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## That Buddy Bolden Band Photograph



This is a print positive, slightly enlarged from a 2 1/4 x 3-inch copy negative in Bill Russell's personal collection. On the envelope in which he stored it, Russell had written, "Reverse Negative"  
(Courtesy The Historic New Orleans Collection, 92-48-L)

### This Issue Features Two New Takes on That Only Known Photograph of Jazz Pioneer Buddy Bolden and His Band:

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# A Gallery of the



The Bolden Band photo as it appeared in *Jazzmen* (1939) (bass player on viewer's left, image cropped on all four sides)



The Bolden Band photo as it appeared in *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album* (1967) (bass player on viewer's right, image cropped more severely on sides and top, but showing more at the bottom)

# Bolden Photograph...



A “straight” print of a seemingly “uncropped” copy of the Bolden Band photo in Bill Russell’s personal collection (Courtesy The Historic New Orleans Collection 92-48-L).



A “reverse” print of the same “uncropped” copy of the Bolden Band photo in Bill Russell’s personal collection (Courtesy The Historic New Orleans Collection 92-48-L).

# The Mystery of the Buddy Bolden Photograph

by  
**Gerhard Kubik**

The only known photograph of late 19<sup>th</sup> century New Orleans ragtime cornetist Buddy Bolden (d. 1931), by many considered to be “first man of jazz” (Marquis 1978), was discovered by Charles Edward Smith in 1939 in the possession of valve trombone player Willie Cornish, then the only surviving member of Bolden’s early band. It was first published in *Jazzmen* (Ramsey and Smith eds. 1939). For more than half a century it has been the subject of controversy and sometimes wild speculation. In *Jazzmen* the picture appeared with the bass player on the viewer’s left. Incongruities were noted, and subsequently it appeared in Al Rose and Edmond Souchon’s *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album* (1967) with the bass player on the viewer’s right, creating the impression that guitarist Brock Mumford and bassist Jimmie Johnson were left-handers. Soon it became clear that in whichever way one turns the picture, some musicians would appear with strange ways of holding or fingering their instruments.

It was argued that one shouldn’t forget that these musicians were not actually playing, but were merely posing for the photographer. With this explanation many were satisfied, and yet when the picture was reproduced in a number of books and articles over the years, it became apparent that individual researchers had their preferences. A negative was never found, and so any questions of what the negative may have been like were not pursued.

Over decades the controversy has continued, expanded by a host of other queries, especially the dating of this photograph. More mysteries were added when it was claimed that Buddy Bolden had made a cylinder recording around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century, but the cylinder had somehow disappeared (cf. Wengel

1994: 11-12). Conjectures and legends took over.

## Source Criticism

In a well-informed article, jazz researcher Alden Ashforth (1985) took up the query of which print of the Buddy Bolden photograph was correct, the one published in *Jazzmen* (first edition 1939) or the one published in *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album* (first edition 1967). He argues that in *Jazzmen* this only known photograph of Charles “Buddy” Bolden was deliberately “flopped” by the editors who thought that it was impossible that two people in the band could have been left-handed: the guitarist and the bass player.

After the reproduction of the photographic print borrowed from Mrs. Bella Cornish appeared in Al Rose and Edmond Souchon (1967), it fanned more controversy, not only about the original Russell/Smith dating “before 1895,” but also about the identity of the two clarinet players in the Bolden picture. Apparently, their names had been exchanged; the Bb-clarinetist (standing) is Frank Lewis and the C-clarinetist (seated) is William Warner. Another controversy arose from the question why there was no drummer in the Bolden photograph, while Bolden’s most important rival in the late 1890s, John Robichaux, had included his drummer in the 1896 photo of his orchestra (cf. Rose and Souchon 1967). Ashforth deplores: “It is unfortunate that Bolden’s regular drummer, Cornelius Tillman, is unaccountably missing from the picture...” (p. 171). It may be that he was missing, but Bunk Johnson, who had provided the name Tillman in the first place, did not find anything abnormal with the picture when Russell first showed it to him. He explained to Russell (cf. Ramsey/

Smith ed., 1939:25): “The picture you have of Bolden’s first band was taken just before I started playing with his large band. In those days he only carried a five piece band. In the late years Bolden’s five piece band became so great in the city of New Orleans that he had to make his band bigger by putting in drums and cornet which made it a seven piece band.” Bunk said that he joined Bolden on second cornet in 1895 playing in short pants, since he was just 16.

Bunk’s statements have been disputed, even his claim that he had ever played with Buddy Bolden as part of his enlarged band. But one should be careful about portraying Bunk Johnson as a liar or accusing him of an all too inaccurate memory. If, for example, one assumes that Bolden did not have the two clarinet players regularly in his earlier band before 1895, but just one of them, then it was indeed a five-piece band. Bunk did not have to account for the presence of a guest performer in the photograph. So there is not necessarily a serious discrepancy between Bunk’s oral testimony and the fact that in this picture six musicians are seen.

Alden Ashforth then tries to solve the Bolden picture’s riddle of left-handed musicians, working from the assumption that the print as published by Al Rose and Edmond Souchon is correct, not the image printed in Ramsey and Smith’s *Jazzmen*. Ashforth strengthens his argument by an analysis of the construction of clarinets and cornets in those days. He points out correctly that both Lewis and Warner played the “nineteenth century, fifteen-key Albert system clarinet” (p. 176). From a number of details, e.g., the large “pipe key” at the top which “curls around the left side from the player’s point of view and therefore should be seen to the right when viewing the photograph”, he concludes that in the Rose/Souchon reproduction the clarinets are correct. As a clarinet player with an instrument in the Albert system, I can only endorse Ashforth’s analysis. However, his conclusion, based on cornet construction and placement of pistons, that Bolden must have held his instrument in the right hand, is not convincing. The choice of one’s hand for

holding a cornet does not necessarily derive from the construction of this instrument. It would only apply if the musician were about to play. Circumstantial evidence also points to the likelihood that Buddy Bolden held his cornet in the palm of his left hand. From iconographical material it is evident that all of Buddy Bolden’s African American contemporaries held their cornets in the left hand when posing for a photograph; so did James Williams and James McNeil of the John Robichaux Orchestra 1896; so did Manuel Perez in The Imperial Orchestra, and so did Bunk Johnson in The Superior Orchestra in their early 20<sup>th</sup> century photographs (see reproductions later in this paper). I will argue that the correct print of Buddy Bolden’s portrait is the one where he holds his cornet in the *left hand*.

Unless Bolden deliberately rejected cultural conventions – a pattern of behavior we associate more with the late 20<sup>th</sup> century than with the late 19<sup>th</sup> – he should then be expected to have held his cornet as shown in the Ramsey/Smith publication of the picture, with the guitarist and bass player also in the correct position. However, it is true that he holds it a bit differently from some of his contemporaries, which could have been instigated by the photographer or his own wish to be seen with it more clearly behind the guitarist’s head. The way he holds it compares somewhat to that of trumpet players Manuel Perez and Maurice Durand in a 1920s photo of Manuel Perez’s Band (first reproduced in Ramsey and Smith 1939). Incidentally, former Bolden bassist James (Jimmie) Johnson is also in this photo, and, of course, he holds the bow in the right hand, left-hand fingers on the strings.

Like everyone else, Alden Ashforth has wondered about the apparently left-handed musicians in the Bolden band, namely the guitarist and the bassist in the Rose/Souchon print. Marquis (1978:77) had clearly stated that, “Johnson was not a left-handed player, and Mumford’s family and others who knew him say he was not left handed either.” Ashford then concludes: “Thus we are reduced to three

unlikely and disquieting possibilities: left-handed string players, clarinetists who finger incorrectly, or a capricious photographer. It is worth remembering that the players are only posing, however, not actually playing.” He then endorses a proposal originally made by Rose and Souchon: “When we consider the testimony that Mumford was not left-handed, the ineluctable conclusion is that, for whatever fanciful reason, the photographer indeed posed the string players left-handed” (p. 176).

Unfortunately, in spite of the informative, scholarly excursion into the construction of clarinets, valve trombones, and cornets, Ashforth does not offer us any really new idea about the “left-handed photograph” (p. 173). He only endorses what Al Rose and Edmond Souchon were writing about the photo as they had found it in possession of Mrs. Bella Cornish (Rose/Souchon 1967:160): “It has been published twice before, but printed backwards each time, because the photographer posed the bass and guitar players playing left-handed.” The photo was then credited “Courtesy Mrs. Bella Cornish”.

### The Fate of the Photograph

Researchers and especially editors/publishers are sometimes guilty of well-intended but, in effect, serious interventions into the integrity of primary data. Apart from the possibility that in its first publication the photograph was not reproduced faithfully to the original print, but side-reversed, there are other, minimal but consequential interventions. In practically all publications the photo has been cut to a “presentable” size, so that there are missing margins. In its first publication in *Jazzmen* the lower part of the legs of the seated musicians as well as the lowest part of the bass resonator were cut off. Editors regularly “crop” photographs, eliminating what they think distorts the picture’s coherent impression, or what they think is irrelevant, or distracting. Only in later publications of the original print did it turn out that the centimeter-wide margin cut off from the bottom contained important

information. In the version published in *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album* there is an unidentified object to be seen in front of the feet of clarinet player William Warner. The part of the object seen reveals that it was circular, probably metal, perhaps a container of some sort or a pail. Someone speculated that it might have been part of the photographer’s equipment. Jazz researcher Alden Ashforth, referring to this “smallish, round object in the foreground at the bottom of the photo,” thinks that “the inner curved line identifies it... as some sort of bass brass instrument” (p. 171). But there is also something else in the foreground. It looks like a piece of white cloth, seen beneath one of the legs of the guitarist. Or is it a damaged part of the photographic print? All this raises more questions.

While we should be grateful that such visual information was not deleted from later publications, in the same reproduction some other margins of the picture were cut off. The top margin and some area on both sides, left and right, were reduced. Thereby the upper end of the photo is cut to the top of the string-bass, and the folds in the upper part of the curtain are not seen.

To make matters worse, we can no longer consult the original. The photo has disappeared, as brought to light in an interview with Bella Cornish conducted by Richard B. Allen and William Russell on January 13, 1959, in the William Ransom Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University, New Orleans (cf. Marquis 1978:76). The information is that she had later loaned the photograph to the older brother of Sidney Bechet, Dr. Leonard Bechet, who was a dentist, trombonist, and collector of jazz memorabilia. But after his death, the photograph was not found in his estate.

So, we are relying on our analysis of the various prints that were published, usually with some margins “cropped,” and not clear enough for us to say with certainty, for example, whether Buddy Bolden held his cornet with his fingers on the tubes of the pistons from below, as I suspect, or otherwise. Ashforth (1985:172)

describes Bolden's portrait this way: "... his cool half-smile and cavalier posture, cornet nonchalantly balanced on his palm, suggest a man of confidence and insouciance."

### Object Reversal and Mirror Inversion

Decisive for an assessment of the photograph, however, is to ascertain whether the thicker, wound guitar strings in the allegedly "left-handed" posture of Jeff Brock Mumford run in the lower or higher side of the fretboard. In the first case the guitarist's fingering as seen in the photograph would not go together with the string's tunings. Even if the photographer had really told his client to reverse the guitar in that manner, his fingering patterns, both of the left and the right hand, would not look so natural, as if he had just played a piece of fingerstyle guitar.

The idea that the "capricious" photographer may have demanded that the string players act left-handed is seriously flawed. It is based on a lack of understanding of the difference between *object reversal* and *mirror inversion*. If you tell a guitarist to turn his guitar by 180 degrees, so that the neck would point to his right, then you also get the strings up/down reversed. The somewhat thicker, wound bass strings (6<sup>th</sup> string 0.47 inches) will no longer be up, but down from the player's viewpoint, and consequently he could not apply an analogous fingering with his right hand to the reversed fretboard. The available prints of the Bolden picture are not clear enough to see which strings are thicker. But in that particular print which shows Brock Mumford left-handed, we notice that his fingering is still visibly correct, so it cannot be that he put his fingers on string nos. 6, 5, and 4 (instead of 1, 2, 3) which would now run the lower half of the fretboard.

This excludes the possibility that he was told by the photographer to reverse his guitar with the neck pointing in the other direction. Even less plausible is the idea that the bassist Jimmie Johnson would have been asked to stop the bass strings with his right hand and bow them with the left, as it appears in the print published by Rose and Souchon 1967. There is

simply no likely motivation for the photographer to have asked for that, and for the musicians to have accepted such a request. Whether the bass player acted with his left or right hand could have hardly been the photographer's concern, because it would have had no effect on the placement of the musicians within the picture. So Al Rose and Edmond Souchon's idea is intrinsically flawed, a sort of "quick fix" of a complex problem, and those who have followed it have accepted too hastily an ostensible logic.

On the other hand, if the guitar was *not reversed*, but the original shot was *printed mirror-inverted*, then there would be no change in the order of the guitar strings. In an inverted picture the string order from high to low is preserved, the 6<sup>th</sup> string will still be up, not down. Obviously, this is the case of the photographic portrait of Brock Mumford with his guitar. His fingering in the "left-handed" print looks genuine, only mirror-inverted, and in the "right-handed" version (as in *Jazzmen*) it is visibly correct.

One could even argue on psychological grounds that the explanation given by Rose and Souchon cannot work. It also shows lack of empathy. Which musician, if told by a photographer to reverse his guitar would do so willingly, or even be able to do so? I discussed this idea with Dr. Giorgio Adamo of the Accademia Nazionale St. Cecilia in Rome, when he visited us at our research center in Malawi, July 2008. He and his wife Rossella have much experience in iconographic work. He said if a guitarist were truly left-handed, he would also have to change the string order, so that he could play. But Brock Mumford was neither left-handed nor does his fingering suggest that the guitar was reversed. I also discussed it with guitarist Sinosi Mlendo in our African jazzband in Malawi. When I requested that he reverse his guitar, he first did not even understand what I wanted. Instead of turning the guitar, he rotated his own body with the guitar in normal playing position! It is certain that Brock Mumford would have considered a similar request by their photographer as an act

of insolence. And in any case, he would then not have known where to put his fingers.

So the solution to the riddle of the Buddy Bolden photograph cannot be found in declaring both the guitarist and the bassist to be lefthanders by decree. Even if aesthetic considerations had motivated the photographer “to pose the string-players left-handed” it would have been sufficient only to ask the guitarist to do so.

So these two musicians are surely not “posing” left-handed; rather, their images were printed mirror-inverted. In the Ramsey and Smith reproduction of the photograph they are printed correctly, but with the result that the clarinet players and the trombone player appear side-reversed.

### **Insoluble Contradictions?**

Trying to solve the riddle of the Bolden photo is like investigating an unsolved crime that took place some time between 1894 and 1903, whereby nobody is even sure of the exact year of the deed.

The solution therefore has to be sought in a different kind of approach. We proceed from three irrefutable observations: (a) that neither Brock Mumford nor Jimmie Johnson (who can also be seen in a later photo published in Ramsey/Smith, 1939, were left-handed; (b) that the photographer did not pose the string players left-handed. The photographic print suggests mirror-inversion, not object reversal; (c) if the mirror-inversion of guitar and string-bass is rectified, we are faced with the impossible clarinet fingerings of Frank Lewis and William Warner, and indeed, mirror-inverted clarinets.

What then is the solution? Surely there must be something wrong with the photographic print rather than with the people involved in Buddy Bolden’s band. This throws the problem back on the photographer, though not in the sense that we assume he was “capricious.” On the contrary, he was probably a very normal darkroom specialist, applying the techniques any black-and-white photographic expert of the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century was familiar with. He

must have had one of those apparatuses to pose with a black cloth over his head...

Strangely, jazz researchers have not questioned the integrity of the photograph itself, and they apparently never thought of the possibility that there could have been some form of darkroom intervention, rather than ordering the musicians to pose in a certain manner. Historical photographs are often taken at their face value. As Karl Gert zur Heide (1999) has shown, two early 20<sup>th</sup> century photographs of rival bands in New Orleans, The Imperial Orchestra and The Superior Orchestra (with Bunk Johnson on cornet) that were dated by Rose and Souchon (1967:164) “half a decade” apart – 1905 and 1910 respectively – were probably taken “at the same photographic session, as the background shows exactly the same drapery.” Big Eye Louis Nelson appears in both bands. “I’m convinced”, writes Gert zur Heide (1999:18) “that Big Eye Louis Nelson is wearing the same jacket and just put on the cap of the orchestra whose clarinet player failed to turn up.” In light of such observations it is somewhat surprising that this author also subscribes to Rose and Souchon’s opinion about the Bolden photo, declaring that the dispute was “brought to an end” with Ashforth’s article (Gert zur Heide 1994:6). He does not question the strange posture of Bolden with the cornet in his right hand.

The real problem of the photograph is that, in whichever way one prints it, there will always be *three* apparent left-handers. If you take the version published in Ramsey and Smith, then it is the two clarinet players who hold their instruments with impossible fingering, and Willie Cornish standing behind clarinetist Red Warner, holding his trombone in an unlikely manner. If you reproduce it the other way around, then Brock Mumford appears to be left-handed, etc.

But “left-handed” is the wrong term. We have to reformulate: (1) In whichever way you print the Bolden picture, *three out of the six people and their instruments will appear mirror-inverted.* (2) And the three mirror-inverted

people always sit or stand next to each other,  
*occupying the same space of about half the photograph.*

A solution to the riddle is now almost on our lips. But before I reveal it, we have to delve into a few more things.

### The Cultural Context

Karl Gert zur Heide has stressed that in New Orleans around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century, a band usually consisted of seven musicians, including a violinist (absent in the Bolden photograph), and that one alignment was common. He writes: “Viewed from the audience, the lineup reads from left to right as follows: drums, trombone, cornet, clarinet, violin, guitar, bass” (Gert zur Heide 1994:7). Based on comparisons and an interview in Chicago, April 30, 1972, with a contemporary of Buddy Bolden, Charlie Elgar (1879-1973), Gert zur Heide concludes that William (Willie) “Red” Warner, the seated player of the C clarinet in the Buddy Bolden photograph, was probably the leader of the Buddy Bolden band, on the grounds of being able to read music. He also quotes and interprets what Bunk Johnson had written to Roy Carew in a letter (quoted in Rudi Blesh and Harriet Janis 1950:170). Bunk wrote “they had only one man in the King Bolden band that could read a little, and that was the leader, that was Dada Brooks, now he was a violin player of Buddy Bolden’s band...”

Of course, “leader” is to be understood in the word’s then current meaning. The leader was the one who could read music, however imperfectly. Therefore, he was able to instruct the others what they would have to memorize. This was essential in bands that incorporated, for example, some of Scott Joplin’s rags in their repertoire. In his “Last Testament” (cf. CD review by Hazeldine 1994), Bunk Johnson, in December 1947, tried to recreate his band version of “The Entertainer.” The function of a bandleader in New Orleans at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century was that of an intermediary between the written and the oral transmission. In

the ragtime era this function was usually fulfilled by the violinist. In the Bolden photograph there is no violinist; however, there are two clarinet players, William (Willie) “Red” Warner (seated) playing C clarinet, and Frank Lewis with Bb clarinet. Based on several sources, including a letter by Bunk Johnson, Gert zur Heide thinks that Warner would probably have had this function as a “leader,” as the term was understood in early New Orleans jazz (Gert zur Heide 1994:7-8). Like a violinist, says Gert zur Heide, a C-clarinetist plays a non-transposing instrument, which explains the “central” role of such a person in a ragtime band that took its tunes from written rags and other materials, developing the themes with variations, adaptations, etc.

Ragtime in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, like other popular music in New Orleans and elsewhere, was basically a written tradition. This was in conformity with the prevailing idea in that era that “real music” would have to be composed on paper and played sight-reading from those scores. This was the down-town ideology in New Orleans inherited from European classical music. However, when ragtime, let alone the blues, was adopted by many popular bands in New Orleans, many if not most of the (up-town) musicians playing for dance gatherings could not read music. Nowadays no one would stigmatize them as “illiterate,” since we have long acknowledged in ethnomusicology the importance of orally transmitted music. Many sources meticulously examined by Lawrence Gushee (1994 [2000]) seem to converge on the point that the dance culture of New Orleans began to change radically by the mid-1890s. Janis and Blesh (1950) quoted veteran trombonist George Filhe (born 1872) in an interview saying, “Younger musicians about 1892 began to ‘swing’. Older men used lots of Mexican music.” This implies that soon after the start of the popularity of ragtime ca. 1896, some of this music began to be played free of the constraints on expression that go with “playing from paper.” And yet at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century upper-class values

inherited from the world of European classical composers were still dominant in New Orleans. Jelly Roll Morton (cf. Lomax 1950), pianist and composer, was one of those personalities tied psychologically to these upper-class values, although by then “fake musicians,” no longer seen as an embarrassment, had become more popular than those playing from scores. In the end they took over and a new form of music resulted that was to be called jazz as it migrated to the North. Buddy Bolden was the most eminent “fake musician” at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in New Orleans. The clash between the two value systems is well described by Bunk Johnson in his account of the competition between his Original Superior Band and the more conventional Imperial Band of sight-readers around 1908. Jazz was the result of a successful takeover of performance practice by musicians who had inherited an African tradition of orally transmitted music, yet were ready to incorporate into their repertoire some structures from contemporaneous written music. Eventually this approach turned out to be the cultural winner.

### A Darkroom Scenario

I can now offer a solution to the “mystery” of the only known photograph of New Orleans’ “first man of jazz.” *I postulate that the Buddy Bolden photograph is composite; that it is a darkroom photo montage created from two probably square-shaped negatives shot by the photographer in his small studio in New Orleans (or perhaps outside in front of a tent) on the same day.* For the first shot he would ask the nominal “leader,” C-clarinetist William Warner to sit down on the only chair available, in front of the curtain; Bb-clarinetist Frank Lewis and Willie Cornish with valve trombone would stand behind him. For the other shot he would invite guitarist Brock Mumford to sit on the *same* chair, with Buddy Bolden standing behind him, holding his cornet in the left hand. He then positioned the string bass player Jimmie Johnson to the right side of Bolden.

Why would he have made two

negatives? Why did he not snap the members together in the conventional lineup? There are several possible reasons. The most likely one is that the studio was small, that he did not have enough space to accommodate the entire band. However, Alden Ashforth (1985:171) has suggested that perhaps it wasn’t a studio: “In many reproductions of the photo, cropping has obscured a large canvas backdrop which implies performance at a circus show or carnival event, or possibly a large picnic.” Another reason could have been the limitations in the photographer’s equipment preventing him from taking pictures at greater distances. Dr. Richard Ripani (personal communication, May 15, 2009) has suggested that perhaps the photographer did not have a lens wide enough to capture the entire band without moving further away. And finally, it may have been that the musicians did not all show up at once, some coming later. But it is superfluous to speculate about those details which in any case are not directly relevant to our reconstruction of what probably happened in the darkroom.

Equipped with the two negatives, each showing one half of the band, the photographer then had to solve the problem of creating a picture that would show all the musicians together, as expected from a picture for commemoration, for giving to friends, even for advertising. Their band would have to be seen in the correct alignment. In his darkroom, therefore, he had to integrate the two shots. This meant that the two groups of three people in the separate photos had to be repositioned as if standing or sitting close to each other, so that a conventional New Orleans ragtime lineup would be formed. The photographer accomplished this by printing the second negative (with the guitarist, the bassist, and Bolden) side-reversed, the positive exposures overlapping by a margin of ca. 25% of each of the squared negatives. Thereby he was able to create the rectangular picture we know. The guitarist, now appearing as if left-handed, sits next to the C-clarinetist (on the same chair), with the end of the guitar’s neck dubbed into the clarinet player’s left arm.

Musicians' expectations of a certain lineup and the need for eliminating empty space between the groups photographed separately motivated the photographer to turn the second negative around, with the result that the three people in the right half of the composite picture are mirror-inverted, not only Brock Mumford and Jimmie Johnson, but also – less obvious to the casual observer – Buddy Bolden. No New Orleans cornetist posing for a photograph in the decades around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century would hold his instrument in the right hand. Such cultural evidence is, or course, circumstantial. In a crime case, it would not be taken as proof that the next culprit was also “guilty.” And yet there are likelihoods.

In order to reconstruct what happened, I first cut the Bolden picture into two halves (illustrations 1 and 2), approximately along the dark line in the curtain in the middle of the picture, first vertically downwards, then around the neck of the guitar, finally getting to the meeting point of the two dark lines under the chairs which together form a very flat v-shape. Then I reversed the mirror-inverted half of the composite picture to reconstruct the content

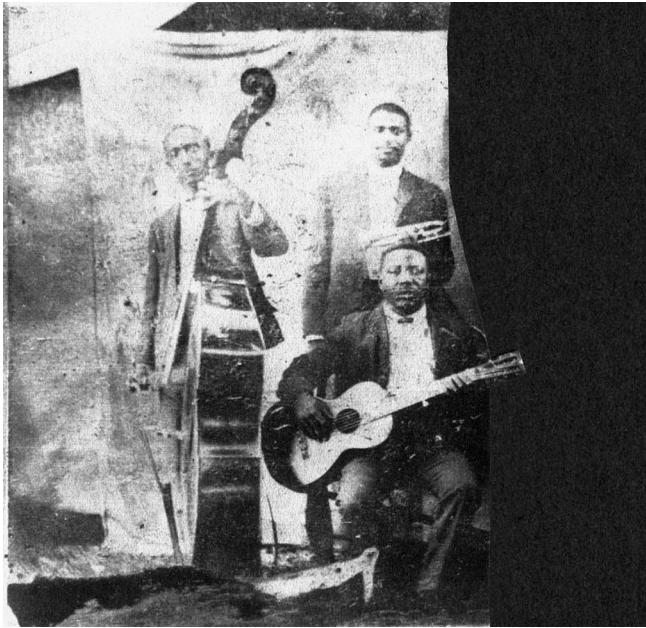


Illustrations 1 and 2: Reconstruction of the two original shots made by the New Orleans photographer. (illustration 1): 1<sup>st</sup> square-size shot made of three members of Bolden's band in New Orleans by the unknown photographer at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century. (illustration 2): 2<sup>nd</sup> shot of Bolden's band made by the same photographer on the same day of the other three musicians, including Bolden himself.

of the second negative. Of course, the neck of the guitar protrudes over the left arm of the jacket-wearing William Warner so convincingly that it is highly deceptive. Equally deceptive is the apparent presence of two chairs. Actually, guitarist Brock Mumford and C-clarinet player William Warner were sitting on the same chair, though at different times. This explains the symmetry of the dark line underneath. When the shots were made, the chair stood somewhat in the right part of the set-up as seen from the photographer's angle. By inverting the second negative the two musicians could then be printed as if positioned next to each other.

The course of the lower fringe of the canvas also suggests a composite picture. Whichever way we print it, the curtains swing back in opposite directions at the left and right margins, though they were slightly rearranged between the two shots.

Even around 1900 photographers had learned to create composite pictures when the need arose – without computers. It is not necessarily relevant to our reconstruction to know whether Buddy Bolden's photographer was working in a small studio or outside in



front of a tent. More important is the fact that, for whatever reason, he was unable to cover the whole band in one shot, while the musicians expected a photograph showing them all in a normal alignment. So he created it. To the casual observer it would not even occur that the two string players are mirror-inverted. And no one, except a specialist familiar with the iconography of New Orleans bands of the period, would question Buddy Bolden holding his cornet in the right hand.

So it is understandable that the members of Bolden's band probably accepted the composite picture without any complaints. It is also understandable that the set of questions we are pursuing here apparently did not come up in Russell's conversations with Willie Cornish. Everyone proceeded from the idea that a photographic image portrays reality.

Illustrations 1 and 2 reconstruct the original squared shots which the photographer made of Bolden's musicians, with the sections that were lost when integrating the prints blackened out by me. These two positives then show everyone as he was photographed; no one is "left-handed."

One can speculate which picture was taken first, the one showing Bolden or the one showing the seated "leader" William Warner. If the photographer respected the latter's nominal leadership role, he must have photographed the clarinet players and the trombone player first. Then he hung another cloth in front of the canvas seen in the first picture to avoid creating an all-too-obvious symmetry of the background in the composite picture; and he photographed the other three musicians against the modified curtains. That he posed the bass player to the right side of Bolden, I believe, also reveals his intent. He had probably planned to create a composite picture from the beginning, reflecting the customary band alignment with the bass player at the extreme left (from the musicians' viewpoint). So, the negative that was *not* to be printed mirror-inverted (i.e., of Warner, etc.) was shot first.

How people stand or sit during

a performance is essential for in-group communication. In the band in which I perform in southeast Africa, Donald Kachamba's Kwela Heritage Jazzband, with a repertoire including "Make Me a Pallet on the Floor" and "Buddy Bolden's Blues," the bass player is also positioned to the extreme left; next is the rattle player, then the guitarist (in the middle), and on the extreme right there are reed or flute players. Requests made, for example, by radio technicians, to change the order for a better recording balance are not heeded by us, because it would upset communication within the band. I have no reason to assume that it was otherwise in Bolden's band. The alignment was in conformity with the pattern of contemporaneous ragtime bands, guaranteeing the most efficient communication between all of them during a performance. And that is, of course, how they wanted to be seen in the photograph.

Looking at the reconstructed shots (cf. illustrations 1 and 2) we can ask which other possibilities the photographer would have had to integrate them, had he decided *not to reverse the second negative*. He would have only had two options, both with awful results. Rejoining the pictures this way: B U A, one gets the following lineup: Bass, cornet guitar player (seated), Bb clarinet, trombone, and C-clarinetist (seated) – an alignment contrary to cultural patterns in New Orleans. Moreover, the two people seated would have been separated by a large gap between their chairs. Conversely, rejoining the pictures: A U B, the awful result would have been a band lineup with the string bass in the center, Buddy Bolden and the guitarist relegated to the extreme left of the lineup (from the band's viewpoint) and the two seated musicians still separated by more than 1.50m. So, reversing the second negative was the best choice.

### An Alternative Darkroom Scenario?

I am sure that some researchers will insist upon Buddy Bolden holding his cornet in the right hand, perhaps claiming that he was a unique personality and somewhat

idiosyncratic. Buddy Bolden stands behind the guitarist Brock Mumford. Only the torso is seen. If he was holding the cornet in his right hand, then Bolden cannot have been part of the shot with the guitarist and the double bass player. In this case the alternative scenario would be that the photographer first snapped the four players of wind instruments together (on one negative) and then the two string players (on the other negative). But to intersect the two shots in a darkroom montage would presuppose considerably more photographic skill. He would have had first to expose the photographic paper from the negative with the four musicians, blotting out the lower part of Bolden's body, perhaps with a stencil the size of Brock Mumford's image, or simply by waving his fingers in circular motion in front of the lens. Then he would have dubbed in the string players side-reversed from the second negative onto the underexposed part of the rectangular sheet of photographic paper, with the neck of Brock's guitar protruding into the left arm of William Warner.

However, there is an argument that would seem to make scenario 2 more unlikely. If one looks carefully at directional light and shadow in the split prints (illustrations 1 and 2) one discovers that light conditions are different in the two pictures. The half with Johnson, Mumford, and Bolden has a very strong directional light from the left. As Lynn Abbott pointed out to me (letter dated December 8, 2008), "the upright bass appears to have cast a distinct shadow across the back of the body of the guitar." It is obvious that this reflects reality. And so does Buddy Bolden's portrait in illustration 2. Directional light hits his right side while the lower left part of the face and chin are darker. This, I think, argues for the homogeneity of this picture.

I think that the second scenario is less likely than the first one. Nevertheless, it has a certain psychological appeal: (a) the photographer would have recognized two categories of musical instruments, wind and stringed instruments, and separated

the performers accordingly; (b) the way he photographed the four musicians, three standing and one sitting in the middle in front of them would suggest a certain aesthetics of symmetry on his part, not unusual in photographers; (c) he would have paid attention to the status hierarchy in Bolden's band. Accordingly, he would have united in the first picture William Warner, the "leader" who was able to sight-read and Buddy Bolden, the most prominent performer who used to "fake" – giving them equal importance.

While the second scenario is psychologically plausible, the first scenario is more convincing by its simplicity in the photographic procedure, and also that it does not alienate Buddy Bolden culturally from his contemporaries, who all posed with their cornet in their left hand (illustrations 3, 4, 5, and 6).

### Open Queries

Although not central to my analysis of the Buddy Bolden "left-handed photograph," many questions relating to Bolden and his contemporaries remain. Here are some of them:

- (a) There is the absence of a drummer in the band photo. Bunk Johnson not only gave us his name, but also a plausible answer to why he was absent.
- (b) There is the strange round object that is seen in the Al Rose and Edmond Souchon reproduction in front of the C-clarinet player. A host of interpretations has been given, including the one that it was part of the missing percussion.
- (c) The mixing up of Frank Lewis and William Warner in the Ramsey-Smith publication of the photograph has stirred controversy. Alden Ashforth suggested solving this problem "by internal visual evidence. All sources agree that while Lewis played the longer Bb instrument, Warner played the shorter clarinet in C. "... the seated clarinetist holds an instrument that is shorter than that of the standing clarinetist" (Ashforth 1985: 176). This makes sense, but I wish Ashforth, claiming that "all sources agree...," would have given us the actual references to all those sources. He only mentions



Illustrations 3, 4, 5, 6. How Bolden's contemporaries used to hold their cornets in their left hand when posing for a photograph. Clockwise, from upper left: The John Robichaux Orchestra; The Original Creole Orchestra; The Original Superior Orchestra; The Imperial Orchestra.

that it was Rose and Souchon who "once again" "rectified matters".

(d) Probably insoluble is the dispute about the dating of the Bolden photograph, and also about the actual birthdates of Buddy Bolden, Bunk Johnson, and several others. Marquis (1975), Rose and Souchon (1967), Ashforth (1985), etc., all had their personal convictions. Here I would only add a warning: when working with oral history one should never dismiss an interlocutor's statements outright, only because they do not match one's preconceived scheme. This is what Marquis did with Bunk Johnson's information that he was born December 27, 1879. There is no hard evidence that this is wrong. And that Bolden (according to Bunk) in 1895 was married with two children and aged between 25 and 30 is a credible assessment by Bunk who in the same year was 16 as he joined Bolden's band. Marquis, however, advances

Bolden's year of birth from the earliest estimate, 1868, to 1877.

According to Bunk's testimony the Bolden band in 1895 included "Cornelius Tilman, drummer, Willy Cornish, trombone, Bolden, cornet, Bunk, cornet, Willie Warner, clarinet, Mumford, guitar, and Jimmy Johnson, bass" (Ramsey and Smith, eds. 1939:25). It was already the larger, seven-piece group. What underlines the authenticity of Bunk's statement is that the order in which he cites the names and instruments of these musicians is precisely in the traditional lineup of a New Orleans band of the period, with the drummer at the extreme right (from the musician's viewpoint), then trombonist, cornet players, clarinet, guitar, and bass. The bass is always at the extreme left, bass and drummer forming a kind of frame of the band.

Bunk then said that the Bolden

picture was taken “just before” he himself started playing in the larger, seven-piece band. Accordingly, the editors of *Jazzmen* dated the photograph as “before 1895.” Bunk said that prior to the seven-piece band including him on second cornet, Bolden had a five-piece band.

I have no reason to throw doubt on Bunk’s testimony, allowing for small inaccuracies in the years. I think it is also inappropriate to point fingers at the apparent contradiction between Bunk’s talk of a five-piece band and the fact that the Bolden photo shows six people. Bunk’s testimony was based on his memory, and his memory did not contain an image of *two* clarinet players in Bolden’s early band. Obviously he was not asked to explain the presence of a second clarinetist in the Bolden photograph when he saw it for the first time after its discovery. It could well have been a casual inclusion, while the members of the original five-piece Bolden band may not have included Frank Lewis on a regular basis. Bunk’s memory did not have to account for this variation which the photograph represents and which he also saw for the first time.

(e) The argument that the orally transmitted birthdates for William Warner and Jimmie Johnson are also wrong because they conflict with what is written in their marriage certificates, would only hold good if we assumed that New Orleans bureaucracy was efficient and always accurate. No researcher in ethnomusicology would proceed from such an assumption. In Africa we find a comparable situation even now; one cannot trust official documents when reconstructing an individual’s past. Many people have no birth certificates at all, and, for example, when someone applies for a passport to go overseas, some relative is then called to sign an affidavit. The birthdates they give depend not only on memory, but are sometimes deliberately modified in order to make a person a bit older or younger, depending on what is

advantageous. Therefore, written birthdates, even the spellings of a name, are not necessarily more reliable than oral tradition. Marriage certificates are ancillary sources for birthdates with an uncertain credibility in societies like that of New Orleans in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When Buddy Bolden and Harriet Oliver officially recorded the birth of their child Charles on May 2, 1897, she gave her partner’s age as 22 (Marquis 1978: 46).

Information obtained from oral testimony may be wrong, but a census-taker under the spell of 90 degrees Fahrenheit, confronted with the incomprehensible utterings of some of his informants, may also err and write what he believes he has heard. Any fieldworker in ethnomusicology is familiar with such a situation. That Jimmie Johnson, the bassist, would have been born in 1884 (cf. Marquis 1978:5) is almost surely wrong. Even if the photograph of the Bolden band were tentatively dated to 1905 instead of “before 1895”, Johnson would have to look like a 21 year-old lad in the picture. Obviously he looks like one of the elderly members in the band.

Bolden’s baptismal document cited by Marquis (1978:5) is not foolproof either.



Illustration 7: Manuel Perez Band, showing Perez and Maurice Durand holding trumpets in left hand, and Bolden Band veteran Jimmie Johnson bowing his bass right-handed.

I would not want to argue with Marquis, but I would recommend a little more exercise in source criticism, and to abstain from investing *on principle* more confidence in written sources than in oral tradition. Such attitudes perpetuate outmoded stereotypes about “people without history”.

(f) An even bigger question mark applies to Lawrence Gushee’s examination of a 1900 federal census in which a ten year-old “Gerry” Johnson is listed. With some caution he assumes that it could be Bunk Johnson. But this document contains so many corrections and writings-over that rigorous source criticism forbids categorically taking it as reliable. We do not know who was conducting door-to-door listings and what qualifications the person had.

In sum, I have the impression that researchers of jazz history tend to give more credit to written documents than they give to oral testimonies. But written documents are equally prone to errors, to illegitimate corrigenda, and even fabrication. Luckily, Ashforth (1985) throws doubt on at least several of Marquis’ conclusions in the latter’s book on Bolden. He says that Marquis’ observations on Bunk are “counterbalanced by photos taken in 1944 in which Bunk looks well into his sixties, hardly fifty-five” (Ashforth 1985:178). At least it can be ascertained that Willie Cornish left Buddy Bolden’s band in 1898 to serve in the Spanish-American War. So the band must have existed in that year.

(g) An acceptable assessment of the relationship between Buddy Bolden and the young Bunk Johnson is given by Ashforth in the final paragraph of his article: “The question of Bunk Johnson’s alleged membership in the band is not, in fact, germane. In dating the photograph it is immaterial whether he could never have played with Bolden (as Marquis conjectures), or whether he played with Bolden, but only occasionally (as Charters suggests). Rather, the key people in dating the photograph are Cornish and the bass player James Johnson” (p. 179). Ashforth eventually settles on a rough dating of the photograph in his figure 2 (p. 173):

“probably taken between 1899 and 1903.”

(h) There are also psychological questions arising from our analysis. If Bolden held his cornet in the left hand, as I deduce, what could have made him hold it so unusually as compared with his contemporaries? He seems to have turned the instrument around, holding it almost horizontally in his palm, fingers on the underside of the pistons’ tubes. My colleague Giorgio Adamo has suggested (July 2008) that either a wish by the photographer or by Bolden himself to hold it higher up could have been a factor; so that Bolden could be seen with his instrument behind Brock Mumford’s head. He would have raised his left hand a bit to avoid having his cornet disappear behind the head of the guitarist sitting in front of him. Although this is speculation, it is plausible. Another suggestion Adamo made was that it could have been a type of cornet somewhat different from those of his contemporaries, possibly even with some home-made adaptations. In fact, nobody has asked what kind of technique Bolden had used so “he could be heard across the river throughout up-town New Orleans” when he played in the pecan grove (Russell/Smith in Ramsey and Smith 1939:11). We know from African research that creative musicians often modify factory-manufactured instruments to obtain a more sonorous tone.

(i) Another psychological question is why some musicians would not get bothered if their pictures are printed mirror-inverted. When I wrote up the text of this article which I had planned for so long, in my domicile in Malawi at Dr. Moya A. Malamusi’s Oral Literature Research Programme in July 2008, I became interested in knowing whether an experienced African guitarist would easily notice that the picture of another guitarist was mirror-inverted. On July 24, 2008, in the morning, six-string guitarist Christopher Gerald, a member of our jazz band, came to my house on another matter. I had never discussed my article with him, but now I showed him the print of the photo with the “left handed” guitarist. I asked him in Chichewa: “Look at this picture! Do

you think there is anything wrong with it? Look carefully!" He gazed at it for a long time, then said: "Perhaps it is the print, there are dark spots." I replied: "No, look at the musicians and their instruments. Is there anything wrong with them?" He looked at it again very intensively, and then said: "I can't find what should be wrong." So I had to tell him: "It's something concerning the guitarist." Then, suddenly, he recognized that it was mirror-inverted.

Although a casual test undertaken with a musician on another continent a hundred years later cannot be conclusive in any kind of cross-cultural inquiry, the result has at least confirmed that a photograph of a guitarist printed mirror-inverted need not be rejected even by another experienced guitarist. The implication is that Buddy Bolden's musicians, including Brock Mumford, probably accepted their photographer's print, even if it was side-reversed.

(j) The perception of mirror-inverted images by the human eye as correct may be based psychologically on the fact that we all see each other (with or without tools) from time to time in a mirror and learn to accept ourselves in the inverted representation. Orchestras in New Orleans have sometimes played in halls with mirrors and got accustomed to seeing themselves in that way. We do not believe that a mirror image changes our identity.

In the afternoon of the same day I tried to repeat the test with another guitarist in our group in Chileka, when he came to my house. Sinosi Mlendo is a jazz guitarist. When he came, I showed him the picture and said: "This is the photograph we have of the first jazzman and his band in the 1890s. Is it fine or do you think there is something wrong with it?" After much cogitation he said: "You had better tell me!" I said: "Take your guitar and turn it around with the neck pointing to the right!" First he did not understand my request, so I took his guitar and turned it around on his lap. Then I said: "Try your right hand! Could you still apply your standard guitar fingering to the fretboard turned that way, with the sixth string down?"

He saw that he couldn't do it. I said: "But in the picture the guitarist apparently can. So how could that be explained?" Sinosi, much more inclined towards theory than his colleague Christopher, had no idea, but came up with a psychological explanation. He said in Chichewa (I am translating): "The problem is that we don't question pictures, photographs. We believe what we see is true and that there never could be anything wrong with what we see."

It is interesting that the same musician, Sinosi, plays the *kwela* metal flute with a reversed fingering, right hand up, left hand down on the six fingerholes. But the irony is that I did not notice it for at least a year after we had started to play together. I only discovered it when he played together with a second flutist who used the normal fingering. Of course, nobody else has ever found our posters with the left-handed flutist to be unusual.

## Summary

The solution to the riddle of the only known Buddy Bolden photograph, apparently incorporating left-handed musicians in his band, is that it is a *photo montage from two different negative shots*. The photographer had snapped three musicians at one time, later creating a composite picture in his darkroom by printing *the second negative side-reversed*. His aim was to represent a correct New Orleans ragtime band lineup combining the two separate shots. Apparently he was unable to photograph all six band members at once.

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# The Bolden Photograph: A Photographic Examination

by

**Justin Winston, assisted by Clive Wilson**

The only known photographic image of Buddy Bolden's band has always been an enigma for jazz fans. The original was about the size of a postcard or smaller and came from Willie Cornish, who played the valve trombone in the band. He loaned it to Charles E. Smith for use in *Jazzmen*,<sup>1</sup> where the image was first published in 1939. The present whereabouts of the original of the image are unknown.

From *In Search of Buddy Bolden*,<sup>2</sup> Don Marquis estimates the date it was taken to be 1905 because the bass player, Jimmie Johnson, who was born in 1884, does not look like a teenager and could be twenty-one years old. Bunk Johnson's statement that the picture was taken in 1895 would make Jimmie Johnson eleven years old, which clearly he is not.<sup>3</sup> Alden Ashforth concludes in "The Bolden Photo – One More Time" that the date is "probably between 1899 and 1903."<sup>4</sup>

On closer inspection, the photograph as printed in *Jazzmen* is puzzling. Both the cornet and valve trombone are backwards, mirror images of what they are in reality, and Willie Warner is holding his clarinet with his hands reversed on the keys, which also turns out to be a mirror image of what we should expect. So has the picture been printed here backwards?

There are several possibilities. One is that the image, as first presented, is correct. In this case we are looking at a very "sinister" band indeed consisting of a left handed guitar (not an unknown item) played right handed, a string bass played backwards if the image is backwards, but normally if the

image is correct, two left handed Albert system clarinets, a backwards valve trombone and a backwards Artois cornet. Even though we have never seen a backwards Albert system clarinet, valve trombone, or Artois cornet, it doesn't mean that such cannot or could not have existed. French instrument makers in the 19th century are well known to have experimented with hybrids that look very odd to our eyes and maybe sound very odd to our ears. While in Paris in 1999, I saw a trombone with two slides, at right angles to one another, made by none other than Adolph Sax, inventor of the saxophone.<sup>5</sup> Then we must remember the ophicleide and the sarousaphone, tales of which the world is not yet prepared to ponder.

The world, however, may be prepared to look at the picture of Mr. Bolden and his friends printed the other way around. Immediately, we see that there is no longer a problem with the cornet, trombone, and clarinets. They have not been made backwards. The guitar and bass players are now playing left-handed, which, if they played so, was not mentioned in any interviews and doubtless would have been if they had. Also we can tell from looking closely at the guitar strings that their position is backwards! Normally, the bass string is on top, closest to the player's head, and here it is on the bottom, closest to his knee. The guitar is not strung for a left-handed player, and he appears to be playing it the opposite way round. While not impossible, it is most unlikely and not mentioned in any literature. If the picture is backwards, how did it get

that way? If the musicians are holding their instruments backwards or upside down, why?

It could have been a printer's mistake. Since a press cannot print continuous shades of gray like a photograph, to be printed the image had to be converted into a "halftone." A halftone tricks the eye into seeing shades of gray by changing a continuous tone image like a photograph into dots of different sizes. Dark tones become larger dots and light tones become smaller dots. The conversion was usually done by making a *halftone negative* on lithographic film and from the film a plate or printing block (called a "cut") would have been made. While printers always display the highest degree of professionalism, mistakes can be made, and when the cut was made the negative could have been "flopped." That is to say, the negative was put on the plate or cut backwards. In 1938 (or 1939) such work was done by human hands, minds and eyes. There is, however, no evidence that this happened. But, if the original source material is backwards and the negative and cut were forwards (done correctly) then the result would be a backwards image.

The printing cut could have been made either from the original Cornish print or from a copyprint made from Mr. Cornish's original print, what is now called a first generation print. If a copyprint were made, then it would have been copied on continuous tone film and printed photographically, and the cut made from that copy. The copying photographer could have made a mistake and "flopped" the negative when the copyprint was made. Then the platemaker would have done his job correctly and the resulting printed image would be backwards.

These questions could be answered by looking at Mr. Cornish's original, which we cannot. So, how close can we get? The

provenance of the image is thus: The first publication was in *Jazzmen* (1939). According to the story we heard from Alden Ashforth, Charles Smith took the photograph to Fred Ramsey, who worked at the publisher which subsequently published *Jazzmen*. Ramsey made a photographic negative of the original on his kitchen table, from which he probably made four prints – for Smith, Russell, Cornish, and himself respectively.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, Al Rose borrowed the print from Mrs. Bella Cornish to make a copy for himself sometime in the 1940s. A copy of this copy appeared in *New Orleans Jazz – A Family Album*.<sup>7</sup> Bella Cornish also lent the print to Dr. Leonard Bechet, but when he died in 1952 it could not be found, she said.<sup>8</sup> Much later, Alden Ashforth borrowed, and returned, Bill Russell's print and had an uncropped negative and print made from that.

The questions are: Did Ramsey and Smith return the original to Willie Cornish, or did they keep it? We know they gave him a new print, as you will see from the argument below. If Ramsey kept the original, is it to be found in the Ramsey Collection at the Williams Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection? And is Russell's original print now at the same place?

In the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane there used to be a copy negative of the Bolden Band image once owned by Bill Russell.<sup>9</sup> This was probably a negative made from Russell's print. In 1971 I had an opportunity to examine that negative. According to some notes I took at the time, it was a 35mm single frame uncropped negative on safety stock. The image was sulfiding slightly, that is to say, the silver was coming out of suspension. There are a few dust spots. The black spots are where the emulsion flaked off during development. Therefore, all the imperfections, dust spots, scratches and the problem of William Warner (the standing

clarinetist<sup>10</sup>) being out of focus, were on the original. There seem to be no dust spots or scratches on this that are not also on the plate in *Jazzmen*.

We can see a number of things in the image as it has survived. First, *all* the extant images are from the same copy negative. Close examination of the imperfections show that they are the same in every copy of the image. This is why we can say with certainty that Al Rose did not make a new negative of the original – he must have used a print that was given to Cornish by Fred Ramsey.

The original photograph was made outdoors, probably at an event where the Bolden Band was playing sometime between 1895 (if you believe Bunk Johnson, who wasn't there) and 1905 (if you believe Don Marquis, who also wasn't there). In the uncropped photo you can see that the canvas backdrop is not a tent. The foreground shows a curved object, and it is our guess that this is the bell of a mellophone. The smear in the bottom right corner appears to be thumb print.

Photography was still something of a novelty when this picture was made. Amateur photography was just beginning to become common and if you took a picture you would usually be the one to process it. Having a photograph made was an occasion on which one would go to a studio and have to wait some time before prints might be ready. Dr. Land hadn't yet been born and there was no such thing as one-hour processing. There was nevertheless a demand for quick photography to provide something by which to remember an event. To be a viable process for such activity a finished product would have to be ready within a few minutes. If it took more than half an hour the customer might wander away and forget about it. The process we are most familiar

with today of making a film or glass negative and then printing it took much too much time. However, several applicable processes were available to the artists (often called “street photographers”) supplying fast, commemorative photography to the general public.

The newest process for street photographers was the use of paper negatives. This process was made possible by the recent introduction of prepared paper light sensitive enough to produce an image from a projected image. Street cameras were large enough to fit trays of chemicals to process pictures. A sheet of paper was put in the camera, exposed and developed, fixed, and partially washed by hand (still in the camera) to produce a paper negative. The negative, still wet, was taken out of the camera, put on a board in front of the lens, another sheet of paper was put in the camera, the negative was copied, and upon development, produced a positive print sold to the customer usually in a cardboard or paper frame. A practiced photographer could produce a finished print in less than 10 minutes.

This process was probably too new and too expensive to have been used for the Bolden photograph.

The most common street camera process, and by far the most popular process of the Victorian period, was the *melanotype* (literally meaning “black print”), also known as the *ferrotype* (meaning iron print), or most commonly, the *tintype*. It was a variation of the collodion or wet-plate process which was described by the Rev. Dodgson as Lewis Carroll in “Hiawatha’s Photography”.<sup>11</sup>

*“Mystic, awful was the process.  
First a piece of glass he coated  
With Collodion, and plunged it  
In a bath of Lunar Caustic  
Carefully dissolved in water:*

*There he left it certain minutes.  
Secondly, my Hiawatha  
Made with cunning hand a mixture  
Of the acid Pyro-gallic,  
And of Glacial Acetic,  
And of Alcohol and water:  
This developed all the picture.  
Finally, he fixed each picture  
With a saturate solution  
Of a certain salt of Soda -  
Chemists call it Hyposulphite.  
(Very difficult the name is  
For a metre like the present,  
But periphrasis has done it.)”*

The “Luna caustic” cited by the Reverend was silver nitrate ( $\text{AgNO}_3$ ) which sometimes photographers made by dissolving a silver dollar in nitric acid. The “Luna” is a reference to chemistry’s roots in alchemy in which discipline silver was referred to as Luna (silver apples of the moon).<sup>12</sup> Collodion, on the other hand, developed about ten years before,<sup>13</sup> was first used in photography in the Ambrotype process. The process was just as Mr. Dodgson describes, producing a negative image when viewed in light passing through it. However, when viewed by incident light there was enough reflectivity in the image that when viewed against a dark background the image appeared to be positive. Ambrotypes were always presented in cases with the image on a dark background. Not surprisingly, the process was also known generically as a “collodotype.”

Ferrotypes or tintypes differed from glass plate collodotype in that a positive image was produced directly. The collodion was coated directly on a substance, usually iron (hence ferotype), but it could have been anything else painted black. It took between 3 and 5 seconds to make the exposure, about two minutes to develop, one to two minutes to fix, and 3 to 5 minutes to dry.

A finished positive image could be produced in less than 10 minutes and the photographer collected a cool 10-25¢. Oh, how the money rolled in! *There was really only one problem with tintypes: they came out backwards.*

A famous picture of William Henry McCarty, AKA William H. Bonny, AKA Billy the Kid had some scholars saying he was left handed because he was holding his rifle in his left hand. In 1958 Paul Newman starred in a movie about Billy the Kid called, *The Left Handed Gun*, based on the evidence of this image. The photograph is, however, a ferrotype and is, therefore, backwards, so he was actually holding the gun in his right hand and while he may have been a sinister<sup>14</sup> character, he was nevertheless right handed.

So if the picture is backwards, why are the musicians all holding their instruments backwards or upside down? This isn’t an exam, so having asked the question, we’ll also answer it: because the photographer told them to. Whatever process was used to create the image, the photographer knew it would come out backwards, so to have the image look right, the musicians playing the string instruments must have been told to hold their instruments left-handed.

How should the image be printed and/or viewed? This question isn’t as easily answered. We see two equally valid answers. Which one is correct depends on your view of photography and of history and historical documents.

### **The image as historical document**

What we have here is the only known contemporary image of any kind of one of the seminal bands, if not *the* seminal band, in the early development of jazz music, so the status of the image as an important historical document is quite solid. We should, then, restore the image to most closely approximate whatever the photogra-

pher actually saw with his own eyes: print the photograph reversed. To maximize the clarity of the photo, effects of the processing and incidental damages could be minimized and image enhancement could be used to discover and interpret information recorded therein. The resulting image would serve as an extremely important historical document. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

### The image as an artistic work

On the other hand, the image is also a work demonstrating some moderate degree of artistic acumen transcending simple reportage. With the same photographic equipment and materials the picture could, with some difficulties, have been made of the band on the stage. While we might wish it, this is not what was being done. A more formal portrait of the band was being made. Even though the New Orleans city council once passed an ordinance declaring that photography is not an art form, there are still artistic choices to be made. There was a choice of background. It was plain, to maximize the focus of interest on the subject rather than confuse the eye with complexity. There was a choice of pose to emphasize the dignity and elevated status of the subjects. And, of course, there was the choice of the position of the instruments, which has caused us so much trouble, but which actually indicates that the photographic artist knew what he was doing.

Therefore, any attempt to restore the image should follow the original intent of the artist, as much as is possible. The image should be viewed as a mirror image of the original scene, exactly as the artist intended it, with tonal values presented as they would have been in the original tintype, not as in modern bromide or in digital photographic standard. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

What else does the surviving image itself show?

The musicians are wearing what look to me like fairly heavy wool suits, so it is likely that the photograph was taken during the winter months, sometime between late October and early March.

This may be an overly critical comment, but the musicians are out of focus. One has to realize that the size of the original photograph was quite small, so somebody looking at it would not have noticed the slight focusing error. It was never meant to be enlarged to cover a wall or even an 8" x 10". How do we know how big the original was? Well, there were standard 19th century sizes.<sup>15</sup> The proportions in the least cropped versions of this image seem to be 4" x 5" to me.

The image appears to have been taken on a cloudy day. There are no shadows. A cloudy day also could explain why the back row is out of focus and the front row is more or less in focus. If the day were cloudy and fairly dark the photographer would have had to open the lens aperture as wide as possible to reduce the exposure time, thus also reducing the depth-of-field. The least in focus element of the image is Willie Warner, the standing clarinet player, and the sharpest element, not counting the dust spots, is actually the semi-circle (that we think is the bell of a mellophone) in the foreground. Some of the street cameras I have seen are fairly primitive and were either fixed focus or could only be focused with difficulty. As most of the pictures taken that day would have been portraits of one or two people from four or five feet away, it is possible that the photographer did not refocus the camera at all. He would have moved the camera back to accommodate all the band members, putting the front row just barely in focus and the back row just barely

out of focus. Looking at the full, uncropped image it becomes obvious that the lineup recedes somewhat from us. In other words, the camera wasn't square with the lineup of the subjects. Willie Warner is farther from the camera and more out of focus than the rest.

Assuming the picture was taken on a cloudy day, probably on a Sunday, during the winter months in New Orleans between 1899 and 1905, we could come up with some dates when it might have been taken. We *could* do it, but we're not. We can't do everything for you, you know.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> F. Ramsey & C. E. Smith (ed) *Jazzmen*, Harcourt, Brace & Co, Ithaca, NY (1939).

<sup>2</sup> D. M. Marquis *In Search of Buddy Bolden*, LSU Press, Baton Rouge, LA (1978).

<sup>3</sup> Of peripheral interest, the latest published research lists evidence for no fewer than seven possible birthdates for Bunk Johnson. The possible birthdate of 1889 is by no means certain. Mike Hazledine concludes that the most likely date is 27th December, 1885. See "Bunk Johnson—the Story So Far," *New Orleans Music*, Vol.14, No. 1, (March, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> A. Ashforth, "The Bolden Band Photo – One More Time," *Annual Review of Jazz Studies 3*, Transaction Books, (1985).

<sup>5</sup> Al Rose believed that the saxophone has no place in jazz music and should never be allowed. Other well known authorities are of an opposite opinion.

<sup>6</sup> The question as to who took the photo of the original, Ramsey or Smith, has not been verified.

<sup>7</sup> Rose & Souchon, *New Orleans Jazz – A Family Album*, LSU Press, Baton Rouge, LA (1967).

<sup>8</sup> Allen and Russell, interview with Bella Cornish, January 13, 1959, in the Hogan Jazz Archive.

<sup>9</sup> This negative has disappeared.

<sup>10</sup> That Warner is the standing clarinetist is based on Don Marquis' interviews with the Warner and Lewis family members.

<sup>11</sup> L. Carroll, *Phantasmagoria*, (1869).

<sup>12</sup> As might be expected from the name, *Luna caustic*, silver nitrate is somewhat caustic as well as being corrosive. It will turn one's skin a fine shade of blue-black. Ingesting it can lead to a condition called argyria which not only can turn the skin a cold blue gray, but also lead to insanity, convulsions, coma, death and the belief that photography is an art form. I often wonder if the term "*lunatic*" had alchemical roots. *Luna caustic* was also used as an antiseptic, especially on oysters, before its poisonous characteristics were considered.

<sup>13</sup> Collodion was used extensively during the American Civil War as a wound dressing, a use to which it is still put as New Skin™ Liquid Bandage. It is also used by make-up artists to make temporary scars on actors.

<sup>14</sup> If you didn't understand this earlier, *sinister* is, of course, derived from the Latin *sinistra-ae*, meaning the left hand.

<sup>15</sup> They sold photographs in sizes based on a standard "plate". A full plate was 6½" x 8½", half plate – 4½" x 5½", quarter plate – 3 1/8" x 4 1/8", sixth plate – 3½" x 2½", on down to Gem which was ½" x 1". During the early 20th century standard sizes were changing to a full plate being 8" x 10" and a quarter plate being 4" x 5". The other sizes were still made and were quite popular.

# Swingin' On The 'Nue With Ike McKinney: An African American Dance Promoter in Shreveport, Louisiana, 1929-1939

By  
Chris Brown

In the northwest corner of Louisiana near the Texas and Arkansas borders lies the city of Shreveport. The city boasts an impressive musical heritage, yet many of its subjects remain under-explored. One such subject is that of the African American music scene of the 1930s,

Shreveport's African American community. Information related to the city's African American music scene represents one of the more thoroughly documented subjects within the pages of *The Sun*. However, historians have yet to deeply explore the city's music history from



Bert Benton's Night Hawks (Paul L. Carriger Correspondence and Records, 1928-1975. Archives and Special Collections, Noel Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Library in Shreveport, Shreveport). When this photo appeared in the *Shreveport Sun* on April 16, 1932, the personnel was identified from left to right as: Bert Benton, manager, trombone and tenor saxophone; Theodore Mills, assistant manager, trumpet and alto saxophone; George McDaniel, trumpet; Curtis Foster, saxophone; Joe Armstrong, tuba; Major Lampkins, piano; Clarence Hall, banjo; Henry Mills, drums; Jasper Tompkins, booking agent.

which is well documented in the newspaper *The Shreveport Sun*. Founded in 1920 by Melvin Lee Collins, *The Sun*, which is still in publication, "is the oldest weekly newspaper for African Americans in Louisiana."<sup>1</sup> The earliest preserved issue of the newspaper dates from 1927, but even after this date some individual issues and entire years remain missing.<sup>2</sup> While a complete record of the paper may not exist, the surviving issues contain a rich record of

the perspective of this resource.<sup>3</sup>

Information regarding musical activities regularly appeared in *The Sun* in the form of advertisements, articles, notices, reviews, and social columns. Many of these related to dances and often named the person responsible for promoting the event. One promoter, Isaac "Ike" McKinney, Jr., first surfaces in the newspaper in 1929. For the next ten years, set against the backdrop of the Great Depression

and the years leading up to World War II, *The Sun* printed more information on McKinney's dances than for any other promoter in town. His shows included revered "territory" bands on tour, led by the likes of Walter Barnes from Chicago, Oscar Celestin from New Orleans, Clifford "Boots" Douglas from San Antonio, and Andy Kirk from Kansas City. He also promoted dances for popular Shreveport groups such as Bert Benton's Night Hawks and Eddie "Coot" Lewis's Orchestra. The story of Ike McKinney ultimately represents a steady rise in achievement that ends with an abrupt and tragic conclusion in 1939. His story also provides a glimpse into Shreveport's African American music community from a unique perspective – that of one person responsible for promoting dances at a variety of venues around town.

Ike McKinney was born around 1906. According to the 1920 census, he and his family were living at 1912 Garden Street, located in the Allendale neighborhood of Shreveport.<sup>4</sup> Ike's mother, Annie Lou McKinney, who worked as a laundress from home, was listed as the head of household.<sup>5</sup> The census also noted that she was a widow at the time, though marriage records indicate that she married George Waits in 1920, and then married Thomas Kinsey in 1925.<sup>6</sup> As for the rest of the McKinney household in 1920, the census also documented Ike's two younger sisters, brother, and niece.<sup>7</sup> The census also indicated that Ike was working as a chauffeur, employed by a "private family."<sup>8</sup> The annual city directories recorded more of his early employment history: porter for the Elks Home (1919), chauffeur (1922), porter for the Dreyfuss Dry Goods Company (1923-24), and chauffeur (1925-27).<sup>9</sup>

The first reference to Ike McKinney in *The Shreveport Sun* occurred November 9, 1929; his name appears within a notice for an Armistice Day Dance at Duncan's Auditorium "under the direction of Mr. Ike McKinney [sic]."<sup>10</sup> The event cost 50 cents to attend and featured music by Kelso Morris and His Texas Jazz Steppers Broadcasting Orchestra, who were making their first appearance in the

city.<sup>11</sup> Duncan's Auditorium, located at the intersection of Murphy Street and Allen Avenue, began hosting events in the summer of 1927.<sup>12</sup> Morris's orchestra hailed from nearby Marshall, Texas. An article appearing in another African American newspaper, *The Chicago Defender*, suggests that Morris taught at Wiley College, and his orchestra consisted of students.<sup>13</sup> During this time period, the "Wiley Collegians" also traveled to performances in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and southern Louisiana.<sup>14</sup> McKinney again promoted the group in the spring of 1930:

Mardi Gras Dance At Duncan's Auditorium March 4  
The unique Mardi Gras dance...  
will furnish amusement lovers  
a source of much pleasure,  
according to Mr. Ike McKinney,  
promoter. The services of the  
Kelso Band, Marshall, Texas,  
has [sic] been secured in order  
to guarantee the best and  
highest quality of music for  
the occasion. An invitation is  
extended [to] all who believe in  
clean, classy entertainment and  
lovers of good music.<sup>15</sup>

Located half a mile east from Duncan's Auditorium was Texas Avenue, a vibrant business and entertainment center where many of McKinney's later dances occurred. The activity of the district was described in a 1939 *Shreveport Sun* article:

A familiar phrase in our grand city is "on the Avenue." ...  
Things happen in this section from the Negroes' standpoint—especially in the 1000 block.  
For here are located centers for entertainment and business.  
There are the Sun Publishing Company, The Moonlight Café, Henrietta's Beauty School and Salon, Colored Funeral Benefit

Association, E. W. Clay's Barber Shop, Smith's Barber Shop, White's Barber Shop, Nash Bros. Shine Stand, Avenue Confectionery, Nellie Jones' Tailor Shop, Smith's Boarding House, Allen's Boarding House, The Hub Hat Shop, Ed. Green Realty Co., physicians' and dentists' offices, and many other business places. For entertainment, there is The Star Theater, Shreveport's only Colored Theatre, where nightly the crowds flock to see movie offerings, varying from Buck Jones' "Ride 'Em Cowboy" to plays by Shakespeare. Across the street from The Star, is the Plamoor Ballroom, where the two-steppers, one-steppers, waltzers, or jitterbugs gather at dance time.

In the other cities, "ON THE AVENUE" may not mean a thing, but in Louisiana's Grandest City, "on the avenue" means ACTIVITY – scissors clipping, orchestras' swinging, films unreeling, roaring presses, joyful laughter, excitement, and crowds. That's Life "on the avenue!"<sup>16</sup>

The area was also referenced in a 1936 *Sun* column entitled "Ballyhoo." Writer "Yours Truly—Me" assembled a "Port Dictionary" that defined "The Nue" as "Texas Ave, the 10 hundred blk., where the 'country boy' gets his first lesson how to 'sprawl' and 'meet the girls' and gab the next day bout 'Boy, didn't we raise a fog!'"<sup>17</sup>

One particular building on the Avenue, the Calanthean Temple, served as an important location for the African American community of Shreveport. Throughout the 1930s, the Calanthean was also the setting for many of

McKinney's dances. Located at 1007 1/2 Texas Avenue, the "building [was] constructed in 1923 by the Court of Calanthe, the women's auxiliary of the black lodge of the fraternal order Knights of Pythias."<sup>18</sup> *The Shreveport Journal* reported in 1929 that it "is the largest [building] owned by negroes in Shreveport."<sup>19</sup> An article in *The Sun* from 1932 described it further: "The Calanthean Temple, a large office building operated exclusively by Negro citizens, is the headquarters of many Negro businesses, lodges, doctors' offices, and various other types of businesses..."<sup>20</sup> Located above these businesses was an open-air rooftop garden that hosted dances and social events.

Throughout the 1930s, Ike McKinney maintained a productive relationship with the Calanthean. In fact, the earliest reference to a dance at this venue as recorded in *The Sun* indicates McKinney's involvement. The event, a Labor Day dance occurring September 1, 1930, included music by the "Red Hot" Majestic Ramblers from Monroe, Louisiana.<sup>21</sup> The event's notice predicted, "A record crowd of fun and entertainment will wiggle the fantastic toe to their heart's satisfaction."<sup>22</sup> These itinerant Ramblers played throughout the region, and held residencies in Alexandria, Louisiana, as well as Greenville, Mississippi, in the mid-1930s.<sup>23</sup>

The site of McKinney's next musical event was the Odd Fellows Hall, located at 1212 Western Avenue. Taking place October 27, he and S. B. Vagner co-promoted a dance "honoring football teams and fair visitors."<sup>24</sup> A notice indicated that the dance "lasts until l-a-t-e" and would be "of a superior quality...full of real, honest-to-goodness thrills."<sup>25</sup> The ad further stated, "Good order is assured. Fun and pleasure for all."<sup>26</sup> For the occasion, the Eddie and Sugar Lou Orchestra provided music. This group operated out of Texas and performed in the city of Tyler in 1932 and 1933.<sup>27</sup> This Tyler connection also surfaces on the group's recordings for Vocalion Records where they were listed as Eddie and Sugar Lou's Hotel Tyler Orchestra.<sup>28</sup> The group also had a connection to Shreveport as indicated by their song "KWKH

Blues.” Recorded in 1929, it references the city’s popular and controversial radio station operated by W. K. Henderson.

During the summer of 1932, McKinney again worked with the Calanthean. On May 23 he promoted Celestin’s “Original Tuxedo and Columbia recording orchestra of New Orleans.”<sup>29</sup> The event’s notice stated, “A cordial invitation is extended to the amusement loving public to attend and enjoy an evening of honest-to-goodness pleasure.”<sup>30</sup> McKinney promoted the group a second time on July 18 “atop the Calanthean temple, where the cool breezes blow.”<sup>31</sup> This return performance was “sponsored by Messrs. Sam Dixon and Ike McKinney, local young men noted for sponsoring clean and up-to-date amusement here.”<sup>32</sup> As for the musical group, Oscar “Papa” Celestin led New Orleans groups beginning around 1910 and recorded for both the Okeh and Columbia record labels in the mid 1920s.<sup>33</sup>

A Labor Day dance was the occasion for McKinney’s next event. It occurred September

5, 1932, at Duncan’s Auditorium, where “the cool ceiling fans will make you forget the temperature on the outside.”<sup>34</sup> *The Sun* informed readers that “the dance and music loving public will be given an opportunity to spend a pleasant evening, dancing to the strains of melodious music, played by T. Holder and his Twelve Clouds of Joy.”<sup>35</sup> On the day of the dance, the group also scheduled a broadcast over radio station KTBS from 5:45 to 6:00 p.m.<sup>36</sup> Terrence Holder had been leading bands since the mid-1920s, and around the time of this Shreveport show, his orchestra contained such noteworthy musicians as Earl Bostic and Buddy Tate.<sup>37</sup>

McKinney promoted three more events throughout the remainder of 1932, all occurring in the month of October. On the tenth, he promoted “the last [barn dance] of the season” with a notice that included a reference to “gingham dresses and over-all.”<sup>38</sup> The event took place at Duncan’s Auditorium with music provided by Lou Johnson and his California Orchestra.<sup>39</sup> One week later, on the seventeenth,



Celestin's Original Tuxedo Band played for Ike McKinney on at least two occasions in 1932 (Clarence Hall Collection, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University)

he promoted another dance at the same venue, this time with music by Monk Hoggart's Twelve Joy Spreaders of New Orleans. An advertisement for the event proclaimed, "Dine And Dance: Mr. Ike McKinney Presents another Big Cabaret Dance."<sup>40</sup> The following week, on the twenty-fourth, T. Holder and his Twelve Clouds of Joy returned to town for a performance at the Odd Fellows Hall thanks to "Mr. Ike McKinney, popular local young man, and dance promoter."<sup>41</sup> The event occurred in honor of the Southern-Bishop college football dance, which the paper named as "one of the leading annual social events here."<sup>42</sup> An extra feature was included as well – the Dorothy (*sic*) Devoe Review floor show with "a host of pretty girls galore."<sup>43</sup>

In 1933 McKinney is mentioned in *The Sun* for the first time outside the context of a music event; on February 18, the social column "Ballyhoo," which regularly cracked jokes and name-dropped locals, reported: "And they say these are some of the many things here that will not likely happen...Ike McKinney smoking a 10 cents [*sic*] cigar."<sup>44</sup> His other 1933 *Sun* appearance connects him to a dance on Christmas night at the Del Rio Ballroom. Located at the intersection of Williamson and Peabody streets, the Del Rio advertised itself as "'Where Friends Meet' (formerly Foresters Temple)."<sup>45</sup> For this McKinney-sponsored event, Frank Tanner's 11 Rhythm Kings of Kansas City with "Showboat" Edwards Entertainer provided music.<sup>46</sup> Three years later, in the fall of 1936, "Frank Tanner's Rhythm Kings" recorded for Bluebird Records in San Antonio, Texas.<sup>47</sup>

Issues of *The Sun* from 1934 and 1935 are missing; McKinney next appears in 1936. By this time, he was promoting dances at a more frequent pace. Many of these dances occurred at the Calanthean Temple, with the Savoy Ballroom serving as a backup venue during inclement weather.<sup>48</sup> The April 11, 1936, issue of *The Sun* proclaimed, "The cool Calanthe roof garden, the ideal seasonable dance pavilion here, will be officially opened

on Monday night [April 13] with a grand Easter Monday dance."<sup>49</sup> McKinney promoted this first dance of the season, and Bert Benton and His Original Night Hawks orchestra supplied the music.<sup>50</sup> An advertisement for the show included the parenthetical note: "give the home boys a break."<sup>51</sup> A similar comment appeared in the following week's "Ballyhoo" column: "The 'Home Boys' are due for a break in the orc. bizz here this spring and summer since they've started pullin' together, givin' their extra gigs to the other fellers farthest down, that happen not to be engaged for time bein....That's the stuff, boys, and this sorta packin' is fair an' square, on the up 'n' up!"<sup>52</sup>

Benton's orchestra hailed from Shreveport, and his personal musical history can be traced to 1923 at which time he played trombone for Frank Neal and His Deluxe Jazz Orchestra.<sup>53</sup> By 1932, Benton was playing trombone and tenor saxophone as well as managing Bert Benton's Night Hawks (formerly the Deluxe Night Hawks).<sup>54</sup> This group, who frequently performed in Shreveport and the surrounding region, conducted a tour of south Louisiana and southeast Texas in the spring of 1936.<sup>55</sup>

The Calanthean's "second dance of the season" on their "beautiful and cool roof garden" occurred April 20, 1936.<sup>56</sup> McKinney promoted Harry Walker's All-States Orchestra, which featured "vivacious torch singer" Edith Curry.<sup>57</sup> According to *The Sun*, the band "just finished an extensive tour of 3 months in Florida, where they played to capacity dance crowds."<sup>58</sup> Walker's group hailed from Alexandria, Louisiana. A notice for one of their 1932 Shreveport shows states, "The well balanced Harry Walker Squealers has been playing in most of the leading hotels and clubs of the entire South, and those attending the dance will be assured of an evening of real, genuine pleasure, tripping to the music of one of the leading dance orchestras of the country."<sup>59</sup> As for "Hotcha" Edith Curry, *The Sun* reported that she "has been 'wowin' em' in some of Harlem's smartest night spots, and dance lovers

here are in for a rare treat.”<sup>60</sup> Two years later, in 1938, she performed in Shreveport with “Little Joe and his 12 Killer-Dillers.”<sup>61</sup> Later, in the early 1940s, while billed as “America’s Queen of Swing,” Curry led a band that toured Georgia, Ohio, and North Carolina.<sup>62</sup>

The Calanthean hosted another McKinney promotion on April 27, 1936. Its advertisement stated, “Yeah, Man! Another grand dance on the Roof,” and featured “T. H. Crone and His 11 Artists Featuring Ernest Sheppard, Entertainer.”<sup>63</sup> Like Harry Walker’s group, Crone’s orchestra hailed from Alexandria. A January 1936 *Chicago Defender* article originating from Shreveport reported, “Crone’s popular ‘swing’ band is about the biggest thing in a musical way down here now.”<sup>64</sup> The same article indicated that they were gearing up to hit the road: “Arrangements have been completed by the management [of Crone’s orchestra] with promoters in western states for an extensive tour by popular demand. The western tour will begin about the latter part of March.” No details of this planned tour surface in the later issues of *The Sun* or *The Defender*.

The summer of 1936 began with McKinney promoting another dance at the Calanthean for Harry Walker’s group. For this June 1 show, they were billed as “Harry Walker All States Orchestra of 14 pieces, featuring Edith Curry, Harlem’s greatest blues singer.”<sup>65</sup> *The Sun* reported that the group “made a big hit several weeks ago” and were returning “by popular request of the dance lovers of Shreveport.”<sup>66</sup> On the third of June, McKinney promoted a dance at the Paris Casino, located at 1455 1/2 Murphy Street.<sup>67</sup> The notice stated: “‘Boots and His Buddies,’ renowned entertainers and recording artists – FOURTEEN MEN – will hold forth from 9:45 till 2, spilling music that won’t let dancers quit. There’ll be ‘truckin and truckin’ plus all the latest steps. ... They have many fans in Shreveport, who will be on hand to welcome them and share in the dance program, which is now ‘the talk of the town.’”<sup>68</sup>

Hailing from San Antonio and led by drummer Clifford “Boots” Douglas, the group

toured mainly throughout Texas and surrounding states in the 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>69</sup> During this period they also recorded for Bluebird Records and performed in Shreveport over half-a-dozen times. By 1938, the band contained a Shreveporter; trumpeter Sam Player toured and recorded with the group.<sup>70</sup>

Truckin’ also appears in conjunction with McKinney’s June 10 dance in which Al Dunn and His Famous Orchestra performed on the Calanthean roof.<sup>71</sup> An article for the event noted, “This will be a barn dance, and [a] fifteen minute ‘truckin’ contest will be held with a prize to the winner.”<sup>72</sup> These truckin’ dances must have occurred at the chagrin of “Yours Truly—Me” because the “Ballyhoo” columnist wrote just months earlier: “At last, ‘truckin’ and the other phony vulgar wiggles are playin’ out round the ole Port, and the decent dances are holdin’ their own, which The Ole Scribbler knew would play out sooner or later.”<sup>73</sup> As for the details on drummer Al Dunn and His Orchestra, one source suggests they originated from New York City, while another suggests Louisiana.<sup>74</sup> Regardless of their origin, they performed in Mississippi in the early part of 1936 and frequently played in Shreveport throughout the latter half of the year.<sup>75</sup> By 1938, they were touring in Arkansas, Canada, and Idaho, where “Swing critics and hep jitterbugs claim this band to be one of the best in the near future.”<sup>76</sup>

Throughout the remainder of the summer of 1936, McKinney continued to promote shows at the Calanthean. On the Fourth of July, Al Dunn’s orchestra performed, having “made a big hit several weeks ago on their first appearance in Shreveport.”<sup>77</sup> Then, on August 3, McKinney promoted a “kiddy costume dance” with Duke Wright and His Famous Swing Orchestra.<sup>78</sup> *The Sun* noted that it would be Wright’s “first appearance...in Shreveport in quite a long time, and the dance lovers are looking forward to hearing his orchestra.”<sup>79</sup> McKinney’s next promotion was a Carnival Dance on August 24, and it included another performance by Al Dunn’s orchestra.<sup>80</sup> For this event, the group was scheduled to “swing out

the hot rhythm which made them a big hit here last July 4.”<sup>81</sup> On September 7, Dunn’s orchestra would “again swing into town” for a Labor Day dance at the Calanthean.<sup>82</sup>

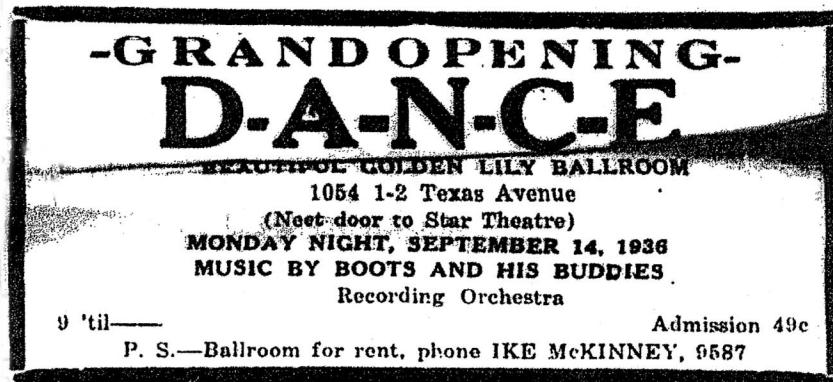
During the month of September, ads and notices began appearing in *The Sun* for a new venue, the Golden Lily Ballroom. Located “next to the Star Theatre building” at 1054 1/2 Texas Avenue, it could be rented “for dances...for a popular price” by phoning Ike McKinney.<sup>83</sup> One notice described the space: “The Golden Lily is trimmed in gold with a large seating capacity, and is considered one of the largest and best equipped ballrooms in the south.”<sup>84</sup> Another stated that it “is one of the longest ballrooms in the South and will accommodate 2000 people.”<sup>85</sup> McKinney’s ties to the Golden Lily resulted in his only Shreveport city directory listing that references his involvement in the entertainment business; the 1936 directory lists his occupation as manager of the ballroom.<sup>86</sup>

The grand opening of the Golden Lily Ballroom took place September 14. It involved a return visit by Boots and his Buddies, who “had made a big hit with dance lovers of Shreveport on their first appearance, several months ago.”<sup>87</sup> One week after this first dance, *The Sun* noted the debut dance “was a real success, as a large crowd attended, and a good time was had by all.”<sup>88</sup> The ballroom’s second dance, scheduled for September 28, featured music by Duke Wright’s Famous Swing Orchestra.<sup>89</sup> McKinney promoted the event, and its notice included the reminder: “The Golden Lily can be rented for Club dances by seeing Ike McKinney, manager.”<sup>90</sup>

Throughout the month of October additional events were held at this new ballroom. On the third, the manager of the Star Theatre rented the Golden Lily to entertain his employees with a social.<sup>91</sup> “Confectionary, beer and sandwiches” are mentioned in an article for the social, but neither McKinney

nor musical entertainment surface.<sup>92</sup> As for musical events at the venue, on the fifth it hosted Al Dunn and His Famous Orchestra.<sup>93</sup> A notice stated, “The Dance is sponsored by Ike McKinney, well known dance promoter, and he assures the dance will go through and will be well policed.”<sup>94</sup> The following week, on the twelfth, McKinney promoted Harry Walker’s All-States Orchestra at the ballroom.<sup>95</sup> The next dance at the Golden Lily involved a more expensive ticket price and a larger ad than usual; for this occasion, “One of America’s Big Shot Orchestras, [the] McKinney Cotton Pickers, a Victor Recording Orchestra,” would perform at the ballroom on October 21.<sup>96</sup> *The Sun* reported that the group had “just competed (sic) a long engagement at the Terrace Gardens, New York City, and are headed for the West Coast.”<sup>97</sup> Admission to the dance cost 75 cents at the door, and advance tickets were available “for 60 cents at Olivia’s Coffee Shoppe, 1032 Texas Avenue, or the New Avenue Pharmacy.”<sup>98</sup> Hailing from Ohio, the Cotton Pickers had been playing since the 1920s and recorded extensively for Victor Records from 1928 to 1931.<sup>99</sup> By the time of this Shreveport engagement, though, the group had undergone numerous personnel changes since its earlier days.

Ike McKinney continued to host shows at the Golden Lily throughout 1936. On November 2, he promoted a football dance whose advertisement included the post script: “Meet the football players at the Golden Lily, Monday night.”<sup>100</sup> The football players may



*Shreveport Sun*, September 12, 1936

have been the high school athletes competing earlier in the day at the State Fair.<sup>101</sup> Music at this football dance was provided by Al Dunn's Famous Orchestra, who the paper noted "is always a big drawing card for Shreveport dance lovers."<sup>102</sup>

The next dance promoted by McKinney involved Walter Barnes' nationally revered group. Scheduled for December 2, a notice for the event proclaimed, "The biggest treat of the year is in store for the dance lovers of Shreveport, when Walter Barnes and his Royal Creolians direct from Terrace Gardens in Chicago will make their only appearance in Shreveport for one night only at the Golden Lily Ballroom."<sup>103</sup> Barnes was a columnist for *The Chicago Defender*, and a few weeks after this dance, he referenced the show and complimented the venue: "The Golden Lily ballroom is Shreveport's best and most popular."<sup>104</sup> Barnes' group hailed from Chicago and conducted successful tours through the South during the 1930s.<sup>105</sup> By the time of their 1936 Shreveport show, they had already performed in the city on previous occasions as early as 1933.<sup>106</sup>

The year came to a close with two more McKinney promotions at the Golden Lily. On December 7, he promoted Eli Rice and His Famous Orchestra of Minneapolis.<sup>107</sup> "A large crowd is expected as this orchestra made a big hit in Shreveport about a year ago on their first appearance," stated a notice for the event.<sup>108</sup> Rice's group toured the country extensively throughout the 1930s, and one reviewer wrote in 1935, "Eli Rice and his gang of cats can swing – no foolin'."<sup>109</sup> McKinney's 1936 promotions concluded on December 14 with another performance by Al Dunn and his Famous Orchestra at the Golden Lily.<sup>110</sup>

No issues of *The Sun* exist for 1937; by the spring of 1938, when McKinney reappears in the paper, his dances were no longer being held at the Golden Lily Ballroom. In fact, no mention of the venue appears outside of the productive fall 1936 season. By 1938, his events were occurring at familiar venues around

town as well as a few new ones. On March 22, he sponsored a dance at the Plamoor Ballroom, located at 1051 1/2 Texas Avenue.<sup>111</sup> The notice for this event stated, "Shreveport's lovers of the Terpsichorean art have a treat coming... when Clarence Love and his fourteen piece orchestra invades the city with a full supply of Swing Rhythm of rare quality."<sup>112</sup> The notice also indicated that this orchestra, "acclaimed in all of the larger cities," included "Miss Myra Taylor, swing-style artist; and Mr. John Porter, vocalist."<sup>113</sup> Love had been leading an orchestra based out of Kansas City since the late 1920s.<sup>114</sup> A review of the group in 1936 states that these "crack musicians have proved themselves to be the season's sensation among the many dance bands touring the Southland this spring."<sup>115</sup> Following their 1938 Shreveport performance, they held engagements in Dallas, Texas, and Tulsa, Oklahoma.<sup>116</sup>

During the month of June, McKinney sponsored two dances. The first was the "annual Juneteenth Breakfast Dance" occurring at the Paris Casino Ballroom.<sup>117</sup> "Good Morning, Folks – Nineteenth Of June Is Here Again" began one advertisement, which continued by providing additional details: "Starting at 12:05 Sunday Nite Ben Burton And His 11-piece Swing Orchestra Will Swing You 'til 4:30 Monday Morning. Why Sleep—Let's Have Fun."<sup>118</sup> Burton's group was based out of Monroe, Louisiana, and his musical history can be traced to 1930 when he was a reeds player in the Majestic Ramblers.<sup>119</sup> McKinney next sponsored a dance with Don Albert's orchestra at the Odd Fellows Hall on June 30.<sup>120</sup> Occurring "in honor of the Shreveport Black Sports" baseball team, it promised a "gala floor show featuring 17 versatile colored musicians and entertainers."<sup>121</sup> Before the dance, the group scheduled a broadcast over local radio station KRMD from 5:30 to 6:00 pm.<sup>122</sup> Albert, a trumpeter and bandleader, was operating his orchestra out of Texas during this time period.<sup>123</sup>

The grand opening of a dance pavilion at Palace Park, located at 1900 Clay Street, marked the occasion of McKinney's next

promotional event. The event occurred July 13, 1938, and involved a “Kitty Dance” with music by the Eddie “Coot” Lewis Orchestra.<sup>124</sup> “Everybody Invited To Witness the Opening of This New Entertainment Center. Good Order Assured,” stated its advertisement.<sup>125</sup> This orchestra from Shreveport frequently performed around town throughout the 1930s. One 1938 dance notice suggested the city thought highly of him: “Mr. Lewis has entertained Shreveporters with his sweet music for years.

... Come out and let him know Shreveport is proud of her Native Son.”<sup>126</sup>

By mid-July, McKinney was back to promoting at the Calanthean rooftop ballroom. On July 18, he sponsored a musical duel between two local groups. *The Sun* published a notice stating, “The Roof will be the scene of a big Battle of Music Dance...when Harry Walker’s Popular Orchestra featuring Eula Mae Morgan, Shreveport’s own torch singer, fights for honors against Ben Burton’s famous Swing Orchestra and a favorite of the Port’s dance lovers.”<sup>127</sup> The notice also stated that “Ike McKinney, sponsor and well known dance promoter, will be present to greet you on the cool Roof top. Come and help choose the winner.”<sup>128</sup> An

advertisement for the battle encouraged, “Folks! Come out and root for your Favorite Band. Both Bands a hit.”<sup>129</sup>

September 1938 began with McKinney promoting a Labor Day dance at the Calanthean. On the fifth, Betty Mae McKinney and her 13 Harlem Playboys came “swinging into town” for the occasion and played “on the cool Roof.”<sup>130</sup> Later that month, McKinney promoted a dance by Bud Scott, Jr. and his 13-Piece Orchestra; the advertisement read: “Let’s Go Slumming – At

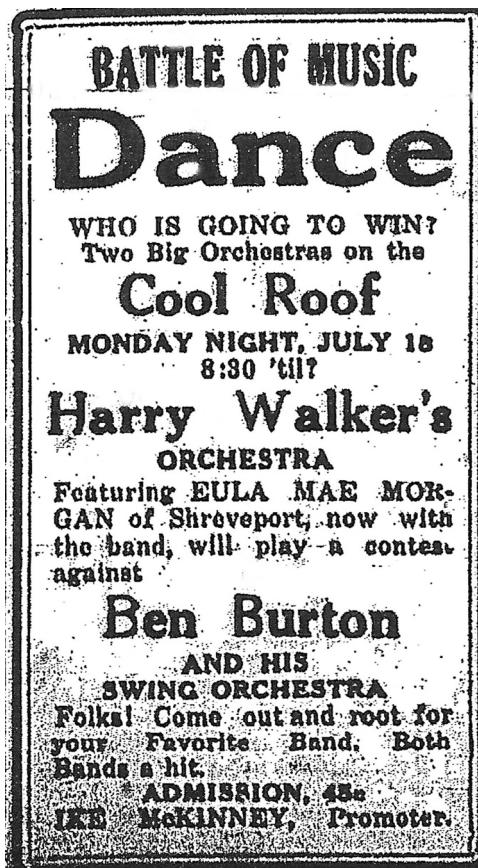
The Paris Casino Mon. Night Sept. 26.”<sup>131</sup> It also revealed that this would be the group’s first performance in town and compared the group’s pianist to the famed Earl Hines.<sup>132</sup> Saxophone player Clarence “Bud” Scott, Jr., who came from a distinguished musical lineage, formed the orchestra around 1936.<sup>133</sup> His father, Bud Scott, performed with such bandleaders as John Robichaux, King Oliver, Kid Ory, and Jimmie Noone.<sup>134</sup> Scott, Jr., tragically died in the same 1940 Natchez nightclub fire that took the lives of Walter Barnes, eight of his band members, and nearly 200 people in the audience.<sup>135</sup>

On Halloween,

McKinney promoted a dance at the Plamoor Ballroom.<sup>136</sup> In addition to the holiday, the dance also celebrated a football game between Wiley College from Marshall, Texas, and Southern University from Scotlandville, Louisiana.<sup>137</sup> For the dance, Milton Larkin and his 14-Piece Collegians Orchestra provided the music.<sup>138</sup> One ad for the show encouraged, “Meet your friends at Plamoor; Nice Rest Rooms for Ladies and Gents.”<sup>139</sup> The group had a local connection; Henry “Doe” Mills, “a Shreveport Boy,” was a member of the orchestra.<sup>140</sup> Mills’ background involved

playing drums in Bert Benton’s Night Hawks in 1932.<sup>141</sup> As for Larkins, he formed his group in Houston in 1936, and they “toured extensively throughout the Southwest and secured successful engagements in Kansas City, Chicago (1941-2), and New York (at the Apollo Theatre).”<sup>142</sup>

The November 5 grand opening of the Paradise Nite Spot, located “at the new Palace Park; end of [the] Allendale Trolley Line,” was McKinney’s next appearance in *The Sun*.<sup>143</sup> McKinney was listed as the manager



*Shreveport Sun*, July 16, 1938



Venues associated with Ike McKinney's Dances - Top left: Del Rio Ballroom, 2009; Top right: Calanthean Temple, 2009; Bottom left : Golden Lily Ballroom, 2007; Bottom right: Plamoor Ballroom, 2007 (Photos by Chris brown)

of the venue, which declared itself “open every nite.”<sup>144</sup> It hosted a “pre-Armistice Day dance with popular music,” and while no particular music groups were named, an ad for the event encouraged: “dine and dance with us; free beer will be given away from 7:30 to 8:30.”<sup>145</sup> The club boasted that they were “newly equipped with all modern conveniences, private booths, bar, package house liquors and beers of all kinds” and “specialize[d] in sea-food and barbecue of all kinds.”<sup>146</sup> After such an enthusiastic opening, no additional references to the Paradise Nite Spot appear in the pages of *The Sun*.

McKinney’s final year as a promoter was 1939. It began with a dance on January 25 at the Paris Casino with music by Ben Burton and His Famous Swing Orchestra.<sup>147</sup> Next, he

promoted a Paris Casino homecoming dance on February 6 for Harry Walker’s Orchestra, which featured “Shreveport’s Blues Singer,” Eula Mae Morgan.<sup>148</sup> The following month, McKinney promoted a “big time attraction” originally scheduled at the Paris Casino, then moved to the Odd Fellows Hall.<sup>149</sup> A notice for this March 7 attraction stated: “Jimmie Lunceford, the college boy who made good in swingland, will bring his entire ‘school of jazzocracy’ to Shreveport... Many noted critics of popular music have rated Jimmie and his Harlem Express Orchestra in a class by themselves. On many numbers, they deviate from the ordinary trend and ‘let themselves go’ into a round of riotous entertainment – rising and sitting, throwing instrument [sic] in the air, and beating out the rhythm on instrument cases.”<sup>150</sup>

Advance tickets sold for 85 cents until March 1 at the Pierre Avenue Grill, Freeman and Harris Cabin Inn, and the Casino Bar; the ticket price increased to \$1.10 after this date.<sup>151</sup> Lunceford's orchestra spent much of the 1930s performing in New York, and "by 1935 the group had achieved a national reputation as an outstanding swing band and was immersed in a routine of ceaseless touring."<sup>152</sup>

McKinney's final three dances occurred during the month of May. On the second, the Paris Casino held a "May Day Barn Dance" with music by Ben Burton's New Swing Orchestra.<sup>153</sup> Admission cost 40 cents, but for "children (girls)" the price was 29 cents.<sup>154</sup> The dance also involved a contest for "Best Crooner" and "Neatest Print-Dress or Slacks."<sup>155</sup> An ad for the event encouraged people to "Watch for Broadcast Tuesday Evening, KRMD."<sup>156</sup> The dance was also mentioned in Hazel Robinson's *Sun* column, "Society on Review in Greater Shreveport." She wrote, "Tell me that the bugs 'tore themselves apart' at ye ole barn dance when Ben Burton breezed into town Tuesday p.m."<sup>157</sup> On May 22, McKinney promoted another dance at the Paris Casino. This time the music was supplied by Jimmie Westbrook and His Swinging California Play Boys "direct from Los Angeles."<sup>158</sup> An ad for the event stated, "I Sent For You Yesterday...and Here You Come Playing a Sport Dance."<sup>159</sup> A reference to this event also appeared in Hazel Robinson's weekly column. She commented, "Monday night Jimmy Westbrook (who has anchored in 'ports in China' at one time) breezed into town and 'lighted' at the Paris Casino to give the bugs a zipping send-off."<sup>160</sup> Robinson also anticipated the next dance promoted by McKinney: "And, well, just what must I say about tha' t Andy Kirk hop?... Aw, let's can it 'til nex [sic] week."<sup>161</sup> One week later, though, she did not follow through with the additional information. The Andy Kirk dance proved to be McKinney's last promotion. Its notice stated: "Shreveporters who like popular music, sweet and swing, are looking forward to the coming of Andy Kirk and his famous Clouds of Joy, to play at the Plamoor

Ballroom, May 30. With Kirk and his "big time" orchestra will come the one and only Pha Terrell, the sweetest of sweet singers, and June Richmond, popular swing songstress, formerly with Cab Calloway. Mary Lou Williams, America's premier female pianist, will tickle the ivories in her own famous style. It's a dance you can't afford to miss. Ike McKinney, popular promoter, is staging this big Spring event."<sup>162</sup>

An advertisement for the dance began by stating "When The Real Thing Comes Along – Playing A DANCE."<sup>163</sup> The notice suggests the popularity of Kirk's group while the ad hints at their successful song recorded with Pha Terrell entitled "Until the Real Thing Comes Along."<sup>164</sup>

The final mention of Ike McKinney in *The Shreveport Sun* sharply contrasts with the ten years of dance notices and advertisements containing promises of cool rooftops and clean fun. In the early hours of June 6, 1939, two policemen discovered McKinney's body in a storm culvert located nine blocks south of his home. *The Sun* published an article on June 10 describing the incident:

Ike McKinney, Well Known  
Dance Promoter, Dies Of  
Injuries From Fall

Ike McKinney, of 1912 Garden Street, well known in Shreveport and vicinity as a dance promoter and sportsman, died in Charity Hospital Wednesday night, about 7:20, of injuries believed to have been received by a fall. He was taken to the hospital Tuesday about 4:30 a.m., after having been discovered in a storm culvert at Weinstock Street and Park Avenue by two patrolmen. It was believed that the promoter either fell or had been knocked into the culvert, a distance of about 12 feet, suffering head injuries and bruises about his

body.

The untimely passing of McKinney came as a shock to many Shreveporters for he was well liked by many persons of both races. Ike, as he was affectionately called, was a familiar character in the entertainment world, having sponsored some of the largest spectacles, featuring several "name" bands. Two weeks ago, he sponsored the appearance of Andy Kirk and his famous Clouds of Joy, noted Negro orchestra, who played at the Plamoor Ballroom.<sup>165</sup>

Though seriously injured, McKinney did not immediately die from his fall. The initial police report logged by patrolmen Busbey and Bernard on June 6 at 4:30 a.m. stated that "while making their rounds they found Ike McKinney, negro man, 1912 Garden Street, had either fallen or had been knocked into a storm culvert at the corner of Weinstock and Park Avenue, apparently falling on his head a distance of about twelve feet. J. S. Williams Ambulance was called and McKinney was taken to the Charity Hospital and it was found that he had a head injury and possible body bruises. No actual witnesses could be found. McKinney is being held at the hospital for further observation."<sup>166</sup>

One of Shreveport's daily newspapers, *The Shreveport Journal*, ran an article summarizing this report.<sup>167</sup> A further investigation by the police involved Deputy Stone and State Officer Terry questioning people who had seen McKinney before and after his fall. According to the police report, Cleveland Conner, proprietor of the Pierre Avenue Grill, located at 1304 Pierre Avenue, "stated Ike left his place between 2:30 and 3 AM, and was pretty well intoxicated, staggering from side to side as he left front door, no one was with him."<sup>168</sup> Sammie Silbernagle, an employee at

the grill, provided a similar story: "Ike came to his place [i.e. the grill] around 1 AM and stayed until past 2:30 AM, did not buy anything to drink while there, but was pretty well intoxicated when they got ready to close; he left at 2:30 AM. Cleveland Conner had to wake him up to get him out; he saw him turn and stagger down Weinstock Street shortly after he left."<sup>169</sup>

After McKinney left the grill "Teressa Harris...saw him one-half block from the culvert, on Weinstock and Park, he was staggering down the street; no one was with him."<sup>170</sup> The report continues with information provided by Mack and Eliza Adams, who lived at 1124 Park Avenue: "They heard someone groaning, it was between 4 and 4:30 AM, Eliza was the first to get up and go out to the bridge, and saw the body of Ike lying down in the bottom of the culvert."<sup>171</sup> Another neighbor provided assistance:

David Walls, 1221 Park, came by a few minutes later and saw Ike in the culvert and went to get the police; he found the police car cruising near and stopped them and told them there was a man hurt in the bottom [sic] of the culvert. With the police he went down to the culvert and picked him up, took him through [sic] the culvert to the opposite side and carried him up to the other side. Mark and Eliza stated that the police asked him his name, age, and where he lived, he gave them the name of Ike McKinney, Jr., age 33, 1912 Garden St. They asked him how he got into the culvert, he did not reply. Complained of side hurting him and asked to be put down; police called an ambulance, he was sent to Charity Hospital.<sup>172</sup>

Some Shreveporters were suspicious of the events surrounding Ike McKinney's injury. Frank Jamison, a "colored investigator for Juvenile Court," told police "he has heard rumors of someone taking McKinney away from 1304 Pierre in a car and carrying him to the bridge; and also someone hearing Ike begging for his life."<sup>173</sup> The police, in response, "told [Jamison] to investigate these rumors and told him if he could get any further evidence turn it over to Mr. Stone or Mr. Terry."<sup>174</sup> A handwritten note on the police report lists one lead: "Suspect was Harry Reeves 1204

R. Sprague."<sup>175</sup> Reeves was another dance promoter in town. No subsequent details on the rumors or lead appear within McKinney's file.

McKinney was admitted to Charity Hospital at 5 a.m. on June 6, but he did not survive long. His injuries proved fatal by 6:15 p.m. on June 7. As reported by the coroner, McKinney died due to "traumatism by fall from bridge, in city of Shreveport, accidental."<sup>176</sup> Autopsy findings revealed: "Fracture of skull and acute brain injury."<sup>177</sup> On June 11, McKinney was buried at Zion Rest Cemetery.<sup>178</sup> It is here that the story of Ike McKinney ends. Even future issues of *The Sun* lack



Ike McKinney's Shreveport

1. Palace Park (1900 Clay Street); Paradise Nite Spot (located at Palace Park)
2. Ike McKinney's home (1912 Garden Street)
3. Site of Ike McKinney's injury (intersection of Murphy Street and Allen Avenue)
4. Duncan Auditorium (intersection of Murphy Street and Allen Avenue)
5. Paris Casino Ballroom (1455 1/2 Texas Avenue)
6. Odd Fellows Hall (1212 Western Avenue)
7. Del Rio Ballroom (intersection of Williamson Street and Peabody Street)
8. Golden Lily Ballroom (1054 1/2 Texas Avenue)
9. Plamoor Ballroom (1051 1/2 Texas Avenue)
10. Calanthean Temple Roof Garden (1007 1/2 Texas Avenue)

additional information on his death and funeral arrangements.

Compared to other African American dance promoters in Shreveport who are named in the pages of *The Sun* during this time period, McKinney appears first and most often. Two other active promoters were Dennis Lyles and Harry Reeves. Lyles, who often promoted dances at the Paris Casino, first surfaces in 1936. During McKinney's lifetime, *The Sun* identifies Lyles as the promoter of sixteen dances. After McKinney's death and before 1939 ended, Lyles promoted four more shows. Reeves first surfaces in 1938. *The Sun* only names him as being the promoter of two dances during McKinney's lifetime; however, he did promote dances for Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, though the latter dance was cancelled.<sup>179</sup> Following McKinney's death, Reeves booked two more shows in 1939 and began managing a new club, the Top Hat Lounge.<sup>180</sup>

In conclusion, while Shreveport did have other African American dance promoters, Ike McKinney stands out for a variety of reasons. Evidence in *The Sun* suggests that he was the most active African American promoter in the city from 1929 to 1939. Over this ten year period, *The Sun* indicates that he promoted forty-three dances at eight venues around town. In addition, McKinney managed two venues of his own. As for the musicians with whom he worked, they ranged from local favorites to popular touring groups. The nature of assembling information using the incomplete issues of *The Shreveport Sun* suggests that McKinney may have played an even larger role in the city's entertainment business. It is unfortunate that McKinney's history has missing pieces. It is even more unfortunate that his life concluded on such a tragic note. Just as suddenly as Ike McKinney appeared in one 1929 dance notice, his career had ended ten years later at the age of 33. During those ten years, though, Ike McKinney played a critical role in Shreveport's realm of musical entertainment.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Autumn Campbell, *African American Heritage Tour of Shreveport-Bossier*, <http://www.nsula.edu/regionalfolklife/aamct> (updated 2008; accessed February 1, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Preserved copies of *The Shreveport Sun* from McKinney's era consist of: May 1927 to May 1928, November 1929 to November 1930, January to November 1932, February to March and October to December 1933, January to December 1936, and February 1938 to December 1939. Within these dates some individual issues remain missing. Louisiana Newspaper Project, Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge, La.), and United States Newspaper Program. *The Louisiana Newspaper Project Printout, October 1999, 3rd Ed.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Newspaper project, LSU Libraries, 2001), 297-299.

<sup>3</sup> Sources that do mention Shreveport's 1930s African American music scene include: Eric Brock, *Eric Brock's Shreveport* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 2001); Willie Burton, *The Blacker The Berry: A Black History of Shreveport* (Shreveport, LA: The Times, 2002); Chris Sherman, "On the Avenue," *Shreveport Journal*, February 22, 1984; Robert Trudeau, "Dance Hall Days," *Shreveport Journal*, June 17, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> U. S. Census, 1920. *HeritageQuest*, ProQuest (accessed February 1, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Caddo Clerk of Court, *Online Marriage Indexes*, [http://webserver.caddoclerk.com/General/marriage\\_public.shtml](http://webserver.caddoclerk.com/General/marriage_public.shtml) (updated 2008; accessed October 8, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> U. S. Census, 1920.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Brueggerhoff's *Shreveport (Caddo Parish, La) City Directory* (Dallas, TX: RL Polk & Co.).

<sup>10</sup> "Dance At Duncan's Auditorium Monday Night, Nov. 11," *Shreveport Sun*, November 9, 1929.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> "Okeh Club Presented A 'Tacky Dance' At Auditorium," *Shreveport Sun*, August 6, 1927.

<sup>13</sup> "Wiley Holds Unique Place In Education," *Chicago Defender*, August 28, 1937 (Black Studies Center, ProQuest). Subsequent *Defender* citations were also located via Black Studies Center, ProQuest.

<sup>14</sup> "Arkansas State," *Chicago Defender*, November 25, 1933; "Formal Hop Enjoyed By K. A. P. Guests," *Chicago Defender*, May 18, 1935; "Callie Mae Cohn Made Prom Queen," *Chicago Defender*, June 8, 1935.

- <sup>15</sup> "Mardi Gras Dance At Duncan's Auditorium March 4," *Shreveport Sun*, March 1, 1930.
- <sup>16</sup> L. Jay Harrison, "Week By Week In Shreveport: Personal Glimses Of Life In Louisiana's Grandest City," *Shreveport Sun*, January 28, 1939.
- <sup>17</sup> "Ballyhoo," *Shreveport Sun*, April 18, 1936.
- <sup>18</sup> Brock, 218.
- <sup>19</sup> "Where Convention Is Meeting," *Shreveport Journal*, April 16, 1929.
- <sup>20</sup> A. Streeter, "Through The Streets," *Shreveport Sun*, January 30, 1932.
- <sup>21</sup> "Majestic Ramblers of Monroe To Play For Labor Day Dance On Roof," *Shreveport Sun*, August 30, 1930.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Jack Ellis, "The Orchestras," *Chicago Defender*, October 27, 1934; Jack Ellis, "The Orchestras," *Chicago Defender*, August 17, 1935.
- <sup>24</sup> "Famous Eddie & Sugar Lou Recording Artists To Furnish Music For Entertainment At Odd Fellows Hall," *Shreveport Sun*, October 25, 1930.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> "Texas State News," *Chicago Defender*, June 18, 1932; "Texas State News," *Chicago Defender*, January 14, 1933.
- <sup>28</sup> Brian Rust, *Jazz Records 1897-1942*, 5th rev. and enl. ed. (Chigwell: Storyville Publications, 1982), 1: 461.
- <sup>29</sup> "Big Dance Monday Nite On Calanthean Roof," *Shreveport Sun*, May 21, 1932.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> "Celestin's Orchestra To Play For Dance," *Shreveport Sun*, July 16, 1932.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> John Chilton, "Celestin, Papa," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., ed. Barry Kernfeld (New York: Grove's Dictionaries Inc., 2002), 1: 412.
- <sup>34</sup> "Big Labor Day Dance At Duncan's Auditorium," *Shreveport Sun*, September 3, 1932.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Eddie Lambert, "Holder, Terrence," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed., ed. Barry Kernfeld (New York: Grove's Dictionaries Inc., 2002), 2: 262.
- <sup>38</sup> "Barn Dance At Duncan Auditorium," *Shreveport Sun*, October 8, 1932.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Advertisement, *Shreveport Sun*, October 15, 1932.
- <sup>41</sup> "Big College Dance At Odd Fellows Hall Mon. Nite," *Shreveport Sun*, October 22, 1932.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> "Ballyhoo," *Shreveport Sun*, February 18, 1933.
- <sup>45</sup> "Famous Mexican Orchestra to Play at Del Rio Ballroom Monday Nite," *Shreveport Sun*, December 3, 1933; Advertisement, *Shreveport Sun*, December 23, 1933.
- <sup>46</sup> Advertisement, *Shreveport Sun*, December 23, 1933.
- <sup>47</sup> Rust, 1: 1528.
- <sup>48</sup> "Roof Opens Monday Night, Bert Benton's Orc. Playing," *Shreveport Sun*, April 11, 1936.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Advertisement, *Shreveport Sun*, April 11, 1936.
- <sup>52</sup> "Ballyhoo," *Shreveport Sun*, April 18, 1936.
- <sup>53</sup> Joseph Jones, "Say Jonsey," *Chicago Defender*, April 21, 1923.
- <sup>54</sup> "Off On Two Weeks Tour," *Shreveport Sun*, April 16, 1932.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> "Harry Walker's Band To Play Roof Garden's Second Dance, Monday Night," *Shreveport Sun*, April 18, 1936.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> "Spectacular Balloon Dance To Be Presented To Public By Colored Catholics," *Shreveport Sun*, June 11, 1932.
- <sup>60</sup> Entertaining With Harry Walker's Orchestra On Roof Monday Nite," *Shreveport Sun*, April 18, 1936.
- <sup>61</sup> Advertisement, *Shreveport Sun*, May 28, 1938.
- <sup>62</sup> "On Tour With Her Own Band," *Chicago Defender*, November 23, 1940; "Edith Curry," *Chicago Defender*, March 29, 1941; "Edith Curry Leads Band For Soldiers," *Chicago Defender*, May 16, 1942.
- <sup>63</sup> Advertisement, *Shreveport Sun*, April 25, 1936.
- <sup>64</sup> "Crone's Band Tops Down South," *Chicago Defender*, January 18, 1936.
- <sup>65</sup> "Harry Walker And Orchestra At Roof Monday Night," *Shreveport Sun*, May 30, 1936.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup> Advertisement, *Shreveport Sun*, November 25, 1933.
- <sup>68</sup> "There'll Be 'Truckin' At Paris Casino," *Shreveport Sun*, May 30, 1936.
- <sup>69</sup> John Chilton, *Who's Who of Jazz: Storyville to Swing Street* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), 98.
- <sup>70</sup> "Don't Miss the Frog's Hop and Crazy Quiz," *Shreveport Sun*, March 25, 1939; Clifford Douglas, *Boots and His Buddies, 1937-1938* (France: Classics, 1993).

- <sup>71</sup> "Al Dunn To Play Barn Dance Here," *Shreveport Sun*, June 6, 1936.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup> "Ballyhoo," *Shreveport Sun*, April 18, 1936.
- <sup>74</sup> "Tupelo, Miss.," *Chicago Defender*, February 8, 1936; "Al Dunn's Orchestra Success In Canada," *Shreveport Sun*, September 17, 1938.
- <sup>75</sup> Alton Eskridge, "Charleston, Miss.," *Chicago Defender*, April 4, 1936.
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- <sup>82</sup> "Al Dunn To Play Labor Day Dance On The Roof," *Shreveport Sun*, September 5, 1936.
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# Finding Buddy Bolden, or, Buddy Bolden Found Again!

by  
**Alma Freeman**

Providence. It's strange how fate works, isn't it? I was more than surprised when I opened an envelope from the Hogan Jazz Archive to find a copy of the most recent newsletter with a lead story on Buddy Bolden. I do call the Archive from time to time to catch up on the latest events or just to hear those familiar voices. Of late, we have not discussed *The Jazz Archivist* or what subject matter is slated for future publications. I'm not sure that I am even on the mailing list still, as the mailing label on this particular envelope was handwritten. I have been physically separated from the Archive for over three years now, but somehow refuse to be totally disconnected from it. Yes, I know what it means to miss New Orleans! Just days earlier, I'd sent emails of recent photos of my family to my friends, curator Dr. Bruce Boyd Raeburn and his assistant, Lynn Abbott, and requested that they do the same in return. Bruce had responded with a couple photos via email, so I expected to see photos of Lynn and his wife Linda in the above-mentioned envelope.

Wichita State University's Ablah Library has an excellent online electronic database that I like to search during my lunch break, as time permits. More often than not, I am searching for information on the early days of the Church of God in Christ, a subject dear to my heart, but sometimes I also search for those renowned jazz names that are forever embedded in my mind. On Wednesday, October 29, 2008, I was carrying out such a jazz-related search. I usually search the NewsBank Inc.'s America's Historical Newspapers site, but on this day I decided to try searching Gale Cengage's Nineteenth Century U.S. Newspapers. I first found and

sent information to Lynn and Bruce on the Pig Ankle Saloon at the corner of Franklin and Customhouse from an article published December 29, 1899, in *The Daily Picayune*. I was curious to know if this establishment had been included in Dr. Karl Koenig's *Jazz Map of New Orleans* (1983). After Bruce informed me that he had come across this name before while researching his dissertation, I decided to look for musicians' names. I instinctively entered "Charles Bolden," which returned 42 hits, most of them on a Charles Bolden from Chicago papers. But, item number 37 was labeled

"Misdeeds and Mishaps. Shot in the Face" (News) *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA) Thursday, December 25, 1890. I read the article about a 13 year-old miscreant, but was skeptical as to whether or not this was "our Buddy." A quick internet search proved that the age was right, but doubt set in about this being new information. Not really wanting to admit that I may have missed some detail

**MISDEEDS AND MISHAPS.**  
**Shot in the Face.**  
About 6 o'clock last evening on Liberty, between Philip and First streets, a colored boy named Henry Smith, aged 8 years, while on his way to the grocery was accosted by another negro boy named Charles Bolden, aged 13 years. The latter was armed with a toy pistol, and ordered Smith to halt and at the same time fired at him, the charge striking him in the right side of the face, inflicting a very painful wound. Bolden was arrested by Officers Lonergan and Bowen, and locked up in the sixth precinct station.

*New Orleans Daily Picayune*, December 25, 1890

in Don Marquis' *In Search of Buddy Bolden*, or that "old age" had set in and erased part of my memory, I hesitantly addressed a quick note to Bruce and Lynn, suggesting that this info may have already been covered in the vertical file. When Bruce returned an email minutes later with news that "that's a pretty major find" I had to pick up the phone and speak with him. Having found the article renewed my sense of belonging to the Archive's family and even more so after seeing the recent *Jazz Archivist* article. I know there is much more research to be done, so perhaps this information may cause serious Bolden researchers to once again delve into the New Orleans Police Department records for more hidden information.

## Curator's Commentary

Greetings to all. Just when you thought that everything that *could* be said about the Buddy Bolden picture *had* been said....Well, never say never.

I am pleased to announce that back issues of the newsletter are now available as pdf files on our website: [http://specialcollections.tulane.edu/Jazz/jazz\\_archivist.html](http://specialcollections.tulane.edu/Jazz/jazz_archivist.html)

This resource will enable all interested parties who seek copies of back issues of *The Jazz Archivist* to gain direct access, with the further benefit that Lynn and I will no longer have to Xerox them. Hallelujah! (Thanks to Lynn Abbott, who scanned the back issues, and to Neal Schexnider of the Systems Office at Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, who loaded them.)

Thanks to the good work done by George Blood's Safe Sound Archive in Philadelphia and Professor Tae Hong Park of Tulane's Music Department, we have also completed the digital transfer of the oral history interviews with funding provided by The Grammy Foundation (the open reels done by Safe Sound) and the Pritzker Foundation (the cassettes done by Professor Park) and will endeavor to get the MP3 files loaded onto the website within the next year to provide access to the oral history audio files as an open source research tool available to everyone for free. We are currently testing software to ascertain which will best suit our needs for this project, the timing

of which will be subject to my availability to load the MP3 files once a decision has been made. This may be a matter of later rather than sooner: after almost four decades of service to Tulane University, Bill Meneray, the Assistant Dean for Special Collections at the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, retired on May 29, and I have agreed to serve as Interim Director of Special Collections for the next year (at least). Bill's steadfast support for the Hogan Jazz Archive and his guidance throughout my tenure as Curator (a position which I retain) have been crucial to the success of our operation during the past twenty years, and we wish him well in retirement, while also admitting that we will miss him very much indeed.

Special thanks to Innovative Learning Center Instructional Technology Specialist Gina Allen and Howard-Tilton Memorial Library Systems Specialist Michael Jones for teaching Lynn how to use our new layout program.

Finally, notice is hereby served that the Friends of the Jazz Archive dues for 2009 are now payable and should be sent by check in the amount of \$25 made out to the Hogan Jazz Archive, a necessary supplement to the expense of producing this newsletter. As always, thanks for such support, in hopes that you will find your donation to be money well spent in advancing the cause of jazz scholarship and the community of interest that supports it.

- Bruce Boyd Raeburn



Wondrous items continue to emerge from the Katrina-ravaged materials that were salvaged from Danny Barker's Seventh Ward home. This little photo was taken, possibly, in Pensacola, Florida, perhaps in 1928. Barry Martyn immediately recognized the trumpet player as Lee Collins; but, who is that on soprano sax?

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