

**ORAL HISTORY T-0325**  
**INTERVIEW WITH "PETE" JOSEPH PATTERSON**  
**INTERVIEW BY PAT IMMEKUS**  
**JAZZMEN PROJECT**  
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IMMEKUS: You've been here...how many years did we figure out?

PATTERSON: In August, I'll be here 51 years, and I won't be 79 until the fourth of next month...I'll just give 78, then.

IMMEKUS: Okay. Were you born in St. Louis? I assume not.

PATTERSON: No, Washington, D.C.

IMMEKUS: Did your parents live...were your parents living? Did you live with your parents when you were young?

PATTERSON: Well, up until they died. You know what I mean. They both passed when I was a youngster.

IMMEKUS: Oh, then who did you live with?

PATTERSON: Huh?

IMMEKUS: Then, who did you live with after your parents died?

PATTERSON: With different people. Kind of batted around like, you know. one of them kinds of things.

IMMEKUS: Were your parents slaves?

PATTERSON: No, no.

IMMEKUS: I guess they couldn't have been if they were in the north.

PATTERSON: Well, I don't know. They had them up there, too.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, that's true. Do you know anything about any of your ancestors?

PATTERSON: Well, yeah, my father died in 1911. I was trying to think how old I was. I was 16 years old when he passed.

IMMEKUS: I don't know if I can count back that far. We'll take your word for it. How was it

that you came to St. Louis?

PATTERSON: Well, I went with a show. A minstrel show.

IMMEKUS: A minstrel?

PATTERSON: Yeah. At that particular time, I was playing tuba and guitar.

IMMEKUS: Did you come down by steamer?

PATTERSON: No, I didn't quit the show here. I quit the show in Durham, North Carolina.

IMMEKUS: Oh, then, how did you come to come farther south?

PATTERSON: Well, when I quit the show and got that far with them, and they were going to Florida and down around there, Georgia, you know, and I quit the show in Durham, North Carolina. And then a friend of mine went to Helena, Arkansas, to visit his mother, and while he was out there, he decided to get a band up out there and hoped for me to come out there. In the meantime, instead of going back to Winston, Delaware... that's where I used to live...I went to Philadelphia. I was going to work in Wannamakers Store...just like Famous-Barr Store here, and they had a fifty-piece band at that time.

IMMEKUS: Wow! That was pretty big for that time, wasn't it?

PATTERSON: And so instead of that, this boy sent for me to come out to Helena, Arkansas. When I got out to Helena, he was dragging, and he wasn't getting anything done. I must have been jinxed all my life, because it looked like the bottom fell out. So, I stayed around Helena. Finally, this friend of mine and I decided to go to Chicago. Instead of going to Chicago, we had to come through St. Louis, and we stopped at St. Louis. I started playing...well, I was here just about a month, and I finally got permission to play my first job at Eagles Hall at Jefferson and Lafayette, and I had to get permission to play from Old Man McKinney...where you all was down the other day. He was the recording secretary at that time. And he said, "I'll let you play this job providing that you take part of that money (which was \$9.00 for four hours...which was a lot of money back in them days) and pay on your initiation fee into the union." And I said, "Well, I will." And so I made \$9.00 and kept \$5.00 for myself and paid \$4.00 to the union. When I went over to his house to pay the money...which was downtown at that time...he said, "Well, I'm going to give you a list of all the orchestra leaders around here and see what you can run into"...so, he gave me a list of the different bands. In the meantime, one of the fellas he sent me to was getting a band up to go into a place down on Market Street we used to call, "The Bohemian." It was a jazz land that closed up and stayed closed for about a month or so.

IMMEKUS: What year is this?

PATTERSON: That was in 1923. And so, this first fella's house that I went to he was supposed to get a boy, a youngster, playing saxophone, but him being so young, his dad wouldn't let him go...this place was kind of rough. And I was glad he didn't. I went down there scared to death, because I didn't know nobody. I was a stranger here and he said, "Well, we'll try you out and see if we like your banjo playing...then, we'll hire you." And so I went

on down there, and it looked like you could hear my heart beat, as scared as I was, and so I played and they all started looking at each other, and I didn't know what to say. "Man, where did you find this fella? This fella really can play that banjo." It kind of made me stick my chest out. You see what I mean? I did that and so when we got through playing, there was a fella named John Lapas, a Greek, and Billy Moore, and they'd been partners together opening this place up. They liked the band very well, and said they were going to start you all off at \$31.00 a week...which was a whole lot of money back in them days. So, I said, "Well, they started me off." In the meantime, we stayed down there about ten months, and when they let us off, I went with Charlie Creath's band. Charlie Creath.

IMMEKUS: Yeah.

PATTERSON: A lot of people call it "Creth," but I say, "C-r-e-a-t-h," I would pronounce it as "Creeth," wouldn't you?

IMMEKUS: I don't know. I wouldn't quarrel over it. It could be, really, either. I don't know.

PATTERSON: Generally, the white people pronounce it as "Creeth," but some people pronounce it as "Creth." But I said, "Creeth," Charlie Creath. I stayed with him about a couple of years. I quit his band and went with Benny Washington's Six Aces. I stayed with Benny about four or five years. A couple of those years, I stayed with Charlie, I played about six weeks on the Steamer J.S.

IMMEKUS: Lots of people seemed to have played on that. It must have been a popular one.

PATTERSON: After I got out of Charlie's band, I went with Benny Washington's Six Aces, and we started broadcasting down at KMOX which was down at the Mayfair Hotel at that time. A fella named Gene Roedebeck had a band down there at night. We were broadcasting for J.V. Evans Coffee Company, which is Old Judge now. And Streckfus heard our band on the boat...they had a radio on there then and hired us on the Steamer St. Paul. I was on that for five seasons.

IMMEKUS: Wait. Go back for a minute and tell me...the Steamer, J.S. was the one you played with Charlie Creath?

PATTERSON: Right. That was around 1924.

IMMEKUS: And at that time was there broadcasting?

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, there was broadcasting. But 1926 was when we went down to KMOX.

IMMEKUS: Oh, I see.

PATTERSON: And Streckfus heard us on the boat...on the St. Paul. See, most times when they'd hire a band, they would go around and have auditions with different bands on the job. He said he didn't have the bands come down to play before him, because if they play on a job, then they're going to try to put all they had in it. But by him hearing us on the radio...that's how we got the job on the boat. I was on the boat '26, '27, '28 with Benny Washington. And

then in '29 and '30, I was on there with Dewey Jackson. After that, we left, and we went to Castle Ballroom. Castle Ballroom. With Dewey. For two years down there. Then...left there and went down to Sauter's Park...which used to be Down's Park...at 8616 Broadway. I went with that band, and then I went with some other bands...Cecil Scott, Len Bowden, and so many different combos and things, you know.

IMMEKUS: I want you to go back for a minute and tell me a little more about the minstrel shows.

PATTERSON: Well, that was in 1922. A friend of mine and I used to play together on the guitar and mandolin, and so he went with this show, and he had to come back to Wilmington, Delaware, for something, and he asked me if I would go with him. I said, "Yeah." Oh, I know what it was. The railroad strike caught him back there, and they had to jump in and out of them cities to keep from being caught in them little towns down there. So, I went with the minstrel show playing the tuba and then we had a little musical act on the stage with the guitar, too.

IMMEKUS: How could you play a tuba in a minstrel show? Weren't they traveling shows?

PATTERSON: Yeah, we traveled.

IMMEKUS: You carried your big tuba?

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah...yeah.

IMMEKUS: You're awful little to be carrying a big tuba around like that all the time.

PATTERSON: It's the hardest horn in the world to play, because it's got such a big bow and such a big mouth-piece and you get more air. Now, a trumpet is hard to play because of the little mouth-piece, and you've got to squeeze...your lip up there...you know. But with a tuba, you live the "life of Riley." A lot of people said, "Can that big horn."

IMMEKUS: Boy, you've got to be windy to play a tuba, don't you?

PATTERSON: No, it don't take that much wind. You can live a life of ease on a tuba. A trumpet is something you got to put your lip...I mean, you got to blow on the trumpet. So, I stayed with the minstrel show and then we came on back to...I quit the show, as I told you, and went back to Helena, Arkansas. After we left Helena, we came to St. Louis, as I told you, going to Chicago. So, finally, this friend of mine...about two years after we got here...he did go to Chicago. But I stayed and got to playing with them different bands...well, I already had found Chicago...'cause that's what I was looking for in Chicago...if I'd have gone. And I've been here ever since, as I said. Fifty-one years. I played with Dewey, as I said, Charlie Creath, Benny Washington, Eddie Randle. I've got some of those pictures in there if you care to look at them.

IMMEKUS: Yeah. Sure, we'd love to. (At this point, "Pete" Patterson plays a banjo solo.)

IMMEKUS: That sounds really good! Wow! You've still got the old touch, don't you? ("Pete" picks up on the solo again.)

IMMEKUS: Wow! That was really good. We really enjoyed that!

PATTERSON: The year before last, I played on the Admiral, and I play before country clubs.

IMMEKUS: Oh, I didn't know you were still so active...still playing.

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, I still have my life-time membership in the Musicians Local.

IMMEKUS: Heavens! That's tremendous. Well, tell me, where did you learn to play?

PATTERSON: Well, I started up in Wilmington, Delaware, and then when I got to St. Louis, a fellow by the name of Washington...used to live on Easton Avenue, in the 5000 block...right in front of the center there... years ago used to be the Sherman Center. He was a big German fella, and he wasn't particular about chasing the colored, but a friend of mind and I went up there, and he played so much banjo...he had a great big stomach...and I stopped to tell him to just go and keep it. That's right. I took it from him and that was it.

IMMEKUS: I see. Do you know how to read music?

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah.

IMMEKUS: Tell me. What kind of music were you playing back then? In the minstrel shows?

PATTERSON: The same old pieces. "Won't you come home, Bill Bailey?" all them pieces...back then, you know..."Alexander's Ragtime Band," and "Dark Town Strutter's Ball." All them old pieces. Some of them you hear now. They were new back then to us. Then, of course, I got with some of those other bands around here. I was playing regular Dixieland..."Clarinet Momma" and "Found a New Baby," all them different numbers like that. That was our "Rock and Roll" of that day. So, that's why I don't criticize these youngsters today, because they're going through their era just like we went through ours.

IMMEKUS: Back then, they probably thought you were pretty bad, too, didn't they?

PATTERSON: What are you talking about? If you can't lick 'em, join 'em! So, I joined in with them.

IMMEKUS: Was there any difference between the music you played back with the minstrels and the music you played when you came...you said, to the Eagles Hall and the Bohemia. Was that a different style?

PATTERSON: Well, not too much...not too much. New places would come out but not...you know what I mean? See, I'll tell you one thing, though, back in them days...you see, now, records has got the day. People back in them days...well, they had records, too, back in them days, but people, I don't know, just seems like they cut more with music of that day...of the late numbers. Like, we used to broadcast from the Castle Ballroom. That's how they'd do it. Now, last time, we'd have our program made up to go on the air. Back in them days, they called them "song pluggers," come up there...a little group...their band, and they'd come up

there and say, "Dewey, would you mind putting this number on the air for me?" The guy would be nervous 'cause, see, there's no turning back. Once you've caught a hog, he's going over here. I liked that, because he would really make you watch your music. He'd come out and pass the music on around and Dewey would stop off. Ordinarily, if we'd have rehearsal, why, somebody would cut it off, because they knew we would go back over the piece again. And Dewey said, "Why, this is better than having rehearsal." Because he was going to make you watch it.

IMMEKUS: So this came in...the broadcasting really comes in around '24 or '25?

PATTERSON: Yeah, that's right. Around '26, I told you I was down at KMOX, down at the Mayfair Hotel. I don't know if you know where the Mayfair Hotel is...

IMMEKUS: Yeah.

PATTERSON: Well, since you're so young, I didn't know whether...Well, anyway, that's where we broadcasted. We broadcasted from down there, and there's a lot of people today don't know that Stix downtown had a broadcasting station down there.

IMMEKUS: No, I didn't know that.

PATTERSON: WCKY broadcasted from there...I think it was in '24, and the pieces that they had...I mean, you make up your list to go down to broadcast and there's a restriction...what do you call it? The composers, you know I can't think of what it is now. But, anyway, they had a restriction on so many numbers that you wouldn't hardly have a chance to broadcast.

IMMEKUS: Censorship?

PATTERSON: Yeah, you couldn't put them on the air. I was talking to a lady down there...kind of an old, white lady...and I asked her, I said, "There's so many people I ask down there, naturally they would know, you know." She said, "Sure, I remember when you used to broadcast from down there." In my scrapbook in there, I have a paper in there from when I used to broadcast from Stix when the station was down there. And also there's a church just right down here on Kingshighway...when the white people used to have that church, and when they used to broadcast from that church down there. The card and everything on this little piece of scrap paper I have in there.

IMMEKUS: When you played in the ballrooms and things, what kinds of audiences were you playing for? Were they mostly white people or colored people?

PATTERSON: White and colored. Well, they weren't mixed back in them days, just like...they had us come up to Hillsboro and around there. At that time, they were broadcasting and they never did state whether they were white or colored. And they wanted us to come over there so they could show us a good time, and they thought we were white. They shouldn't have treated us any better if we had been white. So, we got up there, and we played for the Moose, all the Moose. [Order of Moose] When we got up there, they looked at us like they got a good deal or something. But they said we played for the pay. The funny thing was that night after 12 o'clock...well, after 12 o'clock was the first of April. We were standing there just playing up a storm, and all of a sudden, it stopped. The drummer and somebody

else got in an argument. "If you don't like it..." and everybody was looking, "come outside. Let's fight it out." Then, finally, they hollered, "April Fool's!"

IMMEKUS: Oh, no!

PATTERSON: We had more fun.

IMMEKUS: That sounds like a good time! That sounds like fun.

PATTERSON: Yeah, that's right. And then they carried us, after we went up there for the early part of the evening to have a good time and after dancing was over, they carried us back up there, and so that's all I know. ["Carried" meaning transported here.] I don't know what time they brought me up, but I know I was about gone. Out on "The Hill", the Italians out there, they were my friends. I talk to some of those fellas down at Union and Market now about it, and they're all interested, all enthused about where we used to play. All I've got to do is mention Charlie Creath. If you wanted to get a good workman back in them days, I remember we used to play at West Lake Park. They had six bands... no, five bands, out there and this fella, I know you all have heard of Fritz Bierbach, and I was reading something in the paper the other day. I think I have something in my scrapbook, too, about it. And our business manager, the white fella. Local 2, they're consolidated now...merged in '71.

IMMEKUS: Just recently. It hasn't been long.

PATTERSON: No, it's been about four or five years ago. I was talking to the business agent of the white local...that's the guy...he's got a picture of the band...he was out there that night, too, when they had five bands out there...and we left from there, and that's where I met Frankie Trombone and we left from there and went out on the Hill. We set a ten-piece band up in the house. Now, you know how big a ten-piece band is. It was about two or three o'clock in the morning. We looked here and there and a light came on, light come on, light come on, and we looked at some colored police who were standing there and made up some sandwiches. And another place I don't know when they brought me out. I was drinking Italian wine, and you know what happens. I was trying to drink then at that time, and I cut it way back later. It wouldn't take over two to knock me out. I'm so glad it did, because as I got older, you know, some fellas that were learning how to drink back then...well, I tried to learn how, because I wanted to keep up with the Joneses. Everybody else was drinking. Some of the same fellas back there learning how to drink is in their grave from drinking...through drinking...and I'm still here.

IMMEKUS: We gave that up a long time ago. We can hold about one each. We're out of it.

PATTERSON: I remember I got so I'd take a drink or two, and it would make me sick. I thought, "You're a fool if you try." The same thing about eating a lot of food. If you sit down to something you don't like, you don't eat it.

IMMEKUS: Right.

PATTERSON: And, then, medicine...well, medicine is different. No matter how bad it tastes, you know it's got to cure you, so you take it. I'd burn myself up sweating and looking funny

out the eyes, stomach all stirred up. I said, "Shoot, I'll just cut that out!"

IMMEKUS: Tell me, you played on the Hill, but what year was that?

PATTERSON: Huh?

IMMEKUS: What year were you playing out on the Hill?

PATTERSON: Oh, 1924 and '25.

IMMEKUS: Well, tell me, what...you said there were ten pieces. What kinds of pieces were there?

PATTERSON: The Charlie Creath band?

IMMEKUS: Yeah.

PATTERSON: Oh, goodness sakes, I can hardly remember who was in the band. I know there was a trombone...

IMMEKUS: Who carried the lead? Do you know that?

PATTERSON: How's that?

IMMEKUS: Did the trumpet lead?

PATTERSON: Yes.

IMMEKUS: Did the trumpet always carry the melody?

PATTERSON: Yeah, the trumpet, and we had Charlie Creath as the leader and a fella by the name of Bob Shaftner played second trumpet. He should have been playing first.

IMMEKUS: Was there a clarinet?

PATTERSON: Huh?

IMMEKUS: Oh, I'm sorry...go ahead.

PATTERSON: What did you say?

IMMEKUS: I said, was there a clarinet?

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, yeah. A fella by the name of Art Hughbanks. He's been there. He played clarinet and Willie Rawlings and Sammy Long, they played alto and tenor. One played alto and one played tenor. Willie Lewis was on the drums, and Charlie's sister, I mean Charlie's wife, played a (can't understand) for a while and then his sister played. I guess you all never did hear or read about a drummer by the name of Zutty Singleton.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, sure.

PATTERSON: Did you? He had a stroke, you know.

IMMEKUS: Oh, did he? No, I didn't know that.

PATTERSON: Yeah, he's up in New York now, because when his brother, Ned, died at that time they were on their way to England opening with some band in England, he couldn't. But since then, he's had a stroke. Well, Zutty was playing drums with us at that time.

IMMEKUS: What part did the clarinet take? Did the clarinet play a high counter-melody?

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

IMMEKUS: It wasn't a strict harmony, though, was it?

PATTERSON: What now?

IMMEKUS: Did the clarinet play, not a harmony, but sort of a counter-melody?

PATTERSON: That's right... in and out.

IMMEKUS: At this time now, were you playing jazz music? Was this considered jazz?

PATTERSON: Well, yeah, that's what it was.

IMMEKUS: Well, tell me...I know this is a stickler of a question...but what is jazz?

PATTERSON: Well, I'll tell you the truth. I just go along with the program. They say "jazz" and I join in with them.

IMMEKUS: Did you improvise, then? Were you improvising?

PATTERSON: Yeah.

IMMEKUS: You weren't reading from music at that time, I gather?

PATTERSON: Well, sometimes you would and sometimes you wouldn't. See, 'cause lots of times we'd go to rehearsal with Charlie, and he's having...we're setting our racks up, and he says, "To devil with rehearsal! Let's shoot some crap." At that time, when you said, "Crap!" you were right up my alley. I'd be the first one on my knees and the first one to get up. That's the truth. I wouldn't tell you no lie. One of those deals, you know. We did pretty good back then. We had...playing with Dewey, Streckfus had a guy by the name of Bob Sylvester come up and rehearse the band...white fella to rehearse the band a while. For about a month. He was a saxophone player and, man, he was hard on saxophone players, too. Back in them days, he had an alto clarinet and a saxophone and he would have us play out an arrangement on "Rhapsody in Blue" and different things, and he was a...some of the guys would cut a hog

or something like that. And he'd grab their instrument out of their hands. He was a fanatic. As soon as you'd say, "Rehearsal," he's like a maniac. When he said, "Time out," why, you wouldn't want to meet a better fella.

IMMEKUS: Now, did you get to improvise at that time, or was it strictly playing from written music?

PATTERSON: Well, it was strictly...well, yeah, we'd be improvising, too, because this Bob Sylvester I was telling you about, he was a real demon on arrangements. Sometimes he'd have them guys hopping up trying to do something. He had some arrangements...I'm telling you the truth...we all just about blew it just trying to get out the introduction sometimes.

IMMEKUS: Back in the minstrel shows, now, how does that music differ?

PATTERSON: There's some drunk people there! I can tell you what that would be like.

IMMEKUS: What kind of people came out to hear you at the minstrels?

PATTERSON: Well, down through Kentucky...down in Appalachia...

IMMEKUS: Yeah, Appalachian Mountains.

PATTERSON: Yeah, that's where he played...down through there...and made a fortune down there. That type of people, and you couldn't tell when we had parades whether...they'd come out and hide on us, and we couldn't tell whether it was white or colored, because they used to come out of the coal mines all full of coal.

IMMEKUS: Oh, yeah...everybody was black, then, huh?

PATTERSON: Yeah, yeah, there wasn't no comedian either. We used to go down through Logan, West Virginia...Charleston, Huntington, Wellston. They called some names off from West Virginia the other day, and I told my wife, I said, "Well, I've been all through them towns down through there." Wheeling and...you name it...Bluefield, West Virginia.

IMMEKUS: Did you ever make it as far as New Orleans?

PATTERSON: No, I never did. I had an opportunity to go to New Orleans. To tell you the truth, at the time I had a chance to go, I was playing with an organized band. We had a treasurer and different little things...put money in the bank and during the time of Lent when everything would fall off, we always had the treasurer there, and he'd come out and bring us \$50.00 a piece, and when we'd go back on the boat, we'd put that money back, you know. I never did get a chance to go to New Orleans, but I was making more money here than I could have there.

IMMEKUS: Tell me a little more about Chicago. How's Chicago's music? Or what did you do there different?

PATTERSON: Well, I never played in Chicago.

IMMEKUS: Oh, you didn't?

PATTERSON: No, I had a chance to. We went up there in '26, and I had a chance to go with King Oliver's band. At that time, they were playing at the Plantation and Louis Armstrong was with them. But as far as Art Hughbanks...he tried to get me to stay up there with the band. At that time they was making \$45.00 a week which was a whole lot of money back then, too. When we was playing on the boat, we made \$50.00. On the St. Paul, we made \$56.00 a week. But the thing about it is, we were making \$10 and \$12.00 a night for four hours for "giggin"...what we called "giggin" back in them days...and we was making more money there than if I went up to Chicago. So, I come on back to St. Louis for the band like I should have. I wouldn't have quit them, but he wanted to come back up here. I'm glad I didn't, though, because I know so many people who've been there all these many years and got an application in an old folks' home.

IMMEKUS: Didn't the steamers...when you played on the steamers, didn't they go from Chicago to New Orleans?

PATTERSON: Well, yeah. At that time I'm talking about, they had four boats. They had the J.S. and the St. Paul that stayed here, and they had another boat...two more boats...the Capitol and the Washington. Now, the Capitol used to go to New Orleans...just like they have a boat down there now called the President...they built that before they built the Admiral...and the President is still down there, but I never did go down to New Orleans.

IMMEKUS: Did you happen to see Louie Armstrong or King Oliver when they played here in St. Louis?

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, sure. There's very few of them old-timers that I didn't meet. Lots of times, they'd be on the same job that had two bands, you know. I had the chance to meet King Oliver and Louie in his younger days. I remember, because he was young. And you know that guy couldn't read music? Sidney Costello...he's dead...he used to take him to his house and learned him them pieces. He played with Fletcher Henderson up at... What is the name of that place in Chicago? I've forgotten now. Anyway, Louie was a heck of a trumpet player. A player asked me one day which one I liked best, Louis or Harry James. I told them, "Harry James!" He said, "Well, look, you being colored..." I said, "Look, I'm not crazy about music about who produces them. You make me a little different from your mouse (sounds like)." Harry James would play all them, "The Trumpet Man"...you know how he can blow. I said that Louis is all right. I mean, he could play them just like I Charlie Creath. Charlie Creath had a heck of a pose. Man, he had a pose just like a fella.... He died just not too long ago. Charlie Spivach who used to be up in North Carolina...oh, he's a heck of a trumpet player. He had a tone. He played waltzes and suite numbers like that. But, I was telling it like it is. He thought I was going to say, "Louis," because he was colored. Well, I'm going to tell it like it is, right up until today. If a person's good, he's good. It don't make me no difference who he is. One of those things.

IMMEKUS: Let's see. What else can you tell? Just lots of things? Where did you get your instrument from? Where did you get the instrument that you've got?

PATTERSON: My banjo? From Hunleith.

IMMEKUS: From Hungary?

PATTERSON: From Hunleith.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, I thought you meant you got it imported or something.

PATTERSON: No, no. \$375.00 back in them days...yeah, it was \$350.00 for the banjo, and I got the same case and that was \$25.00.

IMMEKUS: Wow! Where did you get that kind of money back then? Just saved up from playing jobs?

PATTERSON: No, no. You could buy on time like you can today. Put a little bit down and a little bit when they catch you.

IMMEKUS: Where did you get the tuba? Earlier...where did you get your tuba from?

PATTERSON: Oh, I bought that off a guy. To tell you the truth, when I first went on the show, I hadn't been playing tuba, but I used to be able to borrow one at home and when I went on the show, they already had a tuba on the show, but when I came off, I bought one. When I got through playing, I didn't try to sell it, I gave it away. I didn't have one of those Singleton Palmer had a recording tuba that would sit on your lap on a belt.

IMMEKUS: You didn't have one of those. You had the kind you put on yourself and blow out. I forgot what I was going to ask...oh, back with the minstrel shows again. About how many people were playing in the bands at the minstrel shows?

PATTERSON: To tell you the truth, I forgot because the people were coming and going so quickly. That's the reason I quit the band. When I quit, there was five others who quit besides me.

IMMEKUS: So, it was more than five, then, that were in the bands?

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, more than five.

IMMEKUS: Did you have enough to make up your own regular little parade? Did you all just get together and parade through the streets playing your instruments?

PATTERSON: Yeah, you had some red uniforms on...loud...you know...to attract the people's attention. I wish I could just walk one-third as fast now as I could back in them days. In a minstrel show, wow!

IMMEKUS: Yeah, you have to walk as fast as you play.

PATTERSON: The problem is now, if I go down steps, you'd be playing a dead march. You know how slow they are!

IMMEKUS: Skipping back again to when you played with Charlie Creath and heard King Oliver and Louie Armstrong and those, how did those men influence your playing...if they

did at all?

PATTERSON: Did what?

IMMEKUS: Did they influence the way you played at all?

PATTERSON: Oh, yes, because they were blowing...they were producing. You know, I'm a friendly person. Pretty much all the instruments and people, if they're playing, is all right with me. You know what I mean. I don't have too much to criticize. First thing, they always say, "Clean up your own house first." I never was much to criticize. Just like...you take...back in them days Frankie and Vie...now, to me, they were just ordinary trumpet players. They played nice, but I mean I wouldn't classify them as no more than any other trumpet player. Maybe after a person dies, they get big, you know? That's the way I look at it. All those different guys, Louis Armstrong and Fletcher Henderson had a band back in them days, and he was real good, and I liked them all.

IMMEKUS: Why did...some of them really were well renowned over the whole country and, apparently, you've been around quite a bit throughout the entire country...

PATTERSON: Well, see, there are a whole lot of bands that was good but never had the opportunity to be known.

IMMEKUS: It was just a matter, then, of being in the right places at the right times for those people?

PATTERSON: That's right.

IMMEKUS: Well, if they were able to be successful, both in St. Louis and Chicago and New Orleans, New York, Arkansas, Virginia, all over. What quality made them good? Was the music that was being played in St. Louis the same as the music that was being played in Arkansas at that time?

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, that's right. The only relevance it really has to the larger world is in the legal realm of creator rights.

IMMEKUS: You know, I guess, it's kind of hard for me to see how when you really don't have broadcasting at this time, and you're doing the types of parades and minstrel shows on the steamers and things, how does the music...you know, how can someone be successful in all parts of the country at one time without...

PATTERSON: Well, a lot of those people in those things did a lot of traveling. They had a booking agent, and they would book them out. That's how they got known. That's the way they did it.

IMMEKUS: You know, I guess...are you hearing the same kind of style of music in other parts of the country because you're hearing the same people? Or is this style coming first?

PATTERSON: Well, I don't know. I'll tell you the truth. I think it's to each his own...what a person likes. Just like, you take this "Rock and Roll." A lot of people criticize it. Well, I

don't. That's the way they want it. I was reading in the paper the other day that some of the musicians are going deaf from it being so loud. Before we merged with the white local, we used to have "fun night" over at the U.A.W. Hall out on Goodfellow, and they had a couple of "Rock and Roll" bands that belonged to the local who would play. We were sitting at a table like deaf and dumb people making signs because you couldn't hear. It's pitiful, but if that's the way they want it...

IMMEKUS; You played in the halls and the ballrooms you said.

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, you should see the Castle Ballroom. I played there with Harry Lang's band. It used to be up on 3500 Olive Street, and they hired us for five weeks...Washington and the Six Aces. It was kind of up in the air because they didn't think we was going to go over as good as we did. We had to have continuous music. One band on one side, one on the other. As soon as one stopped playing, the other one started.

IMMEKUS: Did the bands, then, kind of trade off? If you heard another band and you liked something that they played, did you then incorporate that into your band?

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, we were there five weeks, and we'd stopped booking jobs. See, we were on a booking and our bands was really popular then with white and colored, and so we just kept on booking jobs and then with five weeks was near about up, in walks a fellow who wants us to sign for another five weeks. Well, if we'd went in there, and they'd said ten weeks, we'd have signed for ten weeks. But we had been booking so much work until our five weeks was near about up, we couldn't take it because Ye had so much work on the outside. And if I'm not mistaken, we went down to broadcasting; I believe it was, down to KMOX downtown.

IMMEKUS: When you went to other places, then...when you traveled, how did you go about getting yourself jobs in those places?

PATTERSON: Well, the thing about it is if people would hear you...see, when you go out and play...back in them days, 75-80-100 miles going to a dance was just like going around the corner. When you played for a crowd of people, you don't know who's going to be there. Once they book you, well, you get to playing and they like you, they're going to come to you and ask you, "What's the name of this band? Well, we need to hire a band out, so will you come to such-and-such-a-place?" It's just one of those things. That way, you're liable to end up the next time in Kansas City or something like that. Like you say, there wasn't broadcasting, so you go up to Kansas City and all over Illinois...Carbondale. You name it. Champaign, Decatur, Bloomington, all over. All over Missouri.

IMMEKUS: Tell me a little more about the ballrooms...about the dances and things that you played, you know. I want to hear more about the bands and where they were playing.

PATTERSON: After I got out of Dewey's band, I went to Cecil Scott. We used to call him, "Mister Five-By-Five," because he was just about as broad as he was tall. In '31, we went up to Cincinnati and around up through there, and then we went up to...we had a booking agent...this was through a booking agent...he had about five or six jobs booked and sent Cecil a letter. If we'd played them jobs...that was about in '31 and '32...we wouldn't be

back yet with all them jobs he had lined up to get us out on the road, so he could get his percentage on the jobs he had booked. We played at Walnut Theater in Louisville, Kentucky, and the first time I ever saw...I was reading something about them the other day in the paper...his name is Perry...Steppenfetchit.

IMMEKUS: Gus Perry?

PATTERSON: Huh?

IMMEKUS: Are you talking about Gus Perry?

PATTERSON; No, no, no. It wasn't Gus. His name was...I forgot his name. But, anyhow, Steppenfetchit, he was on the stage...

[END OF SIDE ONE]

IMMEKUS: At that time, for example, in New Orleans...at that time, it was primarily in the Negro bars that the music was played.

PATTERSON: Well, most of my jobs was in dance halls and like that. Not too many balls.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, that's much closer to the Chicago ballroom and bar dancing and that kind of thing. Except, I guess, we were lacking the Big Time, the Vaudeville and that.

PATTERSON: And then I went with...I have a little picture...we all got these at that time.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, yeah. Can we see your scrapbook, in fact?

[COMMENTS ON PICTURES IN SCRAPBOOK FOLLOW]

IMMEKUS: That's really good. This is really interesting. "Fidgety Feet."

PATTERSON: Yeah, Fidgety Feet. This fella plays bass right here. His name is Bill Ruler. If someone would ask for him, they'd say, "Dirty Feet."

IMMEKUS: I want to copy a little bit of this material here down, if you don't mind. (pause)

IMMEKUS: Where is this, now?

PATTERSON: Jefferson Barracks. That's the picture I showed you a little while ago. Skip Durringer and me.

IMMEKUS: This is a local restaurant?

PATTERSON: Yeah.

IMMEKUS: This is a local restaurant? Oh, I didn't know you played at those. What year was this now?

PATTERSON: That's the same picture. [CAN'T UNDERSTAND] This trumpet player. Bill

Mason, he's trumpet player with the Ragtime, down in Louisville.

IMMEKUS: This is just in the last 10-12 years, you said.

PATTERSON: Yeah, that's down at Gaslight Square. At the Club Biltmore down on Jefferson and Lafayette that was taken. Now, this was taken on the Admiral in 1971.

IMMEKUS: Was this in the paper?

PATTERSON: Yes, it was in the paper...that was when I was playing tuba. [Another person enters into the conversation from this point who is not identified.]

UNKNOWN VOICE: Here, you can see what date the paper is.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, but what year?

UNKNOWN VOICE: '71, he said.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, I know. I just meant that the paper doesn't say.

PATTERSON: Can't remember the guy who gave me that.

IMMEKUS: Did you...now you mentioned that one of the men of the ballroom... someone...came and rehearsed you. Remember when you talked about that?

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, I talked about Buster Sylvester. I ain't never going to forget him!

IMMEKUS: Did you have a conductor like this?

PATTERSON: Oh, no, no.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, that's what I was going to say. Yeah, that's not your style, is it? That's broadcasting.

PATTERSON: That's Eddie Randle. That's the same picture I showed you a little while ago...that's a different one. We had a big argument on who was going to get behind him. See me peeping out there?

IMMEKUS: Yeah.

PATTERSON: Everybody wanted to be seen, so I said that I'd get behind him. This girl, she has one on Liz Taylor. She was an entertainer. She was really temperamental, but we got along fine.

IMMEKUS: Good.

PATTERSON: Now, that's the rhythm section of the Washington Band.

IMMEKUS: Did you bands have a rhythm section set up like this?

[SOMEONE IS TALKING IN THE BACKGROUND - CAN'T UNDERSTAND.]

PATTERSON: This is on a street car.

IMMEKUS: My father drove a street car back in, I guess that must have been in the late 50's...early 60's.

PATTERSON: Is that so?

IMMEKUS: Yeah, he drove a street car.

PATTERSON: We used to go down to Gaslight Square, and everybody hopped down onto the ground and started dancing. The funny thing is that they had a great big tin tub of beer and they got to drinking that beer and only...that's what happened...I said, they was going to put you all in jail.

IMMEKUS: Okay, this talks about hot music. This talks about hot jazz. What is hot jazz as opposed to...

PATTERSON: I don't know. This sounds weird, but I don't know. You name it. Different things.

IMMEKUS: Handy wrote "St. Louis Blues."

PATTERSON: Yes, I met him in '26 at the Statler Hotel.

IMMEKUS: Oh, did you?

PATTERSON: That one was taken down on the river. Elijah Shaw. Did you ever meet him?

IMMEKUS: No.

PATTERSON: He was a drummer with Singleton Palmer. Real short.

IMMEKUS: They have a tape of him at the library, and I listened to that but I haven't actually met him myself.

IMMEKUS: That says, "Preservation Hall."

PATTERSON: Oh, that's in New Orleans, down in New Orleans. We used to play together with Dewey's band...Bill Humphrey. He was a clarinet player with the band. He tried his best to get me to come down there, but I was making so much money in St. Louis here, I said, "No." I turned down a job in San Francisco playing on a ship out there for \$75.00 a week. As I say, that was a whole lot of money back in them days. I could make at least that much money or more here in St. Louis. We got so popular, we got practically what we asked for.

IMMEKUS: Yeah...that's Singleton Palmer.

PATTERSON: That's Singleton Palmer's band.

UNKNOWN VOICE: That's in Gaslight, isn't it?

IMMEKUS: Yeah.

PATTERSON: Yeah.

IMMEKUS: Wow! Look at that fatty!

PATTERSON. Yeah. There's Mason, the trumpet player I was telling you about.

IMMEKUS: Did you know Al Striker?

PATTERSON: Why, sure!

IMMEKUS: Did you?

PATTERSON: He was playing banjo to me. See, I gave him information and this banjo hung on order for somebody and they didn't take it. So, he came down to me and asked me if I wanted it for \$100.00 cash. And I asked him to describe it and then I said, "Get that banjo." He got it.

IMMEKUS: What year was this now?

PATTERSON: '61-'62. Ragtime piano player. He used to play...

IMMEKUS: He plays all by ear. Probably doesn't know how to read music. Looks like an amiable fellow.

PATTERSON: Yeah.

IMMEKUS: I'm really curious about...you know, they keep talking about Chicago style and New Orleans style. Now, what does that mean?

PATTERSON: I guess they played different styles, you know. When I hear music, I just...

UNKNOWN VOICE #2: Louis Armstrong played a form of New Orleans jazz.

IMMEKUS: With this hot jazz in the early times. You can tell often by just listening to the record...gives you more of an indication of the difference between "hot" jazz and "regular" jazz, but to specify what it is...nearly impossible. And yet, they all persist in talking about it as though you could listen and say, "This is 'hot' jazz," "This is 'jazz,'" and this is "Ragtime." In fact, you can't. Each has an element of every other.

PATTERSON: Now, this picture was taken when we rehearsed on the boat...on the Admiral. Five bands I think there was.

IMMEKUS: Where did you rehearse?

PATTERSON: Down at...(can't understand)...have you ever been there?

IMMEKUS: No.

PATTERSON: Gaslight...

IMMEKUS: No, I haven't met them.

PATTERSON: No? We used to be right here on the boat when this was taken.

IMMEKUS: You've got some really nice pictures.

UNKNOWN VOICE: Nice of them to send you a couple, so you could put some in there.

PATTERSON: Different fellows, you see. And that's just about it.

IMMEKUS: Forgot one page here.

PATTERSON: Time marches on.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, that's really interesting.

PATTERSON: Well, that's just about the story. It ain't much of one.

IMMEKUS: Well, I don't know about that. You've been around quite a bit.

UNKNOWN VOICE: Pete, did you speak of this...what was it? Some organization had you to play and they wrote it up in the Post or Globe or something. What was that?

IMMEKUS: We got this one here.

UNKNOWN VOICE: I think this is it.

PATTERSON: You mean...jazz... That was at Washington University.

IMMEKUS: He showed us that. I read most of...almost the whole thing, actually.

UNKNOWN VOICE: Now, this has been within two or three years...something like that.

PATTERSON: That was on the Admiral.

UNKNOWN VOICE: Was that on the Admiral?

PATTERSON: Yeah, 1971.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, I saw that, too. [To UNKNOWN VOICE] You sound like you are familiar with jazz.

UNKNOWN: Well, I have a musical family, but it isn't picking me up too quick.

IMMEKUS: That's all right.

UNKNOWN VOICE: But I only have an appreciation of music.

IMMEKUS: I'm a very measly, meager clarinet player. That's not very good at it.

UNKNOWN VOICE: I used to be...the Whitman Sisters...you don't remember them at all...that was before our time.

[ALL TALKING AT ONCE]

PATTERSON: There was three sisters. They was from dancing fame, just like the Andrew Sisters, just came down and booked the Washington Theater.

IMMEKUS: Did you ever play with them while they danced? Did you ever play for dancers?

PATTERSON: Oh, yes, quartettes, you name it. That's Dewey Jackson.

IMMEKUS: 1966.

[ALL TALKING]

PATTERSON: Way back in the twenties, I think, I played down at a place called the Golden...(can't hear)...with Billie Jackson and she was singing down there.

IMMEKUS: What was she singing? Blues?

PATTERSON: Yes.

IMMEKUS: Was she singing the blues?

PATTERSON: Yes. You know, like..."River Stay Away from My Door."

UNKNOWN VOICE: I know that one.

IMMEKUS: I do, too.

PATTERSON: Oh, she could sing to a man! ...that was in '69.

UNKNOWN VOICE: I don't smoke and I don't drink hardly at all.

PATTERSON: Hardly at all!

IMMEKUS: Hardly at all!

PATTERSON: You're doing all right for yourself. Keep up the good work.

UNKNOWN VOICE: I wonder how much that is.

IMMEKUS: "Hardly at all" is about two beers.

UNKNOWN VOICE: About.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, about once every month.

PATTERSON: She supposed to be...what does that say?

IMMEKUS: Girl Friday.

PATTERSON: Yeah, she's supposed to be [can't understand] daughter. I wouldn't call her nothing in the world except Magnolia White. If you want to get a good cussing out, you call her "Magnolia" to her face. "She's changed her name to Beverly White. She was born at 320 Lucas Avenue, and I used to call up her mother and talk with her. She can sure play the piano, though.

IMMEKUS: There's something back here I was trying to get to.

PATTERSON: [can't understand]

IMMEKUS: No, here's something else, too.

PATTERSON: That's when I played out to one of them country clubs.

IMMEKUS: Oh, here's the other half.

PATTERSON: I was in the room by myself there.

IMMEKUS: Look at this one, it's got his name on it. He's the feature guy in that.

[INTERRUPTION]

UNKNOWN VOICE: ...that was down in New Orleans yet.

PATTERSON: I'm trying to think what country club that was. I had to play by myself.

UNKNOWN VOICE: Oh, I see...so this is somebody else?

PATTERSON: I'm trying to think...one of those country clubs out there.

IMMEKUS: That's pretty neat, isn't it? What did you play for them? Did you play the same music you'd been playing since 1920?

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, yeah.

[can't understand]

IMMEKUS: Yeah, I read that article. I've heard of him, but I don't know an awfully lot about him.

PATTERSON: No, I don't either.

IMMEKUS: He was born on May...1864...that's a pretty long time ago, isn't it? Eddie Condon. Did you know him?

PATTERSON: Who is that?

IMMEKUS: Eddie Condon.

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, Eddie Condon.

UNKNOWN VOICE: I bet McKinney has some old pictures.

IMMEKUS: He didn't have too awfully many, did he, Greg?

GREG: We didn't even look in his scrapbook.

IMMEKUS: Oh, yeah, that's right. He never got it out, did he?

GREG: He should have his pictures by now...the ones we took.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, he should be getting them in the mail shortly.

PATTERSON: You know, this Norman Mason, he's...

IMMEKUS: That's the one that played with Singleton Palmer.

PATTERSON: Yeah, that's right. He died in '71. He and Louis died just about the same time. He used to play with Louie. He used to tell everybody his home was down in the Bahamas.

IMMEKUS: Yeah, the Bahamas.

PATTERSON: All the others would say, "Oh, his home is down in Mississippi." So, he went down to the Bahamas and Singleton had him replaced while he was gone. This is Perry...he died not too long ago.

IMMEKUS: That's who I thought you were talking about a while ago when you said something about Perry. You were talking about...

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, yeah. I'm trying to think of Steppenfetchit's name. He's trying to sue CBS or a movie company about something. This guy is called Steppenfetchit. I worked with him a week on stage in Louisville, Kentucky, and I'd laugh every minute. I worked in a... [can't hear]...and these ain't my shoes. My shoes has so-and-so, and this...and he looked at them and said, "Yeah, these ain't my shoes!" I laughed every night out there.

IMMEKUS: Those were his shoes, huh?

[ALL TALKING...CAN'T UNDERSTAND]

IMMEKUS: Oh, yeah, did you know Margie Creath, too?

PATTERSON: Margie was...and Zutty...I was telling you about...married teach other. Charlie and Zutty got into it, and Charlie fired Zutty and Marge got hot and quit the band.

IMMEKUS: Al was telling us something about that. He wasn't as explicit on what happened.

PATTERSON: I ain't telling you what they told me. I'm telling you what [happened].

IMMEKUS: Are you well-educated now? How much education have you had?

PATTERSON: How much what?

IMMEKUS: Education.

PATTERSON: I'm a first year high school dropout.

IMMEKUS: Shame, shame. I guess at that time it was quite common.

PATTERSON: What are you talking about?

IMMEKUS: You're not supposed to drop out.

PATTERSON: No...drop out...fall in.

UNKNOWN VOICE: Back then I imagine it didn't take a whole lot of education.

PATTERSON: Huh?

UNKNOWN VOICE: Back then I imagine an eighth grade education...

PATTERSON: What's that guy that used to be on the "Tonight" show? Jack Parr. He didn't finish high school. Some time ago, he was hired by some television station for three million dollars, so he's good...doing good. Dropping in. That's just the way it goes. Some people turn out to be different things, you know.

UNKNOWN VOICE: Have you been on any of the television shows that are around in St. Louis?

PATTERSON: The last television show I was on was the one that used to be on every day, "Charlotte Peters."

IMMEKUS: Oh, yeah, my mother is young enough to have gone, and old enough...to have gone to that show.

PATTERSON: That's the star.

IMMEKUS: Well, that was really interesting. I suppose we could spend hours more talking about it, couldn't you?

PATTERSON: Oh, yes, different things. Some of the things I've forgotten. Yeah, like McKinney. When I came to St. Louis, I was in pretty bad shape. I'd get a dime here and there. I used to eat in this restaurant, and I'd tell them to get me a bowl of soup, and bring me the heels of the bread. He'd bring me stuff like that. And I got to be such a regular customer all I had to do was to sit down. I wouldn't have to say nothing to him. He knew what I

wanted. So, when I got to playing this first job I was telling you about, I went to McKinney, and he said, "Yeah, I'll give you permission if you pay part of that money on the initiation fee."

UNKNOWN VOICE: How much was the initiation fee?

PATTERSON: \$14.50. Now, it costs a hundred and something.

UNKNOWN VOICE: Pretty much, I imagine. Everything has gone up.

PATTERSON: I got a thing...some literature...you know right here on a card...once in a while, I get a little work and I get a little pension, so I ain't doing too bad. But I ain't doing too good. I went into the hospital in '71, and I was down in South St. Louis.

GREG: Whose ballroom was that you were talking about before? You said it never did have the black and white together.

[ALL TALKING]

GREG: Never played to both of them at the same time?

PATTERSON: No. That's the truth. They had one side and one on the other. When they'd stop playing for one, the next time the other group got out their instruments.

IMMEKUS: Did they not allow the black musicians to play for the white audiences? Were you playing primarily for...

PATTERSON: Oh, my goodness, I should say so. That's how I made most of my money, was with the whites.

IMMEKUS: That doesn't seem fair. They want to hear the music, but they don't want to let you...

PATTERSON: That's just the way the ball bounces. This is one of them things.

IMMEKUS: Well, it's not fair.

PATTERSON: Time has brought a lot of change, and it's just one of them things. That's the way I look at it. [can't understand] Just like that girl...I hope they turn that girl loose...what's her name?

IMMEKUS: Patricia Hearst?

PATTERSON: Whatever it is.

IMMEKUS: The Symbionese Liberation Army.

[ALL TALKING]

PATTERSON: See, I guess I don't know. I guess I did pretty good, and I have a chance to

think about it. I didn't have a chance to think about it then.

IMMEKUS: You've certainly crossed most of the barriers, anyway, with your music, it seems.

PATTERSON: Oh, yeah, I didn't do too bad. I could have done a little better, maybe.

IMMEKUS: Maybe, I don't know. It sounds like you did all right to me.

PATTERSON: Well, I stayed here and I liked it here, and I know I'm not going anywhere at 79 unless I put my application into the Regency Nursing Home, or some little nursing home.

IMMEKUS: Well, thank you very much for your time and for letting us see your scrapbook and for the solo.

PATTERSON: Well, if you hadn't come, you know what I'd be doing?

IMMEKUS: Sitting there!

PATTERSON: What I'm not supposed to do.