

# Eddie Bowles's New Orleans

## Growing Up in the Birthplace of Jazz

As a boy and young man, Eddie Bowles lived in New Orleans until 1914. It was there that he first learned to play the guitar. Music was a part of life in New Orleans, and it was played constantly in



the many dance halls throughout the city. The musical scene in New Orleans at the time was largely divided into two districts: Downtown and Uptown. Downtown New Orleans was where the majority of the French-speaking population lived, including the Creole communities. Uptown New Orleans, however, contained much more of the English-speaking communities, including a large Black population.



Scan here to listen to an excerpt from Louis Armstrong's "Basin Street Blues" (54 seconds).

Downtown music in the late 1800s and early 1900s was considered to be more mainstream. The bands that played it were "society bands," and were considered more respectable. The parts were more clearly written out, and there was little improvisation. Their bands tended to play ragtime and blues,

musical genres that were fairly common throughout the United States at the time.

Uptown music, however, was jazz. These musicians didn't call their music "jazz," but rather considered it a form of ragtime music. The musical style was in many ways a fusion of ragtime and blues, with members memorizing their parts and improvising new ones as they played. Their bands combined instrumentation from brass marching bands and string bands. It was in Uptown where many of the famous early jazz musicians were born.

Eddie Bowles was involved in music from a very early age, with he and his friends gradually teaching themselves to play their instruments. By the time he was a young adult, they were good enough for the famous early jazz musician Kid Ory to take them under his wing. They also ran in the same circles as the young Louis Armstrong. "We used to call him Pug, when we were kids, and it made him mad," Eddie said in an interview. He and his band

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played in all the hottest Uptown spots, including Basin Street, which Louis Armstrong eventually immortalized in the song "Basin Street Blues." Before long, Eddie was leading two different bands.

Once Eddie got married to his wife Sarah, however, he quickly realized that his music career wasn't stable or profitable enough to support them. He put away his guitar for nearly thirty years, eventually moving to Cedar Falls for work in 1914. The music he learned in New Orleans, however, would remain with him for the rest of his life.