

And this particular fella that made, in the '50s he made this 'I'm Tore Up Drunk As I Could Be' — he's in East St. Louis now. He played guitar and he played real high on the guitar, y'know high pitch on the guitar . . . Billy Gayles! That's who I'm talking about and now who else was this uh made the 'Night Train'? Yeah Jimmy Forrest is correct. So those were the people that were more or less working steady around St. Louis. I think Milton was, Milton Sparks — if he was alive during that time he was playing — Milton was doing a lot of vocalist [*sic*] around when he could find someone to work with. He more or less worked with his brother but if I'm not mistaken I believe he did some work with Joe Dean and he done some with me of course when I would go out. But I never did too much of it after that as I said, I kinda folded up. Brown had got inactive — occasionally he'd go out and do some gigs back in the '50s but I think he kinda folded up after Ike passed on him — he wasn't too strong anymore. I think Mary Johnson begin to go out of the thing about that time. Oh Gibson was around — I believe he Clifford was around — I think he died the late part of the '50s if I'm correct. Somewhere around about this time was one of the reasons why I wasn't too interested. St. Louis had kinda keeled over for Blues musicians — for musicians *period!* So that was some of the reasons that I had cut it loose. More or

less after Walter passed I kinda closed out on my music — it kinda done something to me and I kinda slowed it down, until Michael Stewart was implicated in me coming back into it. That must have been the '60s — oh '65 or something that I really went back into it.'

#### Notes

- 1 *Jamieson* is almost certainly wrong. No street of that name intersects with Market on any map I have studied.
- 2 Jesse Johnson, owner of the DeLuxe Music Shop and major talent scout-entrepreneur of St. Louis in the '20s.
- 3 This is Aaron 'Pinetop' Sparks.
- 4 Probably *Horn Lake Road*.
- 5 This may be New Madrid, Mo.
- 6 The four Henry 'Thomas' sides were recorded 11th December 1933 according to *B&GR* and were part of a large week-end session involving other St. Louis artists Roosevelt Sykes, Walter Davis, Teddy Darby, Carl Rafferty, Napoleon Fletcher among others.
- 7 Probably Othum Brown who recorded for Ora Nelle.
- 8 According to Police reports which Francis Smith obtained and discussed in *Nothing But The Blues*, p. 5, 'Straw' was an alias for

Sonny Boy himself! This has never been corroborated by any of Sonny Boy's contemporaries and Henry's account would seem to be the true one. Mistakes can easily occur in abstracting from Police files some twenty years after the event.

#### Selected Discography

All Henry Townsend's pre-1941 sides, save the undiscovered Paramount, are available on reissues. The following are recommended to those who have yet to delve into the fascinating pre-War Blues of St. Louis:

Yazoo L1003 'St. Louis Town' contains one Townsend title.  
 Yazoo L1030 'St. Louis Blues 1929–1935 The Depression' contains five Townsend titles including 'Sick With The Blues'.  
 Mamlish S3806 'Hard Time Blues St. Louis 1933–1940' contains one Townsend title.

Other associated albums are:

Origin OJL 20 'The Blues In St. Louis 1929–1937' (two Townsend titles also on Yazoo L1030).  
 Mamlish S3805 'Good Time Blues St. Louis 1926–1932'.

Fine examples of Henry's recent work, 1969–74, are to be found on Adelphi AD1016 'Henry T — Music Man' and a St. Louis anthology Adelphi AD1012 'Things Have Changed'.

# The Birth of the Boogie

'I want all of you to know — Pine Top's Boogie Woogie'

Bob Hall & Richard Noblett



(Sylvia Pitcher)

So begins the A-take of the most famous boogie woogie of all time. Clarence 'Pine Top' Smith was born in Troy in southern Alabama on June 11th 1904, the son of Molly Smith and an unknown father. At some time in his teens Clarence moved north to Birmingham, Alabama, a city with a strong blues tradition which nurtured such pianists as Walter Roland and Jabbo Williams. It is here that he learnt piano and was well remembered playing there in the early 1920s. It seems, however, that he led the life of a travelling musician because during these years he also toured widely on the Theatre Owners' Booking Agency (TOBA) vaudeville circuit in the company of such artists as Ma and Pa Rainey, Butterbeans and Susie (Joe and Susie Edwards) and Coot Grant and Sox Wilson (Leola B. and Wesley Wilson). Clarence appears to have acted as an accompanist and also to have performed his own comedy, song and dance routine. In 1920 he seems to have settled in Pittsburgh, and it was while playing in a club on Schem Alley that the pianist Cow Cow Davenport saw him. Davenport, an important figure in the music business, acted as a part-time talent scout for Brunswick and at his instigation Clarence moved to Chicago around 1924. He is reputed to have stayed with his wife, Sarah and their two children in a house on South Parkway, which he shared with Meade 'Lux' Lewis and Albert Ammons. Chicago at that time had a flourishing rent party circuit, and it was probable that Clarence made at least part of his living in this way. He was, however, more versatile than the other rent party pianists and it was likely that some theatre engagements also made their contribution. By 1928 Clarence's reputation reached the ears of Mayo Williams, probably through Davenport, and Williams arranged a recording session at the Brunswick studios in the Furniture Mart in Chicago on December 3rd. This session, for Pine Top Smith and on two tracks, his Hokum Jug Band, proved abortive, as did further sessions on the 7th and 8th, the latter with vocalist Alberta Reynolds. Williams persevered, however, and on Saturday 29th December he finally struck lucky. The second song recorded at this session was the immortal 'Pine Top's Boogie Woogie' which, even if the music was by then fairly familiar, introduced a new term into the language.

Further successful recording sessions followed for Brunswick on January 14th and 15th 1929 and on March 13th. However, on March 14th 1929 tragedy struck and Clarence was hit in the chest by a stray bullet whilst at a party sponsored by an Odd Fellows Lodge on Orleans Street, Chicago. He died at Henrotin Hospital on March 15th and was buried in the Restvale Cemetery for Negroes about ten miles southwest of the city. Strangely a search of both the *Chicago Defender* and the *Chicago Tribune* for the period in question reveals no account of his



'It has been suggested that he had a pointed head . . .'

death and the two adverts for Vo. 1245 which appeared in the *Defender* after his death made no mention of it.<sup>1</sup> However some of the details can be checked on his death certificate.<sup>2</sup> This shows the name of his assailant to be David Bell, who was subsequently arraigned before the Grand Jury on a charge of manslaughter, and also that Clarence's address at the time was 1009 Larrabee Street.

It is curious that the events of March 14th/15th were not recorded in the media at the time, if, as suggested by his wife Sarah, Clarence was a well known public figure. It thus seems possible that his popularity was largely posthumous, since none of his recordings were issued until after his death.

There is some confusion surrounding the nickname 'Pine Top' and various explanations have been put forward at different times. It has been suggested that he had a pointed head like a pine tree but according to his wife, 'When Smith was a small boy in Alabama he and a chum fixed up a telephone line which ran from the top of a pine tree to another. It was a tin can affair with a string. They spent a lot of time up in the trees 'talking' with each other - so much time that Smith's mother kiddingly started calling her son 'Pine Top'.' (Pease, S.: *Downbeat*, Oct. 1, 1939). Another explanation is that Clarence was very tall and had red hair, the latter commonly found amongst negroes due to a dietary deficiency in childhood, and 'Pine Top' was the current nickname for such people. Whatever the true explanation Clarence 'Pine Top' Smith is remembered as the first to record a piece called a 'boogie woogie' and is so credited with its invention.

Although Pine Top Smith undoubtedly introduced the term 'boogie woogie' into the English language, and is so credited in the Oxford English Dictionary, (see Cowley, 1973), the term has an origin much older than that. Prior to 1928 it is reported to have been used in the South to mean secondary syphilis (Hurston, 1942), which even if unconfirmed indicates an earlier usage.

Paul Oliver has mentioned the use of the term 'booger rooger', (e.g. Blind Lemon Jefferson: 'Booger Rooger Blues' recorded in 1926), to describe a type of wild party and the term 'booger' is an Americanism for bogy traced back to 1866. Boogie is thus a term which could well have resulted from bogy, and boogie was also used as a synonym for negro. (Mencken, 1944).

What probably happened is a fairly typical linguistic change in that words of similar sound came together in a new word which takes on shades of meaning from all sources. Thus 'bogy' and 'booger' from English, possibly 'bouger', meaning to move or stir, from French<sup>3</sup> and West African words such as 'buga' (or 'bugi' before a noun object) from Hausa and 'bug' from Mandingo, both of which mean 'to beat' including the sense 'to beat a drum'. It is interesting to note that in Sierra Leone the black West African English 'to dance' is 'bogi', and it is clear from his vocal that Pine Top intended the term 'boogie woogie' to mean a type of

**Vocalium**  
**25**  
**best sellers**

Jelly Whippin' Blues Tampa Red and Georgia Tom 1251  
Train Time Blues Tampa Red and Georgia Tom 1261  
Baby, Don't You Love Me No More Leroy Carr 1241  
How Long, How Long Blues Number 2 Leroy Carr 1241  
Prison Bound Blues Leroy Carr 1257  
How Can I Get It? Frankie Hall Pint Joon 1215  
Fun It Leroy Carr 1241  
Pine Top Blues Pine Top's Boogie Woogie Pine Top Smith 1244  
It's Tight Like That Tampa Red and Georgia Tom 1216  
Chicago Moan Blues Tampa Red and Georgia Tom 1259  
Grievin' Me Blues Tampa Red and Georgia Tom 1254  
It's Tight Like That Tampa Red and Georgia Tom 1258  
Think of Me Thinking of You Leroy Carr 1255  
Happi A.K.A. Leroy Carr 1254  
Good Gordon Gin Tampa Red's Harlem Jug Band 1258  
Down the Alley Tampa Red's Harlem Jug Band 1258  
How Long, How Long Blues Tampa Red 1255  
It's Tight Like That Pine Top Smith 1255  
Big Boy, They Can't Do That Pine Top Smith 1255  
Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out Pine Top Smith, Reynolds 1232  
Truthful Blues You Got to Reap What You Sow Leroy Carr 1263  
Shake That Jelly Roll June C. Cobb and 1263  
Don't Cry Honey Has Grains of Corn 1260  
Hain and Eggs Bassinet Sunset Four 1255  
Mighty Day Rev. D. C. Rice 1193  
Come and See Coreless Love Blues Lulu Jackson 1228  
Take My Yoke Upon You Lulu Jackson 1191  
You're Going to Leave the Old Home, Jim Lulu Jackson 1193  
Coreless Love Blues Lulu Jackson 1228  
It's Tight Like That Tampa Red's Harlem Jug Band 1191  
How Long, How Long Blues Leroy Carr 1262  
My Own Lonesome Blues Leroy Carr 1262  
I'm in the Battle Field for My Lord Rev. D. C. Rice and His Sanctified Congregation 1252  
Chinin' the Blues Chas. Cow Davenport 1249  
Alabama Strut Chas. Cow Davenport 1249  
Texas Worried Blues Henry Thomas 1246  
Fishing Blues Henry Thomas 1246  
Long Ago Blues Georgia Tom 1243  
Lonesome Alan Blues Georgia Tom 1248  
I Heard the Angels Singing Rev. E. W. Clayborn 1248  
I Shall Not Be Moved Chippie Hill 1144  
Trouble in Mind Blues Chippie Hill 1144  
Hangman Blues Chippie Hill 1144  
Jim Jackson's Kansas City Blues Jim Jackson  
Jim Jackson's Kansas City Blues Jim Jackson

Artists featured in portraits: Leroy Carr, Tampa Red, Frankie Jaxon, Jimmie Noone, Rev. D. C. Rice, Lulu Jackson, Chippie Hill, Cow Cow Davenport.

(courtesy Hall/Noblett)

dance. (Dalby, 1972). It is also interesting to note that after years of referring to a particular style of piano playing the term 'boogie' has reverted to this meaning in popular music.

**Notes**

1. Conducted by Laurie Wright of *Storyville* magazine.
2. Kindly obtained for us by Erwin Helfer.
3. We are indebted to Francis Smith for drawing this to our attention.

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