Alex Bigard was born September 25, 1898. Other musicians in his family include his brother, Barney Bigard, an uncle, Emile Bigard (who played violin and was with Sidney Desvigne's orchestra--AB later played with that group, which was then known as (Emile) Bigard and Desvigne's orchestra--and a first cousin, Armand [J.] Piron, violinist [and orchestra leader]. There was a four-year difference in EB's and AB's ages. AB was about eighteen years old, when he began studying drums and reading music with Louis Cottrell [Senior], remaining under his tutelage about three years; he also filled in for Cottrell when the latter was sick, playing with the Piron band, then at Tranchina's Restaurant, at Spanish Fort. Members of that band at the time: Peter Bocage, Piron, Steve Lewis, Lorenzo Tio [Jr.], Albert Warner [trombone--AB means Louis Warnick, saxophone], Cottrell. There was no trombonist at that time, Johnny Lindsay being added later. The band, actually an orchestra, played "classical" [for definition see The Baby Dodds Story.] music from written parts--no Dixieland. (Cottrell's folding bass drum and folding snare drum are mentioned, AB saying those were the only ones of their kind that he ever saw.)

After studying with and substituting for Cottrell, AB joined the Maple Leaf Orchestra; the members: Manuel Perez, cornet; Vic Gaspard, trombone; Alphonse Picou, clarinet; Willie Santiago, banjo; Octave Gaspard, bass; AB, drums. AB was with that band about nine years. [Without a change of personnel!!! RBA] The band played the same kind of music as Piron's band. Leaving the Maple Leaf, AB joined the orchestra Sidney
Desvigne was then organizing; AB says the year was around 1925 [if he was with Maple Leaf nine years, he joined Desvigne about 1928--PRC]. [Only if he was born in 1898, studied with L.C. for three years, and joined the Maple Leaf orchestra immediately thereafter. Should we re-question on all this? RBA]. Emile Bigard was not with Desvigne then; the band didn't use any violins. Leaving Desvigne, AB worked the field [i.e., worked free-lance], going to the Black and Tan Cabaret on Iberville, between Burgundy and Rampart; members of the band: "Kid Shots" [Madison], trumpet; Professor [Manuel] Manetta, saxophone; Udell Wilson, piano; Henry Martin, ex-drummer, banjo; AB, drums. (Martin played a long time with Bob Lyons; Lyons would frequently hire AB to replace Martin; Martin was a great drummer; he was a brother of [Albert] [PRC please check this name. RBA] "Coochie" Martin, banjo player.) AB discussed old-time drum kit. Regressing--AB was with Desvigne about four years; he joined John Robichaux immediately after leaving Desvigne [see few lines previous], remaining with him seven or eight years, until Robichaux's death [1939]. Members then: JR, violin; Willie Pajaud, trumpet; Harrison Barnes [trombone]; Mercedes Gorman, piano; Sam Dutrey, Sr., alto [sax]; Charlie McCurdy, tenor [sax]; [AB, drums]. The orchestra played for society people (at LaLouisiane, the New Orleans Country Club, etc.). Robichaux was tricky; after a rehearsal, he would purposely bring different music to the job, but the musicians would read right through it. The band had a lot of work; AB tells of going across the lake to play for old man Votrain [spelling?] in Mandeville, returning and playing aboard the steamer Susquehanna, go to the baseball park, Heineman Park, and from there to the New Orleans Country Club. The Robichaux and Piron bands didn't play blues [Piron's band recorded blues and Robichaux had blues in
his library--PRC]; they played schottisches and waltzes for colored; for ordinary dances they played mostly waltzes; the JR and SD were the only bands that could play these numbers; the Robichaux band had the Red [Back] Book [ ], numbers [mostly] by Scott Joplin, of considerable difficulty. AB says the "classic" [or standard] orchestras in New Orleans were those of Sidney Desvigne, Robichaux, Piron and the Tuxedo Band (led by Papa Celestin [and William Ridgley]). After Robichaux, AB went to the Black and Tan Cabaret band [see above, p. 2], remaining there until the place closed; he then played with Buddy Petit a "good while", three or four years or more, [Petit died in 1931; AB's chronology is confused--PRC]; possible members: Petit, trumpet; Freddy "Boo Boo", trombone; [Philip] "Cripple Pill" [Coycault], clarinet; Buddy Manaday (or Manade) banjo; Chester Zardis, bass; AB, drums. ([Eddie] "Face-O" [Woods] played with Petit after AB had left that band.)

The leading drummers during that time were "Red Happy" [Bolton], Zutty Singleton, [Abbey] "Bebe Chinee" [Foster], James Willigan [Check, name is William LeBoeuf?RBA], AB, Baby Dodds, Henry Zeno, Cottrell, Henry Martin and "Black Benny" [Williams]. Joe Lindsay was another good drummer. The others, such as "Face-o", were of another class of drummers-[mostly] non-readers, playing in dance halls [and other rougher places]. More on changes of drum kit and dances. Buddy Petit didn't read, but he had a good ear; he could play a lot of Joplin numbers "by head"; he had a bigger reputation than Louis Armstrong. Kid Rena was another great trumpet player; while Petit was noted for his variations on melodies, Rena stuck to the melody; he could and did play extremely high, being the only man AB ever
heard play [the trio of] "High Society" above the staff [i.e., an octave higher than written]. AB says that when several bands (such as Chris Kelly's, Buddy Petit's others) would be out [advertising], they would all go elsewhere when they heard that Rena, also known as "Little Turk", was out with his band. Until his death, Rena played with AB at the Brown Derby. Rena ' could not read, but could "spell" [i.e., figure out written notes slowly] a little. The Petit band [and the other jazz bands, including those mentioned previously] played a lot of blues, some waltzes, some of the standard Dixieland tunes (e.g., "Fidgety Feet", "Panama Rag", etc.) [and probably a lot of the popular tunes of the day--PRC; No doubt, I have heard it said by some musicians that he featured "Baby Face."--RBA] Chris Kelly was a great blues player; AB worked with him four or five years, just after he left Petit. Rena was the only trumpet player who featured playing above the staff. BP played below the staff [!!!RBA]. Emile Barnes, clarinet; Sunny Henry, trombone; Lawrence Marrero, banjo; Eddie Marrero, bass; AB, drums [Kelly, cornet] were members of the Kelly band then. Lawrence Marrero played the same style then as he did in later [recorded] years; he was a timekeeper, not a great soloist like his brother, John. (Simon Marrero, bass, is mentioned) who played with the Tuxedo Band. Kelly's feature was blues, especially "Careless Love"; everything he played was slow. Barnes was a good clarinetist then.

Talk about drum sets--when the sock cymbal [or high-hat] came out, if slapsticks were used much in earlier bands. Sam Morgan's band used the slapstick more than any other group; the slapstick was used to set the time [tempo], and when the time had been set, the slapstick was not used anymore [on that tune].
After leaving Chris Kelly, AB took his own band into the Brown Derby, remaining there fourteen months; members were: Kid Rena, trumpet; Andrew Morgan, tenor [sax] and clarinet (Alphonse Picou first played clarinet with AB there); Sadie [Goodson?] piano (perhaps the sister of the wife of De De [Pierce], Billie). Picou and Sadie left the band after a time. "Shots" [Madison] played trumpet with the band before Rena came in; Shots got another job and left. Raymond Doris [spelling?] replaced Sadie on piano. The name of the band was Bigard's Band. The time was about 1949. The men in the band made forty-five dollars a week; they played four shows nightly, besides for dancing. The name of the show was Watts and Watts. [When did he leave Chris K? About 1948? When did CK die? RBA heard this band with Kid Rena. Check his notes about 1946-7].

End of Reel I
AB joined John Robichaux when he formed the band to go to the Lyric Theater. After AB's job at the Brown Derby, his next job was at the Cadillac [Club]; it was Kid Rena's job [see Reel I, where AB says Rena played at the Brown Derby with him until his death]. The Cadillac, across the street from the Fifth Precinct [police station], was run by old man "Coochie". The band, which played only Dixieland (preferred by the clientele), remained on that job until the place was sold; band members: Rena, Jack (from Chicago), tenor [sax]; AB, drums; "Toots" Washington, piano (Toots has [recently?] played with Andy Anderson). [Compare photograph in Ralston Crawford collection, A.N.O.J.] Toots was replaced by Walter Decou. AB had worked years before with Decou, in a trio, at the Fifth Ward Athletic Club, and also at the West End Bungalow; members of the latter band: Willie Pajaud, trumpet; Sam Dutrey, Sr. [actually, the elder], [alto] saxophone [and clarinet?] (who succeeded "Big Eye" Louis [Nelson]) [clarinet?]; Decou, piano; AB, drums. The Bungalow job was about in 1930; the Athletic Club job was during the depression. Charlie Love was the third member of the Athletic Club trio; all members read, and most of the music played was from orchestrations.

Many of the bands and orchestras were named only for the leaders (e.g., Buddy Petit's Band, Chris Kelly's Band), but some, such as the Maple Leaf Orchestra (run by Octave Gaspard), had different names. (AB explains that the difference between an orchestra and a band, as he sees it, is that the orchestra plays from music, while the jazz band plays "by head.") Jazz has been called jazz as long as AB remembers.
AB says that when playing written drum parts, he would learn where the breaks and various sections, including the coda, were and then play a part to fit in, filling in where necessary, and swinging the band; if a drummer just played the part as written, the band wouldn't have any life.

AB heard white bands sometimes; he says they played with a swing different from colored bands; he thinks the swing of colored bands is better. If he could use them and could get them, AB would get the white clarinetist, Pete Fountain and the young white trumpet player [Warren Luening] with Lawrence Welk. Most of the great colored musicians are dead.

AB does not like rock-and-roll, but some audiences demand it for dancing.

"Jack Carey", or "Play Jack Carey", which AB recorded [recently] with Punch [Miller], is the same as "Tiger Rag"; it began to be played when Punch was playing with Jack Carey. [Compare dates in Punch Miller, reel ?] Original [and of ↑ Dixieland Jazz Band's recording].

After the Bungalow job, AB free-lanced. Years later, he played at Haydel's Melody Inn; in his band, called the "Mighty Four" were: Lionel Ferbos, trumpet; Harold Dejan, [alto] saxophone; George Guesnon, banjo [or guitar. Compare Mighty Four MONO 12 inch LP notes]; AB, drums. The men all could read; Ferbos would make arrangements, and the band played any type of music. The place was like the [old] Luthjen's--a bar and a dance hall. The band was very successful. When the owner died, a waitress and her husband took over, and the business declined. The place is now a restaurant. The "Mighty Four" existed about nine years ago. AB again
free-lanced, after the slump at the Melody Inn; he then went to the Harmony Inn, playing with Eddie ["Big Head"] Johnson [alto saxophone and leader], Reginald Kola [spelling?], trumpet and "Tee-nine-tsi"[spelling?] [real name: Lenzsey Ramsey] piano. This band also read, and was good, but AB says the "Mighty Four" beat them all.

AB free-lances now, playing with such men as Peter Bocage, Harold Dejan, [George] "Sheik" [Colar], Eddie Johnson and others, including some of his own jobs.

AB played snare drum and cymbal (attached to snare drum) with the Excelsior Brass Band for a good while, around 1919; some members: [George] "Na Na" Moret, trumpet[and leader]; Al [cide] Landry, trumpet; Vic Gaspard, slide trombone; Albert Jiles, Sr., bass drum. The band played all types of jobs, including picnics at the Fair Grounds; the brass band played in the basement, while Kid Rena's band played upstairs, in a place called "The Tonk." Rena's brother, Joe Rene [sic], was playing drums with Rena then; when Joe gave up playing drums [he is an elder, or minister, of some church--PRC], AB replaced him with Kid Rena.

AB never rehearsed with a Dixieland band; his rehearsals have been only with orchestras, such as Robichaux's and the Maple Leaf, and with brass bands.

Tempo was set in rehearsal.

"Black Benny" [Williams] was playing drums with Robichaux just before AB replaced him; Benny was killed. AB tells of a tough number for drums, "Ace of Diamonds, Ace of Hearts, Ace of Spades, Ace of Clubs", and of playing [at least] the introduction correctly, and of being congratulated by Robichaux. JR had a good ear and could hear musicians's mistakes no matter how many were playing.

End of Reel II
Entire interview recorded at home of AB, 2724 St. Peter Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Kid Rena persuaded AB to replace Nathan, drummer with Rena at Papa Coochie's place [Cadillac Club] on St. Claude [Avenue]; tiring of the job, AB was persuaded to remain by Papa Coochie; AB played there until the place closed. AB doesn't know Nathan's last name, but says he also played with George E. Parker, pianist.

When AB was small, his father, also Alex Bigard, was a partner, with two others (Monette [spelling?], a barber and "Chinee") in a pleasure organization called the "You, Him and I" Club; the club held dances and other functions, including minstrel show at the Francs Amis Hall (until the club broke up). AB says he was allowed to attend only one of the functions, a picnic held at Manuel's Pavilion at Milneburg. "[Smoky] Mary", a train traveling on Elysian Fields Avenue to the lake was the means of transportation. The elder Bigard expected the affair to be a flop, because of rain, but it was successful; Buddy Petit's band played for it.

Don Albert [Albert Dominique] is a second cousin of AB; he is now in [San Antonio] Texas. AB says Albert left New Orleans as soon as he formed his own band; he thinks Albert ["Fats"] Martin, drummer, went with him. AB tells of meeting Albert and his band in Lafayette [Louisiana]. RBA mentions the Texas leader, Troy Floyd, with whom Albert played at one time.

The band at the Bungalow first had "Big Eye" Louis [Nelson] on clarinet, but he became ill and was replaced by Sam Dutrey, Sr., who played [clarinet?] and alto saxophone, remaining there until the place closed. Others in the band: Walter Decou, piano; Willie Pajaud, trumpet; AB, drums. The
salary (twenty-four dollars and fifty cents per week) was small, but the
tips were good, sometimes bringing [the total?] to one hundred dollars per
man per week.

AB tells of going to National Park, at Third and Claiborne, he thinks,
when he was a "kid" and hearing a band in which his uncle, Emile Bigard,
played violin; others in the band: Kid Ory, trombone [and leader?]; Mutt

AB didn't know Wade Whaley, who had left town when AB began playing.

[?? Check date. RBA]

AB's brother, Barney [Bigard] first played with Amos White, at
Spanish Fort; Barney was strictly a reader in those days. When "Big Eye"
Louis or [Alphonse] Picou would be out of work, they would come take
Barney's job, as he wasn't a good faker. Barney, who was reared by his
grandmother (his mother died when he was one day old), was advised by her
to give up music, to come back to cigar making; Barney stuck to music,
declaring that he would have revenge on Big Eye and Picou. Arnold Metoyer
formed a band to play at Tom Anderson's, hiring Barney on tenor sax, [Paul]
"'Ti' Boy" Barbarin on drums, Albert Nicholas, alto saxophone and clarinet,
Willie Santiago, banjo and [Luis Russell,] piano; Metoyer assured Barney he
wouldn't fire him because of his inability to fake. Barney taught Nicholas
to read; in return, Nicholas taught Barney how to fake. They became the
best saxophone team in New Orleans. Refusing all offers from other New
Orleans bands (Sidney Desvigne, [A. J.] Piron, an offer to join the band
[Marable?] on the [Streckfus] boat), they and Barbarin accepted an offer
to join King Oliver in Chicago. Nicholas began on first [alto] saxophone,
but wasn't fast enough, so he was assigned third [alto] chair, first being
taken by the previous third man, Darnell Simeon [or Omer Howard? PRC.]
Compare Walter C. Allen and Brian Rust, *King, Joe Oliver*, p. 17. No doubt it was Darnell Howard. RBA) (Barney remained on second [tenor] saxophone).

Nicholas became angry, and quit. [Compare Ibid., p. 18] Barney joined Duke Ellington, remaining with him fourteen years. Barney took lessons on clarinet from some German professor in New York. It was a practice for the Ellington band to send flowers to the family of a band member when there was a death in his family; when Barney's father died, no flowers were sent, so Barney quit the band, forever refusing to rejoin. He later played seven years with Louis [Armstrong), and is back with him now [but not at present, 1965--PRC].

The drummer with the Amos White band was [Eddie] "Face-o" [Woods]. AB was working with the Maple Leaf Band at the time Barney worked with White; the Maple Leaf had much work; they were the ones who got Papa Celestin into playing at the New Orleans Country Club.

When Barney was "coming up", he played with a band at the St. Bernard Market on Saturday; Omer Bernard was the trumpet player in [and leader of?] that band.

AB explains 1-beat, 2-beat and 4-beat (also called "double forty" [i.e., Forte?]). AB tells how the various instruments were placed on an advertising truck; the drummer was at the front [nearest the cab] and the trombonist and bass player were at the back, while the others were between the extremes. AB talks about the placement of musicians on various bandstands; the piano and drums should be together on the left [stage right] the banjo and the bass together on the left [stage left]. AB talks of drum placement in brass bands; in the old times, the drums were in the back of the band,
but practice has proven that the drums are more effective in the center of the band. [Is he referring to high school bands?]

AB worked with Willie Pajaud's band at the Alamo, a dance hall; when AB left, he got the job for Ernest Trepagnier, who later passed it on to Black Benny [Williams]. AB mentions drummer Joe Strohter, who also played slide whistle. In Pajaud's band, besides AB on drums were: Wilhemina Bart, piano; Pajaud, trumpet; Yank [Johnson], trombone; Willie Foster, banjo; Willie "Kaiser" Joseph (brother of Nelson Joseph and John Joseph), clarinet.

When AB played with Bob Lyons [bass], the other members were: (at first) Ricard Alexis, trumpet, later replaced by Wesley Dimes, of Baton Rouge; Frankie Duson, trombone; Sidney Vignes, clarinet; [Tom] Benton, banjo, later replaced by Lorenzo Staulz (a singer of nice [i.e., very dirty] songs, in the manner of [pianist] Steve Lewis). When Lyons used a pianist, he sometimes used Mercedes Gorman, sometimes "Tink" (probably [Xavier] not "Tink" Batiste) and sometimes Benny Turner. "Fess" [Manuel Manetta] sometimes played saxophone with the band.

The Maple Leaf Band broke up because of death [and sickness]: first, cornet player Hypolite Charles (still living) quit because of heart trouble; (AB, drums and Camilla Todd, piano are still living); later, Vic Gaspard and his brother, Octave Gaspard died, and Willie Bontemps, guitar, and Charlie McCurdy, clarinet, died. [Check death dates. RBA] AB begins a story of how Manuel Perez, just back in New Orleans and back in the Maple Leaf, agitated to have a new drummer in town hired; as AB was dressing for a job one night, "Oke" Gaspard came to his house and told him the band had decided to get another drummer--AB explains that in the earlier days musicians were fired in this manner, rather than receiving some longer sort of notice. Reel ends.

END OF REEL III