

**ORAL HISTORY T-0010**  
**INTERVIEW WITH EDDIE JOHNSON, ELIJAH SHAW, CHICK**  
**FINNEY AND EDDIE RANDLE**  
**INTERVIEWED BY IRENE CORINOVIS**  
**JAZZMAN PROJECT**  
**AUGUST 20, 1971**

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Today is August 20, 1971. This is Irene Cortinovic of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, Oral History Program. I am going to interview today four jazz musicians, all of whom played on the riverboats on the Mississippi, the Illinois and the Ohio Rivers. I have Chick Finney, Eddie Randle, Eddie Johnson, and Elijah Shaw, and we're going to talk about music in St. Louis in the 30's, 40's, 50's, 60's, and 70's, I guess, you might say.

RANDLE: Irene, why don't you name the date. What is the date?

CORTINOVIS: Today is August 20, 1971, and this is one of the series of tape recordings for the Archives at the University of Missouri. Mr. Johnson, before we started, we were talking just a little bit about the riverboats. Did you ever play on any?

JOHNSON: Yes, I played on the Steamer Idlewild which ran from Alton, Illinois to Cincinnati, Cairo, up and down until we were paid for five months at a time, and we played on there all the summer months, and we would end up in Cincinnati for two months and then we would go to Louisville, Kentucky and play for two months.

CORTINOVIS: So when did you start?

JOHNSON: Back in 1931, but before then, though, I was playing with an orchestra called Oliver Cobb, which was a great trumpeter that sounded like Louie Armstrong. He would also go over and play dates for Louie Armstrong when he was sick by the great promoter of St. Louis by the name of Jesse Johnson. Have you heard of Jesse Johnson the great promoter?

CORTINOVIS: Oh yes, very famous.

JOHNSON: Jesse Johnson promoted most of our dances on Monday nights. We appeared back in the 29's, 30's, and 31's. Then we would also bring in names like Louie Armstrong to play on Monday nights on the boat, that was the Steamer St. Paul by Streckfuss.

CORTINOVIS: Oh yes, I remember that. What instrument do you play? Did you mention it?

JOHNSON: I play piano, and I had a band that was twelve pieces. It was by Oliver Cobb, but he passed and I took the band over. Jesse Johnson would handle me. He would put me with all the name hot town bands, that's when I had a chance to work with all these top bands in the country, like well, there was Kenny Cotton Pickers, there was the Fate Marable Band,

Duke Ellington would come here. Other types of bands I would work with went to the Club Plantation. Do you remember the Club Plantation here in St. Louis?

CORTINOVIS: And where was that?

JOHNSON: It was 911 North Vandeventer, here in St. Louis and I opened the Plantation Club back in 1931, that's when I had a fellow called Tab Smith come in my band. Tab Smith died yesterday. He was a great saxophone player.

CORTINOVIS: Oh yes, I have notice his name in some of the books.

RANDLE: Pardon me, Johnson, what was the name of your band. I didn't get the name.

JOHNSON: My band?

RANDLE: Yes, your band.

JOHNSON: Eddie Johnson and his Cracker Jacks.

CORTINOVIS: Chick, you've been with the Cracker Jacks.

FINNEY: Yes, but it was a different band.

CORTINOVIS: It was a different band.

FINNEY: Yes, that's right.

CORTINOVIS: There were three different Cracker Jack bands.

JOHNSON: I started the Cracker Jacks.

CORTINOVIS: Oh you started all of them.

JOHNSON: I started the Cracker Jacks when they first started. I started the Crackers Jacks because when Oliver Cobb died, I took the band over and I called it, I saw some popcorn so I said I am going to name our band Cracker Jacks.

CORTINOVIS: Did the Cracker Jacks play on the Idlewild?

JOHNSON: Yes, they played on the Idlewild and they also played on the boat, and all the attractions were with Jesse Johnson.

CORTINOVIS: You mean on the St. Paul.

JOHNSON: Oh yes.

CORTINOVIS: And what other boats, did you play on any other boats?

JOHNSON: That's the only boat I played on the Idlewild and the Steamer St. Paul.

CORTINOVIS: The Idlewild is the old Avalon, but was re-christened wasn't it?

JOHNSON: That's right.

CORTINOVIS: Who own the Idlewild. Do you recall?

JOHNSON: No I don't recall.

CORTINOVIS: I saw a picture of it at the Missouri Historical Society. And that went all the way down the Illinois River?

JOHNSON: The Illinois River and clean into Louisville and Cincinnati and it would end up in Louisville, Kentucky. Then we would come back to St. Louis, and we play back in St. Louis.

CORTINOVIS: And what clubs did you play around in St. Louis?

JOHNSON: Well I, like I said, we played in an old club called the Dance Box, was the place we played in quite often. We also played in a place called the Chauffers' Club, we also played in a building called the Finance Building, which odd type names and attractions would come there. Green Pastures was there, and I would play with them. Remember the show. Green Pastures? Then I played in a place if you remember called the Palladium. When Jesse Johnson brought in the Mills Brothers for the first time, the Mills Brothers, and I worked with the Mills Brothers there.

CORTINOVIS: Is this the Palladium right off Grand?

JOHNSON: Yes, right off Grand.

CORTINOVIS: On Delmar are Franklin?

JOHNSON: Yes, it's on Delmar and Franklin.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, Delmar and Franklin.

JOHNSON: And when the Plantation closed on Vandeventer, they moved up there and called it the Plantation, remember.

CORTINOVIS: It was a big ballroom, the Palladium Ballroom wasn't it?

JOHNSON: That's right. They changed it then to the Plantation Club, later. I also played at the Palladium and as I was saying the Finance Building, the Chauffer Club, and they had a ballroom called the Paradise. The Casa Loma Ballroom, which later years they named it the Riviera if you remember, on Delmar.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, and where was that.

JOHNSON: On Belmar.

CORTINOVIS: And who owned the Riviera?

JOHNSON: Well, Jordan Chambers owned it.

RANDLE: Correction, that was the Showboat that they changed to the Riviera.

JOHNSON: You're right, thank you, right, it was the Showboat, but I also played at the Casa Loma Ballroom and they were two different spots.

CORTINOVIS: Well Eddie, we started right off on the music, but I would like to know, where you were born and if you are a native of St. Louis.

JOHNSON: I was born in East St. Louis in 1912.

CORTINOVIS: And something a little bit about your early life. How did you learn how to play a piano?

JOHNSON: Well, a school teacher by the name of Florence Johnson, a cousin of mine, started giving me piano lessons and I studied under her most of all of my life until I went to New York and went to the Institute of New York to take theory.

CORTINOVIS: How old were you then?

JOHNSON: Thirty-eight, and now I am fifty-nine.

CORTINOVIS: So you got to New York on your own power then?

JOHNSON: On my own power.

CORTINOVIS: So what are you doing now?

JOHNSON: Still playing music. I still play music and I also have a small record company I am trying to build.

CORTINOVIS: Do you have a band now?

JOHNSON: I have a trio.

CORTINOVIS: And what kind of jobs do you do now?

JOHNSON: Well I was working at the King Brothers Motel for ten and a half years. That's on Clayton Road and Lindberg, and we closed there for three months and they sold it to the Seventy-One club.

CORTINOVIS: After the Seventy-One burned.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's right. Now I am just playing with the trio in small spots.

CORTINOVIS: Well, let's see, did any of you other men play with Eddie in these bands. What about you Mr. Shaw?

SHAW: Yes, I played with Eddie for about four or five years at the Showboat, at Delmar and Taylor and it was owned and run by Sammy Greenberg. I played there with Eddie until Eddie left and went up to the Plantation, and then I took the band and kept it there for about a year and a half. I had a lot of piano trouble, changing piano players. I had some come to work one night and just walk off and never even say where he was going, so I had quite a time. What was this boy name, this Alvin Jackson that used to play with you Eddie.

JOHNSON: Yes, Harrison Jackson.

SHAW: Yes, Harrison Jackson. He came up there and played with me for about a week.

RANDLE: He was a genius.

SHAW: He was a genius, really, and he just walked off one Saturday night and said he had to go and that's all he told me.

CORTINOVIS: He was an independent genius.

SHAW: Yes, and I haven't seen or heard from him since.

RANDLE: He came out of the Army and cracked up. And after he worked with me at Club 400 in Sikeston right after the war. World War II, and everybody just admired him, just anybody. Like Art Tatum, you name it. Like the old masters, he would make up his own music and play it, and people who majored in music would come to the band stand and say, "Where did you learn that, where did you learn to play it." And he just as soon as tell them to go to hell as to say good morning to them. He just cracked up.

FINNEY; My interest in music came as a pianist probably when Eddie Johnson's experience when he launched his band. Eddie didn't get to that part, but he had one of the finest general bands in St. Louis. And when the band disbanded in 1933, the late Winfield Baker and his brother Harold Baker was a genius and they pulled off to themselves, and they had piano trouble, and I was just starting on the piano from the drums and that's when I came into the picture. I came into the picture as a pianist for Cracker Jacks Number Two, you can call it, see. Well, from that experience and knowing I need more knowledge, I began to take private lessons not only in piano but in ranges and composition work, see. And I became head of the band in 1935, because Baker and his brother made another switch to go another way. But Eddie still kept his own as to Cracker Jacks, the original Cracker Jacks, course we carry the name too, and I became the head of the band in 1935 or early '36. But Eddie hadn't gotten this far, but he made records first and I made records too. I made my records in '36. One of my compositions called Blue Thinking of You and the Cracker Jack Stomp. But Eddie, tell them about your experience in making records with the same band.

JOHNSON: Well we made records sponsored by Jesse Johnson. Jesse Johnson was a talent scout. He would go around the country picking up orders to help me build my name up. He put me with the Victor Company and we made our first recording back in 1932, called the "Ducks, Yes, Yes."

CORTINOVIS: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: They made the first copy of that.

CORTINOVIS: What kind of music did you play on the Idlewild?

JOHNSON; Well, we played mostly popular music, just popular standard tunes.

CORTINOVIS: Well the "Ducks Yes, Yes" that's a jazz tune isn't it?

JOHNSON: Yes, but I didn't play that on the boat.

CORTINOVIS: Oh you didn't.

JOHNSON: But we took that number and we played it around the Chicago area and the Graystone Ballroom, you must remember the Graystone Ballroom.

CORTINOVIS: I remember the name.

JOHNSON: Where the Kenny Cotton Pickers were playing. While I was at the Club Plantation, I say in 1932, the Manager of the Graystone Ballroom came down stairs and heard us play and took us back to the Graystone Ballroom in Detroit and we were the house band for a while there.

CORTINOVIS: Who was in your band on the boat, were they mostly St. Louis people?

JOHNSON: Mostly St. Louis people, and around St. Louis, cause we changed men every year. Once I had Tab Smith, I also had George Smith, president of our union here in St. Louis, George Smith. Also, one of the board members of our local now, Robert Carter, he worked on the boat with me. Lester Nichols worked on the boat there with me.

CORTINOVIS: Who got these bands together? For instance, like you say "I had a band." Did you have to get the band members together?

JOHNSON: Well, like I said before, Oliver Cobb already had this band organized. He passed and I took the band over. I just added to the band.

CORTINOVIS: Hi, well we're recording now here. (Interruption).

FINNEY: Now I've been most interested in promoting and I'm thinking about this strongly and I can make the announcement as an official, but here's three gentlemen that I think we should, and I say we, maybe you and I and maybe we will get a committee. Last week they had a reunion of Earl Hines, we will get back to that later, band out of Chicago. When I say reunion, all the boys that had been playing with Earl Hines within the fifty years were present. Bud Johnson, you name it, on down the line. I think it's time now, Irene, for you and I and someone to get together and stage a program with these three gentlemen and try to call all the musicians that are available to come at this affair. Does that sound good to you?

CORTINOVIS: Yes, it sure sounds like fun.

FINNEY: How does it sound to you fellows?

EVERYONE AGREES...

FINNEY: Because Eddie hadn't brought it out, I'm going to have to bring it, but Eddie has a book that's out of sight, I forgot to tell him to bring it, he brought it to my office. This book will show you where they played for dances at fifteen cents. You go to a dance...

CORTINOVIS: Well is this your cost book, your accounting book are what?

JOHNSON: Yes, a book of pictures.

FINNEY: And he played along with Fats Waller.

CORTINOVIS: Oh I would love to see it.

FINNEY: The book is priceless, I forgot to tell him.

CORTINOVIS: Is this a scrap book?

FINNEY: Also, Eddie was on a tour with the worlds greatest jazz pianist. The world greatest jazz pianist at that time and still was Earl "Fatha" Hines. St. Louis Eddie Johnson made tours across the country. Earl Hines vs. St. Louis Eddie Johnson.

CORTINOVIS: Gee, Eddie you're too modest.

FINNEY: Too modest, he won't talk. He won't talk. If Chicago can force a big program off, why can't we pull one off for you fellows here, see. It would be a wonderful thing, see. Because if we get this staged right and the right backer behind it, these fellows from out of town may come to this revival or this reunion. Eddie, take over from here and let me stop talking.

JOHNSON: Well, as Chick mentioned we tripped with Earl Hines, all on the account of Jesse Johnson, I can't forget his name. Jesse Johnson put me with Earl Hines. Also, he put me with Fats Waller. We played in Cincinnati and worked all in the area in the East with the late Fats Waller. But all these main attractions, Jesse Johnson put me with them. Like I said, we played with Earl, we played with the Mills Brothers over the country, we played with all these top-notchers by Jesse Johnson promoting me with them.

CORTINOVIS: Well, Mr. Randle, we haven't given you much of a chance to talk, you neither Mr. Shaw, you started a little bit but didn't get very far. What instrument do you play Mr. Randle?

RANDLE: Trumpet. First I was born in Illinois, Pulaski County down near Cairo, I think everybody knows about Cairo.

CORTINOVIS: Now they do, yes.

RANDLE: Anyway, I came to St. Louis when I was about sixteen years old and I never tried to play music until I was about seventeen. But my grandfather who raised me was a great musician, in fact all of my people played and I listened. But after I got older I didn't have the

training and I just start playing.

CORTINOVIS: You did;

RANDLE: Yes, that's the way I started. I had an uncle that was a very good musician. As far as music was concern, he had a very poor tone on his instrument, but he was a very good musician, and he taught me after I did want to start. From there on I just kept playing and in 1932, before that when the band would come up on the boat, they would room at my house.

CORTINOVIS: In St. Louis?

RANDLE: Yes, in St. Louis. We lived at 3112 Lucas. One fellow, particular Albert Stein was a trumpet player, and we got to be real friends. I just loved music more than I wanted to play. Then when they brought Red Alien on the boat. Red Alien was real popular, well then, he was an artist but he couldn't read music. They left him with me for me to teach him the book, so that he could go on the boat at night and play the book, play the parts as well as his horn. He was an artist, he could play his horn, but he was slow reading. We used to find a lot of musicians that way, they could really play but they didn't have the training. In fact, training for us was limited. Believe it are not, I didn't take any lessons to amount to anything, professional lessons until after I had quit playing music. Then I went to Mr. Lambiasi for music lessons. And when I went, I went in my son's place. I have a son that played three years with the St. Louis Philharmonic he's a very good musician. And when I went there...

FINNEY: What's your son's name Eddie?

RANDLE: Eddie Randle, Jr. When I went I told him that I wanted to take lessons in my son's place. He says, "Take lessons in your son's place, I never heard of such." Well I said, he was going to St. Louis Music Institute, and if he missed so many lessons he couldn't stay in his theory class. So I went to take the lessons in his place. And he said, "Well since you're here, can you play that?" Well I took out my horn and said yes. He said, "Lets see what you can do, but you got to get it cleared through the office." I took out my horn and start running a few scales for him and then he went and got his horn, and then we start playing duets. When I left there he said, "You don't have to worry about the office, I'll get it straight, you come and take lessons." Well I took a few lessons from him, and when I quit, when I stopped he begged me not to stop. And I told him I wanted to see how wrong I was when I was playing for a living, you know. I had a pretty good groove together. Of course, I started playing on a station, radio station, WEW. In fact we made that station popular.

CORTINOVIS: So now when was that?

RANDLE: This was back in the fall of 1932. And we didn't accept regular jobs because we had so many one nighters, I played very few places where you have to play regular every night.

CORTINOVIS: Who arranged these one nighters? How did you get so many?

RANDLE: I did, I did. My aunt asked me one time how did I even have the nerve enough to do it. Back in those days I played in Redbud, Illinois and in those places they really didn't even want to speak to you, really in those times. But I would go and try until-finally they

would hire me. There is one place in Carrollton, Illinois where I went and the man of the radio station wanted me to play in his place. And when I got there it was funny, it was always funny to me. He wanted me to play in his place but he told me that they would bring it down to my level to do business with me. So if you had a booker or hirer, say I really want you. Your band sounds good, but I can't come down to your level.

CORTINOVIS: In Carrollton, Illinois?

RANDLE: In Carrollton, Illinois. That was really funny.

CORTINOVIS: Big town.

RANDLE: Yeah, it was a big town and big mind this guy had too.

FINNEY: Let me get this clear, Randle, once more. You were the band leader and your own booker?

RANDLE: Yeah, all the way.

FINNEY: And how far advance booking did you do for the band.

RANDLE: Well, I would book a year in advance, one nighters.

CORTINOVIS: One nighters, a year in advance?

RANDLE: One nighters.

CORTINOVIS: I was going to ask, wasn't this kind of precarious living, but then if you booked in one year advance...

RANDLE: I had no trouble. We were well known, I had a good group, we were well liked, and I had very good musicians.

SHAW: Another question too, Eddie. What was the name of your band? RANDLE: Eddie Randle and the Seven Blue Devils. That's what I started out with. Then later on after I added more men, I dropped the Seven and I just had Eddie Randle and his Blue Devils. I never had over an eleven piece band though.

CORTINOVIS: How did you pick the name?

RANDLE: I was out here on, they call it. Dago Hill, begging for work, and the guy says to me, what do you call this band? This was in the depression days. And I looked at the fellow that help me start the band by the name of Joe Joniken, he's dead now. And Joe looked at me, and I says, ah. Blue Devils. I happened to think of the Oklahoma Blue Devils and I just said Seven Blue Devils, we just had seven men. And so these fellows hired us, and we started from there. And a quick count of some of the things we did. We traveled all over. In fact, I don't have any professional records, but I have some other work that the fellows did. One thing we made a lot of tunes. We would go this town, as ASCAP it was hard on us making radio programs. It wasn't any such thing as television programs at that time. Every time we

would take in a program, they seem to, I don't know, if they didn't want you to play or if they were just real, but they would always have this alibi, that it hadn't been cleared through AS CAP. So we start making up our own sounds. We could play all night and not play anybody's music but our own.

CORTINOVIS: You didn't see any royalties that way.

RANDLE: I was playing something on the tape recorder as I came out with Chick Finney and Shaw just now.

FINNEY: Another point I want to add to this. Eddie Randle was an inspiration to a lot of young fellows around there. What I mean young fellows, some people who we call new comers and veterans. He also was an inspiration to me. Still today, a very fine artist whose a double truck, that's the name we used in the newspapers. But Eddie was a business man, a director and he did his booking. And like Johnson said earlier, Jesse Johnson got mostly all the gigs, we use the word gigs for short. But Eddie was a terrific booker. Eddie inspired me, I was a member of the Eddie Johnson band, I mean Eddie Randle band.

RANDLE: Chick Finney was my first drummer, when I first start trying to get a group together.

FINNEY: And I said, he made a great contribution. Since I'm a writer now, I'm interested in this and I'm doing a story on all three, I did so many stories on Eddie Johnson, I can do it backward on him. But I want Eddie he gave us points of his band, but he have had some very good musicians, he will name them, but listen to that tape today, I enjoyed it coming out here. One of the fellows in his band came to be an outstanding flutist. He played with Earl Hines. We call him Lloyd Smith, and Eddie you can take it from there.

RANDLE: Yes, well, Lloyd was about seventeen when he start working with my group. In fact, I loved music, I love music, and I rather hear it, and that's one of the reasons why the fellows that worked with me had a good chance to play with me. I was mostly interested in booking the work, course I played my horn too. I always played in those first part in those larger bands, who had a first man to keep the style. I wanted a certain style, but then you would pick up your soloist, and I always gave these fellows a chance. Now there's ah, the first time I heard Miles Davis, I had two choices. In fact all the guys in the band wanted to quit when I hired Miles. But I could see the possibilities, I said, boy, the sky is the limit for this kid and the rest of them said, well you got a chance to get this other fellow with all this experience. And I says, well he's got the experience and he's not going any further, he's like me. He just going to play good and that's it. And I said sky is the limit for this young fellow. And so by being the boss, I didn't mean it exactly like that, but I didn't let them out talk me. And I was proud that I gave Miles the chance. And Miles has given me a lot of credit for giving him his chance. He didn't have to give me personal credit, but he showed that he appreciated it by moving up in the world. I guess you've heard of Miles.

CORTINOVIS: Oh yes, of course. The reason I asked you about the name, Eddie, is because I thought, maybe you could become the Blues. That the Blue Devils had something to do with the Blues. What kind of music did you mostly play in the thirties and forties. How long did you have your band to begin with.

RANDLE: Well I started the band in the fall of 1932. I was working with the band by the name of Warner Long. I had two fellows in the band. I always like to play soft and sweet. In fact, they called my band the band of sophisticated rhythms, because we played rhythms but it wasn't noisy, it wasn't loud. We played real soft.

CORTINOVIS: For dancing.

RANDLE: For dancing. Nobody on my band stand could pat their foot. I would top them right away. That's the drummer's job. You know guys would make all that noise. That's the drummer's job. And when we would get started, nobody would make any noise, everything was just smooth. And by liking to play soft like this, I had a couple of fellows that played with me in the band Warner Long, they wanted a loud trumpet player. So they kept riding me, so I told Warner that I was going to stop, gonna quit. So Warner begged me not to quit, because I was getting all the work for him, and these guys didn't know it. I was going around getting the work. So they hired a fellow by the name of Carl George, which was a very good trumpet player. If the doors had been open for blacks, as they say today, Carl could have played in the symphony, he was really a good musician.

FINNEY: But along the line, too, he did make one first step. He was the first black boy to play with the Stan Kenton Band, is that right fellows?

RANDLE: Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Who was this, Carl George?

FINNEY & RANDLE: Carl George.

FINNEY: The first black boy to play with Stan Kenton Orchestra. And I talked to Stan on his visit here, and Stan highly praised him. He's deceased ain't he?

RANDLE: Who Carl?

FINNEY: Yeah.

RANDLE: No: I see Carl so often, but he doesn't play anymore. I see him often, all the time. But anyway after he took the job with Warner... When they get through they say, "Well when we need you again we'll let you know." So we had a fellow by the name of Joe Joniken playing in the band. Joe said the other guys says, "Why aren't we working?" All the work had stopped because all the jobs that I had booked, when they play the jobs, well they say, "When we need you again we will call you back." So Warner Long the bandleader, told them, says the fellow that quit was the fellow getting all these jobs, that's who the people are asking for. And Joe said to them, "You guys killed the goose that laid the golden egg." And Joe came to me and begged me to start a band. I said Joe I like music, but nobody likes the way I play. Joe says, "Man people like it. You don't have to worry about anything. I'll help you get a band together." So Joe and I start working on this band. Joe was the arranger, a very good arranger and he played Alto Sax, and Joe died in 1937.

CORTINOVIS: How long did you have the band then?

RANDLE: I started the band in '32 and I played and was satisfied with it until Uncle Sam broke it up in '41. And I just played one nighters and ....

CORTINOVIS: Some of the guys had to go in service?

RANDLE: Mostly all of them went into the service.

CORTINOVIS: Well Mr. Shaw, you know both Eddie Johnson and Eddie Randle have made reference to some of the limited opportunities for black musicians, and I know that you know all about that especially through your work with the two locals. How about telling us a little bit about the union situation?

SHAW: Well the union situation is coming to the inevitable because we merged in 1971, but really we should have been merged in 1896, when the American Federation of Musicians were born. Because when the American Federation of Musician was born, the black musicians of St. Louis they went in their pockets and sent their first and only black representative to their first convention.

CORTINOVIS: Who was that, do you know his name.

SHAW: His name was John L. Fields, he was a piano player and he also tuned pianos. He played, I think he played a melophone or a French Horn, I think. I'm not sure.

CORTINOVIS: So what year was that, do you know?

SHAW: Oh it was 1896, I wasn't even living. I get this information from one of our very old musicians who still is living. And they formed 44 locals at that time. And being the only black representative there, we got the last number. Local 44.

CORTINOVIS: Just by coincidence.

SHAW: By coincidence, yes. And ah, for years and years we had the number 44 in St. Louis. And a number of years before the American Federation of Musicians was formed. Black musicians in St. Louis was tuning for Baldwin Piano Company. Now about myself to the musician. I was born in Jackson, Tennessee, September 9, 1900. And I used to work in my home town with a little amateur show, we used to give shows on Saturday to the people who come in from the country. And there was a fellow who played on the drums by the name of Granville Robinson. The drums always fascinated me, although I was what they called t-heat-the buck dancer in the show and now they call it tap dancing. And every time he would get off the drums, I would get on them and make so much noise that they would come by and say, "Stop that damn boy from playing those drums, he's driving us nuts." But I kept it up anyway. So he took sick and when he took sick he came back from World War I, he got sick and his leg drew up, he couldn't play, and I was the only one around that knew enough about the drums to play them in his place. But I couldn't carry them because I wasn't big enough. So I used to have to...we got five dollars a night, and I used to give him two dollars and a half and I would give somebody fifty cents to carry the drums for me because I couldn't carry them.

CORTINOVIS: How old were you?

SHAW: I was ten at that time.

CORTINOVIS: Oh no.

SHAW: Yeah. Then I used to sit out in front of a silent movie and play the drums and an electric piano, and I wouldn't even have on any shoes. Because when summer come, most kids in those days were very anxious to get in their bare feet. And I would sit out there in the sun and play with the electric piano all day especially on a Saturday. And I got a dollar a day, some days.

CORTINOVIS: With just a little portable piano or what kind of piano was this.

SHAW: Well it wasn't a portable piano, it was kind of a piano that they had in amusement places and clubs and what have you, and people used to put nickels in them, you know. I guess they called them nickelodeon are something like that. And the man just cut out the slot where you put coins and switched it on and let it play continuously, and I would play with this piano. And so I lost my mother and I said I was going to play the drums for the rest of my life for a living So when my mother died I left and went to Memphis, I was going to be a drummer. But in the meantime a gentlemen that was a dentist, Dr. W. D. Holden, had caused me to lose my job at a barber shop shining shoes, and ah, on the account of going around to his office to take his shoes back after I had shined them, then he sent me on an errand and I took too long, when I got back to the barber shop, man that I worked for name was Elijah Pearson. He took me back in the barber shop and give me a good whopping on top of that he fired me. (LAUGHTER). So then I went around to Dr. Holden office crying, around the corner from where I was shining shoes. He wanted to know what was the matter. He said ah...I t51d him I got fired because I stayed around his office too long. So he says, don't worry about it, I'll give you a job. So he gives me a job cleaning up the office, and hanging around the chair and handing him whatever things he needed. And every time he stuck his nose into somebody's mouth, I had my nose in their mouth. So finally he said well I learn you how to do mechanical dentistry. So he learned me how to set up teeth and vulcanized plates and make crowns.

CORTINOVIS: Was this a black dentist?

SHAW: He sure was and he's still living.

FINNEY: Memphis, Tennessee?

SHAW: Jackson, Tennessee, this was. And when I left home and went to Memphis, I always was fascinated by the paper. I always read the paper. So I picked up the paper one day and I saw an ad in there where they wanted a mechanical dentist. So I go up to Main and Madison in Memphis, Dr. H. H. Farfax office and applied for the job. And when I got there, I had short pants on and he looked at me and says, "What do you know about mechanical dentistry?" I say, well I can't tell you everything I know. But I said if you take me back into the laboratory I'll show you what I know. So he took me back in the laboratory and he had a flask there and I say that's a model of a set of teeth being made, and I set up some teeth on this flask and I got the job. So when I got this job I started to buy myself some drums out of the pawn shop. And at nights, a lot of people used to come in from the country want some

teeth for the next day, and I would have to stay at the office that night and set the teeth up and vulcanize them and have them ready for the next morning. So the first thing I got out of the pawn shop pertaining to my drum outfit was the snare drum. So I used to take this snare drum up there in this building upstairs on Main and Madison in Memphis, I guess I made so much noise a lot of people thought that the building was falling down. So I said when I get these drums out I'm not going to work for anybody else. I'm going to play the drums. So sure enough when I got the drums out, a man name Charles Moore, he came from Zanesville, Ohio. He came into Memphis looking for a drummer to go away to a minstrel show. So all the drummers who could play drums, they saw me standing down on Deer Street in front of Pee Wee's, that's where all the musicians hung and got their work. So they told him there's a drummer standing over there. So I went over and got over to the side edge of the walk so those fellows couldn't hear what we said. The man said, "I want a drummer to go away with a minstrel show and he said ah, "They tell me that you're a drummer." I said well, I'm not exactly a drummer, I said I'm learning how to play the drums and I said ah well I'll go if you send me back home when you fine a better drummer. So I told him that I was buying a long pants suit and I wasn't through paying for it, if he would get that out and I had some laundry in the laundry, he get the laundry out and the rest of my equipment out of the pawn shop, I would go away with the show.

CORTINOVIS: So what year was that Elijah?

SHAW: That was in 1916. So ....

CORTINOVIS: You were only sixteen years old.

SHAW: I wasn't sixteen. I was going to be sixteen that year. So he took me and the very first place we went was Cottin Plan, Arkansas. Incidentally that's the home of Roszetta Thorn. So when I got there, I didn't even know how to put the drum on me to play a street parade. So I put it in my belt and when we start walking, I didn't know what foot to walk on are beat to play or what foot we should walk on. And the drum was flopping all around me and I was trying to hit it and when I got back after we made the parade all the fellows on the show say, "Where in the hell did you come from saying you could play the drums?" (Laughter). And I broke down and start crying. So I just knew that they were going to send me back home. But there was a bandleader on there, one of the finest trombone players that ever picked up a but he started his musical career in St. Joe, Missouri, and incidentally, he studied along side of Arthur Pryor, who is one of my greatest trombone players.

CORTINOVIS: And bandleader, and' musicians.

SHAW: And bandleader and musician.

CORTINOVIS: Composer I mean.

SHAW: Yeah. So they came along together. So he just took me under his arms then and he told all the fellows say now, "You all will have to stop kidding this kid 'cause he's going to learn. You just let him along and give him a chance, we'll make a drummer out of him." So that's the way I started. I worked there for a year. The man that owned the show and his wife, they took an interest, paternal interest in me. They looked after me and his wife used to make

silk shirts for me and put my initials on them, which was a fad at that time.

CORTINOVIS: Now this is a traveling show.

SHAW: Yes it was a railroad show, we traveled in Pullman cars.

CORTINOVIS: And where did you go?

SHAW; Well, we went all over Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi...

FINNEY: You play out doors or indoors?

SHAW: Played under canvas.

CORTINOVIS: This was a pretty big show then?

SHAW: Well, for a Minstrel Show it wasn't as big. We traveled...

CORTINOVIS: How many, how many, about how many members?

SHAW: I guess it was 35 or 40.

CORTINOVIS: Well isn't that a pretty big show, wasn't that a pretty big show?

SHAW: Yeah it was a pretty big show for a railroad show in Memphis, Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: And you just pulled up on the siding...oh now you said you ah, you performed in tents.

SHAW: Under a canvas, under a canvas.

CORTINOVIS: And you brought all this stuff with you?

SHAW: Oh yes, yes, we had two cars. One car we loaded the equipment for the show and the tent and all that and our baggage and the other car we lived in.

FINNEY: Shaw, you was sixteen years old, was you carrying your drum now are was you still paying somebody fifty-cents to carry it for you.

SHAW; I still carry it, but I don't like it. I never have got use to carrying it. (LAUGHTER).

CORTINOVIS: Are you still playing.

SHAW: Oh sure.

CORTINOVIS: Do you. Do you play regularly are when?

SHAW: Well I played regularly up to 1963, I was playing with Singleton Palmer's Dixieland Six. I was tuning a piano out in University City for a lady name Mary Ruth. At 7171 Washington. This was May, 1949. She asked me if I knew the older musicians in St. Louis

and did I know where they were and what instrument they played and if I thought we could get them together to see if we could revive some of the riverboat music, in St. Louis. So being president at that time of the Negro musicians, I had a roster in my pocket. So I gave her the names of the older musicians who played on the boats, and to my surprise she called everyone of them up and invited them out to her house for a party. And she said, "I haven't got the money to pay you, I just want to see if we can start something." So we went out there like about 2:00 o'clock on a Sunday. She had bar-be-cue, hot dogs, hamburgers, beer and whiskey if you like and all kinds of soda. So we played, some of the first ones to play we had George Foster, I mean, what is it Jam, Sam, ah...

FINNEY: Stroler?

SHAW: No not Sam Stroler.

RANDLE: What instrument?

SHAW: Played Bass Fiddle. You know he used to play...Shelton.

RANDLE: Shelton, yeah.

SHAW: Sam Shelton and they got him, they had Dewey Jackson, and they got Jamie Hemingway for the first set. And, well, we had John Orange on trombone and we got Norman Mason on clarinet, and I told her I would play on the drums until they found a better drummer. We played there from about 2:00 o'clock in the evening till the people next door on both sides start complaining about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. We had such a good time until we decided that we would do that once a month, and move it around to the different ones that present at this first party house if they had a piano. So we moved it around to quite a few places, but we had a problem of each Sunday, maybe some guy had a job and we couldn't depend on him we had to get somebody else. So we had quite a number of ones to play with us. So finally when we got back to Mrs. Ruth's house, she had invited one of the tavern operators, a fellow name Ernest Shapiro. He and his brother run a place on Delmar called the Barrel. He was so impressed with the music that he decided that he would have a Dixieland band jam session at the Barrel on Saturdays from 3 til 5:30. But at that time we had mingled so till the band had become 50 percent black and 50 percent white. We had Barbara Sutton, Ralph Sutton's sister, playing the piano by that time and a boy that used to play trumpet with Gene Krupa name Norman Murphy was playing trumpet. And we had lost our trombone player John Orange to Joe Smith.

CORTINOVIS: And you were playing Dixieland all this time?

SHAW: Dixieland yeah. And we had a boy name Sid Dawson from out in Ferguson who incidentally is a residential musician of Chicago now. So we got our thing started and the place caught on so, we kept such a crowd until the man put the band on for five weeks every night. But it just wasn't a big enough place to support six musicians. So we started to play Dixieland jam sessions on a Sunday at the Universal Dance Studios right in front of De Baliviere on Delfflar. The people used to pay a dollar and bring their own bottle and they get ice and soda there in the hall. So the business outgrew that place. And we went down on a boat called the Fort Gay, it used to be docked at the foot of Harper Street, and we star giving

Dixieland jam sessions on there on a Sunday evening.

CORTINOVIS: This was in the '50's?

SHAW: Yeah, that come in to the '50's then. We played down there and played down there til this boy that was running all these stop signs and things, lived on Waterman or something, I think they called him Hot Rod Moore. He come down there once...leaving away from there he hit a post and wrapped his car around the post and the police come and shut down the jam sessions, cause he suppose to have gotten drunk on this boat. But as far as I know of, nobody was selling nothing to drink on the boat, if he got drunk on there he brought his own drink.

FINNEY: Is this the starting of Dixieland Six or is this a star band?

SHAW: Well I'll get to that now. We started this...ah we contemplated these Dixieland sessions at the Universal Dance Studio. And one time Singleton Palmer come in town on one of his lay offs from Count Basie's band and our bass player had quit and went to working with Eddie Johnson and Tab Smith down at Compton and Lawton, I think they called that place...what was that Eddie? Flame...

FINNEY: Hurricane.

RANDLE: Hurricane.

FINNEY: What was the bass players name?

SHAW: Vernon King, Hawk. So he got Singleton Palmer to play in his place with the jam bunch. So Singleton had him to bring his tuba one day, he impressed everybody with the tuba so well that he decided he would bring the tuba rather than bringing the bass fiddle. So Bobby Swain who was the musical advisor for the Koppler Hotels, he came over one Sunday to hear the group and he invited Singleton Palmer over to his table to have a drink and he asked Singleton Palmer to organize a band. But he said he couldn't take a mixed band, have to have all blacks. So that's when Singleton and I got together and decided who we would get to replace the white musicians in our band. We were very hurt over the fact that they wouldn't take the band mixed because all of us was very crazy about Barbara Sutton and I think she loved us and loves us til today. I get a Christmas card from her every year and occasionally I get a letter from her telling me about her family. Incidentally, she met her husband who was in the service over at Scott Air Base, she met him while she was playing with us. And so we went over to the Forest Park Hotel...

FINNEY: Interruption a minute Shaw. In my writing I've written so far that Dewey Jackson was the first leader of that band, is that right?

SHAW: No he was not. Singleton Palmer was the first leader of that band. And the only reason Dewey got in the band was because they didn't want a mixed band over to the Forest Park Hotel, so that's when we got Dewey.

CORTINOVIS: Had to be one or the other.

SHAW: Yeah, and I told Singleton to get Gus on the piano...(Interruption)

CORTINOVIS: Gus Ferryman?

RANDLE: Perryman.

SHAW: And Orange had went to work with Joe Smith at the Windemere, so we had to get a trombone player. So everybody appreciated Robert Carter's tone, but we didn't know or think that he had had to much experience playing the type of music we wanted to play. So we got Robert Carter and he fitted in better than anybody else we ever had or could get. We went to work at the Forest Park Hotel to stay a week because disappointment of some traveling attraction was suppose to come in there and we stayed eight months. And while we were there, they couldn't ever get the people in there. They always turned them away, and that was the beginning of Singleton Palmer's Dixieland Six.

FINNEY: Another question Shaw, I mean, ah, you were very good in your early days as sixteen years old, I wish you could just give me a little brief of that and bring me back to St. Louis, when you first came to St. Louis. Go back to your carnival days.

SHAW: Well when I...not a carnival. I never was on a carnival but once...

FINNEY: Well, the tent are whatever it was.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah. (Laughter).

SHAW: Minstrel Show.

CORTINOVIS: Minstrel Show.

FINNEY: Minstrel Show, (Laughter).

SHAW: Carnival kind of grips me. And I never was on a carnival but once in my life, and I was on a carnival for two weeks. Well, when I got on this show, this bandleader he sent off and got a drum solo that he wanted me to play. At that time it was the only drum solo that I knew of at that time, was "Oh You Drummer." So every morning after we have our breakfast, and they get the baggage car and load it, I would have to go back in the baggage car and practice this drum solo. And he would stand back there with me, and one time I kept making mistakes so much, he went outside and got half a brick, and said, "You'll make this passage or I'll take this brick and bust you brains out." (Laughter). I think I made it that time. (Laughter). Then I memorized that solo and he used to play a trombone solo first. He used to play "Old Kentucky Home" and variations, it was a trumpet solo that used to be played by Herbert Clark, who was a great trumpet player at that time. And he played this trumpet solo on his trombone and after they introduced him and he played his solo, they would introduce me and the spieler the announcer of the show would say, "Now we're going to have the famous Tennessee kid drummer to do "Oh You Drummer" on the drums." And then I would step out in the middle of the circle, was usually in the middle of the town up in Horton City, and play "Oh You Drummer." And from that on I started to learn how to play all of the percussions. I never had a lesson in my life. And my Godfather...once we stopped in Waco, Texas and we went into a music store there runned by a fellow named Charlie Parker, who was a trumpet player on the order of Herbert Clark. And he used to put on records by Herbert

Clark and he would play along with him. So he had a set of Bells there once and he wanted to sell them for \$17.00, and I told my Godfather, Mr. Woods, I said, I would like to learn how to play the Bells. And I said Mr. Parker got a set he wants to sell, "Why don't you buy them." So we brought the Bells and I used to keep everybody awake all through the night and day fooling with the bells, and the first thing in the morning. Finally I learned how to play and got pretty efficient on the Bells. So they start featuring me in the orchestra playing Bells solo, just ordinary popular tunes and I just have the music and that's all. So I stayed there four or five years and in every show he went on to lead the band, he would always see to it that I got there, and I would play the drums for him. So the last time he sent for me, he sent for me to come to California and I went to Lodi, California to join the show. And then we played the Orpheum time, the Pantages time, up and down the Pacific Coast and all in the middle west.

CORTINOVIS: You mean these were vaudeville Circuits?

SHAW: Yeah, vaudeville Circuits. And we played the Butterfield time, those were all the Circuits there was then, as far as I know. We played all over the United States. Then I got back on the Minstrel Show and...

CORTINOVIS: What year was that? I didn't know Minstrel Shows were still going then.

SHAW: Oh yeah. Minstrel shows were going on up until the early '40's. But after the transportation got so bad so far as railroads was concerned, they didn't have no way to get around, you see. And a couple of companies tried it with buses and trucks but it was too rough, and they just gave up on it. Because all west of the Mississippi River and southwest, there just wasn't any trains, you couldn't get around.

FINNEY: Shaw, did you just jump up to St. Louis now or when did you arrive?

SHAW: Well I arrived in St. Louis in August, 1917, right after the riot in East St. Louis. And I came into East St. Louis with the Alabama Minstrel. And then after we played in East St. Louis I quit and came over to St. Louis because I had a lot of relatives here. I had cousins and brothers, so I came over here. I went to work at Bob Losater's Manhattan Cabaret.

CORTINOVIS: What year was that?

SHAW: That was in 1917. I went to work at Bob Losater's Manhattan Cabaret at Newstead and Finney. I played there until I went to work at the Pendleton Theater with Willie Grant. He was a very famous violin player around here at the Pendleton Theater.

CORTINOVIS: Have you lived in St. Louis, then, since 1917?

SHAW: Yeah. I'm almost used to the place now.

FINNEY: Is this the Grant, the famous violinist Willie Grant he's talking about?

RANDLE: No, that's David Grant's brother.

SAHW: That's David Grant's brother. David was in the orchestra too. He was a cello player

and he was a good one. We had another one name Lizzy Brown who played piano. We had one of St. Louis' most outstanding clarinet players, Fred Richardson who played clarinet. And Grant Cooper who was a very famous trombone player and a good one. He used to have a grocery store on Finney Ave. and he played with Charlie, he played with everybody. We had a fellow named Clayton, he used to be secretary of the union, he played bass. We had about six or seven piece orchestra there.

FINNEY: Now when did you become business agent of the 44? I want to go on up from there, see.

SHAW: When I became business agent of Local 44?

FINNEY: Yeah.

SHAW: It was around 1922 when I became business agent. I wasn't business agent first, I first was chairman of the Sick Committee in the local. Then I got to be business agent behind Charlie Lawson. Then I got to be vice president.

RANDLE: Charlie Lawson was a trombone player.

FINNEY: Yeah, he used to be my neighbor. I remember him.

SHAW: Then I got to be president. But I never did get to be president of Local 44. The highest I got in Local 44 was vice president. I was vice president and business agent for Local No. 2, and then I became president of Local 197. I was first...

FINNEY: You were vice president under who?

SHAW: Under Dewey Jackson, no I was business agent under Dewey Jackson. I never was vice president under nobody but Jimmy Harrison in Local 44.

FINNEY: Now I want to ask two questions. It's true that we find a lot of top musicians who said I never had any lessons, but now they are teaching people. Well how did you get this theory and technology to teach people?

SHAW: Just by constantly working from eight to twelve everyday and...

FINNEY: Did you read some kind of theory or something to get the knowledge?

SHAW: I brought all the literature I could pertaining to drumming. And I use to study George Hamilton Green's theory and study on xylophone and I brought all the books that you could buy on drums. And I never had a lesson in my life.

FINNEY: You say you bought the books like I did. Second question is, how did you get so much knowledge on business administration of the Local. How did you get that knowledge?

SHAW: By reason of necessity.

FINNEY: I know when you first attracted my attention, we had a problem Mrs. Irene

Cortinovis, we was a nonunion band. Was you in it Eddie?

RANDLE: Oh yes. All of us started out that way.

FINNEY; We wanted to get in the Local and in order to get in the Local we used to chaperone and we paid Shorty's expenses to come down to educate us about the local, you see. And Shorty use to come down to rehearsal and our meeting, didn't he Shaw?

SHAW: Down at the "Y"?

FINNEY: Down at the "Y" and...

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, well I would like to ask some questions about the union too, Mr. Shaw. Now this was pretty early that you got interested in union organization.

SHAW: I joined the union in 1918.

CORTINOVIS: 1918.

SHAW: And I've had uninterrupted membership every since.

CORTINOVIS; So that's when you were still playing...

SHAW: In silent movies.

CORTINOVIS: In silent movies. And this was when you were still traveling around with the Minstrel Shows.

SHAW: No I gave it up traveling around with Minstrel shows then. And I was playing in the silent movies. I use to at one time play at Booker's where they use to play all top Negro entertainers.

CORTINOVIS: In St. Louis?

SHAW: In St. Louis.

CORTINOVIS: And where was that?

SHAW: 23rd and Market.

CORTINOVIS: Was it a theater?

SHAW: Yeah. I played there and I incidentally, played once right during the tornado when Bill Robinson was playing. He came out and did his act at the Booker Washington Theater for the benefit of the tornado sufferers. And I got a chance to play for Bill Robinson.

CORTINOVIS: Was that in 1927 and '28?

RANDLE: '27.

SHAW: Well it was in '27. That's when the tornado was. It had to be after that.

CORTINOVIS: What benefits could you see belonging to the union? What made you join the union then.

SHAW: Well, the best work that you could do and be exposed to the better musicians, it just don't make sense to try to play music if you are going to play to be paid without belonging to the union.

FINNEY: Now Shaw, we are getting back to you and I think you were listening. Irene, you ask him a question first about the union, see.

CORTINOVIS: Yes. I was going to ask you about the union, and how you first got interested.

SHAW: Well, first I got interested in the union because all over the country and every place I went, we became involved with union musicians. And we were usually questioned by the representatives from the various unions, and it just wasn't the thing to do to try to play music to make a living without being in a union. So that was one of my first ambitions, was when I get some place where I'm going to stay long enough I am going to join a union. So I joined the union when I was 18 years old. I've carried an uninterrupted membership since that time. In 1954 George Smith, the president of our local following me, he instituted a life membership for me. And now I have a lifetime gold card presented to me by the local, by the reasoning of Mr. George Smith, that I never have to pay no more dues as long as I belong to the American Federation of Musicians.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, that sounds good.

FINNEY: Is that card still in effect with the merged local?

SHAW: It's still in effect, with the merged local.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah. Now let's just straighten this out. In 1918 you belonged to Local 44.

SHAW: That's right.

CORTINOVIS: Well when did Local 44 become Local 197 of the American Federation of Musicians?

SHAW: It was in '44. 1944.

CORTINOVIS: In 1944?

SHAW: I had went to the convention at the expense of my local and the expense of myself, getting off from my job, I even had to take off a couple of times while I was playing for Eddie, to go to the convention trying to get our charter back. So I had harassed the officers of the American Federation of Musicians so much until one time they had the convention in Atlanta City and the other time I would see the president of the Federation, who was Joe M. Weber at that time. I would bring up the subject as to when and why we couldn't have our

charter back.

FINNEY: When did we lose that charter?

SHAW: So we was walking on the boardwalk in Atlanta City once and President Weber hear my foot steps behind him. And before I could say anything, he turned around and asked me, "You back here again Shaw? What you want now?" I said, well, I want to see why we can't have our charter back. So I carried that fight. There had been a number of subsidiary locals instituted in the Federation at that time. But never at no time was there ever a representative from one of the subsidiary locals there toward the fight of regaining their local autonomy. So finally, one time while I was at work, the local elected me to go to the convention in Chicago, it was at the Palmer Hotel. I got there a day late because I didn't know that they were going to send anybody, and I didn't know that they were going to send me because I wasn't even at the meeting when they decided that they were going to send a representative to the convention. So when I walked in the Sherman Hotel in Chicago, President Weber and at that time Sam Miles, who was president of Local No. 2, and the present president Ken Farmer, was standing in the doorway and when I walked in Jim Petrillo being president of the Federation, he says, "Well, Elijah, you won't have to fight for your charter now anymore. We're going to give you your charter back and Sam Miles here. Ken Farmer and your Local No. 2 has agreed to it." "So you're going to get your charter back." So I didn't even have to appear before the executive board that time.

CORTINOVIS: That was the charter of 197?

SHAW: That was the charter of 197.

CORTINOVIS: And what year was that?

SHAW: 1944.

CORTINOVIS: 1944. Now it wasn't until 1971...

SHAW: Before we merged.

CORTINOVIS: That you merged with Local No. 2. The white local of the American Federation of Musicians.

SHAW: That's right.

FINNEY: Another question, Shaw, that we didn't bring up, is it 1900 when you said we became Local 44 or what was it.

SHAW: 1896.

FINNEY: 1896 we became Local 144.

SHAW: 44.

FINNEY: And we kept that name until when?

SHAW: 1931. And our charter was revoked a year before we even knew it was revoked.

CORTINOVIS: Why?

RANDLE: Oh, you asked a question that time. (Laughter).

SHAW: Well the reason for it, a lot of the work that we had been living off of and then No. 2 had a chance to get it. And the reason they needed it was because all the theaters in St. Louis where 85% of their musicians worked had went sound almost over night. Like for instance at the Missouri Theater, they had Brick Johns he had about a twenty-five piece orchestra in the pit, and he wasn't even a St. Louisan himself, but he was here. And they had Milton Slauson was an organ player down to the Ambassador, he had about a twenty-five or thirty piece orchestra. At the Fox they had a fellow name ah, it wasn't Fulton, I forget his name but he had a big band. While the bulk of musicians in St. Louis being white musicians played in all the theaters. And they played little or no dance work. They only had about two bands that was organized that was in competition to the black musicians. And that was Terry Janson and Gene... he was playing at the Grand Central however, and a fellow name Harry Lang. He used to always have the band at the Castle at Ewing and Olive.

RANDLE: Wasn't there another one by the name of Lou Chortcot or something like that at the Showboat? You remember that guy.

SHAW: It was a fellow that use to have the band name Al Ross. He used to have the band at what turned out to be the Riviera, that was the Avalon Ballroom. And then they later changed it to the Showboat. But it was first the Avalon Ballroom. One time Duke Ellington came here to play and Sonny Grier was sick, one of my students Wilbert Curt played in Sonny Grier's place, at the Avalon Ballroom, which was later the Showboat and the Riviera:..

FINNEY: You speak of pupils, brother Shaw, and Wilbert Curt was a classmate of mine. We all know Wilbert Curt. Name some other people who went to fame from your guidance.

SHAW: Well one of them, one of the more popular drummers around town now, one of my students, his name is Kenny Rice. He used to live in Kinlock. And sometime he wouldn't have car fare to come all the way down to Sarah Street to my house. He would ride the bus to Wellston and walk all the way from Wellston to my house to take his lessons, and get me up out of the bed to take his lessons after I had played all night in Gaslight Square. And sometime that clown would be there until I would have to put him out so that I could get dress to go to work.

FINNEY: Who is he playing with now?

SHAW: Now he is playing down in the Mansion House complex, I think. At the Garage or something. But he played about five years over at the Blue Note over in East St. Louis with Leo's Five, he played there about six or seven years. And recently he was out to the Hilton Inn, with a mixed group. And now I think he is playing downtown in the Mansion House complex. And one of my drummers more recently played with Russ David, one of my student rather, his name is Bud Murphy. He has played with Russ David more recently and now he is playing with this fellow, some fellow name Johnson has got a band now. He

recently organized a band and incidentally he played for the benefit we had for Norman Mason with this new band, Johnson's band.

CORTINOVIS: I'm interested in the Showboat days, you know, Mr. Shaw. Did you ever play on any of the boats on the river?

SHAW: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: And which ones?

SHAW: I played on the St. Paul. I played on there one year with Charlie Creath. And ah, I tell you the funniest situation about that. The Streckfuss people had requested, had concession price, and the employment of the musicians on the river at that time, and the Local No. 2 didn't see fit to grant such concession. So Captain Joe had decided that instead of using three white men on the two boats that they ran out of here at that time, that they were going to use four colored bands. So Charlie Kent, Fate Marable and Dewey Jackson and ah...

JOHNSON: White, Johnny White?

SHAW: Not Johnny White, no. Not Johnny White. And someone else was suppose to have a band and Lovingood. They suppose to have a band, one on the boat in the day time on the two boats and each one of the leaders was suppose to have a band on the boat at night. So before No. 2 would have this come about, they formed a special committee which was headed by a fellow name Harry Lang, who use to have a band at the Castle Ballroom and he use to play the summer engagment at the Forest Park Highlands, to wait on Cap'n Joe about this crisis. So when the final analysis came about, instead of having four colored bands on the boat, we just had one colored band and three white'bands. And that resulted with Charlie being on the boat together with Fate, Dewey and Lovingood. So all four of those leaders were on that boat that year at the same time.

CORTINOVIS: What's this, about '30, 1930?

SHAW: It was about 1934.

CORTINOVIS: Was Charlie's sister playing with him then?

SHAW: Oh no. Charlie's sister had married Zutty Singleton and she had moved to Chicago years before.

CORTINOVIS: Did you know Margie Creath.

SHAW: Oh sure, I knew Margie Creath since she was nothing but a kid. Yeah, I knew Margie. I knew her when she met and married Zutty.

FINNEY: Irene, speaking about the boat, I thought we should put something on this tape which we talked about in our last gathering is that, in 1928 Jesse Johnson, the late Jesse Johnson promoted a battle of music with Floyd Campbell's orchestra vs Alphonzo Trent band featuring the late Louie Armstrong on trumpet, and they attracted five thousand people. I think this should be on that tape.

CORTINOVIS: On the boat?

FINNEY: On the boat.

CORTINOVIS: Which one was it?

FINNEY: St. Paul, wasn't it fellows? Yeah. That's in 1928.

SHAW: You must have the wrong boat. You must have the wrong boat.

FINNEY: What do you mean we have the wrong boat?

SHAW: Yeah, cause see for the simple reason you couldn't get five thousand people on the St. Paul.

FINNEY: Well I mean that was,,,

SHAW: The only boat that they could get five thousand people on is the Admiral now, and after we had that for a while then we had the President you know, which was much bigger but it wasn't as big as the Admiral.

JOHNSON: The attraction Chick was talking about had a large crowd would not be able to get on the boat.

FINNEY: Yeah that's right.

JOHNSON: That's when they had a lot of trouble in the dock.

FINNEY: Yeah, they had trouble. So I thought that would be good to be on the records, about the boat.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, well I'm very interested in Jesse Johnson. I come across his name all the time and he's passed away I'm sure...

JOHNSON: Jesse Johnson was one of our greatest promoters. Jesse Johnson brought Cab Calloway here and what year was that?

FINNEY: '33 I think.

SHAW: And anyway he advertised, he start throwing tickets from airplanes. Tickets from the sky. And he had about 15,000 or more other affairs. Jesse Johnson was one of the greatest promoters this country ever had.

RANDLE: You know we...

SHAW: And incidentally, I had to stop Cab Calloway from playing that time because Jesse Johnson owed Lionel Hampton \$50.00. And I wouldn't let Cab Calloway play until he payed that \$50.00 that he owed Lionel Hampton. So Jesse Johnson come out to the union and said somebody was going to kill me. I said well if they kill me they'll have to kill me. I said I got

a telegram here from President Wilbert saying that Cab Calloway shouldn't play until you pay the \$50.00 you owed Lionel Hampton.

FINNEY: Did he pay it?

SHAW: Yes, he paid. He paid it on a protest, but Lionel Hampton got his money.

RANDLE: Speaking of Jesse Johnson, right now we are going to an era in here everything is black business, black this, black that. We've always had black people doing something. What is so amazing is that these people had limited schooling. But ah, the world will school you, but I mean limited book schooling.

CORTINOVIS: What kind of man was Jesse Johnson?

RANDLE: Jesse Johnson...

SHAW: He was just a promoter, and a smart man and he always wanted to be in some business and he always kept some kind of business. First, he use to sell the records that the black musicians made. And he used to have people going from door to door selling those records. Any musician that wanted to make a little something got a percentage of what he made. And I got the first record that ever was made by a black blues singer, Mamie Smith.

SHAW: And Jesse Johnson promoted some of the first recordings a lot of the black musicians ever made.

RANDLE: Jesse Johnson was a man with a dream, with a foresight. You know, he had a desire. You know, that's a big part of the battle. Even the musicians that played, you would be surprise at the good (we used the word colored musicians) colored musicians all over the country. You see, we didn't have television and half of the radios we own didn't work and if we got an old piece of horn, we worked with that horn from morning until night. So we had genius all over the country that could really play their instruments. We had one young fellow come in here by the name of Jimmy Blanton. When Jimmy went for lessons to a symphony man, the man told him to come back and just practice with me. And he wouldn't even...he said there's nothing I can teach you. I mean he had just advanced himself that far just through applicance, just by applying himself to his instrument. You can buy the best instrument and go to the best schools, if you don't apply yourself in this game in music then you don't get any place anyway. Just like when I was telling you about... (Interruption)

JOHNSON: You ain't going to make it.

RANDLE: going to take lessons from Mr. Lambiasi, he enjoyed playing a duet with me. He use to say, "How did you learn how to get the sound." And I said, well I just wanted to play, that's all. Incidentally, I was on this boat ride that Chick Finney mentioned where Louie Armstrong was on it and Alphonzo Trent. There was a trumpet player, a saxophone and trumpet player by the name of Lee Hillard on there. He played beautiful trumpet, but he was a saxophone player. But they featured him, they had different men playing different instruments. They had a fellow by the name of Steff Smith on the violin. He's one of the greatest jazz violinist ever.

JOHNSON: He's dead.

RANDLE: He's dead? I didn't know he was dead. And Leo Mosely, I believe, he had a sliding trombone. They had a quite a lively band but it was a good band. They were great musicians all over, because once we got these instruments, this was the food we had. We were kicked around so many different ways, that all we did was to give out in a good way. We didn't fight back, break out windows and what not, we applied ourselves to something that amounted to something in the end.

FINNEY: Perseverance.

RANDLE: One time my son came to me, we had a record of Lunsford Band and later they had a record of Mays play Lunsford, they played this record.

FINNEY: Billy Mays?

RANDLE: Billy Mays plays Lunsford. I listen and I set there and I didn't go overboard for it like my son thought I would, but it was good. And he asked me what was the difference? I said well the difference is this. Mays band had great musicians. They possibly made one rehearsal if that, they just played it on sight. The music was arranged and written and just played by Mays. I said, but when it comes to Lunsford's band, sometimes you would get the sound that you wanted he would pick up men that couldn't hardly read music. So you would go over and over your songs to teach him these parts each time you would perfect it. And then not only that, you would ride miles and miles to a job, now like when we were coming up, we couldn't play in hotels, we couldn't play in places around here where my son plays. They just didn't allow us to play there. We would ride from here to Memphis to play one-nighters and come all the way back to St. Louis that same night. From here to Chicago. We felt alike, we were hungry alike. There was so much togetherness, that a guy from college knowing how to play these couldn't get the sounds that we play, because music is one way of expressing yourself. So Mays could never play Lunsford like Lunsford played Lunsford.

FINNEY: Irene, getting back to Johnson, I think this gives us Eddie Johnson and myself a chance to express our opinions of Johnson. I will yield to Eddie Johnson, you talk about Johnson and I'll talk later. About the late Jesse Johnson, say something about him.

JOHNSON: Well, one thing is that he was a promoter. I had a band, but without Jesse Johnson...He put me through the limelights. He put me with every name. If someone was coming to St. Louis, I say Duke Ellington, he say "Well Eddie you're going to play against Duke Ellington's Band, You're going to play Count Basie, Lucky Miller. And my name would be almost as big as the attraction. By him doing that people all over the United States and Europe begin to know about me.

CORTINOVIS: He brought those bands in. He would contract with these bands. Where would they play?

JOHNSON: Well they would play at the Coliseum, a big spot then, on the boat, Sallis Park, Jesse Johnson was a Kingpin. Jesse Johnson brought mostly all the attractions in St. Louis at that time. What Wriggly? Sports are doing now, Jesse Johnson done the same thing then.

CORTINOVIS: Did Jesse Johnson die a wealthy man or not?

JOHNSON: Well he was...

CORTINOVIS: Was he a financial success?

SHAW: Yes he was.

RANDLE: In those days it wasn't too much money to...the union scale at that time, I often tell my son, I don't mean to interrupt. But he makes as much in one night as the little eight piece band I had made in one night. The union scale at that time, one time was as low as eight dollars a night. At eight pieces a whole lot of nights you go out and make a hundred dollars.

JOHNSON: Well Jesse Johnson use to take me out of St. Louis, I would go east, and Jesse was a manager and a booker. Well...

SHAW: A hustler too.

JOHNSON: He would promote dances in all those towns. If no one would give a dance, he would give a dance himself, he would promote the dance. Then he would pay me so much money for my band, four pieces and put all the rest of the money in his pocket for himself.

CORTINOVIS: He's the kind of man that could have been a success in almost any business, it sounds like.

FINNEY: That's right.

JOHNSON: He had motherwit.

CORTINOVIS: With a lot of initiative.

FINNEY: Well he had a very popular restaurant in town at that time. Deluxe Cafe.

RANDLE: He started a cab company.

FINNEY: He started a cab company. He was always getting into something.

CORTINOVIS: That's why I say that he's the kind of man that could have made a success in almost any kind of business that he might be interested in.

JOHNSON: He also had a real estate.

SHAW: I think, you asked if Jesse was wealthy, I think, if I'm not mistaken, I read in the paper where Jesse left 60,000 cash dollars when he died. Besides from the fact that he had his business that he had interest in, of course.

FINNEY: Well, my part of Jesse Johnson I would add with the previous speaker. He was a great contribution to St. Louis and to our race, I have to say that. He worked in civic, religious, and he had a dream like Mr. Randle said, to give St. Louis something to put them

on the map for entertainment. He not only brought entertainment to our community, for them to make money like Mr. Johnson said, he help encourage fellows to make money. Today, we do need another Jesse Johnson. Now, I haven't forgotten my music, but I'm interested in bringing people together in harmony. Just like I met you. This is my second trip out there. I hope you got something from my visit here. We got something, I know I did, see. That's why I just said Jesse Johnson was an idol, I said fellows to our community and he did a lot of good things.

RANDLE: He was a dear friend of mine.

JOHNSON: He made a lot of contributions to the black community. Jesse Johnson could put a band in places where anybody else couldn't even talk to the people. For instance when he brought Cab Calloway here. I doubt very seriously, whether there was anybody around at that time in black communities that could have done that.

FINNEY: Another thing, Jesse Johnson even brought Fats Waller and played him out at the Forest Park Highland. And that was one of the places where we seldom ever played, because they always had contracts tied up with No. 2. We just couldn't get in there.

JOHNSON: Getting back to Jesse too, Jesse on the riverboat days, Jesse had control of the Streckfuss boats. Jesse Johnson was the black Streckfuss. If you wanted to play on the boat then, they came to Jesse Johnson.

CORTINOVIS: You mean the Streckfuss Steamers used him as a booker.

FINNEY: They would negotiate with him before they would anybody else

. JOHNSON: He was shrewd.

RANDLE: One point. See, on Monday nights they would turn the boat over to the colored.

CORTINOVIS: You mean for patrons.

RANDLE: Yes. But the society wasn't mixed and that was the only night that we could go on. And if you belonged to an organization and you wanted to use the boat, you wouldn't go to Streckfuss, you would go to Jesse Johnson.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, I see.

FINNEY: Jesse Johnson was a fad on that boat.

JOHNSON: And he made a many nights hit for himself. Like graduation night and certain nights, he would make the money for himself.

FINNEY: Before we leave, Irene, I want to get this on the tape because I'm going to mention something about Cotter about this vist. And John Cotter a real good organist, would you repeat now what you said earlier what you thought about John Cotter, please.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, his thesis that he had at Washington University, well I studied it, read it

all the way through. When I was doing my own thesis and found a lot of very valuable information in it. He has made a survey of music in St. Louis. That is, music performed by black musicians. I believe the title of his thesis is The Negro in Music in St. Louis. And he went from the beginning up until around I believe it was about '55. But he covered the whole scene, not only popular music in ragtime and jazz which I was especially interested in, but also church music and school music, music teachers and he must mention four or five hundred names, in his thesis all together. But it's a monumental piece of work, and I'm sure it would have been published, except it's a kind of limited subject as thesis always are. The thesis is really meant to be available for people writing books, they are usually not meant to be books themselves. But he has a wonderful piece of work there and I'm sure it took him a very, very long time.

SHAW: Are you saying a thesis is as a rule not available to the general public?

CORTINOVIS: Yes, as a rule. They are very seldom published. They are always in the libraries of the schools where they are written. But they are known as monographs, that is work on one small subject, usually. The information in a monograph is usually a lot of information on a small subject, so that a person who is going to write a book usually use parts of it, you know. They usually are not published themselves. There's a couple of subjects that we just barely touched on that I would like to talk a little bit about. One I'm interested in Fate Marable, and I wondered if any of you have ever played with him.

SHAW: Well I played with him. I played with Fate and one night I...

CORTINOVIS: You've played with everybody.

SHAW: I played with everybody...

RANDLE: Even now, I'm a mortician. I buried him.

CORTINOVIS: You did?

RANDLE: I'm not glad that I buried him. (Laughter).

CORTINOVIS: Is that your full time work now Mr. Randle?

RANDLE: Yes, that's my full time work.

SHAW: Fate and I played once when they were having walk-a-thons.

CORTINOVIS: Oh yeah.

SHAW: Fate and I played once for a walk-a-thon down at the Coliseum, we played all night and the only time we would ever stop for anything was for the absolutely necessities.

FINNEY: What year was that Shaw?

SHAW: Oh I think that was in '28. We just got us a special engagement down there and played all night and we came on after the regular musicians got off. We played all night until

the next morning and never stop.

FINNEY: Was this a duo or combo?

SHAW: Just he and I.

FINNEY: Duo. Just piano and drum.

SHAW: Yeah. Just keep them people moving around the floor. And we got a long write-up for the duration of our performance. You know playing so long without a rest, except when you had to go maybe to the rest room are something like that.

RANDLE: You ever hear of what they call the steam calliope, I believe that's the way they pronounce it.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah.

RANDLE: Well when I was a kid, see. Fate is out of Paducah, Kentucky and I'm across the river on the Illinois side. And back in those days there were not so many machines and what not, and you actually...well people use to cross the river on the ferry and they would even call across the river, they would say "hey" and you could hear the voice echoing back softly and they would call for the ferry. Well when. Fate would come down the river on the famous steam Calliope, way before they had orchestras, when I was a little fellow, we use to listen to Fate then. Not knowing that some day I would be associated with him as a musician. I never worked on the boat with him, but I have worked many engagements with him.

SHAW: Fate played on the boat a long time when the boat didn't necessarily dock in St. Louis.

CORTINOVIS: 1919 when he first started.

SHAW: And he played on there a long time with all the musicians white but him.

CORTINOVIS: Right, he was the first black musician to play on the riverboat. At least that I know of.

SHAW: As far as I can remember.

JOHNSON: He brought a lot of musicians here. Most of the musicians he brought to St. Louis riverboat...

RANDLE: Pops Foster.

JOHNSON: Pops Foster.

FINNEY: The late Earl Bostic.

RANDLE: Earl Bostic and ah..

. SHAW: Larry Morgan.

RANDLE: Al Morgan.

FINNNEY: Al Morgan the bass player.

CORTINOVIS: Well, Louie Armstrong in his book, he gives credit to Fate Marable. He taught, although Louie Armstrong had been taught to read music when he was a boy, in the WAIF-'s Home in New Orleans, he had forgotten. Because he was patterning himself after King Oliver in New Orleans, and King Oliver couldn't read music so Louie promptly forgot about it too. But then when he got a job with Fate Marable, Fate Marable wouldn't have anybody that didn't read music, at least this is what Louie Armstrong said. Well, this is the way that Louie Armstrong tells it, that Fate Marable wouldn't have anybody that didn't read music, so that's when he had to brush up on his music and start studying again.

RANDLE: Fate Marable had one man...what was that, he had a bass solo that couldn't read music but he played so perfect...

SHAW: Played horn, tuba...

CORTINOVIS: He faked it out.

RANDLE: I believe it was tuba. He didn't know it until the next man that could read music. And when this fellow played the part right, Fate said, "Oh no." He liked what this other fellow was playing so much better than what was written, that he said, "Oh no."

CORTINOVIS: The only other question that I wanted to cover was, I would like to know from each of you what kind of music you prefer to play. How about you, Mr. Johnson?

JOHNSON: Well, I like strictly commercial, straight, sweet music, that's my favorite.

CORTINOVIS: That's your favorite music to play and to listen too?

JOHNSON: I play for a living doing that now. I been doing that all my life.

CORTINOVIS: Who are your favorite musicians among the well known musicians now?

JOHNSON: Well mostly the old ones. I don't care for the young generation. I'm an aristocrat. I don't seem to understand them myself. I like the old music the best. Like I said, Louie Armstrong, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, those type of fellows. Art Tatum, Earl Hines, those are my favorites, the old musicians.

SHAW: Oscar Peterson.

CORTINOVIS: As a piano player yourself, who is your favorite piano player?

JOHNSON: Teddy Wilson.

CORTINOVIS: He's a great one all right. How about you, Mr. Randle?

RANDLE: Well, I, you know there's no such thing as bad music, I love all kinds of music.

Of course there is accepted and unaccepted music, but I really like conservative music, straight music.

CORTINOVIS: How do you do with the kind of music your son plays? What kind of music does he play?

RANDLE Well he's very versatile. As I said before, he has played with the Philharmonic and then he plays with jazz groups. By liking just music period, I will accept just about...

CORTINOVIS: Is he a professional musician?

RANDLE: He is a professional musician.

CORTINOVIS: Is that his main job?

RANDLE: That's his main job. He plays music.

CORTINOVIS: How about you, Mr. Shaw. What do you like to play the best?

SHAW: Well I like to play symphony the best, but until recently our activity as far as being a serious musician was so limited, I spent all my time playing the music I had to play to live. But I like playing serious music and I like particularly I like the music we use to play in the silent movies, because it was so varied until you weren't confined to one or two kinds of music. Because you had to play music according to the pictures. It was a rule when the pictures came in they sent a cue sheet to the orchestra leader telling the leader what tunes to play for a certain scene. I would suggest tunes in certain tempos and then the leader could pick the tunes, unless they designated the tunes. But even some tunes like ah, I remember when we played the show for Douglass Fairbanks, that big picture he was in the Thief of Bagdad. They sent the music along with the picture, so we didn't have any problems.

CORTINOVIS: Oh from Hollywood?

SHAW: Yeah, it came right along with the picture. So what we had to do was have a rehearsal.

CORTINOVIS: Hey.

SHAW: That was something. And any number of pictures, the music came right along with the pictures, see. So we didn't...the bandleader didn't have to go down to the library in the theater and pick out the music to play for this certain picture, see.

CORTINOVIS: Well, my mother played piano for silent movies.

SHAW: Is that so.

CORTINOVIS: Yes. In a little neighborhood theater in North St. Louis.

SHAW: Is that right.

RANDLE: You didn't ask me what band I like. After Duke Ellington, the others are bands. Duke Ellington he's out there, way out of everybody in my line. I always loved Duke Ellington. And speaking of music when it comes to singers, I've always felt that way about Ella Fitzgerald. When you go to talking about who's the best singer, well, when you talk about singers, if you leave Ella out, then we will talk about singers. But if you're going to put Ella in we just have to forget about the other singers.

CORTINOVIS: She's the singer's singer.

RANDLE: She is the singer of singers as far as I am concerned.

CORTINOVIS: I noticed nobody mentioned jazz.

FINNEY: Well you haven't asked me yet.

CORTINOVIS: Ok Chick, how about you?

FINNEY: Well I'm interested in versatile music but my main specialty is jazz. I don't have any bands now but I do teach music for talent shows. I felt happy last week, I don't know if Randle was present there, but they had a convention last week called the National Funeral Directors Convention. And they asked someone in our church to do a number. So I said well ok, I'll get one of my boys, one of my pupils to do the number. And they told me there wasn't nothing to it if I could get somebody, but I don't like to play no straight number. I like to play with a soul feeling, and I made a duet out of it, if I could help

FINNEY: somebody, no man is silent. Well I just did that because I wanted to make a showing for the funeral directors. But I was surprised to find out that all the attendants there were strangers except Randle and Goose Taylor.

RANDLE: I was there, yeah, it was very good.

FINNEY: Because they came in a bus. Now I went to the meeting at the hotel, and all I was getting was compliments, and I didn't think I was doing anything special.

RANDLE: It was very good, very good.

FINNEY: Yeah. And then I said I must be a musician.

CORTINOVIS: (laughter).

FINNEY: No joke. Eddie was there and then I went to the hotel everyday and they would say, "There's that man who played the piano." And Lawrence...you know the boy, Jones, out of Kansas City, he invited me up to his house, and Greg out of New Jersey, I can name them all, and it was just from that plain and creative music and originality and soul I would say. So I really...we didn't put much jazz in but it was different from anything they had heard, you see.

CORTINOVIS: Let's see, there was one more subject that occurred to me along the way. How about vocalist. Have any of you ever worked with a well known vocalist? I know

somebody mentioned Mamie Smith.

FINNEY: Johnson, you help. You played for a lot of those top vocalists.

JOHNSON: Yeah.

RANDLE: In fact in those days, instrumental was the thing, because...

CORTINOVIS: Did you mostly play bands then?

RANDLE: Yes that's right. They would bring these different vocalist in when you were playing in a club. I only played two clubs in my whole career of music. And that's in New York. I played a couple of summers, I believe they called it Joe's place at Sodis Point, New York. It's right on Lake Ontario and Sodis Bay, and the club extends over the bay. And it was a real nice thing then.

JOHNSON: Ah, I worked with Dina Washington.

CORTINOVIS: You did?

JOHNSON: But it was with the band. Dina Washington, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holliday, and I'm trying to think of this Smith's sister...

CORTINOVIS: Well there are so many Smith's vocalists. There's Trudy Smith, Mamie Smith...

RANDLE: You worked for Jean Calloway too, didn't you?

JOHNSON: I worked with Jean Calloway, I worked with Vance Calloway.

SHAW: Well I played for Bessie Smith.

JOHNSON: I worked for her.

SHAW: The last year before she was killed in an automobile accident. She was on the showboat.

CORTINOVIS: About '38 or something, wasn't it.

SHAW: About '38 or '39, I don't remember exactly. But I got it in my scrap book. I got a scrap book that high...I got things...

CORTINOVIS: Notice my eyes scrinching when you say scrap book.

SHAW: Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Now how do you compare all of these vocalists?

JOHNSON: Frankly I don't like blues.

CORTINOVIS: Oh you don't?

JOHNSON: Now I love Dina Washington and Ella Fitzgerald and those type of singers.

CORTINOVIS: Of course they could sure sing the blues.

JOHNSON: But they were real singers, you know.

CORTINOVIS: They're sweet, (pause), sweet blues singers.

JOHNSON: We call them gut puckers.

FINNEY: Here's what I would like to add. From what I have learned in music, I like to arrange also. That is one of my hobbies. I'm putting that into voice, because my hobby is still training vocalist, as Eddie Randle said he heard the boys sing at the program. Now California is begging for me, not California, but a young lady she's got a lot of guts. She got five children and she said she went to California for two weeks and sang from tavern to tavern. Did I give you one of my records?

CORTINOVIS: You gave me a record.

FINNEY: Well, right now she is going from tavern to tavern taking that record, see. And so when she went to California, she said I been out to California for two months. I said, "Well why didn't you let me know." Well being a newspaper man you do have contact, and so I can get you right into the people. So she said well I will leave Monday if you want to give me somebody. So I called Hollywood, California and they said a St. Louis boy got his hand on the door. And she called me last week and said that the record that I gave you or you hear is beginning to catch on because she is making it catch on. Now she has talked with Ray Charles people, and she asked me who shall I talk to next. And I said by all means to go to Gordy Barry. I don't know

FINNEY: Gordy Barry personally, he's a Motown man, but I know his PR man. His PR man said, "Chick, if there is anything that I can do for you let me know." Now her last phone call was they are interested in that song. So I may have to go out there and talk to your friend Leon Harris, he's big out there. You know, the undertaker. To do some legal work if Ray Charles or Gordy Barry wants my song, see. But I say all the music I learned I puts it now into the people who I teach vocalist. I mean the same style. When they say a band or instrument, well I tell them that I am still interested in voice.

CORTINOVIS: What do you think...do you think we covered it. Anybody got anything they would like to add?

JOHNSON: I would like to say one thing. I was one of the first bands to work for KMOX. I use to play mostly every morning, come on at 7:00 o'clock in the morning. Then I use to have a show three times a week called Shade of Blue, in the afternoon. I was working with a regular band then for KMOX.

CORTINOVIS: All live music? So when was that Eddie?

JOHNSON: That was back in the early '30's.

SHAW: Did you play for KMOX?

FINNEY: It was late in 1929, pardon me Eddie, so that I can keep the record. We use to leave Vashon High School to go across the street to the restaurant, the lunchroom, to catch Eddie Johnson's band on the radio at 12:00. Even though long ago, I remember that, see.

SHAW: Were you on there before...

JOHNSON: I mean I was getting paid. A lot of bands was on the radio, but I was getting paid.

FINNEY: He was stepping in the band.

JOHNSON: I mean I was making money.

SHAW: Well I was assuming that they were getting paid. They stayed down there a long time during the time that Mike Childs had the band, the staff band at KMOX, In the Mart Building.

FINNEY: Eddie, you were the first band, we followed you on the radio, didn't we follow you?

RANDLE: Yes.

FINNEY: You broke the ice didn't you?

SHAW: As far as that is concerned, every radio station in St. Louis when they first open up they had a black band. For instance, Benny Washington and the Six Aces was the first band on WIL. Cecil White used to have a band out to the Chase Hotel on KWK.

RANDLE: Is White still living?

SHAW: No, he got burned up coming from Milwaukee to Chicago in a car. And I said before Harvey Langford played on KMOX, but I didn't know that Eddie had played on it.

CORTINOVIS: How did it come about that the radio stations had Negro bands'

SHAW: I don't know how it came about except it was by reason, in most instances the exploitation.

RANDLE: Here's the way it came about. There was so much work like in the type of music they use in an opera, in theaters and what not that the Negro bands had just a better dance hand in those days. This is the way that that came about. Because this was the only thing that we could play and it was a matter of making it. And we applied ourselves. We practiced. We had arrangers that would sit up all night writing to put us in this position where that if our kind of work came along we could do it and the only kind of work we could get was the dance work and we did a good job at it.

CORTINOVIS: I see.

JOHNSON: I remember the time back in the early days when the white musicians when he wanted to get his Ph.D and play in dance music, he would follow a colored musician around day and night. He would come to your house and eat breakfast, stay all night to hear you play and play with you. I can name a many one, top notchers that would do that in the early days.

FINNEY: Another point I want to bring in too, we mentioned earlier the late Tab Smith. He did inspire me in many ways. Because I'm not a top arranger, but I do arrange. And when Eddie's band disbanded, I won't say disbanded, but when he got new faces in his band, I think Tab Smith was one of the new faces he got. He brought in all the out of town fellows. And Tab Smith would take his pen and sit down and write eleven or twelve different parts. And when they play that music, the song could be "Dear Heart," for example, well when they played it, it was so much rhythm and everything, it was a different "Dear Heart." That inspired me, Irene. I wanted to be an arranger and Tab Smith was a great inspiration in my life.

JOHNSON: And he died day before yesterday.

CORTINOVIS: Oh that's really too bad. Well I certainly thank you all for giving up your afternoon to come out here. I really enjoyed it a lot. I think we really got an interesting tape here.

JOHNSON: I would like to add one more thing, I hate to interrupt you. If you wish, I could add a lot more to it by bringing in my scrap book, (LAUGHTER).

CORTINOVIS: Oh I would really love to see your scrap book, because I would love not only to see it, but to have a microfilm made of it.

JOHNSON: Yeah, cause see, I have worked with so many bands, promoters and. . .

FINNEY: Eddie, when are you coming out here again? Anyone know who I could bring out here next?

SHAW; I don't know anybody that you could bring out that could cover the music field any further than we have covered it.

CORTINOVIS: (Laughter) That's good.

RANDLE: I tell you one thing. I have clarinet players that when Benny Goodman would come to the Fox Theater, that when he would leave the Fox he would be standing around in front of the band...

FINNEY: Benny Goodman.

RANDLE: Yeah. And he would always set in with us, Benny Goodman. And we would have these jam sessions and what was his name, Ziggy Elman, they would run him off the band stand. But Benny Goodman had another little blonde head boy, I believe his name was Clarkly Cornelius. Benny never featured him.

FINNEY: Irene, I think they're leaving out a lot of things. Eddie is just waking me up. It was a time, Johnson, remember, after every dance, we use to go down to this fellow who had a cab stand on Compton, for a jam session. And we had that from 2:00 o'clock, 1:00 o'clock to 4:00 o'clock in the morning. It was a blonde head fellow around town who sounded exactly like the late Louie Armstrong. Remember that boy. So after every dance, after every big band come here, they would have a jam session. Isn't that right Shaw. And we would just...

SHAW: I know who you are talking about.

FINNEY: I said who we use to have jam session with.

SHAW: Yeah. He use to follow Dewey around too.

FINNEY: Butch, Butch.

SHAW: Yeah. I don't know what Butch's last name was.

RANDLE: Now this is the way we learned. We would get in fast company and competition. I was a fast trumpet player...

SHAW: Butch is around here now.

CORTINOVIS: Sure sounds like fun.

RANDLE: Yeah. I was a fast trumpet player until I used Sleepy Tomlin. After Sleepy left my band. Sleepy played so much horn until I had to play because I was the boss, you know. And it made me actually play. Then the guys that I had played with before, when they come back and played with me well I had advanced so just by being in fast company. And I often say that Sleepy made a musician out of me. Because he was one of the first to play with Lundsford when Lundsford first started his band, but by some reason on his own he didn't stay in fast company. But he was a terrific, he was a fine trumpet player.

CORTINOVIS: Well it's awfully hard to remember, you know just everything. Probably after a while or something you will remember something that you wished that you would have said. But if you have a scrap book too, Mr. Shaw, I would really love to see it.

SHAW: Well I've got scrap books that high.

CORTINOVIS: Have you?

RANDLE: I'm going to give Chick some of my tapes. And if he is coming out to bring his recordings...

SHAW: I got one laying on my table now and every night I say I'm going to put something on it because I want to complete it. But it's about that high. Then I got another about that high. And pictures of pretty near everybody that's in the show business.

FINNEY: We can have the same trio out here if they are going to bring the books.

JOHNSON: Yeah. I also have the Earl Hines band, Leroy Harris and Eugene Thomas.

CORTINOVIS: Well as far as making another tape is concerned, I think we've really covered it, but I would love to see the scrap books, and have microfilms made of them.