

# Some new Tommy Ladnier findings

Compiled by Bo Lindström

Since the printing of our book **”Traveling Blues – The Life and Music of Tommy Ladnier”**, some new discoveries have been made. In this document, new information on Tommy Ladnier’s stay with a friend in Connecticut in 1937 has surfaced.

The marriage to “Daisy” has also been investigated in depth and we now know much more about Tommy’s mysterious wife – albeit there still are many questions to answer.

It has also been discovered that Tommy’s mother Willie married in Chicago in 1918 and that she is shown to have been 5 years older than we originally found.

Finally, some more information on the Victor recording of Maple Leaf Rag in 1932 is given

## Tommy Ladnier in Connecticut 1935

In “Traveling Blues” we have stated that *“Tommy Ladnier left New York and made a visit to a friend living in Connecticut. Originally he intended to stay for only a couple of weeks but according to what he told Panassié, he stayed for two years.”* (Page 171) This was based on Hugues Panassié’s statement.<sup>1</sup>

According to Panassié, Tommy played around Stamford and also gave trumpet lessons. Perhaps one of his students from that time is still living?

The Price & Lee’s Co City Directory, Stamford, Connecticut of 1935 shows this entry:

**Ladnier Thomas musician r 105 Pacific** (r meaning “Resident with householder”)

—Salvatore (Mary G) h 22 Spruce  
Ladner Emma Mrs emp 168 Stamford av r do  
—Sherman W (Katherine) carp h 55 Lockwood av  
**Ladnier Thomas musician r 105 Pacific**  
Laetsch Paul (Sophie) upholsterer h 77 Ridgewood av Springdale  
SPO

As for the two Ladners living in Stamford in 1935, it can be proved that there were only 14 Emma Ladner registered in the whole of the 1930 U.S. census and they were all white. There was no Emma Ladner at all registered in Stamford in 1930, so Emma Ladner probably had moved to Stamford after 1930.

According to the 1930 US census for Stamford, Sherman Ladner was a Canadian born carpenter born about 1890 living with his wife Katherine, also born in Canada around 1896

Therefore, since the Ladners living in Stamford in 1930 most probable were white, it can be concluded that there were no links between these Ladners and Tommy Ladnier.

In the 1935 Street Index, 105 Pacific has only two householders, *Baugh M Mrs* and *Scott Arthur* but it is not clear which of these was Tommy’s “friend”. The fact that he can be found in the 1935 directory indicates that he might have moved to Stamford already in 1934 – there are notations about people having died in November 1934. From the 1936 Stamford street index, it is possible to see that 105

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<sup>1</sup> Panassié, Hugues, *Bulletin du Hot Club de France No. 88 et 89 (Juin/Juillet 1959 et Juillet/Août 1959)*

...Tommy, dégoûté de rejouer pendant des soirées entières une musique de manège, préféra quitter New York. Il 'se rendit chez un ami qui habitait à la campagne, dans le Connecticut, comptant y passer quelques semaines. Il y resta près de deux ans, donnant des leçons de trompette ou jouant (pour de modestes cachets) dans de petites villes environnantes. Cette vie paisible lui plaisait, tandis que la vie trépidante de New York avait fini par lui devenir insupportable.

Pacific was a three family house. Therefore, Tommy Ladnier probably lived in the third apartment, hired by Baugh or Scott while he stayed in Stamford.

**Arthur Scott**, born 1884, lived at 203 Pacific as shown in the 1930 census with his wife Eddie, b 1887, his son Ellen (sic, the enumerator perhaps made a mistake), b 1912, four other children, his daughter in law, and a granddaughter. He was registered as a Negro, born in Georgia. Both Arthur and his son were “*laborers at asphalt work.*” Arthur Scott can also be found in the 1930 Price & Lee Stamford City Directory, which shows the address as “rear 203 Pacific” with 4 apartments and a shop (S Greenstein & Son, meat) fronting the street. The Scots remained at 203 Pacific in 1936 and 1937 but relocated in 1938 to 296 Pacific (rear). Considering the number of people the Scotts had in the apartment, it is unlikely that Tommy lived in their apartment.

**Mrs. M Baugh** was Marcella Baugh, in 1930 married to Joseph A. Baugh. In 1930, Joseph and Marcella, both registered as negroes, had a boarding house or hotel at Advocate Place, obviously specializing in attracting Afro-American customers. Advocate Place seems to have been demolished since then. Joseph, born in British West Indies in 1891, had become an U.S. citizen in 1913 and had married Marcella in 1924. Marcella was born in Georgia in 1898. With Joseph lived his brother in law, William Singleton, born in Florida in 1898<sup>2</sup>, and his sister in law, Antonia, born in Georgia in 1900. However, William’s potential relationship to the well-known drummer remains unknown.

In 1935, Joseph Baugh owned Astoria Hotel at 24 Gay Street, probably very close to Advocate Place. If the Baughs had separated in 1935 is not known but they seem to have had separate households with Joseph registered as living at his place of business at 24 Gay Street and Marcella living at 105 Pacific. Marcella then completely drops out of the city directory; she either moved away or died. Joseph remained registered as owner of Astoria Hotel in the Stamford city directories up to 1944.

**So what clues does this give us** to the “friend in Connecticut?” None of these people gives any obvious lead to whom Tommy visited – it could of course also have been someone else. However, it seems more likely that this friend was Baugh. It is also plausible that Tommy lived in the third apartment at 105 Pacific.

Stamford, Connecticut, is situated some 35 miles (56 km) north-east of New York. The town population in 1935 was some 56,720 with only 1,154 colored. Neither 105 Pacific nor 24 Gay Street can be found today; they have been replaced by what appears to be a town centre.

According to Hugues Panassié, Tommy Ladnier lived in Connecticut for almost two years – probably from late summer 1934 to spring 1936 – and subsequently spent some time in Philadelphia from spring 1936 to early summer 1936. He returned to Connecticut again after the Joe Louis – Max Schmeling bout June 19, 1936 which caused him all his savings. Whether he returned to Stamford or any other city at that time is not known. In any case, he was not completely gone from New York.

One proof of his New York presence is that drummer Kaiser Marshall told Panassié in Paris in 1937 that Tommy had waved goodbye to him from the wharf when leaving New York.

Another proof that Tommy stayed close to New York is that when Sidney Bechet again tried to form a New Orleans group with Tommy early in 1938, Tommy’s wife seems to have been with him and the old antagonism between her and Sidney once more surfaced. In his autobiography, Sidney wrote:

*I tried one time to get a real New Orleans band together, that was in 1938. It was with Tommy Ladnier. I wanted him to come with me and start a band where we could play how we wanted to play, composing our own numbers and all. ...Tommy, he was all enthused; but right away his wife, she began to get after him. She tells him, why don't he get a band of his own? “This way Sidney, he'll get all the credit.” ...I tried to talk to Tommy. I told him it could be his band; it didn't*

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<sup>2</sup> A Draft registration card for William Singleton from 1942 shows him, still living in Stamford, as born in Daytona, FL, December 14, 1896. He then states one James Watts, Stamford, as a brother in law.



As we have described in “Traveling Blues”, one **Daisy Ladnier** (registered as “Ladiner”) lived at 4632 Prairie Avenue as shown in the 1930 Chicago census. This address is rather close to the address given in the 1920 census. According to the 1930 census, Daisy Ladnier was born in 1902 in Michigan by parents from that state. Even though she was registered as “widow” in this census – which she in principle was at that time – she most certainly was Tommy Ladnier’s wife. The fact that she worked as a waitress at a café does make the change of first name this time somewhat plausible. We have to remember that census data often were provided by other people than the person concerned; the informant could be a neighbor, a landlord or someone else living in the same house. Another very strong factor for this assumption is that there were no other Ladnier or Ladners living in Chicago at this time. In fact, colored Ladniers/Ladners in general were – and still are – rather unusual outside Mississippi and Louisiana and in particular, there were very few in the northern states.

|     |                     |      |      |  |      |    |   |    |    |     |             |             |             |    |  |     |          |        |
|-----|---------------------|------|------|--|------|----|---|----|----|-----|-------------|-------------|-------------|----|--|-----|----------|--------|
| 106 | Montgomery, William | Head | R 32 |  | W Va | 35 | M | 23 | no | yes | Florida     | Florida     | Florida     | 29 |  | yes | Perito   | Light  |
|     | Olivia              | Wife |      |  | Pa   | 23 | M | 24 | no | yes | Alabama     | Alabama     | Alabama     | 72 |  | yes | Waitress | Café   |
|     | Robert              | Head | R 32 |  | Pa   | 27 | M | 46 | no | yes | Michigan    | Michigan    | Michigan    | 65 |  | yes | Waitress | Café   |
| 121 | Walter              | Head | R 32 |  | Pa   | 30 | M | 46 | no | yes | Michigan    | Michigan    | Michigan    | 24 |  | yes | Waitress | Street |
|     | Robert              | Head |      |  | Pa   | 28 | M | 45 | no | yes | Mississippi | Mississippi | Mississippi | 24 |  | yes | Waitress | Street |

We know that Tommy’s wife moved to Michigan after leaving Tommy in the early 1930s and Mezzrow states after Tommy’s death, in “Really the Blues“: “The police located a wife of Tommy’s in Jackson, Michigan, and she wired me to call her collect.” This indicates that Hazel B had a telephone at this time.

In the Jackson, Michigan, city directory of 1938 we find Mrs. **Hazel B. Ladnier**, 315 E Franklin, which marks the end of this street.<sup>4</sup> She was a householder, living in a single family house and had a telephone. She can also be found at this same address of 315 E Franklin in 1937. She stayed at this address until 1940 when she relocated to 209 E Wesley; at her old address lived one Janie Simpson in 1940. 209 E Wesley is located very close to E Franklin, in fact she just moved to the next block since E Wesley runs parallel to E Franklin. Hazel B. Ladnier then remained at 209 E Wesley until 1943. In 1941 and 1942 her occupation was stated as “maid.” Today, these houses are destroyed and replaced by a new family house and a parking lot respectively.



Jackson 1937

So everything fits very well with what Mezzrow wrote and Hazel B evidently used her married name after 1936.

However, if we search the Jackson City Directory of 1936, we can find one **Hazel B. Cloptin** living at 315 E Franklin. This is utterly strange. Without doubt this is Hazel B Ladnier living at the same address

<sup>4</sup> Polk’s Jackson City Directory 1938

as in 1937. Could Cloptin have been her real maiden name? Unfortunately, the Stamford city directories before 1936 are not available, so it is not possible to check who was living at this address before 1936.

Searching for Cloptin/Clopton indicates that very few black families with this name lived outside the South. Only 58 black female Cloptin/Clopton born between 1895 and 1905 can be found. Most of them lived in Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama. None with the “right” genealogical “profile” can be found, though.

Why Hazel B chose to submit the name Cloptin in 1936 remains a mystery. Perhaps, when the 1940 census will be made public during 2012, we can get more information about the mysterious Hazel B Ladnier, alias Hazel B Matthews, alias Daisy Ladnier, alias Hazel B Cloptin, possibly even alias Hazel B Thomas.

## The Willie Ladnier Marriages

As described in “Traveling Blues,” Alfred Ladnier married Willie (Willa) Williams in St. Tammany on January 20, 1898.<sup>5</sup> It is very probable that Alfred did not spend much time with his wife and son Tommy. Willie and Tommy Ladnier moved to Chicago in May 1917, almost 2,5 years before Alfred died on November 11, 1919.<sup>6</sup> In spite of this, Tommy Ladnier told Panassié that they left Mandeville after his father’s death.

According to a newly found Chicago marriage record index, Willie Ladnier married one **Joseph B Bell** on Wednesday March 27, 1918 in Chicago.<sup>7</sup> It is not known if her marriage to Alfred was legally dissolved, but since he was still alive at this time, it probably was.

Joseph Bingham Bell was born June 3 1872 or 1873 – he was not himself certain of the year according to his draft registration card from September 12, 1918. At this registration time he lived at 2904 Pine (Street), St. Louis. His nearest relative is stated as Willa Belle (sic), living in Chicago. His occupation is stated as “Express Man” (sic?) working in his own business and he is described as tall and slender. There is no evident trace of him in the 1920 census, neither in St Louis nor in Chicago.

| REGISTRATION CARD                                  |  | REGISTRAR'S REPORT   |   |                 |                 |
|--|--|--|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| SERIAL NUMBER                                      | ORDER NUMBER   | DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRANT  |   |                 |                 |
| 1 <i>Joseph Bingham Bell</i>                       |  | HEIGHT   | BUILD                                     |                 |                 |
| 2 <i>2904 Pine St. Louis Mo.</i>                   |  | T-1 Medium Short   | Slender Medium                            |                 |                 |
| 3 <i>not certain as to year</i>                    |  | 21 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 22 <input type="checkbox"/> 23 <input type="checkbox"/> 24 <input type="checkbox"/> 25 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 26 <input type="checkbox"/> 27 <input type="checkbox"/> 28 <input type="checkbox"/> 29 <input type="checkbox"/> 30 <input type="checkbox"/> 31 <input type="checkbox"/> 32 <input type="checkbox"/> 33 <input type="checkbox"/> 34 <input type="checkbox"/> 35 <input type="checkbox"/> 36 <input type="checkbox"/> 37 <input type="checkbox"/> 38 <input type="checkbox"/> 39 <input type="checkbox"/> 40 <input type="checkbox"/> 41 <input type="checkbox"/> 42 <input type="checkbox"/> 43 <input type="checkbox"/> 44 <input type="checkbox"/> 45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46 <input type="checkbox"/> 47 <input type="checkbox"/> 48 <input type="checkbox"/> 49 <input type="checkbox"/> 50 <input type="checkbox"/> 51 <input type="checkbox"/> 52 <input type="checkbox"/> 53 <input type="checkbox"/> 54 <input type="checkbox"/> 55 <input type="checkbox"/> 56 <input type="checkbox"/> 57 <input type="checkbox"/> 58 <input type="checkbox"/> 59 <input type="checkbox"/> 60 <input type="checkbox"/> 61 <input type="checkbox"/> 62 <input type="checkbox"/> 63 <input type="checkbox"/> 64 <input type="checkbox"/> 65 <input type="checkbox"/> 66 <input type="checkbox"/> 67 <input type="checkbox"/> 68 <input type="checkbox"/> 69 <input type="checkbox"/> 70 <input type="checkbox"/> 71 <input type="checkbox"/> 72 <input type="checkbox"/> 73 <input type="checkbox"/> 74 <input type="checkbox"/> 75 <input type="checkbox"/> 76 <input type="checkbox"/> 77 <input type="checkbox"/> 78 <input type="checkbox"/> 79 <input type="checkbox"/> 80 <input type="checkbox"/> 81 <input type="checkbox"/> 82 <input type="checkbox"/> 83 <input type="checkbox"/> 84 <input type="checkbox"/> 85 <input type="checkbox"/> 86 <input type="checkbox"/> 87 <input type="checkbox"/> 88 <input type="checkbox"/> 89 <input type="checkbox"/> 90 <input type="checkbox"/> 91 <input type="checkbox"/> 92 <input type="checkbox"/> 93 <input type="checkbox"/> 94 <input type="checkbox"/> 95 <input type="checkbox"/> 96 <input type="checkbox"/> 97 <input type="checkbox"/> 98 <input type="checkbox"/> 99 <input type="checkbox"/> 100 <input type="checkbox"/> |   | 37 <i>Brown</i> | 38 <i>Black</i> |
| 4 <i>45th June 3 1872 or 1873</i>                  |  | 39 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:   |   |                 |                 |
| RACE   |  | U. S. CITIZEN  |   |                 |                 |
| 5 <input type="checkbox"/> White                   | 6 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Negro          | 7 <input type="checkbox"/> Oriental  | 8 <input type="checkbox"/> Indian         |                 |                 |
| 9 <input type="checkbox"/> Citizen                 | 10 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> U. S. Citizen | 11 <input type="checkbox"/> Alien  | 12 <input type="checkbox"/> Non-declarant |                 |                 |
| 13 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Naturalized | 14 <input type="checkbox"/> Declared                 | 15 <input type="checkbox"/> U. S. Citizen  | 16 <input type="checkbox"/> Non-declarant |                 |                 |
| 17 <i>Express Man</i>                              | 18 <i>Myself</i>                                     | 19 I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true  |   |                 |                 |
| 19 <i>2904 Pine St. Louis Mo.</i>                  | 20 <i>Willa Belle Chicago Ill.</i>                   | P. M. G. O.  |   |                 |                 |
| 21 <i>Joseph Bingham Bell</i>                      |  | 22 <i>Sept 12, 1918</i>  |   |                 |                 |
| 23 <i>Joseph Bingham Bell</i>                      |  | 24 <i>Local Board 149, 17</i>  |   |                 |                 |
| 25 <i>Joseph Bingham Bell</i>                      |  | 26 <i>CITY OF ST. LOUIS, MO.</i>   |   |                 |                 |
| 27 <i>Joseph Bingham Bell</i>                      |  | 27 <i>S. E. Cor. Spring Ave. &amp; Olive St.</i>   |   |                 |                 |
| 28 <i>Joseph Bingham Bell</i>                      |  | 28 <i>(STAMP OF LOCAL BOARD)</i>   |   |                 |                 |
| 29 <i>Joseph Bingham Bell</i>                      |  | 29 <i>(The stamp of the Local Board having jurisdiction of the area in which the registrant has his permanent home shall be placed in this box.)</i>   |   |                 |                 |

<sup>5</sup> According to Louisiana Marriages 1718-1925.

<sup>6</sup> According to Louisiana Statewide Death Index, 1900-1949

<sup>7</sup> Cook County, Illinois, Marriages Index, 1871-1920

From the marriage index we also learn that Willie was 37 years old in 1918 and thus born about 1881. This is completely new information since we earlier only had the erroneous Chicago Defender statement that she was 37 years old at her death in 1923.

Since Willie was known as Willie Ladnier at her death, it is very probable that the marriage to Joseph Bell was short and dissolved before her death. Joseph Bell might even have died before 1920 – the Spanish flue ended many marriages. In any case, Willie evidently reassumed the Ladnier surname.

The link to Joseph Bell and St Louis is very interesting from another point of view. It has been alleged within the Ladnier family that Willie and Tommy spent some time in St Louis on their way from Mandeville to Chicago. It has also been said that Willie married another man. We now have an indication that Willie and Thomas probably did go to St Louis first and that Willie probably met Joseph there. The St Louis link is also interesting since Tommy spent some time in that city, as a professional musician, around 1921-1922.

## Maple Leaf Rag Recording 1932

The New Orleans Feetwarmers recorded 6 titles in September 1932. On Victor 23360, the title *Maple Rag, Foxtrot by Joe Jordan* is stated. Jordan (1882 – 1971) actually composed this song but the tune played by the Feetwarmers is Scott Joplin's much more well-known *Maple Leaf Rag*. This mistake was probably made by Victor since Ladnier and Bechet certainly knew the song title and the composer. Perhaps the mistake also can be explained by the fact that *Sweetie Dear*, recorded the same day, also was composed by Jordan on collaboration with Will Marion Cook.

This mistake clearly was observed by Victor and most reissues of this recording bears the title *Maple Leaf Rag* composed by Scott Joplin. This mistitling has not been noticed by discographers. In the discography to "Traveling Blues," the title is given as *Maple Leaf Rag* but there should have been a remark added about the original record mistitling.

(Courtesy to Björn Englund for this observation)

