Spasm Bands

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Emile 'Stale Bread' Lacoume
1885-1946

Lacoume

Merriam-Webster: 'Spasm Band' - A jazz band originating during the ragtime period, using chiefly improvised instruments (such as cowbells, jug and kazoo, etc.) and later being composed primarily of youths, performing especially in the streets.'

Many Scholars and jazz researchers consider the Spasm Band of 'Stale Bread' Lacoume to be the first 'jazz' band. Stale Bread was the leader and the band played on street corners for coins. In later life Lacoume played piano and banjo in various clubs around New Orleans including the Halfway House, the

LaVida Dance Hall and at West End. He finally ended up as a program seller at the Fair Grounds race track.

Spasm Bands were seldom, if ever, mentioned throughout the United States and possibly it was more a New Orleans happening then country wide, as no entries in written newspapers and few journals cite the words 'spasm band' when describing a band.

The peculiar and original title of 'spasms' was given to a musical team of the 'Young Men's Gymnastic Club' in 1894 (YMGC) so that the specificity would not be too exacting, as the boys merely organized to amuse themselves and occasionally entertain their friends. (See page 57 for info on this band.)

The boys intended changing the name as soon as the improvement in playing warranted, but in the meantime their appearance at different concerts created so much favorable comment that 'spasm' was retained.' (Times Picayune, June 2, 1895)

Spasm Band in 1897
Harry Gregson, Emile 'Whiskey' Benrod, Willie 'Cajun' Bussey, 'Stale Bread' Lacoume, Frank 'Monk' Bussey and Anthony 'Warm Gravy' Brecknagle. (One article named him Cleve Kraven)
Instruments: Tambourine, zither, string bass, mandolin,? harmonica, and a string instrument.

<u>Enlargements of Spasm Bands Instruments</u>

Tambourine

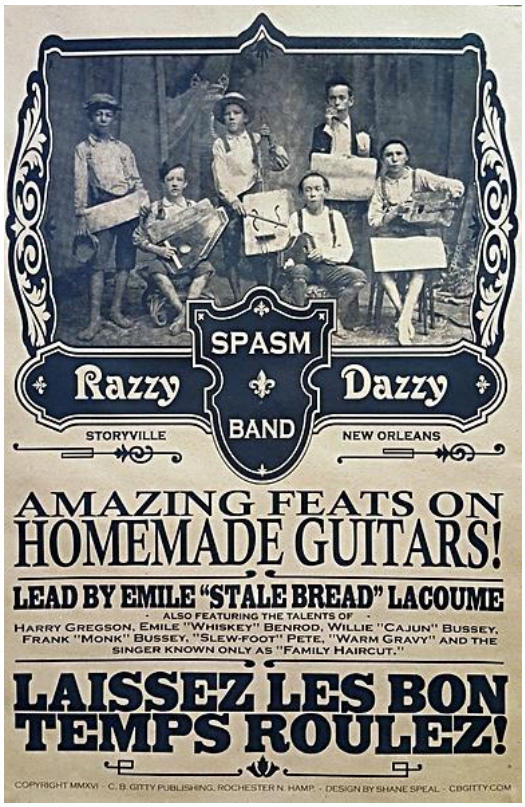
Zither

String Bass

String instrument

harmonica

String instrument



The Spasm Band in 1899

New Orleans Spasm Band -1903

A spasm band was a musical ensemble that made musical instruments out of various objects not usually employed in the performance of music. The Spasm band played around New Orleans from around 1894 until around 1909. They played a length of gas pipe, a kettle and a fiddle made from a cigar box, etc. They played many assortments that could produce sounds.

In New Orleans, poor white and Negro boys roamed the streets, docks theaters and railroad stations playing home-made instruments since the end of the Civil War, but none of these received the notoriety or publicity that the Spasm Band did. One wonders why? No Spasm Band, if other true spasm bands existed in New Orleans, was famous as the Spasm Band.

The expression 'Spasm Band' arose sometime during the late 19th century in and around the better brothels of New Orleans, which provided music and dancing. The 'original jazz band,' (the Stale Bread Spasm Band) according to Herbert Asbury's 'The French Quarter' (1938), was 'The Spasm Band' made up of seven boys, aged twelve to fifteen, who first appeared in New Orleans about 1894 to 1909. They advertised themselves as the 'Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band.' During their tenure the personal and the instrumentation was fluid. I believe the popularity of the band was due to its leader, Emile Lacoume and to the original sounds that the band possessed. It seemed to be different than the music played by other street bands. The band had imagination and showmanship and put on a 'show' for their patrons, and their music was different and unique to the band.

Books and magazines on Lacoume

A Newsboy's Home - Rev. A.C. Partand - no date - There were in the hall some 12 or 15 little urchins squatted on the floor, while 5 others were sitting on a long bench. The Rev. Father asked the boy Tommy:

"What are you doing here?" I asked one of them. "We are listenin' ter de "Spasm Band Fawder," he answered, pointing at the boys on the bench.

"Spasm Band!' I exclaimed.
And what is that?"

"Oh, its dem fellows who have got instruments made wid soap and cigar boxes, and a mouf harmonica and a tambooreen and was givin' us a concert."

At my request, and for my special benefit the members of the 'Spasm Band' performed several pieces on their quaint home-made instruments. Their execution was most pleasing to the eye, if not tuneful to the ear, each performer being animated with a total disregard of his fellow artists playing. The leader conducted the complex and difficult music with a broom handle and without a score. When asked why he had been made leader of the band, he answered, "Because I don't know no mooic and I can't play no instrooment."

<u>Literary Digest</u> - April 26, 1919

Some years ago there was a blind newsboy on a street corner in New Orleans, and there were times when misery and melancoly overwhelmed him, for he had a little of the soul of an artist, which is generally supposed to be sad, as well as misfortunes beyond the average. He could play the violin, and his common or street name was 'Stale Bread.' One day he hit upon a new kind of music, a music so wild, and swinging, and ear-catching, and nerve-twisting that it was able to drive away his sadness, as once the harp of David drove awaoy the 'blue devils' from King Saul. To the music that 'Stale Bread' invented the name of 'jazz' was ultimately applied, and anyone who doesn't care for 'jazz' is privileged to remember that 'Stale Bread' was suffering a great deal when he invented it says of writer in The New Orleans Item, dealing with the syncopated harmonies and other features of 'jazz.'

It's called 'jazz' that synchoronizing super syncopation that originating in New Orleans, has aggravated the feet and fingers of America into a shimming, tickle-toeing, snapping delirium and now is upsettinng the swaying euilibrium of the European dance.'

The dictionary of culture contains so such teasing monosylable. The nearest is comes to is 'jazzy.' which means a kind of worsted sweater.

But says Josep K. Gorham, 'Daddy of the Jazz,' "the word, common to the knowledge and frequent in the vocabulary of the Barbary Coast and the southern darky for years, means simply enough, and without any explanation or definition, the only thing it's possible for four such letters in such order, when pronounced, to convey, and that is just 'to mess 'em up and slap it on thick.' That's the verb 'to jazz."

The noun means just the same as the verb, except that the noun implies the process and the verb the action.

Musically and technically speaking, jazz is correctly defined; but the writer admits his inadequacy, and Mr. Gorham, ponderng deeply for five minutes, gave it up and observed:

'Why ask such an unnecessary question, anyway? ....

And there is the story that as far back as twenty years ago a blind newsboy, known to his particular gang here as 'Stale Bread' felt the creep of the 'blues' coming on him and translated them on a Fiddle acquired from a minstrel show passing through town.With his moaning, soothing melodies he was soon threatening to corner the trade, playing as he sold his papers. Then one by one other denizens of the street, picking up the strain and whatever

instruments they could lay their hands on, joined him until there were five christened by the leader as 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band.' But their was the music of the street and the underworld, and the years passed before it penetrated into the homes, the clubs, and the restaurants of the fashionable.

<u>Studies in Etymology and Etiology</u> - David Gold - 2009

A company of boys from 12 to 15 years old, who called themselves the Spasm Band. They were the real creators of jazz, and the spasm Band wa the original jazz band. in short, theyh apparantly originated pradcticallyo all of the antics with which the viruosi of modern jazz provoke the hotcha spirit, and someetimes downright nausea. The spasm band first appeared in New orleans about 18895, they were advertised as 'The Razzy Dazzy Spasm band.' About 1900 - the date is uncertain - Jack robinson, owner of the haymarket Dance hall on custom house Street between Dauphine and bourbon engaged a band of experienced adujlt musicians who imitated the antics and contortions of the spasm Band and moreover, usng their billing - 'Razzy dazzy spasm band. "when the membeers of the original Spasm band appeared at the Haymarket with their hands and pockeets filled with stones and bricks and made vioilent protest. robinson repainted his advertising placards to read "Razzy Dazzy Jazz Band." thus it began.

<u>French Quarter</u> - Hebert Asbury - 1936

A few of the best brothels regularly employed orchestras of from two to four instruments, which played each night in the ballroom from about seven o'clock to closing, which was usually at dawn. The others depended upon the groups of itinerant musicians who frequently appeared in Storyville, playing in the streets and saloons for coins and drinks. One of the most popular of these combinations-though not for dancing-was a company of boys, from twelve to fifteen years old, who called themselves the Spasm Band. They were the real creators of jazz, and the Spasm Band was the original jazz band. There were seven members besides the manager and principal organizer Harry Gregson, who was the singer of the outfit-he crooned the popular songs of the day through a piece of gas-pipe, since he couldn't afford a proper megaphone. (E.g. Gregson later became a chief detective for the New Orleans Police Department.) The musicians were Emile Lacoume, otherwise Stalebread Charley, who played a fiddle made out of a cigar-box; Willie Bussey, better known as Cajun, who performed entrancingly upon the

harmonica; Charley Stein, who manipulated an old kettle, a cow-bell, as gourd filled with pebbles, and other traps and in later life became a famous drummer; Chinee, who smote the bull fiddle, at first half a barrel and later a coffin-shaped contraption about by the boys; Warm Gravy (Anthony Brecknagle). Emile Benrod, called Whisky, and Frank Bussey, known as Monk. The three last-named played whistles and various horns, most of them home-made, and each had at least three instruments, upon which he alternated. Cajun Bussey and Stalebread Charley could play tunes upon the harmonica and the fiddle and the others contributed whatever sounds chanced to come from their instruments. These they played with the horns in hats, standing upon their heads, and interrupting themselves occasionally with lugubrious howls. In short, they apparently originated practically all of the antics with which the virtuosi of modern jazz provoke the hotcha spirit, and sometimes downright nausea. The spasm boys even screamed 'hi-de- hi' and 'ho-de-ho'-and incidentally these expressions, now the exclusive howls of Negro band-leaders, were used in Mississippi river songs at least a hundred years ago.

The Spasm Band first appeared in New Orleans about 1895, and for several years the boys picked up many an honest penny playing in front of the theaters and saloons and in the brothels, and with a few formal engagements at West End, Grand Opera House, and other resorts, when they were advertised as 'The Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band.' Their big moment, however, came when they serenaded Sarah Bernhardt, who expressed amazement and gave them each a coin. About 1900-the date is uncertain-Jack Robinson, owner of the Haymarket dance-hall on Custom House Street between Dauphine and Bourbon, engaged a band of experienced, adult musicians, who imitated the antics and contortions of the Spasm Band and, moreover, used their billing-Razzy Dizzy Spasm Band. When the member of the original Spasm Band appeared at the Haymarket with their hands and pockets filled with stones and bricks and made violent protest, Robinson reprinted his advertising placed to read: 'Razzy Dazzy Jazzy Band.'

The next article cites Stale Bread as a Negro which was incorrect.

<u>From Jehovah to Jazz</u> - Helen L. Kaufmann - 1937

One certainly about jazz's early history is that it originated in New Orleans, and that the first group of interpreters of which history takes

cognizance was known as the Dixieland Jazz band. Henry Osgood, in 'So this is Jazz,' tells of a blind Negro named Stale Bread who roamed the streets of New Orleans playing syncopated tunes on a fiddle donated by a minstrel in a passing show. By annexing recruits here and there, he gradually acquired Stale Bread's Spasm Band, and took them into all the gin shops up and down the water front for the edification of the patrons.

Jazz history-Paul Whiteman, George Gershwin - part II - The Famous Spasm Band - 1916

There were eight members of the Stale Bread orchestra. They were known about town as Piggy, Family Haircut, Warm Gravy, Booze Bottle, Seven Colors, Whisky, and Monk. The band hangout was the old Newsboys' Home on Baronne Street. Stale Bread was the organizer and owner. His instruments were a cheese box for a banjo, a soap-box guitar, a cigar-box violin, and a half-barrel bass fiddle. He had also an old tambourine, a zither and a harmonica.

The leader trained his gang until he had it going along in great shape. Then he took it out to play on the street. He had no trouble at all in collecting a crowd that completely blocked traffic. Some sour face complained and a cop promptly pinched the band. They were brought to court and the judge, trying to keep a straight face, invited them to defend themselves by playing.

It was a great moment in the life of the little blind boy. He rose gravely, bowed to Hizzoneer and the spectators, raised a lath that he used for a baton, and the dirty--faced, ragged eight were off. 'Off' is the word that one who heard them uses advisedly. Stale Bread thinks that is the first time any court ever heard a jazz band. The judge listened to the bitter end. Then he beckoned to the leader.

'Stale Bread,' said he, 'you may be a band, but you are a spasm band. Discharged!'

Jelly Roll Morton remarked: (reference unclear)

Called them spasm bands and described many of them as poor performers who did a lot of ad lib playing in ragtime style with no definite routines.

A lot of bad bands we called 'spasm bands,' playing any jobs they could get in the streets. They did a lot of ad-libbing in ragtime style with different

solos in succession, not in a regular routine, but just as one guy would get tired and let another have the lead.

Some other names are mentioned as playing in the streets.

Charlie Galloway was also to be a street musicians in a street skiffle band with bass player Bob Lyons, who started playing skittle in the streets around 1885. Another skittle band performer was the band leader Louis Ned, born in 1858, he was said to have played skiffle music in the streets with tuba player Wallace Collins, one of Galloway's associates, as early as 1869. Pops Foster said there were many street corner bands that played for coins in the streets. Guitar Lonnie Johnson and his violinist father playing for coins in the streets and a harmonica player called Blind Freddie.

'Montudie' Garland's first instrument was a homemade 'gut bucket,' made from a milk can and a stick with a string from one end to the other.

Wingy Manone played kazoo in a spasm band at the age of 12. He said, 'You had the whole red light district going and all the dance halls and the food and especially the music. Man, this town was wide open. You had to be dead not to have a good time.'

John Provenzano wanted to start a band. He needed a 'real' instrument to start a band. His harmonica and banjo, and the leaky tubs and washboards, and even combs were all right to play around with, but you needed an honest-to-goodness real instrument for a band.

In the book <u>'Jazz, From the Congo to the Metropolitan'</u> by Robert Goffin - 1998, we read:

'One of the most popular of the combinations-though not for dancing-was a company of boys, from 12 to 15 years old, who called themselves the Spasm Band. They were the real creators of jazz, and the Spasm Band was the original jazz band. There were seven members besides the manager and principal organizer. Harry Gregson, who was the singer of the outfit-he crooned the popular songs of the day through a piece of gas-pipe, since he couldn't afford a proper megaphone. The musicians were Emile Lacoume, otherwise Stalebread Charley, who played a fiddle made out of a cigar-box; Willie Bussey, better known as Cajun, who performed entrancingly upon the harmonica; Charley Stein, who manipulated an old kettle, a cow bell, a gourd

filled with pebbles, and other traps and in later life became a famous drummer; Chinee, who smote the bull fiddle, at first half a barrel and later a coffin-shaped contraption built by the boys; Emile Benrod, called Whisky, and Frank Bussey, known as Monk. The three last named played whistles and various horns, most of them home-made, and each had at least three instruments, upon which he alternated. Cajun Bussey and Stalebread Charley could play tunes upon the harmonics and the fiddle and the others contributed whatever sound chanced to come from their instruments. These they played with the horns in hats, standing upon their heads, and interrupting themselves occasionally with lugubrious howls. In short, they apparently originated practically all of the antics with which the virtuosi of modern jazz provoke the hotcha spirit, and sometimes downright nausea. The spasm boys even screamed 'hi-de-hi' and 'ho-de-ho'-and incidentally these expressions, now the exclusive howls of Negro band-leaders, were used in Mississippi River songs at least a hundred years ago.

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There were undoubtedly several groups similar to the Spasm Band, and before its formation in 1895 real orchestras of true musicians had made their appearance for many, many years.

Stale Bread on right at resort-West End - Lacoume with guitar at right, 1918

<u>Exploring Early Jazz</u> - Daniel Hardie - 2005 - The Spasm Band

One of the earliest mentioned groups of white players was the Spasm Band of the late 1890's that operated under the leadership of Emile (Stalebread) Lacoume. This street band, known as the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band, consisted of young boys who played makeshift instruments.

Lacoume is probably the best known of all New Orleans street players. Charters quoted the following letter from a New Orleans resident (Harry Huguenot) to the New York Dramatic Mirror in 1919:

'I have been reading with interest the articles relative to the origin of the 'jazz band' and am in a position to give the truthful facts to your readers that may help to clear the situation.

Being born and raised in New Orleans, the following statement is absolutely correct: whether the question involved is regarding the origin of the word 'jazz or the 'jazz band' is hard to determine, but some twenty years ago a newsboy in New Orleans began to attract attention by his originality. This boy was known as 'Stale Bread,' and during the procedure of his sales he entertained with a harmonica. The success of this little stunt led to the combination of other musical inclined newsboys and the result was that one day there appeared on the main street of New Orleans 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band' of five or six instruments of original construction, made mostly from cigar boxes and half barrels. The bass fiddle, constructed and played by Stale Bread, was the centre of attention. This band grew in proportion and played all the latest airs of the period with an attempt at the present jazz effects. Stale Bread became blinded (1901).

Charles Edward Smith gave 1896 as the year when Stale Bread formed the group. He said Stale Bread played zither, and gave the original personnel as: Cajun (Willie Bussey) harmonica, Whiskey (Emile Benrod) string bass,

constructed from a half barrel strung with clothes line chord and played with a bow made of a cypress stick, Warm Gravy (Cleve Carven) cheese box banjo, slew-foot Pete (Albert Montluzin) four string soap box guitar.

Smith said they played for Doc Malney's Minstrels and by 1903 they were 'practically legitimate' using normal instruments. The personnel then was Stale Bread, zither and piano, Dolly (Charles Carey) string bass, Sonny (?) guitar and mandolin, Dude (Jimmy Lacoume) banjo, Sweet Potato (Harry Carey) tambourine and cornet. A photograph of 1906 shows a trombone and violin in the group. Herbert Asbury said the band first appeared about 1895 and was advertised at formal engagements as the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band. He said they serenaded Sarah Bernhardt in 1903. He added Charley Stein, playing kettle and cow bell and gourd filled with pebbles, to the above list. Another source said a member Harry Gregson sang through a piece of gas pipe.

The band evidently played in front of theatres, saloons and bawdy houses and may have had an engagement at the West End Opera House. They inserted yells of hotcha and hi di hi or ho do ho, expressions apparently used in songs of the river, into their performances.

One theory holds that these boys created a form of jazz that was later copied by professional musicians. Herbert Asbury even named Haymarket Restaurant owner Jack Robinson as the person who hired a group of experienced players to imitate the hotchas of the street kids, thus creating instrumental jazz. Asbury said they even appropriated the name.

The Haymarket Cafe band was called the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band but the unverified story is that the boys in the Spasm Band protested against this appropriation of their name by hurling stones and bricks, until the title was changed to the Razzy Dazzy Jazzy Band.'

Huguenot's letter quoted above by Sam Charters suggests who these musicians might have been. It continued:

At this same time there was a social organization in New Orleans composed of young business men, numbering about 100. An orchestra was formed of the musical members, consisting of the piano, guitar, cornet, and bass fiddle, played respectively by Gus Shindler, Yellow Nunez (a Spaniard), cornetists name forgotten), and myself. The addition of Frank Christian, another guitarist, prompted Yellow Nunez to purchase a clarinet, and then from the clarinet began to flow the weirdest blue notes I ever heard. After a week of practice, Nunez had these blue notes arranged as cadenzas, and I am

firmly of the opinion that this was really the first 'jazz' effect in an orchestra. The orchestra became known as the 'Right at 'Em's Razz Band' and continued successfully for some time, I mentioned above that it was some twenty years ago, but a correct idea of the time can be ascertained by the fact that our star number was 'Bill Bailey Won't You Please Come Home.' This orchestration was brought direct from New York and we were the first to play it in New Orleans. Incidentally, 'Frankie and Johnnie' was an old selection. This information gives a clue to the date of the development. 'Bill Bailey Won't You Come Home' was published in 1902 and of course 'Frankie and Johnnie' was a very old folk song with a long history in the WSA, a fact that links the group to the street folk tradition.

<u>New Orleans Nostalgia</u> - Ned Hermard

'Skittle bands' were first known as 'spasm bands' and began, coincidentally, in New Orleans in the early 1900s. Street performers used simple improvised instruments like kazoos and cigar-box fiddles The earliest known band to perform in the Crescent city under the name 'spasm band' was formed in 1895, known alternately as 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band' and the 'Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band'. Their informal musical style was influential in the development of instrumental New Orleans jazz.

<u>Studies in Etymology and Etilogy</u> - David Gold - 2009

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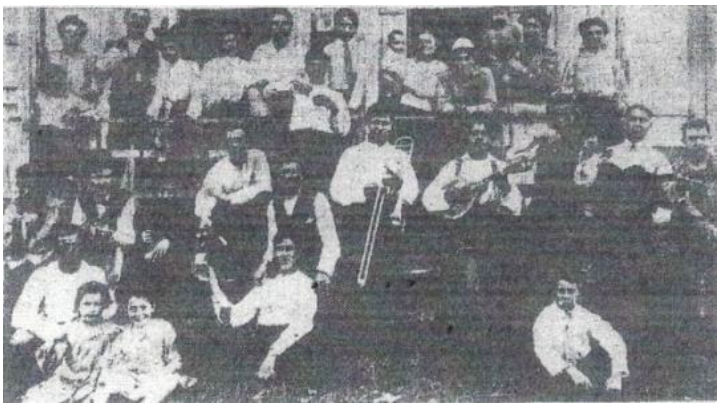
<u>Down Beat</u> - George Malcolm Smith - Jazz goes 'way back.'

Let's follow the down beat with a foolproof premise, and then improvise from that point. The premise is that jazz was introduced into the states through New Orleans. Nobody can dispute the, for it is a fact; that the 'delta was ringing with jazz music as far back as the 'eighties.' The famed litterateur, Lafcadio Hearn, as long ago as 1885, wrote of the existence in New Orleans of music of a rudimentary syncopated type known as jazz.' We know also that Stale Bread Lacoume and his troupe of white boys were featured too in the joints of New Orleans' Storyville in the 'nineties, when they were billed as 'That Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band.' And we knew, too, that such pioneers as Buddy Bolden, Freddie Keppard and Jelly Roll Morton were giving out hot licks before the turn of the century. We know still further that New Orleans cradled the very greatest of hot virtuosi, including, in addition to those mentioned, such men as Oliver, Armstrong, Mutt Carey, Bechet, Red Allen, Johnny Dodds, Manone, Baduc, Froeba, Bonano, Prima, Celestin, Piron and the Original Dixieland Jazz bands of Tom Brown and Nick LaRocca.

Yellow Nunez played with a number of groups in New Orleans. One such group was the Stalebread Lacoume's Band around 1906. He played guitar in one of the earliest bands with Gus Shindler on piano, a cornet player and Stale Bread Lacoume.



Stalebread's Band- 1906. Nunez is playing guitar on right. Notice a trombone in the center,

Brian Wood stated that Nunez began learning clarinet in 1902. Another source suggested that it was the associates of John Stein (La Hountha) who frequented the Haymarket Cafe, who took up the spasm band style. Yellow Nunez was later a member of the Stein Dixieland Jazz Band. This would

suggest that there was perhaps some basis for the ODJB's later claim to have been involved in the formulation of white instrumental jazz.

Some witnesses still apparently consider Lacoume the father of jazz and his grave bears an inscription to the effect that he was its originator. Emile Lacoume apparently honestly believed himself the creator of the new music and his daughter ensured the gravestone carried his claim.'

Planet Six String - Cigar box guitars - jazz origins.

Many musicians playing in the front of the brothels and bars were children-street urchins who sold newspapers by day and play music on homemade instruments at night.

One of the most prominent was the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band led by Emile 'Stale Bread' Lacoume. They were the precursor to jug bands, playing wild Dixieland, minstrel and skiffle music on instruments cobbled together from trash. Cigar box guitars, cheese box banjos, gas pipe horns and upright tea chest basses were part of the sound. Contemporaries report that the style was imitated by adult orchestras such as the 'Right at 'Em Razz Band,' which featured future Original Dixieland Jazz Band clarinetist Alcide Nunez.

Many historians consider the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band to be the first jazz band.

Scholars remark on the Spasm Band

Al Rose -Jazz historian in his book 'I Remember Jazz' writes in an interview with Lacoume:

'Stalebread Lacoume was younger than Perez-only 53, but he was blind and generally incapacitated. Many had claimed for him the honor of having been the originator of jazz, but he was not among his own claque.'

'Me? Not me! We had this little spasm band-you know- most all homemade instruments. We were really lousy but we had good rhythm-just kids, you know. I guess I was ten, twelve years old. We played around in the district and people used to throw us money. Even them whores, Sarah Bernhardt-you know-the French actress-she come by an' give us a dime. The whores tipped better than that.

'There was plenty kids before use done that. We copied off somebody, I don't remember who. We didn't make up all the dirty songs, neither. We

heard 'em in the streets an' we sang 'em in the streets. Now they say we invented jazz. Ain't nobody invented that music.

'Later on I really became a musician. Played for a livin'! I never knew no music, but I worked playin' the guitar. Good bands, too! Charlie Fishbein, Max Fink. Good bands. I was the onliest one couldn't read in them bands 'course at the Halfway House that was all fakin'. None o' them guys could read. Mickey Marcour, Red Long-maybe Rappolo could read a little bit. Not Brunies or Hook Loyacano or none o' them.'

"Would he still be playing if he were able?"

'Not no more. These new guys are sharks. They playin' stuff we never even thought about. You hear Snoozer Quinn or some o' these dagoes in the hotel bands. They mus' spend all their time playin' or practicin'. We played for fun, y'see.'

<u>Jack "Papa" Laine</u> - Interview, March 26, 1957 - Tulane Univ.

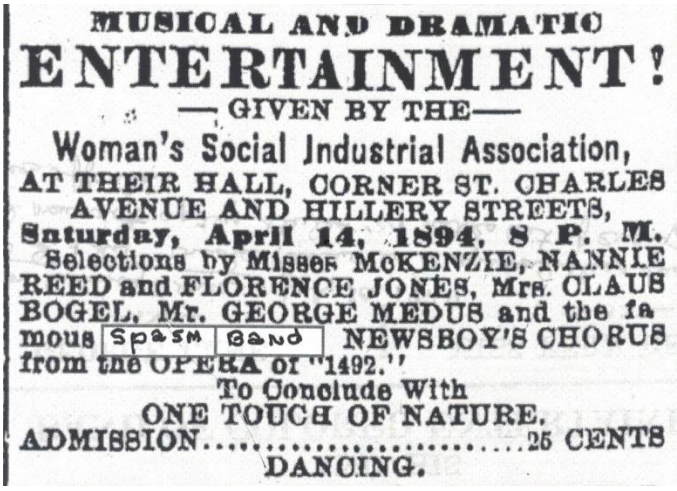
I was very, very young then, very, very young, yes, and of course what made it all the best for us all we used to get a gang of kids and go around the streets, p0arde at nights in the evenings you know, after school was out we'd get home and get supper and wash up and stuff like that and get ready and we'd go out and have a little parade. On the street we'd go around for blocks and bocks and blocks, you see and parade. Some with tin flutes and so on you know and that's how we began to go along; mostly homemade instrument. The other kids had sort of a cane outfit, their daddies use to make 'em canes, cane flutes and stuff like that, and out of cane you know. And then it got so that we got the boys got to buy in the old second hand instruments out here on Rampart Street. It used to be full of all kind of old instruments up there, and they'd toot-toot-toot 'em till finally they begin to make a success. We had a basement all to ourselves and understand at my house and we'd rehearse in there play all kinds of stuff whether it went on good or bad. Some of 'em had guitars, violins and played bass fiddle and banjo.

<u>Danny Barker</u> remembers;

'Spasm Bands played all sorts of gadgets that produced sounds; musical saws, washboards, spoons, bells, pipes, sandpaper, xylophones, sets of bottles (which with a different amount of water), harmonicas, Jews harps, lone string fiddles, guitars, small bass fiddles, tub basses, kazoos, ram hours, steer horns, bugles, tin flutes, trombones, and many others. These performers and

musicians were welcomed by the patrons in the joint, although the first time it was manly out of curiosity. If the fool was an artist and performed well, he was always welcome to walk through the swinging doors and perform. Some of these performers were hired to keep the joint jumping.

The next adv. could be either the Stale Bread Band or the YMGC Spasm Band. I believe it is Stale Bread's Band.


MUSICAL AND DRAMATIC
ENTERTAINMENT!
—GIVEN BY THE—
Woman's Social Industrial Association,
AT THEIR HALL, CORNER ST. CHARLES AVENUE AND HILLERY STREETS,
Saturday, April 14, 1894, 8 P. M.
Selections by Misses McKENZIE, NANNIE REED and FLORENCE JONES, Mrs. CLAUS BOGEL, Mr. GEORGE MEDUS and the famous Spasm Band NEWSBOY'S CHORUS from the OPERA of "1492."
To Conclude With
ONE TOUCH OF NATURE.
ADMISSION.....25 CENTS
DANCING.

April 14, 1894

<u>Articles</u>

<u>1894</u>

Below is the first mention of a Spasm Band in New Orleans The mention of newsboys taking part led me to believe it was Lacoume's band. The reporter mentions an overture being played which does not sound like the Spasm Band repertoire but there is no mention of another spasm band this early in 1894. Later, there is mention of Lacoume's band playing in a minstrel troupe. I do not know of any minstrel band being called a spasm band. The spasm band mentioned perhaps was part of a 'turn' in the minstrel's program. The article mentioned the newsboys also with mention of the Spasm Band so I believe it could be the earliest that the Spasm Band is mentioned.

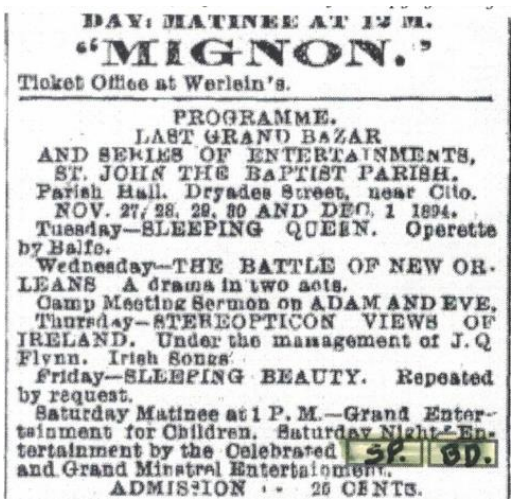
<u>Times Democrat</u> - May 9, 1894

The strains of the Spasm Band, the howl of the fakers, and the blare of the weird instruments all tried to be heard at once, and the ear of the listeners got tire trying to unravel the sounds and tell just what was going on. The Spasm Band held chief away in the Javanes, and delighted little audiences clustered around it.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - May 31, 1894 - Amateur Minstrelsy

A large audience witnessed the amateur minstrelsy last night at the Woman's Social Industrial Hall. The entertainment had been gotten up under the management of W.T. DeVan, and right well had he performed his work. A grand overture by the Spasm Band opened the affair, followed by a grand medley by the members of the company.

The Spasm Band also took part, as did the newsboys, who by special request joined in the chorus.


DAY: MATINEE AT 1½ M.

"MIGNON."

Ticket Office at Werlein's.

PROGRAMME.
LAST GRAND BAZAR
AND SERIES OF ENTERTAINMENTS,
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST PARISH.
Parish Hall. Dryades Street, near Clio.
NOV. 27, 28, 29, 30 AND DEC. 1 1894.
Tuesday—SLEEPING QUEEN. Operette by Balfe.
Wednesday—THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS A drama in two acts.
Camp Meeting Sermon on ADAM AND EVE.
Thursday—STEREOPTICON VIEWS OF IRELAND. Under the management of J. Q Flynn. Irish Songs.
Friday—SLEEPING BEAUTY. Repeated by request.
Saturday Matinee at 1 P. M.—Grand Entertainment for Children. Saturday Night—Entertainment by the Celebrated SP. BD. and Grand Minstrel Entertainment.
ADMISSION - - 25 CENTS.

November 27, 1894
Spasm Band

There are no entries for the years 1895 to 1896. Perhaps the band was not popular to the citizens as later and was not mentioned in the various journals, magazines and newspapers. Many journals do mention the Lacoume Spasm Band was playing in 1895/96.

1897

Without a doubt Stale Bread was the leader of this 'gang' of young boys. These newsboys were often mischievous and had occasions to have incidents that warranted police participation.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - August 28, 1897 - Stael Bread vulnerable, but it takes more than a Chinaman to find it out.

Stale Bread, the newsboy, who is perhaps one of the funniest characters in the city, won a legal battle in the second recorder's court yesterday morning. Of course, he had an attorney-Stale Bread never fails to have a legal light when he is in trouble, but then his own keenness whipped the Celestial who was opposed to him.

Chos Fung has a place at 230 Bienville Street and Stale Bread was in the vicinity Thursday afternoon. A rock was thrown at the Chinaman, and he swore that Stale bread hurled the missile, which struck him n the head. Stale Bread said he had not, and told the Celestial to run up the street and cry 'fire,' it would do him good. But the 'Chinaman ran after Stale Bread instead, and Officers Mohr and Durand captured the little incorrigible.

'I'll git out, see,' he said when the bluecoats took him. Then he scowled at the Chinaman and told him that he was lying when he said he (Stale Bread) threw the rock.

'It was the monk that did it, see he yelled in parting.'

Well, Stale Bread was paroled, and yesterday morning he was before Recorder Bezou, of the second recorder's court, charged with the offense of hitting the Chinaman. Stale Bread had his newsboy friends in the courtroom; the Chinaman was there with some people, who he said were his witnesses.

The trail started, and Stale Bread proved that there was a monkey in the house adjoining that of the Chinaman, and that same pestiferous monkey cold throw rocks, and further that the said beast slammed the rock upon the almond-eyed individual's head. The Chinaman and his witnesses were dumbfounded-Stale Bread was too much for them.

Recorder Bezou listened to the stories, and as there was some doubt as to whether Stale Bread or the monkey threw the rock, he discharged the prisoner.

'What did I say, Calls?' said Stale Bread when he had reached the sidewalk and was with his friends. 'Dem guys ain't in it wid me wen it comes to law, see.'

<u>Times Picayune</u> - October 24, 1897 - Protection of Jewish boy, Bubbles.

'Well Bubbles don't come from a scrappy stock, and he's got more beatings from the newsboys than any other kid in the country. They still bawls him out as, 'Reddy the Jew,' but Stale Bread says he'll stop them. And, in course, what Stale says the gang sticks.

Stale Bread was 'Lord and Master of a group of boys.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - December 26, 1897 - Newsboys dining

Seated at the head of the table, as though lord and master of all he surveyed was 'Stale Bread,' a famous leader in the newsboy crowd.

Just then Stale Bread caught sight of the reporter taking down the names (i.e. nicknames) or rather alias, and he cried out: 'Say here mister, don't you brethren Chinee in de paper along with us crowd; it might make the gang look bad,' he explained apologetically.

<u>1898</u>

<u>Times Picayune</u> - September, 1898

The newsboys have been having rather a gay time lately and their mischievousness this time has brought them under the frowning eyebrows of Judge Bezou. Emile Bencoft, James Casey, Jos. Trainor, Sidney Rouch, Albert Marlason, Abe Krower and Frank Bussey were hauled up in court for disturbing the peace and using obscene language instead of pursuing their honest vocations by selling newspapers. The evidence was not very strong against the boys, as it was a claimed that they were only playing their spasm band out in Storyville on Tuesday night. His honor reprimanded the newsboys and discharged them. Just as the culprits were leaving the courtroom, that incurable gamin, 'Stale Bread,' poked his head into the doorway and saluted the judge, who, unprepared for this honor, immediately recognized the kid and called to him, ''You little rascal, you're at the head of all this.' At this remark 'Stale Bread' and his repressive gang of brats laughed mockingly and started on a run. It is safe to say that the next time these boys want to beat the cans and play their spasm band they will do it where they cannot be observed.

The members of the Spasm Band had good relations with the city officials and were devoted to their mothers (Fathers are not mentioned)

Times Picayune - September 8, 1898

The Spasm Band serenades recorder Bezou.

The newsboys were a little mischief but did have their morals and responsibilities, especially to their mother. While the boys had their mischievous ways they had a good relationship with the government officers and officials.

Times Picayune - September 10, 1898 - Press Club evening

The entertainment continued for hours, and talent was not wanting in any line...One of the most amusing features of the evening was the Spasm Band, conducted by the irrepressible character, 'Stale Bread.' His antics and the comical music rendered by the band was 'too funny for anything," as one of the ladies present said.

Times Picayune - September 28, 1898

An affidavit for malicious mischief was yesterday made against Emile Lacoume, the irrepressible little newsboy, popularly known as Stale Bread, residing on Conti, between Burgundy and Rampart Streets. His pal, Anthony Brecknagle, popularly known as 'Warm Gravy, was also charged in the name affidavit was made at the instigation of the Messrs. Fabacher, who say they are continually annoyed by the depredations of these newsboys, who congregate near their restaurant, on Royal Street. Lacoume and Brecknagle are charged as follows: 'That on the 27th day of September, 1908, the accused, unlawfully and without cause or provocation, did pump water into Fabacher's Restaurant from a plug and thereby damaged tobacco, etc., to the amount of $3, the property of L. Fabacher, all in violation of city ordinance -1798m C. S. Warrants have been issued for the arrest of the two boys.

1899

Railroad Trainman, Vol.16, 1899

Imagine my joy when researching old newspaper articles about the newsboys Spasm Band (the first jazz band some say). I turned up a fuzzy photo of the lads published in the 'Sunday vindicator in the February 15, 1903 issue. Six cocky New Orleans Street Arabs, some barefoot, gaze directly into the camera, like some turn of the century rock band bearing their home-made

instruments with pride. The boys were well-known throughout the south, particularly on Canal Street, and to my delight more photographs of better quality would come to light. 'Stale Bread' and his newsboy band seem to have understood the basics of advertising and promotion. Their colorful look appealed to newspaper photographers and their readers.

The leader of the Spasm Band is described as 'the little fellow,' and the little follow is third from the right in the photograph. However, theatrical gent Harry Huguenot, also from New Orleans, claimed (Dramatic Mirror, Feb.8, 1919) Stale Bread, for that was his name, played the bass fiddle which was 'the center of attraction.' The boy had started as a harmonicas soloist, attracting crowds, nickels and dimes with his 'originality,' before starting the newsboys' Spasm Band. Huguenot said the instruments were made from cigar boxes and half barrels.

This band grew in proportion and played all the latest airs of the period with an attempt at all the latest jazz effects. Stale Bread became and was cared for and educated by Miss Olga Nethersole. At this same time there was a social organization in New Orleans composed of young business men, numbering about one hundred. An orchestra was formed by some of the musical members, consisting of the piano, guitar, cornet, and bass fiddle, paled respectfully by Gus Shindler, Yellow Nunez (a Spaniard) (cornetist name forgotten) and myself. The addition of Frank Christian, another guitarist, prompted Yellow Nunez to purchase a clarinet, and then from the clarinet began to flow the weirdest blue notes one ever heard. After a week of practice Nunez had these blue notes arranged as cadenzas, and I am firmly of the opinion that this was the first 'jazz' effect in an orchestra.

At this time the Dramatic Mirror columns were filled with letters anent the birth of jazz with a variety of contenders and claiming to the elusive 'first' Huguenot's band was known as ''Right At 'Em's Razz Band,' and performed popular songs of the period including 'Bill "Bailey Won't You Please Come Home' and 'Frankie and Johnny.'

Spasm Band of New Orleans - 1899

The most bizarre musical fraternity on record is the Spasm Band of New Orleans. It is composed of six urchins who divide their time equally between mischief and selling papers in the day time, but as soon as light falls

they blossom forth as full-fledged members and active players of the Spasm Band.

Born in the south and reared on the street, as it were, these little fellows lead nomadic lives, now taking a day off to pick cotton with the Pickaninnies, now lending a hand on the levee, running errands for the steamboat captains etc. I this way they have caught the inimitable darky dialect, gestures and even voices, with soft, velvety tones. Their musical instruments are home manufactured and, strange to say, the sounds they admit are not inharmonious.

In front of the Tulane Theater or the French Opera House when an especial attraction is playing the audience upon coming, but are greeted with a burst of plantation melody which goes something on this order.

As I was gwine down below
Wid a fiery team and heavy wid the load.
I caught the lines and the leaders sprung
and de whip got caught in de wagon tongue,
Oh, chu, chu, chu, chu, chu.

Perhaps the smaller members will supplement the verse with a double shuffle or a few steps or 'buck' and 'wing.' 'then, while 'Dry Bread' the little fellow, passes his hat, in which a shower of nickels and dimes fan from daintily gloved hands, the remainder of the sextet will ring out with great sprit the rollicking Way Off Down in 'Dixie, Away, Away! And perhaps wind up with 'My Country.'

The bass viol, rigged up from a dry goods box, croaks in a dignified manner, while the smaller instruments sound very much like Chinese fiddles. The six members of the Spasm Band are firm comrades, and as conservative about themselves and how they came to play as a secret society are about its password.

According to a 1903 article in Everybody's Magazine, the Spasm Band, "bad boys of the city, the standard of toughness,'" led by Stale Bread, showed up at the door of Sophie Wright's New Orleans charity school to learn to read and write. He led them as one might lead a horse to water but could not make them drink. One by one they dropped away again, Slew-Foot Pete, Warm Gravy, and Zu-Zu, and the strong arm of Miss Sophie could not drag them back. Only Stale Bread-he had no other name-remained, displaying

remarkable ingenuity in mathematics but struggling vainly with his alphabet-Miss Sophie, too, had found this wayward youngster one of the most fascinating of her charges, so that it is with a catch in her voice that she tells how blindness come upon him, and how the leader, fallen, goes about where his mates may choose to lead him.

The 1899 Railroad Trainman photograph of the group was repeated here identifying the group as the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band. The text lists a different membership than the 1906 Everybody article, with only Warm Gravy's constant, which suggest the band had a fluid line-up. Stale Bread's real name was "Emile Lacoume, and he was probably a Creole. In 1936, at fifty years of age (thus born c. 1886?), Lacoume spoke to the Daily Freeman of New York.

'Stale Bread' Lacoume traces jazz back to'90s. - 1899

New Orleans, La. -- "Stale Bread" Lacoume says New Orleans gave 'hot' music to the world, and that he should know because he started it all.

Now fifty years old, fat, jolly, blind for 35 years, Lacoume has spend most of his life at music after organizing his own 'Spasm Band' of newsboys with homemade instruments.

A group of newsboys became familiar with barroom ballads before The Spanish American War, turning a half beer key into a bass fiddle, a cigar box into a violin, a soap box into a guitar, and so on. The little urchins roved about town for two years playing for handouts.

William Farnum showered them at them at the opera house with nickels. A police judge once ordered them to play before him and he dubbed the boys a 'Spam Band' at the ''command performance."

"Ragtime? No, we didn't play ragtime," said Lacoume, our stuff was entirely different. I don't think we got it from Negro music. We just started putting in the hot stuff all of a sudden."

The band was never recorded but it seems they were primarily a string band. "Dixie" was one of their numbers so they were probably close to minstrelsy or jug bands in spirit. In fact poor white and Negro boys had roamed the streets, docks, and railroad stations playing cigar box banjos, guitars, and fiddles since the end of the civil War. According to various newspaper account urchins played anything that would make a noise

including washboards, dishpans, bones, French harps, stovepipes, jugs, kazoos, gourds, comb and paper, cowbells, harmonicas , whistles and drums.

Stale Bread's band met with a small measure of fame and spawned many imitators. When known as the Razzy Dazzy 'Spasm Band they had their name stolen by an adult group of untutored musicians who changed the name slightly to 'The Razzy Jazzy Band' and played at the Haymarket Dance Hall. In the thirties spasm bands became popular in medicine shows, spreading as far as Hawaii and New Zealand. Stale Bread Lacoume was still alive in 1939, living in a 'trim house' in New Orleans with his wife and two children, still playing banjo, piano and guitar.

'Today's musician' he said, 'my music is different from the music of my father's time. We make 'em holler and jump, in his day everybody just wanted to sit down and cry.'

<u>Times Picayune</u> - January 1, 1899 New Year's Eve

The Spasm Band was a feature of the street scene and they gave impromptu concerts wherever they could collect a crowd.

Stalebread's Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band (1899)

<u>Weekly Advocate</u> - April 22, 1899 - Parade at Fair grounds for soldiers.

Stale Bread and his horde of newies entertain.

<u>Daily Advocate</u> (Baton Rouge) - July 2, 1899 - Natchitoches, La.

The Georgia Minstrels, of which 'Stale Bread,' 'Whiskey' etc. of New Orleans, are a part, gave an exhibition here last night to a small audience. 'Stale Bread' to say nothing of the rest of the concern, was a failure. His representation of the New Orleans youthful hoodlums was a dismal failure.

Times Democrat - November 15, 1899 - Capt. Dwyer's benefit

Stale Bread's Spasm Band will also be on hand.

Times Picayune - December 10, 1899 - The irrepressible 'Stale Bread.'

The well-known boy about town, recognized as a newsboy, and who has acted on the stage with amateurs, engaged in cake walks, been on the road with a vaudeville company, who headed for a time a quaint musical organization that played in the streets of New Orleans as the 'Spasm' band, is called by his familiars 'Stale Bread.' He is still in the public in his eye whenever he can get a gallery front seat at important performances. Like thousands of others, 'Stale Bread' worshiped at the shrine of Olga Nethersole, when that great actress was here two weeks ago. In fact, he was introduced to her by a kind gentleman who will try to have the boy educated to the extent of reading and writing and figuring so that he can have a chance, if he wishes, to become a useful man of business when he grows older. Nethersole's last night at the Tulane Theatre, Stale was there and contributed to her pleasure by swinging down from the gallery, with an up-to-date pitcher's curve, a huge cluster of roses, with his compliments. His reward came later in a letter, which read as follows:

'To the dear lad known as Stale Bread: My dear lad-I thank you for your beautiful gift of roses. I shall always prize them. God bless you, and keep you honest and sober and truthful, and if ever you feel tempted to be otherwise, let the thoughts of how it would grieve me strengthen and help you.

1900

Age Herald (Birmingham Ala.) - July 16, 1900

Grand entertainment of Press Club - Open air concert by the famous 'Spasm Band.'

Russell Register - July 20, 1900 - Silver service for the Alabama.

The Mobile Press Club are determined that the battleship Alabama shall be presented with a worthy testimonial from the people of Alabama. Under the auspices of the Press club there will be a grand entertainment at Monroe Park, Mobile, and July 30th. There will be a great military competitive drill, press clubs baseball game, unique contest of old fiddlers,

athletic exhibitions, games, amusements scientific sparring, open air concert by the famous 'Spasm' Band of New Orleans, and many other attractions.

Stale Bread went mostly blind around 1899 and the following year there was a benefit for him.

Times Picayune - December 25, 1900 - The 'Ring' magazine

A year or more ago the little newsboy Stale Bread became totally blind, and now the lad is in quite a destitute condition. A benefit performance has been planned by Reddy Hamilton, the welter weight fighter and he is seeking assistance from others to make the enterprise a success.

1901

With all the mischief that the newsboys got into the one moral characteristic was their love for their mothers. He visits the mayor of New Orleans and talks about the benefit to be given for his welfare.

New Orleans Item - February 9, 1901

Emile Lacoume, better known as 'Stale Bread,' was a caller on the Mayor this morning. The object of the visit was to obtain a permit to give an entertainment for the benefit of the blind boy. Stale Bread told his honor that he is now completely blind and finds it very hard to get a living for him, mother and sister. He said that he is too proud to beg and too blind, leaving aside his being too honest to steal. The boy added that a great source of regret to him is that his blindness precludes him from being able to avail himself of the opportunity of attending Miss Sophie Wright's night school. Miss Nethersole had taken an interest in him, had given him money and had promised to assist him financially while attending Miss Wright's school. 'Stale Bread' shares in the idea entertained by a great many about Miss Sophie being an angel, and he knows that if he had not been stricken with blindness, that she would have given him an education that would have enabled him to make a mark in the world.

The mayor asked the boy what sort of an entertainment he intended to give, and 'Stale Bread' answered:

'There will be some sparring Mexican Joe and Knuckles will show what they can do; a gentleman will play on the guitar, and two ladies will fence.'

'Stale Bread was about to run through the gamut of his proposed entertainment, when his honor said:

'Mayor Fleischmann, of Cincinnati, has gotten himself into a world of trouble by granting a permit to Ruhlin and Jeffries to fight, and now you want me to get into a similar trouble.'

It was explained to his honor that the sparring that would be seen at 'Stale Bread's' benefit would be of a very 'eau sucre' description, so he acquiesced in granting the permit for an entertainment that will take place in Wenger's Hall, on Saturday night, 16th instant.

New Orleans Item - February 15, 1901 - Stale Bread's benefit-Newsboy to be assisted tomorrow.

Tomorrow night an entertainment will be given at Wenger's Theatre for the benefit of Emile Lacoume, better known as 'Stale Bread,' the newsboy who has gone completely blind. There is no one in this city that is better known than 'Stale Bread,' nor is his reputation merely local, for his fame has spread from Maine to California. As leader of the 'Spasm' Band he made many friends by the means of the un-earthly sounds he used to conjure out of an improvised cello constructed out of a potato barrel. As a duck catcher of the Athletic Park he was inimitable and as a newspaper seller, latterly, he was a dead failure, for his popularity had spoiled him and caused him to look upon the meager profits made by selling papers as being below the dignity of a thorough sport. 'Stale Bread' was a sport of just such order and enjoyed a popularity shared by very few in this city, for did not his picture adore the lid of a box that contained a popular brand of cigars,'-an honor shared by Hon. Paul Capdevielle and one or two other distinguished citizens of New Orleans.'

Stale Bread's usefulness as a newsboy had been wrecked by men who had spoiled and made much of him; who had laughed at his smart answers, and what from anyone else, would be deemed impertinence, and now that he is precluded from earning a living by selling papers or by invoking discordant sounds from his makeshift cello, some of those who know and admired him in his flourishing days have gotten a benefit for him which will take place tomorrow night at Wenger's Theatre. Sparring, fencing, singing, etc. will make up the programme.

Times Picayune - February 24, 1901 - A benefit for Stale Bread - The Ring Magazine (Stale Bread was once a boxer)

On the evening of March 3 quite an elaborate benefit performance will be given in Wenger's Theatre, and the profits of the enterprise will be presented to Stale Bread, the little newsboy who lost his sight some months ago. Stale Bread for years was the life of the band of youngsters who make their living selling papers, but for a long time he has been totally blind. The friends of the little fellow have undertaken the management of this entertainment, and have gathered several of the well-known local boxers and athletes to assist in making the programme a success.

'Mexican' Joe and 'Knuckles O'Brien will box a limited number of rounds, and Joe Dumfree and 'Ruddy' Hamilton will do some lively sparring, and they will be followed by Benino and Lafoute in a boxing bout.

Prof. Schoenfeld, instructor of the Young Men's Gymnastic Club, has also volunteered his services, and will give some interesting tumbling and the like.

Stale Bread went to Hot Springs, Ark. to get help with his eyes but it was not successful.

<u>New Orleans Item</u> - March 24, 1901 - Hot Springs, Ark. are doing their best to make the boy well.

It will doubtless be a pleasure to the friends of Emile Lacoume, best known as 'Stale Bread,' to hear that the newsboy's safe arrival in Hot Springs, Ark., where he went in hope of finding relief from the disease that robbed him of his sight. It need not be mentioned here that some weeks ago a benefit was tendered the little fellow at Wenger's Hall. The proceeds of the benefit were duly counted up and delivered to the guardian of 'Stale Bread,' with who he left for Hot Springs so afterward in high hopes of regaining his sight. The trip was a matter of only a day or more and by this time little 'Stale' is under treatment of the Arkansas specialists.

A letter received from him last evening shows in 'Stale's' own style the hope that he entertains recovering, that which his local friends most desire he should once more possess. Mr. W. G. Maurice, owner of the Maurice Bath House and one of the most philanthropic citizens of Hot Springs, has consented to give the little fellow free access, to the baths and medical aid has been promised to from Drs. Greenaway and Vaughn. 'Stale' will only remain at this Hot Springs for eight weeks, according to his letter. He says his sight

has already improved. The boy's good fortune will be a pleasure to those interested in him.

1902

Times Picayune - February 18, 1902 - Stale Bread's mother shot.

Stale Bread's mother was shot a little after midnight, but fortunately the wound she received is of no great consequence. Mrs. Jennie Lacoume is the mother of the irrepressible newsboy who is one of the town characters. (Son James accidently shoots here.)

This next article is a long one but it speaks of the situation in New Orleans of the dance halls and of Stale Bread being found in one of them. In the last paragraph we read of Stale Bread and his Spasm Band in the saloon of the Unexpected Dance hall.

Times Picayune - November 23, 1902

While passing the corner of Marais and Customhouse Street the officer saw five youngsters playing inside of a barroom. He entered and ordered the boys to stop, and the proprietor, on learning that the music of the boys was objected to, insisted that the boys should go outside. It was 'Stale Bread' and his band of artists who were in the barroom. Mr. Fish was informed that Stale Bread was blind, and that he visited the place to obtain money to support his mother.

1903

Nothing is fond about how the Spasm Band really sounded. We read about the various homemade instruments and a few of the songs they played but only brief and not realistic of how they sounded and played.

Detroit Free Press - February 15, 1903 - Description of Spasm Band

The most bizarre, musical fraternity on record is the Spasm Band, of New Orleans. It is composed of six urchins who divide their time equally between mischief and selling papers in the day time, but as soon as night fails they blossom forth as full-fledged members, managers and active players of the Spam Band.

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The bass viol, rigged up from a dry goods box, croaks in dignified manner, while the smaller instruments sound very much like Chinese fiddles. The six members of the Spasm Band are firm comrades, and as conservative about themselves and how they came to play as a street society is about its password.

<u>New Orleans Item</u> - June 14, 1903 - Reunion

Then there was the Spasm Band which we enjoyed immensely.

<u>New Orleans Item</u> - July 5, 1903 - Sophie Wright School

Among the odd characters that applied for admission was the quartette that composed the Spasm Band. 'Stale Bread,' 'Warm Gravy,' Stewfoot Pete' and 'Zulu' had made their instruments out of barrel staves and boxes; their music gave 'spasms' to all listeners, hence the band's name.

The leader was 'Stale Bread,' a lad of fourteen. He lived a careless ignorant life until he saw Olga Nethersole. He loved her with a boyish devotion, but it was a sincere one. Touched by this, Olga Nethersole became interested and wrote him a helpful letter, promising him ten dollars when he could read. Hoping to please her, 'Stale Bread' came to school and worked to accomplish his friend's desire. After months of patient labor, just as he was about to succeed, he became blind, and I can still see that pathetic little figure holding his Reader and saying: 'I am blind, fellers, I am blind.'

There is a wealth of devotion, a rough love and a spirit of sacrifice among the working people that is found in no other classes. Many a night there has been a sudden hush in the noisy room, and you will find some tired man or boy wore out from his day's work asleep on his desk, and silence reigns until the sleeper is gently aroused.

The school is handicapped in many ways, for it need larger buildings and more teachers. It is impossible to put the older men in all the classes of their grade, for their lives would be made miserable by such questions.

<u>Times Democrat</u> - November 26, 1903

Newsboys House benefits greatly from big festival. The Newsboys' Spasm Band furnished a few minutes amusement when it flashed on the Screen. (Slide show)

<u>Times Picayune</u> - December 12, 1903 - Stale Bread's money gone and he accuses Spasm band of stealing it.

Emile Lacoume, the blind newsboy, who is familiarly known as 'Stale Bread,' had James Rogers and Amelita Delpidio, young street gamins and former associates of his, arrested, because, he say, they sneaked into the latter's room, at No. 520 Burgundy Street, on Wednesday night, about 9 o'clock and stole $56,90 belonging to the sightless youth. Yesterday Rogers and Delpidio were arraigned before Judge A. M. Aucoin, of the Second City Criminal Court, and, after 'Stale Bread's' testimony had been heard, they were placed under $250 appearance bonds, which they failed to, furnish while the court remained open.

Lacoume is the tall boy who generally amuses the patrons of the Tulane and Crescent Theatres while they are passing Baronne and the Grunewald Alley after the performance. He invariably plays the harmonica and guitar with considerable skill, and is accompanied by one or two gamins who use a

'bass violin' improvised out of a half-barrel, with strings and a regular bow. The whole assortment produces a mixture of weird notes, which attract attention and result in the musicians receiving slight donations from the spectators.

By the constant use of his 'Spasm Band,' as it is called, 'Stale Bread' managed to save up quite a sum of money. He explained to Judge Aucoin yesterday that he put is nickels and dimes together until he had piled up $56.00. 'I was saving the money to get my guitar out of Grunewald's repair shop,' said Lacoume, His testimony yesterday.' 'I thought it was safe in my room and didn't see the use of putting it in the bank. Christmas is coming along and I need a suit of clothes. I figured on making my sisters presents and fitting myself out in great style, with my guitar; but Rogers and Delpidio came along and spoiled the whole business. They got my coin, and if they would only give it back to me, Judge, I would certainly ask you to let 'em go.'

Lacoume manifested extreme disappointment at the loss of is money, and while he was telling his hard-luck story to the court he started to cry. He had never accumulated such a large amount before, and, as the holidays were approaching, he looked with pride and satisfaction at the opportunity which presented itself to purchase clothes and Christmas gifts. His spirit was all gone, and he indicated that he would begin the New Year without a cent.

<u>Time Democrat</u> - December 24, 1903 - At Hotel de la Lousiana

All was ready by nightfall, and at 11 o'clock Miss Harned gathered her company in one of the private dining rooms. 'Stale Bread' and his 'Spasm Band' were present to render joyous music upon the half-barrel 'cello, harmonica and the other instruments which have made him uniquely famous among theatrical visitors who have invariably take a great fancy to him.

'Stale Bread's' band numbers six instruments, and there are fifteen members in the company.

<u>1904</u>

<u>Times Picayune</u> - February 11, 1904 - Convicted

Petty larceny-James Rogers and Amalite Delpideo, two young men who robbed Emile Lacoume, alias Stale Bread, a blind newsboy, on Dec. 9, 1903 of $56, which he had saved up and had placed in a trunk in his room at No. 520 Burgundy Street, were convicted yesterday. William Seelig, a boy companion

of Stale Bread had been forced at the muzzle of a revolver to open Stale Bread's trunk during his absence from home and take the money, of which the two accused relived him as soon as he had possession of the money, and threatened to murder him if he said a word about it to anyone. They even went so far as to threaten to kill him after having served time should they be arrested and convicted.

Times Democrat - February 11, 1904 'Stale Bread' robbed. Proceeds of 'Spasm Band' taken from trunk.

The trial of James Rogers and Amelite Delpideo, for petit larceny, in the Criminal District Court yesterday, was for stealing $56 from Emile Lacoume, a blind newsboy, commonly known to all the newsboys, to the police and to the newspapermen as 'Stale Bread.'

'Stale Bread' is now eighteen years old, and has been a street boy all of his life. Four or five years ago his sight began to fail, and he eventually went blind, although the Times-Democrat sent him to Hot Springs, Ark., and gave him the best medical attention, in the hope of saving his sight.

While Olga Nethersole was in this city 'Stale Bread' sent her a very handsome bouquet. The great actress was told who sent her the bouquet, and she became interested in him. She wrote him a letter, expressing her thanks for the flowers, and told him she would write him a letter. 'Stale Bread' was anxious for an education, and he immediately went to Miss Sophie Wright's school. He was learning rapidly when his sight began to fail and he had to quit school.

'Stale Bread' was always a hard worker and the money he made he took to his aged mother who lived, at the time of the theft, at 520 Burgundy Street. After losing his sight he could not run the streets with the morning and afternoon papers, and he organized a 'Spasm Band,' the bass violin which he plays being made out of a barrel. Every night his band was stationed in front of the Grunewald Hotel, and when the theatres were out his band was given many nickels. All this money was taken to his mother, and in a short time he had accumulated $56.

The money was put into a trunk, but it was stolen. Suspicion pointed to Roger and Delpidio, and they were arrested. They were tried before Judge Aucoin and were remanded to the Criminal District court for final trial. Yesterday they were tried before Judge Chretien and were found guilty. They were remanded to the Parish Prison to await sentence.

'Stale Bread' was led to the witness stand and testified as the prosecuting witness. He had the sympathy of all, because he had worked hard to save the money to help his aged mother.

1905

The newsboys and the Spasm Band seemed to be religious and often played for the clergy.

New Orleans Item - January 28, 1905 - Archbishop at the Newsboys' Home.

The usual 9 o'clock Sunday mass at the Newsboys' Home Chapel will be said tomorrow by his Excellency Archbishop P. L. Chapelle. After mass the boys will tender a reception to their distinguished visitor by 'Stale Bread's' Spasm Band.

Times Democrat - January 30, 1905 - Distinguished prelate presides at mass and then breakfasts with youngsters-
'Stale Bread' and his 'Spasm Band' features of impromptu entertainment.

Archbishop Chapelle visited the Newsboys' Home yesterday morning and celebrated 9 o'clock mass. After mass the newsboys entertained him with an enjoyable programme of songs and recitations. 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band' played several popular selections. The playing of the 'Spasm Band' was particularly amusing to him. He insisted on several encores, and then addressed a few special words to the blind boy, who has been given the name of 'Stale Bread.'

Times Picayune - February 10, 1905

When the boys had eaten to their heart's content and Stale Bread's Spasm Band had played itself down into their hearts, they rose in a body and gave three ringing cheers for Archbishop Chapelle.

Times Picayune - December 26, 1905

Soon after the last mass the boys began gathering in Baronne Street in front of the Home, preparatory to the opening of the dinner. 'Stale Bread' and his Spasm Band provided the music for the day, and it was stated by those in a position to know that never had the annual Christmas dinner been attended

with better music. The band played a march and the boys all filed into the dinner hall.

1907

Times Picayune - December 26, 1907 - Newsboy's feast-sumptuous repeat served at the home by the sisters.

To the tinkling harmony of the Spasm Band with Stale Bread as director, discoursing such classic numbers as 'Charley Butler,' 'Popularity,' 'Bye, Bye You'll Be My Honey,' etc.

1908

Times Picayune - March 2, 1908 - Newsboys receive Archbishop Blenk.

The program opened with a processional by the Spasm Band.

New Orleans Item - March 2, 1908 - Opening of gym-Archbishop praises Outing Association.

'Stale Bread' and his celebrated Spasm Band partook of an excellent lunch on the second floor of the home.

New Orleans Item - September 25, 1908 - Word contest and parade.

The offering of this word contest developed unique and amusing features in advertising, conspicuous among which was the 'spasm parade,' in which twenty-seven newsboys appeared on the streets behind a band each carrying a banner with a letter on it; strung out these letters spelled the words 'Home Manufacturers' Exhibition.' The appearance of the parade on Canal Street and other busy downtown thoroughfares last Tuesday night created a roar of laughter wherever they marched.

Times Picayune - December 23, 1908

Stale Bread & Company in charge of the famous Spasm Band will discourse attractive musical numbers during the progress of the banquet, and all bids fair to go as merry a marriage bell when time is called to fall to on Dec. 25.

Christmas at Newsboys' Home-1908
On top let we see boys with musical instrument

Times Picayune - December 26, 1908 - Christmas feast at Newsboys' Home.

The Spasm Band kept up its glorious work in a musical way with such classic ditties as sung in a sweet tenor voice by Emile Lacoume otherwise Stale Bread.

1909

Lower Coast Gazette - July 31, 1909 - Moonlight ride

The Spasm Band out in full force, added greatly to the pleasure of the occasion. (Lunch on the steamboat Tormenter.)

Times Picayune - August 28, 1909

The Spasm Band was stunts which caused a great deal of amusement.

Times Picayune - November 7, 1909 - St. Sophie could get mad.

That was an understood fact. Gentle and kind to the timid but earnest student, she has no place in the school for triflers, large or small. A Redoubtable member of the newsboys gang, the famous Stale Bread leader of the well-known Spasm Band when questioned once as to why he behaved so well at the night school, admitted that he 'had a respect for Miss Sophie's muscle,' and while Miss Sophie's muscle was more spiritual than physical, by dint of the most American of grit-it went.

Each year there was a Christmas dinner given for the newsboys and the Spasm Band often played for the occasion.

New Orleans Item - December 23, 1909 -Christmas Day at Newsboys' Home.

Stale Bread and his Spasm Band will be there to deliver the musical goods.

New Orleans Item - December 26, 1909 - And 'Stale Bread' sang

Emile Lacoume, a blind boy, once of some local fame as 'Stale Bread' played the bass violin, with Oscar Battle James Lacoume and Byers Williams filling for the orchestra. And 'Stale Bread' sang. 'Stale Bread' training with the 'spasm band' in the day before cabarets closed his eyes did little to acquaint him with consecutive fifths or suspensions on the dominate; but he knew his auditors and he sang to their taste as well as any person who studies the fancied of the patrons of the metropolitan Opera house. 'Stale Bread' was particularly consistent that the Item should tell all the world of the fact that the 'Grunewald music house furnished him with a piano for the occasion.

1910

New Orleans Item - February 28, 1910 - Archbishop Blenk - visit to Newsboys Home.

The 'Spasm Band' rendered an overture followed by the 'Hip-A-Addy-I-Ay. 'A Chinese.

The article below might be one of the last appearances of Lacoume's Spasm Band. This is the last article found in my research. A new leader is given in the next article.

Times Picayune - April 24, 1910

Take the simple and un-garnished story of Emile Lacoume, the musician, who was known throughout the city as the newsboy 'Stale Bread.'

He was nicknamed 'Stale Bread' by the other boys because he was given a piece of stale bread at one of the Fabacher Restaurants and divided it among his companions of the Newsboys' Home, in Baronne Street. In a spirit

of mischief one of the boys wrote 'Stale Bread' on the school blackboard, and as such it will cling to Lacoume through life.

It is interesting to note here some of the picturesque nicknames that have been bestowed on newsboys by their comrades-such as Warm Gravy, All Night, Whisky, Boozy, Sheon, Frenchy, Big-Foot Pete, and Shake 'Um Up. The raison d'être for each name is usually based on some trait or characteristic of the boy hearing it. For example, Warm Gravy shows are predilection for that particular on table at every opportunity. Shake 'Em Up is so called because of his fortune with dice, or what is more popularly designated as ''craps.' owing to the suspicious nature of his companions at hazard, he was always admonished to 'shake 'em up,' and therefore the title.

But returning to 'Stale Bread,' his mother was a cripple, and his little brothers and sisters were dependent on him for their food and lodging. He was not always blind, but was troubled with sore eyes from the start. At the solicitation of Miss Olga Nethersole, during one of her engagement in this city, several specialists of repute took 'a chance at 'em,' as the newsboys say, but 'Stale Bread' gradually lost his sight. He did not give up in despair, but determined to stick it out. He was a natural-born musician, and not only found time to sell papers, but studied several instruments at the same time, playing with his mouth, hands and feet. His proficiency became so marked that he was engaged to play in orchestras about town, and now he earns enough to support his mother with ease. While at the Newsboys' Home 'Stale Bread' organized the famous Spasm Band,' thus quaintly described by one of the members; 'Oh, it's dom fellers wat has got instruments made with soap and cigar boxes, an' a mouth harmonics an' a tambourine.' The leader conducted this unique organization with a broom handle, without score. When asked why he had been made leader of the band he answered. 'Cause I don't know no music an' I can't lay no instrument.' But one of the artists simplified the information that he was an adept with the knife and fork.

No matter how wild and unruly a newsboy may be, he remembers his mother at home, if he has one. Driven out to face the world at a tender age, he matures faster than the average boy who is nurtured and protected by more fortunate parents, and his sense of the serious responsibilities of life is abnormal developed in him before his cousin of the silver soon is well out of his swaddling clothes. He sees the rent notes when they fall due, the bill collectors when they call around, and too often he sees his mother go to bed hungry. Consequently the duties of a man crowd upon him at an age when he

should be in school and surrounded by better influences than those of the street. But he does not shirk; he throws back his sturdy shoulders and goes out to face the world, to curse and be cursed, to give and take.

This little incident may give you an insight into the character of the average newsboy, his love of home and other and his moral code. At one of the Christmas dinners given by the sisters at the Newsboys' Home there was one little fellow who developed a surprising protuberance in the region of the waist. Becoming suspicious, a Catholic father, on investigation, discovered that the boy had concealed one-half of a big turkey under his shirt. When asked what he intended to do with the turkey, he replied; 'That's for my ma.'

In another case one of the fathers noticed that a small urchin seemed to have a ravenous appetite, disposing of plate after plate. Owing to the large number of newsboys in attendance, there were two dining tables and this little boy had been assigned to the first. But he soon turned up at the second, much to the surprise of the others, and when questioned in regard to his suspicious movements, he was forced to confess that he had been busily engaged in concealing food-for his mother. As a matter of fact, he had not eaten anything himself, saving everything for his mother, who was an invalid.

What becomes of him?"

One wonders what becomes of the newsboy after he grows up to be a man. Well, there is Joe Boylan, who has accumulated a tidy little wad of $75,000 or $80,000, and is still a carrier for the Daily States. But it is quite probably that he made his money in real estate, and not by carrying papers. Still, he made enough as a newsboy to buy his first property, and he now owns property all over the city.

Some of the newsboys and carriers have been very successful after branching out in other work, and, strange to say, the wildest and most unmanageable boys often prove the best business men. There is one boy well remembered by the sisters of the Newsboys.' He, chiefly because he was so bad. Bad boys are not unusual, but this one was very, very bad. One Sunday he secured a nice, big brick, which he was just about to throw at someone passing in the street, when a sister stopped in. She led him upstairs immediately, and gave him the thrashing of his life. That boy is now a well-known photographer of the city and he dates his reform from the thrashing given him by the good sister.

Not so very long age a young man left the Newsboy's home in this city to accept a very good railway position. He had lived at the home and saved up enough money to get married. When he left the Newsboys' Home he had a house of his own completely furnished, and was well equipped for the responsibilities of married life.

Newsboy's Home

The Spasm Band was now a thing of the past and Lacoume became a 'regular' musicians playing guitar with various 'jazz' bands. Later he 'giged' on the piano.

Stale Bread playing piano

<u>Times Democrat</u> - December 26. 1910

Music was furnished by 'Stale Bread' and his orchestra. Once Stale Bread was famous for is Spasm Band, but now his band is no longer a Spasm Band but furnishes good music.

<u>1911</u>

<u>Times Picayune</u> - March 11, 1911 - 'Stale Bread' in New Role

Emile Lacoume alias 'Stale Bread' snatched a necklace of gold beads from the neck of a woman named Jessie Brown in a house at No. 223 Basin Street. The string broke and the beads were scattered around, some of them being lost. 'Stale Bread' then struck a man named James Smyrear in the face and escaped for the time-being. He was later arrested and charged with being drunk.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - March 17, 1911 - 'Stale Bread' no more

Emile Lacoume emphatically denies the statement made by the police several days ago that he snatched a necklace of beads from a woman named Jessie Brown, and in his ''get-away' struck James Smyrear in the face. Lacoume also takes exception to his soubriquet of his newsboy days, Stale Bread and declares that the alias should no longer be attached to him. He claims that he was not taken by the police, but surrendered as soon as he heard that the authorities wanted him. He had a hearing in court yesterday and was discharged, and he feels that his discharge vindicates him and entitles him to a correction of the impression that might have been created by the first story told.

A new leader of the Spasm Band is mentioned in the next article.

<u>New Orleans Item</u> - October 14, 1911 - Boxing show

The newsboys' 'Spasm Band' headed by Robert Hennessey, entertained during each round and picked up a nice collection, which they turned over to the hospital jubilee committee.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - October 16, 1911

Emile Lacoume, known as 'Stale Bread,' a musician, used a revolver early yesterday morning. So___ that he fired at Charles fury of Poydras and Roman, but the blind man insists that he discharged the revolver for assistance because he had been hit and he did not know but that he was being followed and would be hammered again.

<u>1913</u>

Times Democrat - April 20, 1913 - May festival

The Tulane Glee Club and the famous Spasm Band composed of ten young men; prominent social circles will be heard. (This could be the YMGC Spasm Band.) (Young Men's Gymnastic Club)

New Orleans Item - October 12, 1913 - 'Stale Bread' not husky from drink. Musician of underworld tell life.

Emile Lacoume, musician, known as 'Stale Bread' in that world where he uses his knowledge of notes at night to earn his living. Believes a wrong was done him in a recent story of the cabarets of the underworld wherein his voice was referred to as being husky from the use of whisky. Lacoume is almost blind and depends for a livelihood entirely on his earnings from singing and playing the piano, and says that the huskiness is caused by too much singing.

Surrounded in his work by men and women who care little for the judgment that may be meted out to them by society for their misdoings. Lacoume declares that he struggles to live righteously and wishes to forget the day when he was known as 'Stale Bread.' the letter reads:

His Sight Faulty

'God has willed it that my sight should be fault; in fact, almost blind; that is something man must not discuses one way or the other. But I believe I am privileged to speak in my own defense and take this liberty to say that I am not husky in voice because of liquor, but for the reason that I have used it in my endeavors to support myself, and perhaps I have called upon it too much.

'One cannot blame me in using my only poor gift so much when my plight is appreciated. All draw on every talent and some for gain or otherwise. I have only one talent and I thank God that much has been left to me in this life, dark and sorrowful though it may be.'

Lives unsightly

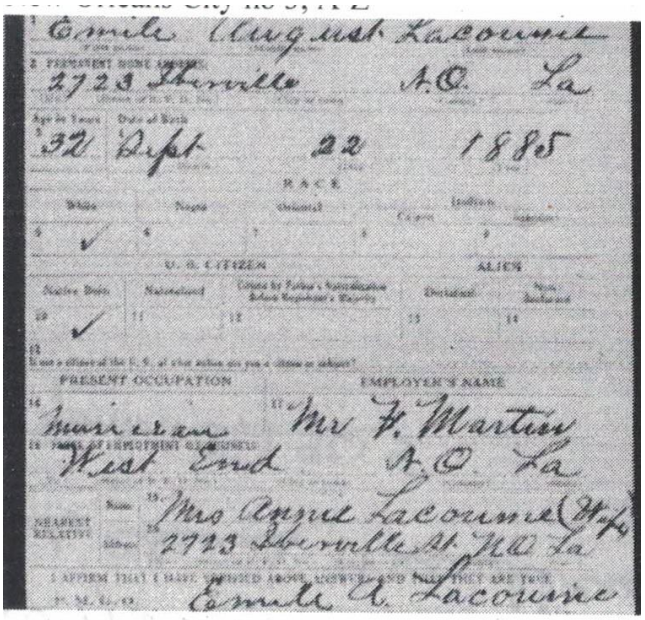
'In my boyhood days, perhaps, I was indecent and may have merited occasional criticism, but today I am a man and do all in my power to live in an upright manner, and even my disability will not cause me to think of my boyhood days, when I was nothing more than a boy just like so many others

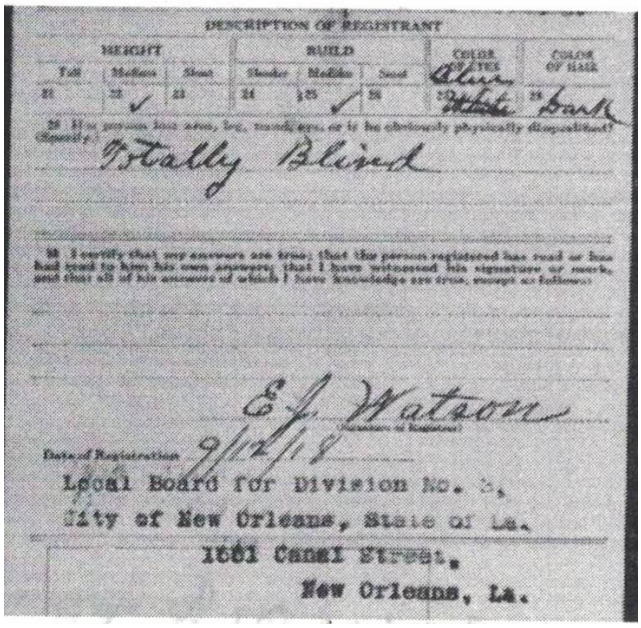
who are men today. I have forgotten those times and have the satisfaction of knowing that those boyhood times are forgotten by people in general.

'I am sure that you did not intend to either ridicule or injure in your recent story of the underworld. But it appeared to me as an unintentional hurt, and I thought it best to as acquaint you some of the facts of myself-a most regrettable thing for me to call attention to my physical condition. My true name is Emile Lacoume 'Stale bread' died when I became a man.'

Draft Cards-Sept. 12, 1918

Lacoume's Draft card lists him as blind and his employee was the West End Resort on Lake Pontchartrain and listed as a musician. It lists his birth date as Sept. 22, 1885, and living on Iberville Street Orleans. He was listed as medium height and medium build. He had olive eyes, dark hair and a Caucasian.


Emile Augusts Lacoume
2723 Iberville N.O. La
32 Sept 22 1885
RACE
White Negro Indian
✓
U. S. CITIZEN ALIEN
Native Born Naturalized Declared
✓
PRESENT OCCUPATION EMPLOYER'S NAME
musician Mr F. Martin
West End N.O. La
NEAREST RELATIVE
Name Mrs Annie Lacoume (Wife)
Address 2723 Iberville St. N.O. La
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE ANSWERED ABOVE QUESTIONS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE
Emile A. Lacoume


DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRANT

HEIGHT			BUILD			COLOR OF EYES	COLOR OF HAIR
Tall	Medium	Short	Slender	Medium	Stout		
21	22 ✓	23	24	25 ✓	26	27 Blue	28 Dark

29 Has person lost arm, leg, manhood, or is he obviously physically disqualified? Specify: Totally Blind

30 I certify that my answers are true; that the person registered has read or has had read to him his own answers; that I have witnessed his signature or mark; and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

E. J. Watson
(Signature of Registrar)

Date of Registration 9/12/18

Local Board for Division No. 3,
City of New Orleans, State of La.
1601 Canal Street,
New Orleans, La.

September 12, 1918

<u>1919</u>

The Spasm Band of Stale Bread was considered the first jazz band. The following article mentions the word "jazz" to describe the spasm band of Stale Bread Lacoume.

<u>New York Herald</u> - February 9, 1919

Twenty years ago a blind newsboy of New Orleans known to all the river city as 'Stale Bread' mastered a few ''blues' and 'hesitations' and acquiring a fiddle from Al G. Field's Minstrels set out to play his way into local fame on the street corners. He collected crowds and sold papers. One by one other newsboys with an ear for exotic rhythms and barbaric chords joined him until he had a band of five motley musicians which he christened 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band' to the delight of New Orleans, whose inhabitants still consider 'spasm music' a more pictorial and satisfying term than 'jazz music.'

Barred in polite place

This was street music and the polite resorts of New Orleans would have note of it, though it flourished n the resorts of horizontals. This fact prejudiced fashionable New Orleans against the lawless music of Stale Bread's

Spasm Band.' One gifted musician, John Spricccio, loved jazz for its own sake and reeling in 'blues' and tricky syncopations he taught his violin pupils what we now call jazz.

Times Picayune - March 2, 1919 - First Jazz Music. Old-time actor tells of origin of St. Vitus affliction on sounds.

New Orleans appears to have pretty thoroughly established herself as the real mother of the 'jazz and Harry Huguenot, a native Orleanian now with the East is West' Company, tells this story in the Dramatic Mirror:

'I have been reading with interests the articles relative to the origin of the jazz band, and am in a position to give the truthful facts to our readers that may help to clear the situation. Being born and raised in New Orleans, the following statement is absolutely correct; Whether the question involved is regarding the origin of the word jazz or the jazz band is hard to determine, but some twenty years ago a newsboy in New Orleans began to attract attention by his originality. This boy was known as 'Stale Bread' and during the procedure of his sales he entertained with a harmonica. The success of this little stunt led to the combination of other musically inclined newsboys and the result was that one day there appeared on the main street of New Orleans 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band of five or six instruments of original construction, made mostly from cigar boxes and half barrels. The bass fiddle, constructed and played by Stale Bread, was the center of attraction. This band grew in proportion and played all the latest airs of the period with an attempt at the present jazz effects. Stale Bread became blind and was cared for and educated by Miss Olga Nethersole. At this same time there was a social organization in New Orleans composed of young business men, numbering about one hundred. An orchestra was formed by some of the musical members, consisting of the piano, guitar, cornet and bass fiddle, played respectfully by Gus Shindler, Yellow Nunez (a Spaniard), cornetists (name forgotten) and myself. The addition of Frank Christian, another guitarist, prompted Yellow Nunez to purchase a clarinet, and then from the clarinet began to flow the weirdest blue notes ever heard. After a week of practice Nunez had these blue notes arranged as cadenzas, and I am firmly of the opinion that this was really the first jazz effect in an orchestra. The orchestra became known as the 'Right at 'Right 'Em's Razz Band,' and continued successful for some time. I mentioned above that it was some twenty years ago, but a correct idea of the time can be ascertained by the fact that our star number was 'Bill Bailey,

Won't You Please Come Home.' This orchestration was brought direct from New York by one of the members and we were the first to play it in New Orleans; incidentally 'Frankie and Johnny' was an old selection.

New Orleans Item - March 9, 1919 - 'Stale Bread's' fiddle gave 'jazz' to world.

It's called 'jazz,' that synchronizing supersyncopation that, originating in New Orleans, has aggravated the feet and fingers of America into a shimmying, tickle-toeing, snapping delirium and now is upsetting the swaying equilibrium of the European dance.

The dictionary of culture contains no such teasing monosyllable. The nearest it comes to it is 'jazzy,' which means a kind of worsted sweater.

Bush says Joseph K. Gorham, 'Daddy of the Jazz,' the word, common to the knowledge and frequent in the vocabulary of the Barbary Coast and the southern darky for years, means simply enough and without any explanation or definition, the only thing it's possible for four such letters in such order, when pronounced, to convey-and that is just 'to mess 'em up and slap it on thick.' That's the verb, 'to jazz.'

The noun means just the same as the verb except that the noun implies the process and the verb the action.

Musically and technically speaking, jazz is correctly defined-but the writer admits is inadequacy and Mr. Gorham, pondering deeply for five minutes, gave it up and observed:

'Why ask such an unnecessary question, anyway?'

However, 'jazz,' which, in the opinion of Mr. Gorham, has delighted the soul and excited the terpsichorean tendencies of the Negro of the levee and cotton fields these many years, drifted out of the shanties and the Tango Belt of New Orleans back in 1913 to begin triumphant, blaring, screeching ascent into the ball room and restaurants of the cultured.

They hang it on 'Stale Bread.'

And there is the story that as far back as 20 years ago, a blind newsboy known in his particular gang here as 'Stale Bread,' felt the creep of the 'blues' coming on him and translated them on a fiddle acquired from a minstrel show passing through town. With his moaning, soothing melodies he was soon threatening to corner the trade, lying as he sold his papers. Then one by one other denizens of the street, picking up the strain and whatever instruments

they could lay their hands on joined him until there were five, christened by their leader as 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band. But theirs was the music of the street passed before it penetrated into the homes, the clubs and the restaurants of the fashionable.

Mr. Gotham, the man who introduced 'jazz' to Chicago, from whence it spread to New York and the East, came to New Orleans five years ago to direct the Grunewald winter amusement features. Not long after his arrival he was hailed as he was walking along canal Street by the discordant, yet strange harmonious and amazing efforts of a group of performers operating instruments identified boy their appearance more than their melodies as a trombone, a clarinet, a cornet and a drum. Such results on those instruments Mr. Gotham, who is a theatrical man of wide experience, had never heard.

Emile Lacoume was an amateur boxer.

A prize fight advertisement started it.

The perspiring rapid-fire musicians were most energetically and successfully advertising a prize fight, the announcement of which was borne by the wagon which carried the players from corner to corner.

Mr. Gotham, observing the grinning faces, the shaping fingers and the patting feet of the crowd that gathered around the wagon, was soon himself swaying to the barbaric tune.

It was then he scented that ever eagerly-sought 'something new.' To the prize fight and on the streets he followed his hunch and so he was convinced. The players were then known he found out as 'Brown's Orchestra.'

Last week Mr. Gorham dug out from is trunk a four-year-old notebook, in which he displayed the memorandum; 'Brown's Band,' good rag orchestra, can't read music, 1108 Camp Street.' That was before the connection of the word 'Jazz' with the wild harmony, the leader of the players was Raymond Lopez, the cornetist. The others were Tom Brown, trombone, Gus Mueller, clarinet and William Lambert.

In the season of 1915-1916, Mr. Gorham arranged for the band to play in Lamb's Cafe, in Chicago. They appeared there as 'Brown's Band from Dixieland.'

'The boys had been there hardly a week before I got a wire from the management of Lamb's asking me to take them off their hands,' said Mr.

Gorham. 'It explained that their music was too noisy and wasn't taking at all. I wired back, as Lamb's is rather a small place, for them to tone down a little and try again. Lopez wrote me, much discouraged over is first efforts. All of his boys were nice young fellows, who never before had been away from New Orleans. I wrote him in reply just to ease up a bit and keep going.

The derby hat mute

'They did, and soon Lamb's was turning people away from its doors in droves. Lopez and his band stayed there 33 weeks.

'Then under the direction of Harry Fitzgerald they went to New York. For a while they played there in vaudeville and later went to Reisenweber's, where I understand they are still playing.

'Lopez was the cornetist who first muted his instrument with a derby hat and Tom Brown used the same idea on his trombone.

'It was not long before all over the North and East imitators of the New Orleans boys were springing up. Largely they were educated musicians and while they imitated, to my mind, they have never have able to achieve the effects obtained by players who can't read a note of music.

New plans are under way to take the jazz band to the Alhambra Theatre in London and it will be a sure enough jazz band from Dixie, not one of the imitations.

'Those boys who were making around $15 and $20 a week on the streets of New Orleans are now earning $50, $75 and $100 in various places over the country.

'I've got two of them here now under my notice and am arranging to send one to the Vernon Country Club in Los Angeles.

Here's Bert Kelly's argument

So heated has become the controversy among the pioneers of jazz that in Harlem recently it was necessary for the police to take a hand when two rival bands meet outside the Alhambra Theater in New York. This is one side of the argument, as attributed to Bert Kelly, who claims the distinction of having coined the expression 'Jazz music.'

'The phrase 'jazz band' was first used by Bert Kelly in Chicago in the fall of 1915 and was unknown in New Orleans. In March, 1916, the first New

Orleans band of cornet, clarinet, trombone, drums and piano arrived in Chicago to play in the Lamb's Cafe; it was called Brown's Band from Dixieland.' The band was brought from New Orleans on recommendation of Frisco, who was then, dancing in the Lamb's Cafe. (Note: they did not use the jazz band.') The band consisted of Tom Brown, trombone, know with Bert Kelly's Jazz Band), Raymond Lopez, cornet, (now with Blossom Seeley), Gus Mueller, clarinet, United States Army; William Lambert, drums, United States Army.

First and best

'This was the first and by far the best band that ever came from New Orleans. Gus Mueller, clarinet player, joined Kelly in the spring of 1916 and was placed at White City, Chicago, with the following combination; Gus Mueller, clarinet, C. Brush, banjo, Fred Miller, saxophone; Jack O'Neil, piano and Fred Oxenius, drums. At this time Harry James meteoric career as a cafe manager was starting and was in charge of the Boosters Club in the Hotel Morrison, Chicago, and had a ladies orchestra playing for his dancing.

'Kelly approached him with a proposition to furnish him with better music but he could not see Kelly's patrons it has been necessary to raising his prices and print cards for is tables reading: 'On account of the big expense of hiring Bert Kelly's Jazz Band for the entertainment of our patrons it has been necessary to raise the prices as follows:' etc.

'This was in the fall of 1916, and the band from White City was the first band ever to be advertised as a jazz band. It was a big success, and in the spring of 1917 James sent to New Orleans for the Original Dixieland Jazz Band and insisted upon their using the words 'jazz band.'

'This was in 1917, and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band was the first New Orleans band to use the term, while Bert Kelly used it in 1915. Bert Kelly had about 20 orchestras known a Bert Kelly's Jazz Bands and when the Dixieland arrived they adopted the name of 'Original Dixieland jazz Band.'

'This was in 1917 and the Original Dixieland Jazz Band was the first New Orleans band to use the term, while Bert Kelly used it in 1915. Bert Kelly had about 20 orchestras known as Bert Kelly's Jazz bands and when the Dixieland arrived they adopted their name of 'Original Dixieland Jazz Band.'

<u>Literary Digest</u> - April 26, 1919

A story of a blind newsboy in New Orleans known to his gang as 'Stale Bread'. He had picked up a violin from a passing minstrel show and learned

to play. He was always saddened and melancholy and one day hit on a new kind of music. A music so wild and swinging and ear catching he played while he sold newspapers on the street corner. Soon his fellow gang members picked up any instrument they could find and joined in his playing this new music until there were five playing and were called ''Stale Bread's Spasm Band. Many years passed as their music of the street and the underworld penetrated into the homes, clubs and restaurants of New Orleans. This is how the music began, before it was known as 'jazz.'

Topeka State Journal - June 28, 1919 - Originated in South.

Jazz is said to have originated in New Orleans. Twenty years ago, so goes the story, a small boy called 'Stale Bread' was struck with the blues, which he translated on his fiddle and trebled his sale of daily papers. At last he hit upon a new kind of music which was so alluring, so tantalizing and so unlike anything yet known that it won instant favor and ultimately became known as jazz.

Joseph K. Gorham, now directing the Gorham Revue at a Kansas City park, discovered the new music in New Orleans and took it to Chicago five years ago, since which time it has found its way into the homes and ballrooms and music halls of the wealthy and cultured. 'Stale Bread' eventually organized a band known as Stale Bread's Spasm Band,' which made a great hit in the South.

Wellington Daily News - September 16, 1919 - Maybe blind newsboy started Jazz.

Twenty years ago a blind newsboy of New Orleans, known as 'Stale Bread,' mastered a few 'blues' and 'hesitations' and, acquiring a fiddle from al G. Fields' Minstrels, set out to play his way into local fame on the street corners. He collected crowds and sold papers. One by one other newsboys with an ear for exotic rhythms and barbaric chords joined him until he had a band of five motley musicians which he christened 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band,' to the delight of New Orleans, whose inhabitants still consider 'spasm music' a more pictorial land satisfying term than 'jazz music.'

Call & WA Sportman - December 19, 1919 - The blind boy jazzer

Twenty years ago a blind newsboy of New Orleans known to all the river city as 'Stale Bread,' mastered a few 'blues' and 'hesitations' and

acquiring a fiddle from 'Al G. fields' Minstrels set out to play his way into local fame on the street corners. He collected crowds and sold papers. One by one other newsboys with an ear for exotic rhythms and barbaric chords joined him until he had a band of five motley musicians which he christened 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band' to the delight of New Orleans, whose inhabitants still consider 'Spasm music,' a more pictorial and satisfying term than 'jazz' music.'

Barred in polite places

This was street music and the polite resorts of New Orleans would have none of it, though it flourished in the resorts of horizontals. This fact prejudiced fashionable New Orleans against the lawless music of 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band.'

1920 - Halfway House-Emmett 'Buck' Rogers, Abbie Brunies, Mickey Marcour & Emile Lacoume (The Jazz Babies)

<u>Times Picayune</u> December 5, 1921 - Aid for toy fund comes from one made happy by it. Stale Bread looks back 15 years and tells his plan to help.

Emile Lacoume, blind banjo and piano player with the Five Babies at the Half Way House , had laid aside his banjo for a moment, and between mouthfuls of a club sandwich and ginger ale, was telling about the Poor children's Christmas Tree as he knew it fifteen years ago, before he was stricken blind. In that day he was known in New Orleans as 'Stale Bread' lustiest throated of newsboys, and leader of the gangs that made Royal Street a bedlam with newsboy pranks. He organized one of the first jazz bands in the city with instruments made from half barrels and lard tin tops.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - December 7, 1921 - Stale Bread's charity

Led by his 5year-old son, Emile J. Lacoume, blind banjo and piano player, at the half Way House and known to New Orleans dancers and amusement lovers as Stale Bread, came into the Time Picayune office Tuesday afternoon and deposited $165.2 in contribution to the Doll and Toy Fund.

It was the amount donated by dancers at the Half Way House Monday night following the plea of 'Stale Bread' for New Orleans' poor citizens, and was given through the 'kitty' throw open for the night for the fund.

'I hoped it would be more, 'Stale Bread said, 'but I am glad to help that much anyway. Fifteen years ago, I knew what the distribution of toys meant to me, and I knew what it means now.'

'We have a good time raising it too. Every waiter and employee at the Half Way House chipped in his mite and the first dollar came from a street car conductor who had been reading about the fund. 'Tote,' the clown at the Orpheum this week was there and he made a speech for the children. One man threw in a check for $100. The 'Five Jazz Babies' did their best and we sang parodies on poplar songs. Say our 'kitty' never was so fat before.'

It was explained that the word 'kitty' meant a box provided by the orchestra for manifestation of appreciation by the dancers for the music.

1922 - LaVida Hall - Eddie Faye, Harold Peterson, Buzzy Williams, Charlie Fishbein (leader), Florenzo Ramos, Joe Kenneman & Emile Lacoume

Fishbein was a popular leader of orchestras in New Orleans. When jazz became the popular style he changed his orchestra to have a more jazz style. His band played a number of New Orleans nightclubs and was employed at the LaVida at the opening of the 'cafe' on November 8, 1923. The job lasted until Parenti's Band was hired in December, 1923. It is presumed that Lacoume was

with the band during that time. Lacoume is a member of the musician's Union as of April 22, 1921.

<u>New Orleans States</u> - August 19, 1923 - Stale Bread and Warm Gravy' among leader of 'Spasm Band.'

They've sentenced jazz to be led out and shot at daybreak-once more. This winter, say experts, it yields to the waltz.

Someone has been sentencing jazz to death for a long, long time. Ever since there was a jazz, it seems.

But the New Orleans man who invented jazz-the musically untrained youth in whose fantastic brain those lilts and slurs and hesitations and strange dissonances first formed into music that has swept the world. That man gains confidently, and says, 'Jazz will never die.'

<u>New Orleans States</u> - August 19, 1923 - Blind Orleanian originated Jazz Music. Newsboy's band was organized 26 years ago. 'Stale Bread' and Warm Gravy' among leaders of the' Spasm Band'

They've sentenced jazz to be led out and shot at daybreak-once more. This winter, say experts, it yields to the waltz.

Someone has been sentencing jazz to death for a long, long time. Ever since there was a jazz, it seems.

But the New Orleans man who invented jazz-the musically untrained youth in whose fantastic brain those lilts and slurs and hesitations and strange dissonances first formed into music that has swept the world-that man gives confidently, and says; 'Jazz will never die.'

He lives here in New Orleans, today, the man who invented jazz. Much has been said and written about him. But he rarely talks. And here for The States readers, he rambles back through the mists of twenty-six years to say with his own lips of the birth of the strange, half-African music that came out of New Orleans to sweep a world. For you can dance to jazz today not only in New York San Francisco, but all the cities and towns in between. You can dance to it in Yokohama and Hong Kong, in Calcutta and Cairo, in Cape Town and Rome, in Paris and London. You can hear it ground out on rubber discs in Petrograd. Millions of human feet slither to the rhythm of it.

And it all began in New Orleans, twenty-six years ago-with a newsboy's band.

The Father of Jazz?

His real name is Emile Lacoume. His age is 37. His residence is at 2723 Iberville Street, New Orleans. He is married. His wife was Miss Anna LaPrestie. They have two children, Emile Lacoume, Jr., aged six, and Rose Rita Lacoume, aged four-'they're jazz babies if ever there was a jazz,' says their father.

But not by the name of Emile Lacoume do the jazz experts who have followed in his train know him. Few know that name. To them he is known by the newsie's 'moniker' given him in those far-off days of a quarter of a century ago, when he, himself a newsie, organized the newsies' band that sounded on the streets of New Orleans the first jazz the world had ever known.

Sure, you've heard that name. 'Stale Bread!' and the man who founded a school of music is blind.

Today he supports himself and his family as a musician-and he support them well. But for close on twenty-two years he has been sightless. In that time he has taught himself to play the banjo.' I'll stand up and tell the world I'm willing to go up against any jazz banjo player on it; and that's just what he says- and the piano, the trap-drums, the guitar, the mandolin and the bass viol, that's all. He reaches aspiring banjo-players and guarantees they can play after ten lessons.

In New Orleans cabarets and road houses he has played these many years. For club and fraternity houses at Tulane University he has played for Mason's entertainments he has made music. (Some of article hard to read.)

If I can remember. That was twenty-six years ago, boy,' let's see, Bedee Bottle was Emile Stein and Whisky was Emile Benrod, but that's all I can remember. They're all dead now, except me. I think. That Emile Stele-Booze

Bottle-he was the best jazz drummer the world ever saw, too. Did orchestra work in theaters right here in New Orleans.

'Well, there we were, eight of us. Our hang-out used to be the old Newsboys' Home on Baronne near Perdido Street. dog-gone. Them were the days Old Mother Kelley, and stew and beans and bread for twenty cents. They ought to have kept up that home. We were all for so I got 'em together and I organize kept up that home. We were all of us dancing and whistling and singing and making music on something while in the band. Stale Bread's Band they called it.

I had some time getting our instruments. We made 'em out of anything. There was a cheese-box banjo. There was a soap-box guitar. There was a cigar box violin. And there was a half-barred bass fiddle. Chris Neilson made that for us when the priest, Father Nicholas, asked him to help us, and we had an old tambourine and a zither and a harmonica. That was our line-up.

'We began on that old piece 'Georgia Camp Meetin'. I had an awful time trainin' 'em. But we'd been whistlin' the stuff, like that, and Rosie 'Grady, and pretty soon I had 'em workin' like a machine. All those slinky slides, and the hesitations, and the bang-bang stuff, and the sudden stops-I worked 'em all out in my head and drilled my gang.

The debut of Jazz

'Then one night we hit the street- it was Royal Street between Canal and Iberville-and we cut loose. Say, we had that street blocked inside five minutes.

Boy' they didn't know what it was they were hearin,' but they sure liked it. The Royal Street sports filled the hat with coin when we passed it around, and then and there Stale Bread's band was on the job. I was the leader, and I played the harmonica, and the bass fiddle we'd had made out of half a barrel.

The gang fights Germany

'Then things began to happen. Did you know I was a veteran of the First War with Germany? Sure. There were dinky little German bands playin' in New Orleans streets then. We'd trail 'em. One of 'em would start playing, something like Dixie. We'd be camped on the other side of the street, and just when they got started-whang! Bam!-we'd smash into it with some hot jazz, though we didn't know what to call it then. And when we began to cut into

their coin, there was one hot battle, in Exchange Alley and Royal Street and even on Canal Street. (One of the earliest examples of bucking)

'Then we got a name, added to Stale Bread's Band. It was 'The Spasm Band.' W e got it by bein' pinched.

'I'll never forget that night.

The old grand Opera House was on Canal Street then. We'd camped on the banquette near it and started whanging away. There was a big crowd on the street that night, and they were all jazz-hungry. Dog-gone, we blocked traffic. Some grouch complained, and a cop pinched us.

'They brought us up in the Second Recorder's Court before Judge Bezou. 'Who's the leader of this gang?' he asked.

The Spasm Band

'I steps up and confesses it's me. You're charged with disturbing the peace and blocking traffic and being a public nuisance, among other things,' says Judge Bezou.

'We're not a nuisance-we're a band. You're Honor,' I tells him.

'If you're a band,' says Judge Bezou, 'let's hear you play.'

'We had the whole works with us when we were pinched, and there we had 'em with us in court - cheese-box and cigar-box and soap-box and the half barrel bass fiddle and all the rest.

'I lines my gang up, and slips 'em the name of the piece, and gave the signal, and we cut loose. That was the first time any court heard jazz music in the world, I guess.'

'Judge Bezou never cracks a smile all the time we're whanging away. Then when we'd finished he looks at me.

'Stale Bread,' he says, 'you may be a band but you're a spasm band. Discharged.'

'We were known as the Spasm Band for a long time after that.

'Well, we sold our papers and sold flowers and blacked boots - manys the time we blacked the boots of Judge Foster that's in the United States District Court now. And we played all over town after the editions was out. Then they got us to play on the stage of the old St. Charles Theater. And then we got ambitious.

'We went on the road. We got as far as Shreveport and there the first jazz band in the world was stranded for the first time. We played on the

streets and passed the hat for enough for coffee and cakes and to get us to Jackson, Miss. There we gave a show for the Elks there, and they gave us enough to get home on. Dog-gone, but New Orleans looked good to us.

Olga Nethersole's protégé.

'We went back to newspaper, selling and flower-selling and boot blacking and playing the Spasm Band on the streets. Pretty soon theatrical men began to copy our stuff. It spread to Chicago and New York. Then it kept on traveling.

'Then I remember Olga Nethersole came to town, playing 'Sappho.' We all went in a bunch. At the end of the first act, she came out for a curtain call, and I threw a big bouquet to her up over the footlights. She smiled and bowed, and threw a kiss, and leaned forward and started to pick it up. I had a fine flashline tied to the bouquet and I pulled. She chased that bouquet half-way across the stage, with the audience howling, before she gave it up. We ought's have waited for the last act. Cause the management bounced us. Gave us the bums rush out on the street.

'Well, we went around and waited at the stage door, and when she came out we started playing for her. That amused her. Then she invited the whole band to come to visit her and play for her at her hotel. We did. And she told me she was going to send me to school. She fixed it up before she left town for me to go to Miss Sophie Wright's night school, and that was where I got my education. It was a little while after that, that I went blind. And then I took up music for my living. I've been making a living at it ever since.

New Orleans means Jazz

'I'm still a member of the Newsboys' Benevolent Association. And every now and then I meet some of the men that used to be newsies with me, when The States was in Natchez Alley, and we used to have to fold our own papers before we could sell ''em.

'I'm still playin' jazz, though, and it'll be a long time after my time before jazz dies out, if it ever does.

'And don't make no mistake about it. Jazz was born in New Orleans and the best jazz players in the world were trained here in New Orleans. Why, New Orleans means jazz. You've got to have jazz in you before you can play

it. And white musicians can play better jazz when they're real jazz artists, than the darkies themselves.

Here's the prescription

'What would be the best jazz band in the world? Well you've got to have eight pieces-same as the original jazz band had. There's got to be a piano, drums and traps, banjo, trombone, clarinet, cornet, saxophone and a bass fiddle. You get good jazz artists on that combination and it can't be beat. Turn them loose on stuff like 'Sensation,' 'Number Two' 'Gasoline' 'Pussy Cat Rag' 'That's Where my Money Goes, 'Angry,' Dixieland One Step, 'Ostrich Walk,' Fidgety Feet,' Clarinet Marmalade,' High Society,' Panama,' 'Tiger Rag,'' 'St Louis Blues,' and 'Shake It and Break It,' and maybe get the word jazz right there.

'This classic stuff is all right in a place but don't you forget that jazz is all right in its place. I was playing at the Half Way House when it opened. They ordered the soft classic stuff. We played it (rest of article unreadable.)

Many writers and reporters of the era publish some wrong material about Lacoume and the Spasm Band. A couple of articles mention that Lacoume was a Negro. He was a Caucasian as listed on his previous shown Draft card. While excellent historians (mostly in classical music) these writers knew little about New Orleans jazz and only wrote brief descriptions of jazz music. One example was that Louis Armstrong was born on July 4.th He was born, as Tad Jones discovered on August 4th.)

<u>Times Picayune</u> - May 15, 1927 - Jazz misinformation-Hearn wrote about jazz.

The author was equally wrong in his comments on 'Stale Bread,' first and most positively in his describing that person as a Negro. He was born distinctly Caucasian. That 'Stale Bread' learned to play by ear 'because he was blind' is also largely error, for the original 'spasm band' organized by a group of New Orleans newsboys back in the nineties had 'Stale Bread' a member long before, the boy lost his eyesight. At that time he could see as well as the next and was a right good minor boxer at the time 'Freckles' and 'Mexican Joe' also were often put on as added attractions at the old Olympic club matches. That 'spasm band' was indeed somewhat jazzy, because the

members had little if any technical skill and delighted in throwing in volunteer effects of their own, to the amusement of the crowd. They first played on the sidewalks just for the fun of the thing, but later were sometimes paid for their entertainment. But the word jazz was unknown to them as to New Orleans and the world.

Stale Bread

<u>Times Picayune</u> - May 15, 1927 Jazz 'misinformation'

Henry Osborne Osgood, associate editor of the Musical Courier, who died this week in New York City, was the author of 'So This is Jazz,' a work as near to authoritativeness perhaps a any that has been written on that subject but that none the less has its facts hopelessly twisted when it brings New Orleans into the discussion. Death of the author has been the occasion of a reprint of excerpts from the work in the Northern press, and it happens that the erroneous Orleanians have been given special prominence. In these blunders are found two characters who, at opposite extremes of fame, have been known to our city, Lafacdio Hearn and 'Stale Bread.'

Perhaps because Hearn did make a serious and profound study of Negro music it was an easy opportunity for the author of the jazz work, to credit the literary master with knowledge of jazz. It happens, however, that Hearn had left New Orleans and indeed had left the United States some twenty years before the peculiar musical eccentricities that differentiate jazz from the previous forms of syncopation first came into existence. Hearn, who died in 1904, could not have had cognizance of a music that first came into being from six to eight years after his death. That which Hearn studied was the earlier 'ragtime' music which though it furnished a base of departure for jazz, was entirely minus the fancies that gave the latter its individuality.

The author was equally wrong in his comments on 'Stale Bread' first and most positively in describing that person as a Negro. He was born distinctly Caucasian. that 'Stale Bread' learned to play by ear 'because blind' is also largely error, for the original 'spasm band' organized by a group of New Orleans newsboys back in the nineties had 'Stale Bread' as a member long before the boy lost his eyesight. At that time he could see as well as the net and was a right good minor boxer at the time 'Freckles' and 'Mexican Joe' also were often put on as added attractions at the old Olympic club matches. That 'spasm band' was indeed somewhat jazzy, because the members had little if any technical skill and delighted in throwing in volunteer effects of their own, to the amusement of the crowd. They first played on the sidewalks just for the fun of the; thing, but later were sometimes paid for their entertainment. But the word jazz was unknown to them as to New Orleans and to the world.

Times Picayune - July 4, 1929 - Blind of Orleans are given dance.

A dance for the blind of New Orleans and their friends was given Wednesday night at the Menorah Hall, 1631 Euterpe Street, by the entertainment committee of the Lighthouse for the blind, assisted by the Loyal United Friends, an organization of blind and partially blind.

Emile Lacoume blind since he was 15, and his Blue Moon Orchestra, played for the dancing. Refreshments were served.

Stale Bread

Times Picayune - October 8, 1930 - The beginning of Jazz

Years ago, on a rainy winter night (sounds like a spook story), I was standing at the corner of Camp and Canal streets, under the then canopy of the bank building, when along came Stale Bread and his gang of ragged paper boys, offering to play for a bare pittance. 'Stale Bread' is the English

translation of 'veille crouie' a Parisian slang word of underdog sympathy bestowed on the newspaper urchin by some French Opera artist. Of course, the sounds were horrible and the instruments primitive; the cornet was out of tune, the violin emitted squeaks and every boy was out for himself. But there was a wild rhythm about it, reminiscent of the old fair Grounds dancing reference in which would at the time cause refined young ladies to titter behind their tans and young bloods in indulge in loud guffaws; still, there was something more barbaric about it; it was the urge of savagery Stale bread had romped around Treme Market and may have caught from some old denizens of echo of those wild Bamboulas of Place Congo, with the syncopated stamp of brown feet on the metallic ground. some years after, Brown and his Negro band caught the cacophonic tempo, and a certain local club, then young and unfettered, employed Brown for its dances; the tempo was peppier and at a cheaper cost. Then came Paul Whiteman.

Sometimes, when I hear the present cultivated jazz, well groomed, polished and corseted by masters of the counterpoint, I think, as through a fog of recollections, of the rain patter, the thunder claps, and the barbaric uncouth syncopation of Stale Bread and his gang, crouching under the dripping canopy. Little did they dream that their discordant echoes of the old Bamboulas world one day grip the world.

New Orleans, so full of distinction, charm and unique grace, with its airy frothy bubbles that make life so much more worth living might do worse than to honor those who made it famous.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - November 3, 1935 - 'Hot' music born here, says blind musician who played band that started it. 'Stale Bread' Lacoume recalls days at turn of the century when small group put lively style into melodies; some call it jazz, not ragtime.

If its other claims to fame are ever challenged, New Orleans can always boast that it gave 'hot' music to the world, according to Emile A. Lacoume, 2723 Iberville Street.

'Nobody can ever contradict that' said Mr. Lacoume, who this year is observing the 40th anniversary of the organization of his Spasm Band of home-made instruments. 'I had a part in the beginning of hot music, and I know.'

He feels that it's nothing to be ashamed of, either, because this type of music has outlived a variety of uncomplimentary appellations, among them

'jazz,' and has come to be accepted among a great many recognized leaders as a definite contribution toward the development of American folk music.

Mr. Lacoume himself has no such high conception of his 'art,' but he is convinced that his own individual brand of music is more strongly entrenched now than ever.

Asserting that 'jazz' was only a temporary adaptation of the more fundamental 'hot' style of playing, Mr. Lacoume said of present-day popular music: 'I don't care what it is, if you don't put hot spots into it, it's not worth the piece of paper it's printed on.'

That's his opinion now, after 40 years in the business, and he is just as proud of the noted 'hot' musicians that hail from New Orleans as he is of his own creative work in the field. Apparently there are thousands of others who share his belief. America has its hordes of 'hot' phonograph record collectors, and Europe even has its dozen of publications devoted exclusively to the subject of 'hot' music.

Blind 35 years

These are the experts and connoisseurs of the field. Add in them the millions who dance and listen to music which contains much of the same kind of rhythmic interpolations that Mr. Lacoume and his fellows introduced, and one realizes that the spasm band really started something.

Mr. Lacoume story begins before the Spanish-American War and is still today as he plays the piano at small private parties and leads his orchestra for larger dances. A shingle on the front of his house advertises that here may be found the leader and business agent of the 'Blue Moon Orchestra Hot.' The 'hot' he explains, is not a part of the name but refers to the band's style of playing.'

Blind for 35 of the 50 years of his life, Mr. Lacoume is known by citizens of New Orleans and by musicians throughout the United States as 'Stale Bread.' How he gained the nickname is a part of his life story. It is a story that deals mostly with music, and contains enough detail to prove that New Orleans is indeed the birthplace of so-called jazz.'

'Stale Bread' was born in a house on Exchange Alley, between St. Louis and Conti Streets. When he was 7 years old he was compelled to start earning his own living. He became a newspaper boy. Selling his papers on the streets

outside the barrooms, he head of lot of ragtime music and he thought he would like to play himself.

Played harmonica

Several of his fellow newspaper boys shared the desire. Having no money to buy banjos, cornets, fiddles or clarinets, they decided to make their own instruments. Under Mr. Lacoume's direction they fashioned a bass fiddle from a half--barrel, a banjo from a cheese box, a violin from a cigar box, a guitar from a soap box, and a mandolin from a tin serving tray.

'Stale Bread' did manage to buy a harmonica, which he chose to play with the homemade guitar. For a couple of years this bizarre man moved about the streets of the city, playing for 'handouts' in front of the beer parlors and, when there were large crowds departing in front of the Tulane and Crescent Theaters and the old Grand Opera House on Canal Street.

'William Farnum used to shower us with nickels,' Mr. Lacoume said. 'And it was a 'kick' the way we used to make a 'hoopa do' in front of the theaters. The police would come around and try to scatter us. Once the chief came dressed in civilian clothes. We busted our fiddles and guitars over his head, not recognizing him as a policeman.

'We used to 'bump' (i..e. buck) the old German Band quite a bit. We would wait for the band to start playing on a corner and attract a big crowd and then we would 'bump' it, taking over the audience ourselves, passing around the hat. The German band most of the time would play for beer and we would play for peanuts.

Gain sudden fame

'Ragtime? Naw, we didn't play ragtime. Out stuff was something entirely different. It was just an idea. I don't think we got it from Negro music. We just started putting in the hot stuff all of a sudden.'

And just as suddenly the band gained its fame. After one of their main affrays with the police, the band boys found themselves in police court, charged with disturbing the peace. The judge thought he ought to hear some of their music before passing in the case.

'Stale Bread' commented the judge when they had finished, 'you may have a band there, but it certainly is a spasm band.

He turned the wild young musicians loose, but the name stuck. Mr. Lacoume had received his own nickname just a short time before, when the boys decided they would go traveling. They boarded a freight train and were put off at Claiborne and Elysian Fields Avenue.

That was 'way out of town' in those days, before the Spanish-American War of 1898, and the musicians were hungry. They delegated Mr. Lacoume to obtain food from a nearby bakery shop. He returned with two loaves of stale bread, one of which he divided with the boys and the other of which he hid in his bosom. His companions discovered his trick, and 'Stale Bread' came into being.

Colorful Nicknames

After its day in court, the Spasm Band moved from the beer parlors into the cabarets and soon the boys who had started with homemade noise-makers several years before, graduated to 'store-bought' instruments. They rose from 50 cents a night to $50 a week, for a while, according to Mr. Lacoume.

The musicians in the Spasm Band had colorful nicknames themselves. Frank Bussey, the bartender of today, was known as 'Monk.' He played the bull fiddle. His brother, Willie, was called 'Cajun.' Then there were 'Warm Gravy' (Cleve Craven), 'Whiskey,' 'Booze Bottle,' 'Seven Colors' (because his hair had that many hues), 'Family Haircut' and 'Piggy' Louis.

Soon after 'Stale Bread' lost is eyesight in 1900, the spasm band was disintegrated, and Mr. Lacoume quit selling newspapers. He turned to music for a livelihood. Meanwhile the seed that he and his 'spasm' players had soon had begun to flower, and the group had a lot of imitators. There were 'hot' bands all over town at the turn of the century.

They antedated the 'jazz' bands, therefore, by almost 15 years. New Orleans furnished its own quota of nationally known 'jazz' bands at about the same time that San Francisco and Chicago began taking them up, but 'Stale Bread' has the evidence that this type of music originated here long before the rest of the country knew anything about it, or long before it was called 'jazz.'

Supports Family

How the latter name originated, 'Stale Bread' doesn't know, but he has his own idea, just as a lot of people offer other explanations, none of which seems to have been definitely established.

'Stale Bread' doesn't care much. He is satisfied to know that a spontaneous type of music that he helped originate on the streets of New Orleans when he was 10 years old has since traveled into some rather dignified circles.

Now 50 years old, 'Stale Bread' also takes pride in the fact that, though blind since he was 15, he has been able always to take care of himself and his wife, buy a home and educate his son and his daughter, both now grown.

Most of his livelihood has come from music, although in recent years he has sold programs at the race tracks during the racing season. He plays the banjo, piano, guitar, trap drums and other instruments, and teaches some of them. 'Scholars are scarce now, though,' he says.

The Lacoume name in music will be carried on by the son and daughter, both of whom, he says, 'play and sing.'

<u>Albany Capital</u> - March 12, 1936 - 'Stale Bread' Lacoume traces jazz back to 90's.

'Stale Bread' Lacoume sys New Orleans gave 'hot' music to the world, and that he should know because he started it all.

Now fifty years old, fat, jolly, blind for 35 years, Lacoume has spent most of his life at music after organizing his own 'Spasm band' of newsboys with homemade instruments.

A group of newsies became familiar with barroom ballads here before the Spanish-American war. turning a half beer keg into a bass fiddle, a cigar box into a violin, a soap box into a guitar, and so on, the little urchins roved about town for two years, playing for handouts.

William Farnum showered them at the opera house with nickels. A police court judge once ordered them to play before him, and he dubbed the boys a 'spasm band' at the 'command performance.'

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'Stale Bread' Lacoume says New Orleans gave 'hot' music to the world, and that he should know because he started it all.)

The term 'jazz' was not used until Bert Kelly's used it in 1917. What then was the RDSB's music called? People recognized their music as something different. They later called it early 'jazz.'

<u>Decatur Daily Review</u> - November 3, 1936

Thought I was done with discussing swing music but along comes Red Nichols in support of the contention that swing is nothing new after all. Swing music, as a matter of fact, Nichols holds, goes clear back to 1895 when Stale Bread's Spasm Band swung it for New Orleans. The leader's name came through the fact that when playing on the streets didn't bring in much, he lived on crusts. Razz's band played swing for New Yorkers in 1910, and in 1912 the Dixieland Band, white musicians, swung it as Reisenweber's. Then there were two colored bands. One was led by Jim Europe, who was killed in Paris, and the other, Turk's played for the crowd, led by Mrs. S. Standwood Menken, who at that time made the McAlpin their meeting place.

<u>Brooklyn Daily Eagle</u> - July 9, 1937

'Back in 1895,' Miss Neisen point out, 'a gentleman named Stale Bread played the fiddle on New Orleans streets. He gathered a group of five disciples and together they became indentified as Stale bread's spasm band. Their fame spread far and wide on Canal Street but it is improbable that anybody outside of New Orleans ever heard of them. The only evidence of their existence is in a few yellowed newspaper clippings of that day.'

<u>New Orleans City Guide</u> - 1938

New Orleans has often been said to be the birthplace of jazz (originally called 'jass'), the outgrowth of cacophony turned out by 'spasm' bands, which made their appearance in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Playing in front of the theaters, saloons, and brothels of the city, these bands regaled the public with their informal 'ear' music. One of the earliest of these organizations, the 'Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band,' was composed of such colorful individuals as Stalebread Charley, Family Haircut, Warm Gravy, Cajun, Whisky, Monk, and Seven Colors. Instruments consisted of a cigar-box fiddle, old kettle, cowbell, pebble-filled gourd, bull fiddle constructed of half a barrel, harmonica, and numerous whistles and horns. However abhorrent the clamor produced by this assortment of instruments might have seemed to music-loving Orleanians, the band attained sufficient popularity by 1911 to warrant an engagement in New York, where its name was changed to 'Jazz band.'

<u>Times Picayune</u> - August 27, 1938 - Frank Bussey, familiar figure of quarter dies.

'Buzzle' used to boast that he was a member of one of the first 'hot' bands in the city. He played a bass viol, which he called a 'dog's house,' in the Spasm Band of Emile A. Lacoume, who was known as 'Stale Bread.'

'Stale Bread,' blind since he was 15 years old, organized his 'hot' band in the days before the Spanish-American War. It was composed of newspaper boys who played their ''licks' on homemade instruments and its fame spread throughout the country.

<u>Warren Times Mirror</u> - September 2, 1938

Chicago and Southern's racy Lockheed is 7,000 feet above the delta. We're clipping along at 181 miles per hour. But I can't hear the motors. The only thing I hear is the throbbing jangle of a New Orleans Spasm Band. Ever hear one? A spasm band is a miscellaneous collection of Negroes playing on pan tops, soap boxes, broomsticks, tin cans, and gongs. They play in jitterbug fashion, wandering the streets like strolling minstrels and serenading anybody for a dime.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - January 7, 1940

Outside of the cabarets and amusement palaces, jazz underwent an interesting development at the hands of street corner and parade bands. Emile 'Stale Bread' Lacoume gained fame as the leader of the spasm Band comprising musicians who used homemade instruments for street corner jam sessions.

<u>Butte Montana Standard</u> - November 6, 1938

As a blind newsboy on the street of New Orleans, 'way about 1899,

<u>San Bernardino County Sun</u> - November 6, 1938

But overshadowing nearly every other figure in the city's popular-musical history is the legendary Stalebread.

Stalebread. Erudite critics have written about him, knowing him by no other name. He was, they say, a progenitor of jazz.

As a blind newsboy on the streets of New Orleans, way back about 1899, Stalebread organized and led a six-piece newsboy aggregation that coaxed snappy, danceable tunes from homemade instruments; a guitar constructed from an empty wooden soap box; a comb covered with silk paper; a harmonica; a zither or two; a bass fiddle made from a packing box.

People called this outfit Stale bread's Spasm Band. It performed on street corners for casual nickels. It won fame, imitators, and now a place in history. 'Stalebread' and ''Warm gravy' and 'Monk' and 'Cajun,' and Slew-foot Pete,' and 'Whiskey' - and substitutes, among them the euphonious 'Family-haircut.'

They're all dead, now, save one; Stalebread. Stale Bread's name is Emile Lacoume, and he lives in a trim house in New Orleans with his wife and two children. Fifty-two now, he can still play like a hep-cat of 22 plays piano, banjo, and guitar.

Stalebread says, 'the best real hot jazz band that ever stepped out of New Orleans produced; it did stuff nobody else has ever done. It was the Dixieland Jazz Band.'

And Stalebread says, 'Today's music, my music, is different from the music of my father's time. We make 'em holler and jump. In his day everybody just wanted to sit down and cry.'

<u>Daily Herald</u> - May 15, 1939

In the 90's Stale Bread Lacoume's white troupe was nick-named the 'Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band.'

<u>Times Picayune</u> - October 29, 1939 - birthplace of jazz still hot music.

The city that also gave grand opera to the New World remains primarily hot music conscious-and the stronghold of present-day swing, here as elsewhere, is the tavern and its inevitable 'music box,' successor to the old-time barroom and its 'Spasm Bands of a quarter of a century ago.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - January 7, 1940 - Opera, jazz music just 4 blocks apart in city.

Outside of the cabarets and amusement palaces, jazz underwent an interesting development at the hands of street corners and parade bands. Emile 'Stale Bread' Lacoume gained fame as the leader of the Spasm Band comprising musicians who used homemade instruments for street corner jam

sessions; Jack Laine and others were star performers in Carnival parades, and LaRocca and his contemporaries were popular attractions of the trucks that used to publicize prizefights.

Advocate - April 15, 1940

Basin Street has gone the way of all progress to make way for the New Orleans Housing Authority's project. But in the gaudy world of early American jazz, Basin Street will continue to live in a perpetual gaslight era of red plush and cut-glass chandeliers, where syncopation had its origin in the spontaneous improvisations of the 'Spasm Band' and the 'parade band.'

State Times Advocate - October 8, 1942 - Column by Neal O'Hara

If you've wondered about the origin of jitterbugism you may as well know the first jazz (then spelled jass) band started getting hot in New Orleans n 1895. and billed itself 'The Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band.

Narrascoorte Herald - November 6, 1942

Jazz, a modern interpretation of music, was created in living memory. The first jazz band came from New Orleans in the closing years of the last century and the leader was a blind newsboy. He called his band 'The Stale Bread Spasm Band.' Stale Bread refers to the nickname by which he was known.

Wodonga & Towong Sentinel - March 5, 1943

Jazz, a modern interpretation of music, was created in living memory. The first jazz band came from New Orleans in the closing years of the last century and the leader was a blind newspaper boy. He called his band 'The Stale Bread Spasm Band'. Stale Bread refers to the nickname by which he was known.

Shamokin News-Dispatch - December 8, 1943

The Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band. Ever hear of it? That was the famous New Orleans band which had for instruments a cigar-box fiddle, an old kettle, a cowbell, a pebble filled gourd, a bull fiddle made from a half a barrel, and a harmonica. In 1911 this band played a New York engagement. The leader of the Razzy Dazzy spasm band was named Stale Bread Charley

<u>Modern Screen Magazine</u> - January/November, 1944

Warner Brothers drafted the entire gumbo speaking population of Los Angeles to appear in the French Quarter scenes-a total of 26 people. Gumbo is the Louisiana Negro dialect of Creole French. Also in the market scene is the first Razzy 'Dazzy spasm Band to appear on the screen. No, not double talk. It's a Negro band composed of home-made instruments.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - January 4, 1945 - 'Stale Bread keeps chin up.

Very few people who attend race tracks know Emile Lacoume, but very few do not know 'Stale Bread' the blind program seller who has been the most prominent program seller on New York and New Orleans tracks for more than 40 years.

'Stale' used to be a newsboy, selling the old Picayune and Times-Democrat. Then he went totally blind and from early youth he has sold programs. In the days of the bookies 'Stale' did well, because many of the bookies thought it brought them good luck to slip 'Stale' a little extra change for the programs.

But he didn't complain even when; the bookies went out.

'What kick have I got?' he asked at that time. 'Here I am, making an easy living and me not being able to see when it's light or dark.'

And then, Tuesday when he; stood for the 'last roundup; at his little stand i the thronged Fair grounds betting hall, 'Stale' held his chin higher. Tears came into his sightless eyes as his blank gaze tried to focus on those to whom he spoke. His line of talk ran:

'Look how lucky I've been; when I was a kid and went blind I was able to make good money, travel, meet swell folks. Think of those kids whose eyes are being shot out in Europe or the South Seas. A few weeks back I was very sick; they said I couldn't live. But I beat it. Here I am living, getting enough to eat, meeting old-time friends. Yes, life is sweet to me. I'll get along, somehow. I'm nearly 60 but there's lots I can do. I just hate to think of missing the old bugle call, and the shouting of the crowds and the greetings of friends. It's going to be tough, but nothing like layin' in a fox-hole expecting a bomb to drop on you. I can take it. And I'm glad to take it if closing up racing will help our boys. I'm living on borrowed time and those kids have a fling at life coming to 'em.'

And unashamed he allowed the tears to roll down his cheeks.

Yes, nearly every race track regular of New Orleans and New York knows 'Stale.' That's all they ever called him-'Stale.' And in a day when thousands would come up and say: 'One, Stale,' and get a program. 'Stale' would say without hesitation; 'Yes, Mr. Smith or Mr. Jones or Mr. Murphy'-getting the right name 999 times out of 1000. Even voices that he heard after a lapse of five or 10 years seldom fools him. Though their owners tried to change their tones a bit to stump him. Invariably his face would light in a broad smile and he'd say, with outstretched hand: 'Well, Mr. Rogers-haven't seen you in years. Where have you been?'

Times Picayune - November 20, 1946 - E. Lacoume, 'Stale Bread' dies after long illness.

Programs, how many? The familiar Fair Grounds chant as chanted by 'Stale Bread' will be heard no more. Emile Lacoume blind race track attendant, who was better known as 'Stale Bread,' died Tuesday at Charity Hospital after a long illness.

Stale Bread's Death

Times Picayune November 20, 1946 Last rites today for 'Stale Bread'. E.A.Lacoume, Sr., blind musician, was 61.

E. A. Lacoume, Sr. old time New Orleans musician widely known by his sobriquet of Stale Bread,' died at 4:50 a.m. Tuesday. He was 61 years old and resided at 2723 Iberville.

Funeral services will be conducted at 10:45 a.m. today from the mortuary of Alfred E. Briede and Son, Inc., at 1160 Camp. High mass at Jesuit Church, Baronne near Canal, will be followed by interment in St. Patrick Cemetery No. 1.

Mr. Lacoume had played at many of the night clubs and hotels here for 30 years. A stroke in 1943 crippled his right hand, but he overcame the misfortune as he did the blindness which struck him as a youth.

For over a quarter of a century he has interspersed his musical activities with program selling at the Fair Grounds.

Friends said his title of 'Stale Bread' sprang from an incident many years ago, when an itinerant band of which he was a member, found itself in financial difficulties. He appealed to a house-holder for food, and received a

loaf of bread. When he returned to his companions they seized the bread avidly, but on attempting to consume it discovered it was stale.

<u>Brooklyn Daily Eagle</u> - July 9, 1947

Back in 1895 Miss Neilsen points out, 'a gentleman named Stale Bread played the fiddle on New Orleans streets. He gathered a group of five disciples and together they became indentified as Stale Bread's Spasm Band. Their fame spread far and wide on Canal Street but it is improbable that anybody outside of New Orleans ever heard of them. The only evidence of their existence is in a few yellowed newspaper clippings of that day.'

After playing with the Spasm Band, ironically, Gregson became a police officer and his beat was the very same place that he once played- Storyville.

<u>Horn of Plenty</u> - Robert Goffin - 1947 - Closing of Storyville

On October 1th, the situation looked desperate indeed. To Harry Gregson, the detective who 20 years before had gotten his start in life as a singer with the Spasm Band (a company of newsboys who were the first singing quartet or sextet in New Orleans) fell the task of going from cabaret to cabaret, from sporting house to sporting house, to announce that the city Council had voted the day before to enforce the July ordinance.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - November 14, 1948

that the first jazz band were called 'spasm bands' and consisted of cigar-box fiddles, half-barrel bull fiddles, cheese box banjoes, harmonicas, kettles, whistles, a horn and some strolling players.

<u>Mason City Globe-Gazette</u> - April 26, 1949 - Jazz born in New Orleans

I am told that the grand-daddy of all 'jazz' and 'swing bands was an outfit organized in New Orleans back in 1895.

It was called the 'Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band,' and its leader was Harry Gregson, who later became a captain of detectives in the New Orleans Police Department. It was made up of Gregson and 7 other teen-age boys.

Instruments consisted of a weird assortment of homemade horns, fiddles, harmonicas, drums and traps. Harry did the vocals. There was something infectious about the rhythms they played. It was 'American Jazz!'

The 'Spasm Band' played for what it could get in the famed French Quarter. Its fame grew and it got some dates uptown. Then imitators sprang up, right and left. By 1900 jazz bands were on their way!

These New Orleans boys made history with the strange assortment of sounds they coaxed from their stranger instruments!

I believe the Lacoume had exited the band and its leadership. When the name 'Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band' was performing it was with regular instruments and played what we know as jazz. So the Stale Bread Spasm Band became the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band around 1909. Lacoume had been blind since 1899.

<u>Long Beach Independent</u> - February 24, 1952

Although the basis of jazz was probably the native Negro rhythms, the best evidence seem to show that this Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band, composed of New Orleans boys in their early 'teens, who used many of the 'hi-de-his' and 'ho-de-hos' that the Negro boatmen of the Mississippi originated many years before, was the first organized jazz band. Its leader was a lad named Harry Gregson, who later became a captain of detectives in the New Orleans Police department. Harry Gregson's Spasm Band (an imitator later called his band a 'jazz band' and thus originated the term that has spread far and wide) was made up of himself and seven other boys.

They played an assortment of homemade horns fiddles, harmonicas, drums, and traps. Harry did the vocals. None of the professional popular musicians of the day could match the Razzy Dazzy Spasm for the originality of their style of playing.

They might not be finished musicians, and their instruments were the crudest. But there was something infectious about the rhythms they played. It was 'American jazz.'

The Spasm Band played what they could get in the notorious French Quarter. Their fame grew, and they got some dates uptown. Then imitators sprang p, right and left.

By 1900, jazz bands were on their way. These New Orleans boys started it with the strange assortments of sounds they coaxed from their stranger instrumental.

<u>A History of Jazz in America</u> - 1952

The way for novelty outfits had been opened by E. A. Lacoume better known as Stale Bread, who was a zither player. Stale Bread played with the Brunies brothers and Rappolo, and in the late years of the last century he led a 'Spasm Band' so called after the sound of its toy & improvised instruments; the harmonica, the zither, a bass formed out of half a barrel with clothes line wire for strings, and a cypress stick for a bow, a banjo with 4 strings and anything from tin cans to barrels for drums. In 1903 Stale Bread had to leave the legitimate riverboat band. He was then leading (which featured Lawrence Veca on cornet) because of an eye infection that blinded him.

The below article mentions that Harry Gregson is now the leader of the Spasm Band. Lacoume has been blind for a number of years and no longer with the Spasm Band.

<u>Playboy</u> - August, 1954 (James Lavely)

Another well-known, if unusual, group was the Spasm White Band, made up of eight youngsters and led by Harry Gregson. He carried the melody while the rest of the boys, coaxing music from such instruments as a homemade cigar-box fiddle and cowbell, decorated his central theme with wild, extemporaneous flourishes. The spasm band was active in Storyville for a dozen years, playing in street corners and in the whorehouses, and passing the hat after each performance. The sounds produced by the group may not have amounted to much in the way of music, but they were exciting and rhythmic, and the antics of the boys were certainly engaging. They became so popular that, in 1906, they played a couple of engagements at the New Orleans Grand Opera House, billed as Harry Gregson's Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band.

<u>Ukiah Daily Journal</u> - August 30, 1954

For according to what I found in a highly reputable library tome, seven boys between the ages of 12 and 15k and their organizer-manager, Harry Gregson, were the ones, above all others, who started jazz on its merry way into every creek and cranny of American life.

These boys were Emile Lacoume-otherwise called Stalebread charley-who played a fiddle made from a cigar box; Wilie Bussey, better known as Cajun, an entrancing performer on a harmonica; Charley Stein, who later became a famous drummer, manipulated an old kettle, cowbell, a gourd filled with pebbles, and other traps; Chinee, who at first smote a bull fiddle made

from half a barrel and later had a coffin shaped contraption built by the boys; Emile Benrod, called whisky, Frank Bussey, known as Monk, and warm Gravy, who played whistles and various horns-nearly all home made. And each of the boys used at least three instruments, upon which he alternated.

This aggregation, frequenting the streets of Storyville, called them 'The Spasm Band,' and it took some time for them and similar groups to rid themselves of the title 'spasm players.'

Organizer Harry Gregson was the singer of the outfit, crooning the popular songs of the day through a piece of gas-pipe, not being able to afford a megaphone.

All of the jazz musicians contributed mightily with whatever sounds they could arouse from their instruments and put horns inside of hats, played instruments while standing on their heads and interrupted themselves occasionally with lugubrious howls.

In fact, they seem to have originated most of the antics which modern jazz virtuosi perform while in 'hotcha' spirit. The Spasm Boys even screamed 'hi-de-hi' and 'ho-de-ho' though this was nothing new. Negro band leaders had been using this jabber in songs up and down the Mississippi River for at least 100years.

The writer of this article gave the date of 1885 when he says he gave the name of Stalebread's band 'Jazz.' This doesn't seem correct. The name of jazz was not used until around 1916. He would have been 13 years old. He says that 57 years ago the Times Picayune would show he is correct. That would be in 1898, years earlier then the first use of the world jazz to describe music.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - August 12, 1955 - 'Stale Bread'

I am 70 years old. 'Fifty-seven years ago I was a newsboy. At that time there was a newsboy whose nickname was 'Stale bread.' I never knew his real name. He had a band consisting of a flour barrel sawed in half, and three other boys had cigars boxes with strings on them. These white newsboys played good music by ear, and collected a few nickels on Canal St. I gave them the name of 'Stale Bread's Jazz Band.' so they are the originators of jazz. These others who claim they started jazz are all wet. If our fine mayor wants to erect a statue to jazz, let him erect it to these newsboys who started it. Files in the Picayune 57 years ago will show I am correct. Give these boys the credit for music that has spread all over the world. (Charles ''Chick' Russell)

<u>Times Picayune</u> - August 17,1955 - Jazz in 1897

This is to verify 'Jazz in 1898,' by Charles 'Chick' Russell. I am four years older than Mr. Russell (who says he is 70). He saw, heard and named 'Stale Bread Jazz Band.' That was the name that they went by when I saw them, just before the outbreak of the Spanish-American War (1898) I wrote some, free lance, for the Chicago Saturday Bland and Chicago ledger.

My mother's husband, Uncle Chris Lindauer, was a star reporter for the Picayune, until it merged. I turned a lot of material, over to Uncle Chris, which he caused to be published. The 'district' was a treasure trove for stories, so I was a frequent visitor there. I often saw Stale Bread's Band, and listened to it in action, nearly always at the edge of Storyville, usually on Customhouse Street. (Now Iberville).

But before Stale Bread's time, I listened many a time to Negro jazz players who played in Tom Anderson's second saloon on basin and 'customhouse. That six or seven-piece band was the hottest in New Orleans at the time (1897)

Louis Armstrong (Satchmo or Satchel Mouth) played in that corner saloon band (but a few years later). He must be showing 80 by new. (Lee Lewis)

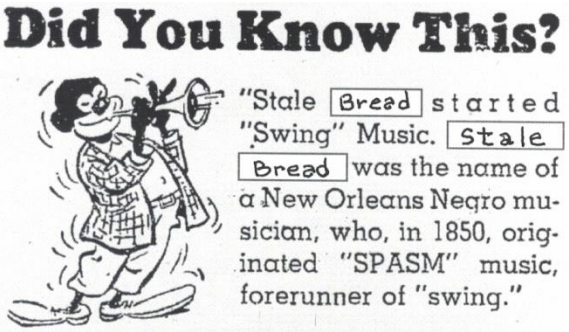
<u>Times Picayune</u> - December 24, 1955 - More jazz history.

Recently several contributors claimed 'Stale Bread' was the first jazz band that was styled as such. As I remember, his outfit was known as a 'spasm band' and his most performed renditions were: 'Sobre Los Olas' (Over the Waves), 'Wait Tell the Sunshines Nellie' (Von Tilzer), 'Good-by Little Girl Good-Bye' (Cobb and Edwards), and 'When the Harvest Days are Over Jessie Dear' (Paul Dresser). His great forte was using a half-barrel converted into a bass viol which had little or no tone quality or resonance but sounded like the tearing of a wet burlap bag.

<u>Daily Mail</u> - April 30, 1956

In 1893 a blind newsboy, named 'Stale Bread' began to sing distorted versions of work songs in order to sell his papers. Soon he was joined by other boys, and they formed 'Stale Bread's Spasm Band.

Even at late as 1958 some were saying 'Stale Bread' was a Negro.



August 1, 1958

<u>Times Picayune</u> - December 28, 1958

The famous actress Sarah Bernhardt gave each of the seven members a coin the group called itself 'The Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band. An adult band tried unsuccessfully to usurp the title and ended up calling itself 'The Razzy Dazzy Jazzy band. There are many other explanations, but this is one version of how the word 'jazz' came into the American idiom.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - April 13, 1966

Emile Lacoume better known as Stale Bread, one of her students and a charter member of the turn-of-the-century street urchins' group, the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Jazz band (they played homemade instruments), said in later years that he learned to read out of respect for Wright's muscle. And she once snapped at a hulking hooligan, 'I'm here to teach, not trifle.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - February 6, 1966

Stale Bread Lacoume and his friends, 'moonlighted' along Basin Street for coins thrown by passerby. They admired Jelly Roll's style and copied it.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - October 30, 1966 - Spasm Band are a relic of the past.

The memories of old-timers in the Crescent City should be jogged by a gently nostalgic article on Spasm Band appearing in next week's issue of Dixie Roto Magazine.

The Spasm Band were composed of musicians who played homemade instruments in the leisurely New Orleans of yesteryear, when Spanish Fort was the Mecca of revelers and 27 street car lines crisscrossed the city.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - November 6, 1966

'You can't get Papa Laine band? You can't get King Oliver's either? Well, go get a spasm band.

Danny Barker, curator of the New Orleans jazz Museum, reflected on New Orleans past and explained that spasm bands were usually spontaneous gatherings of would-be musicians. Often the city's merrymakers outnumbered the available music sources. Enterprising youngsters took advantage of the port city's conglomeration of visitors, who were always willing to support a local Spasm Band. Usually these youngsters were between 9 and 15 years old. Each aspired to make music-and usually made his own instrument.

'I played in one as a kid,' Barker reminisced in the red-light district.

At the turn of the century, band music was at its peak in the city, and the demand for talent grew until the onset of World War I, when Storyville's proximity to a naval base put out its lights. Bands played in street processions, in parades, at picnics and other outings. Jazz noise seeped out of every cabaret and honky-tonk, and bands were booked months ahead of schedule.

'A spasm band always had a comic flair,' Barker said. if a youngster wanted to hear a band like King Oliver's he stole through the dark streets of Storyville and stood outside the cafe doors, listening awe until a policeman sent him running home-to copy the style and sound of his idol.....

What has happened to spasm bands? Barker contrasted the kids of today who want to imitate the popular sound. 'They don't need to go through lots of training,' he said....'And,' he added, 'with today's credit systems and today's parents, homemade spasm instruments are almost things of the past.

As for the sound produced by the spasm bands, perhaps they will endure. Jazz concert man Edward T. 'Noon' Johnson, who for years led New Orleans' most successful novelty bands, thought so highly of his old bazooka that he had a new one made especially by a metal works company, and so, the spasm song still sings.

Spasm bands consisted of harmonicas, cowbells, combs and paper, tin pans and wooden crates, and other homemade whistles and horns, each as the kazoo and bazooka, a suitcase or box sufficed for drums and empty jug for a tuba.

Johnson and his bazooka

'We made our nickels and dime on the corner, making people enjoy themselves,' Barker said. 'The funny; songs, added to the makeshift instruments, made these bands....Spasm Bands were noisy and crude, as improvisation is apt to be. Nevertheless, their rhythms captured audiences. Musical inspiration came to these boys from the numerous marching bands of this era.

Danny Barker Interview - June 30, 1959 Danny organized a Pickaninnies band; the drum was made from a washboard and little contraptions, a kazoo player, a makeshift tambourine, and the uke. He called the group the Boozan Kings, (Boozan means good-time in patois); it was a very popular word: 'I'm going over to so-and-so's. They're having a Boozan over there.

This little group used to sneak off in the district after seven o'clock at night and go in the barroom and ask the bartender if they could play a couple of tunes. They would play a couple like: "Little Liza Jane,' and 'My blue heaven; all the current songs they would sing and then pass the hat around-in other words, they would hustle. The group got popular; they would pay on the steps, and all the kids ii the neighborhood would congregate around in the afternoon after school/ they would rehearse in the street.

In the Boozan Kings: Joe Francis on Kazoo, Russell on little makeshift drums, Danny & Herman Henderson who was a terrific ukulele player.

Times Picayune - February 3, 1974

Small bands of musicians played from 7 p.m. till dawn in many of the spots as itinerant musicians wandered in from the streets. One of these groups of young men called themselves 'The Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band' and that this is one explanation of the birth of the word jazz as an American idiom. It was

these musicians and others like them who traveled upriver to St. Louis, Chicago, taking the sounds they played with them.

Times Picayune - May 22, 1975

One of the reasons why Storyville has lived in memory is its association with the development of New Orleans jazz music. Some of the entertainers who play ragtime in the mansions or joined the spasm bands that roamed the streets were pioneers of the catchy two-beat form.

Times Picayune - August 16, 1978 - Storyville - Norma Wallace place.

In the early 1900s, spasm bands were noisy and crude, as improvisation is apt to be. Nevertheless, their rhythms captured audiences. Musical inspiration came to these boys from the numerous marching bands of this era.

Tony Spargo's Kazoo and a midget bass fiddle handmade by Alcide 'Slow Drag' Pavegeau are in the New Orleans Jazz Museum.

Times Picayune - June 18, 1982 - Golden oldies from Radio's elegant past.

My favorite jazz group, 'The Razzy Dazzy Jazzy Spasm Band. The leader was called 'Stale Bread,' several were newsboys and (legend has it) one of them wrote book for the Picayune.

Times Picayune - April 13, 1986

Emile Lacoume, better known as Stale Bread, one of her students (Sophie Wright's School) and a charter member of the turn-of-the-century street urchins' group, the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Jazz Band (they played homemade instruments), said in later years that he learned to read out of respect for Wright's muscle. And she once snapped at a hulking hooligan, 'I'm here to teach, not to trifle. If you don't behave yourself, I'll put your head right through that window.'

Association for education and Rehabilitation of Blind - Newsletter, Spring, 2013 - Emile 'Stale Bread' Lacoume (1885-1946

As a youngster, guitarist Emile 'Stale Bread' Lacoume led a ragtag group of very young New Orleans street musicians, the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band, which is credited by some music writers as being the first jazz band. 'Stale bread' was a visually impaired newsboy who played a violin (sometimes

described as a zither or viola) on a street corner in New Orleans to attract customers. Experimenting, he hit upon a new kind of music. It was wild, entertaining, and infectious and drew many to his corner. Eventually, attracted by the music and the resulting tips, others joined him, picking up whatever instruments they could lay their hands on. In 18996, at the age of 12, Lacoume formed his first band and christened them 'Stale Bread's Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band.' In the original band, Stale Bread played a home-made zither, Willie 'Cajun' Bussey-the harmonica, Emile 'whiskey' Benrod-the string bass (constructed on a half barrel strung with clothesline cord and played with a bow made of a cypress stick), Cleve 'Warm Gravy' Carven-the cheese box banjo, and Albert 'Slewfoot' Montluzin-the four string soapbox guitar. Stale Bread built many of the instruments himself. In their performances, they included shouts of 'Hi-de-Ho' and 'Hotcha' which were later copied by many early performers. They played in front of theaters, bawdy houses, and bars (including the West End Opera House at some point.) Actress Sarah Bernhardt reputedly gave the band gratuities when they performed for her in 1900. By 1903 they were practically legitimate-playing mostly regular instruments.

For a scruffy group of kids playing homemade instruments on street corners, the Razzy Dazzy spasm Band left a large imprint on history. Some jazz enthusiasts credit Lacoume and his band as being among the very earliest to play music that could be called jazz. Herb Asbury in his book *The French Quarter* calls them 'the original jazz band' and Stale Bread has been credited by the New Orleans Jazz Hall of Fame as 'one of the originators of the New Orleans Jazz sound when in 1897 he founded the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band.' Lacoume was the only member of the band who became a professional musician. He upgraded to a store-bought guitar, taught himself how to both guitar and banjo by listening to skiffle bands of the era, and teamed with mandolin player Frank Landry for jobs in Storyville, the infamous red light district. He also worked with dance bands around New Orleans and at resorts on Lake Pontchartrain, as well as with the Halfway House Orchestra. He played in many of the legendary 1920s and 30' New Orleans jazz bands which included jazz pioneers like Monk Hazel (drums, cornet), Florencio Ramos (saxophone, Charlie Fishbein (violin), Buzzy Williams (ragtime piano),and Louis Armstrong (cornet singer). Stale Bread said of Armstrong: 'That boy's got chops'. Satchmo went on to become one of the greatest jazz performers of all time. To the end. Lacoume consistently denied the claim that he was the

jazz originator, but his gravestone (thanks to his daughter) bears the inscription 'Creator of Jazz'.

Conclusions and Thoughts

Was the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band the first jazz band? There is mention of the band as early as 1894. (Times Picayune, May 31, 1894) How does the performances of the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band compare with the early jazz bands such as Buddy who by 1897 was developing a band style and membership of his band and was taking a definite shape. There were early Negro bands at this time, many coming from the larger brass bands) usually smaller in size to fit in the smaller dance halls.

Both the Spasm Band and many early jazz bands were comprised mostly of untrained musicians; their music was cacophonistic, but it was played by musicians with good musical ears. Did they think of chord progressions? The Spasm Band were entertainers, using various techniques in their performance such as trombone slides, unique sound effects made by homemade cigar boxes, a gas pipe, tin cans, musical saws, washboards, spoons, bells, pipes, sandpaper, xylophones, sets of bottles filled with different amounts of water, harmonicas, Jews harps, lone string fiddles, guitars, small bass fiddles, tub basses, kazoos, ram horns, and steer horns.) 'Showmanship' was an important part of the Spasm Band's performance with singing, dancing and various acrobatic antics. Early 'jazz' bands such as Bolden's Band were playing for dances where the Spasm Band performed as a 'show' band. Was their musical ability the same as many of the dance band musicians? The boys in the Spasm Band could not afford regular instruments unlike the dance bands that used regular instruments and had some instructions from their peers.

Did the ODJB, the Original Creole Band and the Tennessee Ten and other bands in vaudeville get their antics from this spasm band? All of the above mentioned were vaudeville acts-not only playing music but dancing, singing and even comedy was included in their vaudeville acts. (Creole Ragtime Band, Nov. 25, 1916 in the Colorado Springs Gazette-at Basinstreet.com 'Creole Band.') Also the 'Tennessee Ten Jazz Band' in the Scranton Republican, May 19, 1816, page 3 in Basinstreet. com.

The Spasm Melody

Other in the band were chordal or rhythm instruments. We don't know whether other melody instruments in the Spasm Band played a 2nd part as Buddy Petit was known for. (See 'Under the Influence,' page 6 At Basinstreet.com) Then what is the basis for calling the spasm band an early jazz band? Did the Spasm Band eventually acquire regular instruments, and what did they sound like?

The melodic instrumentation of the Spasm Band at various times was a violin, harmonica and guitar supported by various rhythm homemade instruments. The guitar probably played chords, while the violin and harmonica played melodic lines. Did the two melody instruments play in unison, or one back up the other with a second part? This we do not know. The violin would take the melody with the harmonica might have improvised a 2nd part. It is likely that there was no solo improvising. When one boy got tired another would take up the lead. Being amateur musicians they probably did a lot of 'faking' which led to a 'jazz' interpretation. Not being schooled most of their playing was not by written music but by individual interpretation. We read that the band 'bucked' against a German Band. How could a spasm band outdo a German brass band?

This 'bucking' contest was mentioned in 1923, (New Orleans States, August 19, 1923, 26 years ago-making it in 1897).

Did the Spasm Band develop into a more conventional instrumental band? By 1903 were they playing mostly regular instruments? This development could be the beginning of a more jazz sound.

The Spasm Band was a string band. Was it an early example of jazz? It did contain some jazz elements. First was syncopation. The earliest example of syncopation is seen in the works of Machaut (c1300-1377) The Second is improvising. Music began with improvisation. It could be called 'faking.' When a member played alone his skill and musical knowledge was such that he probably didn't stick to the straight melody but played it as well as an unskilled music could. Bands of the era, either music readers or more skilled ability than is seen in a musician that played by ear. So the jazz main elements of the Spasm Band were syncopation and improvising ('faking') their music. There is no mention of 'blue notes' in their music. We must also mention that the Spasm Band had a strong rhythm section. We don't know if they played with a 'backbeat' which would also be an element of jazz linked to syncopation. Where accents were

placed is unknown. Also the tempos are unknown. Did their performance include 'jazz' effects' such as glissandos, half value and other jazz effects?

'Their repertoire was varied with popular songs, folk songs and other music. There was a singer with the group but we don't know how often vocals were used. The band's antics also are spoken of that added to the group appeal. There were other street musicians on the streets of New Orleans but none received the fame and publicity of the Spasm Band. There were small groups playing but a large band of street musicians was not noted in any publicity or newspaper articles.

A number of early so-called jazz bands couldn't read music. They played solely by ear.

What was different with the Spasm Band?

Around 1894/95, the date of the beginning of the Spasm Band, we don't have evidence of what these early bands sounded like, only oral transcriptions describing their sounds.

Their repertoire was extensive. A number of popular songs ('Charley Butler,' 'Popularity,' and 'Bye, Bye You'll be My Honey.' 'I'm Glad I'm Married,' 'That's What the Rose Said to Me,' selections from the 'Merry Widow' and 'Big Night Tonight,') were played by the Spasm Band. The boys in the band knew a number of folk and popular tunes and often whistled them. (I wonder whether the early Spasm Band could have played a number of the 'standard' jazz tunes.). Stale Bread said: 'We copied off somebody. We heard 'em in the streets an' we sang 'em in the streets. Now they say we invented jazz.

Before disbanding did they develop into what is called a 'regular jazz band?'This was without Lacoume. The Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band was one of many spasm bands given in Newspapers (YMGC Spasm Band, the Fort McComb Spasm Band, John Spramer Spasm Band, the Spasm Band of the Elks, and others-Page 54)

The 'Young Men's Gymnastic Club Spasm Band,' listed in 1894 in the newspapers was an amateur string band mostly guitars that took the name 'Spasm Band' as they were also amateur musicians that later developed into a more professional band. (See page 43 for articles on this band)

Other bands that had the name of 'Spasm Bands' but this title during this era meant they were not professional musicians but amateur musicians most often playing homemade instruments.

The letter of Huguenot (earlier quoted) and the band he formed might be called the first jazz band. They were adult musicians and the members could read music. His letter used the word 'jazz band.' (Dramatic Mirror, 1919)

We have no evidence for the date of disbanded of the Spasm Band but it was around 1909. Lacoume went blind in 1903 and Gregson is listed as leader. It was during his leadership that the band changed to regular instruments. Could this be called the first real jazz band? Lacoume continued in music after the Spasm Band disbanded. He was a musician through his entire life.

Some answers of past history will never be known. Whether one calls the Spasm Band the first jazz band will always be debated but as the music of the Negro and white minstrels, cakewalks and ragtime are now considered prerequisites to early jazz. The Spasm Band will take its place as such.

Henry Kmen describes the dancing and music of Congo Square as early as 1799 had fifes and fiddles were used, and in time banjos, triangles, Jews harps and tambourines were added? Was this activity the ancestor of the Spasm Band?

It is not known who first called the Spasm Band the 'First Jazz Band.' One wonders what criteria were used and whether he had heard the music of the band in a live performance. One's opinion, whether the Spasm Band indeed was what is called 'The First Jazz Band,' is open to discussion, opinions and historic facts. In history it is impossible to give a beginning date of an art. Events can be dated accurately but the development and evolution of an art cannot be dated.

Buddy Bolden (1877-1931) is consisted the first 'legit' jazz band. Again there is no recording of Bolden although there is thought to be a cylinder that Bolden recorded but it has never been found. Bolden developed his band style and membership by 1897. Did he hear the Spasm Band and was he influenced by the band? That concept is hard for me to believe.

The 'Right at 'Em Razz Band' formed and is said to have been an imitator of the Spasm Band. In this band there were reading musicians with Yellow Nunez a 'faker.' What did they imitate from the Spasm Band?

There have been no answers to the questions stated in the above article. Perhaps the questions just lead to more questions.

Lacoume said the following:

'We were really lousy but we had good rhythm; just kids you know. We played around the district and people used to throw us money. There were plenty of kids before us. We copied off somebody. We heard 'em in the streets an' we sang 'em in the streets. Now they say we invented jazz. Ain't nobody

invented that music. Later on I really became a musician. I never knew no music, but I worked playin' the guitar. Good band too. I was the onliest one who couldn't read in them bands, 'course at Halfway House that was all fakin', no o' them guys could read. We played for fun,' see'

'At this same time there was a social organization in New Orleans composed of young white business men, numbering about one hundred. An orchestra was formed by some of the musical members, consisting of the piano, guitar, cornet, and bass fiddle, played respectfully by Gus Shindler, Yellow Nunez (a Spaniard) (cornetists name forgotten) and Harry Huguenot. The addition of Frank Christian, another guitarist, prompted Yellow to purchase a clarinet, and then from the clarinet began to flow the weirdest blue notes one ever heard. After a week of practice Nunez had these blue notes arranged as cadenza, and I am firmly of the opinion that this was the first 'jazz' effect in a Band.

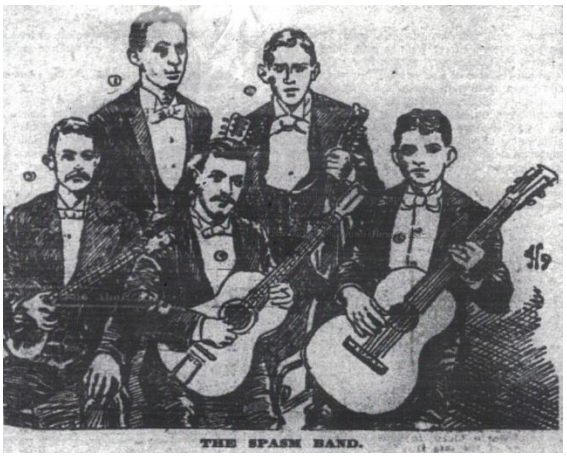
Time Line

1885 - Born
1884/85 - Forms Spasm Band
1897 - Bucking with German Band
1899 - Fair Grounds & New Year's Eve Minstrels - becomes blind
1901 - Visits Mayor (Lacoume is blind)
1902 - Playing in barroom
1903 - Enters Mrs. Wright's school. Had money stolen from him.
1905 - Spasm Band plays for Archbishop
1906 - Playing guitar in trio. (Gregson leader of Spasm Band)
1908 - Trouble at restaurant (23 years old) Again plays for Archbishop
1909 - Plays on Steamboat Tormentor (still in school) also sang
1910 - Perhaps last appearance of Spasm Band. Stale Bread has orchestra
1911 - New leader of Spasm band - Robert Hennessey
1913 - Playing piano in clubs.
1918 - Playing at West End
1919 - First mention of Spasm Band 'a jazz band.'
1920 - Playing at Halfway House -guitar/banjo
1921 - Playing guitar & piano for toy fund
1922 - Playing at LaVida dance hall

1929 - Blue Moon Orchestra
1943 - Crippled right hand
1946 - Selling programs at Fair grounds.(probably in 1943)
1946 - Died

There were many bands at the turn of the century or earlier. They had all kinds of instrumentation. One can't go by what they named themselves. The YMGC was a string band (guitars and mandolins), but was called a spasm band.

Spasm Band of the Young Men's Gymnastic Club (YMGC)



The YMGC Spasm Band

At times an article mentions the 'spasm band' without a heading or mention which spasm band it was. For more formal events it probably was the YMGC.

Times Picayune - April 1, 1894 - Elks ladies social

Prof. Edward Hesselberg and the Spasm Band of the YMGC.

New Orleans Item - April 2, 1894 - Letter Carriers walking match.

Captain Wright will be preceded costumed to represent 'Pickwick,' and will be preceded on his march around the track by the Spasm Band of the YMGC,

New Orleans Item - May 19, 1894 - Letter Carriers

The YMGC Spasm Band which is so well known for its exquisite music will appear.

New Orleans Item - May 23, 1894 - Collen Bawn' for the letter carriers benefit.

'Colleen Bawn' was presented at the St. Charles Theatre last evening to a packed house. Every seat in the great building was occupied and the aisles were crowded. The affair was a benefit tendered by their friends to the Benevolent Association of Letter Carriers. The famous 'Spasm Band' of the

UMGC played three selections in their most attractive way. The following gentlemen compose the band:

Geo. P. Hayman, W. A. Lindaner, Henry Mumme, Jr., W. C. Williams, W. C. Lindaner, G. W. Nemminger, L. J. Morris, R. J. Kennedy, E. DeBrgue, Ed. C. Stoddard, Henry Killain and J. H. Schuchard.

Times Picayune - May 23, 1894 - 'The Coleen Bawn' at the St. Charles Theatre.

Prior to the opening of the play the Spasm Band performed some Spanish music and were warmly welcomed.

Times Picayune - May 31, 1894 - Amateur Minstrelsy

A large audience witnessed the amateur minstrelsy last night at the Woman's Social Industrial Hall. The entertainment had been gotten up under the management of W.T. DeVan, and right well had he performed his work. A grand overture by the Spasm Band opened the affair, followed by a grand medley by the members of the company.

New Orleans Item - December 18, 1894 - Gymnastic quartette

The Spasm Band original organizations will play a medley.

Times Picayune - July 20, 1895 - Washington Artillery to entertain its friends at a military smoker.

A superb programme has been arranged - The Spasm Band of the UMGC.

New Orleans Item - November 8, 1894 - Concert to aid of sisters.

The Spasm Band of the UMGC tendered some fine selections.

Times Picayune - June 2, 1895 - The Spasm Band. The famous musical quintette of the Young Men's Gymnastic Club.

One of the popular musical organizations of New Orleans is the 'spasms.'

Some months ago several members of the Young Men's Gymnastic Club met and talked over the advisability of organizing a mandolin and guitar club. The result was favorable, and it was decided that the club should be organized at once. A short time thereafter about ten of the boys in the club signified

their intention to go into the musical club, and they began at once to rehearse, and so great was their progress that in less than a month they were playing well together and making very pretty music.

At first the club confined its efforts to popular airs, and gave no attention to notes at all, but the demands from their many friends for performances at entertainments inspired the boys, and they undertook to play accurate music. Their success was fully shown at the concert given by the Y. M. G. C. quartette on the 10th ult., and the applause which they received on that occasion was very 'ratifying to them and to the management of the entertainment.

The peculiar and original title of 'spasms' was given to the musical team so that the skeptical would not be too exacting, as the boys merely organized to amuse themselves and occasionally entertain their friends.

The boys intended changing the name as soon as the improvement in playing warranted, but in the meantime their appearance at different concerts created so much favorable comment that 'spasm' was retained, and they have been heard under that name in all the halls and theatres of the city, and have always been well received. Owing to a press of business during the winter five of the members were compelled to remain away from rehearsals, but the present quintette adhered firmly to their practice, and are playing delightful music.

Nearly all of the selections chosen by the club are arranged from piano music by the members, and the list includes some charming Mexican airs. The services of the team have at all times been gratis, and the manager has in his possession some very grateful acknowledgements from churches of all denomination and from the managements of charitable entertainments in which they have assisted.

Following are the names of the 'Spasms': George Menninger, with the New York Life Insurance Company; C. Lindaner, with the Illinois Central Railroad Company; Ed DeBergne, student of chemistry; H. Miumme, in the shoe business, and R. J. Kennedy, teller of the Teutonia Savings Bank.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - November 28, 1895 - Young Men's Gymnastic Club

The entertainment to be given tonight by this popular club will certainly be a very brilliant affair, and judging from the manner in which invitations are being sought, the capacity of the gymnasium will be taxed to its utmost. Every department in the club will be represented, from juveniles to 'Spasm

Band,' to conclude with a hop, and those who attend are promised a delightful time.

Times Picayune - June 2, 1895 The famous musical quintette of the Young Men's Gymnastic Club.

One of the popular musical organizations of New Orleans is the 'Spasms.'

Some months ago several members of the Young Man's Gymnastic Club met and talked over the advisability of organizing a mandolin and guitar club. The result was favorable, and it was decided that the club should be organized at once. A short time thereafter about ten of the boys in the club signified their intention to go into the musical club, and they began at once to rehearse, and so great was their progress that in less than a month they were playing well together and making very pretty music.

At first the club continued its efforts to popular airs, and gave no attention to notes at all, but the demands from their many friends for performances at entertainments inspired the boys, and they undertook to lay accurate music. Their success was fully shown at the concert given by the YMGC Quartette on the 11th ult., and the applause which they received on that occasion was very 'ratifying to them and to the management of the entertainment.

Other examples of Spasm Bands

Other groups used the term 'Spasm Band' for their ensemble. None of these spasm bands were considered being the first jazz band. What then was different in the music of the RDSB and other spasm bands? Is it because it was their own interpretation of the music? Then, if this 'white' band invented jazz, then what was the Negro part in its development? Did 'jazz' begin in the latter part if the 19th century with the RDSB?

Times Picayune - May 31, 1894 - Amateur minstrelsy

A grand overture by the Spasm Band opened the affair.

Dallas Morning News - June 28, 1899

In dictating letters it is trying on the nerves and voice to have to speak loud enough to overcome the noise of the constantly passing floats or the passing street band which is more often 'spasm' than otherwise. The instrumentation of this band is not given but one of the members is called 'Stale.'

There is an article in the Thibodaux newspaper of November 21, 1900 that writes of a Spasm Band (called a string band) that uses homemade instruments. Professor Emile Aucoin, better known as 'Stale.' was the leader.

The people of this town are rejoicing over the advent of a fine string band in their midst. Not a brass band, but a real sure enough string band. A band that numbers among its members such artist as professor Emile Aucoin, better known as 'Stale' late of the Schubert symphony company, but now serving a floor walker and general utility man in the store of Ellis Braud's sons on Main Street professor Rocks, who for several years past has been delighting vast audiences with his inimitable playing upon the kazoo. The instruments of the band are of the finest, being made from some of the best cigar boxes that could be had in the town. It is currently reported that the instruments used by Prof. Rocks was made from a box which in its balmy days was filled with fifteen cents straight Havana Fillers, and for the making of the instrument he paid the fabulous sum of ten cents. The band renders the very finest classical music such as - 'Pap's Pants Will soon fit Willie,' 'Sister's Teeth Were Filled with Zinc,' 'Oh! Why Did They dig bill's Grave so Deep?' and other exquisite arias. Several of our citizens have been favored with serenades, and from them we learn that the music rendered by this band is such as would bring tears to the eyes of a Trust being, would revivify an Egyptian mummy. Emile Aucoin, the leader of the band, is contemplating leasing the winter tower from the city, upon the top of which he proposes to fit out a fine roof garden where the band will discourse sweet strains during the long winter evenings. We wish him success.

Dallas Daily News - May 29, 1903 - Knights of Pythians meeting

The Spasm Band, composed of C. M. Hale and C. R. panther, A. H. scare, Louis Well, Joseph E. Trick & E. W. Gilzhic, make life a burden for members of the Grand Lodge, and no one is allowed to sleep during the whole night.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - November 23, 1905 - Dr. Bacon surprised

The music was rendered by the Fort McComb Spasm Band, an organization well known in New Orleans.

<u>New Orleans Item</u> - June 5, 1905

Charley Howard is not a pupil of Prof. Baldwin Magruder, the Fordoche, violinist. Charley received his musical education in Gretna, and for years was leader of the Spasm Band, an organization which still exists.

<u>New Orleans Item</u> - July 4, 1907 - Baseball game

After the game refreshment were served at the residence of Mr. Spies. Headed by Mr. John Spraner and his Spasm Band a parade was then formed and a number of prominent citizens were serenaded.

<u>New Orleans Item</u> - June 7, 1907 - Thirteenth wedding anniversary

The performance was soon over and as the crowd filled out of the auditorium it was attracted afterward by the weird music of the Elks 'Spasm Band.' Major Matthews, hearing the music turned to Sheriff Long with a look of astonishment and started to order the intruders to crease when the bands of Elks swooped down on the care and soon occupied every seat and table.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - May 26, 1912 - Presents Hon. Ed. P. Foley with a magnificent umbrella.

The occasion this year was novel for some of its features, notably, the appearance of some thirty sailors from the Steamship Wayfarer and their unique Spasm Band.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - April 30, 1913 - May festival

The Spasm Band, composed of a number of younger men of the social world, will render a program of bright music. The instruments of the band include mandolins, banjos and guitars.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - August 2, 1914 - Employees outing.

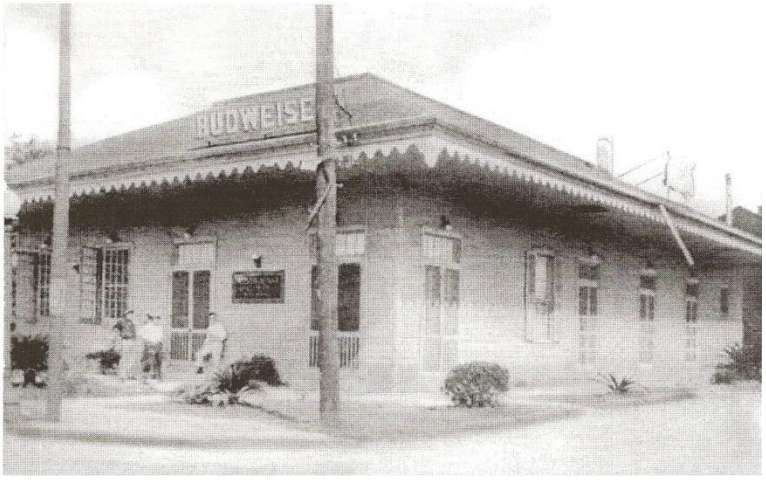
A feature of the occasion will be a double spasm band. The maneuvers of this band have been kept a secret and a big treat awaits the employees.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - August 24, 1925 - 'Spasm Band' heads big Holmes family parade on departure for annual outing on Gulf Coast.

Here they are, Biloxi bound. Don Heller's 'spasm' band heading the big Homes department store 'family' Saturday on its way to the annual outing on the Gulf Coast.

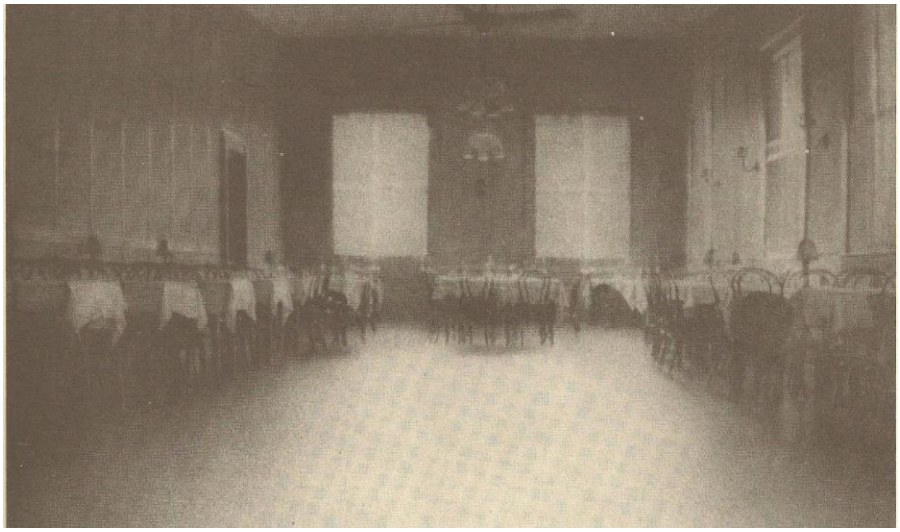
<u>Times Picayune</u> - September 19, 1954 - National Guard show at Loyola
Also scheduled to appear are Henry Dupre, Pinky Vidacovich and Louis Bono and his Spasm Band

Negro Spasm Band



Halfway House

In Edmond Souchon's interview at Tulane, Feb. 17, 1962 he states: "The Halfway House was at City Park Avenue and the New Basin Canal. Its reputation was band, but Souchon says the interior was innocuous. The band was four or five pieces.



Interior of Halfway House

First Jazz Band???

Should the Spasm Band have been named the 'first jazz band? This naming of the Spasm Band is first found in an article by Mr. Huguenot in an article in the Times Picayune on March 2, 1919. Many writers since then in later years quoted this article and it became 'fact' that the Spasm Band was the first jazz band. Emile Lacoume began his association as the leader of this band in 1895. He went blind in 1899. A benefit for him was held in 1900. In 1901 he traveled to Hot Springs, Ark. to have a specialist help with his blindness but to no results. He entered Mrs. Wrights School in 1903 and it is stated that the band was playing 'legit' instruments at this time. It is stated that in 1906 Harry Gregson became leader of the band. Lacoume was still in school in 1909. In 1901 it was mentioned that he was noted as having the 'Stale Bread orchestra. The name 'Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band first mentioned in 1909 with Gregson as leader. The last mention of the band was in 1910. In 1911 it is mentioned that in 1911 the new leader of the band was Robert Hennessey. Gregson had joined the police dept in 1905. In 1913 Lacoume was playing piano in clubs around New Orleans. In 1920 he was playing in the Halfway House Band. He continued to 'gig' playing piano in clubs. In 1923 he was playing at the LaVida Dance Hall. In 1929 it is mentioned of Lacoume Blue Moon Orchestra.

In 1943 had a crippled right hand. Lacoume, in 1946, mentioned being a program seller at the Fair Grounds.

Did Lacoume continue to play as leader of the 'Spasm Band' when he went blind? It would be hard to lead a street band when blind. By 1899 he would have been 14 years old. It was Gregson who was then was leader of the band that was closer to "jazz' then the earlier band and in 1903 they were playing "legit" instruments. An article remarked that ' the first jazz band was organized by Harry Gregson, its leader and called the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band. Bolden's band was well established by 1897.

Is there more evidence of the Spasm Band except the article of March 2, 1919? I think that the first Spasm Band of Lacoume was not a "jazz" band and that writers mixed up the first Spasm Band with the 'Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band' which was led by Gregson. By the time that Gregson had the band as a "legit' Band in 1909 it was just one of many bands that played jazz.

The Spasm Band of Lacoume was not the first jazz band and was misnamed and accepted with only the mention of this band in 1919, and that description was not accurate.

Harry Gregson
1882-1963

There is little information on the future lives of the members of the Spasm Band. One exception is Harry Gregson. Gregson is mentioned as the vocalist of the group. Later he is mentioned as the leader of the Razzy Dazzy Spasm Band.

He joined the New Orleans Police Department in 1905 at the age of 23. Beginning as a regular policeman he rose to the rank of Chief of Detectives. He had a long career in the police department and was involved in countless criminal cases and became a well known character around New Orleans.

After his career in the Spasm Band he, like Lacoume, became a prize fighter. He participated in many athletic events during this time. He ran for sheriff of Orleans Parish but was defeated. He retired in 1954. Gregson is mentioned numerous times in the newspapers and often was in difficulty doing his duties as a policeman but survived to continue as a member of the force.

To list his many events in his police career would be cumbersome but it is just needed to say that he was very active rounding up criminals. He was known for his many disguises used to trap a criminal. One such event is seen in the January 25, 1953 issue of the Times Picayune: "As bum or Mardi Gras masker, Gregson ends by flashing badge-seizing suspect."

"For the third day in a row, the bent old woman, clad in a patched dress, a tattered and thin cloth wrapper, her head bound in a ragged kerchief against the cold, shuffled into the empty church and almost painfully seated herself in a rear row, partially hidden by the shadows.

For more than an hour, she kneeled with bent head, unnoticed by worshippers who entered, stayed briefly and departed. Neither was she noticed by the man who slipped furtively through the open door, glances hastily around and then walked quickly up a side aisle toward the poor box.

With professional efficiency, he hurriedly inserted an instrument beneath an opening under the box's small, locked door. Breaking it open, he raked the coins into a pocket. His work completed, the man briskly walked toward the door. The old woman moved swiftly from her place, timing herself to follow just behind the man as he left the church.

Once outside, she called to hi in a timid voice: "Mister, will you wait just a minute, please?" The man paused impatiently as she approached. She laid a kindly hand on his arm, but her voice changed surprisingly to a heavy, masculine tone. The man stood frozen in awe as he watched the woman whip the kerchief from her head and push a detective captain's badge into his face.

"Mister," she said, "My name is Harry Gregson. I'm a police officer and you have robbed your last box for a while. Let's go."

Harry O. Gregson, detective captain, the New Orleans police department's "Mr. Chameleon,' man of disguises, considered by many; the city's best "public" (as opposed to private) eye has scored another hit in his endless and devoted sleuthing.

Ask anyone in the police department and they'll tell you that Harry Gregson is a thousand years old; that he has been a member of the force since it was created, and that he'll be around as long as there is a New Orleans police department.

Actually, Harry Gregson admits to 70 summers. He's been a policeman 47 years, a detective for 40. Ironically, for a law enforcement officer, he hasn't worn a uniform for those 40 years.

While he can pass himself off as almost any type of individual, Harry Gregson also looks like a policeman. He's of medium height, but has the build of a prize fighter (which he once was). His ragged, dark, heavily lined face is accentuated by a bulbous nose-the greatest sufferer in his ring career. But his eyes are as clear, bright and alert as a child's.

How did Harry Gregson choose the force? 'I was the local bantamweight champ at one time and fought a lot of the big guys around in my time,' he says, "I looked around for something less painful to do and chose the police department when I realized that I couldn't beat anybody anymore."

And what does it take to catch crooks? Experience for one thing, and Harry Gregson has plenty of that-plus a memory like a filing cabinet.

Moreover, it rakes the ability to move among criminals without arousing suspicion. And Harry Gregson can do that. If he has to remain incognito, Harry Gregson can and has become a bum, an old woman (as cited above), a passed-out drunk, a barfly, a masker on Mardi Gras, a successful businessman, a messenger or the woman in a lovers' lane duet.

Years ago, for about a week, he and a fellow officer posed as lovers, parked i a car in an isolated section of Lakeview. They were trying to trap two rapists, working in a team, who had been terrorizing that section. One night the call came-the crime had occurred only a short distance away-a woman had been attacked.

Within minutes, Gregson and his partner were at the scene. They learned the culprits had boarded the only street car line in the sectional. The two policemen sped to the streetcar, arrested the suspects (who subsequently were hanged.)

More recently, a local drug store owner complained of systematic thefts of thousands of dollars worth of cigarettes from his establishment. Harry Gregson got the case. A few days later, in the wee hours of the morning, an employee with a key to the store unlocked the front door as a drunken bum weaved from side to side and seated himself on a nearby fire plug. Suddenly, the bum fell from his perch, striking his head on the concrete pavement. The employee walked to his side. "Are you hurt, drunk" he asked. "Get away and leave me alone," the bum mumbled with a thick tongue. The employee shrugged his shoulders and entered the store.

A moment later the employee reappeared locked the store, placed what appeared to be a box of trash into his automobile and drove away. The bum waited.

Half an hour later, the employee returned, carrying the now-empty box. The bum jumped to his feet, grabbed the employee by the arm and said quietly; "OK, pal, go get those cigarettes you just took out of here.'

The employee, taken aback momentarily, recovered from his astonishment and snarled, 'Get your hands off me, you drunk." The badge flashed, the employee peered closer at the face, and realized he had been caught red-handed. "Harry Gregson," he said in resignation. "I should have spotted you. I've known you for years from seeing you around town."

Gregson believes the easiest police job is nabbing pickpockets, who operate in pairs on such days as Mardi Gras, when streets are packed with celebrants. It's a simple matter, he says, to put on a false nose and eyeglasses and lose yourself in the crowds. Locating pickpockets is simple, too, he says. Just go where they ordinarily would operate and look for them. They operate on a routine setup, Gregson says. The first man will bump the victim hard, apologize and begin to brush him off. Meanwhile, the other team member has lifted the wallet.

Gregson is so sharp in spotting pickpockets that he has grabbed as many as four teams in a single day before they realized he wasn't a Carnival masker.

One pickpocket, whose activities had been witnessed by Gregson, but who had discarded the evidence before he was arrested, identified himself as the son and heir of a wealthy Eastern tire manufacturer. The suspect threatened severe libel action. Gregson took him to the suspect's hotel room to search his effects, all the time listening to demands that the mayor be called in. finding nothing illegal in the man's possessions, Gregson decided to use a ruse, which, if it failed, could have gotten the policeman into hot water.

Gregson had noticed the man's bags were packed with a number of expensive suits. He called in the hotel porter. 'Look," he said. 'This guy is a crook, i just caught him. You can have all these clothes-sell 'em or do what you want with 'em. He won't need 'em anymore."

The man broke and confessed. "All right," he said. "I did take that fellow's wallet and those are phony papers I showed you. Only don't give my clothes away-they cost me plenty."

Gregson believes he sometimes has to take chances to gain results.

The question of retirement recently was put to Gregson. 'Me retire?' he said. 'Not me. I'm in just as good shape as I ever was. No use to quit. I'll be around for a little while yet." His colleagues agree.

<u>Times Picayune</u> - July 30, 1954 - Veteran police officers to bid adieu to force.

Pictured at City Hall where they were given certificates of merit Thursday are four of the seven over-70 police officers who by law must retire Monday night. Gregson on right in photo below.

Gregson on right of photo

<u>Times Picayune</u> - February 20, 1963 Death claims Capt. Gregson. Rites for veteran police officer planned.

Funeral services for Capt. Harry O. Gregson, retired new Orleans Police Department veteran and onetime boxer, will be held Thursday at 9 a.m. at the auxiliary funeral home of Jacob Schoen & son, Inc. 3837 Canal Interment will follow in Hope Mausoleum.

Capt. Gregson, 79, died Tuesday at his residence, 155 N. Broad, after a brief illness. His lone survivor is his widow, the former Alice Daisy White.

He joined the police department here in 1905 after working i the plumbing trade, boxing professionally and enjoying a brief stint as a jazz musician.

Carrying the latter two into police work, he demanded good physical condition on the part of men serving under him and participated in numerous department minstrels. He led the police minstrel band.

Capt. Gregson served in most departments of the police force, became a detective squad member in 1914, later advanced to the rank of captain of detectives in 1928. He served as acting chief of detectives several times during his police career, which ended in 1954 with his retirement as a detective captain.

He was known for his ability to find persons wanted by police departments throughout the United States. He would assume various roles, such as a woman worshipper in church, a stumblebum drunk or a masquerader in his usually successful attempts to get his man.

A proficient boxer, he was the southern bantamweight champion in 1903. He defeated Freckles O'Brien. In 1901, he fought three rounds at the old Orpheum Theater with champion Terry McGovern, and in 1904 lost by a knockout to William Matthews, who had just lost the welterweight championship at Laurie, Miss.

Capt. Gregson was an unsuccessful candidate for Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff in 1949.

The authors of 'Jazz Men' concluded that the Spasm Band was not a jazz band but they put the beginning of the band in 1896 when it was around 1894-95. Stale bread went blind in 1899 at which time there was a benefit for him.

Jazzmen - Ramsey , Russell & Smith (page52-53)

Stale Bread played in the district but only when he'd learned to play legitimate musical instruments. A lot of nonsense has been talked about Stale Bread and his Spasm Band. Jazz didn't come from toy instruments, no matter how quaint or colorful this street corner band sound to the tourist trade. A great many New Orleans musicians did begin their careers on something conjured out of odds and ends that made sound. Rapp's was a one-string violin, made with a cigar box. Stale Bread himself didn't play a toy instrument but he did make a business of what others confined to the back yard.

In 1896 Stale Bread got together his first band, years before Rappolo was born. He himself played zither but the line-up is so raggle-taggle that it might as well be listed:

Stale Bread (Emile August Lacoume, Sr.), zither; Cajun (Willie Bussey), harmonica; whiskey (Emile Benrod), bass constructed from half-barrel, string with clothes-line wire and played with cypress-stick bow; Warm Gravy (Cleve Craven), four-string, cheese-box banjo; slew-foot Pete (Albert Montluzin), soap box cut down to make a four-string guitar.

With these crude instruments the boys dished out home cooking for Doc Malney's Minstrel show. They continued playing, one job following another, until 1901. In that year Stale Bread went blind from an eye infection. By 1903 he was back in the music business and the band was practically legitimate:

Stale Bread (Lacoume), zither and piano; Dolly (Charles Carey), string bass, Dude (Jimmy Lacoume), banjo; Sonny (?), guitar & mandolin' Sweet Potato (Harry Carey), tambourine & cornet.

Within a few years Stale Bread was playing on riverboats, sometimes with Lawrence Veca, of who he commented, 'he was a real musician.' One job was on Basin Street at Toro's, with Harold Peterson on drums. Years later, when he played at the Halfway House with the Brunies and Rappolo, Stale Bread played banjo. He liked people to think of him as a musician, not as a blind man playing music. He wore dark glasses and most of the time no one seemed to notice it. The boys didn't read music, anyway.

How did Jazz begin?

To begin with it is impossible to date when an art form began. One does not know how music began. Common sense tells us that it was not on purpose but an experiment in sound, perhaps used as a signal as a warning of danger.

The music that was present at the beginning of jazz (around 1900 or earlier) was: classical, opera, military music and dance music. In New Orleans all of the above were present and the citizens were exposed to these styles. There were very professional musicians as well as amateurs playing music. These amateurs were not performing opera and the military bands were reading musicians and very capable. Jazz was influenced by these styles but their interest was performing their musical jobs. The elements of jazz were not used at first in marching or funeral bands. These early dance bands did not give concerts. Most of their jobs were dance jobs and playing for picnics, ballyhooing in the streets and other odd jobs needing a band. During this era (the turn of the new century) dancing was a very popular activity. In New Orleans there were more requests for dance bands then there were bands, thus the need for musicians. There is much info. On a person who was asked to join a band that did not have very much skill as a musician. When they joined a band many times they would be faking more notes than they knew. When a part was not well known the person would 'fake' the notes. Then rhythm was furnished by a 'trap' drum set and kept the rhythm study. While ragtime was present with its syncopated style, this syncopated style was popular during this time. The new musician often was struggling with his instrument and thus (not being a schooled musician) would either come in early or come in late. The 'faking' of a musical part was the beginning of jazz. It was not one person or band but a number of bands in New Orleans played

in this manner. Solo improvising was not present. Many club owners would ask why a musician was not playing. This probably was due to the length of time bands played in this era. Often they played from the early night to almost dawn. The cornet player would need a rest for his lip. Another horn would cover for him and perhaps try to play his part, not the way that a cornet player would play but a attempt to duplicate his part, He was not able to duplicate his part exactly but 'faked' through a chorus with his performance covering the cornet's part not exactly, thus this 'fake' improvising was played with rhythm and syncopation by a musician trying to 'fake' the leading part. It was not until Armstrong played solos with the Oliver band that 'true' jazz as we know it was born. Buddy Petit was noted for his ability to improvise a second part and other rather 'unskilled' musician did the same. Petit' was imitated by many other New Orleans musicians including Armstrong. The Ballyhoo wagons and the bands playing at the resorts and camps around Lake Pontchartrain heard other bands and had bucking contests and listening to the repertoire and style of bands they heard. White and Negro bands had the opportunity to hear each other. Many of the 'legit' bands such as Piron were heard and their repertoire was duplicated as best they could. Thus the attempt at duplicating what they heard was not perfect. Thus many bands would play a piece the best they could. This 'faking' was the principle element of the beginning of jazz. The bands and musician developed a style that was more personal and each band could be known by their individual style. The bands were known as ragtime bands but they played ragtime with what would be known as jazz elements. New Orleans bands thus played ragtime in what would be known as a jazz style making them heard with a new way to play ragtime. The ancestors of jazz- minstrel music, cakewalks were styles that these bands were exposed to. Even the March compositions were said to be interpreted in a 'rag' style. The cakewalk main rhythm was a syncopated one (short, long short)

These 'amateur' dance band played ragtime for dancing in their own style. Playing ragtime was an art, especially for pianists. This ragtime music was not simple and must have been difficult to imitate by an amateur band. With syncopation present the musician used it in their performance. With the rhythm of the trap drums playing a steady beat this emphasized the conflict between syncopation played with a steady beat added. The wind instruments playing together in a contrapuntal style was more cacophony then schooled

counterpoint of Bach. Thus no rules were followed but played with a good musical ear.

Jazz grew up with all the above musical elements present. These bands were accepted, not for their great skilled musical abilities but for their ability to furnish music needed for a certain activity. Music was a good activity for musicians who usually had daytime jobs and was a way to earn more money. There were few people who could use music as a regular job. A person who needed extra money would attempt to become a musician and thus have more money coming in.

The repertoire of the 'old' dance bands were played but their dancers, being young, wanted new styles as those of our present day and they attended to dances with these 'amateur' bands playing. Soon most of the music played at these dances was 'modern' for its day. This music became jazz.

Any accepted and popular band that was accepted was attended by the dancers and soon their rhythmic style was used to try and get dancers to attend their dances. These bands played in the then modern style that evolved into jazz.

Stale Bread's Blindness

When did Lacoume go blind? There are many mentions of his blindness that give a different year that this happened. The problem is that Lacoume blindness was not a sudden thing, but he began to lose his sight gradually, beginning as early as 1899. There is no evidence that he was totally blind. The 1917 draft card list him as blind so he was not drafted. He was sent to Hot Springs Arkansas in 1904. There was a benefit for him in 1901. He visited the mayor's office blind in 1901. He was going blind when entering Mrs. Wright's school in 1903.

My conclusion is that Lacoume was gradually beginning to go blind in 1899 and his eye sight deteriorated in the years to come. Gregson became leader of the band around 1906. After this year no longer is the Spasm Band called Stale Bread's Spasm Band. In 1913 Hennessey is listed as leading the spasm Band. In 1906 Lacoume would be 21 years old. In 1910 he is mentioned as having on orchestra. He would have a number of years to study a 'legit' musical instrument and began to take 'gigs' as a 'legit' musician on the guitar

and piano. He is listed in 1913 as playing piano at various New Orleans clubs. Thus began his career as a 'legitimate musician.