

Don Marquis Oral History

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Interviewed by Mark Cave

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Q: This is Mark Cave. It's February 21, 2011. I'm with Don Marquis, and we're continuing our interview about his life. Last time, I think we stopped when you were talking about your role in editing *Second Line*. Talk a little bit more about that. How did you get involved in doing that?

Marquis: Well, in the very beginning, my connection with *The Second Line* was when I was in high school. They had a radio program on Sunday night on WWL. We could get it all over the country. I used to listen every Sunday night. In 1950, they started this magazine, *The Second Line*, and you could become a member and get *The Second Line* for two dollars. So I sent my two dollars in. Then I was in the navy for four years and college, four years. I sort of forgot about things. When I moved down here, the Jazz Club had concerts on Sunday, usually at the Royal Orleans, and I got to know a few people. Then as I got more involved in my Bolden work, I thought it would be important to write things for the magazine. So I got to become friends with Myra Menville, who was the editor. This was probably around mid-seventies, '75, '76, and I had a

few articles published in there. Then, unfortunately, Myra was on her deathbed. She had cancer that she didn't take care of, and so her time on Earth was limited. She called me and asked me if I'd take over *The Second Line*. She said, "I'll see one more issue, and I'm sure that's the end of it." So I said, "Well, I've never been an editor before, but I'll do the best I can." So I think my first issue was winter of '79, and it was a tribute to Myra. There were a good bunch of people that worked. George Kay had been the editor, and Gilbert Erskine, John Lucas. There were a lot of good writers, and they all wrote and gave me their support. See, at that time—I'm trying to think if it was a bimonthly. But anyhow, I enjoyed it. Like I say, I had good people to write for me. I could depend on them, and it came out on time. Then as time went on, the printer we'd had for many years couldn't do it anymore because of the expenses, and we had a new printer. This was probably ten years after I took it over. We had problems getting it out on time. So there were a lot of frustrations with it. By on time, I mean like a month because we had—the Jazz Club at that time had members from all over the world, and, of course, what they got outside of New Orleans and around the world was *The Second Line*. That's what they paid their dues for, so it was important to keep that thing up as much as possible, and I was proud of the magazine.

Like I say, I had good help. I had a guy named Bob Morris, who'd been with the club since its beginning, and he sent me fillers. When I started the magazine, if a story ended with maybe an inch or two inches or half a page, the only thing they could do is put some—not a picture, but I don't know what you would call it, logo or something, and I thought that was wasted space. So he was very good. He would send me fillers of all sizes, maybe two lines or four lines, and that helped a lot. I got a lot of compliments on that, and he was very good. He took his time, and the stuff was well researched. There was a lady named Mona MacMurray, and she and Sue Hall interviewed a lot of the black musicians, "Kid Sheik" and "Kid" Howard and people like that, Chester Zardis, and amazing what they wrote. It wasn't just about their jazz. When you read the article, you knew their family, what they liked to eat, what their hobbies were. It was a real inside look. It wasn't just he played trombone, he played at this place or that place and knew this guy or that guy. So I think there were some very unusual things in there that made it successful. Preservation Hall would always send us their list of their travels and where they were playing for the next month or two. Then there was a gal named Pat Wynn, and then later Kelly Edmundston [phonetic] did the *New Orleans Jazz Beat*, and they went around to all the clubs that played traditional jazz, not only the

band, but the names of the musicians that played. In later years, that was very invaluable because people would say, well, so-and-so played at such-and-such. Did he? And they could prove it by—they did that for a couple years. It was extremely valuable.

Q: Talk a little bit more about Myra. Who was she and how was she connected to the jazz world?

Marquis: Well, Myra was married to Dr. John Menville. They were uptown society, and I guess she had a connection with "Doc" Souchon, who was the leader of the club. She got involved and I think she was secretary, and then "Doc" Souchon did everything. He played music. He was president of the club. I think he was a pediatrician. And he edited *The Second Line*. He turned it over to her at some point, and at that point it wasn't a magazine. It was just a—not a flyer, but it was mimeographed, and Myra really did a job of turning it into a professional magazine. It became a slick, and it went from, like, twelve or fourteen pages up to—her volumes were usually between forty-four and maybe fifty-two pages. Well, she was a good editor, and she knew people. She knew how to get stuff out of them. Well, she just loved the music. I remember one year she had a birthday party, and she invited the George Lewis Band over and nobody else. George Lewis Band

played for her. She was very dedicated.

Q: Describe jazz scholarship as it existed at the time you were editing *The Second Line*. Were there many periodicals like it? Assess the quality of the scholarship that was going on.

Marquis: Well, it's hard for me to judge somebody else's product. *Jazz Journal* from London was a pretty good magazine. It was a slick. *Cadence* came out of Canada. *Jazz Report* was out of California. A lot of the publications were Jazz Club journals. There were a lot of Jazz Clubs: Florida, Denver, California. I'm trying to think of some of the other magazines. There was *Footnote*, which now is *New Orleans Music*, from London. I'm trying to think of some of the other ones. *The Second Line* was—I mean, it was New Orleans music, not just New Orleans musicians, but people that played our music, and *Footnote* was pretty much devoted to that. Then some of the others, like *Jazz Journal*, they did other things. There's always *Downbeat*, but *Downbeat*, by the time I took over, had left jazz behind back in the thirties and forties. I always used it as a reference to who was playing where, but they sort of got out of the jazz field. So I didn't really consider that a jazz publication anymore. *Jazz Report* worked on a small budget. They were, again, a mimeographed thing. I mean, they covered traditional music very well, but it was suffering from

lack of money. At that time, the Jazz Club had pretty good coffers as far as money went. It was sort of an uptown club, you know, Souchon and the Menvilles and people like that. They had money.

Q: And were they buying things at that time, memorabilia, things of that nature?

Marquis: I think "Doc" always collected things, not on a grand scale. But I don't know when it was the idea of a Jazz Museum came up. I'm guessing maybe the mid-fifties because the Jazz Museum opened in '61. I think they had some ideas about that, so I believe it was probably "Doc" was the head honcho to go after stuff. He got Louis Armstrong's first cornet that he learned on, and he got something from Sidney Bechet and "Kid" Ory. And I'm not sure; it was in storage someplace. I'd have to go back and look at my notes on it because I had sort of a history of how the collection came together. But I think it was just a dream that they were collecting things in case the dream came true.

Q: When did it first come true? Did they have a space before the State Museum?

Marquis: Oh, yes. It opened on—I think it was the 900 block of

Dumaine Street. It was a small space, and they had an archive because there's a lot of archival material. It was in file cabinets. The first curator was a guy named Clay Watson, and Clay Watson was a museum person. The big thing he did was make it museum quality. He knew about registration and cataloging and accessioning. His problem, he always said, was "Doc" Souchon wanted something, he just came in and got it. He never signed out for it. That frustrated him. That'd frustrate anybody. But he got it organized. And then I'm trying to think. There were a few other people. Jo Schmidt was in there for a while. Carolyn Kolb. Danny Barker worked there for a while when it was on Dumaine Street, and he was a real asset because people would come in. And he would talk to them about history and everything. He was a very interesting guy. Then it just outgrew that space, and it seems to me the Royal Sonesta Hotel was under construction and just going up, just being built, and they had a place called Economy Hall, which was a large nightclub. And they had a balcony above where the bands and people seated. I don't think they had archival space, but anyhow, it moved there, and it was mostly pictures and memorabilia hanging on the wall. The original manager of the Royal Sonesta was a jazz fan, so he kind of opened the doors for them. And I don't think he charged them anything. Then he left, and somebody else came in that didn't care anything

about jazz, and he kicked them out. So they got a small place on Conti Street, just kind of stopgap measure to have a place to put the things, but the handwriting was on the wall by then. They didn't have the personnel. That's when the Mint was undergoing a—I think it was a \$6 million renovation. The Mint at that time had been vacant for years, and it was just a gutted building, pigeons flying around inside. So the State Museum had this wonderful building, but nothing to put in it. The Jazz Club had this wonderful collection and no place to go, and I think it was 1977 they made an agreement where the club turned the collection over to the state. It would be the New Orleans Jazz Club Collections of the Louisiana State Museum, which is a little wordy when you're writing a letter. And that's when they needed somebody to take it over. At that time, my book on Buddy Bolden had just come out, and I had been writing for *The Second Line* by that time. Al Rose and his wife, Diane, were interested in the job. I think Al wanted Diane to take it so he'd have his foot in the door, and there was somebody else. I had been working at the public library and I wanted to get out of there and do something else, so I was applying for the job as curator. They kept holding me up and holding me up. Well, that's when the first issue that I edited of *The Second Line* came up and Myra saw it, and she was so pleased. And she called me and she said, "Thank you from

the bottom of my heart. What can we do for you?" I said, "I want that job." Two days later, the museum called me, said, "It's a one-year federal grant to assimilate the collection into the State Museum." Am I going in the right direction on this?

Q: Yes.

Marquis: The collection had been stored in different locations, but it was all dumped at 539 St. Ann in the square. They had all three floors. When I went over there after accepting the job, I looked at it, and I thought, "Oh, my god, what have I gotten myself into?" Because there was just boxes and boxes, five hundred boxes, no clue as to what was in each one. Fortunately, the Jazz Club had a lot of shelving, so I had shelving that I just started going through the boxes one by one. There was a trumpet, there was a piece of sheet music, there was a record, there were some pictures, and I just had to organize it. Fortunately, I'm a fairly good organizer. The thing was that nobody from the museum helped me. I mean, I wasn't a curator; I was a jazz person. I remember asking the head of collections for advice, and he said, "Well, read-." There was a book on cataloging or registration or something. "Read that." That's all the help he gave me. So a lot of it I had to figure out by myself. Fortunately, I got some very good

volunteers that helped me. Well, this was a one-year federal grant, and they informed me that after the one year was up that I'd have to apply for the job as if I'd never had it. I thought that was kind of crummy. I don't know if anybody else was involved in it or not, but they didn't have any problem keeping me as a permanent state employee after a year. And I had good volunteers. The goal was to open a collection at the Mint, an opening exhibit at the Mint. I started in '78. It seems to me that they thought maybe two or three years, like '81. So what I did was pick out the things for display and write the narratives for them. Then they had a design firm in Houston they sent all this stuff, and they set an opening date for, I think, 1981. I remember being at a meeting with the director of the State Museum, Bob MacDonald, and the president, Ed and Rita Morgan [phonetic], of the Jazz Club, and they said, "Well, we've set a date, April-." I think it was April '81, for the grand opening, and I'm sitting there thinking, "Absolutely no way we can do that, but they're the people in charge." So the Jazz Club put a lot of money into special things, t-shirts and setting up things for display. I remember a few months later, McDonald called me in, and he said, "You're going to have to tell the Jazz Club that we can't do it by that time." I said, "I'm not going to tell them." I said, "We've got a board meeting tonight. You tell

them." So everybody just had their head just thumped on the table. It seems to me this was '83. Nobody knew what to do because they made all these plans. They'd hired bands and everything. Somebody said, "Well, it's the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Jazz Club. Why don't we just call it the thirty-fifth anniversary." It was formed in '48, so that would be '83. The Jazz Club lost about \$10,000 in all this stuff they had prepared and couldn't go through with, so there was animosity between the Jazz Club and the State Museum, and I was sort of the man in the middle. Well, it seems to me it was two years later before they were able to open it, but there was a lot of animosity between the Jazz Club and the State Museum, the one that caused the problem. But the Jazz Club, they weren't too happy with the situation, the way they'd been put off and lied to.

Q: What was the reason again for the delay?

Marquis: Well, it just wasn't ready. I mean, I knew it wasn't going to be ready, and the Jazz Club—he said, "Pick a time for the Jazz Club," and they picked this time. I think it was April of '83, and he said, "Okay." And I'm sitting there thinking—I guess I should have said something. They sent it to a firm in Houston to set up the exhibit, and I never saw the damn thing until—it was a year or two later. I was sitting in

the Mint, and these semi trucks drove up and unloaded the exhibit, the artifacts and everything, and they set it up. I looked at it, and you know what I said? "Oh, shit." I was so disappointed. It was dull. It was battleship gray with some kind of purple ink. It was very, very tall ceilings. Halfway up there was nothing. The stuff was hard to read. There was no music. We had a grand opening, which was a great success. The mayor was there and everything, but I was never happy with the looks of the exhibit. It should have had fire, and it should have had music. The collection was supposed to be in one area of the Mint. Well, the collection was in six different rooms. I had an office at the end of the exhibit, and everything else was scattered around. When I needed anything, I'd have to go across the building or downstairs or upstairs. I had a lot of complaints, but that's what I wanted to do.

Q: The Jazz Club, had they been keeping records as to where they acquired different things, or were you just confronted with a bunch of boxes?

Marquis: No, they had accession books. Here's another thing with the museum. When I was doing the collection, there were no accession books, and no accession numbers written on them. I mean, they weren't very professional. It could be a horn,

and somebody had written in big pen and ink, marked on the top of the horn. Anyhow, I was in the director of collections' office, Walt Glasgow, one day, and on his desk was about six ledgers, about this high, and it said "Accession records." I said, "Those are the accession records?" He said, "Yeah." I'd been there six months. And I said, "Why in the hell didn't you tell me?" "Oh, I didn't think about it." So that's the kind of cooperation we got there. But there were accession records. And then, of course, it all had to be reaccessioned into the State Museum, so it was NOJC.LSM with new accession numbers, and they redid the accession numbers properly to be identified and it didn't wear out.

Q: Talk about taking Louis Armstrong's trumpet to Japan.

Marquis: Well, that's when we were still in the Pontalba Apartments. It wasn't on exhibit or anything. I was sitting at my desk one day, and I got a call from Yoshio Toyama. Do you know that name? Yoshio and Keiko were from Tokyo, and they had come to New Orleans in the early seventies, I think, to study the music. He was a trumpet player and she played banjo and piano. They owned the house band for Tokyo's Disneyland. Well, anyhow, I knew him very well, and he called me. He said, "This is Yoshio." Yeah." He said, "We're having a Satchmo Festival, and we'd like to borrow Louis Armstrong's

cornet and bugle." Of course, I didn't know anything about sending musical instruments out, and I said, "Well, I don't know, Yoshio. They're the most valuable things in our collection, and I don't know how we could do that." He said, "Well, we'll pay your way to bring them over." "I'll see what I can do." So I talked to the director, and he said, "Well, it has to be insured and loan forms worked out and everything." But anyhow, it worked out, and I hand-carried them. I remember going through the airport. There's this horn on me, and they said, "What is that?" I said, "Well, that's Louis Armstrong's first cornet." They said, "Sure it is." I had a cousin living in San Francisco, and I stopped, spent some time with him, and then they flew me super executive status. That's the way to go to Japan. I got in, they met me, and they put me up. They said, "Anything you want to do or anything, where you want to go, anything you want to see, you let us know." I mean, they treated me like a king. The exhibit was extremely successful. It was on the top of Tokyo Station, which was Daimaru Department Store, and it was really impressive.

Q: And you got to go on some other trips as well.

Marquis: I had some very nice trips. One was to Darmstadt, Germany. They had, I think, a three-month festival, like the

Centennial of Jazz, and, again, I went over with, I think, John Hasse from the Smithsonian. You know him? He's the head of music collection at the Smithsonian. And Deirdre Bibby, who's the head of the Schomburg Collection in New York Public Library. I was there close to two weeks, and, again, they put me up in a great place, and a wonderful show. They had a million-and-a-half-dollar budget. It was a one-month show, and they had a lot of entertainment. Just walking through the exhibit, I just went, "Wow. I wish we had something like that." I mean, they did it first class. Everybody else went back, and I was there, I guess, about five extra days, and I just kind of wandered around. But it was an extremely successful exhibit. I got back to the States, and I called my cousin that I stopped to see. You know, this was some time after that. I said, "What have you been doing?" He said, "Well, we were in Darmstadt a couple months ago." I said, "Darmstadt? Why were you there?" He said, "Marquis, that's where our family is from." My mother's family was German, was a Strack [phonetic], and Darmstadt is where the family history was. So here I got all this time and didn't realize it till I got back. That was kind of disappointing. Then they did a scaled-down version in Amsterdam. They did a thing. I did a couple weeks in Australia. Again, they flew me business class, which, you're flying that far, that's a nice way to go. But

they had a great exhibit in Melbourne. That's probably the friendliest place I've ever been in my life, Melbourne. The Australian people were very friendly. They had a tremendous exhibit there. And I took the instruments to São Paulo, Brazil. That was just, like, four or five days. That was sort of a fiasco because it was not set up properly, but I got to see São Paulo. I'm trying to think where else. Well, Lille, France, which is northern France, which is a—I forget what the industry is there. Anyhow, it's in northern France. That was getting close to the time I retired, so I thought, "Well, I'm going to make that my last thing, go over to that." So I hooked with a lot of people, people in London. I said I'd spend a couple days there and do some talks, cashing in on relationships with people from Europe. The thing in Lille was cancelled because they ran out of money. So we had invested money getting things reproduced and things like that, so decided to go anyhow. So I went to London. They took me over to—what's the underground—

Q: The Chunnel.

Marquis: Yes, the chunnel, to Brussels and with a friend there, and I gave a talk there, to Amsterdam, gave a talk there, went to Hamburg—no, Cologne. There's a guy, "Doggy" Hund, has the Maryland Jazz Band in Cologne, so I knew him,

and I gave a talk to them, and Hamburg, and there was another musician, Norbert Susemihl. I gave a talk there in Hamburg. Then I had always wanted to go to Copenhagen, but I didn't have any gigs there. I was doing these one-nighters and getting up early in the morning. I thought, "Well, I'll just take three days in Copenhagen and relax." See, I was on the train get off the train in Copenhagen, and this guy said, "Hey, Don, welcome to Copenhagen." It was Jon Larsen, who's a musician and had a radio program. So I spent three great days in Copenhagen. Then I was scheduled to spend, I think, four or five days, maybe a week in Stockholm, and they had a museum there. I was met by two guys that had Bunk Johnson t-shirts on, and that was a great time. I gave a number of talks there. Then it was all the way back to stop at Lille to meet the people that had cancelled the show, because they owed me some money, and spent a night there and then in London for a week. I spent three days in northern London and three days south of London with two different friends and gave talks all the time. But the whole time I didn't spend a dime. It was great. I mean, that's the way to see the country, not going on a tour, because everybody, they took me around personally, and going in a train like that, you really see the countryside. And I got back—it was, I think, November 14, 1995. The next day I went to the Mint—or, the Palm Court for my retirement

party. So that's the way to go out.

Q: Yes. Was Jon Larsen from New Jersey?

Marquis: No.

Q: No, okay. So he wasn't the Larson up there who is the automobile dealer?

Marquis: That was Paul Larson.

Q: Paul Larson. Okay.

Marquis: Yes, he was a Bunk fan. No, Jon was—he played banjo or guitar. He had a jazz radio program, so that's how we connected. It was a real coincidence. I was in New York to give a talk at Lincoln Center, and I was staying at this hotel. And I went down to the corner to get a bottle of Scotch. I saw this guy looking in a case. And I thought the guy looked familiar, and it's Jon Larsen. He was over, just kicking around. He said, "I had to come see the city." So a lot of coincidences in life.

Q: Why do you think there's such an enthusiastic interest in jazz internationally?

Marquis: Well, I think, one thing, it's happy music. Well, of course, you had the blues, but it's good—well, the musicians

are good, they're quality musicians. And I think sometimes I'm kind of down in the boons, and I used to put the records on. I said, "No, I'd walk down and see it in person. It just does something to me," and I think it probably does that to a lot of people. It just sort of perks them up and makes them want to jump up and dance and things like that. There's something about the music. I don't know. It's in the soul, I guess.

Q: Were you involved in any way with the creation of the archive at the Hogan Jazz Archive at Tulane?

Marquis: No, that was started with Bill Russell and William Ransom Hogan before I got here. Basically what they were doing were oral histories, and that's the meat of their collection. The meat of our collection is a three-dimensional instrument or the three-dimensional things. But I got to know Dick Allen, and, of course, doing the research, I spent a lot of time out there because I was going through the oral histories. But as far as having anything to do with putting it together, no.

Q: Talk more about the development of your book on Bolden. You had mentioned that you had originally intended it to be just a part of a book, but then you—

Marquis: Well, I was doing research. I mean I was doing a lot of interviewing and, like I say, learning how to pronounce the

street names and things like that, and I wanted to write something, but I didn't know exactly what. This guy John Bentley moved here from California, and he was a good piano player. And he was a writer. We got to be friends, and we sat down, probably had too much to drink, said, "Let's write a history of jazz, of New Orleans jazz." "Okay." So we started working on it. I think we got maybe six chapters, which were history of Louisiana and things that led up to it. So we got to the fifth or sixth chapter, and it was two directions, one chapter on "Papa Jack" Laine, the father of white jazz, and Buddy Bolden. For some reason, I said, "Well, I'll take Buddy Bolden." Okay. So I wrote about twenty pages, and I looked it over and I thought, "This is nothing. It's paraphrasing what everybody else said, and there's got to be more to this guy than that." So I started asking around, and one thing, the girl I was going with was working with this psychiatrist. She was a psychiatric social worker, and I got talking to the head of the psychiatric department and tell him what I was doing. I said, "Well, he went insane, but there's no..." He said, "Well, in those days, if you went insane, you were sent to Jackson. He would have had to have been arrested." So I went to the police department, and they had all this stuff. I think there were twelve or thirteen precincts, so I started going through those precinct by precinct. In 1906, I found "Buddy

Bolden, arrested for insanity." It gave a certain age, couldn't read or write, was a musician, and his address. I thought, "Boy, this is something," and then I kept on going. Then I think it was six months later another arrest record. By that time, his age had changed by seven years, illiterate, occupation, so obviously something drastic had happened. I remember when I found that, the guy at the police department, he put me onto this, and I told him what I was looking for, he said, "Good luck," and I remember when I found that, he came over and he said, "Boy, you're a lucky man. Can you give me advice on betting on the horses?" [laughter] So that was the first thing that was actually documented, and then the thing that really made it for me was working at the library as, I guess, basically a page, but the library had come into possession of city archival material which was outlawed for personal research or private research, marriage records and birth certificates and death certificates. There was a wealth of information there, tickets to balls and registrations for balls and parties and things like that, police and arrest records. Places in Storyville were raided and witnesses were King Oliver and Sidney Bechet and things like that nobody had access to. So that was really pretty much what made the book different from other books, because they were quoting from musicians or other people that wanted to put their own selves

into the story, I think, and this way, he was really a person. City directories, I traced through those. I read three or four city directories, and they weren't cross-referenced by street. So to find anything, I had to read through. I found out who his neighbors were. It was a lot of work. You'd say, "You're crazy." Probably was.

Q: Frederic Ramsey, whose papers we have here at HNOC, he was also working on a book on Bolden. Did you know about that when you were working on your book?

Marquis: Well, when I decided to write a book on Bolden, I called Dick Allen, and I said, "Is anybody else doing this?" He said, "There's a guy named Fred Ramsey from New Jersey, but he's been basically fooling around with it for three or four years and hasn't done anything." And I said, "Well, is it okay for me?" He said, "You have my approval." When I met Fred Ramsey, he mentioned something about, "Well, in New York we check it out if somebody else is working on it." And I felt like saying, "Well, we're not in New York, and I checked it out. And I was given approval by somebody that I trust." So Fred and I got together, but I said, "We won't talk about Buddy Bolden, but at some point I'd kind of like to look at his material." I think he was more, had a little bit more poetic thing to it.

Q: Yes, and he was living up east, so he didn't really—

Marquis: Yes, he lived in New Jersey. The thing was there was a guy involved named Tom Bethel, who I thought was a friend, and he wrote a book on George Lewis that came out the same time as mine. So he said, "Why don't you review my book and I'll review yours." So I reviewed it, and I think it was not the Gambit, the Vieux Carre Courier, nice write-up. He was an editor for *National Review*. He wrote about Buddy Bolden. He told all this stuff that Bill Russell had done and all the stuff Fred Ramsey had done, and he said, "By the way, Don Marquis wrote a book on it." Man, was I pissed. I wrote him a scathing letter because he was picking my brains when I was at the library and telling Fred Ramsey what I was finding. The Bolden commitment papers were in the Hogan Archives. And he was looking for them, and he couldn't find them. And I had the key to it. Like a fool, I gave him the information. On a hunch, I went there a week later. They were gone, and he was the last one to sign out for them. So in my scathing letter to him, I said "P.S. Why did you rip off the Bolden commitment papers?" So that's part of the story, that he really pissed me off.

Q: Did you go up to Jackson to the—

Marquis: I didn't get up there, but the assistant

superintendent—what was his name—it's in the book, I'll think of it. He went to bat for me. I mean, he got just as interested. He did research for me up there. He was my left-hand man or my right-hand man up there because he dug into files. He found people that were there. I'm trying to think. Why can't I think of his name? But I kept thinking I was going to go up there, but the opportunity never arose. But like I say, he did all the work that I needed.

Q: I suspect your book destroyed a lot of myths about the beginnings of jazz, particularly with Bunk Johnson and things he was saying to a lot of jazz scholars.

Marquis: Yes.

Q: What was the reaction on their part to your book?

Marquis: Well, I accused Bunk Johnson of lying about ten years. What he talked about was true. I mean, he knew what he was talking about, but he changed it. He said it was 1895. He was talking about the picture of the band. He said, "It was 1895 because that was just before I came into the band." Well, I found that the band picture couldn't have been that because the age of some of the people. And then he said things about Bolden that were true, but they weren't true until ten years later. So it became obvious that he wanted to put himself in

the picture. I remember later somebody said, "Why were you so hard on-?" Tom Bethel. "Why were you so hard on Bunk?" And I said, "Well, I wasn't hard on him." I said, "His album, *Last Testament of a Jazz Man*, is my favorite record." And I said, "If you were writing about George Lewis and somebody threw it off by ten years, you would point it out, wouldn't you?" "Well, I guess so." So I shut him up.

Q: Describe the memorial stone dedication to Bolden at Holt Cemetery.

Marquis: Well, that was something I had wanted to do for a long time. See, I went out there looking for his grave, and it was an August afternoon. The grass was like that. I talked to the guy, and he said, "Well, I don't think you'll be able to find it," the caretaker. And I said, "Oh, I'll find it." I walked around there, and I realized and came back. And he said, well, in those days, they didn't take care of the grave. The family didn't take care of the grave. They dug it up and pushed the bones in a corner and buried somebody else on top, and they didn't keep track of the name. And they changed the number. Because I had a number for his grave, you know, like number 623, but when they bury, they change the number. And then I had wanted to do something out there, but I didn't have the money. I'm trying to think who was the first person I got

to—oh, it was the guy that was head of Public Relations at Delgado Community College. My mind's going. Joe—anyhow, he read my book, and he said, "I'm looking out over the cemetery." And he said, "We ought to do something." So he and I started getting people together, and I think we got Frank Minyard, the coroner, we got Stewart Enterprises, the cemetery people, and Olympia Brass Band. We got a lot of support. Stewart Enterprises wanted to make the gravestone, and they said, "We'll put up the marker." Then we just organized a burial, a memorial ceremony, and it was extremely impressive because I had no idea that—Mark, have you seen it? Well, anyhow, it's big. There were over two thousand people at his funeral, and that came off real well. A lot of people still go out there and take pictures, and some people...I think Yoshio goes out there and plays his trumpet.

Q: Was it a jazz funeral?

Marquis: Oh, yes. They had a jazz funeral that walked all the way around. They had Olympia Brass Band, and they had a big second line. They went all the way around the cemetery, and a couple people gave talks. Well, see, I found his granddaughter and great-granddaughter. He had a son, Charles Bolden, Jr., that was not close with him, but he was in the Navy and then he died in 1931. I met, I got acquainted with his

granddaughter, Gertrude, and Rita, the great-granddaughter, and we got them invited, brought them to the ceremony. And we've been in touch ever since. So that was a thrill, but she didn't really know anything about him. She barely knew him. She said, "I remember my dad would take me to the bar and put me on the pool table." That's all she remembered about him. But I think one thing, the book sort of brought Buddy Bolden out of the shadows. I might brag a little bit. You know, people that heard the name, but they didn't know anything about him. In the beginnings of jazz, they always said, well, "Jelly Roll" Morton, King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, and nobody mentioned Buddy Bolden. That's why when LSU—see, I had "In Search of the Bolden Legend", and they said, "Nobody knows that name. We have to get the word 'jazz' in there." So they said, "In search of Buddy Bolden: First Man of Jazz", which was a wise decision. I didn't say that. He wasn't that well known, but now in the last—well, it's been out thirty-two years now.

Q: When was the marker ceremony? What year was that?

Marquis: It was in the nineties. I think the updated version of the book has a picture. If you have that here, we can double-check it. It was in the nineties. And then they renamed a street Buddy Bolden Way, which is out there.

Q: After you finished the book and before you started your career as a curator, did you have aspirations to write another book on a jazz musician?

Marquis: I really wanted to do something on "Papa Jack" Laine, and here again I'm going to have to lay something on an old friend of mine who disappointed me. I mentioned it, I was starting to gather material. See, "Doc" Souchon was close to him, and "Doc" had all this material in the collection. Do you know who Jack Stewart is?

Q: Yes.

Marquis: Well, I was talking to Jack, and he said, "I'm going to do it," or, "I'm working on it." So I thought, "Well, fine." I said, "I've got all this stuff you can use." That's ten or fifteen years ago. I could have written a damn book on it. And it really kind of—you know, I told him about it one time. I said, "You really kind of disappointed me." I said, "I could have had a book out on him, but I laid off because of you." Well, I mean, we were friends, but still there could be a book on him. Jack has a lot of things going. I think his problem is he's got too much going, and he takes on a lot of things that he doesn't have time to do properly. Like I say, we're friends, but it's a disappointment. It should have been

done.

Q: Talk about the issuance of the Louis Armstrong postage stamp. Were you involved in that?

Marquis: Oh, yes. It seems to me a stamp came out for Elvis Presley, and that's when I was still working at the museum. Well, Louis Armstrong deserved a stamp. So I was talking to somebody, and I said, "What's up in Postmaster General?" I said, "Well, does he have to be dead so many years?" And he said, "Well, if the Postmaster General approves it, it could be done tomorrow." I said, "Would it help to send petitions in?" "Well, yeah." So I put petitions at the State Museum. I think that maybe in a year we had forty-thousand signatures, and I mean, they were from fifty different countries. One of them was signed "Elvis Presley." So I went through them. I mean, if I thought things were phony, I crossed them out. And I bombarded the post office department. There were some other people involved. Well, Phoebe Jacobs from the Louis Armstrong Foundation, always at the meetings, always said that they had a lot to do with it. Well, I sort of doubt that. I never heard anything from her, but everybody kind of jumped on the bandwagon. But the head of the post office out here was very helpful, and it came to the point where they decided they were going to do it, but they had to decide a city of issue.

Well, Chicago wanted it, New York wanted it, Los Angeles wanted it, of course New Orleans wanted it. So all the people from the Post Office came down here, and we had a party for them at the Palm Court. They were very sociable, and they were committed. Nina got the band to do a number to second line with, and they all got up and second-lined it. When they all sat down, next thing we heard, "You got it." [laughs] So that was a big thrill to have that stamp. I think it's the only place. Well, he lived in New York. There's possibilities there. He had a reputation in Chicago, but I still think New Orleans.

Q: Describe your involvement in Jazz Fest.

Marquis: Well, Jazz Fest, to me, was a place to go listen to music. It started out in Congo Square. It's right down the street, and I knew most of the musicians that played because it was pretty much traditional jazz. And I knew most of the patrons because they were old jazz fans. In fact, there were probably more musicians than there were patrons at that time, but it was a lot of fun. I think it lasted there maybe three years. Woody Allen used to come and sit in there. He would go over to Buster's, and all the musicians would sit around a table. I remember sitting across from Woody and he was just [unclear] guy. He was mostly interested in talking to the

other clarinet players. You'd think he was going to say something funny, but he was very serious about his music. Then I think it was about the third year—they had some good concerts there. They had Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington. They had concerts in the auditorium. It was a very close-knit bunch, the Jazz Fest people. They were struggling and everybody knew each other. I think it was about the third year, I was talking to Quint Davis and he said, "We're going to move to the fairgrounds." I said, "Quint, nobody will go out there." That's why I'm not running the Jazz Fest.

[laughs] But even when it was at the fairgrounds, you knew most of the people, and you had to make a decision about which stage. I mean, the stages were basically still traditional bands. You might have a brass band playing at one stage. You might have "Kid" Ory's Band here. They had a gospel tent which was extremely popular. But I'd go out there, and I'd have to move around to different stages. It was always a nice sunny day. You'd see your friends. You could drink beer, get something to eat, relax, sit down and relax. It wasn't crowded. Then as time went on, it just got bigger and bigger and bigger. I remember one day I went out there, 30,000 people. I thought, "My god," so I just stopped going out there. For one thing, my legs weren't like they used to be, and there wasn't as much as I wanted. The things

I basically wanted to see, I could see up front and personal down here in the Quarter. I was invited—I think it was 2001. It was Louis Armstrong's hundredth birthday, and I was invited to be on a panel to talk about Louis and I said, "Well, it's kind of hard for me to get out there." They said, "Well, no, we'll get a car to pick you up." So I said, "Okay. Take you up on it." So they brought a limousine to my front door, took me out there. They said, "When you're ready to leave, let us know." Well, we did the discussion, and I started walking around the grounds. There were 120,000 people there, and it was just too crowded, plus I said there wasn't that much I wanted to see. So I told them, I said, "I'm ready to go home." So they put me in a limo and brought me home. I don't knock it. It's great for the city, and there's a lot of good music. But it's not a jazz festival. It's a lot of other things, and it's not something that I care to go out to. I can't handle the walking.

Q: What was your involvement in the French Quarter Festival?

Marquis: Well, the earliest days, I just enjoyed it. That was '84, I think. It was after the World's Fair, and I think the mayor was Dutch Morial at that time, and he wanted to do something for the Quarter because we'd kind of been left out of the World's Fair stuff. I just enjoyed it because it was

local. I mean, walking down the street and seeing a lot of friends. I remember the first couple years there weren't many people there, and I took pictures. I'd stand back and take pictures of all the bands on the stages. In the second year, it would be a little further back. By the third year I was getting the backs of people's heads. So it grew pretty fast. Then I started working with Sandra Dartus, who had started the whole thing. She'd just call me for advice and things like that. Mostly I hung out. Then I think it was the late eighties, they decided to do a brass band stage and asked me if I would put that together, hire the bands and manage it, and that was when it was on the river, riverfront. I said I'd never done that before, and they said twelve or fifteen bands. I said, "Well, I'll do what I can." I'm walking home and I think, "My god, what have I gotten myself into? That's a lot of bands." I ran into Mike Owen, a trombone player who was living here, from England, and I was thinking, "How am I going to get fifteen bands together?" I said something to Mike. He asked me what I was doing. I said, "Well, I've got to hire fifteen brass bands. Do you have a brass band?" And he said, "No," but I knew he knew a lot of people. About two hours later, he called me back and he said, "I'll put one together. It's my baby's first birthday. We'll call it Miss Belle's Brass Band." And that was a hit. Somehow I had no trouble at

all getting bands together, and they were all traditional bands. The Olympia, the first few years they always kicked it off. Eleven o'clock in the morning, they were always there a half-hour early, dressed properly. One year it just poured down rain at the beginning, and they were all still there at ten-thirty. The weather was so bad they couldn't play, but they were there. Then they moved it by the Audubon thing, which at first I was real upset about it because I don't like change, but it was really a great place because it had all that grass, and the first day out there, there were a lot of people there, and I said, looking out there, it reminded me of the early days of Jazz Fest. The people were sitting out in the grass and just enjoying it. I spent ten hours a day there, was there at ten o'clock in the morning, and I enjoyed it. Kind of reminded me of the early days of Jazz Fest because you'd look out there and you'd see all your friends. I did it until—I'm still hiring the bands, but I'm kind of getting out of it. I hire traditional bands. I dealt a couple years with the New Birth. They never showed, and there were all these people out here at nine o'clock at night waiting for the band. I didn't know what the hell to tell them. They never apologized. The Soul Rebels, I'd try to call them, and, "Well, we'll think about it." Well, the other guys, "Yeah, what time do you want us? Yeah, we'll be there." These guys, I just got

tired of fooling around, so I said, "These guys are important—I don't knock that—but I can't deal with them. You deal with them." So I hired seven bands this year, but they're all traditional ones. And I think this will be the last year. For one thing, I can't get to the stage. They said, "Well, we'll get you a golf cart and take you over there." I could probably make it, but it's an awful lot of walking for legs that aren't like they used to be.

Q: When did you first go to the Palm Court?

Marquis: I was probably there the opening day. See, when they opened, they had lunch. They had lunch there, and I remember the opening day. The mayor was Sidney Barthelemy. He was there, cut the ribbon. I've got pictures from the earliest days. Then they realized they were open from, like, eleven to two and that meant the people working there would have to come back at six, and generally there wasn't that much of a crowd at noon. So they open from seven to eleven now. What I like about it, it's friendly, it's very roomy, and the music is good.

Q: Do you still go to Preservation Hall?

Marquis: Well, I'll tell you, I stopped there on the way over here because I was killing time, and I talked to Ben Jaffe

for a while. But no, I haven't been there in years. Well, it's too crowded. Like I say, most of the guys I can see in more comfortable situations. I mean, I'm not knocking the place. You get older, and there are just things you don't feel like doing anymore. You've done them. They're going to have an exhibit of Preservation Hall at the Mint in November, because I've helped them with that.

Q: You've lived in New Orleans probably longer than you've lived anywhere now, but you still maintain a connection to your hometown.

Marquis: Oh, yes. I was born in '33. I pretty much left there in '59, and I've been here since '62. My sister lives in the house that my granddaughter lived in. My folks lived there when they got married, Dad lived there. It's been in the family about 100 years, and she's been there since '51. And she has three daughters and a son that all live there in the city. My brother lived there for—he was a bank president. He retired to Sarasota, so that's the family. But I still have a lot of friends I went to kindergarten with and grew up with, so I still call it home. I remember when my mother, who was from Pennsylvania, I remember one time she said, "Well, I'm going home." I couldn't understand. I said, "Well, this is home." But I understand now what she was talking about. When I

talk about going home, I'm not talking about Royal Street; I'm talking about Goshen. It's still home. It's a nice city. It was about 11,000 when I lived there, maybe about 30,000, but where there'd be little towns, there were fields, and now it's all grown up between—you can't tell where one ends and the other begins. It's like every place else, grown up. It's a nice place.

Q: You wrote a book on the history of Goshen, didn't you, or a booklet?

Marquis: No, it was a history of the neighborhood. It was a unique neighborhood. There was only about seventeen homes, and it was a mill race. It was a hydraulic canal, and we called it the race. And it was right along there. It wasn't a rich neighborhood. It was a pretty neighborhood because there was a lot of woods and trees, and they had the water. It was a very close-knit bunch of people. We all knew each other's dogs and would babysit. Well, I got in touch with everyone from there, but it's been forty years. My brother and I were talking one day what a unique place it was. He encouraged me to get in touch with some of the people I'd grown up with, and it just developed into a book. I said, "Wow, what a great place it was," and it's called *A Nifty Place to Grow Up*. The reason for the "nifty" is a good friend that was a year older died while

I was doing the book. I had gotten in touch with him, but his favorite expression was, "Oh, Captain Parks got a nifty car. Mrs. Simpson is a nifty lady." So that was sort of a tribute to him. It was fun doing it. They invited me—I was back there last year, and the mayor lives there and he said, "We're having a block party. Come over and be our guest of honor and give a talk." So I saw these old friends. That's a kick.

Q: You've made some really important contributions to jazz scholarship.

Marquis: Well, I always felt that I had to do something to pay back the enjoyment I got out of music and the friendship I had with the musicians and the people. I mean, they really made my life in New Orleans easier because they accepted me. Some had their doubts, but I think after a while they realized I really enjoyed it and was serious about it.

Q: What would be your dream for the future in the jazz world here in New Orleans? Do you envision a bigger, better museum?

Marquis: Well, I would like to see the museum reopened. Now, the auditorium—they're going to be working with schools and have programs. My desire would be for them to get the word out nationally and internationally that there's something in it. Knowing the frustration I had, nobody knew anyone was in

there. There's no signs outside. It was almost forbidding, you know, to look in the building, and there's gates around it and there's no signs on the doors. I think it could be a tremendous contribution, but we'll see. The director, Sam Michaels, just resigned, and god only knows who's going to come in. I shouldn't say this. Sam was probably not a good director. He's not politically oriented. He knew the museum, he knew the people, he knew the city and the state, but he was better off just being a head of what he was, the department he was in.

Q: I don't have any more questions. Is there anything—

Marquis: No more questions.

Q: Is there anything that we didn't talk about that you think is important?

Marquis: I was trying to think the other day if there was something, but we pretty much covered it. I appreciate your asking good questions, and I apologize for—my memory's not what it used to be.

Q: No, it was very good.

Marquis: Especially the guy from Jackson. I don't know why I can't remember his name. And Joe, I think it was Joe O'Brien

from Delgado.

[End of February 21, 2011 interview]