anything but a neophyte. He claimed that Johnson was never able to master Willie Brown's version of *Pony Blues* and generally "made such a mess outta everything he played" that he was surprised by word of Johnson's recording session. But House was no judge of musical talent: he considered the mundane Brown to be Charlie Patton's superior, and obtusely insisted that Patton was a poor musician. Elizabeth Moore would say of the young Johnson: "This Robert Johnson was over Son House to my idea of playin'." She only preferred Willie Brown to Johnson for his lower, bassier guitar sound, which she called "B-flat music."

Whatever Johnson's actual abilities in the early 1930s, his reputation was still too recently established to rival that of Brown, who had been a musical fixture in the Lake Cormorant area since 1916. "He wasn't as good as Willie Brown," claimed a Rolling Fork bluesman, Willie Morris. "Brown was a lot better ... knew more about music, 'cause he (Johnson) was young and Willie was old: Willie had been playin' God knows how long." The local ascendancy of Brown and House as house "frolic" commodities no doubt gave Johnson impetus to develop an independent brand of music.

"He wasn't around Willie and them too much after he learnt," House reported. "He'd always go another direction by himself ..." On the other hand, Elizabeth Moore recalled: "... He used to go around, sit and play with Willie Brown lots in Robinsonville. See, they had a colored juke ... just up the railroad north; it's a little piece out of town ... He'd play there with Willie Brown. Willie Brown and Son House." In such situations, Johnson used Brown as a backing guitarist. "When Saxton'd be playin' he want to play lead all the time," Willie Moore said. "... Willie would want to play the second guitar."

Another early local crony was House's cousin Frank House, who often worked with Johnson before his death in Robinsonville in July of 1932. They played at a juke in Bowdre, which Elizabeth describes as "just a little old flagstop below Robinsonville." Of Frank (who also performed with Willie Brown) she said: "Frank played near about like Son ... Most everyone say they was two brothers 'cause they looked so much alike."

In addition to these older figures (Frank House had been born in 1894), Johnson also worked in tandem with a young female blues guitarist who came "back west of Helena": "she didn't know how to play too good, she was just like Robert," Elizabeth said. "I reckon he'd learn what she know and she'd learn what he know."

Johnson seems to have devoted his formative years between 1929 and 1931 towards building a repertoire that was independent of House and Brown. In that period, when Johnson "wasn't twenty years old ... wasn't nothin' but a boy," Willie Moore was to meet him outside a Chinese owned grocery store in Robinsonville. Moore's account of their collaboration provides our most detailed glimpse of his early career:

"... He seed me with a guitar," Moore reported. "I was goin' to Austin<sup>3</sup> to play for a dance ... He asked me, he say: 'Say! ... What you play, lead? Or just 'play?'"

"... I say: 'I hardly ever play the lead ... When I got a partner, I play



the complement." (Moore had been Willie Brown's frequent back-up guitarist since 1916 and had accompanied Charlie Patton some ten years before meeting Johnson.)

"He say: 'God knows I need one so bad!' He say: '... I got a boy could play, but ... he don't know how to put that introduction in there.'

"I say: 'Man, he musta learned at home! ... I learned at school' ... I can make 'B-flat' so slick until it'll kill me!"

Given this assurance, Johnson induced his new-found accompanist to wait while he procured his guitar, a wood-bodied Stella with a metal resonator.<sup>5</sup> Without further preliminaries, they then launched an impromptu concert on the sidewalk in front of the grocery: "... We got to rehearsin' there ... and the folks couldn't get by 'em (their audience). We hadda quit there."

Moore's recollection of the various tunes Johnson played indicated that he began his career with a derivative repertoire, as did most bluesmen. "He sing about: *Captain George, Did Your Money Come?*," said Moore, who added that this was an "old" song. It was phrased in the mode of eight-bar "rag" ditties and began with the verse:

Captain George did your money come? (3)

The reason I ask I wanna borrow some

Captain George did your money come?

"... Willie Brown and them never *would* play that," Moore said. "He (Brown) didn't like it ..."

Moore added: "... Next thing he played about: *Make Me Down*, but he never did say: 'Make me down a pallet,' he say: 'Flung me down a pallet on your floor, an' make it so your man won't never know.'" Johnson also sang a *Black Gal, Whyn'cha Comb Your Head?*, a piece called *You Can Mistreat Me Here But You Can't When I Go Home*, and a bottleneck song called *President McKinley*, which derived its title stanza from the familiar *Frankie And Johnnie*.

A rubber-tired buggy and a

decorated hack:

They carried McKinley to the cemetery, but they didn't bring him back.

His front-line pieces were two standards: *East St. Louis Blues*, and a bottleneck version of *Casey Jones* he called *A Thousand And Five On The Road Again*.

From Moore's account it would appear that the only one of Johnson's recordings that might have typified his early repertoire was *Last Fair Deal Gone Down*, a 16-bar "rag" ditty Henry Thomas had recorded as *Red River Blues*.

Moore recalled the youthful Johnson as having had a "bad eye," an abnormality of his right eye is clearly visible in the full-length photograph Steve LaVere obtained from Johnson's sister.

"A white passerby...summoned Sheriff Willfork to the scene."

Besides using Willie Moore as a sideman at local dances, Johnson appeared in Robinsonville and Hughes, Arkansas with a back-up guitarist named Wash Hamp: "He just second on him when him and Robert'd play together," Moore said of Hamp, who lived at Walker's Levee near Helena, Arkansas. Johnson also played with a pianist from Lost Lake (a town five miles southeast of Robinsonville) named Punk Taylor, who was then in his forties. Without having "any idea what they were singin' about," Moore would chime in as Johnson and Taylor sang a duet patterned on the familiar *Crump Don't Low It* in a Robinsonville barrelhouse: "Mister Smith don't low it, Mister Willfork ain't gonna have it here." This allusion to the local constable and high sheriff alarmed a white passerby who, taking their revelry for insubordination, summoned sheriff Willfork to the scene. "We got put in the calaboose 'bout an hour," Moore said, who recollected the episode with laughter. "Then we got out ... and went across

Buck Island Bayou<sup>6</sup> where the people was dancin' ... And then we come back to town that mornin', played all night."

For a time afterwards, Moore continued his casual working relationship with Johnson: "Like if he need me, he'd get in a buggy or get on a mule or horse ... get a car or somethin'; come and get me and we'd play ... Plenty a-times ... they'd be so many folks would be wantin' that boy (Johnson), we'd have to split up and play those dances ..." Finally Moore joined a Greenwood blues band and "never saw Robert 'Sax' no more."

In turn, Johnson exported his own blues throughout the upper Delta. Elizabeth Moore said: "... He'd go down to Tunica where people run them old roadhouses ... Heap of times he'd be all 'round Lambert, you know; somewhere back on this *Dog*, down 'old Mud-line', they called it: 'T'se down 'old Mud-line' such and such a night. Boy, I had a big time!" He was still not popular enough to perform for asking fees: "He couldn't set no price on nobody; he was just takin' what they'd give him."

"The first chance I get, I'm goin' up to New York..."

At the same time, Johnson made no secret of his ambition to become a blues recording star. "He told us, he said: 'The first chance I get,' say: 'I'm goin' up to New York—they tell me there's a good place up there where ... you just make a record ... an' you can get lots of money for it.'" Apparently, Johnson was oblivious to the moribund condition of the record industry, which had been toppled by the Depression.

"I don't know if he ever went to New York," Elizabeth added, "but he *did* go to Memphis," she recalled, Johnson produced a vanity disc in 1931 or 1932: "He just had that little stuff demonstrated for hisself, and he just carryin' it amongst the colored people where he'd be, you know ... He'd sit down and play it, let us hear it ... People would say: 'Oh

child, that *dosound* nice!' 'Boy, you hear that?' 'That's really nice!' 'Boy, you keep goin' on!'"

During this period Johnson was fashioning the basic repertoire he would use on his recordings. Four years before he recorded in 1936, Elizabeth heard him perform such pieces as *Kind-Hearted Woman*, *Ramblin' On My Mind*, *32-20 Blues*, *Come On In My Kitchen*, and *Cross Roads Blues*, a piece he invented while waiting for a bus after performing at a local barrelhouse. Of his eventual musical trademark, she said: "He called hisself tryin' to play that boogie when he's around Robinsonville." An idea of what Johnson's early boogie sounded like is afforded by listening to Johnnie Temple's *Lead Pencil Blues*, which was recorded in 1935, but was based upon the music Temple heard Johnson play in 1931 or 1932 in Jackson. At that time, Johnson was situated in Hattiesburg and traveled under the name "R.L." (the only one by which Temple knew him). He would hobo to Jackson on Friday nights, and play there before moving on to the Delta town of Sunflower, where he would perform for the rest of the weekend. To Temple, Johnson otherwise loomed as an imitator of Charlie Patton. Unknown to Temple, Johnson was apparently a musical sponge: he managed to acquire the version of the *Devil Got My Woman* Temple had recently learned from Skip James, for he would record the work as *Hellbound On My Trail*.

Johnson's early Depression orbit extended well beyond south and central Mississippi; Elizabeth Moore recalls him traveling "from Missouri on up to St. Louis" in pursuit of his calling. At a Robinsonville house party he serenaded in the summer of 1931 or 1932, he announced his departure for San Antonio, Texas. "He say: 'I'm leavin' this mornin', you-all ... Say: 'I don't know when I'll be back ...' We saw him about two months after then ... He come back in September."

Finally Johnson quit Robinsonville for keeps: "The last time I seen him, fall of 1932," Elizabeth said. "He went to Helena then. He left from Robinsonville...with another young man, you know, makin' music..."

## House described Johnson as a "monkey man"...

Son House, who attributed Johnson's departure to family strife, was left with a single impression of him: "He was a nice boy, just crazy about women," adding contemptuously: "He was always up in some woman's face." When asked how Johnson's conduct differed from that of other blues singers such as Charlie Patton, House described Johnson as a "monkey man", or someone whose guileless appreciation of women made him their ready dupe. (As Skip James put it, a "monkey man" is "grateful to touch the hem of a woman's garment.") If Johnson ever belonged to this species, he had outgrown it by the time he made his recordings, which take a jaundiced

attitude towards the opposite sex.

Although Sol Henderson (an amateur Robinsonville guitarist who knew Johnson casually) regarded him as a quarrelsome drinker who often fought with women, Willie Moore said: "I ain't never knowed him to get in no fights. He wasn't no clowny person ..." The advances of local women, Moore said, outdid Johnson's own: "He wasn't wild, but I'll tell you, them gals pulled at him all the time ..." Elizabeth Moore said of him: "Oh, he liked ... when he's growin' up, you know (to) talk with women a whole lot—I don't say, you know, he just done a whole lot of dirt."

In Helena, the southern tip of the Arkansas Delta region extending from West Memphis that was known among bluesmen as "The Bucket" (perhaps to complement "The Gut", a section of Memphis), Johnson acquired yet another alias. "The



photo by Steve LaVere

Low Tide—1/2 mile west of the Memphis-Arkansas Bridge



biggest thing they called him was 'Blue,'" recalled a native of Marvel, Willie Brown. A Helena resident named Sammy Washington said: "He called himself 'Dusty', though; Robert Dusty." The name "Blue" had probably arisen through a misapprehension of the meaning of "Dusty": both terms were once a common slang designation for dark-featured blacks.

According to a local source, Johnson normally worked out of Marianna, a town of 4,300 located twenty miles northeast of Helena (which was nearly twice as populous), and would visit the latter town for only a week or two on end: "He'd always be uptown here; play on the streets ... And then from there on to West Memphis, little old place they call *The Blue Goose*, right off Eighth Street." Sammy Washington, who frequently saw Johnson perform in a Helena barrelhouse called *The Hole in The Wall* between 1932 and 1936,

remarked: "He never did stay in one town long, because he be playin' from one place to another one. Those small towns: no big towns."

*"...Johnson frequently mentioned Patton as an inspiration..."*

While living in "The Bucket" Johnson was imitated by Robert Lockwood, a native of Marvel three years his junior whose mother was once his common-law wife. (Lockwood's mother "looked about as young as he did," David Edwards said. "I think she had him when she was young, 'bout fourteen years old or somethin' like that.") Johnson acquired another protégé in the person of Johnnie Shines, a twenty-year old novice from Hughes who met him in 1935 while visiting Helena with a pianist named "M&O,"

who was already a friend of Johnson. Among Johnson's main performance pieces were Charlie Patton's *Pony* and *Banty Rooster Blues*, and Shines recalled that Johnson frequently mentioned Patton as an inspiration. Although the most popular musicians of the time and place were (Shines' recollection) Howlin' Wolf and Memphis Minnie, Shines became enamored of Johnson's music, which he admittedly couldn't copy. He was impressed by Johnson's ability to "play guitar like a piano," to play what sounded like "horn riffs" (a farfetched comparison), to play guitar without a capo, and to rearrange his pieces as he re-played them. According to Shines, Johnson would occasionally hazard hillbilly tunes and such pop pieces as *My Blue Heaven*: "Certain types of music—if you didn't know, you missed a meal back then," he said. "A buck was a whole day's work." Since the audiences that demanded pop and waltz numbers of musicians like Johnson and Shines were situated "in St. Louis, Kansas City, East St. Louis, Chicago, and Decatur, Illinois," it may be safely assumed that Johnson played such music infrequently.

*In Brooklyn, Johnson hoped to appear on Major Bowes' show...*

Despite Shines' admiration for his music, Johnson was not a willing teacher. He would turn away if musicians watched his fingering, and generally shunned Shines, who found him uncommunicative (except when drunk) and "hard to understand." Thanks to Shines' persistence, they passed interludes in Decatur, Illinois (a town they visited with Shines' cousin Calvin Frazier, an Osceola, Arkansas guitarist then on the run from the law), Detroit (where they met the bootlegger-pianist Big Maceo and performed for the *Elder Moten Hour*, a local radio show), and Windsor, Ontario. After Johnson's sudden departure from Windsor, Shines located him in Brooklyn, New York; Shines thought he had visited the city in hopes of appearing on Major Bowes' amateur talent show. Once they hoboed to



**New 1938  
HUDSON  
Terraplane**

courtesy of Stephen Galt

St. Louis, where they were turned away from a barrelhouse featuring Peetie Wheatstraw because of their scruffy clothes.

The two or three visits Johnson paid to the Delta after leaving Robinsonville lasted, in Elizabeth Moore's recollection, only a weekend. On those occasions he traveled with a wife named Roberta. "They'd go from Robinsonville to the (Mississippi) river, out there at Lula; see, that's where the ferry was ... and then they go on 'cross home." She would last see Johnson around 1937 at a Friar's Point barrelhouse called *The Blue And White Club*; when she and her husband Harvey attempted to engage him at their own local club, he declined: "He goin' back to Arkansas; it's Moro, Arkansas, where he say he's gonna go back to play."

*H.C. Speir  
recommends Johnson  
to ARC's Oertle...*



from the collection of Sherman Tolson

(November 23, 1936—San Antonio)

While staying on a Louisiana plantation, Johnson either visited or was discovered by the Jackson, Mississippi dealer/scout H.C. Speir. Speir recommended him to a New Orleans record salesman, George

Oertle, who covered Louisiana and Mississippi for the American Record Company (ARC), and often picked up scouting tips on fortnightly visits to Speir's store. He subsequently recorded 16 tunes in three days of

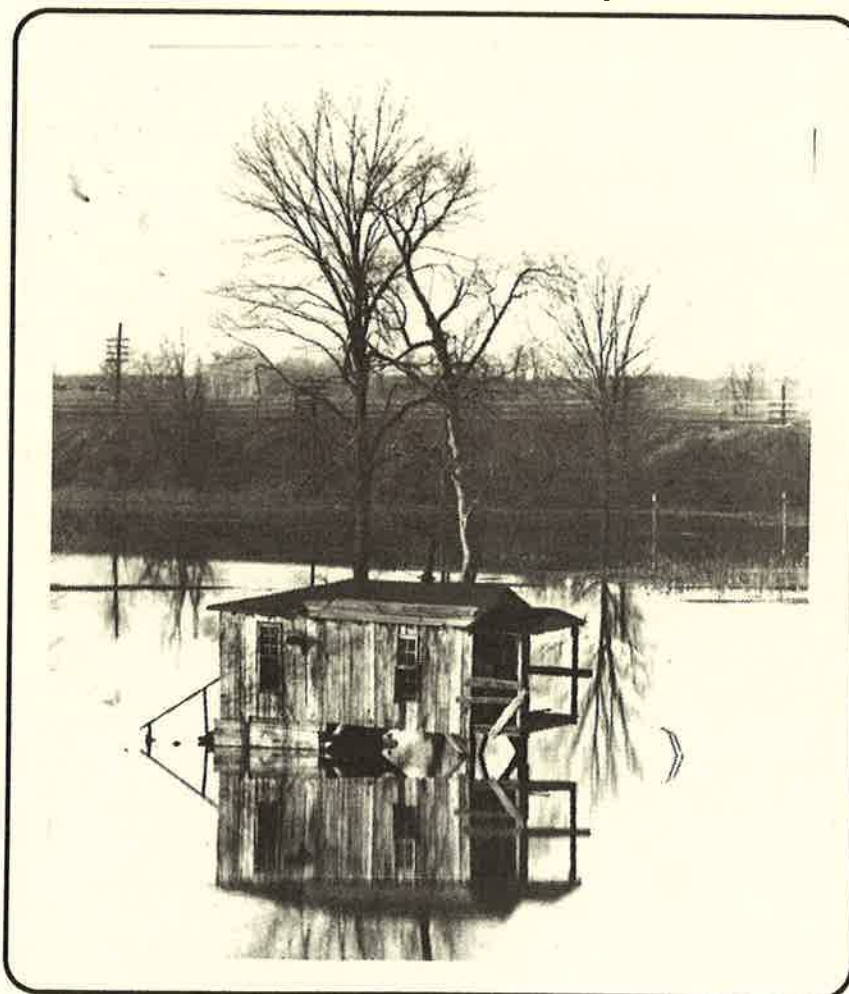


photo by Steve Lallere

High Tide—1/2 mile west of the Memphis-Arkansas Bridge



recording for ARC at facilities given over to radio station KONO at the Blue Bonnet Hotel in San Antonio, Texas, which was originally eyed by the company as a recording site in order to provide material for the Texas jukebox market.

When Johnson turned his back upon a group of Mexican musicians in the studio while playing music, his producer Don Law (the bearer of "tall, exciting tales" concerning Johnson to John Hammond) formed the impression that he was extremely shy. In light of Johnnie Shines' recollections of Johnson, however, it would seem that this gesture was intended to thwart imagined copyists.

Johnson was one of the first blues musicians whose sound was not muzzled by poor recording. The recording process masked his most notable deficiency: a weak singing voice that would have hampered his efforts to corral "house frolic" audiences. "You didn't have to sing loud to sing louder than Robert," Johnnie Shines said of him.

Although it is Johnson's song imagery that has fascinated modern commentators, the most notable aspect of his lyrics was the extent to which they echoed his vagrant lifestyle. At the time of his session, Johnson could not claim to be the denizen of any particular region: he had transient roots in Robinsonville, south Mississippi, and the Arkansas Delta. In this respect he was unlike most of the recorded blues singers of the era. Impulsive departures figured as his primary song motif:

I got up this mornin', feel around for my shoes

You know by that I got these old walkin' blues

I go ramblin', I got ramblin' all on my mind

I'm gonna get up this mornin', I believe I'll dust my broom ...

Likewise, Johnson's music had no pronounced regional ambience. It was broadly eclectic, drawing freely upon records, other musicians, and presumably, his own imagination.

## *Terraplane Blues became his most successful recording...*

Between January and October of 1937 Johnson's commercial sponsors issued nine of his records, averaging one new release every month. Its first offering, *Terraplane Blues* and *Kind-Hearted Woman*, proved to be his most successful work and probably served as the justification of his return session in Dallas seven months after the first. This time Johnson produced 13 sides in two days. Although his Dallas session did not exhaust his fund of music, it must have taxed his performing repertoire, for five of his works were remakes of earlier-recorded tunes. One of his departures, *Hellhound On My Trail*, was played with an uncertain touch, indicating that Johnson was straining for material. The session produced no commercially successful sides, and when his ARC contract expired in June of 1938, he was not returned to the studio. At the age of 26, Johnson was a record industry has-been.

Before his Mississippi and Arkansas audiences, however, Johnson could still garnish prestige merely by virtue of having recorded. "At that time one record was worth a dozen now," Johnnie Shines said. "If a man made a record out there, he was a popular son of a gun ... It's a thing unbelievable to most people: 'I have just met a man made records!'"

## *Reunion with Son House and Willie Brown: "All our eyes was bugged!"*

Sometime after his last session Johnson visited Robinsonville with copies of his records. He carried a National guitar (to which he had added an extra first string) and entered a barrelhouse where Son House and Willie Brown were performing. House had not seen him for several years.

"... He's comin' in waggin'

through the crowd," House recalled, "... with the guitar on his back. I said: 'Bill, look who'se comin' in the door.'

"He said: 'That's Little Robert.' We all called him 'Little Robert.'

"(I) said: 'Now I wonder where's he going to annoy somebody today?' He got over there and I said: 'Boy, where you going with that thing?'

"He said: 'Well, allow me a little chance; I'll show you.'

"I winked my eye at Willie, I say: 'Okay, c'mon, sit down in my chair then, let me see.'

"And man, that little rascal—when he got through with it, all our eyes was bugged ... he was going! Playing that piece about the *Terraplane Blues*. Yeah, he was 'gone' with it.

## *"You crazy about every woman you see..."*

"I said: 'Well, Robert, look ... you crazy about every woman you see ...' Say: 'Every time a woman pat you on the back or the shoulder and call you 'Daddy,' don't go crazy about her, now. She be dippin' that snuff and mixing it with that old corn whiskey; she just callin' you that for you to play some more. And she's liable to have three or four men standin' 'round there in the corner. So don't get too crazy about her, or you won't last long ...' 'Course, he *didn't* last too long, either ... About three weeks after that, he got killed."

Although House probably made no such speech to Johnson, his sentiments regarding the dangers of their profession were practically proverbial among bluesmen. For this reason, Johnson's fatal fall, as reported by David Edwards, reveals an astonishing degree of naïveté or recklessness on his part.

"Robert was down in McComb City," relates Edwards, who considered him Mississippi's best bluesman of the period. "He was livin' with a old lady in 'Beartown,' they call it; that's in McComb ... I think her name was Cora. She's settled; a lot

older than Robert, but she had her own house. You know how a musician is: a woman got a house, he sleep and lay around the house; he go out and make his money. So he left there and come up to Greenwood and played around the country and make him some money."

## *"Mister, can you play the Terraplane Blues?"*

Greenwood, the Delta's second largest town, numbered 11,000 residents (half of them black) when Johnson played there. Among its resident musicians were Tommy McClennan and Edwards himself.

"... He hit there on Saturday evenin' ... He just standin' on the streets playin'. One lady walked up ... she didn't know who he was ... she said: 'Mister, can you play the *Terraplane Blues*?'

"He said: 'That's my record', say: 'I just recorded it.' Times was tough then, and she give him a quarter, and he played that number ... They just kept a-pitchin' him nickels and dimes then.

"... So this fella ... he come up there in the crowd and said: 'Can I get you tonight?' ... He offered him so much to go out and play for a country dance; went out that Saturday night ... I went out there with him.

## *"... This man's wife...went crazy about him."*

"... The next Saturday night, this man's wife (i.e., the wife of the party-thrower) went crazy about him ... After the next weekend, she comes to Greenwood, where Robert was ... She met him in town, and they start layin' around together. The next Saturday night we went out there, and the man discovered that Robert was goin' with his wife ... he give his friend some whiskey ... At that time he (Johnson) was greedy; drank a lot of whiskey."

Booker Miller, a recently-retired Greenwood bluesman who routinely accepted drinks from strangers during performances, heard that Johnson's benefactor was something



photo by Tom Hudgins

Three Forks, Mississippi. The possible site of Johnson's final performance.



photo by Tom Hudgins

The "black people's cemetery" near Morgan City, Mississippi in which Johnson is thought to have been buried.



less than friendly: "They tell me that he come out there ... and a fella called him outside and give him a drink of whiskey. And he come back in the house and he just taken suddenly sick ... I guess they wanted to say that this fella that carried him out there intend to poison him."

David Edwards reached the same conclusion: "After he got that first drink, he played about thirty or forty minutes longer; then he quit and we went back again, and he started to gettin' sick. And the peoples' just pourin' in from town, then, havin' a good time. They said: 'Come, let's play!' He said: 'I'm sick as I can be!' ... He was just faintin' out ... The people still didn't know what's wrong with him: they was steady-punchin' him to play ... He just got so he couldn't go no further."

Johnson died outside of Greenwood on August 16th, 1938, after having been removed to a friend's house. The official who drew up his death certificate declined to rule on his cause of death, as was required by state law, but blandly reported that there was "no doctor present" when Johnson died. None of his local cronies reported his death as suspicious. "... Us colored people 'round there knowed what's happenin' but we didn't have no evidence," Edwards said. "You couldn't say if you didn't see nobody do nothin'." But this disclaimer was disingenuous: poisonings are solved by autopsies, not eyewitness evidence. Most likely, Johnson's associates did not consider his death to be unwarranted, given the mores of the times, and simply washed their hands of the matter. The life of a blues singer was, in any event, cheap.

**Footnotes**

1. Son House supposed that Johnson's nickname reflected his resemblance to a stepfather, Robert Saunders, whose short stature led others to call him "Robert Dusty".
2. He also played a jew's harp, Johnnie Shines recalled.
3. Austin lies about twelve miles below Robinsonville.
4. Moore had received musical training at Tuskegee University.
5. Elizabeth Moore once asked Johnson his purpose for using the resonator guitar: "He say: 'Well, that make my guitar sound louder, sec?'" Johnnie

Temple reported that Peetic Wheatstraw played the same kind of Stella.

6. An unincorporated settlement near Robinsonville.

**Sources**

Quotes attributed to Elizabeth Moore and her husband Willie were drawn from tape recorded interviews conducted by Gayle Wardlow between 1967-1969, when both were residents of Sumner, Mississippi. Quotes attributed to Booker Miller, Sammy Washington, Leroy Willis, and Willie Brown were drawn from tape recorded interviews conducted by Wardlow at Greenwood, Mississippi and Helena, Arkansas in 1969. Quotes attributed to Son House were drawn from tape recorded interviews conducted by Stephen Calt in 1965. Quotes attributed to David Edwards were drawn from a tape recorded interview conducted by Calt in 1971. Johnnie Shines was interviewed by Calt in 1972.

**HUNTER & JENKINS**  
(Vocal Blues with Inst. Acc.)  
02613 Lollypop  
02613 Meat Cuttin' Blues

**ROBERT JOHNSON**  
(Vocal Blues with Guitar Acc.)  
04002 Honeyman Blues  
03416 Kind Hearted Woman Blues  
04108 Little Queen of Spades  
04630 Love in Vain Blues  
03665 Malted Milk  
04108 Me and the Devil Blues  
03665 Milkcow's Calf Blues  
04630 Preachin' Blues  
04002 Stop Breakin' Down Blues  
03601 Sweet Home Chicago  
03416 Terraplane Blues  
03601 Walkin' Blues

**BLIND WILLIE JOHNSON**  
(Sacred Singing)  
03095 Dark Was the Night—Cold Was the Ground  
03021 If I Had My Way I'd Tear the Building Down  
03095 It's Nobody's Fault But Mine

courtesy of Sherman Tolén  
from the 1938 Vocalion catalog

MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
VITAL RECORDS

BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS STANDARD CERTIFICATE OF DEATH State File No. 13704

MISSISSIPPI STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

1. PLACE OF DEATH  
County Leflore Registered No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Voting Precinct \_\_\_\_\_ or Village \_\_\_\_\_  
or City Greenwood (outside) Ward \_\_\_\_\_  
(If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give its N° NE instead of street and number)

2. FULL NAME Robert Johnson (Write or Print Name Plainly)  
(a) Residence: No. Greenwood Miss. St. \_\_\_\_\_ Ward \_\_\_\_\_  
(Usual place of abode) (If nonresident give city or town and State)

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

3. SEX M 4. COLOR OR RACE B 5. Single, Married, Widowed, or Divorced (write the word) single

6. If married, widowed, or divorced HUSBAND (or) WIFE of \_\_\_\_\_

7. DATE OF BIRTH (month, day, and year) \_\_\_\_\_

8. AGE 26 Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_ Days \_\_\_\_\_ If LESS than 1 day, specify hrs. \_\_\_\_\_

9. Trade, profession, or particular kind of work done, or officer, seaman, housekeeper, etc. musician

10. Date deceased last worked at his occupation (month, day, and year) Aug 1938 11. Total time (years) spent in this occupation 10

12. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) Greenwood Miss. (State or country) \_\_\_\_\_

13. NAME Robert Johnson

14. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) B. I. (State or country) \_\_\_\_\_

15. MAIDEN NAME Julia Major

16. BIRTHPLACE (city or town) Miss. (State or country) \_\_\_\_\_

17. INFORMANT (and Address) Jim Moore

18. BURIAL, CREMATION, or REMOVAL Place Greenwood Miss. Date 8-17-1938

19. UNDERTAKER (and Address) Family

20. FILED 8-18-38 Registrar \_\_\_\_\_

21. DATE OF DEATH (month, day and year) 8-16-38

22. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ Death is said to have occurred on the date stated above, at \_\_\_\_\_

The principal cause of death and related causes of importance in order of most were as follows: \_\_\_\_\_

Contributory causes of importance not related to principal cause: no doctor

Name of operation (if any was done) \_\_\_\_\_ Date of \_\_\_\_\_

What test confirmed diagnosis? \_\_\_\_\_ Was there an autopsy? \_\_\_\_\_

23. If death was due to external cause (violence) fill in also the following: Accident, suicide, or homicide? \_\_\_\_\_

Date of injury \_\_\_\_\_

Where did injury occur? \_\_\_\_\_ (Specify city or town, county, and State)

Specify whether injury occurred in industry, in home, or in public place \_\_\_\_\_

24. Was disease or injury in any way related to occupation of deceased? \_\_\_\_\_ If so, specify \_\_\_\_\_

(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_ M. D. (Address) \_\_\_\_\_

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE ABOVE IS A TRUE AND CORRECT COPY OF THE CERTIFICATE ON FILE IN THIS OFFICE.

Alton B. Cobb, M.D. January 19, 1989 David Lohrlich  
STATE HEALTH OFFICER STATE REGISTRAR

WARNING: It is illegal to alter or counterfeit this copy.

Robert Johnson's Death Certificate—found by Gayle Wardlow in January, 1969.

courtesy of Gayle Dean Wardlow

# Facts about the Robert Johnson photographs...

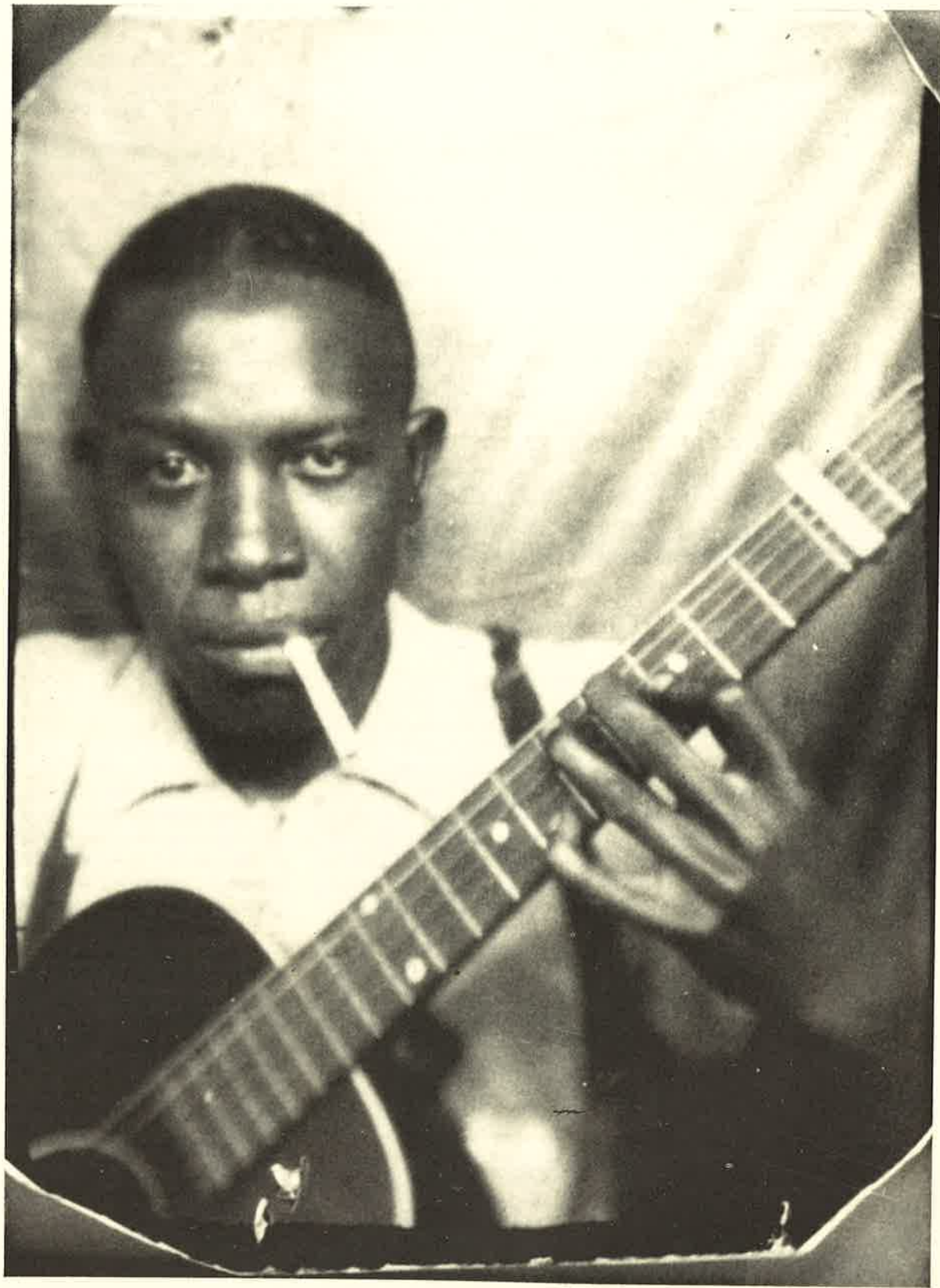
The two photographs (on page 40 and page 52) were obtained in 1974 from Johnson's sister by blues researcher Steve LaVere, whose definitive biographical work on Johnson is still in progress. The studio portrait was to have appeared on the cover of a projected Columbia triple LP—*The Complete Robert Johnson*—but that album never materialized. According to Mr. LaVere, the occasion for the studio portrait, which was taken in Memphis, was the departure of Johnson's nephew for the Navy. Readers interested in obtaining a poster of these photographs may do so by sending \$10 for both (or five dollars each) to Pomegranate Publications, Box 808022, Petaluma, CA 94975.

The area in which Johnson last played—and died...

I took the photographs on a trip through the delta in the summer of 1987. Based on information from Mack McCormick (which stated that Johnson 'was buried in the graveyard of a small church near Morgan City, outside of Greenwood, in an unmarked grave'), I decided to follow this lead to wherever it might lead. I turned south one exit before Greenwood and drove into Ita Bena. My requests for directions to Morgan City led me south down the same road—where, much to my surprise, I drove past the asphalt-sided building in (the top photo). The 'Three Forks' sign told me I was in the right place. And the Coca-Cola sign stirred my curiosity as to whether or not this might be a public meeting place, juke joint, or possibly the site of Robert Johnson's last performance...Further down the road, I came to a sign that said Morgan City. There, I asked a group of black men for directions to a cemetery which would have been around in the late '30s. They asked if I wanted 'the black people's or white people's cemetery.' I got directions to both. The black cemetery (bottom photo) is not visible from the road,

as it sits behind a line of trees. There are some markers there that date to 1935, placing the resting ground in the proper era. It appears to be in use today, since there was evidence of a fresh grave. There was no church in the area, nor evidence of a foundation, contrary to information I had read... (The white people's cemetery does have an old church building on site and markers which pre-date the 30s...whether these are the places where Robert Johnson was poisoned and subsequently buried will have to be verified by further research."—Tom Hudgins





The "dime store" photo of Robert Johnson is available as a poster from Pomgranate Publication, Box 808022, Petaluma, CA 94975. \$5 each retail. Dealer inquiries welcome.

Robert  
Johnson

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# THE IDIOMS OF ROBERT JOHNSON

by Stephen Calt

Robert Johnson's songs were unusual for 1930s blues in their frequent use of slang terms and idioms, which gave them a 1920s cast and projected an image of Johnson as a barrelhouse habitué. With the exception of *Love In Vain*, all of Johnson's recordings are partly dependent on slang terms for their meaning, and many of the terms Johnson uses are unique in recorded song. Although Johnson created cant sexual metaphors in such songs as *Terraplane Blues*, *They're Red Hot*, and *Phonograph Blues*, most of his unusual song expressions were drawn from existing figures of speech. The idiomatic character of his songs is all the more remarkable in light of Elizabeth Moore's recollection that Johnson customarily wrote the words to his songs on paper. Below is a lexicon of Johnson's song expressions; those that are unique to his recordings are followed by an asterisk. Books that are cited by abbreviation in parentheses are listed at the end of the lexicon.

**barrelhouse:**

*An' I'm goin' to Rosedale gonna take my rider by my side*

*We can still barrelhouse baby 'cause it's on the riverside.*

(*Travelin' Riverside Man*, 1937)

To carouse in any socially disreputable fashion associated with the barrelhouse, a commercial establishment given over to drinking, gambling, dancing, and prostitution. By the 1930s barrelhouses were largely obsolete in Mississippi.

**biscuit roller:**

*An' I rolled an' I tumbled an' I cried the whole night long*

*I woke up this mornin', my biscuit roller gone.*

(*If I Had Possession Over Judgment Day*, 1936)

In conventional slang, a cook; associated with ranch use (ATS). It cannot be demonstrated that this term was a *double-entendre*.

**blow:**

*I feel like blowin' my ol' lonesome home*

*Got up this mornin' now, it was gone.*

(*Walking Blues*, 1936)

A conventional slang term meaning to leave, usually hastily (Partridge, DAS).

**booked\*:**

*I got three lanes to truck on, boy please don't block my road*

*I be feelin' 'shamed by my rider, baby I'm booked an' I got to go.*

(*Stones In My Passway*, 1937)

Although this expression is currently used to mean "obligated to leave," with an implied comparison to a theatrical booking, its conventional slang meaning at the time of the above recording was to be in trouble (Partridge). Johnson may have derived it from Lonnie Johnson's *Another Woman Booked Out And Bound To Go* (1930).

**The Breakaway:**

*I'm gonna upset your back*

*Gonna put your kidneys to sleep*

*I'll do the Breakaway on your liver*

*And dare your heart to beat.*





(from the collection of Sherman Tolen)

(They're Red Hot. 1936)

A solo dance section (usually done by males) performed as part of the Jitterbug, which became a national craze in 1936. The above couplet was probably a contemporary bar-restaurant boast.

**bull cow:**

*My milk cow been ramblin', for miles around*

*She been (sellin'?) some other bullcow, Lord in this man's town.*

(Milkcow Calf's Blues take 2: 1937)

A Mississippi blues term for a boyfriend that also occurs in Charlie Patton's *Jim Lee Blues, Part One* ("I got a kid on the wheeler, got a bullcow on the plough"). It was likely formed by analogy to *milk cow* (q.v.).

**bumble bee:**

*The (bee) is gone back in the bumble bee's nest*

*Ever since daddy can't take his test.*

(They're Red Hot. 1936)

An artificial slang term for a sex

partner fostered by the popularity of Memphis Minnie's *Bumble Bee* (1929). The original comparison was technically faulty, as only the female of the species has a stinger.

**business:**

*Now two and two is four,*

*Four and two is six*

*You gonna keep on monkeyin' around here friend-boy*

*You're gonna get your business all in a trick.*

(Sweet Home Chicago. 1936)

Sexual affairs; more commonly rendered in blues song as "to get one's business fixed."

**California\*:**

*Oh, baby don't you want to go?*

*Back to the land of California, to my sweet home Chicago.*

(Sweet Home Chicago. 1936)

Money or wealth. "California" was a 19th century term for gold coins that had been obsolete for 20 years when Johnson used it. Cf. Partridge; F&H.

**captain:**

*My Captain's so mean on me*

*On that Gulfport Island Road.*

(Last Fair Deal Gone Down. 1937)

A standard English term applied to a foreman or superintendent dating to the early 17th century (OED) and obsolete by the time it was used by Johnson. As a servile form of address to white persons, "captain" was used interchangeably with "sir" by Southern blacks in the Jim Crow era.

**child:**

*Runnin' down to the station, get the first mail train I see*

*I got the blues 'bout Miss so-and-so, and the child's got the blues about me.*

(Ramblin' On My Mind. 1936)

A black idiom used synonymously with any of the three singular personal pronouns. The term derives from the English dialect word *chiel*, which was used in the second person as "a familiar term of address to adults as well as children" (EDD). By 1850 it had passed into American colloquial speech (Partridge); Bartlett (1877) treats it (in the form *this child*, meaning "myself") as Western slang.

**Christmas eve:**

*If today was Christmas eve, and tomorrow Christmas day*

*I wouldn't need my little street rider just to pass the time away.*

(Hellhound On My Trail. 1937)

An old-fashioned black idiom for Saturday night that probably reflects the antebellum and Jim Crow era plantation custom of holding Christmas frolics, with food and liquor furnished by the white master or boss. The expression also occurs in Kokomo Arnold's *Old Black Cat Blues* (1935):

*Yes these blues, mama, ain't nothin' but a doggone heart disease*

*I was broke an' disgusted, I didn't have no money for Christmas eve.*

Johnson's couplet implies that on a Saturday night he could either afford or obtain a higher-class or more



(from the collection of Sherman Tolen)

desirable sex partner than his present company.

**clown:**

*Now you Saturday night women, you love to ape an' clown*

*You won't do nothin' but tear a good man's reputation down.*

(Stop Breakin' Down. 1937)

To show off; behave boisterously; generally used pejoratively in obsolete Southern black speech. As applied to women, the term connoted flirting.

**clown:**

*From four until eight she give us a no-good bartend' clown*

*Now she won't do nothin' but tear a good man's reputation down.*

(From Four Until Late. 1937)

A conventional slang equivalent of "jerk."

**cold chill(s):**

*She is a little queen of spades, and the men will not let her be*

*Every time she makes a spread, whoo cold chills just runs all over me.*

(Little Queen Of Spades. 1937)

A dated Southern colloquialism in which the modifier "cold" is redundant. It appears in Opie Read's dialect novel *An Arkansas Traveler* (1896): "Her husband held out his waxen hand, and when I took it I shuddered with the cold chill it sent through me."

**console\*:**

*I can't walk the streets cons— console me my mind*

*Some no-good woman she starts breakin' down.*

(Stop Breakin' Down Blues. 1937)

An archaic standard English word that was usurped by the synonymous "console" in the 18th century, now surviving only as the root of "consolation" (OED).

**creampuff:**

*I'm a hard-workin' man, have been for many long years I know*

*And some creampuff's usin' my money, but that'll never be no more.*

(I'm A Steady-Rollin' Man. 1937)

Apparently, a pejorative for a male consort. Gary Davis defined the expression as "a king of picked-up person ... usually there ain't nothin' else no closer."

**dark:**

*An' the sun goin' down, boy, dark gonna catch me here*

*I haven't got no lovin' sweet woman, love an' feel my care.*

(Cross Road Blues. 1936)

Nightfall. "To be caught by dark" was apparently a Mississippi idiom, as it is found in Faulkner's *The Mansion* (1955): "... if dark catches me alone in this room with them and no guard handy, I'll never see light again" (reflection of Mink Snopes, a "poor white" convict).

**to be one's destiny\*:**

*Pearlie Mae you is my heart-string, you is my destiny*

*And you rolls across my mind baby, each an' every day.*

(Honeymoon Blues. 1937)

A dated romantic figure of speech, related to the expression occurring in Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* (1852): "... I see all of Beatrix's faults as well as you do. But she is my fate."

**dog:**

*She says I don't see why, that I will dog her around*

*It musta be that ol' evil spirit, so deep down in the ground.*

(Me And The Devil Blues. 1937)

To hound; colloquial in black speech.

**to be dogged:**

*I've been dogged and I've been driven, ever since I left my mother's home*

*And I can't see the reason why, that I can't leave these no-good womens alone.*

(Malted Milk Blues. 1937)

To be hounded.





(from the collection of Sherman Tolen)

**donay:**

*I don't want no woman, wants any downtown man she meet*

*She's a no-good donay, they shouldn't allow her on the street.*

(*I Believe I'll Dust My Broom*: 1936)

A black and Southern white variant of *dona*, a 19th century slang term for woman associated with Cockney and British circus slang and regarded as vulgar by Farmer & Henley, though it derives from respectful Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese terms for "lady." (The standard English words *dame* and *prima donna* both derive from the same source.) Although idiomatic, it is likely that the term was more common in song rhetoric than 20th century American colloquial speech. In Southern white song, it occurs as early as 1910, when *Doney Gal* was collected by John Lomax. It also occurred in a slave song, *Off From Richmond*, cited by Talley in 1922:

*Islips off from Mosser without pass an' warnin'*

*Fer I mus' see my Donie wharever she may stay.*

Although Son House defined "donie" as "a no-good woman," it had no pejorative implication.

**dry long so:**

*An' winter time comin', it's gonna be so*

*You can't make the winter babe, just dry long so.*

(*Come On In My Kitchen*: 1936)

For no reason; for nothing; "without a cause" (Skip James). An obsolete black colloquialism of unknown derivation. Willie Moore explained it thus: "The way I always seen it, just like I come up and do somethin' to you an' you hasn't done nothin' to me — Now he done it 'dry long so.' I'd often hear folks say that, too." A slightly different sense is given to it in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937): "Y'all know we can't invite people to our town just dry long so ... We got tu feed 'em somethin'." Johnson's couplet apparently implies that a homeless girlfriend will find it necessary to trade sexual favors for shelter.

**dust (one's broom):**

*I'm gonna get up in the mornin', I believe*

*I'll dust my broom*

*Girlfriend the black man you been lovin',*

*girlfriend can get my room.*

(*I Believe I'll Dust My Broom*: 1936)

To leave hurriedly. Although Dan Burley's *Handbook of Jive* (c. 1940) lists *dust your broom* as a contemporary "jive" phrase, its Southern derivation is pointed up by Johnson's use of it, and its earlier occurrence on Kokomo Arnold's *I'll Be Up Someday* (1936):

*And I believe, I believe I'll dust my broom*

*so some of you lowdown rounders, lord you can have my room.*

The phrase is a blending of two conventional slang synonyms. *To broom* meant to run away in 19th century slang (F&H). In the 17th and 18th centuries, *to dust* was standard English for to depart (Partridge), having been derived from the Biblical injunction of Matthew 10:14: "And whosoever shall not receive you ... when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet." Bartlett (1877) records its use in American speech, which gradually dwindled to the point where it seemingly survived only in convict slang (DAUL: 1950).

**evil:**

*She's a kind-hearted woman, she studies evil all the time*

*You wish to kill me, else to have it on your mind.*

(*Kind-Hearted Woman Blues*: 1936)

Spitefulness; a dated black colloquialism drawn from the standard English sense of the word.

**fair brown:**

*Well well little girl says I'm king, baby and you is the queen*

*Let's we put our heads together, fair brown then we can make our money green.*

(*Little Queen Of Spades*: 1937)

An attractive, brown-complexioned woman, the adjective deriving from the obsolete standard English use of "fair" to mean "beautiful." The late Texas blues singer Tom Shaw defined the phrase: "fairbrown is a good-lookin' colored gal; a good-looking' brownskin gal." Its frequent use in blues songs reflected a contemporary color bias, with only brown-skinned women meriting the adjectival designation "fair."

**friend-boy\*:**

*You can run, you can run, tell my friend-boy Willie Brown*

*Lord that I'm standin' at the cross-road babe, I believe I'm sinkin' down.*

(*Cross Road Blues*: 1936)

Male friend; a black colloquial inversion of "boyfriend." The expression *friend-girl* occurs in Roosevelt Sykes' *Papa Sweetback Blues* (1930) and Bukka White's *Special Stream Line* (1940). Similar inversions are found in the terms *carbox* (Reese DuPree: *Long Ago Blues*: 1923) and *house rent* (used for "rent house," i.e., a rented house),

and in such Southern idioms as *hoppergrass* (recorded in 1829; see Mathews).

**Gatling gun:**

*I'm gonna shoot my pistol, gonna shoot my Gatling gun*

*You made me love you, now your friend has come.*

(*32-20 Blues*: 1936)

A machine gun, named after the man who invented it in 1870.

**gamblin' woman:**

*An' I'm gonna get me a gamblin' woman, it's the last thing that I do*

*A man don't need a woman, fair brown he got to give all of his money to.*

(*Little Queen Of Spades*: 1937)

A woman whose occupation or chief pastime is gambling. Probably less common than *gambling man*, which occurs in Roark Bradford's dialect novel *John Henry* of 1931 ("Maybe you's a gamblin'-man dressed up like a country boy,") and Lucille Bogan's *Kind Stella Blues*:

1927):

*Kind Stella was a good gal, known to be a good man's friend*

*She take money from her husband, give it to her gamblin' men.*

**good girl:**

*I'm gonna call up China, see is my good girl over there*

*I can't find her on Philippines Island, she must be in Ethiopia somewhere.*

(*I Believe I'll Dust My Broom*: 1936)

A blues term for an obliging sex partner. Tom Shaw defined the phrase: "Good gal means some gal that's really good to you and will go for whatever you want, and go for things that make you happy." As described by Gary Davis: "That's a woman, you understand, she's very interested in your affairs and she likes you ... she always looks out for you ... You can call on her when you need it, you understand ... she's not so regular with you, but she's just good when you catch it."

**Gulfport Island Road:**

*It's the last fair deal gone down, good Lord,*

*On that Gulfport Island Road.*

(*Last Fair Deal Gone Down*: 1936)

An apparent reference to the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad, which constructed Gulfport between 1887-1902.

**hail, to fall down like\*:**

*... I got to keep movin', blues fallin' down like hail*

*... There's a hellhound on my trail.*

(*Hellhound On My Trail*: 1937)

A variant of a conventional 19th century simile, *to fall like hailstones* (DAP).

**heart-string\*:**

*Pearlie Mae you is my heart-string, you is my destiny*

*And you rolls across my mind, baby each an' every day.*

(*Honeymoon Blues*: 1937)



(from the collection of Sherman Tolen)





(from the collection of Sherman Tolen)

A once-conventional figurative term (properly pluralized) for the deepest feeling and affection of which humans are capable. The word originally stood for the nerves and tendons ("strings") that were thought, in the 15th century, to sustain the heart (OED).

**heavy-loaded\*:**

*Now one and one is two, two and two is four*

*I'm heavy-loaded, baby; I'm booked, I gotta go.*

(Sweet Home Chicago, 1936)

Depressed; from the expression "to carry a heavy load" (DAS).

**hellhounds:**

*... Blues fallin' down like hail  
An' the day keeps on 'mind me,  
there's a hellhound on my trail.*

(Hellbound On My Trail, 1937)

In rural black superstition, a pack of wild dogs (typically represented as black in appearance, with fiery eyes) unleashed by Satan to pursue sinners. Their appearance in dreams

and phantasy was taken as a summons to the backslider to enter the church or face perdition. Transmitted from English folklore, they date ultimately to Cerberus, the three-headed guardian of Hades in Greek mythology. The earliest allusion to "hellhounds" in a recorded blues song occurs in Sylvester Weaver's *Devil Blues* (1927):

*Hellhounds start to chasin' me,  
man I was a runnin' fool*

*My ankles caught on fire, couldn't  
keep my puppies cool.*

Johnson's lyric may have been derived from Funny Paper Smith's *Howling Wolf Blues No. 4* (1931). Cf. Puckett: *Folk Beliefs Of The Southern Negro* (1926); Charles S. Johnson: *Growing Up In The Black Belt* (1941), and Richard M. Dorson: *Studies In American Negro Folklore* (1958).

**hot tamale\*:**

*Hot tamales and they're hot, yes  
she got 'em for sale.*

(They're Red Hot, 1936)

A cant sexual expression, the phrase ordinarily signifying a sexy girl (DAS).

**howl:**

*I'm the man that roll, when icicles  
hangin' on the tree*

*And now you hear me howlin'  
baby, down on my bended knee.*

(I'm A Steady Rollin' Man, 1937)

To yell or complain; a standard English figure of speech that had become a Southern colloquialism by the time it appeared in *God's Little Acre* (1933): "Nobody ought to howl about just one tiny little bit when nobody is getting hurt."

**in a [—] condition:**

*Now you know the coils ain't even  
buzzin'*

*Little generator won't get the spark  
Oil's in a bad condition got to  
have*

*These batteries charged*

(Terraplane Blues, 1936)

An obsolete construction that appears in *Moll Flanders* (1722): "I was then in a sad condition indeed."

**kind-hearted woman\*:**

*I got a kind-hearted woman, do  
most anything in this world for me*

*But they're evil-hearted women,  
and they will not let me be.*

(Kind-Hearted Woman Blues, 1936)

An obsolete black slang phrase for a woman who keeps a gigolo. According to blues lore most such women were unattractive, and homicidally jealous: "Mrs. Saddy was a kind-hearted woman and there was a lot of them in Mississippi. I know it because I had one, too. Her name was Narcice and she cut me down the back" (Broonzy: *Big Bill Blues*. Oak Publications: 1964; New York: p. 103). Johnson's song likewise delineates a violent "kind-hearted woman":

*She's a kind-hearted woman, she  
studies evil all the time*

*You wish to kill me, else to have it  
on your mind.*

The famous *Frankie and Johnnie* is a depiction of a "kind-hearted woman" who kills her philandering lover.

**kitchen\*:**

*You better come on, in my kitchen  
It's going to be ratnin' outdoors.*

(Come On In My Kitchen, 1936)

An obsolete slang term for vagina (F&H), indicating that the above-couplet is sung from a feminine point of view.

**lemon:**

*Now you can squeeze my lemon  
till the juice run down my leg*

*But I'm goin' back to Friar's Point  
if I be rockin' to my head.*

(Travelin' Riverside Blues, 1937)

A cant sexual term of no discernable idiomatic basis.

**malted milk\*:**

*I keep drinkin' malted milk, trying  
to drive my blues away*

*Baby you just as welcome to my  
lovin', as the flowers is in May.*

(Malted Milk Blues, 1937)

A Depression-era Mississippi slang term for beer (Willie Moore).

**milk-cow:**

*Hey hey, me milk cow, what on  
earth is wrong with you?*

*Now you have a little milk calf,  
and your milk is turnin' blue.*

(Milkcow Calf's Blues, 1937)

A Mississippi blues idiom for a woman, probably suggested by the conventional colloquial synonym "cow," which dated to the 17th century (F&H).

**mojo:**

*Everybody say she got a mojo,  
'cause she been usin' that stuff*

*She got a way a-tremblin' down,  
an' I mean it's most too tough.*

(Little Queen Of Spades, 1937)

An obsolete black colloquialism for a small bag sold by conjurers, the possession of which was held to make one irresistible to a desired member of the opposite sex, and to enhance one's luck in gambling.

**'nation sack:**

*Aw she's gone, I know she won't  
come back*

*I taken the last nickel, out her  
'nation sack.*

(Come On In My Kitchen, 1936)

Donation sack. In dated Southern black speech, a donation sack was a wallet or purse, as well as a pouch worn by barrelhouse proprietors to collect their proceeds from food or drink. It was also applied to any carry-all: "You put money in a 'nation sack; you can put anything in it ... whiskey or a gun, anything ... fasten it around your waist." (Willie Moore). Will Shade recalled their popularity among Memphis women (probably prostitutes) in the early 20th century: "... they used to wear 'Nation' sacks in them days—and they used to wear their money twixt their legs, hung on a sack tied round their waists." (quoted in Oliver, p. 86). Andrew and Jim Baxter's *Bamalong Blues* (1927) contains a pun on the expression:

*Been to the Natton an' I just got  
back*

*Didn't get no money, but I brought  
the sack.*

As a term for a pocketbook, *sack* dates to at least 1888 (Thornton).

**ninety-nine degree\*:**

*I gave my baby now, the ninety-  
nine degree*

*She jumped up and throwed a  
pistol down on me.*

(Stop Breaking Down Blues, 1937)

A dated black slang term for cocaine (Willie Moore). Conceivably the chorus of the song refers to possession of the same drug:

*The stuff I got'll bust your brains  
out*

*Baby, it'll make you lose your  
mind.*

**ride the blinds:**

*Well, leavin' this mornin' if I have  
to, go ride the blinds*

*I been mistreated an' I don't mind  
dyin'.*

(Walkin' Blues, 1936)

A conventional hoboing term for cadging a train ride on an empty boxcar, or between cars.

**rider:**

*I can tell the wind is risin', leaves  
tremblin' on the trees*

*Oh I need my little sweet rider, for  
to keep my company.*

(Hellbound On My Trail, 1937)

A conventional blues term for a sexual consort arising from the verb *ride*, an archaic term for intercourse (F&H).

**roll:**

*I'm a steady-rollin' man, I roll  
both night and day*

*But I haven't got no sweet woman,  
boy to be rollin' this a-way.*

(Steady Rollin' Man, 1937)

To work; an old-fashioned black colloquialism frequently used in blues songs as a *double-entendre*, making an implied comparison between sex and labor.

**Saturday night\* (adj.):**

*Now you Saturday night women,  
you love to ape an' clown*

*You won't do nothin' but tear a  
good man's reputation down.*

(Stop Breakin' Down, 1937)

A Mississippi term meaning he-



(from the collection of Sherman Tolen)



donistic: "The hill people weren't your Saturday night, skin-balling, crap-shooting nigger" (white planter quoted in Calt and Wardlow: *King Of The Delta Blues*: Rock Chapel Press: 1988).

**shrimp\*:**

*I woke up this mornin', and all my shrimp was dead and gone*

*I was thinkin' about you baby, why you hear me weep an' moan.*

(*Dead Shrimp Blues*: 1937)

An obscure or cant slang term that Johnson applies to his own sexuality: "Now you taken my shrimp, baby, know you turned me down..."

**spread:**

*She's a little queen of spades, and the men will not let her be*

*Every time she makes a spread, whoo cold chills just runs all over me.*

(*Little Queen Of Spades*: 1937)

A variant of the infinitive *spread*, a conventional slang term for fornicating (Spears).

**'stillery\*:**

*... I'm gonna drive my blues away*

*Go'n' to the 'stillery, stay out there all day.*

(*Preachin' Blues*: 1936)

Whiskey distillery.

**study:**

*She's a kind-hearted woman, she studies evil all the time*

*You wish to kill me, else to have it on your mind.*

(*Kind-Hearted Woman Blues*: 1936)

To think about; an archaic standard English word that survived in early 20th century black speech.

**talk out of (one's) head:**

*Malted milk, malted milk, keeps rushin' to my head*

*And I have a funny funny feelin', that I'm talkin' all out my head.*

(*Malted Milk Blues*: 1937)

In barrelhouse slang, to babble drunkenly, without regard for the truth of one's assertions. Tom Shaw gave the following illustration of "talking out of one's head": "A lotta times a woman can be drinkin' and she'll tell you some of the sweetest lies you ever saw: 'I ain't got no man' ... 'I'll do anything for you'; until she gets sober. (Then) she say: 'Did I tell you that? Shit, no, I can't do that; I got a old man.'"

**this man:**

*My milk cow been ramblin', for miles around*

*She been (sellin'?) some other bullcow, Lord in this man's town.*

(*Milkcow Calf's Blues*, take 2: 1937)

My; a sense first recorded in the 19th century as "this child" (see *child*).

**throw down\*:**

*Now I gave my baby now, the ninety-nine degree*

*She jumped up and throwed a pistol down on me.*

(*Stop Breaking Down Blues*: 1937)

To draw a pistol. An elaboration of *throw*, a criminal slang for to rob at pistol point (DAUL).

**too black bad:**

*Babe don't mess around them hot tamales now 'cause they're too black bad; mess around those hot tamales.*

(*They're Red Hot*: 1936)

A barrelhouse catchphrase "that means really too bad" (Tom Shaw). Shaw related it to an "old saying: 'If you don't do so-and-so, it's gonna be too black bad for you, buddy.'"

**too tough\*:**

*An' everybody say she got a mojo, 'cause she been usin' that stuff*

*She got a way a-tremblin' down, an' I mean it's most too tough.*

(*Little Queen Of Spades*: 1937)

Too much; a black slang term that survived at least into the 1970s.

**tremble down\*:**

*An' everybody say she got a mojo, 'cause she been usin' that stuff*

*She got a way a-tremblin' down, an' I mean it's most too tough.*

(*Little Queen Of Spades*: 1937)

To dance the Shimmy; used, like the former word, as a euphemism for intercourse.

**windin' chain\*:**

*Beatrice I love my phonograph, but you have broke my windin' chain*

*And you taken my lovin', and give it to your other man.*

(*Phonograph Blues*: 1937)

As a term for penis, this word has a possible idiomatic basis in the 19th century phrase *to wind the clock*, i.e., to possess a woman sexually (F&H).

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(A special word of thanks to Sherman Tolen for sending us the Johnson 78s from his collection)

# REMEMBERING

## BIG

## JOE



(courtesy of Down Beat and Henry Renard)

January 11, 1968—"Big Joe" Clauberg and the Jazz Record Center face eviction

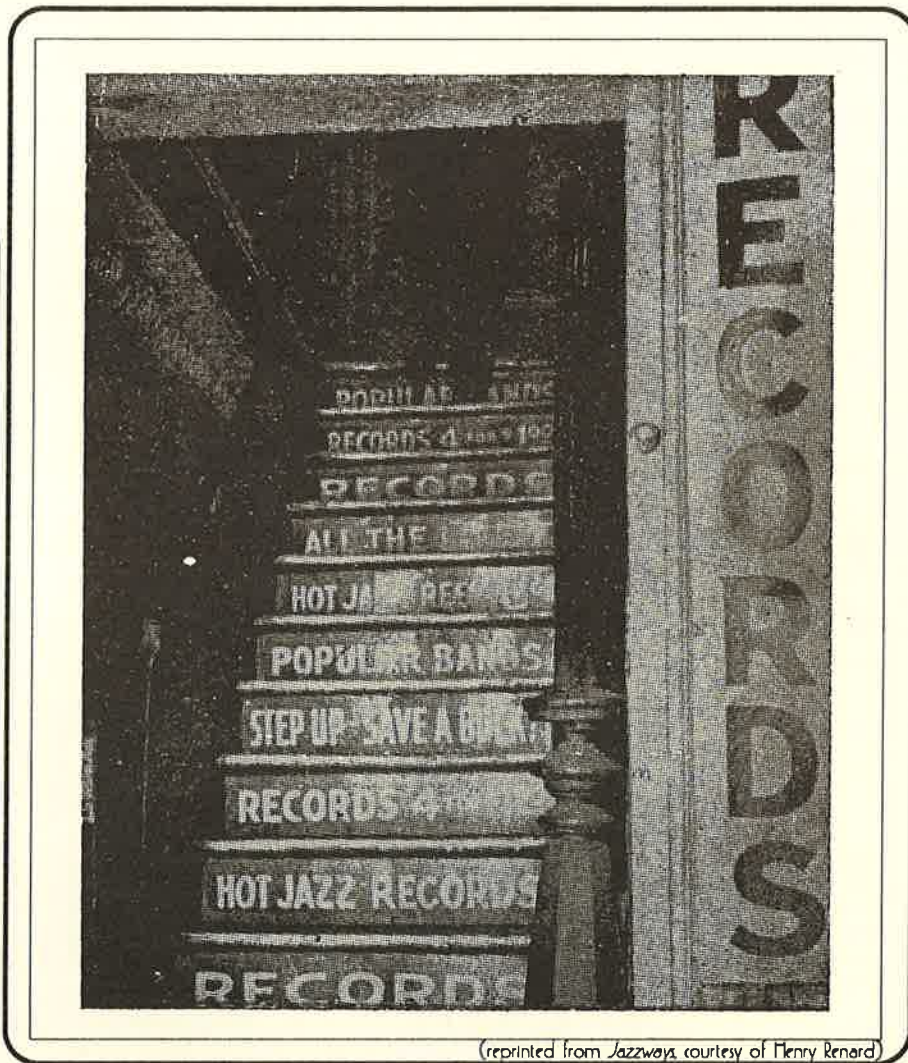


The life and times of Big Joe Clauberg and his Jazz Record Center—New York's famous (and bizarre) hang-out for collectors, celebrities, musicians, alcoholics, and hobos...

by Henry Renard

It is the early 1950s. You walk slowly down the north side of 47th Street, just west of Sixth Avenue and look for number 107. An open entranceway with a flight of stairs lies between a pipe & tobacco shop and a luggage store. Stairway advertisements tell it all. Affixed to the stair risers are slogans inviting you to come up and browse.

You climb the stairs to a landing, go through an open door and enter to the sounds of loud Dixieland coming from a record player. You look around at bins of 78-rpm records. Each bin identifies its contents by artist: Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Bessie Smith, Johnny Dodds, Sam Morgan...SAM MORGAN? A whole bin of Sam Morgan 78s? Reissues of course!



(reprinted from Jazzways, courtesy of Henry Renard)

Up the famous flight of stairs...

"A giant with...wet-combed black hair...nicotine-stained fingers..."

And then on your left, you notice the proprietor—a giant in clean, grey chino pants with a wide black belt and a white V-neck T-shirt, clean-shaven, wet-combed black hair slicked straight back, the ever-present pencil poised behind his ear...ready to add up your record purchases. Nicotine-stained fingers remove a cigarette from his mouth and he smiles. The smile seems to say—welcome to my kingdom.

Big Joe Clauberg in person. Now considered a legend himself in a business that deals in legends. He

hardly ever leaves his combined place of business and lodging. He sleeps and eats and works in one room for 20 years. There he is—behind a short counter perched on his high stool, or maybe he gets up (slowly) and rubs his back against the partition of two walls, or maybe he just sits, gently scratching the inside of his ear with the pencil. Maybe you'll spot a young record salesman trying to convince an elderly customer to buy the latest release by playing it on the phonograph. You'll probably be spotting me.

Little is known of Joe Clauberg's early years. During the eight years I knew him as his part-time salesman, errand boy, and moderator of "Saturday Afternoon Collector Congregations," I learned something of his beginnings.

Joe and Bob (publisher of *Hobo News*) become partners in a New York City book store...

Joe was originally from Arizona, near Tucson, and he was part Indian. Early in his life, he traveled with circuses and carnivals. His strength and size would make him capable of hard work and gain him extra respect. Somewhere on the road, he met up with a man I remember only as "Bob." Bob would become the editor and publisher of the original *Hobo News*, a tabloid-like newspaper filled with risqué cartoons, jokes and news of the hobo life. Since hobos and carnival people were essentially Gypsies at heart, Joe and Bob must have had something in common. In the late 1930s they both ended up in New York City. They went into partnership in a used magazine and book store on Sixth Avenue between 43rd and 44th Streets.

Joe distributes the *Hobo News*—sells juke box records...

Distribution of the *Hobo News* outside the metropolitan area was done by Joe and his old, but large truck. Joe would load up a truck full of the *Hobo News* and distribute them west or south. Because of the risqué cartoons and jokes, no "regular" distributor would handle the paper in those times. Plus, they made more money by eliminating the distributor/middleman. Furthermore, Joe thought it wasteful just to deliver all the papers and return with an empty truck. He started to look around for return freight.

By chance, one of the *Hobo News*' accounts was also a juke box operator, who offered Joe big loads of used records at a very low price. Joe saw it as the solution to his empty truck. Besides, they had plenty of room in their Sixth Avenue store. Joe

built bins and started selling the used records. A truckload of papers to the West or South, then back with another load of records. He sought other juke box businesses along his routes and began bringing more records back.

Bob dies...Joe finds a new location...

Suddenly, in 1941 his partner died and left no will. The widow claimed everything as hers, ignoring Joe's part of the operation. She immediately sold the *Hobo News* and remarried, then forced Joe to take

his records and find a new location. He found a spot on West 47th Street, and renamed his new operation "Joe's Juke Box."

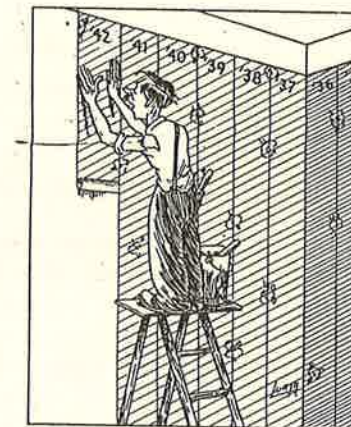
The War was over, and it seemed time for Joe to take on lines of new records. But, unfortunately, the major labels wouldn't sell to small shops on credit (you had to go direct to the warehouse and pay cash). Therefore, Joe began to sell the small East and West Coast jazz labels, whose distributors were eager to get exposure for their products.

Then, in 1946, a photographer on assignment for *Jazzways Magazine* was taking photographs around

10¢ A LITTLE FUN TO MATCH THE SORROW FOR VICTORY LET US BUY BONDS TO BUY BOMBS TO BOMB THE AXIS BUMS

THE HOBO NEWS

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES EXPECTS US ALL TO DO OUR DUTY



ADOLPH SHIKELGRUBER, THE PAPER HANGER—RUNNING SHORT OF PAPER.  
Vol. 2 OCT. 20, 1942 No. 34  
THE HOBO NEWS  
Issued Semi-Monthly at 44 W. 17th St  
New York, N. Y.  
PATRICK MULKERN, Publisher  
Price \$2.00 per year



(courtesy of Henry Renard)

After Bob's death, the widow sold *Hobo News* to Patrick Mulhern



52nd Street. He took a photo of Joe's stairs. The magazine was published in January, 1947; it immediately stimulated Joe's business.

At this time his stock consisted mostly of old, used juke box records that had been picked through by almost all the New York City-area collectors, plus a mixture of new Dixieland and Bebop records on small labels, and the latest issues of magazines like *The Record Changer*, Art Hodes' *Jazz Record*, and *The Needle*.

*Joe forms new partnerships...nears disaster!*

In August 1946, Bob Weinstock, who was a big mail-order dealer and trader with English collectors, decided to open a retail operation in his apartment. However, the City stopped him, and he needed a retail outlet desperately (he had bought stock in anticipation of a grandiose operation). As a result, Weinstock and Joe worked out an agreement that included modernizing the dingy decor of Joe's Juke Box with new paint and fixtures. Weinstock put up the money for painting and for constructing new bins, and Joe provided the location. They assigned bins to individual artists and made name/category placards. The old, inappropriate movie stills used as decoration were shoved under the new bins and covered with curtains. They placed ads in *The Record Changer*. Weinstock brought in his local customers and set up a Dixieland Revival and reissue stock that included imported jazz classics from England and France. The store was renamed "The Jazz Record Corner."

*How a "corner" became a "center"...*

But it didn't work out. Bob Weinstock's father considered Joe (who looked like an Indian Johnny Weissmuller) a drawback to the image he wanted to create for The Jazz Record Corner. Thus, in November 1948, Weinstock Sr. and son left 47th Street to open another store

**ANNOUNCING THE OPENING OF**

## *The Jazz Record Corner*

107 WEST 47TH ST. (OFF 6TH AVE.) N. Y. C. PL. 7-3983

New York has long needed a shop catering exclusively to Jazz Collectors. Owned and operated by Record Collectors, The Jazz Record Corner has the most complete line of New Orleans, Chicago, St. Louis, and Blues Labels in the east. Also imported Jazz Classics.

OUR FIRST RELEASES ON OUR OWN LABEL  
GRAEME BELL AND HIS AUSTRALIAN JAZZ BAND  
JAZZ CORNER No. 1 SOUTH/SHIM-ME-SHA-WABBLE  
JAZZ CORNER No. 2 YAMA YAMA BLUES/BIG CHIEF BATTLE AX  
\$1.05 EACH. USUAL DISCOUNT TO DEALERS

Collectors are invited to come up—play records—and chew the fat. Send for our first mail order catalogue—FREE.

OPEN DAILY 11—10

SATURDAYS 10—10

*The Record Changer—October, 1948*

## **WE HAVE MOVED!**

**JAZZ RECORD CORNER**

NOW LOCATED AT

782 EIGHTH AVE. NEW YORK CITY  
BETWEEN 47TH & 48TH STREETS

We are continuing our policy of serving ONLY the Jazz Collector. As before we have the completest Jazz Stock in the East . . .

Everything from New Orleans to Modern Music.  
Vast numbers of collector's items & imports.

*Opening Special*

**FOR COLLECTORS WHO COME TO OUR SHOP  
20% OFF ON ALL CURRENT LABELS**

*The Record Changer—December, 1948*

**WE HAVE NOT MOVED!!!**

**Still in Full Operation!!!**

*Jazz Record Center*

107 W. 47 St., N. Y. C.  
(JUST OFF 6TH AVE.)

PL 7-3983 10-10

As always we have all the current jazz labels featuring the best in New Orleans, Chicago, Dixieland, Blues and Bop.

We also have a large stock of the best foreign labels including PA E, BR E, HMV, Blue Star, Odeon, CO E, etc.

Come in and Browse Around.

Send us your "want list."  
"Everything from Bunk to Monk"

*The Record Changer—  
January, 1949*

(first use of the "Bunk to Monk" phrase coined by Editor Bill Grauer for Joe)

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on Eighth Avenue. They took the store name along with them. But, Joe, with the help of *The Record Changer's* Editor Bill Grauer, countered by renaming it "The Jazz Record Center." Joe placed ads in *The Record Changer* next to the Weinstock ads. Repainting the sign in front of the store meant changing only three letters ("Corner" to "Center").

The theme that Bob Weinstock had set in his original Jazz Record Corner ads ("Collectors are invited to come up—play records—chew the fat.") didn't follow him to his Eighth Avenue location. Joe continued to hold the customers that Weinstock had originally brought in. Joe's location in the Radio City area was more central, easier for transportation. And, it was a better district at night.

The record salesmen that Weinstock had lured in from the major record companies continued to service Joe's account with all the new releases.

Joe's next partnership venture was with another young record producer, George H. Buck, and his *Jazzology Records*. In November 1949, as part of the agreement to use 107 West 47th Street as his mail-order address, George redecorated the inside of the store. At this time he put up the wonderful photo of Mutt Carey that hung on the wall for many years. George also invited some of the musicians that recorded for him to come over and hang out. Tony Parenti was a regular for many years.

Bob Maltz was the next to invest money in redecorating The Jazz Record Center. In June 1951, he and Joe built some display shelves to exhibit the newly-developing 12-inch LP—records that would soon be taking the place of 78s. In exchange, Joe allowed Bob a corner of the store, where he sold off his collection of rare records to raise money for promoting his Stuyvesant Casino sessions and advertising in competition with Jack Crystal, who ran sessions at Central Plaza just down the street.

*"Joe would often doze off in the midst of everything..."*

Between February 1947 (when I first set foot in Big Joe's) and July 1948 (when Weinstock started renovations before changing the name from Joe's Juke Box to The Jazz Record Corner), my only trips to 107 West 47th Street were to pick up the latest copy of *The Record Changer*. Joe always had them first, even before the mail subscribers. I don't recall much happening in those days. I was usually the only customer in the store, and Joe would be dozing.

I first started running errands for Joe in April of 1949. I was on unemployment and had nothing else to do. I would go for cigarettes or food, usually something Joe could cook in the back of the store, where he had a little kitchen (hamburger or liver was a particular favorite). I would also go to the post office and to record companies to pick up small orders.

Then, in September 1949, I started working for Sam Meltzer (the Bronx baker who became a record producer), and on Saturdays, I would work for Joe. Eager to push Sam's line of blues and jazz reissues, I would report back to Sam what the collectors were buying. This involved hours of talking to collectors about what they wanted reissued. It was the beginning of the famous Saturday bull sessions that Joe's was to become famous for.

Joe didn't like to talk much with collectors about styles or artists, possibly because he was slightly deaf. He also didn't like jumping up and down to play records for prospective purchasers. So, I would fill in Saturdays—the busiest day of the week. I'd recommend new releases to customers, playing records I knew would sell. Joe would often doze off in the midst of everything. So, I also acted as a deterrent to pilferage. Most of the Saturday crowd were regulars—the most active collectors in the metropolitan area.

*The bizarre weeknight crowd arrives...*

In August 1950, I began working for Jacob S. Schneider daily, but continued to work for Joe Saturdays. Jake closed at 4 p.m. Since this was too early to go home, I would stop by Joe's once or twice during the week. Here, I met a different group from the Saturday crowd. One evening you might run into Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis previewing their new Circle Records and hitting Joe up for some orders. Almost every night, Perry Armagnac, the Editor of *Popular Science* and a distinguished record researcher, would be looking through boxes of records shoved under the bins (for their Perfect/Pathé master-number listings). The elderly Jim Newlands collected *any* record of Stardust; he continually encouraged other collectors to listen to the English dance bands, but no one had a taste for them then.

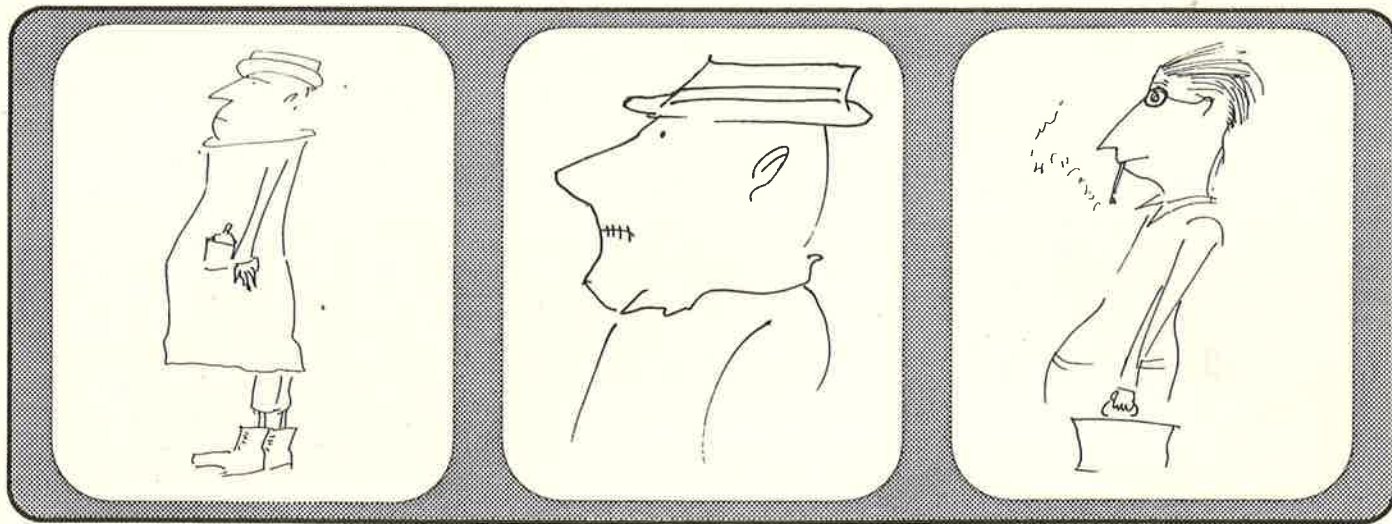
*Enter the cast of characters—the curious bellhop—"Abbie the agent"—"Popeye"—the "Sea Captain"—the circus family...*

And there was the bellhop from the hotel across the street who would run over to buy a Dixieland jazz record every time he got a tip. Many of Joe's cronies ran errands for him or took turns watching the door while Joe dozed. There was "Abbie The Agent"—or "Horizontal Abe"—as he was also called. There was the Greek dishwasher whom Joe called "Popeye." And there were various members of a retired circus family that lived upstairs.

Abbie the agent was a tall, thin man in his mid-40s. He wore thick-lensed eyeglasses, smoked continuously, and was seldom sober. He was the black sheep of a wealthy family in Hartford, Connecticut. His parents would send him a check every month—just to keep him away

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Left to right—"The Sea Captain," "Popeye," and "Abbie The Agent."

from Hartford. He sold racing forms on the trains going to the tracks, and he touted the various horses. He lived across the street from Joe in the same hotel as Perry Armagnac. Perry once said he could always tell when Abbie got his check, because the whores would bang on Abbie's door all night trying to "earn some of his money."

Abbie would occasionally run errands for Joe, mostly for cigarettes—and the wine he and Joe would work on after Joe closed. Joe never drank during business hours. Whenever Abbie got really drunk, he would lay down on the floor and go to sleep, hence the nickname "Horizontal Abe."

Popeye, the Greek dishwasher and janitor, would generally keep the place clean. He would continually oil the floor to keep the dust down. He would also bring Joe food from the restaurant where he washed dishes. Popeye also cut Joe's hair, and one time, he assisted Joe in pulling out a tooth with a pair of pliers! Usually, he slept in the front of the store behind the front bins—next to an open window in the summer—by the radiator in the winter. He was a short, well-muscled man. His peculiarity was his lack of hair: he had no eyebrows, no hair on his head, and no teeth. Often, he would go off to a corner of the store and talk to himself for hours in gibberish not even another Greek could understand.

The circus family upstairs consisted of the husband, who ran the tobacco shop downstairs, his wife, and her sister. The two sisters were

once horseback riders in a circus in Austria before they retired and came to America. The sisters would often cook Joe a hot meal and bring it downstairs to him (they lived on the floor above). That was one of the rare occasions when Joe would close the shop and lock the door while he had dinner.

Occasionally, an old hobo friend of Joe's would drop in and visit for a while. One of these was the "Sea Captain" or "Captain," as Joe called him. He was either Swedish or Norwegian; he understood English, but never spoke. When I first met him in June of that year, he was still wearing a wool-knit hat and a heavy raincoat. He had a pair of heavy work shoes without laces that were too big for him, and they flopped around on his sockless feet. Joe would send him on a ten-minute errand, and it would take the Sea Captain over an hour to perform it.

*Joe advertises on the radio...and everything stops!*

For a while, Joe was advertising on a small radio station that broadcast from Newark. This came about because of a fast-talking salesman who was also a record collector (from time to time, he bought records from Joe). In order to have his ads broadcast on the program (consisting of Dixieland jazz every Saturday night between 8 and 9 p.m.), Joe had to send a money order to the station well in advance of the program.

Joe said, "If they don't trust me to pay, I won't trust them to air my commercials without checking."

So, we hooked up a radio, and for one hour on Saturday night, everything stopped. We didn't wait on customers. We didn't play records that could be purchased. Instead, we listened for Joe's commercials.

There was a reason for The Jazz Record Center's continued existence into the '60s. The property, which was owned by the Rockefeller Trusts, lay dormant, waiting for development. All the small businesses like Joe's had no leases and low rent. They could be evicted at any time.

I continued to work Saturdays for Joe, until June 1951, when my duties at Schneider's caused me to work six days a week. Regretfully, I parted company with Joe as an employee, but kept returning as a customer and friend. In May 1955, I sold Joe part of my 78 collection. I retired from collecting and got married.

On my last visit to Big Joe's around the Christmas shopping days of 1956, I first took my wife to Macy's. We finished early, and I decided to show her where I had worked for so many happy years. Joe recognized me when I entered the store. I introduced my wife. Joe quickly rose up from his chair and shook hands with her.

"I can see why you stopped collecting records and got married," Joe said. Ever the perfect proprietor—Big Joe Clauberg.

## Back in Nagasaki with Lucky

By Russ Shor

Question: what is the only pre-war non-U.S. label to attempt to market hard-core country blues to its public?

- A. HMV
- B. English Brunswick
- C. Lucky (Japan)
- D. South African Zonophone

Wrong.

The answer is C. In 1934 the Lucky Record Co. of Tokyo, Japan issued three titles by Buddy Moss, *Daddy Don't Care* (Hard Road Blues (back to back on Lucky #1030) and *Restless Nigh Blues* (backed by Irving Conn's *Prize Waltz*—believe it!—on #1045).

The Lucky label was started in the year Showa kyunen, juichigatsu (Nov., 1934) by a cotton importing firm called Saito Shoten in Tokyo. The people at Saito Shoten believed there was a market for American pop music, so they made a deal with the American Record Corp. to issue ARC material in Japan.



(from the collection of Sherman Tolen)

January 19, 1933: this daring Japanese label took a chance on jazz and blues—only to become an early casualty of World War II.

A glance at their catalog shows they had basically a trial and error approach to what they thought would sell. Buddy Moss? Perhaps some koto players in rural southern Japan learned to play Georgia slide style from these. Or how about a couple of Cab Calloway sides...maybe they picked his records because sometimes he sounds like a Japanese taxi driver yelling about not getting paid. And then there's the Wilmouth Houdini disc—maybe it was meant for Japan's outlying islands. On the milder side, Lucky did serve to introduce Bing Crosby to the Japanese where he became as popular there as anywhere else in the world.

The first group of Luckys were the 1000 series which went to 1049. Most of these early Luckys are quite scarce. Those I've seen are generally dubbings. The label was also borrowed from the States: it's an almost exact duplicate of the old Van Dyke label, even down to the legend "Every Record a Masterpiece".

The only differences were a yellow lower panel replacing the Van Dyke white and Japanese translations of the song titles underneath the English ones.

In March 1935, Saito Shoten discontinued the 1000 series and replaced it with a 5000 series, keeping the basic label design but changing the color scheme to purple with gold print.

By the time the 5000 series appeared, Saito Shoten was getting a better idea of what would sell in Japan. No more Buddy Moss records, that's for sure. Not as much jazz, either. The exceptions are Eddie Condon's beautiful *The Eel* and one or two better Calloways and some milder Ellingtons. The Houdinis also show up here. As one might expect, some of these are much more common than the earlier series. During this period, the company also came out with a red label 200 series, selling at a higher price (there isn't much difference between the material of



ferred on their lower-priced counterparts) which lasted only seven issues and a 12" disc on the 800 series. It also tried selling Japanese music on a 7000 series.

By the end of 1935 Saito Shoten's venture had become successful enough to attract an offer from Nippon Columbia of Kawasaki. In January, 1936 the takeover was completed and a transformed Lucky, the 60,000 series, hit the market.

The new reddish-brown label was patterned after the American blue-shellac-era Columbia, complete with the "Columbia big notes" and bearing the legend "Brunswick Recording." The pressings were excellent laminated jobs taken from U.S. masters, not dubbings.

Another interesting point about the "new" Lucky: the labels were only in English. Perhaps they thought only foreigners living in Japan were buying their records: a mistaken assumption according to many Japanese I've talked to.

Most of the early 60,000 series were reissues of better selling 5000 series items. Not surprisingly, Bing Crosby, the Mills Brothers and Duke Ellington filled most of those numbers. Sol Hoopii was another biggie, accounting for about 10% of all the early issues.

After 60,090 the people at Nippon started to get a bit more adventurous, issuing a great territorial band *Ethiopian Stomp/Pleading* by J.H. Bragg & his Rhythm Five (#60100), Fletcher Henderson and some Teddy Wilson/Billie Holiday. In 1937, the company decided to take a cue from the British Vocalion Swing Series and begin a new green-red-blue stripe label "Rhythm Series". Unlike their Brit counterparts, the series was a total flop, petering out after 27 issues (numbered S-1 through 26). These are among the rarest of the Luckys.

The following year (at number 60309) Lucky's label changed to a black & silver motif nearly identical to the U.S. black & silver Brunswicks. The label continued, strong, moving away from jazz to the same swing band/personality artists who dominated Brunswick at that time.

By 1939 the nationalist Tojo

government was applying intense political pressure against any Western influence, including American pop music. This pressure forced the company to close down Lucky by the Spring of 1940. Its last issue, #60,521, was the Rhythm Wreckers' *Never No Mo' Blues/Blue Yodel #3*.



### 1000 Series

- 1001 妾の襟巻 My Shawl—Rumba / マラウアナ Marahuana: Royal Castillians
- 1002 美しのハワイ Song Of 'The Islands / ヒロマーチ Hilo March: Roy Smeck & His Quartette
- 1003 お嬢さんはやきもち焼き Celosita—Tango / 夜明けのタンゴ La Noche Pass—Tango: The Argentinians
- 1004 月光のオーキード Orchids In The Moonlight—Tango / 月に描く Spin A Little Web Of Dreams—Tango: Don Richie & His Orch.
- 1005 寂しい牧場へ歸らして Carry Me Back To The Lone Prairie / 家路をさして Goin' Home: Nick Lucas
- 1006 赤い可愛い納屋で In A Little Red Barn / そばかす顔だが別嬪さん Freckle Face, You're Beautiful: Chick Bullock & His Levee Loungers
- 1007 貴女が大好き I've Got You On The Top Of My List / 私の戀をお聴き下さい On Accounts I Love You: Smith Ballew & His Orch.
- 1008 さやうなら Fare Thee Well / 甘い音楽は天国から The Sweetest Music This Side Of Heaven: Charlie Davis & His Orch.
- 1009 禁断の唇 Forbidden Lips / 浮氣は其の日の出来心 Foolin' With The Other Woman's Man: Smith Ballew & His Orch.

- 1010 キヤリオカ Carioca—Rumba: Ed Loyd & His Orch. / 楽晴しき今宵 When The New Moon Shines On The New Mown Hay: Chick Bullock & His Orch.
- 1011 クカラチア La Cucaracha (The Mexican Cockroach Song) / 踊り狂つて In The Madness Of The Rumba: The Royal Castillians
- 1012 ゾムビー Zombie: Gene Kardos & His Orch. / 貴女が心配 As Far As I'm Concerned: Irving Conn & His Orch.
- 1013 テン・タイニイ・トウス Ten Tiny Toes, One Baby Nose (That's I'm Living For) / アロハ・ピラグド Aloha Beloved: The South Sea Islanders
- 1014 貴女一人だけ I Only Have Eyes For You / 當てゝ御覧よ Try To See It My Way: Joe Reichman & His Orch.
- 1015 狩物語 The Big Bad Wolf Was Dead / 美ししの踊子 Dames: Joe Haymes & His Orch.
- 1016 戀はひとすじ Straight From The Shoulder / 誓へよの唄を聴けば A Little Church Around The Corner: Will Osborne & His Orch.
- 1017 お名残惜しいが For All We Know / 燃ゆる思ひを Let Me Call You Mine—Waltz: Will Osborne & His Orch.
- 1018 わたしや野暮だが Pardon My Southern Accent / 明晩は如何? How's About Tomorrow Night: Henry Allen & His Orch.
- 1019 宵闇せまれば The Moon Was Yellow And The Night Was Yong—Tango / おぼろ月夜 Dust On The Moon: The Royal Castillians
- 1020 あなたを真似て I'm Just That Way / 盛れた薔薇 Roses In The Rain: Albert Taylor & His Orch.
- 1021 ではお休み Good Night, Lovely Little Lady / 愛の囁き Shadows Of Love: Bing Crosby
- 1022 リプタイド Riptide / オランダの風車 Little Dutch Mill: Guy Lombardo & His Royal Canadians
- 1023 愛の宣誓 Once In A Blue Moon / 心合せてどこまでも We're A Couple Of Soldiers My Baby And Me: Bing Crosby
- 1024 戀をすれば氣も晴れる I Rained My Hat / 君が夢胸に苦し Stay Out Of My Dreams: Guy Lombardo & His Royal Canadians



- 1025 タンゴニグロ Tango Negro—Tango / ノッリエ トリステ Noche Triste—Tango: The Argentinians
- 1026 カロリナ Carolina / 懐しのわが家 My Little Grass Shuck In Kealakekua, Hawaii: Albert Taylor & His Orch.
- 1027 プライズ・ワルツ Prize Waltz / 二度と會へない二人だが For All We Know: Roy Smeck & His Quartette
- 1028 君故に切なき心 I'm Getting Sentimental Over You / ソリチュード Solitude: The Modernists
- 1029 君なくば心淋し What About Me / 見捨てゝおいてそれでみて How Can You Face Me: Vincent Rose & His Orch.
- 1030 ダッドイ・ドント・ケーヤ Daddy Don't Care / ハード・ロード・ブルース Hard Road Blues: Buddy Moss
- 1031 戀の一夜 One Night Of Love / 戀はスキート It Was Sweet Of You: Will Osborne & His Orch.
- 1032 カメハメハ大王 King Kamehameha / 海邊の唄 Malihini Mele: The South Sea Islanders
- 1033 金の百萬圓も持つてたら If I Had A Million Dollars / 可愛いマンデー Mandy: Joe Haymes & His Orch.
- 1034 いつまでも變らないで Stay As Sweet As You Are / 何と戀の潔けしき Let's Give Three Cheer For Love: Vincent Rose & His Orch.
- 1035 飲めや唄へや Wine Song / ハツ・チャツ・チャツ Ha-Cha-Cha: Joe Reichman & His Orch.
- 1036 ダウン・サウス Down South / ワルツ・クワツグ・メドレー Waltz Clog Medley: An American Novelty Dance
- 1037 可愛がつてよう I Need Lovin' / 私どうしやう What's A Poor Girl Gonna Do: Blanche Calloway & Her Orch.
- 1038 雨 Rain / カロリン、貴女が戀しい I Am Lonesome For You Caroline: Odla Elder



- 1039 舟が着いたら When My Ship Comes In / 戀より外に幸はなし Your Head On My Shoulder: Mal Hallett & His Orch.
- 1040 樂しき夢 Let's Call It All A Dream / 一日位どうならうと What A Difference A Day Made: Will Osborne & His Orch.
- 1041 叶はぬ思ひ Throwing Stones At The Sun / 戀といふものよ In My Country That Means Love: Joe Haymes & His Orch.
- 1042 影と踊る Dancing With My Shadow / 火のない所に煙は立たぬ Where There Is Smoke—There's Fire: Joe Reichman & His Orch.
- 1043 霞かい心 June In January / つのる思ひ With Every Breath I Take: Will Osborne & His Orch.
- 1044 バーバラ Barbara / 可愛い踊子 Little Dancer: The Viking Accordion Band
- 1045 夜明しのブルース Restless Night Blues: Buddy Moss / プライズ・ワルツ The Prize Walze: Irving Conn & His Orch.
- 1046 テキサスの原野 Texas Plains / 小犬を抱へて Hold On, Little Doggies, Hold On: Gene Autry
- 1947 ウインのワルツ Varso Vienna / ハネーサツクル・シヨテイツシユ Honey-suckle Schottische: The Westerners

- 1048 古つるべ Old Fashioned Dipper / 母の涙 My Mother's Tears: Elton Britt with Roy Smeck
- 1049 ちよいと見ぬ間に Growin' Dan / 人氣沸騰 Catch On: Blanche Calloway & Her Orch.



(From the collection of Sherman Tokin)



COMPLETE LIST - OCTOBER, 1930



**Paramount** *The Popular Race Record*



—MAIL YOUR ORDERS TO—

**F. W. BOERNER CO.**

Port Washington, Wisconsin

**NEW RELEASES**

**BLUES**

- 12990—Dry Spell Blues—Part I—Vocal Blues—Guitar Acc. Son House
- Dry Spell Blues—Part II—Vocal Blues—Guitar Acc. Son House
- 12985—Beale And Main Blues—Vocal—Piano Acc. Dobby Bragg
- Long Tall Man Blues—Vocal—Piano Acc. Dobby Bragg
- 12982—St. Louis Fire Blues—Vocal—Piano Acc. Buck MacFarland
- On Your Way—Vocal—Piano Acc. Buck MacFarland
- 12983—Ninety Nine Blues—Vocal—Guitar Acc. Blind Joe Reynolds
- Cold Woman Blues—Vocal—Guitar Acc. Blind Joe Reynolds
- 12984—Blub Blub Blues—Vocal—Guitar Acc. Smokey Harrison
- Mail Coach Blues—Vocal—Guitar Acc. Smokey Harrison

**PIANO SOLO**

- 12988—Eastern Chimes Blues—Piano Solo Henry Brown
- Deep Morgan Blues—Piano Solo Henry Brown

**SPIRITUALS AND SERMONS**

- 12987—Watch And Pray—Prayer and Song Brother W. M. Moaley and Delta Big Four
- God Won't Forsake His Own—Vocal Delta Big Four
- 12989—Something Dead Up The Creek—Sermon Tend Your Own Business—Sermon Rev. Emmet Dickinson
- 12986—Jesus Is A Dying Bed Maker—Vocal—Guitar Acc. I Shall Not Be Moved—Vocal—Guitar Acc. Charley Patton

**OLD TIME TUNES**

- 3251—Sunshine And Shadows—Vocal Duet—Guitar Acc. True Love Divine—Vocal Duet—Guitar Acc. Emry Arthur and Della Hatfield
- 3250—The New Sensation—Voc.—Piano Acc. Bartlett's Gospel Four
- Swing Out On The Premises—Vocal—Piano Acc. Bartlett's Gospel Four
- 3249—Jennie My Own True Love—Vocal Duet—Guitar Acc. A Railroad Lover For Me—Vocal Duet—Guitar Acc. Emry Arthur and Della Hatfield
- 3248—Don't Marry A Man If He Drinks—Vocal—Inst. Acc. Will They Deny Me When They're Men—Vocal—Inst. Acc. Martin Brothers

**Paramount Blues and Spirituals Grouped According to Artists**

**ALL STAR**

- 12898—Hometown Skiffle—Part I
- Hometown Skiffle—Part II

**BIDDLEVILLE QUINTETTE**

- 12969—Blessed Be The Tie That Blinds
- I'm Going Up To Live With The Lord
- 12937—Jesus Is A Rock In The Weary Land
- I Stretch My Hand To Thee
- 12903—Judas And Jesus Walked Together
- Handwriting On The Wall
- 12847—The Day Is Past And Gone
- Got Heaven In My View
- 12848—Didn't It Rain
- Pharaoh's Army Got Drowned

**BEALE STREET SKEIKS**

- 12894—Fillin' In Blues Part 1
- Fillin' In Blues Part 2
- 12758—Wasn't That Doggin' Me
- Rockin' On The Hill
- 12518—You Shall
- It's A Good Thing

**ISHMAN BRACEY**

- 12570—Woman Woman Blues
- Suit Case Full Of Blues

**BARREL HOUSE FIVE**

- 12851—Hot Lovin'
- Mama Stayed Out
- 12875—Endurance Stomp
- Some Do And Some Don't
- 12942—Scufflin' Blues
- It's Nobody's Business

**CLARA BURSTON**

- 12881—Weak And Nervous Blues
- Georgia Man Blues

**IDA COX**

- 12965—I'm So Glad
- Jailhouse Blues
- 12727—Sobbing Tears Blues
- Separated Blues
- 12704—Worn Down Daddy Blues
- You Stole My Man

**COW COW DAVENPORT**

- 12800—Chimes Blues
- Slow Drag

**BLIND BLAKE**

- 12964—Keep It Home
- Sweet Jivin' Mama
- 12918—Baby Lou Blues
- Cold Love Blues
- 12904—Ice Man Blues
- Chump Man Blues
- 12888—Police Dog Blues
- Diddle Wa Diddle
- 12867—Lonesome Christmas Blues
- Third Degree Blues
- 12863—Fightin' The Jug
- Hastings Street
- 12824—Too Tight Blues No. 2
- Georgia Bound
- 12810—Doing A Stretch
- Poker Woman Blues
- 12794—Bookworm Blues
- Slippery Rag
- 12767—New Style Of Loving
- Ramblin' Mama Blues

# PARAMOUNTS IN THE BELFRY...

*by Bob Hilbert*

Diamonds are a girl's best friend... but unissued Paramount tests are a collector's lifelong fantasy!

*(Collector Mike Kirsling discovers the choicest caché ever!)*

At first, Mike Kirsling wasn't sure the telephone had rung. The storm outside was so loud that it took a second ring to convince him. It was November, and the wind blew hard and cold off Lake Michigan into Waukegan. That night in 1985 brought torrents of rain, accompanied by frequent crashes of

thunder. He answered the phone on the second ring.

A voice came though the crackle of lightning. "You collect old records?" it asked. "I hear you collect those old records."

"That's right," he said.

"Well," continued the voice on

the phone, "my son just found a bunch of old records in his attic. He wants to get rid of them."

Quickly, Kirsling got the name and phone number, then thanked him. Minutes later he was on the phone with the son, getting the directions to his house.

"I'll be right over," Kirsling said.

Great, no car, he suddenly thought. Kirsling was temporarily without a "working vehicle." He phoned his record-collecting chum, John Willard, a frequent companion



on record collecting expeditions.

Minutes later, Willard's car pulled up in front of the Kirsling house. Kirsling sprinted through the rain. Soon, windows closed, windshield wipers on high, they were both in the car. The car splashed through the flooded streets.

Kirsling recalled some of the many hunting expeditions he had been on since he started collecting. All, it seemed, had been studies in frustration. "Once in a big landfill a few miles from my house, I found a dumpster half-full of 78's. They turned out to be mostly dross, the best item a clean copy of Lena Wilson's *Four-Flushin' Papa* coupled with *Hula Blues* on Brunswick 2590."

It hardly seemed worthwhile, but the lure of the big discovery always kept him going. Tonight, he thought, was going to be "really special." He had no idea just how special it would be.

The address was only a half mile from the Kirsling house—in a rural area. They pulled up in front of a tiny, one-story building and got out. The son, who was holding a towel, greeted them at the door. He ushered them into the kitchen where his wife was busily drying a 78 record.

*The stack of tests are located directly under a leak in the attic*

"Grab a towel," the son said. "These things are all wet."

Kirsling learned that they had bought the house recently. The rain that day had produced a leak in the roof. The wife called her brother, who looked fruitlessly on the roof for the source of the leak. He suggested they go up to the attic and have a look. They found the leak—and four large water-soaked cardboard boxes, apparently stored there by a previous owner. The leak had been right above the boxes. Inside the boxes were the records—all without sleeves.

Kirsling grabbed a towel. He noticed a two-foot stack of what appeared to be classical 12-inch records. He went to another stack and dried the first record he came to. Sinatra on Columbia. Next was an Ink Spots Decca. Next was—wait a minute—a blank-labeled disc. *A blank disc? Could this be a TEST?*

Kirsling said, "Then, I saw the L followed by three digits in the wax. (*An L?*) I thought, *my GOD! This is a PARAMOUNT TEST PRESSING!*"

Trying to conceal his growing excitement, Kirsling continued drying. Every now and then, another test would appear.

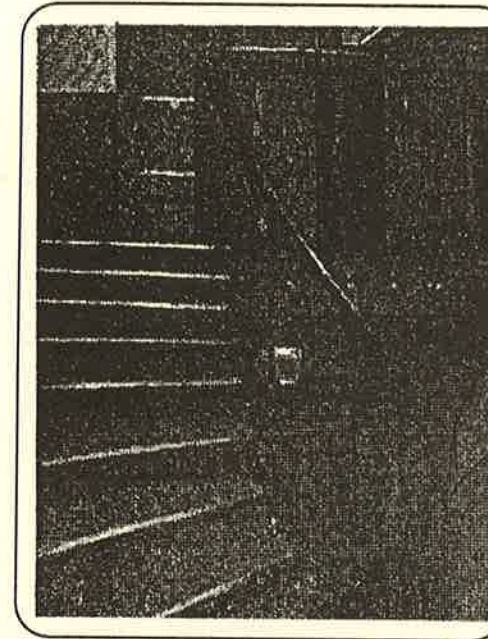
"My heart started beating fast, 'a major coronary' from the moment I picked up the first test," he said. "I couldn't wait to get out of there and see what they were."

Kirsling remembered not to get flustered. He quickly glanced at each test as it appeared, dried each one, and stacked them without a second look. It was obvious the couple had no idea what the blank-labeled records were.

In addition to the test, the only other records of interest were an Uncle Dave Macon Vocalion and Gladys Bentley's *Red Beans and Rice*, coupled with *Big Gorilla Man* on OKeh 8707.

Kirsling told the couple that only about 50 of the 300 records "would be of interest." Nevertheless, he would offer them a dime apiece for the entire batch, and throw in an extra five dollars to boot, for a grand total of \$35. The young couple was delighted.

Then, came a moment of crisis. Kirsling looked in his wallet and found only \$20.50. Willard saved the day. He wrote a check for \$14.50.



"Go up to the attic and have a look."

records.) Now, at last, Kirsling was alone with the records, able to examine each one carefully. One of the blank labels was the Ma Rainey picture label pressed face down into the test. Most of the others had the early (acoustic) bluish-purple labels reversed. There was no indication of the artist or tune on any of the tests. "Fortunately, I had Max Vreede's Paramount book," Kirsling said. "So I could trace most of them by the matrix numbers."

He played the first test. The wax read L-482-3 (Clara Burston's *Beggin' Man Blues*, c. September, 1930). The music he heard had sat

silent in the grooves of the disk since its recording a half century earlier. More previously unheard music poured from Kirsling's speakers, music by the likes of Charlie Patton, Tommy Johnson, Ishman Bracey, J.D. Short, Charlie Spand, Son House, Louise Johnson—virtually all of the greatest blues artists who recorded for Paramount between late 1929 through early 1932.

Kirsling called Willard. He now told Willard that the tests were Paramounts. "We did it," Kirsling said. "We found a monster in an attic, the big monster collection of the century."

Before they left, Kirsling separated the tests from the other records. He asked the couple his usual parting question: "Do you know where I might find other old records?"

"Well," the son said, "my brother-in-law took about half of them, but I think he wants to keep them."

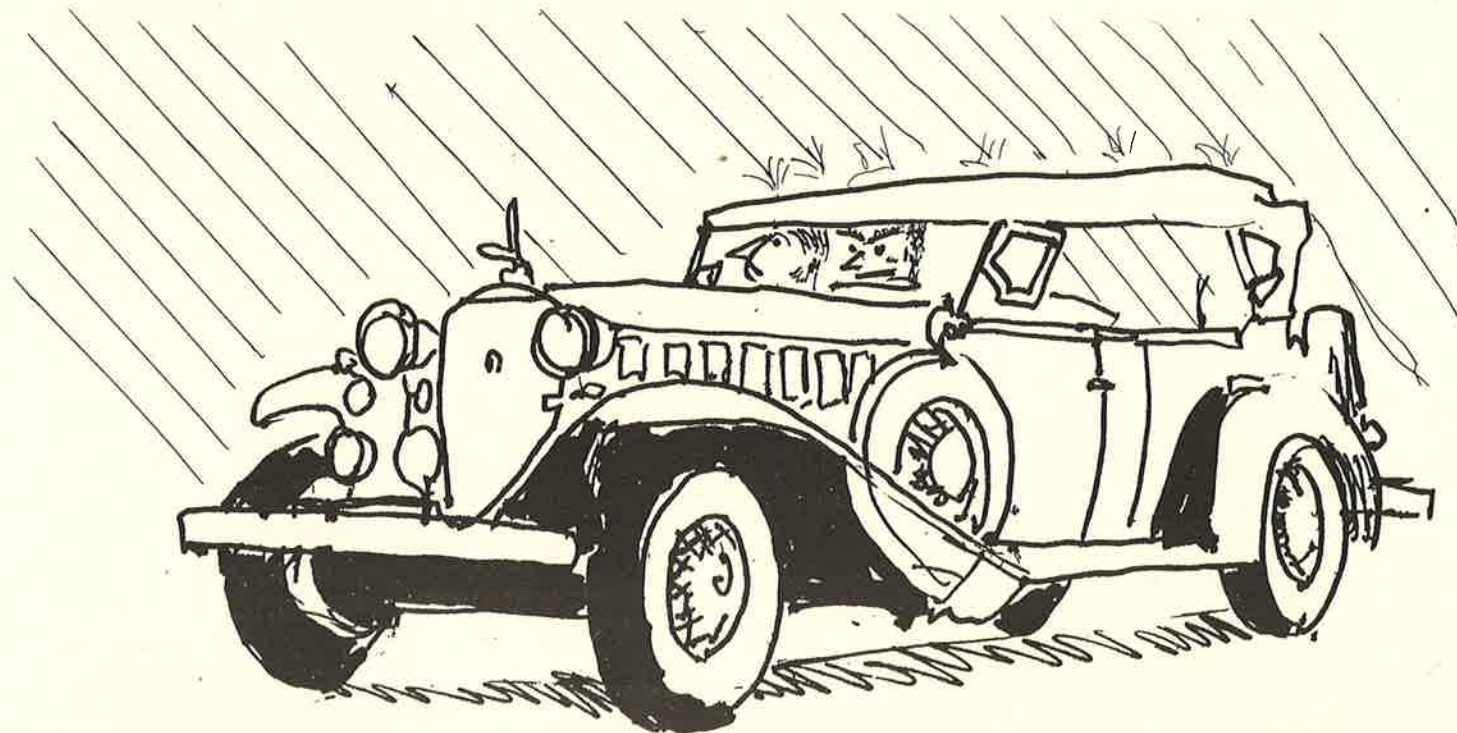
With something akin to the practiced skills of bank vault artists, Kirsling and Willard quickly put the records into new cardboard boxes, carrying the cargo through the rain to the car, getting them wet all over again. Once inside the car, Kirsling transferred the tests to a paper bag and held them gingerly on his lap.

The car and its precious cargo crawled slowly, almost dream-like, through the evening rain—much too slowly for Kirsling, who was in "a state of suspended frenzy." "It was," he said, "the longest half-mile car ride of my life." He remembers repeating the silent prayer: "Please, God, don't let them be by white singers." Now and then, Kirsling tortured himself by thinking about the records the brother-in-law had carted off earlier in the day.

Once home, Kirsling quickly unloaded the records, then reimbursed Willard for the check. (Because of other commitments Willard was unable to stay and listen to the



"If you want to haul them away—be my guest."



"The car splashed through the flooded streets..."



They spent hours in research, listening to the tests through most of the night; then Kirsling phoned the owner of the house. The owner gave Kirsling the brother-in-law's phone number. Kirsling remembers that his fingers were shaking as he dialed the number. The brother-in-law confirmed what had been said. "I want to keep most of them," he said. "If you want to come by and look through them...I guess that'd be all right."

*They find more  
Paramount tests  
stacked and "covered  
with snow"—awaiting  
garbage pick-up!*

It took nearly a week before Kirsling was able to get out to the brother-in-law's house. As he and Willard drove up, both noticed a pile of records stacked by the street in a culvert. It had snowed during the week, and the records were still partially covered with snow. Kirsling said, "But, right there on top was a two-sided test of what turned out to be two different takes of Charlie Patton's *Some These Days I'll Be Gone*. The brother-in-law said he had discarded them because they were cracked or scratched. He had put them in the culvert to make it easier for the trash men to pick them up when they made their rounds the next morning.

"If you want to haul them away," he said to Kirsling, "be my guest." He also let Kirsling go through the ones he had saved. The Ink Spots on Decca and similar items were what Kirsling found in the house—all in pristine condition. "If I had come over a day later," Kirsling said, "that Patton and its unissued take and the other unissued tests would have been lost forever."

In all, Kirsling had bought 42 tests (one was a duplicate). Thirty-four were double-sided and eight were single-sided. Most of the double-sided tests contained a different take of the same tune. "Of course," Kirsling said, "they were not all blues. Some were hillbilly, a

few jazz, and just a mixture of other stuff."

Kirsling decided against keeping most of the tests. "I mainly collect Bunny Berigan records and good trumpet, sax, and piano 78s, especially from 1931 to 1935," he said. "I knew the blues records were valuable, and I needed help in getting to the right people."

The next day, he phoned dealer Mike Stewart (of Green River Auctions) for advice and help. In the next few weeks, the "right people" began to hear rumors about the incredible find. Kirsling's phone began ringing.

*19 tests go for  
\$15 thousand!*

One of the first to call was the late Nick Perls. "He wanted to buy all the tests," Kirsling said. "I told him I thought he should have the Pattons

and the Tommy Johnsons and the other blues items, but I wanted to keep some of the others for myself. I sold 19 tests to Nick for \$15 thousand—most of the blues and hillbilly records."

Perls wired the money to Kirsling's bank. He wanted Kirsling to send the tests through the mail. Kirsling felt that would be too risky and prevailed upon Perls to fly in and pick them up. "He was here about 45 minutes," Kirsling said. Perls, who died in July, 1987, intended to issue many of the tests on his Yazoo label. Plans for their release are still in the works.

The money was used to buy more records, some badly needed audio and video equipment, and a compact disk player.

"I sleep right next to the rest of those tests," Kirsling said. "They're in a locked aluminum box alongside my bed."



(photo by John Schleitendorf)

April 16, 1988—Mike Kirsling grips a scarce "Electrobeam" at the Midwest Antique Record and Phonograph Show in Zion, Illinois.

"Nobody seems to know how the records got in the attic. I haven't checked to see who owned the house before, but I guess the records must have been left there by somebody who worked at Paramount."

Aside from the tests, there were no other Paramount records.

The discovery raises the usual unanswerable questions. Who put the test pressings in the attic? Why were the tests made? Were two-sided tests containing two takes of the same tune standard practice for Paramount? Was the previous owner of the house an engineer or a worker with the Paramount pressing plant in Grafton, Wisconsin—about 100 miles due north of Kirsling's hometown of Waukegan, Illinois? Why were all the tests L-series masters (i.e., made in Grafton)? And why did so many feature the cream of Paramount's blues artists (as if a blues collector had gone back in time and carefully selected each record)?

Whatever the answers, Mike Kirsling is living out a collector's lifelong fantasy. "I found a monster in an attic, and lived to tell about it." He also earned the envy of blues collectors—for discovering a valuable caché—and, gratitude—for saving these performances from certain destruction.

#### THE PARAMOUNT TEST PRESSINGS

(Discovered November 18, 1985 in Waukegan, Illinois by Michael Kirsling and John Willard.)

Grafton, Wisconsin, c. November, 1929.

##### (1) Two-sided test:

L36-3 Got To Have My Sweetbread (Lamoore)—Charlie Spand-voc-p—Paramount 12917.

L36-4 Same as above—UNISSUED—(sold to Nick Perls). (condition unknown.)

##### (2) Two-sided test:

L38-1 Elder Green Blues (Patton)—Charley Patton-voc-g/Henry Sims-vn—Paramount 12972.

L38-2 Same as above—UNISSUED—(sold to Nick Perls). (Both sides about V+.)

##### (3) Two-sided test:

L43-1 Some These Days I'll Be Gone (Patton)—Charley Patton-voc-g—UNISSUED.

L43-2 Same as above—Paramount 13110—(sold to Nick Perls). (Both sides about V+, possible hair crack?)

##### (4) Two-sided test:

L47-1 Hammer Blues (Patton)—

Charley Patton-voc-g—UNISSUED.

L47-2 Same as above—Paramount 12998—(sold to Nick Perls). (both sides about V+)



##### (5) Two-sided test:

L56-1 Milenburgh Joys (Ropollo-Mares-Morton)—Bill Carson and his Orch.—UNISSUED.

L56-2 Same as above—Paramount 20797. (Condition unknown)

Grafton, Wisconsin, c. January, 1930

##### (6) Two-sided test:

L138-1 Sermon on "Tight Like That" (Dickenson)—Rev. Emmet Dickenson and The Three Deacons—UNISSUED.

L138-2 Same as above—Paramount 12925—(sold to Nick Perls). (Condition unknown.)

Grafton, Wisconsin, c. February, 1930

##### (7) Two-sided test:

L151-1 St. Louis Fire Blues (MacFarland)—Buck MacFarland-voc-p—Paramount 12982.

L151-2 Same as above—(both takes were issued). (Condition unknown.)

##### (8) Two-sided test:

L159-1 Moving Day—(Orchestra featuring ? Punch Miller or Reuben Reeves-t/as/bar/p/? Bert Cobb-bb/.d/ male vocal)—UNISSUED.

L159-2 Same as above—UNISSUED—(Condition unknown.)

##### (9) Two-sided test:

L163-1 I'll Be Mean to you Blues (Allison)—Georgia Allison and Willie White—voc/H. Brown-p—Paramount 12960.

L163-2 Same as above—UNISSUED—(Condition unknown.)

##### (10) Two-sided test:

L164-1 Have Mercy Blues (Moore)—Alice Moore-voc/Ike Rogers-tb/H. Brown-p—Paramount 12973.

L164-2 Same as above—UNISSUED—(Condition unknown.)

##### (11) One-sided test:

L188-1 Worry Blues (Peeples)—Robert Peeples-voc-g—UNISSUED—(Condition unknown.)

##### (12) Two-sided test:

L194-5 Rap-tap Buck (Thomas)—Tap instruction by Harvey Thomas with piano acc.—UNISSUED.

L194-6 Same as above—Paramount 101-A—(Issued, condition unknown.)

##### (13) Two-sided test:

L203-1 When It's Springtime In The Rockies (Sauer-Woolsey-Taggart)—Bob Tamms And His Orchestra—Broadway 1372.

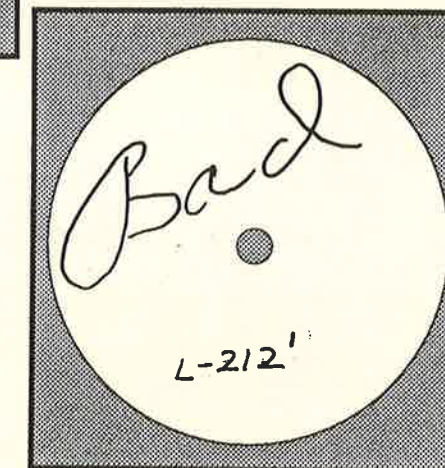
L203-2 Same as above—UNISSUED.

Grafton, Wisconsin, c. March, 1930

##### (14) Two-sided test:

L209-1 Jumping Blues (Wiley)—Arnold Wiley-voc-p—UNISSUED.

L209-2 Same as above—UNISSUED (Condition unknown—take 3 was issued on Paramount 12955.)



##### (15) Two-sided test:

L211-1 Got The Blues So Bad (Wiley)—Irene Wiley-voc/Arnold Wiley-p—UNISSUED.

L211-2 Same as above—UNISSUED (Condition unknown.)

##### (16) Two-sided test:

L212-1 Little Boy (Mama's Got Her Eye On You) (Wiley)—Irene Wiley-voc/Arnold Wiley-p—UNISSUED.

L212-2 Same as above—UNISSUED (Condition unknown.)

##### (17) Two-sided test:

L214-1 Pennsylvania Woman Blues (? )—Six Cylinder Smith-voc-g/harmonica—UNISSUED.

L214-2 Same as above—Paramount 12968 (Sold to Nick Perls—strong pressing, both sides about E-.)

##### (18) Two-sided test:

L221-1 Red Hot And Blue Rhythm (? )—Artie Collins And His Orchestra—Broadway 1375.

L221-2 Same as above—UNISSUED.

##### (19) Two-sided test:

L224-1 I Never Dreamt You'd Fall In Love With Me (Ellis-Parsons)—Artie Collins And His Orchestra—Broadway 1376.

L224-2 Same as above—UNISSUED.

##### (20) Two-sided test:



L231-1 Untitled—(Johnson)—Tommy Johnson-voc-g—UNISSUED.

L231-2 Same as above—UNISSUED (Sold to Nick Perls, both sides V+.)

(21) One-sided test:

L239-2 Woman Woman Blues (Bracey)—Ishman Bracey-voc-g—Paramount 12970—(Sold to Nick Perls, V+.)

(22) One-sided test:

L245-1 Black Mare Blues—Tommy Johnson And New Orleans Nehi Boys—Tommy Johnson-voc-g/"Kid Ernest"-cl/Charley Taylor-p—UNISSUED (L245-2 issued on Paramount 13000, sold to Nick Perls, V+.)

*Grafton, Wisconsin, c. June, 1930.*

(23) One-sided test:

L340-1 Death Has No Sting For The Christian (?)—Delta Big Four-Vocal quartet; unacc.—("Wheeler Ford, Archie, Pokan, and Mosely")—UNISSUED. (Sold to Nick Perls—condition unknown.)

(24) Two-sided test:

L361-1 You Ought To Know (?)—Unknown dance orchestra with male vocal—UNISSUED?

L361-2—Same as above—UNISSUED? (White label, instead of the usual reversed Paramount label. The label of take 2 has the handwritten word "English.")

*Grafton, Wisconsin, c. July, 1930.*

(25) Two-sided test:

L398-1 All Night Long Blues (Johnson)—Louise Johnson-voc-p/talking by Charlie Patton with shouts by Son House and Willie Brown—Paramount 12992.

9/2 #1 (sic.—control number?) Untitled (House)—Son House—voc-g—UNISSUED (Sold to Nick Perls, both sides V+.)

(26) One-sided test:

L456-1 Telephone Arguin' Blues (Short)—Jaydee Short—voc-g—Paramount 13043 (Sold to Nick Perls, V+.)

*Grafton, Wisconsin, c. August, 1930.*

(27) One-sided test:

L482-3 Beggin' Man Blues (Burstson)—Clara Burstson—voc/p—Paramount 13003 (Sold to Nick Perls, condition unknown.)

(28) One-sided test:

L489-1 Maybe It's Love (?)—Glen Litzke's Midnight Serenaders—Broadway 1398.

*Grafton, Wisconsin, c. September, 1930.*

(29) Two-sided test:

L511-1 If I Could Be With You One Hour Tonight (Johnson-Creamer)—White male—voc/vn/g/p—UNISSUED?

L511-2 Same as above—UNISSUED? (Take 1 has "special" written on the label.)

(30) Two-sided test:

L520-1 When The Organ Played At Twilight (Campbell-Connelly-Wal-lace)—White male-voc-g—UNISSUED?

L520-2 Same as above—UNISSUED? (Take 1 has "bad" written on a white label, while the other side is the usual reversed Paramount label. The record was broken in three pieces, but playable after Kirsling repaired it.)

(31) Two-sided test:

L530-1 Unknown Title (?)—Possibly Tampa Red and Georgia Tom (piano solo with guitar)—UNISSUED.

L530-2 Same as above—UNISSUED. (Sold to Nick Perls. Cracked, but both sides V+ and playable.)

*Grafton, Wisconsin, c. January, 1931.*

(32) Two-sided test:

L729-1 Catchin' 'Erbs—Part One (Easton-Howell)—Sidney Easton-voc-hand organ/Bert Howell-voc-vn—Paramount 13061.

L729-2 Same as above—UNISSUED. (Cracked, otherwise condition unknown.)

*Grafton, Wisconsin, unknown dates.*

(33) Two-sided test:

6 Levee Camp Man (Spand) (break-down—test incomplete)—Charlie Spand-voc-p—UNISSUED.

6√ (six with an arrow) Mississippi Blues (Spand)—Charlie Spand-voc-p—UNISSUED. (Sold to Nick Perls condition unknown.)

(34) and (35) Two two-sided tests:

1-28 Wait 'Till The Clouds Roll By (?)—White male/female vocal duet with guitar—UNISSUED.

2-28 The Pentacostal ABC's (?)—White female vocal with guitar—UNISSUED. (There were two copies of this test. One was sold to Nick Perls; the other was kept by John Willard—conditions unknown. Willard's copy may appear in a Mike Stewart auction.)

(36) Two-sided test:

S 96 Drums with male speech (?) radio broadcast. Speaker says "We're going off the air. We'll be on the air tomorrow at 12 o'clock."—UNISSUED.

3/5 High school marching band—UNISSUED (conditions unknown).

(37) Two-sided test:

PM 7-10 Old Black Joe ("Paul Margret at the piano and Art Laibley at the recording machine") Paul Margret, piano solo—UNISSUED.

Pm & WK 3-3 Pack Up Your Troubles/On Wisconsin—Paul Margret, piano and vocal, with unknown male vocal (Laibley?)—UNISSUED (conditions unknown) (Art Laibley was Paramount's Recording Director until 1932.)

(38) Two-sided test:

10-24-30 Gee, But I'd Like To Make You Happy (Shay-Ward-Mongromery)—Cardinal Trio—(Male trio/ukelele/steel guitar)—(In the wax is 10-24-30, instead of a matrix number. This may be the recording date. The title was issued on Broadway 1403, which had matrix L474 printed on the label, but matrix L540-2 in the wax!)—UNISSUED.

540-2 Same as above—Broadway 1403 (note, there is no L prefix. If side

one's "matrix" is indeed a date, it could help dating the matrices surrounding L 540 more accurately.)—(Sold to Nick Perls, conditions unknown.)

(39) Two-sided test:

1837/9718 If I had A Girl Like You (Henderson-Rose-Dixon)—Irving Kaufman-voc/orchestra—UNISSUED?

1838/9723 Once Again (?)—same as above—UNISSUED (First side has a Plaza matrix—9718, no take number, control number 1837; second side also has a Plaza matrix—9723, control number 1838. This test has a white label with "good" written on both sides. Could this have been a Paramount recording sold to Plaza, or vice versa?) (conditions unknown).

(40) Two sided-test:

T5/2 #1 When I'm Gone Don't You Grieve (?)—White male vocal with guitar—UNISSUED?

T 5/2 #111 Two unknown fiddle tunes—violin and guitar—UNISSUED? (Sold to Nick Perls, conditions unknown.)

(41) One-sided test:

106 Speech and My Little Coal Black Rose—unacc. white female-voc—UNISSUED (condition unknown except for a large rim bite that doesn't affect play, since the grooves start 2/3 of an inch in from the rim).

(42) Two-sided test:

2-3 CJ Papa Do Do Do (Jackson)—Papa Charlie Jackson-voc-bj—UNISSUED.

2-3 Baby Lou Blues (Blake)—Blind Blake-voc-g—UNISSUED ((The Jackson side may be an alternate take of matrix L-25-2, issued on Paramount 12905. The Blind Blake side may be an alternate take of matrix L-23-3, issued on Paramount 12918.) (Sold to Nick Perls, conditions unknown).

DOCUMENT DLP 532 *Delta Blues—Volume 1 (1929-1930). The Unissued Paramount Tests of Charley Patton, Son House, Tommy Johnson, Ishman Bracey, and The Complete Recordings of Louise Johnson.*

Side A: CHARLEY PATTON (1) Elder Greene Blues L-380-2 (unissued take) (2) Some These Days I'll Be Gone L-43-1 (unissued take) (3) Hammer Blues L-47-1 (unissued take) LOUISE JOHNSON (4) All Night Long Blues L-398-1, Long Ways From Home L-399-2, On The Wall L-419, By The Moon And Stars L-420-2.

Side B: SON HOUSE (1) Walkin' Blues (unissued title) LOUISE JOHNSON (2) All Night Long Blues L-398-2 (unissued take) TOMMY JOHNSON (3) Morning Prayer (unissued title) (4) "Boogalooosa Woman" (Sic—alternate take of Morning Prayer) (5) Black Mare Blues L-245-1 (unissued take) ISHMAN BRACEY Woman Woman Blues L-239-1 (unissued take).



July 20, 1923

GENNETT  
CHAMPION  
BLUES



Richmond,  
Indiana  
(1923—  
1934) Part  
2  
by Tom  
Tsotsi

Crump: "Nina Reeves  
was way ahead of  
her time..."

Genevieve Stearns (vocal)/  
Nina Reeves (vocal)/Jesse  
Crump (piano), 20 & 31  
July 1923

Gennett reached to nearby Indianapolis for the artists on this session. Ten sides total were cut, two by Genevieve Stearns (both unissued), six by Nina Reeves, and two piano solos by Jesse Crump. These latter eight sides were issued on Gennett Specials/Private Pressings, hence their rarity and obscurity. Paul Oliver gives a brief background to the Crump/Reeves association in his published works—Jesse Crump arrived in Indianapolis at the age of 17 in 1923 after leaving his native Texas and travelling some on



the TOBA circuit. Crump worked as an entertainer and accompanist to Nina Reeves at The Cotton Club and the Golden West Cabaret. Crump mentioned to Oliver that he remembered the Gennett recording session and stated, "Nina Reeves was way ahead of her time, she was a great singer... I wrote Indiana Avenue Blues for her."

On the aural evidence of the two Nina Reeves sides heard—"Indiana Avenue Blues" and "Louisville Lou" (Pete Whelan has this 78, with the label designation "Indianapolis," no issue number)—one hears a competent female vocalist with fairly good range and projection, yet, not much different from the female cabaret artists that abounded at this time. Jesse Crump's accompaniment is quite good; he has a 12 bar solo on "Indiana Avenue Blues" that shows his flashing right hand style. Crump's two solo sides are excellent—"Mr. Crump's Rag" is brilliantly raggy with excellent coordination between both hands; "Golden West Blues" (named for his ongoing venue in Indianapolis) shows his fine blues style, with a predominant right hand and a spot in the middle where he

effectively introduces a walking bass line with the left hand.

It is somewhat odd that the two unissued titles recorded by the mysterious Genevieve Stearns ("Louisville Lou"/"Farewell Blues") were both also recorded at this session by Nina Reeves, then issued. Shortly after this session, Ida Cox sent for Jesse Crump to join her in Chicago as her accompanist, and this association continued for about ten years; they were married for a period from the mid-1920s to the mid-1930s. The March 1952 issue of *The Record Changer* has an interesting background article by Warren C. Huddleston—"Jesse Crump, Piano Behind the Blues."

Tiny Franklin (vocal)/George  
W. Thomas (piano), 10  
December 1923

Gennett's next blues session involves the patriarch of the famed Thomas family from Houston, George W. Thomas, here accompanying an obscure female singer. It is not clear whether Tiny Franklin was from Houston—Mike Montgomery was recently asked whether she was

related to the Thomas family (Mike is preparing a study of the Thomas family for publication), and he stated that no data was available and that Sippie Wallace didn't remember her. Mike conjectured that possibly, Tiny Franklin may have been a protégé of George W. Thomas from the Chicago area.

What one hears on the four issued sides (out of a total of six that were recorded on this date) is a female vocalist with a somewhat high-pitched voice, at times a bit shrill, using voice quavering and sobbing voice breaks for effect at spots. George Thomas' piano work consists of introductions and competent backing to Franklin's vocals; he has no solos.

The Gennett 5345 coupling ("Shorty George Blues"/"I've Got a Man of My Own") has composer credits to "Thomas," yet Sippie Wallace is quoted in Derrick Stewart-Baxter's *Ma Rainey and The Classic Blues Singers*... "There was my elder brother, George Thomas, he played a bit, but he eventually became a music publisher and published two of my biggest hits, 'Shorty George' and 'Caldonia,' both my composi-

tions, and you may remember 'Up the Country,' and that was mine too."

Could "Tiny Franklin"  
have been a  
pseudonym for  
Sippie Wallace?...

Sippie's first two recorded sides were "Up the Country Blues"/"Shorty George Blues" for Okeh in Chicago (with Eddie Heywood, Sr. on piano) about one month and a half before these Franklin—Thomas Gennett versions. Inasmuch as all the Franklin sides are associated with George Thomas (the others issued are "Up the Country Blues" and "Houston Blues"; "Sweet Baby Doll", a Thomas composition that was recorded as an instrumental by King Oliver's Jazz Band in October, 1923, was not released), one suspects that Mike Montgomery's conjecture re: Tiny Franklin has validity. This appears to have been a session booked by George Thomas with Gennett requiring the standard female cabaret singer output, and Tiny Franklin was



(from the collection of Sherman Tolen)

available. Sippie Wallace had started her long-term contract with Okeh (October 1923 to May 1927) so it would appear that she couldn't fill this role for her brother's Gennett session.

I'll admit that before gaining access to the Tiny Franklin sides, I had harbored a question—could "Tiny Franklin" have been a pseudonym for Sippie Wallace? Comparison of the two vocalists indicates, indeed, this is not the case. Although Paul Oliver indicates that Tiny Franklin was from Houston (*Blues Off the Record* and Magpie Lp 4404 notes), and that "Tiny Franklin changed from a career in blues to one in the church in Detroit, as (did) Sippie Wallace..." (*Screening the Blues*), it would appear that this is not correct. Surely, Sippie Wallace would have been aware of Tiny Franklin's presence in Detroit as a fellow church singer—yet Sippie claimed no recognition of the name.

Daddy Stovepipe (Johnny  
Watson), 10 May 1924)

An indication that Gennett was always branching out in the spread of types of artists recorded is afforded us by the sides cut by Daddy Stovepipe (Johnny Watson) on this date—"Sundown Blues"/"Stovepipe blues"/"Tidewater Blues"—this latter side not issued. Here we have a rural male blues singer, self accompanied on harmonica and guitar; surely quite a change from the previous urban female vocalists with their piano accompaniments.

Daddy Stovepipe was born  
in Mobile around 1867—  
1870...

In March, 1924, Ralph Peer, in the second of his Okeh territorial visits to Atlanta, recorded two sides by Ed Andrews, vocal and guitar (Okeh 8137—"Barrel House Blues"/"Time Ain't Gonna Me Stay") for what appears to be the first instance of a rural blues man being recorded—Sylvester Weaver's first two sides for Okeh in NYC in November 1923 were guitar solos, no vocals (Okeh 8109 "Guitar Blues"/"Guitar Rag"). These modest Okeh and Gennett recordings were the harbingers of





(from the collection of Sherman Tolen)

what was soon to follow—the great period of the rural blues on record.

Daddy Stovepipe (so called because of the stovepipe hat he wore) was born in Mobile, Alabama sometime around 1867/1870, thus he was a relatively older man when he first recorded. His voice is deep and expressive, his harmonica style presages what is heard later from the Memphis/Birmingham areas, and his guitar playing augments the harmonica lead nicely. "Sundown Blues" is in 12 bar format with alternating instrumental and vocal 12 bar segments. It's interesting to note the commonality of the vocal lines used by these early bluesmen—Ed Andrews in his "Barrel House Blues" sings, "I got nineteen woman, believe I want one more (x 2), if the one do for me, gonna let the nineteen go." Daddy Stovepipe in his "Sundown Blues" sings, "I got nineteen high browns, and I want one more (x 2), but one don't suit me, I want nineteen more." Daddy Stovepipe's "Stovepipe Blues" is an up-tempo 16 bar blues with alternating instrumental and vocal segments, ending with 48 bars of tour de force harmonica and guitar with some nice bottom

string guitar licks thrown in at two spots.

We shall meet the peripatetic Daddy Stovepipe again in the Gennett Birmingham, Alabama recording sessions in 1927. His later recorded efforts, accompanied by his wife, Mississippi Sarah (Watson), for Vocalion in October 1931 and Bluebird in February 1935 are quite rare. They represent superb examples of this genre carried through after recording emphasis had shifted away from this early rural blues/entertainer aspect. Amazingly, Johnny Watson shows up on the Maxwell Street post-WWII scene in Chicago. References to this period can be found in Mike Leadbitter's *Nothing But the Blues* (p.58) and Paul Oliver's *Conversations with the Blues* (p.64, 143, 201), *Blues On the Record* (p.173), and *The Story of the Blues* (p.150 with photo of Johnny Watson). The question remains in mind—how in the devil did Gennett come by the opportunity and, indeed, the foresight, to record Daddy Stovepipe in Richmond in May 1924? One suspects that he might have been seen locally with a touring medicine show or traveling itinerantly as a street

singer and hustled into the studio to record these unique sides.

### Stovepipe Jazz Band/ Stovepipe Jones (Sam Jones), 16 May 1924

Sam Jones, from Cincinnati, performed as a one-man band, playing guitar, harmonica, and the jug-like stovepipe (hence his recording name). Six days after the Daddy Stovepipe session, Sam Jones cut his first sides, six in total and all pressed on Gennett Specials/Private Pressings. Because of the rarity of these 78s, access to the sides was not available. An indication of Sam Jones' vocals and instrumental accompaniment is available by reference to his following NYC recordings in August 1924 for Columbia whereon his label name is "Stovepipe No.1" (one surmises that he was now aware of Daddy Stovepipe's Gennett 5459 issue, hence the adoption of the "No.1").

We hear a deep pleasant voice accompanied by a constant strumming guitar, a harmonica style that's appealing, and the somewhat flutulent sound of the stovepipe (Jones transitions quite rapidly between the harmonica and stovepipe). The nature of the song material is typical of the all-around street singer—religious (e.g. "Lord Don't You Know I Have No Friend Like You") and white country (e.g. "Cripple Creek and Sourwood Mountain"). It appears that Columbia wanted no blues per se to be issued from these sessions. Those six sides that were pressed were released on the popular series (Col 201 & 210) and the white country series (Col 15011). Some excellent commentary on Sam Jones and Johnny Watson is found in Tony Russell's *Blacks Whites and Blues* (p.35, 36, with another photo of Daddy Stovepipe on Maxwell Street in 1960).

Sam Jones indeed did get around as far as recording sessions go—for Gennett in Richmond (May 1924), Columbia in NYC (August 1924), Okeh in St. Louis with David Crockett (April 1927), and Okeh in Atlanta, again with David Crockett, as "King David's Jug Band" (December 1930). The Okeh recordings

show Sam Jones in more of the jug band milieu rather than the early folk music setting of the Gennett and Columbia sides—he did not use the stovepipe on the Columbia religious sides. Interested readers can get access to all of Sam Jones' commercially issued sides on Johnny Parth's limited edition Lp reissue on Blues Document 2019.

One final note—Sam Jones recorded his versions of "Sundown Blues" for Columbia (August 1924) and Okeh (April 1927)—both unissued. One suspects that the thrust of this may have been directed towards his challenge to Daddy Stovepipe. We'll probably never be able to compare these sides; it's doubtful that the masters were ever retained. The Okeh recordings with David Crockett bear close listening on several of the sides from a discographical sense of assignment of vocal/instrumentation, but that's beyond the purview of this overview and best left for another forum.

### Whistler and His Jug Band, 25 September 1924

Discussion of the jug band tradition properly belongs to Fred E. Cox of Indianapolis, because of his many years of research on this subject. In a brief correspondence, Fred indicated that jug band music was quite prevalent in certain locales prior to its appearance on records, and was branching out. Quoting from Fred's letter: "In October 1920, Earl McDonald was engaged by Jack Reed to play in his Classic Café located near the corner of Ohio and State Streets in Chicago. Jack wanted a novelty jug band with lots of vocalizing. McDonald recruited a group of street musicians for this job which included Harvey Jones (jazzhorn, vocals, dancing), James Turner (banjo, vocals), and Louis Leslie, a/k/a Louis Lasky later (12 string guitar, vocals) to augment McDonald's own jug playing.

"This group played some three weeks at the Classic Café, then Earl McDonald returned alone to Louisville. The others continued for some two years as a novelty band under the leadership of Harvey Jones as 'Jones' So Different Four'. Fred wrote that this information came from a

recorded tape interview with Harvey Jones, conducted by John Steiner and Jasper Taylor in the 1950s, and was provided to the late Prof. John Randolph by John Steiner.

### Jug bands flourished in Louisville and Cincinnati...

It would appear that novelty bands featuring a jug player flourished in the Ohio River port cities of Louisville and Cincinnati. Indications are the other parts of the rural South had picked up on this. From the recordings available, it's noted that the first instance of jug band music on 78s involved Clifford Hayes, Curtis Hayes, and Earl McDonald in NYC for Okeh about 16/19/22 September 1924, accompanying Sara Martin's vocals on eight sides and two additional sides as instrumentals on which the band was listed as "Sara Martin's Jug Band", but the composer credits on Okeh 8188 (MacDonald sic)—Hayes indicate the true identity. It is indeed coincidental that Gennett scheduled their first foray into this novelty jug band genre practically simultaneously with Okeh's programming of the same; both companies reaching to the Louisville area for their pioneer jug band recordings.

Whistler and His Jug Band recorded nine sides for Gennett, four of which were issued (Gennett 5554, 5614), the others unissued. "Chicago Flip" is a romping ensemble instrumental with violin lead, guitar, mandolin and jug. "Jerry O' Mine" is also a fast paced instrumental with numerous jug breaks and with the addition of the leader, Buford



Threlkeld, playing a nose whistle (along with his guitar) leading the ensemble along with the violin. It is assumed that this whistling instrumental role is the derivation of the name "Whistler" that Threlkeld used for his entire recording career (Okeh in St. Louis, April 1927, ten sides made, four issued; and Victor in Louisville, June 1931, two sides made, both issued). "Jailhouse Blues" is a novelty vocal minstrel number (more common with the title "He's In The Jailhouse Now") that was in the repertoire of black and white artists for many years (some examples: Memphis Jug Band, Jimmie Rodgers, and even the Gene Kardos Orch.). Buford Threlkeld does the vocal here backed by jug, violin, and mandolin. "I'm A Jazz Baby" is a similar vocal novelty with Threlkeld's vocal backed boisterously by jug, violin and mandolin. The jug is prominently featured on both these sides, with tuba-like "oom-pah" rhythm and many breaks. On "Jazz Baby", Threlkeld uses several of the "public domain" lyrics that crop up often in later blues and jazz recordings—"The graveyard is a funny place, they lay you on your back, throws dirt in your face... Now if your house catch on fire they ain't no water around, throw your woman out the window, let that shack burn down."

The 1927 Okeh and 1931 Victor recordings evidence that Whistler and his group thrived during this majestic jug band period. The benefit of electrical recording further enhances the minstrel/medicine show sound of this pioneer Louisville jug band. There is extant a short movie clip consisting of Whistler and His Jug Band performing for a newsreel service, probably around 1930. The film clip (with out-takes) shows the jug band performing in a bucolic farm setting. The sound track is "synched", but there is absolute joy in watching the various players in a version of "Tear It Down, Bed Slats and All," which Whistler called "Folding Bed" on his Victor 78, —surely the "national anthem" of the jug bands. I would hope that some kind possessor of this film would see clear to taping the sound track so that it could be added on microgroove to the rich aural history of





this marvelous jug band music.

Next time we'll close out the Gennett acoustical period and venture into the electrical recording period that appears to have started sometime in October 1926.

A JESSE CRUMP ADDENDUM  
*"The Caruso of the Colored Race"...*

After the Part 2 draft was sent to Pete Whelan at his winter address in early October, Pete responded with a most interesting tape cassette of assorted Gennett/Champion 78 sides from his personal collection. Included among these was a heretofore unlisted Jesse Crump piano accompaniment that deserves mention. The record is *Standfield 20057—Chas. M. Standfield, "The Caruso of the Colored Race," Piano Acc./Jesse Crump—(11901), "They Needed a Songbird in Heaven So God Took Caruso Away"/(11902), "Oh Baby"—recorded in Richmond, Indiana on Wednesday, 4 June 1924 (These sides were previously recorded on 21 May, 1924; acc. un-*

known; not issued). "Songbird" is typical sentimental schlock—in retrospect, Standfield is perhaps better described as "The Irving Kaufman of the Colored Race"—Jesse Crump provides the appropriate piano accompaniment, including an 8-bar intro and 6-bar bridge. The reverse side, "Oh Baby," the DeSilva-Donaldson composition sometimes further identified with the title tag ("Don't Say No, Say Maybe"), is a horse of a different color. Jesse Crump absolutely sparkles with his romping, spirited piano—56 introductory bars (8b + 3 x 16b) plus exuberant backing to Standfield's vocal choruses.

John MacKenzie's Gennett/Champion archives do not have Crump's presence noted, but the record label does indeed give him credit. It might be mentioned that MacKenzie's research data has typed transcriptions of the Gennett ledgers up through the period in 1927 to mx. no. GEX-13015. Beyond this, his archives include xerox copies of the actual company ledgers.

The record labels for these two sides illustrate the Gennett Special/

Personal series very nicely (I assume that Pete Whelan will print photos for illustration). The label for Standfield 20057 is black with gold lettering with the typical Gennett printing format within the hexagonal border. The personalization is further indicated by the addition: "To be heard regularly at—CEDAR SPRINGS HOTEL—New Paris, Ohio." New Paris, Ohio is about five miles east of Richmond, Indiana. Whether Jesse Crump had previous association with Charles M. Standfield in Indianapolis is not known. The files show that these sides constituted the day's recording activity for Gennett (there were three takes made of each side). Ferd (Jelly Roll) Morton rolled into Richmond on the following Monday to record 11 piano solos. One final thought—could the Cedar Springs Hotel have been the place where black artists resided when their Gennett recording activity required an overnight stay?

**Tom Tsotsi**  
**28 Varick Road**  
**Waban, Mass. 021268**



(courtesy Alice O'Connell Hardman)

Glenn Hardman (c. 1935)

Glenn  
 Hardman  
 Rediscovered!

by Steve LaVere

Glenn Hardman, an extraordinary keyboard wizard and vocalist, began as a radio station staff pianist. He worked for a number of radio stations both before and after the road- and hotel-career he

shared with his wife, the lovely vocalist Alice O'Connell. Later, he performed in low profile in small venues in and around the Los Angeles area until his retirement in 1983.

Hardman was born June 10, 1910 in Pittsburgh. He was a well-schooled musician, born with perfect pitch into a family of musicians and dancers. His aptitude for the piano first appeared when he was five (he could already pick out tunes he'd heard at picture shows and in vaudeville).

*Hardman subs for Art Tatum in Toledo...*

His career began in the late 1920s as a staff pianist for local Pitts-

burgh radio stations, KDKA among them. By 1930, he had his own daily program "A Study in Black and White" on WJAY in Toledo. By the early 1930s both he and his show had become a feature of Toledo's major station WSPD. It was here that he would often sub for Art Tatum, whenever Tatum was unable to make his scheduled radio performance. The two pianists became good friends and Hardman often spent time with Tatum and his mother in their Toledo home. WSPD was his break into big-time radio and over the course of time, Hardman became the musical director for 13 other radio stations. For many years, he had his own early-morning program, which billed him as "The Sunshine Man."

Special note: Toledo spawned two other legendary pianists—the "novelty ragtime" pioneers Roy Bargy and Henry Lange. With jazz pianist Hardman and Tatum the four were suggested in local Toledo papers as a choice All-American piano team.

*Hardman records for Gennett...*

Hardman's first records were made for Gennett Records in Richmond, Indiana, July 11, 1933, and released on their Champion subsidiary. According to a contemporary report, he travelled to Richmond with fellow WSPD staffers, the Shanks Bros. string trio, and while their recording activity is undetermined at present, Hardman made two piano solos and five vocals accompanied by his own piano. He was billed on one of the discs as "The Sunshine Man."

*Hammond discovers Hardman...*

In the mid-1930s, he teamed up with Alice O'Connell, a young lady with whom he had previously performed auditions. Her younger sister, Helen, would later become famous as the vocalist with the Jimmy Dorsey band. Glenn and Alice were married May 16, 1936 and remain so to this day. As a team, Hardman and O'Connell played hotels, nightclubs,





(Left—piano solo,  
Richmond, Indiana,  
July 11, 1933  
on the rare black-label  
(champion.)



(Below left—July 11, 1933—  
Hardman sings  
and plays piano  
on the even rarer  
green-label (champion.)

and theatres throughout the East. It was during this time that they became a John Hammond "discovery." Hammond brought them to Chicago for some recordings in 1939. Hammond had assembled a pick-up group featuring Lester Young, Lee Castle, Freddie Green, and Jo Jones. It was at this session that Hardman met them for the first time. One exotic title recorded from those highly-regarded sessions still gets reissued from time to time: "Upright Organ Blues" (by Glenn Hardman?—really John!).

The Hardman/O'Connell professional duet continued until 1943, when Alice decided to have a baby. Glenn became the musical director of KTUL in Tulsa, where he would soon discover a promising young vocalist named Clara Ann Fowler, who later became (with a lot of coaxing) Patti Page.

In 1953 the Hardmans left Oklahoma for California and took up residence in the Los Angeles area. Glenn never got into the tightly-controlled recording scene. Instead, he played hotels (Huntington-Sheraton, Pasadena), cocktail lounges (Tail Of The Cock, Studio City), and night-

*They're Back*

**BECAUSE YOU LIKED THEM**

**Glenn HARDMAN**

**Alice O'CONNELL**



They amuse you with their song and patter—and of course—there is really no place just as nice as the

*Rainbow Lounge* Opens Tomorrow

**HOTEL SYRACUSE**

• JAMES F. GILDAY, Manager

Above: Glenn and Alice in the mid 1930s...

Right: Shanks Bros. Trio featuring hot fiddle (July 11, 1933).

clubs (Queen's Arms, Toluca Lake) for 30 years before his eventual retirement.

As a sideline, Glenn became an egg-rancher in the 1960s and continued in that venture when he moved his family to Newhall in 1969. An accident to his left hand left it paralyzed for over a year. The fact that he was left-handed caused him to turn exclusively to the organ for the balance of his performing years.

The Hardmans retired to Redding, California in 1983. Since that time Glenn has begun to lose his faculties. He suffers from Alzheimer's disease and remembers very little about the old days or the records he made. Alice, however, was of great help in preparing this short article. She fondly recalls their lives as performers—and a memorable 1941 reunion in New York—when they visited Art Tatum and Lena Horne at Café Society. Later, Tatum took them to after-hours clubs in Harlem, where Alice sang to both Hardman's and Tatum's accompaniment until 7 A.M.

**A**ND, while we're on the subject of boys who are making good, it should interest you to know that WSPD's piano-playing Glenn Hardman and the singing, strumming Shank Brothers will go to Richmond, Ind., July 11 to make phonograph records for the Genette company. This organization sells records throught the country under both its own and other trade names. Allen Saunders, of course, called your attention to the praise which blind Piano-Player Tatum's records have brought in England. Tatum's return to WSPD'S kilocycles would be welcomed by a lot of people.

(courtesy Alice Hardman and Steve LaVere)





"A dealer is one who knows the price of each 78, but the value of none."\*



78  
PRESENTS  
THE  
RAREST  
78s  
(C-D)

(Continuing with Part 2 (C-D), we are pleased to highlight this "annoying feature about records none of us will ever own."\*\* Some of them can be glimpsed here fleetingly, like fast thoroughbreds cantering the racetrack—or beautiful women prancing up Fifth Avenue. Most will return to obscurity—destined to drop into the obscure sinkholes from which they emerged.

\*Attributed to the late James McKune (1956).

"Hats off to the experts!"

And the dredging operation continues. We are anxious to report the tallies and thoughtful responses from our growing Panel Of Experts:

Howard Berg of Hatfield, Pa.; Ron Brown of Grayslake, Ill.; Pierre Chaigne of Paris; Ken Crawford of Pittsburgh; Robert Crumb of Winters, Calif.; Sherwin Dunner of San Francisco; Marvin Ellias of Swarthmore, Pa.; Bob Fertig of Canandaigua, N.Y.; Paul Garon of Chicago; Andy Hale of Santa Monica, Calif.; Bob Hilbert of Coral Gables, Fl.; Charles Howard of Kifissia, Greece; Tom Hudgins of Cleveland; Dave Jason of Flushing, N.Y.; Don Kent of Brooklyn; Mike Kirsling of Waukegan, Ill.; Bernard Klatzko of Glen Cove, N.Y.; Steve LaVere of Los Angeles; Jim Lindsay of Indianapolis; Frank Mare of Conyers, Ga.; George Paulus of Chicago; Jim Prohaska of Lakewood, Ohio; Dick Raichelson of Memphis; Henry Renard of Pleasantville, N.J.; Russ Shor of Philadelphia; John Sadowsky of Jacksonville; Dick Spottswood of University Park, Md; Francis Smith of Dormington, England; Bill Th-

ompson of Atlanta; Tom Tsotsi of Waban, Mass.; Sherman Tolen of Cleveland Heights, Ohio; Max Vreede of The Hague, Netherlands; Matt Winter of Otford, England; Gayle Wardlow of Greensboro, N.C.; Pete Whelan of Key West, Fl.; and Terry Zwigoff of San Francisco.

"Unheard take takes a dive!"

And now, we harp back to revisions of the last issue's A-B Jazz section...In 1988, Tom Hudgins of Cleveland struck gold in a local junkshop. He found the first Frank Bunch And His Fuzzy Wuzzies to show up on Herwin ("The Alabama Serenaders," *Congo Stomp/Fourth Avenue Stomp*, Herwin 92044). Interestingly, Rust (and the Gennett ledgers) list the Herwin version of *Congo Stomp* as an alternate take (GEX 833-A) to Gennett 6293 (GEX-833). However, we've compared them, and they sound identical.

Ken Crawford writes: "It's tough to really determine the rarest 78s, and you will probably be hearing from lots of guys—listing other rarities not in A-B...I just mention one record—Henry Allen on Victor



(courtesy of Tom Hudgins)

23338. I know of two copies—mine, which is N- and one other, about the same condition with a hair crack. Thru the years, I never found another collector that had the record, although I am sure there are more around." And now, a known, third copy shows up—in *Antique Edison* (John Marinacci's November 1988 auction).

Under Rarest Piano (A-B), we forgot to list the Sammy Brown on Gennett 6337, *The Jockey Blues/Barrel House Blues*, (sorry Sammy!). We estimate between five and ten copies on Gennett. Most pristine may be the N- copy owned by the late Francis Wolfe of Blue Note Records (it went on the auction block in *The Record Changer* in the early '50s). We also overlooked Dudley Brown (Turner Parrish)—*Wake Up In The Morning Blues/Western Traveler Blues*—Supertone 9524. Pierre Chaigne says, "I know of two copies." Another overlooked entry in the piano department is Elder Charlie Beck's piano solo of *When The World's On Fire/Drinking Shine* on Okeh 8907. We estimate about three copies, all in the E+/N- category. Another possibility is the delicate, Joplinesque "Mr. Joseph Batten" (*Sic.*)—*The Tramp Rag/The Nigger's Hop* on an early English label—Popular No. P656 (*Sic.*). Dave Jason tells us that these are probably the second earliest (1912?) ragtime piano solos on a 78 flat disk (after the Booth Victor). We know of at least two copies, both E (Howard Berg and Pete Whelan).

Willie Brown and Ishman Bracey

Getting to the blues—an E copy of Willie Brown's *M & O Blues/Future Blues* on Paramount 13090 has been residing in California since the mid '70s. Likewise, Steve LaVere turned up an E- copy of Ishman Bracey's *Woman Woman Blues/Suitcase Full Of Blues* on Paramount 12970, bringing that grand total to four. (The first, V/V-, was bought in the early '60s by Jim Lindsay "from a woman on a bus." The second was a V+ one-sided Paramount test that turned up in the 1985 caché found by Mike Kirsling. The third was a "G" copy auctioned in 1988.) Ron Brown reports two additional Tommy Bradleys: Champion 16339 (V) and Superior 2736 (E- to E), bringing the grand total to two of each—and an N- copy of the great Garfield

Akers Vocalion 1442 ("Cottonfield").

Terry Zwigoff writes—"In the rare String/Jug/Skiffle section you think there's 'estimated less than five' copies of Louie Bluie & Ted Bogan BB5490! I know of none and I've really inquired quite a bit! Who owns one of these? I have to get in touch with them to get a tape!!!!" Frank Mare reports an E- copy of Victor 38603 by A. & J. Baxter. Bill Thompson writes: "...I am simply amazed that there are so few copies of certain records. And this has to be about the end of many rarities ever showing up..."

And, finally, when we reach the end of this series (Z), we hope to list all the reported copies. In the meantime, keep those letters rolling in. \*\* (Dick Spottswood)

JAZZ

*Café Royal Boys* (Tiny Parham)—A Little Bit Closer/(unknown title of no jazz interest)—Challenge 801—Apparently, this is incorrectly listed in Rust. The E+ copy (take 3) Mike Kirsling found in April, 1989 is listed as "Silver Slipper Orchestra." No others reported.

Lou Calabrese And His Hot Shots—Lip-Stick/Let's Misbehave—Gennett 6421—One or two copies (none reported).

*California Popples* (Sonny Clay)—Lou/What A Wonderful Time—Sunset S-506/S-507—One or two copies (but none reported); Lou/(unknown female singer acc. by Sonny Clay, p.—Mama Likes To Do It)—Sunset test—One known copy.

Blanche Calloway—*Lazy Woman's Blues/Lonesome Lovesick*—Okeh 8279—This and the Nolan Welsh are perhaps the rarest Armstrong accompaniments on Okeh. Ken Crawford writes, "Yes, very rare, but what I have always thought, and others have also, including Bill Love, is that the second rarest Louis accompaniment is Baby Mack OK 8313; in fact, the Mack may even be rarer than the Calloway—it never shows up. I never heard of the Nolan Welsh being that rare, and have seen it in a number of auctions." Estimated about five.

Eddie Carlew's *Baby Aristocrats Orchestra*—Indiana Mud/(Tom Gates)—Gennett 6184—About five estimated—Jim Lindsay (condition unknown), a V copy in a March, '89 auction, and Whelan (cracked).

Hoagy Carmichael And His Pals—*One Night In Havana/Stardust*—Gennett 6311—About five known copies—The N- copy auctioned by John Marinacci in November, 1988, N- (the Bob Mantler collection), and V with "tiny hair crack" (Whelan).

Carmichael's *Collegians*—*March Of The Hoodlums/Walkin' The Dog*—Gennett 6474—Estimated five copies—Jim Lindsay (condition unknown); Champion 16453—About ten, including a pale orange-label second pressing (Sherwin Dunner).

Casa Loma Orchestra—*Exactly Like You*/(unknown)—American Odeon ONY-36076—Ken Crawford advises "one known copy."







**Casa Loma Orchestra**—On The Sunny Side Of The Street/(unknown)—American Odeon ONY-36080—Again, Ken says “one known copy.”

**The Cellar Boys**—Wailing Blues/Barrel House Stomp—Vocalion 1503—Less than 10 copies. Lindsay (E?), Thompson (V+), Russ Shor (V).

**Champion Rhythm Kings**—Sweet Georgia Brown/(Howard Thomas—In The Shade Of The Old Apple Tree)—Champion 16387—Three known copies, E (Pete Whelan), V+ (Max Vreede). Terry Zwiggoff says “a V+ copy exists in California”; Superior 2801—No known copies.

**The Chicago Loopers**—Clorinda/Three Blind Mice—Pathé 36729—Only a few copies on Pathé; Perfect 14910—There are an unknown number of different, unmarked masters of *Three Blind Mice*, and the late Bob Mantler was said to have them all. Estimated between 10 and 15 on Perfect.

**The Chicago Stompers**—Wild Man Stomp/Stomp Your Stuff—Champion 16297—Two known copies, both E+ (Shor and Whelan).

**Buddy Christian's Creole Five**—Texas Mule Stomp/Sunset Blues—OKeh 8311—No laminated second pressings (apparently). Estimated between five and ten copies—Whelan (V to V+), Tom Tsotsi (V), and Raichelson (G)—(there must be better copies out there).

**Buddy Christian's Creole Five**—Sugar House Stomp/(Eva Taylor—You Can't Shush Katie)—OKeh 8342—Estimated more than 10 copies—Raichelson (E+) and Whelan (E-).

**Buddy Christian's Jazz Rippers**—South Rampart Street Blues/The Skunk—Pathé 8518—No known copies on Pathé; Perfect 118—Five or more copies—yet, no

response. (We do know of two, E and V+.)

**Sonny Clay's Hartford Ballroom Orchestra**—When It's Sleepy Time Down South/River Stay Away From My Door—Sonny Clay 22/23—(This Brunswick-Balke Collender Company personal record also appears on Champion 16341 as “The Dixie Serenaders”). The one known copy (E-) belonged to the late Don Brown.

**Sonny Clay's Plantation Orchestra**—Slow Motion Blues/California Stomp—Vocalion 1050. N- (Bob Hilbert) and E (Tom Tsotsi). Less than 10 reported.

**Sonny Clay And His Orchestra**—In My Dreams/Devil's Serenade—Vocalion 15641. Six reported copies, including an N- (Vocalion/Decca) file copy (John Sadowsky). Others credited to Fertig (E), Lindsay, Thompson (E), Bob Vinisky (G+), and Whelan (E-).

**Junie Cobb's Hometown Band**—East Coast Trot/Chicago Buzz—Paramount 12382. Three E+ copies (Max Vreede, the Nick Perls Collection, and the late Francis Wolfe), then V+ (Whelan) and V (Shor).

**Oliver Cobb**—Cornet Pleading Blues—Part I/Cornet Pleading Blues—Part II—Paramount 13002—Two reported copies, both E+ (Spottswood and Whelan).

**Ann Cook**—Mama Cookie/He's The Sweetest Black Man In Town—Victor 20579—Only about five copies of this surprising Louis Dumaine rarity. Thompson (E-), Spottswood had it N-.

**Cookie's Gingersnaps**—High Fever/Here Comes The Hot Tamale Man—OKeh 8369—Probably less than 10 copies of this Truetone OKeh (it never went into a laminated second pressing). Most are between V and G. Bill Thompson (E), Max Vreede (V+), Dick Raichelson (V+/V). Dick Spottswood had an E+ copy.

**Cookie's Gingersnaps**—Messin' Around/(Richard M. Jones Jazz Wizards)—OKeh 8390—About 10 (possibly more) of the great Keppard Truetone. Again, no laminated second pressings, and the trick here is to find one in E condition. Whelan (E-), Thompson and Vreede (V+). Russ Shor reports an E+ copy somewhere in Pennsylvania.

**Cookie's Gingersnaps**—Love Found You For Me/(Arthur Sims And His Creole Roof Orchestra)—OKeh 40675—About five copies of this (deservedly) rare OKeh. John Sadowsky and Max Vreede report E copies.

**Paul Cornelius And His Orchestra**—Sentimental Gentleman From Georgia/(James Raschel and His Orchestra)—Champion 16534. Two copies, both about E, but one of them fell from a record shelf and cracked during a California earthquake.

**Paul Cornelius And His Orchestra**—The Scat Song/(unknown)—Champion 16572—No known copies.

**Paul Cornelius And His Orchestra**—I Found A New Baby/(I'm Still Dreaming Of You)—Champion 16734—No known copies.

**The Cotton Pickers**—“This band, under the direction of Andy Mansfield, may have been a Ray Miller unit.”—Dick Raichelson. Sh-hl Here Comes My Sugar/After Awhile—Gennett 6396—E- to E (Raichelson) and V+ (Whelan); Sh-hl Here Comes My Sugar/Third Rail—Champion 15438—Copies reported by Lindsay, Sadowsky, and Shor.

**The Cotton Pickers**—What'll You Do?/Third Rail—Gennett 6380—(A copy went up for auction about two years ago). Estimated three or four copies; What'll You Do?/(unknown)—Superior 333—No known copies.

**The Cotton Pickers**—What'll You Do? (B master)/Third Rail (A master)—Gennett Special 40114—No known copies.

**Wallie Coulter & His Band** (Richard M. Jones)—Hollywood Shuffle/Good Stuff—Gennett 6369—Two known copies, E (Vreede) and E- (Whelan); Gennett Special 40113 and 40114—No known copies; Superior 327—No known copies.

**Ida Cox, Lovie Austin's Serenaders**—Scottie De Doo(*sic*)/Don't Blame Me—Paramount 12381—Two E copies (Bernard Klatzko and Whelan) of this unheralded Dodds item by the “Gallon Stomp crew.” There must be more copies out there.

**Wilton Crawley**—Big Time Woman/She Saves Her Sweetest Smiles For Me—Victor 23292—Five or less of this Jelly Roll Morton collectable. Max Vreede (E) and the late Bob Mantler.

**Wilton Crawley And The Washboard Rhythm Kings**—I'm Her Papa, She's My Mama/New Crawley Blues—Victor 23344—Probably less than five copies. Max Vreede (E) (Mantler, probably E+ or better). Dick Spottswood had both Victors E+.

**Chas. Creath's Jazz-O-Maniacs** (*sic*)—Crazy Quilt/Butter-Finger Blues—OKeh 8477—Ten estimated copies of this Dewey Jackson item. Bill Thompson (N-). (Dunner, Ellias, Fertig, Lindsay, Raichelson, Vreede, and Whelan). Award for the worst condition (“P-”) goes to John Sadowsky. Spottswood: “N-, I'd kill to



have it again.”

**Creole Jass Band**—Tack 'Em Down/(one-sided)—Victor Test (un-numbered)—No known copies of the historic, trial test, probably featuring Keppard.

**Jack Danford And His Ben Franklin Hotel Orchestra**—Alabama Stomp/On The Alamo—Phonograph Recording Company Of San Francisco (un-numbered)—Terry Zwiggoff says “I've seen three or four copies out here (California) in various collections, so I'd say there's probably a half dozen around.” Dick Raichelson reports an E+ copy.

**Teddy Darby**—What Am I To Do/(Lose Your Mind)—Paramount 12907—The first side is “an instrumental with 1-2 choruses by TD and quite an exciting disc. I had that one and never heard of other copies”—Dick Spottswood. Max Vreede reports a V+ copy.

**Genevieve Davis**—Haven't Got A Dollar To Pay Your House Rent Man/I've Got Something—Victor 20648—About 10 copies. Raichelson (E/E+ “junked in Arkansas”) and Thompson (E).

**Jack Davies' Kentuckians**—Sick O'Licks/(Robinson's Knights Of Rest)—Champion 16607—Two or three copies, E+ (Whelan), E (Don Kent), and (Bob Fertig?); Superior 2610—Sick O'Licks/(Harold Johnson & His Boys—Hello Beautiful)—Four known copies. Dick Raichelson (“V+ with some bad grooves”), Keith Miller and Charles Huber (conditions unknown), and a G+ copy traded by Terry Zwiggoff.

**Charlie Davis And His Orchestra**—When/The Drag—Vocalion 15701—Five copies reported, most of them in the “E” category.

**Paul Davis And His Orchestra**—Underneath The Harlem Moon/Black And Tan Fantasy—Champion 16524—Three known copies, all E or better. (This one

is on that pale orange label.)

**Hal Denman And His Orchestra**—Bugle Call Rag/(I'll Never Be The Same)—Champion 16533—Two known copies. E+ (Marinacci) and E (Whelan).

**Deppe's Serenaders**—Falling/Con-gaine—Gennett 20012—The tally of A and B takes on *Falling* may be academic, since we can locate only two copies of this surprisingly good (for 1923) Pittsburgh band. V? (Bob Fertig) and V- (Marvin Ellias).

**Fred Dexter's Pennsylvanians**—Cheer Up/What's The Use—Gennett 7256—Keith Miller (N-); Gennett Special 20044, Champion 16051; Cheer Up/(unknown)—None reported. Champion 16065—What's The Use/(unknown)—Spottswood: “Had this once, not a remarkable disc.”

**Harry Dial's Blusicians**—Don't Give It Away/Funny Fumble—Vocalion 1515—Tom Tsotsi (E-/E) and Jim Lindsay (condition unknown).

**Harry Dial's Blusicians**—When My Baby Starts To Shake That Thing/Poison—Vocalion 1594—Dick Spottswood and the late Ken Hulsizer had the two Vocalions, N-.

**Carroll Dickerson's Savoyagers**—Symphonic Rags/Savoyagers' Stomp—Odcon (Argentine) 0193329—Possibly 15 or more of this Armstrong item are in “the hands of collectors,” and (considering the number of copies turning up at auction), another 1500 in-wait at the Buenos Aires junk shops. Ken Crawford writes: “What you have described is OdAr 029523, which is a master pressing reissue of 0193329. The 0193329 is extremely rare, and only one copy is known to me and many others, and that is the one Bill Love had, and sold with his Louis collection a couple of years ago. Even the reissue goes very high in auctions. A bid of \$200 on 029231, about two years ago, didn't get it!” (Bob Hilbert reports hav-

ing an E+ 0193329.)

**Duke Diggs And His Orchestra** (Alphonse Trent)—Black And Blue Rhapsody/Nightmare—Supertone 9487—Two or three copies. (Terry Zwiggoff—“I've seen two or three copies out here and was under the impression it was much more common.”) Copies reported by Sadowsky (E-) and Lindsay.

**Duke Diggs And His Orchestra**—After You've Gone/St. James Infirmary—Supertone 9653. N- (Huber) and E (Zwiggoff).

**Dixie Boys** (Andy Preer)—I Found A New Baby/(unknown)—Champion 15227—Estimated less than five. None reported.

**Dixie Boys**—Poplar Street Blues/Suite 16 (as “Rag Pickers”)—Autograph (un-numbered)—One reported, E (Max Vreede).

**Dixie-Land Thumpers**—There'll Come A Day/Weary Way Blues—Paramount 12525—About six copies, ranging from E- to N-.

**Dixie-Land Thumpers**—Oriental Man (20240-1)/Sock That Thing—Paramount 12594—Three or four copies, all E or better.

**Dixie-Land Thumpers**—Oriental Man (20286-3)/Sock That Thing—Paramount 12594—Max Vreede has all three (E), including the one known copy of this odd take.

**The Dixie Serenaders** (Sonny Clay)—When It's Sleepy Time Down South/River, Stay 'Way From My Door—Champion 16341—No known copies (and none reported).

**The Dixie Serenaders**—St. Louis Blues/Cho-King—Champion 16365—None reported.

**Dixon's Chicago Serenaders**—Monte Carlo Joys/Twin Blues—Black Patti 8010—None reported.

**Dodds And Parham**—Oh Daddy/(Dixon And Chaney)—Paramount 12471—About 10 copies. Vreede and Whelan report E+ copies.

**Dodds And Parham**—Loveless Love/19th Street Blues—Paramount 12483—Less than 10. Again, Vreede and Whelan report E+ copies.

**Johnny Dodd's Hot Six** (*sic*)—Goober Dance/Indigo Stomp—Victor 23396—Estimated about five copies. Two E- copies reported (Vreede and Whelan).

**Johnny Dodds' Black Bottom Stompers**—Weary Blues/New Orleans Stomp—Vocalion 15632—Close to 10 copies. Raichelson (E), Hilbert (E- to E), Lindsay, Vreede (V+), and Whelan (V+). Spottswood reports having had the white-label file copy (N-).

**Pat Dollohan And His Orchestra**—My Suppressed Desire/Just For You And Me—Gennett 6711—Bob Fertig: “traded my second copy.” Ken Crawford: “I have seen at least six copies and never thought of it as being rare...”

**Down Home Serenaders** (State Street Ramblers)—Cootie Stomp/(Dunk Rendleman And The Alabamians)—Champion 15399—Five or more copies on Champion. Two copies reported—Bob Hilbert (V-) and John Sadowsky (condition unknown).

**George Drew And His Orchestra** (Floyd



Mills)—Hard Luck/Chicago Rhythm (15277-A)—Superior 2829—None reported.

Roberta Dudley—Krooked Blues/When You're Alone Blues—Nordskog 3007; Sunshine 3001—Two or three copies of each. (Spottswood had an E+ Sunshine.)

Dunn's Original Jazz Hounds—What's The Use Of Being Alone?/Original Bugle Blues—Vocalion 1176—Bob Hilbert reports an E to E+ copy. Perhaps two or three other copies.

Bob Fertig—"What about Dave's Harlem Highlights on Timely Tunes?" Dick Raichelson—"Perhaps the Johnnie Cambell New Flexos..."

## "COUNTRY" BLUES

Joe Callicott—Fare Thee Well Blues/Traveling Mama Blues—Brunswick 7166—Five copies in the E to N- category: Bob Fertig, George Paulus, Russ Shor, "one in Lynchburg, Va.," and the Nick Perls collection.

Bob Campbell—Starvation Farm Blues/Worried All The Time—Vocalion 02798—One copy (N-) reported (Francis Smith). Bernard Klatzko: "Only copy I know of is Francis Smith's."

Bob Campbell—Dice's Blues/Shotgun Blues—Vocalion 02830—One copy (E-) reported (Gayle Wardlow).

Bunny Carter (Sam Collins)—Midnight Special Blues/It Won't Be Long—Conqueror 7266—Two reported copies on Conqueror: E- (Perls) and V- (Wardlow).

George Carter—Rising River Blues/Hot Jelly Roll Blues—Paramount 12750—Perls (?) and Wardlow (E-). Not well-documented.

George Carter—Weeping Willow Blues/Ghost Woman Blues—Paramount 12769—Perls (?) and Wardlow (E+).

Chicago Sheiks (Broonzy & Smith)—Beadle Um Bum/Selling That Stuff—Superior 2798—No known copies on Superior (and none reported).

Big Boy Cleveland—Quill Blues/Go in To Leave You Blues—Gennett 6108—Four known copies, ranging from E+ (Pete Whelan and Russ Shor), down to V.

Jaybird Coleman—Mill Log Blues/(rev. Jelly Roll Anderson)—Gennett 6226—Only two copies known: Wardlow (E-) and Perls (E, but cracked).

Jaybird Coleman—Man Trouble Blues/Trunk Busted—Suitcase Full Of Holes—Gennett 6245—Three reported: V+ (Whelan), V (Wardlow), and V- (Don Kent).

Jaybird Coleman—Ah'm Sick And Tired Of Tellin' You (To Wiggle That Thing)/No More Good Water—Cause The Pond Is Dry—Gennett 6276—Five reported: E (Robert Crumb and Frank Mare), E- (Whelan), V+ (Sherman Tolén), and F (Wardlow).

Sam Collins—The Jail House Blues/Riverside Blues—Gennett 6167—Close to 10 copies, ranging from E+ (Perls) to E- (Francis Smith, Whelan) down to G; Black Patti 8025—One E+ copy (unknown), then V (Wardlow). The rest (about six) are V or less with varied cracks and bites.

Sam Collins—Yellow Dog Blues/Loving Lady Blues—Gennett 6146—One N-copy (Perls), two E- (Smith and Tolén), then a host of (perhaps five) lesser copies; Black Patti 8026—E+ (Whelan), then E (Frank Mare), V (Wardlow), V- (Steve LaVere) followed by five or six with major surgery (cracks, bites, G, etc.).

Sam Collins—Devil In The Lion's Den/(Jelly Roll Anderson)—Gennett 6181—Four known copies on Gennett: E (the late Wally Umphrey), E- to V+ (Whelan), V+ (Mare), V to V+ (Bernard Klatzko), and V (Wardlow).

Sam Collins—Pork Chop Blues/Dark Cloudy Blues—Gennett 6260—Three known copies. One E (Whelan).

Sam Collins—I Want To Be Like Jesus In My Heart/Lead Me All The Way—Gennett 6291—Two known copies: V+ (Klatzko) and V- (Whelan). In 1966 Russ Shor and Steve Mercien junked a third, N-copy in North Philadelphia. Two years later, the late Dave Winslow inadvertently placed it under a rocking chair during a "high-spirited" collectors' gathering. Shor: "It was cracked, split, and crushed into what seemed like jagged shards." The record is now a wall coaster.

Sam Collins—Midnight Special Blues/Do That Thing—Gennett 6307—No known copies on Gennett.

Sam Collins—It Won't Be Long/Hesitation Blues—Gennett 6379—Two known copies. E (Perls) and E- (Whelan).

Bob Crane (George Carter)—Weeping Willow Blues/Ghost Woman Blues—Herwin 93018—Wardlow reports: "Two known copies." A third (V) appeared in a recent auction.

Teddy Darby—My Laona Blues/Lawdy Lawdy Worried Blues—Paramount 12828—Four E+ copies reported (Sherwin Dunner, Bob Fertig, Mare, and Whelan).

Teddy Darby—Deceiving Blues/Built Right On The Ground—Victor 23311—Four known copies, E+ (Perls), E+ (Wardlow) and two E-.

Jimmie Davis (featuring Oscar Woods guitar/spech)—Davis's Salty Dog/(Jimmie Davis)—Victor 23674—None reported.

Jimmie Davis (featuring Oscar Woods vocal/guitar)—Saturday Night Stroll/(Jimmie Davis)—Victor 23688—None reported. Frank Mare: "Three or four copies of 'Saturday Night Stroll' on Montgomery Ward."

Jimmie Davis (with Oscar Woods)—Sewing Machine Blues/(High Behind Blues)—Victor 23703. Bill Thompson, V+.

Blind Willie Davis—Trust In God And Do Right/I Believe I'll Go Back Home—Paramount 12979—Gayle Wardlow reports "two known copies, both G+."

Ruth Day (Ruth Willis)—Experience Blues/Painful Blues—Columbia 14642—One known copy.

Mattie Delaney—Down The Big Road Blues/Tallahatchie River Blues—Vocalion 1480—Gayle Wardlow reports: "Three copies—N-, E-, and G."

Slim Duckett And Pig Norwood—Sister Mary Wore Three Lengths Of Chain/You Gotta Stand Judgement For Your-



self—Okeh 8871—One known copy, N- (Gayle Wardlow).

Slim Duckett And Pig Norwood—When The Saints Go Marching In/I Want To Go Where Jesus Is—Okeh 8899—Two known copies N- (Perls) and E+ with dig (the late James McKune, but it has disappeared).

## PIANO

Harry Campbell—You'll Be Sorry Some Day/(William Walker)—Gennett 7100 (Buddy Burton-style piano)—The only known copy (E-, Whelan) originally belonged to the late Hal Hustedt.

Carlisle And Wellmon—(piano duet)—Chip-Chip Two-Step And March/Sextette From "Lucia" In Ragtime—Columbia-Rena 2054 (English)—One E+ copy (Spottswood reports a second copy) of the first recorded black ragtime piano solos (c. 1912).

Blind Clyde Church—Number Nine Blues/Pneumatic Blues—Victor 23271—Three E+ copies (Smith, Thompson, and Whelan).

Jim Clark—Fat Fanny Stomp/(Dan Stewart)—Vocalion 1536—Again, three E+ copies reported (Smith, Thompson, and Whelan).

Sonny Clay—(piano solos)—Gang Of Blues/Punishing The Piano—Triumph Test 208/210—Apparently, the two known 1923 tests (V+/E- and E, Mike Montgomery and Whelan) on Triumph were never actually issued.

Lillian Crawford—(piano solos)—Holiday/In A Mist—Champion 16817—Two known copies (E+, Whelan and E,

self—Okeh 8871—One known copy, N- (Gayle Wardlow).  
Vreede) of this green-label rarity; Iragen 16-29-02 (a mid-'30s export label)—In A Mist/(one-sided)—Two known copies (E+, Charles Huber, and the V+ listed in a Peter Leavitt auction).

Jesse C. Crump (piano solos)—Mister Crump Rag/Golden West Blues—Gen-

nett (no number)—In 1951 one copy was known—an E- copy with a two-inch crack that originally belonged to Warren Huddleston. Like "the beautiful woman who goes from man to man," it went from Jim Lindsay to Pete Whelan to Jake Schneider to Bob Stendhal to Nick Perls. In 1985 two additional copies turned up (V+) Whelan and (V) Dave Jason. Jason: "There's another one at the Indiana University archives."

Charlie Davenport (piano solos)—Chimes Blues/Struttin' the Blues—Gennett 6838—Four known copies, two E+ (Perls and Whelan) and two V- (Russ Shor and ?).

Charlie Davenport (piano solos)—Atlanta Rag/Slow Drag Blues—Gennett 6869—Two known copies, both E+ (Perls and Whelan).

Charlie Davenport (piano solos)—Struttin' The Blues/Atlanta Rag—Supertone 9517—Smith (V), Jason (condition unknown), and Thompson (G).

Arizona Dranes (piano solo)—Sweet Heaven Is My Home/(It's All Right Now)—Okeh 8353—None reported, but at one time, Pete Kaufman and Henry Renard had E, or better, copies.

Arizona Dranes—(piano solo)—Crucifixion/(In That Day)—Okeh 8380—One reported copy, E+ (Sherwin Dunner). Copies of this appear in back issues of *The Record Changer*.

Herve Duerson (piano solos)—Avenue Strut/Naptown Special—Gennett 7009—One known copy on Gennett, E/ E- (Whelan).

Herve Duerson (piano solos)—Easy Drag/Evening Chimes Waltz—Gennett 7191—E- (Whelan). The only known copy showed up between the walls of a Pennsylvania farmhouse.





# STRING/JUG/ SKIFFLE

**Cannon's Jug Stompers**—Minglewood Blues/Viola Lee Blues—Sunrise S3117—No known copies on Sunrise.

**Cannon's Jug Stompers**—Big Railroad Blues/Ripley Blues—Sunrise S3368—No known copies on this sought-after label.

**Cannon's Jug Stompers**—Going To Germany/Pretty Mama Blues—Victor 38585—Less than five known copies of what has been called "the greatest jug band record." Perls (N-) and Thompson (E-); Howard Berg reports a new copy of Bluebird 5413.

**Cannon's Jug Stompers**—Walk Right In/Mule Get Up In The Alley—Victor 38611—About five known copies. Perls, Fred Ramsey, Thompson (E to N-) and Berg (V).

**Cannon's Jug Stompers**—Jonestown Blues/Tired Chicken Blues—Victor 38629—Estimated less than 10 copies. N- (Perls), Thompson (E), and Bruce Brecke (E).

**Cannon's Jug Stompers**—Bring It With You When You Come/Money Never Runs Out—Victor 23262—Thompson (E+), Berg (E-), Whelan (V with flake), and the former Spottswood copy (E+?).

**Cannon's Jug Stompers**—Wolf River

Blues/Prison Wall Blues—Victor 23272—Howard Berg (E to E+). No others reported.

**Carolina Peanut Boys**—Got A Letter From My Darlin'/You May Leave But This Will Bring You Back—Victor 23267—Possibly two known copies. Terry Zwigoff (E+?).

**Carolina Peanut Boys**—Move That Thing/You Got Me Rollin'—Victor 23274—Thompson (E+), Berg (E- and "had a V- to V/E- copy"), Jim Lindsay (condition unknown) and former Spottswood copy (V).

**Carolina Peanut Boys**—Spider's Nest Blues/Selling The Jelly—Victor 23319—Only copy reported: Thompson (E+).

**Cincinnati Jug Band**—Newport Blues/George St. Stomp—Paramount 12743—Max Vreede (E?), the Bob Hite collection (E?), the former Spottswood copy (N-), and Whelan (V+).

**Kaiser Clifton**—Cash Money Blues/Fort Worth And Denver Blues—Victor 23278—Only one reported: Berg (V+/E).

**James Cole Washboard Band**—Runnin' Wild/Sweet Lizzie—Champion 16150—No known copies on Champion 16,000 series (and none reported).

**James Cole**—I Love My Mary/(Tommie Bradley)—Champion 16308—One known copy, Whelan (V).

**James Cole**—Mistreated The Only Friend You Had/(Buster Johnson)—Champion 16718—No known copies (and none reported).

**Walter Cole**—Mama Keep Your Yes Ma'am Clean/Everybody Got Somebody—Gennett 7318—No known copies; Champion 16104—Two known

copies, E+ (Whelan) and Don Kent (E?).

**Bob Coleman**—Tear It Down/Cincinnati Underworld Woman—Paramount 12731—Only a few copies of what was once described as "the best jug record on Paramount." Vreede (?) and Whelan (V).

**Ben Curry**—Boodle De Bum Bum/Fat Mouth Blues—Paramount 13118—One G copy—Vreede.

**Ben Curry**—Hot Dog/The Laffing Rag—Paramount 13122—No known copies (and none reported).

**Ben Curry**—The New Dirty Dozen/You Rascal You—Paramount 13140—No known copies on Paramount.

**Daddy Stovepipe**—The Spasm/If You Want Me, Baby—Bluebird 5913—Frank Mare (V+ to E-) and Berg (V/V-).

**Daddy Stovepipe**—Strewin' It Out/35 Depression—Bluebird 6023—Howard Berg (N-).

**Dallas Jamboree Jug Band**—It May Be My Last Night/Flying Crow Blues—Vocalion 03132—Estimated less than five copies. Thompson (V+) and Berg (G+ or V-).

**Carl Davis**—Elm Street Woman Blues/Dusting The Frets—Vocalion 03092—Lindsay (E) and Thompson (V+).

**Dixie Four**—Saint Louis Man/Kentucky Stomp—Paramount 12661—Five E+ to N- copies reported—Lindsay, Dick Raichelson, Spottswood, Vreede, and Whelan.

**Dixie Four**—South Side Stomp/Five O'Clock Stomp—Paramount 12674—E+ to N- (Lindsay, Spottswood), and E- (Whelan).



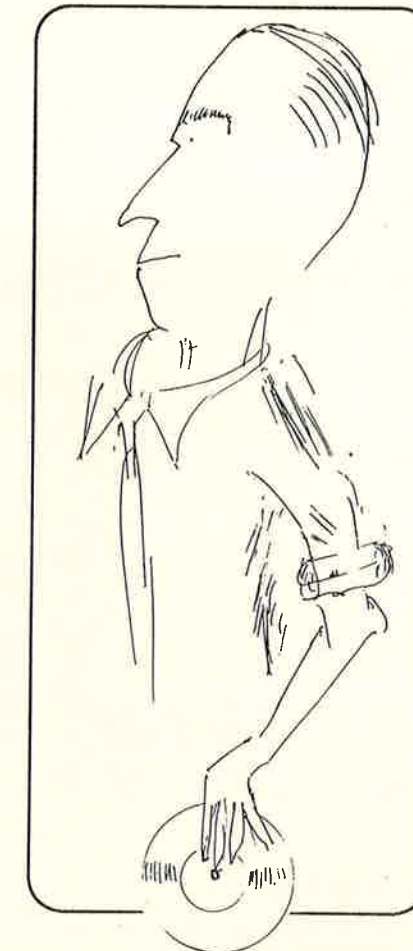
# POSTSCRIPT TO THE MCKUNE STORY...

By Bernard Klatzko

"This is Detective McMahan, Homicide," he said. "Manhattan Fourth Precinct..."

After reading Henry Renard's fascinating and moving "Letters From McKune," I realize that there is a postscript, an exclamation point to the McKune story. To the best of my recollection—this is what happened:

It was September, 1971. I had just taken advantage of the perfect weather with a run through the back roads of my hometown, Glen Cove...just 26 miles from New York City. As I entered my kitchen, still in



the euphoria of a "runner's high," the phone rang.

"Hello," I said.

A strong, New York-accented voice said, "Mr. Klatzko? Is This Mr. Klatzko?"

"Yes?..."

"Bernard Klatzko?"

"Yes? Go ahead," I said.

"This is Detective McMahan, Homicide," he said. "Manhattan Fourth Precinct..."

"Yes..."

"Are you acquainted...do you know a James McKune whose address is the Broadway Central Hotel?"

(pause) "Yes," I said.

"We got your name and address from a letter we found in his dresser drawer."

(Uh oh, I thought) I said, "Yes, what happened?"

"Sorry to say...he's deceased. He was the victim of a homicide last night."

"My God," I said. "What happened?"

"We found him in his room at the Broadway Central. He was nude...bound hand and foot."

"Yes, and...?"

"It was the gag, a towel stuffed in his mouth, that asphyxiated him. You have no idea how it happened?"

"No. (pause) Do you?" I said.

"We can guess," he said.

"Then what do you think really happened?"

"He was decoyed by a serial killer."

"That's a shock," I said.

"We think this fellow, McKune is the latest victim of a killer who is a suspect in four or five other unsolved cases."

"The killer is still on the loose then?"

"We're pretty sure it's the same fella in all these operations. Maybe this fella comes in the hotel room looking for sex. He ties 'em up, then he leaves 'em to suffocate."

In addition to being a collector of blues 78s, James McKune was a teller of imaginative, resourceful, and sometimes tall tales. His sudden death in September, 1971 was as bizarre as any ever recorded on a 1920s blues 78. The McKune we knew might have preferred to exit this way, rather than as a hospital patient. A blues collector's life is an unusual one. Sometimes it is too short.



The  
closing  
date is  
August 25,  
1989



**BERNARD KLATZKO**, 15 Woolsey Avenue, Glen Cove, NY 11542. **AUCTION**

1. Beale St. Sheiks—Rockin'.../Doggin'...Pm 12758 V+ Min. Bid—\$200
2. Birmingham Jug Band—Bill Wilson/Birm. Blues—OK 8895 V/F Min. Bid—\$100
3. Estes/Rachel—Little Sarah/T-Bone Steak Blues—VI 38595 E+ Min. Bid—\$600
4. Buddy Boy Hawkins—Number Three Blues/Snatch...Pm 12475 E- Min. Bid—\$300
5. Sloppy Henry—Hobo Blues/...Best Cheap Car...OK 8683 N- Min. Bid—\$100
6. Laura Henton—He's Coming Soon/Heavenly...Co 14388 E+ Min. Bid—\$100

**JIM LINDSAY**, 1820 Bauer Road, Indianapolis, IN 45218—**AUCTION OR TRADE**

1. Fess Williams—Dinah/Ida—VI 23005 E
2. Washboard Rhythm Kings—My Pretty Girl/Bug-a-Boo—VI 23408 E
3. Washboard Rhythm Kings—My Silent Love/Just Another Dream of You—VI 23348 N-
4. R. M. Jones Jazz Wizards—Smoked Meat Blues/Good Stuff—VI 20859 N
5. Joe Manone's Harmony Kings—Cat's Head/Sadness Will Be Gladness—Co 14282 N-
6. Bob Delkman—No Wonder I'm Happy/Broken-Hearted—Gnt 6248 E-
7. Bernie Schultz—Sweet Violets/Sweetheart of Sigma Chi—Gnt 6216 V+
8. Louis Armstrong Hot 5—Lonesome BIs/King Of The Zulus—OK 8396 N
9. Will Weldon—Turpentine BIs/Hitch Me To Your Buggy—VI 21134 E-
10. Freddy Carter Orch.—China Girl/Cuddles & Kisses—Hollywood 1065 V+
11. Sunset Recording Orch.—Deep Elm/I Never Knew—Sunset 1145 V+

12. Johnny Ogden Orch.—If You Knew Susie/Ah-Ha—Sunset 1110 E
13. Dave Duncan Orch (hot instrumental)—Come On Baby/I Faw Down—Champ 15660 V+
14. Sara Martin acc. Cl.f Williams Blue 5—Careless Man BIs/Brother Ben—OK 8325 E+
15. Benny Moten—Pass Out Lightly—BVE 38672-2 Test N
16. Walter Davis—Howling Wind BIs BVE 67579-1 Test N
17. Cannon's Jug Stompers—Feather Bed/Riley's Wagon—VI 38515 E+
18. Vol Stevens—Volf Stevens Blues/Baby's got The Rickets—VI 21356 N
- Luke Jordan—Travelin' Coon/Pick Poor Robin Clean VI 20957 E+

**HOWARD BERG**, Box 336, Hatfield, PA 19440 (**TRADE offers of scarce guitar, jug, black string bands get preference**)

1. Vic 23429 V+ E- Moten/Morton—Prof. Hot Stuff/Load Of Coal
2. Per 0224 V+ Spark Plug Smith—Deserted Man Blues/Motherless Boy
3. Ro 5010 V V+ Famous Hokum Boys—Using That Thing/Eagle Riding Papa
4. Or 8025 V+ E- Sammy Sampson—Can't Be Satisfied/Ga. Tom—Mama's Leaving
5. Ro 5026 V+ Sammy Sampson—Skoodle Do Do/Ga. Tom—My Texas
6. Pe 148 E- Famous Hokum Boys—Way She Likes It/Eagle Riding Papa
7. Ro 5067 V V+ Famous Hokum Boys—Pat That Bread/All Used Up
8. Vo 5226 V James Cole String Band—Bill Cheatem/I Got A Gal

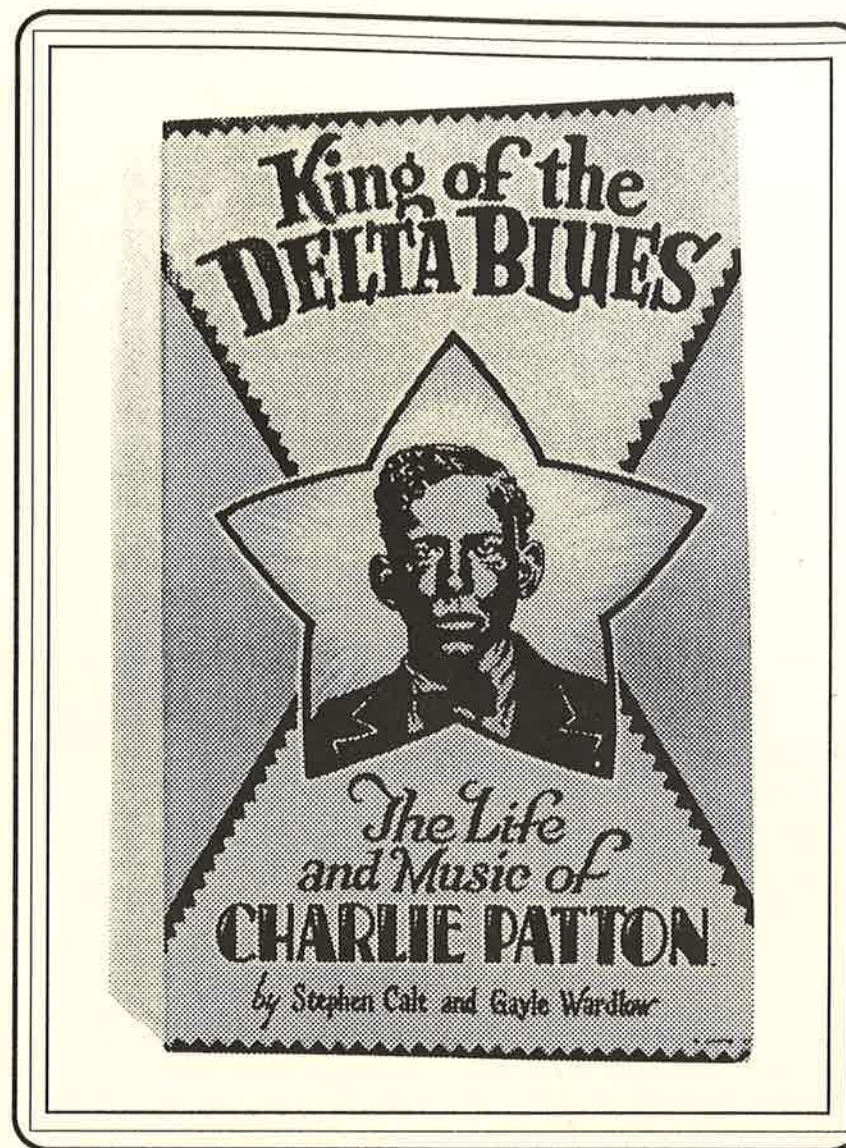
**PETE WHELAN**, 626 Canfield Lane, Key West, FL 33040 (**TRADE ONLY—for blues or jazz on Gennett-family labels and Paramount**)

1. Willie Barnes (Wifley Barner)/Ala. Jazz Singers—Ch 15378 V to V+(start of

## AUCTIONS

one-sided hair moon crk., not in grvs.—not audible).

2. Barrelhouse Five—Pm 12875 V (take 330A on Endurance Stomp)
3. Johnny Bayersdorfer—OK 40133 V
4. Josephine Beatty—Silvertone 4033 (looks E, but "Everybody" plays V-; "Texas" plays V+).
5. Blythe's Blue Boys—Ch 15344 E+/E
6. Blythe's Blue Boys—Ch 15676 V to V+
7. Perry Bradford—Pur 11255 V-
8. The Campus Cut-Ups—Edison 14044 E (electric)
9. Sonny Clay—Gang Of Blues/Punishing The Piano—Triumph Test 208/210 V+ (piano solos; unissued; early shellac; one other known test)
10. Junie C. Cobb—Vo 1449 E- (dig first side; black & gold label)
11. Ida Cox—Pm 12488 E to E+
12. Ida Cox—Pm 12690 E-/V+
13. Walter Davis—BB 8961 V+ (his only piano solos)
14. Dallas String Band—Co 14410 V to V+
15. Jim Foster (Sam Collins)/Geo. Jefferson—Ch 15472 (looks E-, plays V)
16. Fred Gardner's Tx. U. Troub—OK 41440 V+ to E-
17. Gennett Electrical Transcription 1091 V+—"Extra Blue Piano—Mandolin Attachment"—Solos of Maple Leaf Rag, Frankie & Johnny, D. Strutters Ball—(10-inch, early 30s?, unusual & bizarre)
18. Coot Grand & Socks Wilson—Pm 12831 E+
19. Bertha Henderson—Pm 12645 E+
20. Edith Johnson—Pm 12864 V
21. Buck MacFarland—Pm 12982 G+ (dig 2nd side)
22. Lizzie Miles—Vic 38571 V+ (Morton)
23. King Nawahl Hawaiians—Vic 23538 V+
24. Silver Slipper Orch. (Dixieland Thumpers)—There'll Come A Day—Chal 806 E to E+
25. State St. Ramblers—Gnt 6232 V (internal hair crk.—inaudible—good pressing, Dodds)
26. State St. Ramblers—Gnt 6569 V+/V (very rare, one side only on Gennett)
27. State St. Ramblers—Savoy 503 V- (extremely rare)
28. Sammy Stewart's 10 Knights of Sync—Pur 11304 E- to E
29. Eva Taylor—Edison 14046 E (electric)
30. Traymore Orch. (Ellington)—Vo 15555 V+
31. Universal Dance Orch.—Madison 1620 E- Pepper Blues/(rev. no interest)—(hot and unlisted in R.)
32. Walter & Byrd/Rev. Dickenson—Pm 12945 V+
33. The Wolverines—Vo 15766 E+
34. Young's Creole Jazz B./Midway G. Orch.—Pm 20272 E-



## KING OF THE DELTA BLUES

*The Life and Music of CHARLIE PATTON*—by Stephen Calt and Gayle Wardlow—341 pages—40 Photos & illustrations—Rock Chapel Press (available from Yazoo Records Inc, P.O. Box 810, Newton, NJ

07860—\$14.95 plus postage  
(\$2.00 in USA; \$2.75 in Canada;  
\$4.00 surface mail in Europe).

by Bernard Klatzko

The authors, both convinced of the importance of Patton as a seminal blues figure, logged many hours over a period of many years, probing the origins, development, and meaning of Patton's music. The rewards of their painstaking effort are revealed in this book, which is a fascinating study of blues melodies and lyrics and the Mississippi Delta itself, long considered a seemingly forbidden territory to outsiders. But, above all, it is a tribute to Patton as a unique and inimitable guitarist-singer without peer.

Some impressive research into plantation life as it relates to music emerges. Have you wondered as I have, for example, why black musicians deserted the banjo for the guitar? This quote from the very first chapter helps explain it to me: "...Mexicans...had come to the Delta at the turn of the century and afterwards popularized guitars there." This type of obscure, yet vital information abounds throughout the book.

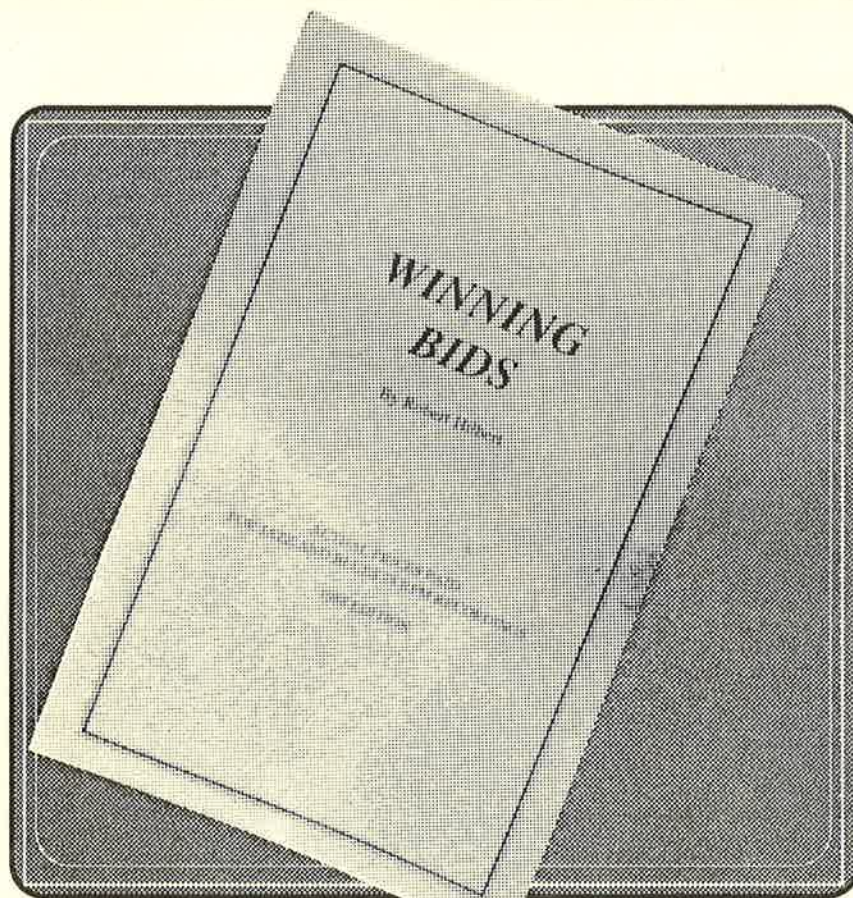
Family, friends, neighbors, former wives, and fellow musicians were interviewed. Some of these musicians have since become legendary: Ishmon Bracey, Joe Calicott, Skip James, and Booker White. However, most of the more intimate details of Patton's personality and music comes from three sources: talent-broker Henry C. Speir, blues singer Son House (famous for his Paramount recordings), and an unrecorded Patton side-kick, Booker Miller. Whereas Miller's testimony is glowing (Patton the master guitarist-singer), House, instead, belittles (Patton, the jerk). Such backbiting is not uncommon among blues musicians. As Calt writes, the blues are "...within a musical culture of unfriendly rivalry that Skip James likened to a barrel of crabs."

Although the authors try to establish Patton's illiteracy based on the testimony of Henry Speir and Son House, I don't feel comfortable with that conclusion, since Bertha Lee told me (in 1964) that "...Charlie was always writing down words to songs."

A most provocative chapter is devoted to Patton's melodies. The most interesting of these, for me, has always been the guitar part to *Green River Blues* for its originality in conception, combining exciting syncopated rhythm with melodic beauty. Calt uncannily shows how Patton transformed a simple tune many of us are familiar with on several recordings by other artists—into a masterpiece. The best known of these is, perhaps, *Turn Your Money Green* (guitar part) by Furry Lewis (Victor 38506).

On the subject of rhythm, Calt gives a masterly analysis of Patton's





superior ability to syncopate both guitar and voice. This extraordinary ability is most evident on his vocal duet with Bertha Lee on *Oh Death* (Vocalion 02904). Calt further believes that Patton was the possible originator of the 1-2 beat on the guitar. Calt points out that the generation before Patton, as exemplified by such dance musicians as Frank Stokes and Henry "Ragtime Texas" Thomas used the 1-2 guitar beat. Calt tries to show that Patton, as a dance musician, was innovative in this regard, pointing out that the 1-2 beat pattern "...first associated with piano ragtime music, resurfaced as the basic beat of the 1930s 'swing' music that usurped Dixieland Jazz..." and further, "...the prevailing dance music of the 1920s was instrumental Dixieland, which used a ponderous beat." I'm not so sure this is correct. My ears tell that on most of the King Oliver Creole Band Gennetts, the banjo, a basic rhythm instrument is accenting 1-2. This Dixieland (New Orleans) jazz band was the most popular dance band in Chicago in 1923. As to ragtime piano, I always thought that the basic beat of the left hand was 1-2, while the right hand syncopates the melody 1-2.

Another section of the book is a glossary of song expressions in which the meaning of southern black expressions and words, long an enigma to blues enthusiasts, are explained.

In other parts of the book there are comments and insights about the art of other Mississippi greats, like Tommy Johnson. And a whole chapter is devoted to Willie Brown. There is a complete discography of Patton's available LP recordings, and a detailed discussion of each of Patton's recording dates. This abundance of riches also includes the musical scores to 16 Patton songs with lyrics.

## WINNING BIDS

*Actual Prices Paid For Jazz and Blues 78 RPM Recordings—1988 Edition—by Robert Hilbert—170 pages—(Available from Pumpkin Productions, Inc., P.O.*

*Box 7903, Miami, FL 33255—\$18.95, postpaid in the USA—Overseas add \$5.00 postage.)*

Record collectors are a discreet lot when it comes to divulging how much they paid for a prized item. Dealers are similarly closed-mouthed—until, that is, a group of them got together and supplied Robert Hilbert with the results of their auctions over a two-year period. Hilbert has compiled this information in a 170-page paperback, listing thousands of items, including several in the thousand-dollar category. The book also provides multiple sales listings for many records and is arranged by artist, record label, and number. The condition of each copy auctioned is also given.

## ORIGIN JAZZ LIBRARY

reports (from Santa Monica, California) that the fine, vintage blues reissues LPs

OJL has released since 1961 are still available along with most of the *Piedmont* and *Testament* blues albums from the great blues revival period of the 1960s, which OJL leased a few years ago (these include Mississippi John Hurt's very first LPs and Muddy Waters' Library of Congress session from 1942). A 25¢ stamp or legal-size SASE gets a detailed catalog—(OJL, P.O. Box 85, Santa Monica, CA 90406).

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