

ORAL HISTORY T-0316
INTERVIEWEE: E. A. McKINNEY
INTERVIEWERS: PATRICIA ANN IMMEKUS AND IRENE
CORTINOVIS
JAZZMAN PROJECT
MARCH 15, 1974

This transcript is a part of the [Oral History Collection \(S0829\)](#), available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at shsresearch@umsystem.edu.

[merged in 1971 which was the, I think, the greatest thing that ever happened to the musicians' profession.

IMMEKUS: Certainly that was nice. That was good, wasn't it?

McKINNEY: Yes.

IMMEKUS: Do you want to tell us a little bit about yourself?

McKINNEY: I might say that I got my education in music at Tuskegee Institute. I spent three years at Tuskegee which time I played in the band and orchestra there, and I studied all of the brass instruments and finished them...and I hadn't spent any time at all on any of the string instruments. However, I spent quite a bit of time on the brass instruments, and then when I came back home to St. Louis, why, I joined a band. I went to work in the post office, and I started a band in the post office in 1906.

IMMEKUS: Wow! That was a long time ago, wasn't it?

McKINNEY: Yes.

IMMEKUS: Tell us, where were you born?

McKINNEY: Well, my people were all Missourians, but my mother and father happened to be in Texas when I was born...that was in Baird, Texas, and I...my father was killed in a well accident, and my mother came back to St. Louis, so all I've known in my life is St. Louis, with the exception of the three years I was away to school. When I joined the Local 44, American Federation of Musicians in about...sometime before World War I, and was in Local 44 where I learned about the interest of the colored musician in St. Louis which dated back to the old Knights of Labor which preceded the American Federation of Labor. The colored musicians had a charter with the Knights of Labor and when the American Federation of Labor organized, why, they had a charter with that organization. And in 1896, the AFL granted the musicians a blanket charter to organize the American Federation of Musicians. The colored musicians were in Indianapolis, Indiana, because that was where the call was for that first convention with the American Federation of Musicians, and there were forty-four delegates that showed up for that convention. The only delegate...only colored delegate...was

John L. Fields from St. Louis, so they gave charters to different locals and were all locals. The only colored local that was chartered was the St. Louis Local...Local 44...and, of course, it played along with that for years. Up until that time, the white musicians never belonged to the AFL at all, but they had an organization called "The Guild," which just took in the white musicians of the city and, of course, back in 18...when James C. Petrillo was interested in the national body to bring all of the musicians together in one organization in each city and, of course, it got to be 1971, when the St. Louis musicians...they were merged.

CORTINOVIS: How does it happen that you know so much about the union activities?

McKINNEY: Well, I was the secretary of the Local for a number of years, and it was handed down to me from those who were in there who were older than I, and that's how I learned about the interest the colored musicians had in the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor, leading to the American Federation of Musicians.

CORTINOVIS: So, when did you first belong? When did you first join Local 44?

McKINNEY: Sometime before World War I...that was around 1917 or 1918.

CORTINOVIS: I think that you didn't tell us when you were born.

McKINNEY: I was born on April 18, 1885.

CORTINOVIS: Wow! You are 89 years old?

McKINNEY: I won't be until April!

CORTINOVIS: Yeah...another month, you'll be 89 years old!

McKINNEY: Yes, that's right!

CORTINOVIS: Well, you look just marvelous!

McKINNEY: I wish I...

CORTINOVIS: How is your health?

McKINNEY: Well, I don't have the very best of health...

CORTINOVIS: Don't you?

McKINNEY: ...no, my legs won't...! Can't kick as high as I used to!

CORTINOVIS: Oh, yes!

IMMEKUS: I should think not! (laughter)

McKINNEY: I do recall having one time walked all the way from St. Louis to Bridgeton, Missouri...and back...which was a distance of fourteen miles...each way!

CORTINOVIS: Sure, I live out by Ferguson, so I know where that is. While we are talking about your birth...you said you were born in Baird, Texas, and you came to St. Louis then when you were a small child?

McKINNEY: Oh, I came back to St. Louis before I was a year old.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, you came back to St. Louis then?

McKINNEY: Yes, my father was killed in a well accident then, and my mother brought me back to St. Louis where she had lived all of her life.

CORTINOVIS: Now, you say that your parents were Missourians. What part of Missouri did they come from?

McKINNEY: Well, Wright City. Well, my mother says she came from half way FAMILY between Wright City and Warrenton.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, I know where that is. You know, I have interviewed Druie Bess...you know Druie Bess?

McKINNEY: Who?

CORTINOVIS: You know, Druie Bess? He's from up around that way, too.

McKINNEY: Oh, yah.

CORTINOVIS: Now, so let's talk a little bit more about your family. If you were born in 1885 that would mean that your parents were born around 1860 or so. Were your parents free? Were they free Negroes?

McKINNEY: Yes, yes.

CORTINOVIS: Did your grandfather farm or what? Do you know anything about your grandparents?

McKINNEY: No, no, I don't.

CORTINOVIS: But your father...before he went to Texas, did he live around Wright City?

McKINNEY: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: Did he farm? Or do you know what he did?

McKINNEY: Well, I learned that when Missourians, quite a few Missourians, went to Texas. You know, Sam Houston was a Missourian. He went to Texas.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, right. I believe that Stephen Austin was, too...

McKINNEY: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: ...after whom Austin, Texas, is named.

McKINNEY: That's right.

CORTINOVIS: So, you think that your father went in a group to settle Texas?

McKINNEY: Well, that's what I understand...in order to get in on some of the property down there.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, right. Was your mother from around Wright City, too?

McKINNEY: Yes, she lived halfway between Warrenton and Wright City. I asked her, I said, "Mother, where did you get your mail?" And she said, "Either at Wright City or Warrenton."

CORTINOVIS: Yes.

McKINNEY: At that time, there was no rural free delivery, and people had to go to the post office and pick up their mail.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, well, I am really interested in your family background, because there are a lot of Missourians...there were Negro Missourians who were free...who owned property. Do you think it is safe to say that your family was in that situation?

McKINNEY: No, I wouldn't say that. What I know about those who were in that category were people like J. Milton Conner and Captain C.H. Tandy, and those who were in the Civil War...Civil War Veterans...who started Lincoln Institute at Jefferson City...they were. But my people hadn't come along...

CORTINOVIS: But you are sure that both your mother and father were freed Negroes?

McKINNEY: Yes.

IMMEKUS: Do you know if they came from farther down South? How did they come to Missouri?

McKINNEY: Well, it seems as though... from what I can learn...the grandparents came from Virginia.

CORTINOVIS: Yes.

IMMEKUS: Oh, I see.

CORTINOVIS: So, that would have been probably before the Civil War then?

McKINNEY: Yes, and they happened to be slaves back in those days.

CORTINOVIS: Yes. Now, your mother brought you back to St. Louis. Now, where did you live when you came back to St. Louis, do you remember? Were you ever told where you lived when you were a small child?

McKINNEY: Yes, on Morgan Street, which is now Delmar.

CORTINOVIS: I'm a native St. Louisan, too, Ed.

McKINNEY: Oh, are you?

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, sure, so I know when that was Morgan Street. Right. That hasn't been too long ago.

McKINNEY: Where do you live?

CORTINOVIS: In Ferguson. How about your schooling?

McKINNEY: Well, I left Tuskegee...

CORTINOVIS: No, I mean your early schooling.

McKINNEY: Oh...early schooling was in L'Ouverture School which was, at that time, in the 2600 block of Papin Street.

CORTINOVIS: Right.

McKINNEY: And, you know, we had separate schools back in those days, too. And at L'Ouverture...which was a colored school...when I went into kindergarten, the teachers were white, but all of the other teachers in the school were colored. Now the reason for that was, you know. . .who went over to Germany and studied the kindergarten under...Froebel...?

CORTINOVIS: Susan Blow.

McKINNEY: Yes, right. Well, when she came back, she never got paid anything from St. Louis, because her school was in Carondelet in the City of Carondelet, and of course, she taught all of the other teachers, you know, and she hadn't taught any colored teachers until after the first two white teachers at L'Ouverture School. And one of these teachers was...I never learned this until after I got out of kindergarten...she played Santa Clause. She was fat, you know, and so when Santa Claus came and dropped bells, there was only one teacher that day in kindergarten...

IMMEKUS: I bet you didn't think of it then!

McKINNEY: And so, anyway, when this Miss Thompson came back to school after Christmas, we told her how much she had missed! Santa Clause was there and Santa Clause knew all of the dances that we had! In fact, Santa Claus took part in the dances! (laughter)

CORTINOVIS: How many years did you go to L'Ouverture?

McKINNEY: Well, I guess when I was fifteen; let's see I went to Tuskegee from L'Ouverture. I didn't graduate from L'Ouverture, but when I got to Tuskegee, I had to go to preparatory school, you know, to go into the college department.

CORTINOVIS: How did it happen that you went to Tuskegee?

McKINNEY: Well, because there was a friend of my mother's that had been at Tuskegee at one time, and she advised my mother to send me there.

CORTINOVIS: Did your mother work? Or did your mother marry again?

McKINNEY: Yes, my mother married again, and I had a step-father at that time...when I went to Tuskegee.

CORTINOVIS: Do you remember how much that cost to go to Tuskegee at that time?

McKINNEY: No, I don't.

CORTINOVIS: You weren't acquainted with that, then?

McKINNEY: Well, I don't recall now. However, it was...Tuskegee was a school where you could go to night school or day school. I went to day school.

CORTINOVIS: That was about 1900?

McKINNEY: That was in 1901, 1902, 1903 when I was there.

CORTINOVIS: How did you get there?

McKINNEY: Went by railroad...by train.

CORTINOVIS: Now, can you tell us what you studied when you got to Tuskegee?

McKINNEY: Well, I took up a trade of harness-making. That's something that is something out of the question nowadays! However, together with that, I studied music.

IMMEKUS: How did you happen to study music? How did you get interested in it?

McKINNEY: Because there was a band there, that's all. I went into what we called the "kid" band, you know, (laughter) the preparatory band, so I can recall when the band made a visit...made a tour...you know. The first tour that I know the band made, and I asked the bandmaster if I was going to go with them, and he says to me, "Do you think you can keep up? Do you think that you can read all of the music that we are going to have?" Well, then, I tried to made different excuses, you know; I hadn't been in band long enough to even make the trip, but after that time, when I got to be better schooled in the brass instruments, I knew that if the band went anywhere, I would be going, too.

CORTINOVIS: So, what instruments did you study then?

McKINNEY: At that time, I had played three or four different instruments...at that time I was playing a slide trombone. I had played the valve trombone, I had played the alto horn, and I had played the trumpet. But I was a trombone player at that time and afterwards, I went back to study the French horn.

CORTINOVIS: Who were your teachers then, do you remember?

McKINNEY: S. W. Grisham was my teacher who was the bandmaster. He had charge of the band and orchestra and the band used to have three rehearsals a week...Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The orchestra had Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturday. The orchestra played in the chapel at night, so I had a rehearsal practically every day. When I left Tuskegee, I came home and I thought that I had knowledge in music, but when I got to playing with older musicians, I found out just how much I didn't know! (laughter)

CORTINOVIS: Who were some of these older musicians? Do you remember any?

McKINNEY: William Blue, Eugene McDonald. They were two...and William D. Flowers... they were musicians who had played in circus bands and different orchestras and, well, they played music from the old masters. Now there was a James A. Harris, I might say, James A. Harris I...I'll put it that way...who was a violinist and also a barber. He had a barber shop around Channing and Pine Street at a time when Pine Street and Lawton Avenue where wealthy lived, so James A. Harris... during the time of day when there wasn't much business...would be practicing on his violin. So, the neighbors one time when Padereski came here and played and stayed at the Beers Hotel...now the Beers Hotel was at a spot near Grand and Olive Street where the Five-and-Ten Cent Store was, and where some of the big shots came through when they came to St. Louis. As well as the old Southern Hotel which was at 4th and Elm Street, so they arranged for James A. Harris to play for Padereski at the Beers Hotel. So after Padereski heard him play, he put his okay on him...he was a wonderful musician...but he said that "You won't amount to anything unless you go to Europe and spend possibly a year over there, or a season over there and come back; then you will amount to something." So, he couldn't do anything like that because of the fact that he had a large family. He had only one grandson...let's see, Harris...Leroy Harris, his name is.

CORTINOVIS: He must be a grandson. I've heard of Leroy Harris.

McKINNEY: Leroy Harris, Sr. was in the band with Cab Galloway. You know, Cab Galloway is a Missourian.

CORTINOVIS: Now, Ed, when you played with these older men...did you get a band together, or did they have a band already?

McKINNEY: Oh, yes, they had a band.

CORTINOVIS: Do you know the name of it?

McKINNEY: Well, Flowers had a Great Western Band and Orchestra, and William Blue had a band and they used to select different ones who were members of the Local, you know, to play in the band whenever they had a job to play. Now, we had at that time...there were circus bands coming to town...

IMMEKUS: Now, what kind of music did you play at the circus? You told us about classical music, the old master type music, but do you know anything about the ragtime and jazz and blues and swing music that came out.

McKINNEY: Well, jazz came later. Jazz came about...I recall when the Streckfus Steamboat Line had the steamer, "Sydney," which came to St. Louis and played on an excursion out of here that...that was the first time I heard jazz and, of course, after they came through here, why, then, the St. Louis crowd all began playing jazz.

CORTINOVIS: Was that when Fate Marable played for the Streckfus Steamers?

McKINNEY: Fate Marable was working for the Streckfus family back in...when the steamer St. Paul was first giving excursions out of St. Louis, and I can't think of the name of the orchestra which was on the St. Paul at that time, but they had a white orchestra...

CORTINOVIS: Fate Marable was the first colored man to be employed by Streckfus.

McKINNEY: That's right. At the same time that the white orchestra was on the St. Paul, though. Fate Marable was playing the calliope, and they used to go around St. Louis and advertise the boat excursion on the St. Paul where Fate Marable was playing the calliope on that steamer.

IMMEKUS: Where did this steamer go...to and from where?

McKINNEY: Well, they'd go down the river to Monsanto Springs, maybe...no, let's us...back before the St. Paul...the old Grand Republic which was a...the Grand Republic was the largest steamer on the river on the river at St. Louis and which had a fire and was sunk, and the whistle that was on the Grand Republic is the same whistle today that you hear at the nine o'clock curfew...

IMMEKUS: Oh, my!

McKINNEY: ...at Liggett and Myers Tobacco Company...they got that steam whistle that was on the Grand Republic.

CORTINOVIS: Yes.

McKINNEY: And that is the one that has been with the...and until today, I think that same whistle is being played. Back in the early days, when I was a child [kid], I used to go on the steamer. Grand Republic, the retail grocers used to pass out tickets for free rides...

IMMEKUS: Oh, I bet that was fun!

McKINNEY: Oh, yes...for free rides...and also you had tickets where you could get soda water, or milk, or coffee.

IMMEKUS: The steamer was a regular entertainment center, then, wasn't it?

McKINNEY: That's right, and then they would go down the river and maybe to Monsanto Springs and then come back from a day's picnic.

CORTINOVIS: Did you ever play on any of these boats, Ed?

McKINNEY: No, never.

CORTINOVIS: All right. Let's take your music...

McKINNEY: But...

CORTINOVIS: ...what were you going to say? I asked you if you had ever played on any of the boats.

McKINNEY: No, now Fate Marable, the first year...I forget now just what...he brought a bunch of New Orleans musicians to St. Louis...

CORTINOVIS: About 1921, I think.

McKINNEY: Exactly, exactly. Now, those musicians from New Orleans had to join the St. Louis colored local here.

CORTINOVIS: Local 44?

McKINNEY: Local 44...they had been playing out of New Orleans before that, but they couldn't join any local down there, because there was only just a white local in New Orleans at that time. So they had to join the St. Louis Local and that's where Louis Armstrong was in that first orchestra that came up here, and so what happened? They played the season and they made pretty good hit. Of course, then Louis Armstrong never played here any other season but that season, because King Oliver came down here just at the end of the summer season and got a hold of Louie Armstrong to take him up to Chicago to play in the Chicago night club up there where he played.

IMMEKUS: What kind of people took these scenic boat rides? Did the upper middle class take them to hear the bands, or was it most of the kids who got these free rides, or who rode the steamers and heard the bands?

McKINNEY: Well, now, the steamer St. Paul and the steamer J.S. also were operating out of St. Louis, and it seems as though the better class was supposed to take the steamer J. S. out and the ordinary folks would go on the steamer St. Paul.

CORTINOVIS: This was all for whites only?

McKINNEY: Whites and colored. Yes, the St. Paul. I had never been on the J.S. at all, but...however, at the end of that season and after that, why, Streckfus hired colored bands for the boats, and when I was recording secretary for Local 44, why, during that time, 1921-1922, when the original Streckfus died, old man John Streckfus...

CORTINOVIS: Captain John.

McKINNEY: Don't get him confused with his daddy. There was a Captain John who was on the steamer J.S. That was John, Jr. And John, Sr. was the original Streckfus. So when the daddy of all those Streckfus brothers and sisters died, why, I wrote a letter to the Streckfus family and came into the local and read it out, and asked if I could get permission from the

local to send that letter of sympathy from the local, and so after that, after the Streckfus family got that letter, that following spring. Captain Joe Streckfus, who was the General Manager of all of the boats, why, he sent out and wanted four colored bands. He wanted to have two bands on the steamer J.S., two bands on the Steamer, St. Paul. On the steamer J.S. that year. Fate Marable had the band in the night time. Norman Mason had the band in the daytime, and the steamer St. Paul...there was Charlie [pronounced] Creath...you might possibly remember him as Charlie Creath because his family called themselves "Creath" but ordinarily during Charlie's activities as a band leader...he was called [pronounced] "Creeth" and he, himself, used to make announcements that the band played, "Music by Creath's Orchestra." He used to call himself that, too, because he was ordinarily Creath. But he was on at night, and Benny Washington had "Six Aces" and played during the daytime.

CORTINOVIS: Was this during the 20's or 30's?

McKINNEY: During the 20's.

CORTINOVIS: Did you know Margie Creath?

McKINNEY: Certainly do.

CORTINOVIS: The piano player?

McKINNEY: You bet I know her.

CORTINOVIS: Do you know the whole family?

McKINNEY: Yes, I knew...I recall in the early days, I played in a school picnic over in East St. Louis under Mr. Blue, William Blue, with his band, and I recall seeing their mother and father both in East St. Louis. That's where they lived. They originally came from Ironton, Missouri...and Charlie...let's see...there's Charlie and Nelson Creath, Gertrude (Black, now),and Margie who is...

CORTINOVIS: She is married to a musician now, too, isn't she?

McKINNEY: I'm telling you...there's a name now...I can't think of it. What's Margie's name now? Singleton?

CORTINOVIS: Zutty Singleton.

McKINNEY: Zutty Singleton.

CORTINOVIS: Ed, tell me, did Margie belong to Local 44?

McKINNEY: Yes, yes!

CORTINOVIS: Did she? Were there any other women belonging to Local 44?

McKINNEY: Yes, yes!

CORTINOVIS: Who else?

McKINNEY: Well, yes, there was Mildred Franklin who has had a dancing school for many years. She was a member of Local 44. And Williams and also a Mrs. Officer, whose husband was in the funeral business in East St. Louis, now Officer Funeral Home. Mrs. Officer was a member. And also Ruth Green who just retired as a St. Louis school teachers here about three years ago. Something like that. She was a member of Local 44, and I recall Banjo Pete, a fellow who played in the band with Ruth...

CORTINOVIS: Was that Pete Patterson?

McKINNEY: Pete kids Ruth now about how they were playing in a band at Bohemia down at the 200 block of Market Street...

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, down by Soulard.

McKINNEY: No...

CORTINOVIS: Was this a Bohemian Club?

McKINNEY: It was a dance hall called, "The Bohemian." And so, Patterson was playing there and Ruth was off...but I don't recall if it was there or somewhere else where the two of them played...but what I'm trying to get to was how Ruth, when she got her call to teach in the public schools, how she cried! (laughter) Oh, how she cried! And so, Pete Patterson kids her now about how she cried back in those days. Pete asked her, "What would you do now?" And she said, "I would cry now if I hadn't taken it." When she retired. ..

(end of Side 1)

CORTINOVIS: ...Do you know if there were any women belonging to Local 2?

McKINNEY: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: Did they? At that time?

McKINNEY: Yes, they did.

CORTINOVIS: Well, you know what I'd really like to do? I would like to go back when you first came back to St. Louis and you started playing with some of these older men. What kind of music did you play and where did you play? Like, for instance, with Mr. Flowers?

McKINNEY: Well, usually street parades with the band and orchestra...let's see. I never played in any orchestra with the musicians at that time until I played with an orchestra which was just supposed to be something of an entertainment...give music to different organizations, you know.

CORTINOVIS: What were the street parades like? What were they for?

McKINNEY: They were for different organizations which would have a funeral or an annual

sermon...Knights of Pythias, the Masons, United Brethren Friendship, all...several of the organizations which were supposed to be secret organizations...they would have their ceremonies at some church, and they would have a band to play for it. Back in the early days when there was going to be a picnic, some of these clubs...these city clubs around here...would hire a band to play in order just to advertise. And we also played in Labor Day parades. I can recall having played Labor Day parades, you know, and I had played with orchestras and bands that, well, would be in the middle part of the parade. It was on the sidelines and people, looking at the parade, I could hear 'em say, "Oh, here's a colored jazz band!" And you'd see 'em; they'd been back resting against the wall, and they'd close in, close into the parade and, of course, we played jazz for marching, too.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, tell us about these funeral parades.

McKINNEY: These funeral parades, we would maybe play "General Sherman's Funeral March." (laughter)

CORTINOVIS: Did you walk after the body? After the deceased?

McKINNEY: We led the parade and the funeral, the hearse and the carriages,...back in those days we had horse-drawn carriages, too, you know...and, of course, later on machines came, you know, and that's when the Cadillac's began to pile in there, you know, and they were going to complain...[I think that's Rusty.]

McKINNEY: Well, anyway, the parades were...

[interruption]

CORTINOVIS: We were wearing him out!

McKINNEY: No, wait, this is what I want to tell you. You were asking about the Creaths. Jeff Leopold came by here once. You know, he comes to my house every once in awhile. He is a St. Louis judge, you know, and he got a picture that I had of Charlie Creath's six-piece orchestra. In it, on piano was Margie, Charlie Creath on trumpet, Rollins and Sammy Long on saxophone, and on drums was Alexander Lewis. He went back to New Orleans, you know, he didn't stay long, and that's when Zutty Singleton came in, because when Alexander Lewis went back to New Orleans, Zutty Singleton came in and, of course, that's where he got familiar not only with the orchestra...

CORTINOVIS: ...but with Margie!

McKINNEY: Yes! Anyway, Jeff Leopold took that picture that I had and he says, "I'm going to fix this up for you." And so he took it and went away. What he did, he came back here and he had a picture that was about 7-8 feet long that he wanted for the St. Louis Jazz Club.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, so that was for their new place, you mean?

McKINNEY: What?

CORTINOVIS: For their new place? You know, they are going to have a place of their own.

McKINNEY: Oh, he did this before they went down there.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, I see.

McKINNEY: When they were still out in the southwest part of the city. Of course that was what he wanted it for...the wall. It was large enough to stretch across the length of that house there, maybe, and he showed it to me. However, now here about three or four years ago, Ruth Green called me up one night and she said that she had somebody she wanted me to see. It was late at night, too, about ten o'clock or after. So I thought it was somebody from Detroit, but when they came, why, who was it but Zutty and Margie from New York! I was just delighted!

CORTINOVIS: My, what a surprise!

IMMEKUS: I bet that was exciting, too!

McKINNEY: Yes, it was! So, anyway, they talked with me until something like one-two o'clock, and after they had gone, why, Elij, Shaw, who lives over in...

CORTINOVIS: Around Cook, isn't it?

McKINNEY: ...yeah, well, he and Banjo Pete was living over there, too; why, they hopped all over me for not calling them over to see Margie and Zutty when they came through.

CORTINOVIS: Well, I know Elij real well.

McKINNEY: Yes, yes, he's well known.

CORTINOVIS: Yes.

McKINNEY: (laughter) Elij gives me trouble for having been instrumental in his studying piano-tuning. I recall back years ago when there was a fellow who was a piano-tuner died, and I said to Elij, "Why don't you take up piano tuning? That's something to go along with your music game." I said, "You musicians have to have something else besides music. Don't you see all these barbers and fellows who are office clerks and carriers. If they are musicians, they can't live off from what they are making in music." And so, Elij took it up. He studied for...oh, he took a course in it, and in about a year's time, he went over to the local hall and practiced up tuning the piano that was over at the Local 44 hall, and so now since...in those days, why, you could get about \$3.00 for tuning a piano, and so Elij said, "Anybody try to get me to tune a piano less than \$12.00," he says, "The only reason I won't charge them \$12.00 is because I have to buy a whole lot of replacements for the piano and then I'll charge them more."

IMMEKUS: Tell me about more of the instruments. You mentioned the banjo and the piano but, certainly, they didn't have the piano and banjo in the marching bands. Did they play in the night clubs and halls with pianos?

McKINNEY: Oh, in the night clubs, sure, yeah, in the night clubs, and there was...I recall the Manhattan Night Club, and it was called 'Chauffeurs' Club." Like years ago...

CORTINOVIS: It was called "The Plantation" later?

McKINNEY: That "Plantation" came along later.

CORTINOVIS: But it was the same building, wasn't it?

McKINNEY: No, no. The "Chauffeurs Club" was on Pine Street and "The Plantation" club was on Vandeventer.

CORTINOVIS: I thought it was the same thing. Was it the same thing later or what?

McKINNEY: I don't know.

DAVID: Ed's the expert here.

McKINNEY: Right'

DAVID: Anybody who works for the post office knows the addresses.'

CORTINOVIS: Well, Rusty, you know, I had just asked Ed to go up chronologically with his music, and he was talking about when he came to town, when he came back from Tuskegee and played with these older men in marching bands. I'm especially interested in the funeral parades.

McKINNEY: Funeral parades?

CORTINOVIS: Do you remember where any of these lodges were? Like the Knights of Pythias, do you remember where that was?

McKINNEY: In the 3300 block on Pine Street, I think.

CORTINOVIS: Okay, so, say one of their members died, and then the bandmaster would call you?

McKINNEY: Well, it would all depend on who had the contract for the parade...to play for it. And they would go to where the body was already laid out...if it happened to be either at a home or the funeral parlor...and they'd get the body out and put it in the hearse and then they'd parade usually. Most of the churches where they went were in the downtown section, and they would parade, most of the time, up Morgan Street, you know, and go up as far as, maybe, Compton or Carondelet Avenue, and then that would be as far as the order would parade with them, and the funeral would go on to the cemetery. Then, we'd have to take the order back to their hall and, of course, we'd play, maybe, "General Sherman's Funeral March" on the parade and then...

CORTINOVIS: On the way out, you mean?

McKINNEY: Yeah, and then when we'd stop, you know, why, they would maybe have a trumpet player play "Reveille" and, then, after the funeral had gone on, then that's when we'd swing around and get into it.

CORTINOVIS: So, what did you play then?

McKINNEY: I was playing the mellophone, then.

CORTINOVIS: I mean, what pieces would be played on the way back?

McKINNEY: Oh, jazz! All the way back to the hall where the Knights of Pythias were...or whichever organization it was that we were playing for.

CORTINOVIS: Did you wear uniforms?

McKINNEY: Oh, yes, yes! Kitten, Mrs. E.A. McKinney get my picture of the band.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, good!

McKINNEY: The one with the uniform on!

CORTINOVIS: Did the members of the order wear uniforms, too?

McKINNEY: Oh, yes, they did.

CORTINOVIS: What cemeteries were the bodies usually taken to?

McKINNEY: Usually, Greenwood, St. Peter's, Washington Park, Father Dixon's Cemetery.

DAVID: I believe that was all Black, wasn't it?

CORTINOVIS: Washington Park is still.

McKINNEY: Washington Park is, but St. Peter's isn't.

DAVID: St. Peter's has a Negro section. At least, that's where Billy Lyons is buried.

McKINNEY: Yes.

DAVID: And Stack Lee is buried in Greenwood.

CORTINOVIS: Is he?

McKINNEY: Yes, and, of course, I might say, that I played in the band when they first started Father Dixon's Cemetery. Father Dixon's Cemetery was...

CORTINOVIS: [looking at picture] Oh, in your band uniform! Oh, this is nice! Oh, what is that? The American Federation of Musicians? Oh, so you had your own uniforms that you

wore to all different things? Oh, I see. Well, that's nice.

McKINNEY: Then if anybody else wanted us to play, you know, without those uniforms...maybe something ordinary...maybe some kind of a Madri Gras affair or something like that, they had to pay for that, you know.

CORTINOVIS: Now, then, what years were these that you are talking about? You came back from Tuskegee to St. Louis about 1901 or 1902...oh, no. 1903 or 1904, is that right?

McKINNEY: 1903. I took the post office examination, and I spent about 49 years, 3 months, and 7 days there.

CORTINOVIS: About!

McKINNEY: (laughter) And, so, I just happened to think about when Channel 4 was out here to interview me about W. C. Handy, you know. I thought that St. Louis...St. Louis, I thought, just isn't on any kind of time at all! As compared with what the other cities Handy had been in...New York, Memphis, and Florence, Alabama where he was born and raised. Now, they've got something there in all those cities...what do we have here? After I was talking to Channel 4, I called David Grant and wanted him to start something...like a statue on the levy, a W.C. Handy one, you know, which he had tried to do back years ago. "Oh," he said, "we've got a Handy Park here now."

CORTINOVIS: You knew W. C. Handy?

McKINNEY: He came to me at my house once, and he said that he wanted me to take him around where there were some colored musicians. He wanted to see some new musicians. And, so, I took him around wherever colored musicians played, and so after awhile, I said, "Mr. Handy, it seems strange to me that you are out here in St. Louis looking for new musicians." He said, "Many musicians that you and I both know are walking the streets in New York." I said, "Can't you get them a job up there?"

DAVID: Hey, Ed, what year was this that you were taking Handy around to see all these musicians? About?

McKINNEY: Let's see...

DAVID: You'll probably tell me exactly anyway! (laughter)

CORTINOVIS: His memory is phenomenal, really!

McKINNEY: I wouldn't pinpoint it.

IMMEKUS: Give us up close.

CORTINOVIS: It was after he became famous?

McKINNEY: Famous?

CORTINOVIS: It was after he became famous?

McKINNEY: By all means, yes!

CORTINOVIS: Well, it must have been in the 30's then?

McKINNEY: He had left Memphis and had an office in New York, and he told me at that time that there was a lady came to see him there in his office up in New York, she came from Hong Kong, and said she just wanted to see that man that wrote "St. Louis Blues."

IMMEKUS: Where did you take him, Ed, when you were going to show him the St. Louis colored musicians?

McKINNEY: I took him to the Chauffeurs' Club and Banjo Pete...I wish he was here now...down there at the...

CORTINOVIS: We're just going to have to talk to Banjo Pete, Pat (laughter)

McKINNEY: The Six Aces were performing at the hotel down there then...the Gateway now...

CORTINOVIS: Oh, the Jefferson?

McKINNEY: No, no.

CORTINOVIS: Isn't that the Gateway?

McKINNEY: No, no.

CORTINOVIS: The Statler?

McKINNEY: No, it wasn't the Statler.

CORTINOVIS: I thought it was. Well, we'll look it up.

McKINNEY: However, when....what Handy said to me...that was the most important. And I watched it for years afterwards. He said, "I'm not looking for new musicians. I'm looking for new ideas." He says, "New York is a clearing house for new ideas, and if you have anything new, you can unload it in New York even if it is just for a season." And after that, I watched everybody who went up to New York, after that, you know, to see how that worked out. Ella Fitzgerald...you know, she had something nobody had ever heard of before.

DAVID: Ed, when he said that he was looking for new ideas, do you mean arrangements for songs?

McKINNEY: Well, anything that he could carry back. Just like years ago, I was awfully interested in NAACP and James Weldon Johnson was here for that for the NAACP, and when James Johnson had his spare time away from organizing, he was Field Secretary for the NAACP at that time...and so, he would go over to Madison, Illinois, Brooklyn,

Illinois...called Lovejoy, too, you know; it's got two names...anyhow, these churches maybe never have a piano or organ and hear them play those plantation melodies...what he would do, he would remember that and put it down, you know. When he got to New York, you know, why, Shaw, he'd get him a copyright on some of them stuff, see?

CORTINOVIS: Let's talk about the music some more, Ed.

MCKINNEY: Okay.

CORTINOVIS: You know, you said when...to get back to these funeral jobs...when...then when you swung around, and the hearse was out of sight, and you'd swing around then and walk the mourners and the lodge members back to the lodge...okay, and you said, "We'd swing into jazz." What did you play then?

McKINNEY: Well, the mourners would go out...

CORTINOVIS: Yes, but the lodge members would go back to the lodge. Well, what would you play then?

McKINNEY: Play anything in ragtime or jazz. Anything...whatever they would call.

CORTINOVIS: And this was before 1910?

McKINNEY: No, no. That jazz...

CORTINOVIS: Ragtime.

McKINNEY: Ragtime back before that.

CORTINOVIS: Were you playing ragtime on brass instruments before 1910, do you think?

McKINNEY: Yes, sure, it was a band, Dink Copperidge's (?) World's Fair Band...that was back during the World's Fair, so you know that must have been around 1904, sometime. They used to play ragtime, you know, coming back from funerals. And we learned that in New Orleans they used to play those street parades at funerals. Maybe it was a funeral for a musician who died, they would have that musician's instrument with them. Somebody walking in front of the band, you know, would have that instrument and they would go to the burial place...they bury above ground, you know, down there, and when the band would march on the sidewalk...that was something that we never knew anything about up here.

CORTINOVIS: You walked in the street?

McKINNEY: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: How many pieces did your band carry?

McKINNEY: They carried maybe ten or twelve.

IMMEKUS: What were the main pieces? What played the main melody? What instrument

had the main melody?

McKINNEY: I can't recall.

McKINNEY: I mentioned "General Sherman's Funeral March"....that's something, you know, you wouldn't play...anytime we'd play a funeral march, we'd play that music in front of us.

CORTINOVIS: On a little stand, right?

McKINNEY: Right.

CORTINOVIS: Did you play John Phillip Sousa's marches?

McKINNEY: Oh, yes, all of them.

CORTINOVIS: I remember Bob [Carter]...! can't remember... he plays with Singleton Palmer now...he talks about playing, "Our Director."

McKINNEY: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: The Sousa march, "Our Director."

McKINNEY: Did Sousa...

CORTINOVIS: Apparently...didn't Sousa compose that? No?

McKINNEY: I don't know.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, well, we'd like to hear about the ragtime, too. What it that you have been talking about the ragtime?

DAVID: Well, let's see, I guess we have been talking a lot about Tom Turpin's Band.

McKINNEY: Yes.

DAVID: And, of course, Tom ties in here because Tom opened the Rose Bud Saloon, and then, of course, his brother has the Booker Washington Theatre.

CORTINOVIS: I thought that was his father?

DAVID: No, that's his brother. (all talking)

McKINNEY: No, his father was Jack Turpin...he was the father of all those Turpins! He started the saloon business, and Tom was the only one that came along behind him in the saloon business. Charlie came along, and he was the man that started the Booker Washington Theater.

DAVID: That was on...what? ...23rd and Market?

CORTINOVIS: Did you ever play at the Booker Washington Theater?

McKINNEY: No, Elij did.

CORTINOVIS: Elij did. Were you ever at the Rose Bud?

McKINNEY: [Yes.]

CORTINOVIS: Who was playing at the Rose Bud when you used to go there?

McKINNEY: Well, whoever happened to come there. It seemed as though down at the Rose Bud, they had a piano in there, and if any pianist came to town, usually he'd hit that Rose Bud Saloon.

CORTINOVIS: Did you ever hear Louis Chauvin?

McKINNEY: Louis Chauvin. [pronounced...Chauv/ann]

CORTINOVIS: Pardon me! (laughter)

McKINNEY: Louis Chauvin...that's French. Yes. I played in the band with Sylvester Chauvin, his brother; Chauvin is a leader now, I think. In fact, I don't know when any of them Lived (?) It was a family with a French name...

CORTINOVIS: Well, the Rose Bud has gotten to be a real famous place. Can you tell us about it, Ed?

McKINNEY: Who?

CORTINOVIS: The Rose Bud. Can you tell us about it, Ed? What did it look like?

McKINNEY: Oh, it was just an ordinary saloon...had a bar and wine room...

CORTINOVIS: For ladies?

McKINNEY: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: What kind of ladies?

McKINNEY: Well, anybody who wanted to go.

CORTINOVIS: "Lady" ladies? (laughter)

McKINNEY: Every lady wouldn't go there!

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, right! (laughter)

DAVID: Do you know who was tending bar? Or did Tom do his own pouring at the bar? At the Rose Bud? Or did you?

McKINNEY: Oh, you did if you wanted to.

DAVID: Yeah, right.

McKINNEY: However, he would always have...let's see...I don't know who...I know one place...when he moved away from the Rose Bud up there on the 2300 block of Market Street...

DAVID: Did he sell the Rose Bud and then move on?

McKINNEY: When he closed the Rose Bud, he and Charlie went out...

DAVID: Oh, that's when they went out west?

CORTINOVIS: Oh, to where?

McKINNEY: Yes, he went out west to Nevada.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, you mean, they left St. Louis? I thought you meant west St. Louis!

DAVID: They went into the mining business.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, good heavens!

McKINNEY: When Tom came back, he wrote "Buffalo Rag"...and that's how he got the way to think of it...seeing those buffalos out there. And so, they tried to get in the mining game, you know, but they didn't make good.

CORTINOVIS: Now, was he a good piano player?

McKINNEY: Yes, he was! He composed "Autumn Rag"...Rusty can tell you more about that than I can because, in fact, Rusty brought a book around in here, you know, and there were...they showed me...

[CORTINOVIS: What did we do with our book?

IMMEKUS: Left it in the car, I guess.]

CORTINOVIS: Well, I've got a picture book, too, and the people that I talk to, like you, I usually ask them if they know anybody; because all the people in the pictures are not identified.

DAVID: I've got one of those on the slides. Maybe you remember the picture of "Hurrah's Forty Club"...Tom had...and there's a picture in there...Ed...taken...it's in the back...now Louis Chauvin is in the picture, but I don't know who the other guys are...I've got it on a slide.

CORTINOVIS: Maybe if Greg would run out and get us our book, we could look at it. Now, let's see, do you remember any of the other piano players who were playing around town? Just about this time? About 1900?

McKINNEY: No, Scott Joplin had gone then to New York. I remember Scott Joplin; in fact,

earlier than that, Scott Joplin composed "Make Believe Rag."

CORTINOVIS: And a lot of other beautiful things, too. I've heard a lot of Dr. Pruett's piano rolls. Did you ever hear of him? Dr. Hubert S. Pruett. He collected piano rolls, and now Trelor Tichenor has his collection. They are just beautiful.

DAVID: He has some of Blind Boone, too...(?)

McKINNEY: Oh, yes, that's right; that's where I saw that mentioned about Blind Boone...in connection with piano rolls.

DAVID: They used to have piano contests.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, the cutting contest.

McKINNEY: Yes. Charlie Thompson used to have piano contests down at the Booker Washington...

CORTINOVIS: How would those go? Would there be two pianos on the stage? Or what...what is a piano contest? What did it look like?

McKINNEY: Well, they had a stage and they put a piano out on the stage, and there was a piano there in the orchestra pit, too, you know. However, most of those piano contests they had were...most of them...they didn't play by music at all. Most of them were "ear" piano players, you know. But, however, Charlie Thompson...

[GREG: The book isn't out there.

CORTINOVIS: Oh? I must have left it at school.]

DAVID: What did they judge the contest on, Ed? How did they decide who won?

McKINNEY: I really don't know.

DAVID: That's always kind of interested me, you know.

McKINNEY: I didn't get around to any of them at all.

DAVID: There are some articles in the Argus.

CORTINOVIS: Are there?

DAVID: Yes, about how they judged them at that time.

CORTINOVIS: You know we have the Argus on microfilm if you ever want to look at it. We have it back to the beginning.

DAVID: Oh, do you?

CORTINOVIS: Yes, a few of the reels are not very clear, but generally speaking. ..

DAVID: I thought only the Missouri Historical Society would have that.

CORTINOVIS: No, we have the Argus from 1915.

IMMEKUS: Tell us, what is the difference between rag, jazz, and blues?

McKINNEY: Well, the way blues started, I think, was back when the people would say...some kind of a mood that a person would get into. "I've got the blues," and of course, I've heard it said that if you got the blues and "I'm as blue as I can be" and, of course, they just started to put it into a song. Now back in the early days, there would be a song with anything that happened...that amounted to very much...at all...would start a song about it. And that's where "Frankie and Johnnie" came in. I saw something that Jeff Leopold had in his jazz club program, or somebody said that "Frankie and Johnnie" dated way back to 1874, or something like that. But I don't think that's there's anything like that that ever happened, because "Frankie & Johnnie"...I knew people who knew Johnnie...

DAVID: Al Britt.

CORTINOVIS: Yes.

McKINNEY: Johnnie was just a nickname and anybody could be him. You could be Johnnie, he could be Johnnie, if somebody didn't know his name, and he'd be Johnnie.

IMMEKUS: I see.

McKINNEY: Yes, so that's how the name Johnnie; in fact, I think it started back during the days when they'd called anybody, a Chinaman, John. Oh, John Chinaman... and maybe that's where it first started. However, anybody could be Johnnie that anybody wanted-to call and didn't know his name, in fact, didn't care whether he had a name or not...

DAVID: Getting back to her question, she asked about the difference between ragtime and jazz. Now, like today, we have in the 50's...we had Elvis Presley...it was Rock and Roll...then, suddenly, they dropped the Roll part and it started to be called Rock.

McKINNEY: That's right.

DAVID: I just wondered how the musicians themselves...when did the term "ragtime" start to fade out...and they started to use jazz when they described their music instead of describing it as ragtime, they began to describe it as "jazz."

McKINNEY: Yes. But it had a...let's see...

DAVID: I always felt that the feel of the music was different. In other words, in the course of playing a job at some night spot, would you play some songs in the style of ragtime and then some numbers jazz?

McKINNEY: Now, ragtime is syncopation with an accent on the after beat. Yes, that's about

the way I could explain ragtime. And jazz is just something that you can play...improvise...say, you could take an operatic number and jazz it up.

DAVID: So, really, then, what you are saying is ragtime is really syncopated rhythm, whereas jazz really talks about what you do with a piece and you improvise around on that melody.

McKINNEY: Yes, that's it.

DAVID: You know, like now when we play a job, someone will come up and say, "Play a Bossa Nova." "Now, I want to hear a Rhumba." "Now, I want to hear an old ballad, an old standard." And I just wondered when you played your jobs, you know, when people come up and say...or, would they request specific numbers like names? Or would they come up and suggest a rhythm? Because when people come up and say, "Play a rhumba, or play a bossa nova, or play a slow piece," they are talking about rhythms. But some people come up and ask for titles. I wondered, did people, you know, like back in the early days, did they come up and ask for titles or rhythms...like "Play ragtime or play jazz?"

McKINNEY: I recall having played two jobs with Sims band and we played...these were school picnics now. We played for the Simmons School Picnic, and they said they wanted concert music. All right, if you want concert music, you have to have...you can't turn loose a ten-piece band on that kind of music. You got to have twenty-pieces, at least. And, of course, we played music from the old masters, you know, where we had rehearsals...

(End of Side 2, Tape #1)

...they wanted jazz at their picnic. [Garnett School]

CORTINOVIS: Now when was this, do you remember?

McKINNEY: That must have been about... They wanted jazz at their picnic.

CORTINOVIS: Now when was this? Do you remember?

McKINNEY: That must have been about...

DAVID: You said that it was shortly after you got back from Tuskegee?

McKINNEY: It was long after that.

DAVID: Oh, it was long after that?

McKINNEY: It must have been after 1919-1920.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, and people were asking for jazz then?

McKINNEY: Yes, so, it must have been in the 20's.

DAVID: Well, you know, the reason I say that Turpin started Jazzland about 1919, 1918 or 1919...it was not too many years before he died.

CORTINOVIS: It was called Jazzland?

DAVID: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: It was a dance hall?

DAVID: Yes.

McKINNEY: Yes.

DAVID: In fact, Ed remembers that.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, did you ever play at Jazzland?

McKINNEY: No, I never did. They only had a five-piece orchestra down there and they...

DAVID: Who did they have in there? When you say "five-piece"...they had a piano...

McKINNEY: Yes, a piano, drums, trumpet...

DAVID: Did they use a banjo, or did they use more rhythm?

McKINNEY: Yes, banjo and when, I recall, Paul Zeigler from New Orleans played a piccolo in there...yes, they had a piccolo...(all talking and laughing)

McKINNEY: Dan Frank, his name was...he played clarinet. After Turpin died...after Turpin sold the place to a Greek by the name of...I really forgot his name...but anyway, they changed the name of the hall to Bohemia.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, that was the Bohemia, see.

McKINNEY: Yes, they changed the name to Bohemia.

CORTINOVIS: Yes.

McKINNEY: And that was when Banjo Pete was playing there then. Well, Pat, we'll just have to talk to Banjo Pete!

IMMEKUS: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: Have you talked to him?

DAVID: No.

CORTINOVIS: [pointing at picture] This is Pete Patterson.

DAVID: Yes, I know.

McKINNEY: Yes, and so that's where Bohemia came in.

DAVID: I thought it was kind of interesting because Tom, you know...when you think of Tom Turpin, you always think of ragtime. He apparently picked out the name of Jazzland for his place.

McKINNEY: I imagine so.

CORTINOVIS: Do you think because it was new? I mean, it was really beginning to be the "in" thing? Jazz, then?

McKINNEY: Jazz was just coming in.

DAVID: Did Tom play much in his own place, Jazzland?

McKINNEY: No.

DAVID: Because he was really a ragtime piano player.

McKINNEY: Yes, because I remember hearing John Earl who was a piano player and some of the fellows said, "John Earl, don't play it that way. Mr. Turpin doesn't want that." So, Young John Earl said, "You tell that big old so-and-so to come up here and sit down on this piano stool and play it the way he wants it!"

CORTINOVIS: Do you think that he was playing "old-fashioned" which meant ragtime, then, huh?

McKINNEY: I don't recall just what it was, anyway...but I do recall John Arnold criticizing Tom Turpin. And John Arnold was a good pianist, and he was a fellow...I don't know how he could do it, you know, and play piano without stopping. Like, you know, you see the articles that came out about this fellow...what's his name? Red....what's his name?

CORTINOVIS: Oh, Red Ferryman.

McKINNEY: Yes, Red Ferryman, and how he played like these dance marathons...yeah, and John Arnold...you see, the reason for it was they...you had to pay in Jazzland...you had to pay to dance. They'd sell you a roll of tickets...

CORTINOVIS: Oh, that kind of a dance hall?

McKINNEY: Yes, they'd sell you a roll of tickets...

CORTINOVIS: Did you ever hear of a ticket dance, Pat? If you'd buy a roll of tickets, and then you could get a hostess to dance with you, and then when she danced with you through one dance, you gave her a ticket. And then at the end of the evening, according to the number of dances that she had taken part in, or danced with partners, she got a percentage of the tickets. She didn't get all the money, but she got a percentage of the tickets.

McKINNEY: Yes, they didn't charge very much at all for admission. The admission was. ..

CORTINOVIS: Usually ten cents, wasn't it? Wasn't it usually ten cents, or did it start out to be a nickel?

McKINNEY: I don't recall.

CORTINOVIS: You know, there's an old song, "Ten Cents a Dance."

DAVID: Were they run like the gangland things?

CORTINOVIS: I think later they got very much associated with gangland operations in Chicago. I'm not sure that they ever were here.

DAVID: I know that Torn was a pretty tough customer.

McKINNEY: Oh, yes.

CORTINOVIS: He was a big man, wasn't he?

McKINNEY: Oh, plenty big...

DAVID: I told Ed that he shot and killed Abe Keeler in a bar room brawl in his father's saloon. Not many people know that, but he got...he didn't go to prison for it though. I don't think Ed knew. I think that was a little before your time.

McKINNEY: Yes.

DAVID: Tom was a pretty tough customer.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, I've read that he is. Ed, there is one other thing that I want to ask you before you get too tired. Except for being born in Texas, have you lived your life in St. Louis?

McKINNEY: Yes, always. You see, I've never lived anywhere else.

CORTINOVIS: Didn't you?

McKINNEY: I went away to school.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, but not other than that?

McKINNEY: No.

CORTINOVIS: So, you see, I've been interested in the question of where jazz originated, and I have usually tried to ask musicians that I interview, do they have any contact with New Orleans where jazz is supposed to have started. Do you remember whenever you first heard people talk about jazz as that word, or that kind of music?

McKINNEY: Well, the first place that I heard it...I heard it on the steamer "Sydney," and there was a musician who was the leader of that orchestra there, and his name was...he was

from...

CORTINOVIS: Wasn't that Fate Marable on the "Sydney?"

DAVID: Or was that on the "St. Paul?"

CORTINOVIS: He was on the "St. Paul," but I think that he was on the "Sydney" first.

McKINNEY: Well, now, the "Sydney" played out of New Orleans...

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, and that's where Fate...

McKINNEY: ...and the reason why being there, it was on its way up to St. Paul, Minnesota.

CORTINOVIS: It was a Streckfus steamer, and I believe that's the first boat that Fate Marable played on...the "Sydney." I could be wrong. I might...But that's the first time you ever heard the word jazz or heard it played?

McKINNEY: And the dancers that all came on that boat excursion had been used to...going to Orpheus Dancing Academy...where they played different kinds of music altogether. They played music from the European style and they played not only...well, they had several different kinds of dance music that they had.

CORTINOVIS: Sweet music, though, really. For dancing.

McKINNEY: Yes, it was, and they criticized those who went there if they wanted to dance a dance that was a "square dance" kind. There was nothing but just plain "one-step." and that's about all.

CORTINOVIS: What was your favorite kind of music to play?

McKINNEY: I liked music from the old masters, and I liked jazz, too, but getting back to these school picnics. That school picnic for the Garnett School which was in North St. Louis. They told Sims that they wanted jazz music played at their picnic. And so, we just carried a ten-piece band there, and had played from their school up to O'Fallen Park there, and played for them to dance, you know, jazz music. And when we played for them, we just...we didn't have to have any rehearsals at all. But what they said, after we got through playing for that picnic, they said, "We had a band! Simmons School never had no kind of band." They were the same musicians that played both places, but there weren't as many of them. And so, we just laughed about it, you know. They would come up to the bandstand where we were and they'd tell us how good we were, you know, and Simmons had never had any kind of band.

CORTINOVIS: You got any more questions. Pat?

IMMEKUS: Yes Ed, you said that the steamers came up from New Orleans and that's where you first heard about jazz. But you also told us that King Oliver came here to get Louie Armstrong. How much influence did the big names have...like Louis Armstrong...King Oliver...those kind of people...have on the kind of music that you played? How did they influence you? Did you hear them play and you tried to play like them?

McKINNEY: Yes.

IMMEKUS: Did you hear King Oliver and Louie Armstrong play? That...the big name men that recorded...did you hear them?

McKINNEY: Well, now...

DAVID: Go ahead.

McKINNEY: Well, I'll tell you. I thought Charlie Creath was a better musician than Louie Armstrong.

IMMEKUS: Why?

CORTINOVIS: Well, I'll bet when they started out, there wasn't much doubt.

IMMEKUS: Why?

McKINNEY: Well, that's right...that is just what I tell 'em! I have seen Charlie Creath down here at the Coliseum when they'd have Fletcher Henderson from New York at the Coliseum and Fletcher Henderson had, oh, he had a large outfit! And Charlie Creath was there, the whole orchestra...just had a six-piece orchestra...he'd get up there behind Fletcher Henderson and he brought down the house! Yes, that's just what people thought of St. Louis musicians...that's the only way I can explain it.

CORTINOVIS: Well, we're just going to tire you out, I think.

IMMEKUS: Yes.

McKINNEY: Well, anyway, Louie Armstrong, oh, he could do gymnastics on his instrument. Oh, and if you see that same stuff on paper, it would scare him to death. He didn't...when he first came up here...he didn't play music at all..or he didn't read music at all. You know, Norman Mason who died here just a...

CORTINOVIS: A wonderful saxophone player.

McKINNEY: He used to take...when he was on the river...he used to take Louie Armstrong during intermission into one of those rooms and teach him to read music. He taught Louie Armstrong. And I've seen books, you know, different breaks, you know. Louie Armstrong...what he had published...if he had seen any of that back in the early days, why, he...

IMMEKUS: He would have laughed, wouldn't he?

CORTINOVIS: Now, Ed, I know that you read music. Did most of the men who you played with read music?

McKINNEY: Yes, yes. You couldn't get into the union unless you could read.

IMMEKUS: One more little question. You went to Tuskegee, and you were introduced to music there, but what about the rest of the St. Louis musicians? Where did they get their instruments, and where did they get introduced to music?

McKINNEY: Who?

IMMEKUS: The musicians that you played with?

McKINNEY: Oh, they would drop in here from different other parts...and then they...now, P.B. Langford...there was an old man...the Langford family. P. B. Langford came in here from down in southeast Missouri back in the early days. And he taught more bands...

CORTINOVIS: Yes.

McKINNEY: ...he'd taught more bands than anybody in the State of Missouri!

CORTINOVIS: Didn't he have the Knights of Pythias Band?

McKINNEY: Blue. William Blue taught the Knights of Pythias.

CORTINOVIS: Where did Mr. Langford teach?

McKINNEY: The Odd Fellows.

CORTINOVIS: Odd Fellows, oh, I see.

McKINNEY: And then he taught the AUK & D of A Bands, and a band from down in Carondelet...he taught them...that's where Johnny White came along...Johnny White, in later years, has been pretty well up with the music game, and as a band leader...

CORTINOVIS: The only other thing, I think, that I wanted to ask you...you mentioned Scott Joplin. Did you know him?

McKINNEY: I didn't know him personally, but I happened to be one place where Scott Joplin came in and played the piano.

CORTINOVIS: You heard him play, huh?

McKINNEY: ...and there was a fellow that I worked with, his wife took lessons from Scott Joplin when he was living here, and Joplin lived on Morgan Street, and on Lucas Avenue, also.

CORTINOVIS: Well, let's just finish up with hearing some more about your life, Ed. You came back from Tuskegee, and you were then only about...what? Eighteen years old?

McKINNEY: Well, I was eighteen years old when I took the post office examination.

CORTINOVIS: I see.

McKINNEY: I went into the post office when I was nineteen, and that was in October, 1904.

CORTINOVIS: 1904. And you worked there until 1953, then, huh?

McKINNEY: 1953 was when I retired.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, and when did you marry?

McKINNEY: I married in '24.

CORTINOVIS: Did you have any children?

McKINNEY: [talking to his wife] When were we married, Kitty?

MRS. McKINNEY: 1924, October.

CORTINOVIS: You both look so young! I can't get over it! And did you have any children?

McKINNEY: No children.

CORTINOVIS: Well, maybe, that's why you look so good! (laughter) Kids can be a real pain!

McKINNEY: Yeah, well, just here in '24 on the anniversary...on the 49th year of our marriage anniversary, we were sitting in St. Anne's Church and Sister Geraldine came by, kneeling, you know, and I told her that this was our 49th anniversary...wedding anniversary...and so she went up to the altar there and told the Father about it, you know, and he announced it from the altar, and people started clapping!

CORTINOVIS: Oh, sure!

McKINNEY: I never heard them clap before in church!

CORTINOVIS: Well, that's a real accomplishment!

McKINNEY: The next few days or so, why. Sister Geraldine brought that candle (?) down here...

CORTINOVIS: That's nice.

McKINNEY: ...a gift from her and another nun up there...she's a musician, too...Sister Angela...she's a guitar-player and also she's a Spanish teacher out at St. Louis U.

CORTINOVIS: Do you ever play anymore at all?

McKINNEY: No, no. I haven't played for...I got a gold-plated membership card that whenever I go anywhere I take that along with me. I was given honorary membership back in 1941.'

CORTINOVIS: Now, you played the mellophone. What other instruments did you play?

McKINNEY: I played the trombone, I played the bass, and I played the trumpet and I played drums, I played...I first started off on cymbals...

CORTINOVIS: That's the easiest!

McKINNEY: When I wanted to go in the band at Tuskegee why that's what the bandmaster gave me...those cymbals... and after that, that was when he started me on those brass instruments.

CORTINOVIS: At Tuskegee, did you live in the dormitory?

McKINNEY: Oh, yes.

CORTINOVIS: Did you work? At Tuskegee?

McKINNEY: Well, there was one-day week...?

CORTINOVIS: For everybody?

McKINNEY: For day students, and every other Saturday.

CORTINOVIS: Then your mother paid your tuition?

McKINNEY: That's right.

CORTINOVIS: And she used to send you spending money?

McKINNEY: Well, spending money...now...that was...maybe what she would do...maybe send me a box of a whole lot of food and maybe a chicken or turkey, and I used to call all the rest of the guys together and we'd have a ball!

CORTINOVIS: So, you didn't have any spending money, really?

McKINNEY: Hardly...no. I used to have some spending money that she would send.

CORTINOVIS: I'm going to turn this off now, Ed. I just can't thank you enough. It's just been so much fun! I've just loved it!

(End of tape)

Helen E. Wehrspann
Final Copy: 4/2/74