

Some of the members also formed the basis for the orchestra for the *Theatre de la Renaissance* which was for "free coloreds."

Several residents of the "Paris of the South" as New Orleans was called, achieved recognition beyond their city.

PICAYUNE BUTLER was a virtuoso banjoist whose career began in the 1820s and was known along the entire length of "The River" as the Mississippi was affectionately known. He acquired such consummate skill that he was invited to become a participant in a competition in New York City in 1857. Contemporary writers reported that had he not broken two strings during the contest, he would have been declared the winner. Even so, despite this handicap, he acquitted himself admirably on the required sets of schotische, reel, waltz, polka and jig. It is alleged that he was the composer of many of the songs that white minstrels performed on stage. So popular was he, that an anonymous minstrel (white) wrote a song in his honor. Picayune Butler's *Come To Town* for inclusion in a published collection of songs of the minstrelsy in 1858.

A common form of advertising wares for street vendors to go through residential sections of town calling out the various attributes of their product and encouraging potential customers with original verses to their recognizable "theme song."

SIGNOR CORNMEAL was such a vendor. Reputed to have a wide vocal range, and enjoying tremendous popularity, his given name is unknown, but his stage name was obviously adopted from his vocation. He was saved from anonymity because he was the first Black to perform on the stage of a white theatre anywhere in the United States. The event took place at the St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans in 1837.

Opening his program with his own song, *Fresh Corn Meal*, he followed that with popular songs of the day.

So enthralled were his audiences by his voice, and presence, that upon his death, it has been said that the entire city mourned him.

As noted earlier, classicists were an important thread in the fabric of music that cloaked the free Black in New Orleans, and the Negro Philharmonic Society was the weaver.

RICHARD LAMBERT, along with Constantine Debarque, became a permanent director of the Society in the 1830s. Lambert was a violinist of note, and a music teacher. He sired four sons and two daughters. The four sons became professional musicians; both daughters played the piano, and one became a music teacher.

LUCIEN LAMBERT, the eldest son, early indicated the seriousness with which he viewed music, for he would practice on the piano for six or more hours daily. This dedication enabled him to achieve laudatory recognition as a pianist by the cognoscenti of New Orleans; and he soon outpaced local instructors. The decision was made that he should pursue further study in Paris. Upon completion of his studies in Europe, he returned to his native city, only to find the color bar intolerable. He then settled in Brazil where he became involved with piano manufacture.

As a composer, he was quite prolific; *Etude Mazurka*, *La Juive*, and *Au Clair de la Lune* (with variations) being three of the more familiar.

SIDNEY LAMBERT, the second son, also composed for and played piano. His major contribution was a manual for piano instruction which achieved for him an award for merit from the King of Portugal. He, too, went to Paris where he remained as an instructor of music.

The younger Lambert sons remained in New Orleans and became associated with the St. Bernard's Brass Band.



James Weldon Johnson

(1871-1938)

Outstanding American poet, author and essayist, his works in the field of literature are world renowned. He was also the first black Executive Director of the N.A.A.C.P.

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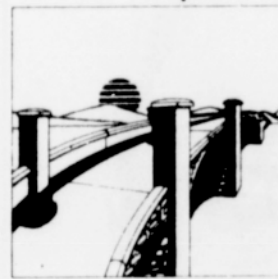
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Garrett A. Morgan, 1877-1963

Kentucky-born Garrett Morgan received wide recognition for his outstanding contributions to public safety. Firemen in many cities in the early 1900's wore the safety helmet and gas mask that he invented, and for which he was awarded a gold medal at the Second International Exposition of Safety and Sanitation in New York in 1914. Two years later, he himself used the mask to rescue men trapped by a gas explosion in a tunnel being constructed under Lake Erie. Following the disaster which took 21 lives, the City of Cleveland honored him with a gold medal for his heroic efforts.

In 1923, Morgan received a patent for his new concept—a traffic signal to regulate vehicle movement in city areas. "Stop" and "Go" signs were systematically raised and lowered at intersections to bring order out of chaos and improve traffic safety. Some years later, after he had sold his design to the General Electric Company, Morgan's device was replaced with the light signal in use today.



Archie Alexander, 1888-1958

Archie Alexander, a design and construction engineer, left his stamp on the landscape of America by building bridges, freeways, airfields, railroad trestles and powerplants.

Born in Iowa, Alexander attended the State University and received an engineering degree in 1912. After several years as a design engineer, he and a former classmate established their own engineering firm and constructed major projects across the Nation. Starting at home, they built the heating plant and powerhouse at the University of Iowa, a sewage treatment plant in Grand Rapids, Michigan, an airfield in Tuskegee,

Alabama, and the Tidal Basin bridge and seawall and the Whitehurst Freeway in Washington, D.C.

Alexander received many awards during the course of his career. At the centennial celebration of the University of Iowa in 1947, he was named one of its outstanding alumni. In 1954, President Eisenhower honored him with the appointment as Territorial Governor of the Virgin Islands.

Fred Meyer

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