

Also present: William Russell

Charles Joseph Hamilton was born April 28, 1904 in Ama, Louisiana, which is located on the west side of the [Mississippi] River between West Kenner and Luling; Ama is about 10 or 12 miles nearer New Orleans than Hahnville, the parish seat of [St. Charles] Parish, where Ama is located. CH's father was a clarinetist who played with a brass band in the area; Professor Jim Humphrey, grandfather of Percy [, Willie J., and Earl] Humphrey, taught the band. The father told CH of men he played with, including Eddie Atkins [trombone]. whose home was Ama; Atkins is buried there. Eddie Atkins (a veteran of [World War I?],[see notes on his tombstone (in ANOJ?) RBA], had a brother named Freddie Atkins who aspired to play drums, but he gave it up; Freddie now collects for the Good Citizens Insurance Company in New Orleans. A younger brother of Eddie was Garrett Atkins, who was a cooler; when he was about 20 years old, he came to N. O. and became the chauffeur for Mrs. Edgar B. Stern; Garrett died about 2 years ago. There is also a sister, married to Joe Bennett; the sister now lives in N. O., and CH thinks she is the only surviving Atkins [Cf. above] sibling. CH's mother, from Edgard, in St. John [the Baptist] Parish, played piano. When CH was five or six years old, the father moved the family to N. O., at least in part, so that CH and his sister could go to school. CH and his sister played "Chopsticks" on the piano in their home; CH played the right hand [i. e., treble] part, inserting his own turns, etc. His mother helped him a lot with piano. His sister never became proficient. A one-legged pianist, Leon Alexis, who played for house parties, etc., sometimes played at CH's home; he showed CH how to play a lot of blues. CH became really interested in playing piano when he was twelve or thirteen years old; by the time he was fourteen, he "had begun to play pretty well."

CH lived "around" Dryades treet when he first moved to N. O.; he attended McDonogh Number Six school [in 1918, according to Soards', located at 926 Berlin, which is now General <sup>r</sup>ershing Street--PRC.], completing his eighth year around

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1917. When CH was seventeen, the family moved to Broadway, in the Carrollton section. WR says Mahalia Jackson is from that area; CH says she is "supposed to be kin to my daddy;...supposed to be a cousin to my daddy." CH has never met her. The area where CH lived was known as Girt Town; CH listened to the bands playing around. "Sweet" Emma [Barrett] lived about three blocks from CH, so he and others would sit under her window when the band was rehearsing. "Papa" Celestin and "Bebé" Ridgley had split their band by that time; Emma Barrett joined the Ridgley band, which rehearsed at her house, her present address [3312 Short Street]. EB helped CH [learn piano]. When CH was about eighteen years old, he began attending New Orleans University, at 5318 St. Charles [Avenue]; he met many musicians there, including [Narvin] Kimball [banjo and bass], with whom CH formerly played, and Louis Nelson, trombone. CH finished from high school there in 1924. CH played in the school band, with Jerry Green and Elliott Lewis, among others; they played only for the school. CH played at house parties; he was in a lot of contests with other piano players, too, and "I always did come out victorious." New Orleans University was <sup>c</sup>doeducational; some of the students also boarded there.

CH bucked against many pianists, including Joe Robichaux, "Tink" Baptiste and Red Cayou; Cayou was the expert in playing "High Society;" CH copied his style.

The first paid job CH played was for the Holy Ghost Church, then at Saratoga and Toledano [Streets], just around the corner from its present location; there is a hall belonging to the church at the old site; (Kid Thomas [Valentine] told WR he played there); the new Holy Ghost Church is at Louisiana and Dahneel [Streets]. CH played for a children's party one afternoon; Papa Celestin's band was to play for the dance at the Holy Ghost that night, but only the drummer, [Abby [[sp?]] ] "Chinee" [Foster]. showed up; so CH and Chinee played the dance. CH knew about

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six or seven tunes then; he says hit tunes didn't come out so often in those times, so some musicians didn't know or have to know many tunes. After the Holy Ghost job, CH began playing a lot of house parties.

CH continued attending New Orleans University off and on for about two years after he graduated from High school there in 1924; he finally left the school in 1926, or 1927 [see below]. There was a college at the university, in addition to high school, etc. WR says Bunk Johnson, "Pops" Foster, and [Manuel] Manetta attended New Orleans University at one time or another. CH says [George?] Carrere was one of the music teachers at the school. CH recalls training and rehearsing a male vocal quartet to sing "That Old Gang of Mine" for a program at the school.

In 1927 CH accepted a bid to join the Black Eagles Band of Crowley, Louisiana; it was led by Evan Thomas. CH agrees with WR that "Chinee" [Foster] played there a while. Two others in the band were from CH's neighborhood: Raymond Brown played trombone, Willie Lacy or Willie Hill [CH can't remember his exact name] played clarinet. Brown had had an eight-piece band in N. O., with "Shots" [Madison] and others. CH had begun playing banjo sometime prior to joining the Black Eagles, and it was that instrument he played with them. He remained with them about six months, traveling through Texas and back to Crowley. Walter Thomas, brother of Evan Thomas, was the drummer in the Black Eagles when CH was with them. WR says Bunk Johnson ~~played once in the~~ once played in the Black Eagles; CH says Bunk Johnson played in a band [Banner Band?] which the Black Eagles would meet on the road; the Black Eagles played more jazz than the other band, which was mostly a reading band. Bunk Johnson was playing in the Banner Band then, CH mentions seeing many diplomas from music schools at Evan Thomas' house. Evan Thomas, says CH, was a wonderful trumpet player with a wonderful lip. CH says the first big band he ever saw was the Alphonso

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Trent band, twelve or fourteen pieces; the Trent band had just finished an engagement at the Adolphus Hotel in Dallas [Texas]; the Black Eagles entered a town at the same time as Trent's band; Evan Thomas played his trumpet in the street to show how good he was; the Trent men acknowledged his capacity. CH later played with Eunice [sp?] Brigham, who had played trumpet with Trent. CH [with Thomas and later?] played all through southwest Louisiana. He knew clarinetist Lawrence Duhe (of Lafayette, says WR); Duhe was in the Black Eagles band when CH was. CH mentions a good "C-melody alto" saxophone player from Breaux Bridge, Louisiana. CH says the Black Eagles once had two bass players; [Nunoon or Lanoon?] played tuba, and another man played string bass.

CH was a baseball player [as a hobby?].

CH tells of accepting a job in Monroe, Louisiana, with a band in which Jesse Charles, Emile Thomas, and [I. C.?] Page were also to play; CH was to play banjo; he tells of the automobile and road trouble they had getting to Monroe. Ed Robinson, drummer, was the organizer of the band, the man who had gotten in touch with CH and the others. CH and the others eventually arrived in Natchez, [Mississippi], where CH located his cousin, violinist Walter King, who played in the band led by singer Bud Scott, and who was also Scott's son-in-law. Scott played mandolin and guitar (CH thinks), but was noted for his singing. WR wonders if that Bud Scott was the same as Bud Scott, guitarist with Kid Ory in later years on the West Coast; CH doesn't know. [Not the same. Cf. Mitchell McAllister, John Handy, and other interviews. RBA.] The travelers finally arrived in Monroe, joined the band members awaiting their arrival, and played the job. Nat Towles and his band were playing in Monroe on the same night, but for "a different class of people." The band in which CH played stayed around Monroe a while, playing here and there. CH joined a band which was better than the one organized by

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Ed Robinson; a pianist from Dallas [Texas] named Stewart helped CH [with music?];  
the band [later?] organized as the Majestic Ramblers; the operated out of  
Monroe, playing up into Arkansas. They met ~~xxx~~ and worked with men like  
Jimmy [Pry or Pride?] and Louis Jordan.

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CH met a lot of musicians in his travels with the [Majestic Ramblers] band; there were John Thompson [Cf. Clarence Vincent, Red ?] and Leonard Parker and banjo player "Baby Buster" from El Dorado [Arkansas]; "Baby Buster" was a fast picker, and played a lot of solos. The musicians from shows such as the Rabbit Foot [Minstrels] and the Silas Green show wintered in Monroe, [Louisiana]; CH [with another band?] went to Wilson's place, a night club in Hot Springs [Arkansas], where he played during the tourist season, about four (or three) months in length. When that job ended, CH returned to Monroe.

Two exceptionally good banjo players CH heard in New Orleans were John Marrero, at the [Pythian Temple?] Roof Garden, and Percy Severe, whom CH met in later years in Natchez [Mississippi]; Severe had a style different from the rest of the players in N. O. WR says George Guesnon has mentioned Severe. CH says Severe was very, very fast.

During the Depression banjo players returned to guitar; CH returned to the piano. After the Majestic Ramblers broke up, CH was invited by saxophone player Ben Burden to organize a band with him; CH told him he had been listening to Earl Hines in person and on records, and that he considered Hines far ahead of other pianists and wanted to develop a similar style. CH stayed with that band in and around Monroe for about four years. He returned to N. O. in 1934 with his wife, whom he had married two years previously. The Depression did not hit the Monroe area until around 1932. He played occasional jobs with George Lewis, with [John] Handy, with Kid Howard; he played two jobs with Willie [J.] Humphrey at the Entertainers Cabaret on Basin [or Franklin?] Street; Humphrey led the band at that spot. He played with Isaiah Morgan, brother of Sam Morgan; he played with George Williams. The number of music jobs he got were not sufficient for his

. Clayton's Happy Pals, "High Society." ]

CH had piano lessons other than from his mother [see Reel I, New Orleans University]; he fingers his playing in his own way, but says it is good to learn how to read music, too.

CH's favorite piano players from N. O. are Walter "Fats" Pichon and Steve Lewis. His favorites not from N. O. are Earl Hines and Fats Waller.

CH played with Goerge Lewis for Regal beer on a weekly program from WTPS radio in N. O. for over a year [c. 1949]. WR says [Oscar "Papa" Celestin was also on that program at one time; CH agrees, adding that Pichon was also on it. CH couldn't leave town for all the work Lewis got after he left the radio program, so Lewis got Alton Purnell. CH worked in the Lewis band which included Lawrence Marrero, [Elmer] "Coo Coo" Talbert and Jim Robinson, and also on the one in which Kid Howard played trumpet [or were there two trumpets at one time? RBA.]. The first time WR ever heard CH was in Westwego, with Israel Gorman and Jim Robinson.

CH has recorded with Peter Bocage for Barry Martyn, of England. CH was supposed to join Kid Thomas and Manuel Paul in Europe for a Martyn-led tour of Japan last year, but it was cancelled. CH may make a trip to Japan with Goerge Lewis soon.

ADDED by WR on Tape box: "After recording, CH identified three photos of Bud Scott of the 1945-48 Kid Ory band period as the same Bud Scott he knew in Natchez about 1928-29." [See RBA's note above.]

End of Reel II.

