

ABSTRACT

“Where East Texas Dances”: The Cooper Club of Henderson,
Rusk County, and Popular Dance Bands, 1932-1942

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A historical study of the Cooper Club in Henderson, Texas, which was open from 1932 to 1942, uncovers an exciting period in both American and East Texas history. Nationally, dance orchestras embarked on tours of the United States, playing one-night stands in small towns. Locally, the nightclub existed during the great East Texas oil boom. Under the management of owner Hugh Cooper, the Cooper Club became a staple for music lovers in East Texas who appreciated its elegant atmosphere and high caliber of entertainment. Local, regional, and national dance bands played one-night stands and brought to the oil field the latest in popular sweet music, swing, and jazz. The Cooper Club has significance and is deserving of scholarly research, for it shines light on the social and cultural history of Henderson, Texas, from 1932 to 1942, as well as the excitement of famous orchestras coming to a small town.

"Where East Texas Dances": The Cooper Club of Henderson,
Rusk County, and Popular Dance Bands, 1932-1942

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the American Studies Program

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

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Accepted by the Graduate School
May 2007

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PREFACE

To say that I was shocked when I first learned of the Cooper Club less than two years ago would be an understatement. The nightclub came to my attention as I was flipping through the pages of *Rusk County History* in search of a local history topic for this master's thesis. As someone who was born and reared in the town of Henderson, Texas, and who loved music from the thirties and forties, how was it that I had never heard about the Cooper Club? During its lifetime, the nightclub had featured many of the top dance bands of the day and attracted customers from all over East Texas. I could not understand how a place that had once been a fixture of the East Texas area was now all but forgotten by the community. If ever there was a topic with my name on it, this was it.

As both an undergraduate and graduate student at Baylor University, I chose American Studies as my degree program. American history has always fascinated me, and the interdisciplinary structure of the American Studies Program gave me the freedom to explore the past of the United States from the viewpoints of multiple fields. To my delight, the subject of the Cooper Club fit perfectly into my American Studies background. The nightclub offered me the chance to consider the music industry, economy, politics, and popular culture of both East Texas and the nation during the Great Depression through the beginning of World War II. Plus, the topic demanded a look at the social mores of the area and era in which the Cooper Club existed and how they affected the night spot. The result is a social and cultural history of a community in East Texas during the 1930s and early forties and how it fit into the national music scene.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Researching and writing a master's thesis is a huge project that is impossible to accomplish alone. This final product of the history of the Cooper Club reflects the many individuals who helped to give it form and meaning, and I would like to offer them my gratitude.

Thanks are certainly due to the libraries whose resources were invaluable to my research. Employees of the Rusk County Library in Henderson, Texas, allowed me to haunt their microfilm machine room for several weeks and were extremely helpful with any questions that I presented. On the Baylor University campus, the staff and student workers of Moody Memorial and Jesse H. Jones libraries and The Texas Collection were also of great assistance with all of my research needs.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to the Baylor University Institute for Oral History. Had I not worked there as both an undergraduate and graduate student, this master's thesis would have been on an entirely different topic, for it was through my experience at the BUIOH that I developed an appreciation for local history and learned the value of oral history. Moreover, the BUIOH was kind enough to lend me the equipment I needed in order to conduct the interviews for this project.

That brings me to another group of people who I must thank: the interviewees. They were more than kind in allowing a perfect stranger to come into their homes and ask questions. Their reminiscences of the Cooper Club lent a firsthand point of view to its story that is priceless. Moreover, through the process, I met many individuals who

had lived in the Henderson area their entire lives, and I came away from each interview with a greater understanding and appreciation for my hometown.

Moving on, I would also like to express my gratitude to Robert Forester. As the grandson of Randolph Harris, the man who designed many of the materials for the Cooper Club dances, Forester had in his possession a collection of invitations, flyers, signs, and tickets and was gracious enough to allow me to borrow these treasured items.

I am particularly indebted to my director, Dr. Thomas L. Charlton, who was a wealth of ideas in ways to better this thesis. His encouragement and optimism were appreciated more than he will ever know. I would also like to express my appreciation to my second and third readers, Dr. Jean Ann Boyd and Dr. Douglas R. Ferdon, for their valuable input.

Finally, I must thank my parents, Mike and Beth Holland, for their contributions. My dad instilled in me his love of reading, music, and history, and for this I will always be grateful. Moreover, he is responsible for my interest in the music that this thesis discusses. Thanks to him, I grew up listening to the strains of Glenn Miller, Harry James, and countless other musicians of the big band era and developed a lasting affection for the genre. Ultimately, this thesis would not have been possible without my mom. Throughout the process, she was a constant source of encouragement and support and from the very beginning understood what I was trying to accomplish in my research—and why it took so long. She endured countless phone calls from me when I needed a sounding board, someone to listen to my fears and concerns, or a conversation about anything but my thesis. I appreciate her contributions more than words can say.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The 1930s will forever be synonymous with the Great Depression. In the United States, unemployment reached levels as high as 25 percent, which compelled many Americans to question both the economic and governmental systems of their struggling nation. It was a distressing time in which to live, for people were unsure of what the future held. No one could say with certainty when or if the United States would be able to recover.

But in one little corner of the country, the 1930s took on an entirely different meaning. In October of 1930, Columbus M. “Dad” Joiner struck oil on the Daisy Bradford No. 3 well in the piney woods of Northeast Texas and uncovered the great East Texas oil field.¹ The vast pool of oil was one of the richest and largest ever discovered in North America and spanned more than 140,000 acres across Rusk, Gregg, Upshur, Smith, and Cherokee counties.² By the spring of 1931, while the rest of America was awash with closing factories and breadlines, East Texas was the scene of a boom without precedent in the United States. People from all over the country with hopes of finding

¹Virginia Knapp and Megan Biesele, “Rusk County,” in *The New Handbook of Texas*, vol. 5., ed. Ron Tyler, Douglas E. Barnett, Roy R. Barkley, Penelope C. Anderson, and Mark F. Odintz (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 725.

²James A. Clark and Michel T. Halbouty, *The Last Boom* (Fredericksburg, Tex.: Shearer Publishing, 1984), 109.

wealth—or at the very least a steady, paying job—flocked by the thousands into the area.³

At the center of this frenzy was the sleepy little town of Henderson, Texas. Located in the center of Rusk County, of which it was the county seat, Henderson rested a few miles east of where Joiner had struck oil.⁴ The town had entered the decade quite innocuously with 2,932 residents who had no inkling of the drastic changes on the horizon. At the time, Henderson featured a sewer system, electricity, a new courthouse, and five-and-a-half miles of paved roads. It was a largely agricultural community, with cotton as the staple crop.⁵

As a city in a far East Texas county—in fact, only one county away from the Louisiana border—Henderson’s characteristics resembled the Deep South more so than towns in other sections of the state. Conditions for African-Americans had not improved much from the days of slavery.⁶ Many white residents could trace their lineage to settlers who in the early 1800s had moved into Rusk County from Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.⁷ Generally, these people had great physical endurance and were fundamentalist in their Christian faith. It did not take much for tempers to flare, and

³Ibid., 123.

⁴Knapp and Biesele, 723.

⁵Ibid., 725.

⁶Clark and Halbouty, 5.

⁷Knapp and Biesele, 724. See also Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South*, with a prologue by Forrest McDonald (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988). According to McWhiney’s “Celtic Thesis,” the majority of these early settlers who came to Rusk County from the Old South were most likely descendants of the large number of Celts who immigrated to the antebellum South from Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Cornwall and embedded their culture into the American South.

grudges could endure for long periods of time. On the other hand, with those they trusted, these people were also generous and shared lifelong friendships.⁸

For Henderson, as well as its neighboring towns in surrounding counties, the oil boom could not have come at a better time. Along with the rest of the country, the small town had begun the thirties experiencing the effects of the Great Depression, and banks were failing.⁹ Even more devastating to this largely agricultural community was the drought that had been plaguing the area for several seasons.¹⁰ With the mineral boom, it appeared that their prayers had been answered and God was smiling down on East Texas. Within the first week after Joiner struck oil, the First National Bank and Citizens National Bank in Henderson received a total of \$150,000 in new deposits, and people across the county earned an estimated \$500,000 from the sudden influx in business.¹¹ Newcomers poured into the city, and by 1936, the population had quadrupled, reaching an estimated 12,000 residents.¹² In Rusk County as a whole, the population doubled between 1930 and 1936, from approximately 32,000 to 65,000, as people from every career background imaginable swarmed into the oil field hoping to find work. Now a hopping boomtown, Henderson witnessed the rapid building of new hotels, offices, places of business, and homes. Suddenly, the formerly provincial town was caught up in

⁸Clark and Halbouty, 5-6.

⁹E. F. Crim and Elizabeth Mason, interview by author, 20 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

¹⁰Clark and Halbouty, 5.

¹¹Knapp and Biesele, 725.

¹²*Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide: 1936* (Dallas: Dallas News, 1936), 153.

a dizzying whirl of wealth.¹³ Oil had delivered the people from the grip of the Great Depression.

However, the East Texas oil boom had an ugly side that Henderson could not escape. For one thing, there were massive amounts of the types of debaucheries typically associated with boom towns: thievery, shootings, gambling, prostitution, and bootlegging.¹⁴ Moreover, lawsuits abounded by the thousands as people tried to reclaim land and mineral rights they felt were theirs.¹⁵ Furthermore, the oil boom was more of a curse than a blessing for many people in the area, especially poor white tenant farmers and blacks. Although some of these people found jobs in the oil field, many were left to face falling agricultural prices and skyrocketing prices for houses and land.¹⁶ The black population also too often fell victim to swindlers. Many schemers looking to make money at any cost tricked blacks into selling the mineral rights to their land for mere fractions of what they were worth.¹⁷

On top of all of these negatives was still another unflattering dimension that prompted the state government to take action. The majority of wildcatters caught up in the excitement of the boom had no basic understanding of the oil industry or economics, and that, accompanied by greed, spelled trouble. People assumed that if a little bit of oil

¹³Knapp and Biesele, 725.

¹⁴Clark and Halbouty, 139.

¹⁵Ibid., 241.

¹⁶Knapp and Biesele, 725.

¹⁷Clark and Halbouty, 133.

was a good thing, then great quantities of oil would be much better.¹⁸ With thousands of oil derricks pumping all day and all night, the market quickly became saturated, and oil sold for as little as two cents a barrel.¹⁹ In an attempt to put a stop to the excessive output of oil, in mid-August of 1931, Texas Governor Ross Sterling declared martial law in the oil field and sent in the National Guard to shut down all oil and gas wells.²⁰ Wildcatters were not pleased. A month later, the Railroad Commission of Texas reopened the field with new proration guidelines, but several oil field workers gave no heed to them and pumped above and beyond the allowable amount on a daily basis. In the oil field, this illegal oil was commonly known as *hot oil*.²¹

Soon, the East Texas oil field became a testing ground for creative minds attempting to outsmart the state government. In the dark of night, many wildcatters secretly buried pipelines. With the flip of a switch, oil could easily flow from one spot to another right under the noses of troops. If the military uncovered these sources of hot oil, the savvy simply used other methods: they dug deeper, found other places to bury their pipelines, used rubber firehoses through which to pump their oil in order to remain hidden from metal detectors, or utilized countless other tactics.²² When Railroad Commission officials attempted to investigate refineries to see if they were manufacturing this hot oil, employees often met them at the door with poised shotguns

¹⁸Ibid., 156.

¹⁹Ibid., 161-162.

²⁰Carl Coke Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 320.

²¹Ibid., 321.

²²Clark and Halbouty, 175-177.

and threats of violence.²³ It was a crazy time, to say the least. Wildcatters, with protest in their hearts and dollar signs in their eyes, and government officials were running around the East Texas oil field engaging in activities fit for a farce. It was a scene of chaos.

Amid all of this turmoil, local businessman Hugh Cooper provided the people of East Texas with an escape. Most likely prompted by the sudden economic boom, in the fall of 1932 in the town of Henderson, he built the Cooper Club, a nightclub that became the calm eye in the middle of the storm until it closed a decade later in 1942. The Cooper Club was not the only night spot in the oil field or even the first, but it was one of the best. Oftentimes, the terms *nightclubs*, *dance halls*, and *honky-tonks*, especially those in boom towns, insinuated unseemly behavior, but the Cooper Club was far removed from that description. Throughout the night spot's existence, Cooper took precautions to ensure that his club had a clean and elegant atmosphere. A few nights each month, the club opened its doors and presented the public with dance orchestras playing popular sweet music, swing, and jazz of the day. Patrons had the chance to enjoy live music, dance, meet new people, and forget about the fiasco occurring all around them in the oil field.

What made the Cooper Club an especially exciting place was the type of talent it was able to book. Many of the biggest names in American popular music of the thirties and early forties appeared onstage for one-night stands, names such as Jan Garber, Ella Fitzgerald, Bob Crosby, Duke Ellington, and Ben Bernie. These were bandleaders who

²³Rister, 322.

East Texans had never even dreamed they would one day see in person. And the Cooper Club, a diamond in the rough, so to speak, proved hard to forget, even for musicians who had played the best places in the nation. It tickled the fancy of Ben Bernie and Jan Garber to the point that they mentioned the nightclub over nationwide broadcasts.

Irrefutably, the oil boom of East Texas played a huge part in Hugh Cooper's ability to book these bands to play one-night stands at the Cooper Club. There was new money in the area, and it was no secret, for newspapers far and wide carried news of the boom. But even so, the oil field was a long way from places such as New York City, Chicago, and the West Coast where renown musical groups typically had their headquarters. Indeed, oil was not the only factor that was luring the top names in the music business to Henderson.

Nationwide Popularity of One-Night Stands in Small Towns

The Cooper Club opened at a unique time for out-of-the-way one-night stand locations in American history. From approximately 1930 to 1942, the modest size of a community could actually help it to attract the top entertainers in the nation. Dance bands were all the rage, but they were not immune to the Great Depression. As a result, by automobile, bus, and train, they were showing up in the most unlikely of places. The entertainment trade magazine *Variety* took note of this growing trend in the spring of 1931 with an article amusingly titled "Bands Prefer Sticks." According to *Variety's* observations of the music business of that era, three facts were economically plaguing orchestras: (1) their usual venues in the larger cities were unable to pay what they once had, (2) record sales were down, (3) and advertisers were not offering substantial pay for

radio spots.²⁴ In an effort to find other avenues of revenue, musical aggregations looked to small towns, a huge untapped resource where residents were hungry for first-rate entertainment. In fact, the *Variety* article of 1931 viewed these destinations as the salvation of dance bands:

Barnstorming holds the new promise of bookings for name bands. This summer will see an outpouring of musical nabobs into the tall alfalfa. There lies the only prospect of prosperity.²⁵

These venues were making it possible for many bands to survive those early, bleak days of the Great Depression. *Variety* went on to add, “It’s no secret orchestras are now hitting the back lanes and smaller junctions which a few years ago most ignored.”²⁶

Although some people in the American music business probably dismissed tours through smaller towns as a momentary fad, these dances flourished, and *Variety* continued to report on their success throughout the decade. In 1934, the magazine informed readers, “Barnstorming one-night tours have been panning out quite well for itinerant dance bands this summer,” and the next year brought “lots of reinvigorated demand on the road for name dance bands.”²⁷ In a continuation of the trend, the year 1937 witnessed a “sudden spurt in one niter business . . . [that] sent the band booking line up to a new high,” and *Variety* estimated that approximately 7,800 one-night stands

²⁴“Bands Prefer Sticks,” *Variety*, 29 April 1931, 83.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷“Barnstorming Orks Getting Good Kale in Rural 1-Niters,” *Variety*, 31 July 1934, 39; “New Band Name Yen in the Sticks,” *Variety*, 22 May 1935, 1.

existed nationwide, “with locations ranging from villages of 2,000 on up to big cities.”²⁸

Tours of one-night stands fast became a staple of almost any dance orchestra in the thirties.

Strong incentives existed for dance orchestras to spend so much time hopping from one town to another. The most enticing one, of course, was money. A telling sign of just how profitable a tour could be appeared in September of 1934 in *Variety*:

American Federation of Musicians has finally given up its long fight to kill off the traveling orchestra fad. Despite heavy taxes, opposition and other obstacles imposed by the Federation, the traveling orchestra continues to grow and prosper, with the public still handing out coin for talent, whether it's local or from another section of the country.

Recognizing that it can't whip the public into doing without name talent, the Federation on Sept. 15 will abolish its 30 % taxation on orchestras playing traveling engagements in hotels, cafes, inns, restaurants and dance halls of any kind. Federation admits that the tax is too high and has not accomplished its purpose.²⁹

The musicians union had attempted to stop touring orchestras because it feared that these groups would put local musicians out of work.³⁰ The fact that tours of one-night stands could not only withstand but flourish when faced with a 30 percent tax speaks volumes about the success of these gigs. In 1937, *Variety* commented further on the lucrative nature of playing in unconventional places: “Claim is that many of the smaller spots, including those far off the beaten paths, turn in better grosses than recognized city palaces.”³¹ In fact, so successful were these one-night stands that they lured one of the

²⁸“7,800 Spots in U.S. for Touring Bands; Competition and Showmanship Aids,” *Variety*, 21 July 1937, 55.

²⁹“A.F. of M. Calls Off Attempt to Curb Road Orchestras; Cuts 30% Tax to 10%,” *Variety*, 11 September 1934, 45.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹“7,800 Spots in U.S. for Touring Bands,” 55.

top orchestras away from a highly sought-after venue. In early 1936, bandleader Jan Garber paid a reported \$47,000 to break his contract with the posh Trianon Ballroom in Chicago after playing there four years.³² This decision stemmed from the success Garber had found on a tour of one-night stands in 1935, during which the orchestra had made an average of \$1,100 at each of its seventy-one stops. As a result of the large amounts of money he was earning at these locations, Garber wanted to be on the road more than his contract with the Trianon would permit.³³ The road won out over the urban ballroom.

In addition to the money made on dance nights, going on road tours helped bands in intangible ways. First of all, tours kept patrons from tiring of bands that were booked for long engagements at large establishments. Each time musicians returned from the road, they were once again a band full of fresh faces featuring a fresh sound. Also, one-night stands increased the public's awareness of the dance orchestras.³⁴ In a manner of speaking, they were self-advertising campaigns. Bands that were prominent on the West Coast or in the New York City area could embark on road tours into other regions and win over entirely new sets of fans who might purchase their records or pass along the name of the band by word of mouth. Even for orchestras with coast-to-coast radio programs, touring could add to their reputations because it made them more accessible to their audiences.

³²“Garber Pays \$47,000 for Release,” *Variety*, 12 February 1936, 52. See also Appendix B, Figure 6 for a photograph of Jan Garber.

³³Charles A. Sengstock Jr., *That Toddlin' Town: Chicago's White Dance Bands and Orchestras, 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 70.

³⁴“7,800 Spots in U.S. for Touring Bands,” 55.

When established orchestras arrived at out-of-the way one-night stand locations such as Henderson, Texas, people in the area certainly needed no introduction to them. Although the majority of the town's residents had never been to the West Coast or the Northeast where famous orchestras were prevalent, they had other avenues for knowing these ensembles. First and foremost among these was radio. Even with the raging depression conditions of the thirties, radio in America thrived. Around 12 million radios were tuning into some 600 stations across the nation in 1930, and by 1940 those numbers had made the leap to 51 million sets and more than 800 stations on the air. The beauty of the radio was that the one-time cost opened an entire world to buyers in which they could enjoy the latest news stories, weather reports, sports broadcasts, comedic and dramatic shows, instructional programs—and, of course, music.³⁵

From ballrooms, hotels, restaurants, and cabarets all across the country, dance orchestras were broadcasting over the airwaves at all hours of the day during the thirties and early forties. Overall, radio was a win-win situation for all concerned: the venues received free advertising; bands reached hundreds, thousands, sometimes even millions of fans at a time; and listeners did not have to pay a dime to hear the broadcasts. In Henderson in the thirties, locals could purchase radio sets from businesses such as the Forman-Hudson Company or General Service Company, both located on West Street, Teller Electric Appliance Company on North Main, or the Henderson Radio Shop on South Main.³⁶ Listeners then could experience the magic of live broadcasts in the

³⁵William H. Young with Nancy K. Young, *The 1930s, American Popular Culture Through History*, ed. Ray B. Browne (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2002), 207.

³⁶*Henderson, Texas: City Directory 1935-36* (Springfield, Mo.: Interstate Directory Company, 1935), 180.

comfort of their own homes, hearing a number of bands that they had seen or would see in the future at the Cooper Club. In Texas, Herman Waldman frequented station WOAI from the Gunter Hotel in San Antonio, and Ligon Smith often played at the Baker Hotel in Dallas over WFAA. Via the nationwide networks of MBS, CBS, NBC-Red, and NBC-Blue, as well as other powerful regional stations, East Texans also had front-row seats in many of the most exclusive venues across the country where the top orchestras were playing. From Los Angeles came the sounds of Gus Arnheim at the Cocoanut Grove in the Ambassador Hotel, as well as Jimmie Grier and Earl Burtnett at the Biltmore Hotel. San Francisco hostelries offered Anson Weeks at the Mark Hopkins and Ted Fio-Rito at the St. Francis. In the music mecca of Chicago, Art Kassel held forth at the Walnut Room of the Bismarck Hotel, Bob Crosby and Art Jarrett played at the legendary Blackhawk Café, and Henry Busse was a staple at the Chez Paree. From the Sherman Hotel came the sounds of Frankie Masters at the College Inn and later Count Basie at the Panther Room of the College Inn. Also in Chicago, Mark Fisher, Charlie Agnew, and Herbie Kay were favorites at the Edgewater Beach Hotel. A flip of the wrist at the radio dial could also bring in the strains of music from the East Coast. From New York City came broadcasts of Russ Morgan at the Biltmore Hotel, Noble Sissle at Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe in the Paramount Hotel, and Ella Fitzgerald at the Savoy Ballroom. Jimmie Lunceford hit the airwaves from the Southland Café in Boston. The very latest in popular music was at the fingertips of East Texans, and they loved it.

Music fans all over the nation could also enjoy well-known orchestras through 78 rpm phonograph records. By the time the thirties arrived, records had been around for a while, and many dance bands that had started well before the decade already had

catalogues of records in circulation. Prominent dance bands had enjoyed their first boom period on records in the early 1920s, and many had cut recordings in earlier years.³⁷ With the economic slump of the Great Depression also came a slump of record sales, which hit rock bottom in 1932 with a national sales total of only 6 million compared to more than 100 million in 1927. It was not until the latter part of the decade that sales began to steadily climb again toward pre-depression numbers. Nevertheless, even during the darkest days of the Great Depression, popular bands were still able to make records on a regular basis and achieve reasonable sales.³⁸ During this time, the town of Henderson had at least a couple of places that sold Victrolas (record players) and records: The Music Shop on South Marshall and Tri State Sales Company on North Mill.³⁹

Another medium that bonded small towns to the famous big bands were the movies of the day. Hollywood suffered greatly from the Great Depression, and in 1933 many studios were facing financial ruin.⁴⁰ Subsequently, the industry underwent many changes that made it possible for it to reach its glory days in the late thirties.⁴¹ One policy it did not change, though, was the use of name bands in short and feature-length films. In popular bands, Hollywood studios found established names that guaranteed movie theater ticket sales. As of early 1942, studio reports showed that every feature-

³⁷Albert McCarthy, *The Dance Band Era: The Dancing Decades from Ragtime to Swing: 1910-1950* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Company, 1971), 15.

³⁸Ibid., 56.

³⁹*Henderson, Texas: City Directory 1935-36*, 181.

⁴⁰Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988; reprint, New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 159.

⁴¹Ibid., 160-161. For a detailed look at these changes, see Part III of Thomas Schatz's *The Genius of the System*.

length film starring a top orchestra had performed favorably at the box office.

Employing bands in the movies was also a way for the studios to compete with dancing establishments for patrons.⁴² The musical groups certainly did not mind this relationship with motion pictures. They were thrilled to be in films, whether short or feature-length, for the extra exposure and prestige it brought them. Downtown Henderson offered East Texas movie-goers the chance to see the many motion pictures featuring orchestras at the town's four movie houses: the Liberty and Strand theatres on South Main, the Palace Theatre on North Jackson, and the Victory Theatre on North Marshall.⁴³

Along with radio, records, and movies, Americans also discovered the top dance bands through the print medium. Music magazines *Downbeat* and *Metronome* specialized in covering current popular dance orchestras.⁴⁴ Furthermore, newspapers constantly carried stories of well-known musicians. *Variety* noted as early as 1930, "Public demand for facts about their radio idols has resulted in newspapers and syndicates devoting an increasing amount of attention to publicity chatter dealing with the home life, personalities, and other intimate details of radio celebrities."⁴⁵ Not unlike later decades, people were infatuated with entertainment figures. Locals could browse through the *Henderson Daily News* or countless larger-circulation papers in search of stories about their favorite bandleaders and the music they played.

⁴²"Celluloid for Jitterbugs with Jive by Hottest Bands," *Dallas Morning News*, 26 April 1942, *Dallas Morning News Historical Archives (1885-1977)*, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 21 March 2006, <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>>.

⁴³*Henderson, Texas: City Directory 1935-36*, 181.

⁴⁴Young, 175.

⁴⁵"Radio Fans Avid for Private Data on Ether Idols," *Variety*, 21 March 1930, 64.

During the thirties and into the next decade, these many outlets, with radio as the leader, allowed the American public to stay informed about popular orchestras on a daily basis. As a result, these musicians rivaled many movie stars in popularity. When these bands arrived in Henderson for dances at the Cooper Club, they were met by scores of devoted fans who felt like they were seeing old acquaintances.

Unearthing the Cooper Club

Through the passage of time, the memory of the Cooper Club has faded, and today it is largely forgotten in Henderson. What little information is available about it is largely legend and full of inaccuracies. Over time, people began to confuse the Cooper Club with the larger Palm Isle Club in Longview, which, in the late thirties and early forties, Hugh Cooper also owned and operated. Many of the errors go as far back as newspaper accounts from the time the Cooper Club was open. Caught up in the frenzy of the oil boom and their zeal for the local nightclub, a few local reporters made false claims of grandeur about it. For example, one story in the *Henderson Daily News* in 1935 stated that the Cooper Club had the largest dance floor in America and that *Time Magazine* had declared it “the best one-night stop in the United States,” claims that were both untrue.⁴⁶ Later newspaper accounts declared that it was Music Corporation of America that had recognized the Cooper Club as “the best one night [*sic*] stand in the U. S.,” but this was

⁴⁶Hugh J. Vaughn, “Your Own Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 6 March 1935, p. 5. The current size of the Cooper Club dance floor was 7,200 square feet. As a comparison, the dance floor of the Palm Isle Club, which opened later that year, measured 15,000 square feet, and a press release stated it was the third largest dance club in Texas (“Geo. Hamilton to Play at Palm Isle Club Saturday Night,” *Henderson Daily News*, 26 September 1935, p. 2). Concerning *Time*, a thorough search through microfilm of the magazine as well as the online Time Archives did not unearth any mention of the Cooper Club.

also inaccurate.⁴⁷ Moreover, writer Oren Arnold, a native of Rusk County, penned an article about the Cooper Club for the Sunday supplement *EveryWeek Magazine* that in late 1935 appeared in newspapers all over the country.⁴⁸ Although entertaining and colorful, the article gave a highly fictionalized account of the nightclub. But the story of the Cooper Club did not then and does not now need any enhancements to merit attention, for the reality is fascinating enough.

Examining the history of the Cooper Club in Henderson, Texas, from its opening in October of 1932 through approximately June of 1942, provides an opportunity to tell the story of one-night stands during the dance band era from the viewpoint of a small town in a time when such venues were collectively playing a vital role in keeping the American music scene thriving. A narrative of the Cooper Club also reveals aspects of the social and cultural history of Henderson during the exciting time of the East Texas oil boom. Chapter 2 focuses on owner Hugh Cooper; physical descriptions of the Cooper Club and the New Cooper Club, the latter resuming club activities after fire destroyed the original building; and the process of planning a dance at the Cooper Club. Drawing from interviews of Henderson residents who remembered the nightclub, the chapter further attempts to recreate a dance night. Chapter 3 discusses select orchestras that performed at the Cooper Club and proved to be overall favorites of patrons. This section also highlights noteworthy individual orchestra members. Chapter 4 covers the many

⁴⁷“Architects at Work on New Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 7 April 1936, p. 12. In the many sources consulted for this project, nowhere did MCA make such claims or focus on any specific night spots. Its business was booking bands, not venues.

⁴⁸Oren Arnold, “Where Radio’s Big-Name Orchestras Play in a Barn!” *EveryWeek Magazine*, 1 December 1935, 2. One newspaper this special section appeared in was the Sunday, December 1, 1935 edition of *The Seattle Sunday Times*.

obstacles that the Cooper Club faced over the years, such as the ill feelings from many members of the surrounding community and the club's destruction by fire. Finally, Chapter 5 examines the last years of the club's existence and the reasons for its demise.

The research for this study relies heavily on primary sources. Chief among them is the *Henderson Daily News*, which, thanks to the oil boom, began in March of 1931, and was going strong by the time the Cooper Club began. *Variety* also proved invaluable by providing an overall scope of the American music scene during the time the Cooper Club was open. Of particular interest among the primary sources are oral histories from many individuals who remembered the Cooper Club when it was open. Playing a smaller role are secondary sources such as musician biographies, autobiographies, and historical accounts of the big band era.

The Cooper Club was a special place of entertainment in East Texas that deserves to be remembered. Several of the biggest and brightest musical stars of the era serenaded patrons into the early hours of the morning against the turbulent backdrop of the East Texas oil boom. It was a unique time in American history when people in small towns did not have to go looking for entertainment if they were fortunate enough to have a motivated nightclub operator such as Hugh Cooper living nearby, for entertainment came to them. In Henderson, it came to the Cooper Club.

CHAPTER TWO

Anatomy of a Cooper Club Dance

The Cooper Club that opened in October of 1932 was not the same one that closed nearly ten years later. In addition to the many renovations that the club underwent through the years, it found a new home in an existing nightclub in 1936 after fire destroyed the original building. Despite these changes, Hugh Cooper remained constant in the high-quality entertainment and refined atmosphere he provided his customers while he was operating the club. With Cooper at the helm, each dance at the Cooper Club was a well-orchestrated event.

Hugh Cooper

The Cooper Club began as the dream of one man and might have never come to fruition. After all, a concept, no matter how great, is nothing without energy behind it. Fortunately, the man behind the idea for the Cooper Club was a “go-getter.”¹ Donald Hugh Cooper was born on October 15, 1901, one of six children born to George W. and Lurah Andrews Cooper.² He grew up a few miles west of Henderson on a farm in Joinerville.³

¹Marvis Green, interview by author, 21 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

²“Hugh Cooper,” *Henderson Daily News*, 7 May 1986, sec. A, p. 10; Rusk County Historical Commission, *Rusk County History* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1982), 155.

³Hazel Cooper, interview by author, 1 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author. See also Appendix A, Figure 1 for a photograph of Hugh Cooper.

During the course of his career, Hugh Cooper held a variety of jobs. Early on in Henderson, he worked for J. L. Cameron at Cameron's Drug Store, which was located on the corner of South Main and East Street, and also owned a skating rink on Fordall Street.⁴ Another position he held was as traveling sales representative for R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, and later in life he credited this experience with teaching him salesmanship.⁵ It was during his partnership with Percy Cannon at Cannon-Cooper, a cleaning business on the square in downtown Henderson, that he came up with the idea for a local nightclub.⁶ During the years that the Cooper Club was open, he also was co-owner of Sandy Beach, a swimming resort three miles west of Henderson on the Tyler highway, and in the later years of the Henderson nightclub managed and eventually owned the Palm Isle Club, now the Reo Palm Isle, in Longview.⁷ In 1950, Cooper embarked on a thirty-year career in the floral business with his wife, the former Hazel Louise Harding of Freestone County, who he married in 1946. After working for other outdoor nursery companies, they together formed East Texas Foliage, Inc., through which they sold cut greens to wholesale and retail dealers.⁸

⁴Rusk County Historical Commission, 155; Josephine Thrasher, interview by author, 18 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; George D. Cooper, interview by author, 1 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁵Rusk County Historical Commission, 155.

⁶Keenan Barrett, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁷"Sandy Beach Destroyed by Flames Today," *Henderson Daily News*, 25 August 1936, p. 12; "Society Everywhere Heralds Technique of Noble Sissle," *Henderson Daily News*, 28 February 1937, p. 14; "Benefit Dance at Palm Isle for Goodfellows," *Henderson Daily News*, 13 December 1940, p. 1.

⁸Rusk County Historical Commission, 156.

Throughout his career, Cooper stayed involved in real estate, buying and selling oil properties, lots, and houses.⁹ Several of these business dealings were with members of the local black population, to whom he sold many houses. “As a matter of fact,” his wife recalled, “I’ve had a lot of them to tell me that they would have never had a roof over their head if it hadn’t been for Hugh. He always financed the houses, and they came here and paid him.”¹⁰ Mattie Jones, one such customer, purchased a house on North Van Buren Street in Henderson from Cooper and remembered the positive business relationship he maintained with the black community:

Cooper had done a whole lot of business with the black people. He bought a whole lot of houses for the black people. I bought a house from him. Every black person in town . . . would take something by Cooper. . . . Bought homes and then they bought them from him.¹¹

Furthermore, Cooper helped many black residents start up their own businesses. “They’d put in a filling station I didn’t think they had the money to put it in,” John Harris recalled. Later he would find out that the lot belonged to Hugh Cooper.¹² Henderson, a very conservative town and a product of the Old South, was fortunate to have a businessman such as Hugh Cooper in a time when racial discrimination was the standard, as he

⁹Hazel Cooper, interview; George D. Cooper, interview. The surge in population due to the oil boom of the 1930s brought a spike in housing prices as living quarters became scarce. Land prices also increased since every acre had a potential source of oil beneath its surface (Virginia Knapp and Megan Biesele, “Rusk County,” in *The New Handbook of Texas*, vol. 5., ed. Ron Tyler, Douglas E. Barnett, Roy R. Barkley, Penelope C. Anderson, and Mark F. Odintz [Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996], 725). Therefore, real estate was a profitable business in East Texas during the oil boom and also in the following years.

¹⁰Hazel Cooper, interview.

¹¹Mattie Jones, interview by author, 1 February 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

¹²John H. Harris, interview by author, 13 February 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

encouraged business dealings with African-Americans that positively affected their community.

Hugh Cooper had a colorful professional life and took investment chances, but he knew what he was doing. As his wife later recalled, Cooper had excellent business skills:

. . . Hugh . . . was an entrepreneur. He could make money, it seemed to me like, just snapped his fingers, and he was just that type person. He was real ingenious about making money.¹³

Hazel Cooper was not the only person who recognized her husband's knack for successfully handling business matters. Lindell Stuart, a life-long friend of Hugh Cooper, echoed these thoughts on Cooper's business acumen:

Hugh Cooper is going to make money. I don't care what he's doing. If he sat out there selling peanuts, he's going to make money.¹⁴

No matter what he was doing, Cooper knew how to make a profit.

Hugh Cooper's positive personality was undoubtedly one of the key ingredients to his success in his many professional endeavors. He "never met a stranger" and was "a gentleman from the old school."¹⁵ Moreover, he had "a sense of humor that was unbelievable" and "just loved to laugh."¹⁶ Lindell Stuart recounted an exchange of conversation he had with Cooper one time that reveals a bit of his wit: "But I asked Hugh one time . . . , 'Hugh, is your folks' property in the oil field?' He said, 'No, it came

¹³Hazel Cooper, interview.

¹⁴Lindell Stuart, interview by author, 18 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

¹⁵Odell Poovey, interview by author, 23 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Thrasher, interview.

¹⁶Billy and Betty Crawford, interview by author, 21 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

right up to our fence and stopped—the oil did.”” Another incident Stuart recalled occurred shortly after the Coopers married and Hazel began playing golf:

So, one Sunday out there they was playing, men in a foursome, and . . . the women were playing. Some of them said to Hugh, Hugh, what was it you said one time about if you ever married your wife wouldn't be playing golf on Sunday?

He said, “Oh, I said a lot of things back in those days I've had to take back since.”¹⁷

Laughter followed Hugh Cooper, and he always had a joke to share with people he met.¹⁸

This friendly demeanor was not just a mask that Cooper wore for his customers and friends. Individuals who worked for Cooper experienced and appreciated his business etiquette as well. Donald Lambeth, a man who helped park cars at the original Cooper Club, recalled that all of his co-workers at the club respected Cooper and agreed that “he was a good fellow” for whom to work and was more than fair. In fact, working for Cooper on a dance night was one of the best-paying jobs in town. For one night of directing cars at the Cooper Club, Lambeth made substantially more money than he did working twelve hours at his day jobs. And his salary was all from Cooper, not tips: “Hell, they didn't have anything to tip you with. If you had a job at ten cents an hour, you were lucky.”¹⁹ Ebb Smith was the coat and hat checker at the New Cooper Club and also recalled his pay as being much more an hour than average. Ever the entrepreneur, at one point Cooper even offered to help Smith start his own dance club, but Smith declined.²⁰

¹⁷Stuart, interview.

¹⁸Harris, interview.

¹⁹D. W. Lambeth, interview by author, 18 December 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

²⁰Ebb Smith, interview by author, 22 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

In his free time, Hugh Cooper could often be found on the golf course. He was a skilled player and often competed in local tournaments.²¹ Automobiles, especially convertibles, were another of his passions, and his wife considered him a true “car buff.”²²

Through the years, Hugh Cooper became something of a local celebrity. Odell Poovey reminisced, “He wore white shoes, a sailor hat, and drove a late-model convertible car all the time. He was a classy dude around town, and everybody liked him.” He added, “Everybody wanted to copy after Mr. Cooper because he was real fancy in those days.”²³ John Harris recalled that seeing Cooper drive by in the latest cars that had all of the extra gadgets on them was a special occasion. People would exclaim, “Mr. Cooper coming through. Mr. Cooper coming through.”²⁴ Bettye Streeter also had fond memories of seeing him around town:

Hugh Cooper was a handsome young man: big, tall, slender, and he had a convertible of some sort. . . . In the summertime, he wore white linen suits, tie, everything, and a white panama hat and [would] go all over Henderson waving at everybody. And, of course, all the girls thought he was just handsome, and he was. And he was real nice.²⁵

It was impossible to reside in Henderson while Hugh Cooper was alive and have no idea of who he was.

²¹Stuart, interview; Harris, interview.

²²Hazel Cooper, interview.

²³Poovey, interview.

²⁴Harris, interview.

²⁵Bettye Streeter, interview by author, 4 November 2005, Overton, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

The Old Cooper Club

Without a doubt, Hugh Cooper was an ideal candidate to run a nightclub in Henderson. It all started one morning, probably in the summer or early fall of 1932, when he attempted to rent the ballroom at the downtown Randolph Hotel for a dance. When the hotel denied his request on the grounds that the music would disturb its guests, Cooper decided he would build his own dancing establishment. Quickly putting his idea into motion, by that afternoon carpenters were at the site of the future club making the grounds ready for construction. Cooper later laughingly told reporters, “I didn’t have any idea what I was building. And before it was finished the club had four additions.”²⁶

For his night spot, Cooper settled on a piece of land one mile from town on the Tyler highway, which was also known as West Street, later West Main.²⁷ East Street and West Street eventually became largely local roads, but back in the thirties they were sections of a main highway that went through downtown Henderson and connected the city with Carthage to its east and Tyler to its west. Highway 79, now one of the major highways through Henderson, was not built until after World War II.²⁸ Thus, the spot Cooper chose for his club was easy to find, plus it was an ideal location to give the club visual exposure to out-of-towners traveling through Henderson.

The Cooper Club was not the first establishment to rest on the hill at this location. Previously, a local man had a store on this spot where he sold freight that area residents

²⁶Information from and Cooper quoted in “Hugh Relates ‘How Come’ He Built Original Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, p. 6.

²⁷*Henderson Daily News*, 26 October 1932, p. 3.

²⁸Thrasher, interview.

had rejected. Because he had displayed the items out in the open, there was not a pre-existing building to tear down.²⁹

When the club was ready to open, it certainly did not have the appearance of a place that would attract famous orchestras. As Lindell Stuart recalled, “Well, it wasn’t much to look at outside, just a big old building.”³⁰ Nancy Preston agreed: “It wasn’t pretty. It was just a functional building.”³¹ The picture that appeared in 1935 in “Where Radio’s Big-Name Orchestras Play in a Barn!” shows a large wooden frame building with a pointed roof and steps leading up to a small porch area. The front side of the building had two windows, one on each side of the entrance, and on the west side, nearly hidden by a tree, was another window. According to the article, the small building sitting in front of the club was the ticket booth.³² Because the photograph mainly captured the front of the building, it was misleading about its size. The nightclub was actually much longer than its width.³³

Just as the exterior was plain, there “wasn’t much to look at inside either. . . . It was just plain vanilla, what it was.”³⁴ The interior may not have been majestic, but in its simplicity it still displayed a subtle sophistication. Josephine Thrasher described it as

²⁹Catherine C. Brown, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Stuart, interview.

³⁰Stuart, interview.

³¹Nancy J. Preston, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

³²Oren Arnold, “Where Radio’s Big-Name Orchestras Play in a Barn!” *EveryWeek Magazine*, 1 December 1935, 2. See also Appendix A, Figure 2 for this photograph of the old Cooper Club.

³³Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

³⁴Stuart, interview.

“really nice inside.”³⁵ When it opened, the *Henderson Daily News* recorded details of the inside of the club:

The interior of the building, which is located on the Tyler highway, just a convenient distance out, is most beautifully constructed. Hardwood floors are found throughout the building, and the walls are made of stained veneer, giving the interior a most attractive color scheme. An orchestra platform, that can also be used as a stage is built at the north end of the spacious hall. Mr. Cooper spared no expense in an effort to give the building the proper accoustics [*sic*]. Restrooms with fine furniture throughout are among the features.³⁶

Clearly, Cooper put a great amount of thought into the creation of his night spot. The dance floor surface was polished, and E. F. Crim had fond memories of the effect:

“You’d slide, and your feet would slide—real good floor.”³⁷ The size of the dance floor changed as Cooper made alterations to the club, and in March of 1935, it measured 7,200 square feet.³⁸ Initially, the only places to sit were on benches built into the sides of the walls, but later Cooper provided tables and chairs.³⁹ Furthermore, a kitchen made the club an ideal place for local organizations to hold banquets and meetings, and next to the entrance was a room to buy soft drinks.⁴⁰ The nightclub also provided a place for guests to drop off their coats and hats as they entered. “The check room at the Club is always handled most efficiently, Lorene Rainey handling the work with the dexterity typical of

³⁵Thrasher, interview.

³⁶“Classy Orchestra to Furnish Music for Opening of Cooper Club Oct. 28,” *Henderson Daily News*, 23 October 1932, p. 1.

³⁷Hugh J. Vaughn, “Your Own Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 6 March 1935, p. 5; E. F. Crim and Elizabeth Mason, interview by author, 20 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

³⁸Vaughn, “Your Own Cooper Club,” p. 5.

³⁹Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

⁴⁰Thrasher, interview.

the hat-check girl in a New York club,” reported the *Henderson Daily News*.⁴¹ Later on, during one of the club’s enlargements in the late summer of 1935, Cooper added an open-air terrace.⁴²

Quite naturally, the acoustics of a nightclub were among the most important elements, and Hugh Cooper made changes to the club over the years to improve them. Apparently displeased with the transmission of sound during the club’s first few months, Cooper installed amplifiers that were in place in time for the first appearance of Herbie Kay and his Orchestra on December 7, 1932.⁴³ To again better the acoustics of the club, in the late summer of 1934, Cooper moved the stage from the far north end of the building to the middle of the west wall.⁴⁴ Stuart remembered this relocation of the bandstand and later commented, “It was better there. He moved it to the center.”⁴⁵ Then in early 1935, the Cooper Club sported another new amplifying system.⁴⁶

Although the Cooper Club opened without modern heating and cooling, it was not without ways of altering the indoor temperature. Two large fireplaces kept dancers warm in the winter months, and a cooling system consisting of large fans attempted to keep

⁴¹“Cooper Club’s Next Dance to be Announced,” *Henderson Daily News*, 10 January 1934, p. 7.

⁴²“Big Dance for Tomorrow Nite at Cooper Club,” 7 August 1935, *Henderson Daily News*, p. 4.

⁴³*Henderson News-Herald*, 4 December 1932, p. 3.

⁴⁴“Charles Agnew to Play Dance,” *Henderson Daily News*, 26 August 1934, p. 7; Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

⁴⁵Stuart, interview.

⁴⁶“Gus Arnheim for Cooper Club on This Saturday,” *Henderson Daily News*, 9 January 1935, p. 5.

patrons comfortable in the summer.⁴⁷ Barrett recalled that the fans “would blow you over if you got too close.” He went on to joke, “It was warmer in the winter than it was cool in the summer. I can tell you that.”⁴⁸ Cooling methods in nightclubs could be quite rudimentary during this period. For instance, in the Bellerive Hotel’s Terrace Café in Kansas City during the early thirties, their “cool dry-ice air” consisted of large blocks of dry ice placed strategically around the room in front of fans aimed at the dance floor.⁴⁹ It is possible that the Cooper Club had a similar system. However, the Texas heat did not bother dancers:

But when you got to dancing, you didn’t care how hot it got. But, of course, you got pretty hot and you sweat, but you just kept going. You didn’t know any better, you see. Didn’t have any air-conditioning or anything like that. You didn’t know there was anything better—would be.⁵⁰

Sweating was just a way of life for southerners. Of course, opening the windows was another way to cool the interior in warmer months. The club had huge windows that reached the floor and were always open in warm weather in hopes of steering onto the dance floor any breezes that blew.⁵¹ So helpful were they in keeping the club comfortable that in August of 1934, when Cooper remodeled the club, he added even more: “Windows are now entirely around the club, affording almost outdoor

⁴⁷“Cooper Club’s Next Dance to be Announced,” p. 7; “Ligon Smith Will Appear Saturday,” *Henderson Daily News*, 7 June 1933, p. 8.

⁴⁸Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

⁴⁹Philip R. Evans and Larry F. Kiner with William Trumbauer, *Tram: The Frank Trumbauer Story*, Studies in Jazz, eds. Dan Morgenstern and Edward Berger, no. 18 (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 155.

⁵⁰Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

⁵¹Mary Melissa Bateman, interview by author, 20 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

ventilation,” reported the local newspaper.⁵² It also helped that dances typically started between nine and ten o’clock in the evening when the earth had had time to cool off from the blazing sun.

Tragically, during its third year of operation, fire destroyed the first Cooper Club building. With all of the money and time invested in the original structure, no one would have blamed Hugh Cooper had he decided not to rebuild. Fortunately, he decided to carry on the Cooper Club.

The New Cooper Club

After fire consumed the old Cooper Club building in the early morning hours of Sunday, April 5, 1936, Hugh Cooper bought Spell’s Night Club from A. E. Spell on August 22, 1936.⁵³ This new location for the club was further down the Tyler highway, approximately two-and-a-half miles outside of Henderson.⁵⁴ When driving west, it was located on the right where the Tyler highway forked with Highway 13.⁵⁵ Spell’s Night Club had originally opened on Wednesday, May 1, 1935, with Garth Green and his Orchestra providing music.⁵⁶ The *Henderson Daily News* covered its opening:

Mr. Spell who is one of the most experienced caterers in this section has built a new place . . . west of Henderson on the Tyler road with ample floor space to accommodate large crowds and furnished it in keeping with the higher class night clubs which have become so popular over the country.

⁵²“Charles Agnew to Play Dance,” p. 7.

⁵³“Popular Dance Hall Burns to Ground Sunday,” *Henderson Daily News*, 6 April 1936, p. 4; Rusk County, Texas, Deed Records, no. 34936, vol. 294, p. 273, Rusk County Courthouse, Henderson, Texas.

⁵⁴Rusk County, Texas, Deed Records, no. 34936, vol. 294, p. 273.

⁵⁵Lambeth, interview.

⁵⁶*Henderson Daily News*, 28 April 1935, p. 4.

The entire place has been furnished in the most modern manner with unusually good lighting arrangements both inside and out and kitchen and dining room facilities that will enable him to serve large numbers of customers. He will specialize in chicken dinners.⁵⁷

It was certainly an impressive building.

Nevertheless, Hugh Cooper made several changes when he purchased the nightclub. Its dance floor was half the size of the Cooper Club's, causing Cooper to expand it to be even larger than the one at his first club.⁵⁸ He also added an additional story to the front section of the club.⁵⁹ When construction was completed, the result was an inviting, attractive building. The photograph of the club printed in the *Henderson Daily News* displays colonial architecture, four columns in front supporting a balcony on the second floor, several windows on both stories, and a nice side view that gives an idea of the size of the ballroom.⁶⁰

Before the club opened, Cooper held a contest to determine the name of the newly-reconstructed club. He ran an ad in the *Henderson Daily News* that stated, "Name Hugh Cooper's New Club and win a season ticket good for all club dances 'til Jan. 1, 1937. Mail Names to Daily News."⁶¹ It would be interesting to read all of the names readers submitted, but ultimately the befitting name of New Cooper Club won.

⁵⁷"Night Club to Hold Opening this Evening," *Henderson Daily News*, 1 May 1935, p. 10.

⁵⁸"New Cooper Club Opening Delayed," *Henderson Daily News*, 31 August, 1936, p. 3; "Hugh Cooper Announces Oct. 20 as Opening [sic] Date for New Night Club Near Henderson," *Henderson Daily News*, 12 October 1936, p. 2.

⁵⁹"Cooper to Open Club on Oct. 1," *Henderson Daily News*, 17 September 1936, p. 12.

⁶⁰"Splendid New Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, p. 7. See also Appendix A, Figure 5 for this photograph of the New Cooper Club that also appeared in an invitation.

⁶¹*Henderson Daily News*, 7 September 1936, p. 5.

For those accustomed to the simplicity of the original Cooper Club, the new one was certainly a change. Inside, the reception room, finished in gold, doubled as a foyer and also housed the check room on its south side. The lounges featured comfortable chairs in deep red and green and matching red carpets.⁶² In the ballroom, heavy red silks with blue trim draped the stage, on which a white concert grand piano stood.⁶³ Pink and sky blue constituted the overall color scheme of the ballroom and appeared in the ceiling drapes and in the wall murals painted by Hungarian muralist Gustav Ivan, who had recently decorated many buildings at the Texas Centennial of 1936.⁶⁴ A picture of the artist at work hand-painting his designs in the ballroom appeared in the *Henderson Daily News*. It is difficult to tell from the picture exactly what he was painting because the photograph is in black and white and the mural unfinished, but it appears to be dancers surrounded by flowers.⁶⁵ Josephine Thrasher remembered that the murals had an “island effect” and exuded a feeling of the South Seas or Hawaii.⁶⁶ Indirect lighting caused the

⁶²“Modern, New Cooper Club Opens to Public Tuesday Night,” *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, p. 6.

⁶³“Club Furnishings Purchased Locally,” *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, p. 7; “Concert Grand Piano at Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 20 October 1936, p. 2.

⁶⁴“Modern, New Cooper Club Opens to Public Tuesday Night,” p. 6.

⁶⁵“Artist Does Murals for Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, sec. 2, p. 2. See also Appendix A, Figure 4 for this photograph of Gustav Ivan painting the mural in the New Cooper Club.

⁶⁶Thrasher, interview.

pastel colors of the interior to glow and created an atmosphere of romance.⁶⁷ Tables and chairs stood on either side of the dance floor.⁶⁸

Continuing on with the photograph of the mural in progress, through the entryway of the ballroom appears a window in what was most likely the reception room, along with stairs leading to the second floor.⁶⁹ Upstairs was the cactus room with a green and red motif. The wallpaper had red panels picturing cacti, and green and red drapes framed the windows. Both the floor coverings and overstuffed furniture featured a Spanish green and gold plaid design.⁷⁰ A bar and ice box were located in the cactus room, so it was probably a lounge area where patrons could order soft drinks and ice as well as chat with acquaintances.⁷¹

The blue and pink motif of the downstairs ballroom also carried over to the café. Mary Cummings, who ran the Green Lantern, a popular drive-in restaurant on the Tyler highway, made sandwiches on pink bread for dance patrons.⁷² She had the concession

⁶⁷“600 Present at Cooper Club on Opening Night,” *Henderson Daily News*, 21 October 1936, p. 6; Thrasher, interview.

⁶⁸Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

⁶⁹“Artist Does Murals for Cooper Club,” sec. 2, p. 2. See also Appendix A, Figure 4 for this photograph.

⁷⁰“Club Furnishings Purchased Locally,” p. 7; “Modern, New Cooper Club Opens to Public Tuesday Night,” p. 6.

⁷¹Rusk County, Texas, Deed Records, no. 51269, vol. 324, pp. 73-74, Rusk County Courthouse, Henderson, Texas.

⁷²Thrasher, interview; “Mrs. Cummings to Have Charge of New Cooper Club Café,” *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, p. 7.

rights to the dining area, and Cooper promised the “choicest foods” under her direction that customers could enjoy in the dining room.⁷³

Compared to the first building, the second one was certainly an improvement. As Josephine Thrasher remembered with a chuckle, “Well, it looked a lot better from the outside, for one thing, and it was on level ground.”⁷⁴ Keenan Barrett agreed that “. . . it was much nicer than the other one.”⁷⁵ When the New Cooper Club opened, several of the businesses involved with its development ran ads congratulating Cooper on the grand opening. Gresham Electric Co. furnished Cook’s Paint and the wallpaper; Anderson & Minor executed the mill and cabinet work; Cooper awarded the team of Victor Montag the paint contract; Horn Brothers Furniture Co. supplied the floor coverings and lounge furniture; and the team of O. H. (Hugh) Green, general contractor, built the club.⁷⁶ Others who took part in the club’s new look appeared in stories covering the club’s opening. From A. B. Chase, Cooper purchased the concert grand piano, and Mrs. W. H. Dunbar served as interior decorator.⁷⁷

When Hugh Cooper leased the New Cooper Club for a year to L. B. Pool and O. Young in August of 1938, he made a list of the building’s contents and their value for legal purposes. The inventory provides an exciting glimpse into a thirties nightclub. Included in the list were the following: 8 cedar buckets, 63 cents each; 36 tin pans, 10

⁷³“Hugh Cooper Announces Oct. 20 as Opening [*sic*] Date,” p. 2; “Club Furnishings Purchased Locally,” p. 7.

⁷⁴Thrasher, interview.

⁷⁵Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

⁷⁶*Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, p. 7; *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, p. 8.

⁷⁷“Concert Grand Piano at Cooper Club,” p. 2; “Club Furnishings Purchased Locally,” p. 7.

cents each; 100 tablecloths, 35 cents each; 300 chairbacks, 10 cents each; 4 half-barrel tubs, 10 cents each; 1 new Coca-Cola box, \$35; 2 old Dr Pepper boxes, \$10; 50 towels, 5 cents each; 98 glasses, 5 cents each; 1 ticket office, \$15; 12 bar chairs, \$6 each; 1 oil can; 2 gas stoves; 91 tables, \$4.50 each; 334 chairs, \$1.25 each; light globes; 4 Emerson fans, \$47 each; 2 big fans on floor, \$170; 1 complete Emerson cooling system, including 4 draw fans and 8 push fans and water system, \$2,750; 1 water pump, \$160; 1 water line, \$185; 1 ice box, \$5, and bar, \$65, in cactus room; 1 public address system with 5 speakers, mike and compte, \$650; 1 piano, \$1,000; 2 big chairs in ladies lounge, \$50; 3 stools in ladies lounge, \$4.50; 1 mirror in ladies lounge, \$35; 1 mirror in ladies lounge, \$2.50; 1 mirror in men's lounge, \$15; 12 window curtains, \$24; 200 ashtrays, \$4; 2 ashtrays, \$1.50; 2 trash cans; 1 chest of drawers, \$10; 500 coat hangers, \$5; 1 rug, \$3.75; carpet in ladies lounge, \$175; and 1 warehouse broom, \$1.25.⁷⁸ Such a detailed list gives the imagination plenty of material with which to envision an event at the New Cooper Club. More importantly, though, it provides insight into how costly it was to operate a high-end nightclub. Basically, all people needed to have a dance was a surface and music of some sort, but Cooper went beyond that in furnishing his club. Such items as chairs, stools, and carpet in the ladies lounge, as well as the rug and tablecloths elsewhere in the club were not necessary. A less expensive piano certainly would have sufficed, but instead Cooper chose a pricey concert grand piano. Apparently, Cooper felt that the money spent on items such as these would prove financially beneficial in the end.

⁷⁸Rusk County, Texas, Deed Records, no. 51269, vol. 324, pp. 73-74. Light editing corrected a few decipherable misspelled words in the list, but the "compte" that was a part of the public address system is a mystery. Also, the inventory does not provide a value for the piano, but an article at the time of the New Cooper Club's opening stated that Cooper paid more than \$1,000 for a new piano at the club ("Concert Grand Piano at Cooper Club," p. 2).

Adding even more to Cooper's expenses was the club's location. In the northern states, nightclubs had no need of costly cooling systems, such as the one valued at \$2,750—a fortune in the Great Depression—at the New Cooper Club. Yet in the South it was a necessity, especially for sophisticated clubs to which patrons wore their very best clothes.

Planning a Dance

Thousands of people flocked to both of these Cooper Clubs to experience live music. However, it took much more than buildings to stage a dance. Putting on a dance, even in a small town, was no small feat and required a great deal of dedication and preparation. Luckily, Hugh Cooper was just the person for the job.

One of the most important steps in staging a dance was the matter of securing a band. Cooper usually went through the booking agency Music Corporation of America to secure orchestras for his club, competing with other spots that were also bidding on bands traveling through the area. If Cooper outbid the other operators, the Cooper Club became one of the stops on the orchestra's route.⁷⁹ To work with MCA was a wonderful opportunity for nightclub operators during this era because it managed most of the top orchestras in the nation.⁸⁰ With the logo "On The Air—Everywhere," the booking agency attracted many bands with its promise of radio exposure.⁸¹ During an

⁷⁹"Tony Mastrona's [*sic*] Orchestra Plays at Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 25 July 1933, p. 5.

⁸⁰"Niteries Nix Costly Bands," *Variety*, 22 July 1936, 57.

⁸¹Evans and Kiner with Trumbauer, 159.

engagement in Dallas, popular bandleader Xavier Cugat joked about MCA's status in the music world:

The topic was MCA and its dominant position in the band field where it is practically all powerful. The[n] it turned momentarily to that man again—Hitler.

“Who,” quipped Cugat, “does Hitler think he is—MCA?”⁸²

Clearly, choosing MCA as the organization through which to book orchestras for the Cooper Club was a wise decision. An MCA branch office opened in Dallas in January of 1934, but the Cooper Club featured MCA bands as early as December 7, 1932, when Herbie Kay and his Orchestra came, so early on Cooper must have dealt with either the main office in Chicago or a closer branch.⁸³

Hugh Cooper did not work exclusively with MCA, though, when he was securing a band. Sometimes booking a band was as simple as calling one up on the telephone. Cooper did exactly this with Herman Waldman and Ligon Smith, well-known orchestras in Texas that played several times at the club. He later told the *Henderson Daily News*:

. . . “But I never had a written contract with either of them, . . . I would call either of them and ask that they play for a dance on a certain date and what their fee would be. They would tell me and that’s all there was to it.”⁸⁴

Cooper probably wished all of his bookings were as uncomplicated as the ones with Waldman and Smith.

⁸²Passage from and Cugat quoted in “Arnheim to Bow on Friday,” *Dallas Morning News*, 3 September 1939, *Dallas Morning News Historical Archives by Newsbank*, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 8 March 2006. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>>.

⁸³“MCA Spreading,” *Variety*, 19 December 1933, 46; “Herbie Kay Orchestra Will Play Dance Here,” *Henderson News-Herald*, 27 November 1932, p. 3.

⁸⁴Cooper quoted in Buster Hale, “Cooper Club Filled an Entertainment Void in Area,” *Henderson Daily News*, 20 August 1981, p. 4.

Using his business sense, Cooper knew how to space dances to ensure a financially successful evening. One consideration taken into account when booking a band was the cost of the orchestra compared with how long it had been since the most recent dance. *Variety* noted, “The average small town, in the opinion of the bookers, cannot afford more than one high-priced band a week. Practice of forcing a group of bands for consecutively close dates has been extremely detrimental, declare these bookers.”⁸⁵ Cooper was wise about this and rarely held more than one dance a week. An exception to this was the nightly dancing that the New Cooper Club featured during its first few months of operation. However, because the bands he hired for these engagements were inexpensive and played multiple dances, Cooper was able to charge much less for nightly tickets—around 40 cents per person—than for a one-night stand.⁸⁶ On the few occasions that he did book two one-niters during a week’s time, at least one of the orchestras was inexpensive.

When playing one-night stands at the Cooper Club, orchestras used one of two methods to determine their fees. Some musical groups, typically the more renowned, required a flat cash guarantee for their services. Most bands, however, came with a clause in their contract allowing them to choose between a guarantee or a percentage of receipts at the gate, whichever was higher.⁸⁷

⁸⁵“1-Niters for Bands Okay if Guarantee and Admish Right,” *Variety*, 9 May 1933, 57.

⁸⁶“Jack Winston at Cooper Club ’Til Christmas,” *Henderson Daily News*, 10 December 1936, p. 5.

⁸⁷“Herman Waldman and His Orchestra for Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 17 January 1934, p. 7.

Setting the price of tickets for a dance depended heavily upon what the bands charged. On one-night tours, pricey orchestras quickly learned that lowering their guarantee yielded higher admission because the promoters were able to offer tickets at lower prices. A lowered cash guarantee also meant more jobs for top orchestras on the road because many nightclub owners were unwilling to risk paying a high price for a band if they were unsure that the costly tickets would sell.⁸⁸ At the Cooper Club, each ticket for one-night stand dances admitted a couple and generally cost between \$1.50 and \$2 but climbed as high as \$4.40 for highly sought-after orchestras. For these more expensive dances, Cooper often offered discounted advance tickets to encourage people to attend. For example, the Art Jarrett dance cost \$3.30 if bought on the night of the dance, August 8, 1935, but advance tickets were \$2.75.⁸⁹ A savings of fifty-five cents indubitably grabbed the attention of many prospective dance attendees.

When it came to advertising, Hugh Cooper was an expert. Ebb Smith later remembered from his days working at the New Cooper Club, “Well, he was a promoter, and he was good at it.”⁹⁰ During the early years of the Cooper Club, Cooper advertised heavily in the *Henderson Daily News* with ads, articles, and photographs that utilized information from publicity and press releases Cooper received once he booked bands.⁹¹ He even placed ads occasionally in larger surrounding papers, such as the *Dallas*

⁸⁸“1-Niters for Bands Okay if Guarantee and Admish Right,” 57.

⁸⁹*Henderson Daily News*, 5 August 1935, p. 11.

⁹⁰Ebb Smith, interview.

⁹¹See Appendix C for examples of ads that appeared in the *Henderson Daily News*.

Morning News and *Shreveport Times*, for major events at the club.⁹² Furthermore, Cooper had Coley Wright, one of his employees, hand out flyers and hang posters and signs announcing his dances in popular hangouts like cafés in towns and cities all over the area.⁹³ Locally, Cooper often instructed his helpers to place flyers on cars as well.⁹⁴ Randolph Harris at the News Printing Company, that later in the thirties became Harris-Holyer, Inc., designed these flyers, posters, and signs, for the Cooper Club.⁹⁵ Quite naturally, helping Cooper's advertising campaigns was the ever present and always reliable word of mouth. As Mary Melissa Bateman recalled, "It was the talk of the town."⁹⁶

A skilled promoter, Hugh Cooper did not limit his advertising to traditional means. By mail, he sent out close to 800 invitations designed by Randolph Harris to regular clientele throughout the East Texas area.⁹⁷ Miraculously, some of these invitations have survived and remain in the possession of Robert Forester, Harris's

⁹²Vaughn, "Your Own Cooper Club," p. 5. In the *Dallas Morning News*, Cooper placed ads for the following events at the Cooper Club: 8 November 1934 dance featuring Ben Bernie and his Orchestra, 12 January 1935 dance featuring Gus Arnheim and his Orchestra, 19 April 1935 dance featuring Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra, 25 June 1935 dance featuring Jan Garber and his Orchestra, and the 20 October 1936 dance for the opening of the New Cooper Club featuring Jimmy Joy and his Orchestra (*Dallas Morning News*, 2 November 1934, sec. 3, p. 8; *Dallas Morning News*, 9 January 1935, sec. 1, p. 10; *Dallas Morning News*, 16 April 1935, sec. 1, p. 10; *Dallas Morning News*, 23 June 1935, sec. 3, p. 9; *Dallas Morning News*, 18 October 1936, sec. 2, p. 5).

⁹³M. G. Wright, interview by author, 23 December 2005, Longview, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

⁹⁴Harris, interview.

⁹⁵"Harris-Hoyler is Outgrowth of Old News Printing Co.," *Henderson Daily News*, 5 June 1935, p. 5. See also Appendix D for examples of Cooper Club flyers and Appendix E for examples of Cooper Club signs.

⁹⁶Bateman, interview.

⁹⁷Hazel Cooper, interview; Vaughn, "Your Own Cooper Club," p. 5.

grandson. They were extremely clever, many designed in unique shapes and opening up in unusual ways, while others were in the format of postcards. All of the invitations displayed engaging graphics along with dance information, sometimes including pictures of bandleaders or band members and information about them.⁹⁸ This practice of sending out personal invitations to prospective attendees certainly made the Cooper Club stand out from the majority of other nightclubs of the era.

To make all of his advertising methods more affective, Hugh Cooper came up with a phrase to sum up his nightclub: “Where East Texas Dances,” and it became the club’s trademark. Shortly after the club opened, the slogan began to appear on newspaper ads, flyers, tickets, invitations, and presumably most other advertisements and materials for the Henderson nightclub.⁹⁹ Even the sign outside the New Cooper Club displayed the logo. It stated, “Visit the New Cooper Club / Henderson / Where E Texas Dances.”¹⁰⁰ Without a doubt, Hugh Cooper was a master at marketing his club.

Patrons of the night spot could purchase tickets for dances at several locations.¹⁰¹ In Henderson, they could acquire tickets ahead of time at such places as Haden & Boucher Drug Store, Jay’s Café, the Randolph Hotel Coffee Shop, and Allen Brothers

⁹⁸See Appendix G for examples of Cooper Club invitations.

⁹⁹Some of the first appearances of the slogan are on the invitation for the 3 February 1933 Joe Candullo dance and in a newspaper ad for the 28 January 1933 Paul Stroud dance (Invitation for the 3 February 1933 Cooper Club dance with Joe Candullo and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester; *Henderson Daily News*, 27 January 1933, p. 2). See also appendices C, D, F, and G for examples of the trademark phrase on newspaper ads, flyers, tickets, and invitations.

¹⁰⁰“Splendid New Cooper Club,” p. 7. See also Appendix A, Figure 5 for a photograph of the New Cooper Club that shows the sign bearing its logo.

¹⁰¹See Appendix F, figures 1-2 for examples of Cooper Club tickets that patrons could purchase.

Drug Store.¹⁰² Cooper also placed tickets throughout the East Texas area for easy access for the club's out-of-town patrons. For example, people from outside Henderson who planned to see Art Jarrett and his Orchestra for the lesser price of \$3.30 at the Cooper Club had the opportunity to purchase tickets from Blackstone Café in Kilgore, Longview Drug Co. in Longview, Hall-Warren Pharmacy in Greggton, Warren Gibbs in Gladewater, High School Pharmacy in Tyler, J. D. Hairston in Tyler, Eddie Bando in Jacksonville, Windy McKewen in Nacogdoches, Steve Pounds Jr. in Lufkin, John Ray in Carthage, Dan Bussey in Timpson, Joe Foster in Center, and Walter Kaywood in Rusk.¹⁰³ Of course, there was always the option of purchasing tickets upon arrival at dances.

Sometimes people were fortunate enough not to have to worry about buying a ticket, for occasionally Hugh Cooper gave out passes allowing people to attend dances free of charge. For example, he presented E. F. Crim with a complimentary ticket to enjoy the orchestra of Harry Sosnik at the Armistice Day dance on November 11, 1935, which was also Crim's birthday.¹⁰⁴ As a natural-born promoter, Cooper undoubtedly realized that the practice of giving out free passes from time to time would yield more ticket sales in the end. People were unlikely to forget the night they were able to attend a dance for free, especially in difficult times such as the Great Depression.

¹⁰²“All Woman Know So Every Man Goes They're Talking It,” *Henderson Daily News*, 4 January 1935, p. 2; “Garth Green Will Play Cooper Club Dance for Apr. 13,” *Henderson Daily News*, 12 April 1935, p. 2; Hugh Vaughn, “Dancing at its Best,” *Henderson Daily News*, 12 June 1935, p. 4; “Duke Ellington Sensation Dance All Night Long,” *Henderson Daily News*, 3 July 1935, p. 5.

¹⁰³*Henderson Daily News*, 5 August 1935, p. 11.

¹⁰⁴E. F. Crim, interview by author, 29 January 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; *Henderson Daily News*, 10 November 1935, p. 2; Complimentary Ticket for the 11 November 1935 Cooper Club dance with Harry Sosnik and his Orchestra, in possession of George D. Cooper. See also Appendix F, Figure 3 for this complimentary ticket that Hugh Cooper gave E. F. Crim.

In addition to providing people the opportunity to buy tickets ahead of time, Cooper also gave his patrons the chance to reserve tables at the Cooper Club. Individuals could make reservations by phoning, writing, or wiring Cooper and sometimes sign up for tables at places that sold tickets.¹⁰⁵ Usually tables were free of charge, but for special events where Cooper expected a large crowd, like the 1936 Armistice Eve dance featuring the orchestra of Garth Green, patrons had to pay a fee, usually around a dollar.¹⁰⁶

It might seem strange that in a time of national depression people would be willing or able to spend their money on a dance. The Cooper Club may have been in the East Texas oil field, but times were still hard for many of the area's residents. For example, Keenan Barrett recalled how on a dance night he often did not have enough money to buy a ticket:

It didn't cost but two dollars to get in, but two dollars was lots of money in those days. I used to go to Mr. Cooper and say, "Cooper, I want to come to the dance Saturday night, but I can't pay you until Monday."

"That's all right, Keenan. Come on in. Just tell them at the door."
And I always went, and I always paid him.¹⁰⁷

Crim also remembered that tickets were a luxury and something for which he had to save. However, no matter what it cost, ". . . That wasn't the problem. You wanted to see it so bad, you'd buy ahead of time and get set up for it weeks in advance."¹⁰⁸ After all, just

¹⁰⁵Flyer for 19 April 1935 Cooper Club dance featuring Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester; *Henderson Daily News*, 13 June 1937, p. 12; *Henderson Daily News*, 19 January 1937, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶*Henderson Daily News*, 8 December 1936, p. 2; *Henderson Daily News*, 8 November 1936, p. 6.

¹⁰⁷Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹⁰⁸E. F. Crim, interview, 29 January 2006.

because people were experiencing troubled times did not mean that they lost their desire for entertainment, and having fun could be a short-lived cure. An event like a dance allowed people nationwide during the Great Depression to escape from their financial woes. In the East Texas oil field, it was also a refuge from the wild prosperity and chaos that had overtaken many towns. Bob Kelley explained the atmosphere that the oil boom brought:

They didn't know . . . how big it was going to be. You had people that would stay up all night trying to buy leases or beat somebody out of their farmland or something. It was fast, and you didn't have a chance to sit down and talk They'd carry their briefcase with them and sit down in the car and write their own contracts, see. In fact, you can't do that today.¹⁰⁹

This dizzying environment surrounded everyone in East Texas during the oil boom, whether they were directly involved in the oil field or not, and dances offered them a brief respite from it. Besides offering escapes, dances could also be a means for embracing life, as did Kelley: “But the thing about boys back there then, they come off of a rough farm during the Depression. And if they had any increase in income, they were going to enjoy it, and that's what we did.”¹¹⁰ For whatever reasons, Americans decided that the cost of a night spot ticket was worth it, and they came in droves. To the Cooper Club, “Everybody went,” reminisced E. F. Crim. “They'd shut down the town practically.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹R. J. Kelley, interview by author, 23 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Crim and Mason, interview.

A Night at the Cooper Club

On the evening of a dance at the Cooper Club in Henderson, Texas, excitement undoubtedly filled the atmosphere of the town. Because Hugh Cooper scheduled dances intermittently with sometimes several weeks in between, each one was an anticipated event for which people had been planning and saving well in advance. On those special nights, East Texans enjoyed the thrill of live music that orchestras played just for them.

After dark, a bevy of cars made their way down the Tyler highway and sought places to park. At Cooper's first club, this could pose a challenge. Behind the club was an area used for parking cars, which was accessible by a road on the west side of the club, and all around the club people parked "just anywhere they could."¹¹² Still, it could seem like parking spaces were nowhere to be seen, as Barrett recalled:

You know, out there at the first one, there was no parking. There was no parking out there. You just parked all the way into town [along West Street].¹¹³

Of course, it helped that people came in groups. "Nobody went just a couple," explained Thrasher. "Everybody ganged up and went because there weren't that many cars."¹¹⁴

Barrett recalled how people coming from out of town came in groups as well:

But in those days, maybe you have a car full of people. The roads weren't real good, and the cars weren't real good like they are now, so maybe two or three couples would get together, say, in Timpson or somewhere and come up to the dance, come in one car. And so, you didn't have as many cars as you would have now. You'd have more cars now than you'd have people out there.¹¹⁵

¹¹²Thrasher, interview; Wright, interview; Stuart, interview.

¹¹³Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹¹⁴Thrasher, interview.

¹¹⁵Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

Had every couple come in a separate vehicle, parking would indeed have been a nightmare at the original club. Since the New Cooper Club was farther outside of town, it offered more room for parking, which was very fortunate as the number of cars continued to increase.¹¹⁶

To ease parking at the old and New Cooper Club, Cooper hired people to police and direct the cars as they arrived and left. Don Lambeth worked alongside four other parking assistants at the original club to direct drivers to resting spots for their vehicles. Their mission was to place the automobiles in an organized fashion so as to minimize wasted space and to prevent fender benders: “Every car that drove in, you had a certain place every one of them would park where they could get in and get out because you didn’t want three or four hundred cars all tight in there and all messed up and couldn’t get out when they got ready to get out,” recalled Lambeth. He and his co-workers would “try to keep them from parking too close to one another . . . [so] they could get out without driving over somebody or something getting hit.” This was especially important since, quite naturally, the bulk of patrons wanted to leave at the same time when the dance was over. After the dance, the parking attendants kept a close eye on the cars leaving. The fact that many people had grown tipsy from drinking alcohol throughout the evening made the task of supervising the parking lot even more important as dances came to a close.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Lambeth, interview.

After finding a place to park, patrons made their way to the entrance of the club and found a doorman ready to greet them.¹¹⁸ They handed over their tickets to the ticket-taker and received a clamp with which to attach their ticket stub to their clothing in order to show that they had paid to attend the dance.¹¹⁹ Some of the club's earliest invitations asked patrons to write their names in the indicated places and hand the invitations to the doorman as well as a way for Cooper to keep his mailing list up-to-date.¹²⁰ However, people must not have wanted to part with their invitations or frequently did not remember to bring them, for after a few months invitations dropped this request. Then guests checked their hats and coats, if needed, and signed a register, which helped Cooper keep track of who attended and to whom he could send invitations.¹²¹ Next, people looked around and sought out familiar faces. Unless people came alone from out of town and it was their first time at the club, they were guaranteed to know someone, for a core group of regular patrons were at all of the dances.¹²²

The crowd arriving at the Cooper Club generally consisted of the college crowd and older, with the young married set well represented. Cooper did not have a minimum age requirement to enter, but "you had to look like you were at least in high school or out of high school. . . . I know I never did get to go until I was a senior in high school . . . ,"

¹¹⁸Bateman, interview.

¹¹⁹Harris, interview; Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹²⁰Invitation for the 11 November 1932 Cooper Club dance with Ernie Fields and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester. See also Appendix G, figures 1, 3, and 5 for examples of these invitations.

¹²¹Bateman, interview; Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹²²Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

Thrasher remembered.¹²³ People drove in from several of the surrounding towns like Longview, Tyler, Marshall, Carthage, Jacksonville, Nacogdoches, Center, and Timpson.¹²⁴ When well-known bands played, many music aficionados from further-away, larger cities such as Texarkana, Shreveport, Houston, Dallas, Forth Worth, and Waco attended.¹²⁵ It was usually a respectable group of people, typically middle class.¹²⁶ And, of course, one of the faces in the crowd was Hugh Cooper, greeting people at the door, talking to the band, and even dancing.¹²⁷

A dance at the Cooper Club was an event prompting attendees to look their best. If they could afford them, the women dressed in evening gowns from local clothing stores that carried the latest fashions, such as Packman's, Reed's Department Store, Mays & Harris, Larry's, and Smith's.¹²⁸ At Smith's, customers could even find clothing lines that Neiman Marcus also carried.¹²⁹ The men dressed formally as well but not in tuxedos, as Barrett explained:

Nobody had a tux this side of Dallas, but . . . everybody had a suit and a [tie]. . . . But there were no blue jeans, no blue jeans there. If you had something else to wear, you

¹²³Thrasher, interview.

¹²⁴Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹²⁵Stuart, interview.

¹²⁶Lambeth, interview.

¹²⁷Bateman, interview; Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹²⁸*Henderson Daily News*, 4 November 1934, p. 4; *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, sec. 2, p. 5; *Henderson Daily News*, 6 October 1935, p. 8; *Henderson Daily News*, 19 October 1936, p. 10; *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, sec. 2, p. 2.

¹²⁹Thrasher, interview.

wore that. You didn't wear blue jeans. They were work clothes or cowboy clothes. They weren't dress clothes.¹³⁰

Men could find suits and other dressy apparel locally at such establishments as Mays & Harris and Hays Clothing Store.¹³¹ All in all, people attired themselves in the best that their budgets allowed. The females were especially excited about getting to dress up for a night at the Cooper Club because it was typically the only place in town where they could wear something as refined as an evening gown.¹³²

Events at the local nightclub required several helpers. Cooper had several employees—both black and white—at the clubs, always splendidly dressed, who helped him run the dances and made it possible for him to circulate and enjoy the evenings.¹³³ In Cooper's opinion, more than twenty-five staff members needed to be on hand to properly run a large dance. He demonstrated this at the New Cooper Club's grand opening, which featured twelve table waiters, three or four parking attendants, two porters, two check room attendants, ticket sellers, and doorkeepers. Lorene Rainey, Johnny McKnight, Coley Wright, Bob Zuber, Delma Smith, John Cooper, Rufus Winfrey, and Sebe Womack were a handful of these employees.¹³⁴ Needless to say, dances were always "well-run" and "well-organized."¹³⁵

¹³⁰Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹³¹*Henderson Daily News*, 6 October 1935, p. 8; *Henderson Daily News*, 6 October 1935, p. 2.

¹³²Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹³³Crim, interview, 29 January 2006; E. F. Crim, interview by author, 22 January 2007, telephone.

¹³⁴"Big Staff Required to Handle Opening of New Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, p. 6.

¹³⁵Crim, interview, 29 January 2006.

Dancing

When the music started, couples made their way to the dance floor, and the men who came alone formed a stag row next to the wall. Stuart reminisced, “It was just like a college dance.”¹³⁶ Barrett explained the dancing technique then:

. . . You could go and tag any girl, and sometimes they didn’t want to break—the boy didn’t—but most of the time he would. And you could ask her her name, and she’d tell you, and you’d get acquainted that way. And you’d dance a little while, and somebody would come and tag you. So, it was fun.¹³⁷

Changing partners so many times allowed people all over that area of the state to know one another. “I knew girls all over East Texas,” Barrett recalled, “and they knew all of our girls.”¹³⁸ Of course, as Stuart explained, there were ways to avoid being tagged if one so desired:

And now I’ll tell you this, too: if you want to be tagged, you’d dance up close to the stag row. Now you got somebody and you don’t want to be tagged, you get over in a corner way over there. Everybody was wise to that. You’d be dancing over in the corner where nobody would find you. That’s where you want to go, kind of get away from them.¹³⁹

No doubt when dancing with someone a person liked, the dancing floor became a battleground with the stag row representing the enemy and the building’s corners the places of retreat. Of course, the opposite could be true as well. Stuart remembered a night when he wanted someone to tag him but waited in vain:

. . . [A husband] was dancing with his wife. And I think he wanted to go out and take a drink, but he was dancing with her and couldn’t leave. I was just standing there

¹³⁶Stuart, interview.

¹³⁷Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Stuart, interview.

where all the stags were. He walks up and just passes her to me to dance with her. That's where I'm stuck for the rest of the night. You wouldn't dare walk off and leave one. No, you wouldn't do that. You stayed with her until somebody tagged you.¹⁴⁰

So, the tagging method had a few snags, but these were trivial compared with the opportunities it afforded dancers to make several new acquaintances at each dance.

Dancing styles in the thirties varied and, of course, depended on what type of band was performing, which at the Cooper Club was always sweet, swing, or jazz. At the Henderson night spot, waltzes, fox trots, and other types of ballroom dancing were common.¹⁴¹ Other popular thirties dances included the shag, big apple, susy-q, continental, carioca, truckin', yam, posin', the lambeth walk, and the lindy hop.¹⁴² The jitterbug began gaining popularity as well towards the end of the decade. As Thrasher remembered, "You danced what was new at the movies."¹⁴³

Learning how to dance could occur just about anywhere. For those with extra money to spend, taking private lessons was always an option. In August of 1935, Denard Haden opened the Haden School of Dancing and Self-Expression and held classes in the Cooper Club building.¹⁴⁴ Several years later, in 1948, he became the first choreographer for the Kilgore College Rangerettes.¹⁴⁵ Assisting Haden at the Cooper Club were Larry

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹⁴²Arnold Shaw, *Let's Dance: Popular Music in the 1930s*, ed. Bill Willard (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 71.

¹⁴³Thrasher, interview.

¹⁴⁴"Haden School of Dancing to Open Here August 20," *Henderson Daily News*, 16 August 1935, p. 12.

¹⁴⁵"History," Rangerette.com, <http://www.rangerette.com/history.asp>.

Lewis and Marilynn Hilbun, the latter a Henderson resident.¹⁴⁶ One of Hilbun's pupils was Mona Graham, who recalled that Hilbun was a skilled tap dancer and led "wonderful dance classes."¹⁴⁷ Other people took a more economic route and learned to dance at home, often from older siblings, or from friends.¹⁴⁸ The latest dance steps were frequently the topic of conversation at schools as students traded information about different moves they knew.¹⁴⁹ For someone who was eager to learn and had a healthy dose of self-esteem, learning how to dance or mastering a new dance step could take place right on the dance floor, as Barrett remembered, and be half the fun of attending dances:

They just got out there and tried and finally learned how to dance, stepped on each other. I remember how I learned. I just danced like the rest of them, just got out there and shuffled around until I finally learned how to do something.¹⁵⁰

All levels of skill were represented at dances, so even beginners had no cause to feel self-conscious. "Some of them were better than others," recalled Barrett. "Some of them weren't very good at all—some of us, I should say—but we tried."¹⁵¹

At the Cooper Club, males always outnumbered females.¹⁵² This disparity was due to it being socially unacceptable for females to arrive single at a dance. As Mary

¹⁴⁶"Haden School of Dancing to Open Here August 20," p. 12.

¹⁴⁷Mona Graham, interview by author, 7 January 2006, telephone, tape recording, in possession of author.

¹⁴⁸Wright, interview.

¹⁴⁹Harris, interview.

¹⁵⁰Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²Ibid.

Melissa Bateman remembered, “. . . I always thought it was better if you had a date. I didn’t just go out there by myself.” She continued, “Boys might have gone by themselves, but girls didn’t.”¹⁵³ This imbalance of the sexes meant that the females always had the opportunity to dance if they wished, while the men had to take turns.¹⁵⁴ However, this did not bother the men. They enjoyed the chance to dance with several different partners. Lindell Stuart could only think of one time when he took a date out to the Cooper Club. Taking a date was unnecessary because “. . . every dance you knew you were going to meet some new good-looking girls, and you did. You’d see one, just walk up and tag her and introduce yourself and dance with her.” He continued, “You just didn’t want to fool with one, I guess, you had such a good time dancing with so many of them.”¹⁵⁵

Throughout the evening, lyrics wafted through the air periodically, as most orchestras featured vocalists. Fans held singers in the big band era in high esteem and gladly interrupted their dancing for them. As Barrett explained, dancers wanted not only to hear but to watch their performances:

. . . Everybody would quit dancing when the vocalist came up because, see, all these bands had a reputation. They’d been everywhere, and we’d heard them on the radio. And so, when somebody would get up to sing, the people knew who he was, and they’d all stop and listen if it’s a girl or a man. They just stopped dancing and just crowded up to the dance stand and listened to them sing. When they get through singing, they’d start dancing again.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³Bateman, interview.

¹⁵⁴Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹⁵⁵Stuart, interview.

¹⁵⁶Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

In a cozy place like the Cooper Club, vocalists could easily connect with audience members. Stuart remembered the effect that the female singers had on the male portion of the crowd. When the females began their vocals, “. . . all those men and boys would get up and stand out there in front, just look up there . . . with mouths wide open.”¹⁵⁷

When the vocalists were not singing, they sat on the edge of the stage in a chair, sometimes the male on one side and the female on the other, and chatted with dancers as they drifted by on the dance floor.¹⁵⁸

Of course, dancing certainly was not a requirement at the Cooper Club, nor was it necessary to have a wonderful time. With the newspaper ad for the club’s opening dance, Cooper reached out to those who loved music but for whatever reason did not dance:

Our gala opening night will be more than a dance—it’s entertainment! We take this opportunity to invite people who do not dance to hear Miss Doris Becker . . . You’ll enjoy hearing Waldman, one of America’s best bands.¹⁵⁹

He emphasized the opportunity for enjoying the musicians with the ears and not just the feet. Some people had scruples about dancing, but some simply did not want to, and both clubs offered plenty of seating to accommodate these non-dancing patrons. Barrett remembered members of one particular segment of the population who did not have dancing on their minds:

. . . There were some older people or middle-age people, some band directors that, I guess, had visions at one time of having a band or something. They would come and

¹⁵⁷Stuart, interview.

¹⁵⁸Wright, interview.

¹⁵⁹*Henderson Daily News*, 26 October 1932, p. 3.

just sit there and watch them, maybe one or two, not a whole group. But I've seen them sit there the whole time [and] watch them play.¹⁶⁰

Fans who were not musicians also enjoyed watching the orchestras. On occasions when a well-known band came, some preferred to crowd around the bandstand the entire night and watch the ensemble.¹⁶¹

Intermission

Because dancing and performing were physically taxing, dances at one-night stands featured intermissions to give both the bands and dancers brief rests. Band members used this time for restroom breaks or went outside to smoke and relax.¹⁶² After hours of non-stop playing, many musicians needed something to eat or drink to give them the stamina to last the night. Dancers could sit down and rest their feet and also purchase refreshments. Throughout the evening, the original Cooper Club sold soft drinks and ice, and at the New Cooper Club patrons could order these items as well as food from the club's café.¹⁶³ Those brave enough to abandon their parking spaces could drive to local diners for a refreshing drink or quick bite of something to eat.¹⁶⁴

Under Hugh Cooper's management, an item that people could not purchase at the Cooper Club during intermission, or at any other point in the evening, was alcohol. With that said, he did not ban the substance from the premises and allowed people to bring

¹⁶⁰Keenan Barrett, interview by author, 29 January 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Wright, interview.

¹⁶³Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005; *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, p. 6.

¹⁶⁴*Henderson Daily News*, 6 October 1935, p. 6.

their own bottles. Patrons could buy setups—soft drinks, ice, and glasses—with which to make their own mixed drinks but never alcohol itself while Cooper was operator.¹⁶⁵

People who chose to stay at the nightclub during intermission mixed and mingled and moved around. It was the perfect opportunity to speak to friends they spotted while on the dance floor or to get to know someone new. Some sat at tables and chatted, while others traveled from table to table and greeted old friends.¹⁶⁶ Guests also chatted with the musicians. Most of the band members were very friendly and more than happy to talk with guests.¹⁶⁷ Conversation topics often included Henderson, the oil field, where the band had last played, where it was headed next, and the hometowns of the musicians.¹⁶⁸ Locals also often requested songs for the band to play once the music resumed. For individuals in attendance who played instruments, intermission offered them a time to discuss their instruments with fellow musicians and ask for some pointers, or to discuss music in general.¹⁶⁹ Likewise, people who dreamed of becoming professional vocalists could talk with the singers in the band.

It must have seemed like a dream come true for many members of the local Texas crowd to talk face-to-face with band members, some of them celebrities, but these musicians were often yearning for a touch of the everyday. Traveling could become tiresome and monotonous, and even when orchestras were not on the road, they often

¹⁶⁵Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005; Wright, interview.

¹⁶⁶Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹⁶⁷Stuart, interview.

¹⁶⁸Bateman, interview.

¹⁶⁹Crim and Mason, interview.

were engaged at venues in cities completely unfamiliar to the band members. Talking with people living so-called normal lives could remind band members of home and of family.

On some evenings, usually during intermission, the club provided opportunities for people in the audience to get up on the stage and showcase their musical or dancing talents in front of the orchestra present. One such amateur night took place on Saturday, June 10, 1933, during a dance featuring Ligon Smith and his Orchestra. The following Tuesday, the *Henderson Daily News* reported on a couple of brave souls who serenaded their fellow East Texans that evening. Mary Ellen Cannon had sung a blues number and received a round of applause, but “Mrs. Johnnie Wright stole the show with that Southern dialect of hers, singing ‘Dinah.’ She had all the movements required, too”¹⁷⁰ A few weeks later on Saturday, July 15, 1933, Hugh Cooper scheduled another local talent show during the dance with Ralph Britt and his Orchestra. Invitations referred to it as a “New Deal,” referencing President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal policies that were intended to bring the country out of the Great Depression:

The Cooper Club will offer a “New Deal” in Entertainment Saturday night by sponsoring a short East Texas Amateur program during the main intermission at 12 o’clock. All who can sing, whistle, tap, hop, skip or jump will be invited to display their talents. Several local artists have already been practicing special numbers and do not intend to let stars from other towns carry off all the prizes.¹⁷¹

These amateur nights apparently became the source of friendly rivalry between the oil field towns.

¹⁷⁰“Chi Orchestra Here Saturday,” *Henderson Daily News*, 13 June 1933, p. 4.

¹⁷¹Invitation for the 15 July 1933 Cooper Club dance with Ralph Britt and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.

Talented individuals who did not volunteer to perform during the local talent time frame still could find themselves onstage, for members of the crowd often made requests. Dancer Marilyn Hilbun, who taught at the Haden School of Dancing and Self-Expression, was a crowd favorite with her expert tap dancing, and patrons often cajoled her into performing. Patrons also made requests for local resident Mabel Jackson to sing. She later recalled a specific humorous incident that occurred the night she sang in front of Jan Garber's band, most likely during his last Cooper Club appearance in January of 1937:¹⁷²

And they let us go up in front of Jan Garber's band . . . And somebody said that they wanted me to sing because I sang with all the little local Lions Clubs and all those programs and everything. And so, I did, and I never will forget—I mean, mind you I was about sixteen. . . . I don't even remember what I was singing— but I heard him [Garber] say, "Get hot or go home." I didn't even know what he was talking about. I wasn't paying any attention to him, and I just kept on doing what I was doing. . . . But he was laughing. Everybody was just loving it.¹⁷³

These were thrilling moments for East Texans. For a few minutes, they were performing in front of an orchestra, often nationally famous, and getting a taste of what it was like to be a part of a dance band.

Watching through the Windows

Throughout the evening at the Cooper Club, not everyone enjoying the activities was inside the building. At the original Cooper Club, which was non-air-conditioned and had huge windows that were open during warm weather, the windows allowed those unable to enter the building an opportunity to take part in the evening's excitement.

¹⁷²*Henderson Daily News*, 19 January 1937, p. 2.

¹⁷³Graham, interview. See also Appendix B, Figure 6 for a photograph of Jan Garber.

Many did not go inside because they could not afford a ticket.¹⁷⁴ Others were simply trying to satisfy their curiosity: “They just wanted to see what was going on, and that’s always been that way.”¹⁷⁵ But, as Barrett also reminisced, just as many had to stay outside because they were too young to enter:

When it opened, I wasn’t old enough to go. I was still in high school. . . . And we could go out there and look in the windows, so we did for two years, along with hundreds of other people out there. You had to fight your way up to get a window to look inside and watch the people dancing.¹⁷⁶

The conversation among individuals outside often involved spotting people they knew on the dance floor: “But they’d say, There’s old so-and-so over there. See him?”¹⁷⁷ Nancy Preston often went out to the original Cooper Club on dates with her future husband: “. . . We would stand on the radiator of the car and look in the windows and watch the people dance.” She continued, “We would go out and see if we could see all the musicians . . .” On one occasion, they could not resist entering the world inside the club: “Once we crawled through the window, just slipped in the edge, but that’s all. . . . We just looked and got ourselves out.”¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth Mason also went out to the Cooper Club and peeked through the windows with her group of friends since they were too young to go inside. As she recalled, “. . . When we knew they were coming to town, we always planned to go

¹⁷⁴Bateman, interview.

¹⁷⁵Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Preston, interview.

out there and just listen to them.” They would watch the orchestra and the dancers and enjoy the music that they knew from radio broadcasts.¹⁷⁹

Fortunately for the people on the outside looking in, no one inside tried to discourage them. Not only did the people inside not mind, “They didn’t pay any attention to you. And Cooper didn’t care, as long as you didn’t try to get in without a ticket.”¹⁸⁰ Barrett further remarked on his memories of looking inside and how it would translate in today’s world:

I think about that sometimes: if you went up to a dance hall today—of course, they’re not good like that was anymore—and just wanted to look in. You go to a window and look out the window, and there are just faces looking at you. And it . . . [would be] strange. It wasn’t in those days, but it would be now.¹⁸¹

People who had paid for tickets did not mind being watched because they were occupied with having a wonderful time, and the people looking in were not disrupting their evenings. Moreover, “They felt sorry for us, I’m sure,” Barrett noted.¹⁸²

Watching dances from outside did not end when the original club burned but continued on at the New Cooper Club. John Harris recalled watching through the windows of both the old and New Cooper Club.¹⁸³ However, the second building was not quite as conducive to this activity as the original one. Whereas the first building had numerous huge windows that stretched so far to the ground that people could sit in them,

¹⁷⁹Crim and Mason, interview.

¹⁸⁰Barrett, interview, 29 January 2006.

¹⁸¹Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹⁸²Ibid.

¹⁸³Harris, interview.

the second building had fewer, and they were much smaller.¹⁸⁴ A probable explanation for the difference in the windows was the fact that the cooling system apparently worked better in the New Cooper Club. Lambeth, who lived near the New Cooper Club, remembered that he could not hear the band from his house at night because, due to its air-conditioning, the club rarely opened its windows or doors.¹⁸⁵ Thus, the glory days of enjoying bands through the windows existed at the old Cooper Club.

Even though dances lasted into the early morning hours, participants did not rush home afterward. Many people went to Jay's Café, a popular local eatery downtown on South Main that stayed open all night. Inside were booths in which customers could relax while they indulged in pieces of homemade pies, as well as rolls and cracklin' cornbread served with honey and butter.¹⁸⁶ Jay's Café had a far-reaching reputation, and people from all over East Texas knew of its wonderful food.¹⁸⁷ The Club Café, across from Citizens National Bank on North Main downtown, was another popular hangout after a Cooper Club dance. Run by Frank and Lucille Melton, it was also open twenty-four hours a day, and late-night crowds ordered coffee, pie, hot chocolate, and sandwiches.¹⁸⁸ Indubitably, when Cooper Club dances were over, cafés and coffee shops open around the clock both in Henderson and the surrounding area enjoyed a surge in

¹⁸⁴Oren Arnold, "Where Radio's Big-Name Orchestras Play in a Barn!" 2; "Splendid New Cooper Club," p. 7. See also Appendix A, figures 2 and 5 for photographs of the old Cooper Club and New Cooper Club.

¹⁸⁵Lambeth, interview.

¹⁸⁶Stuart, interview; Thrasher, interview.

¹⁸⁷Thrasher, interview.

¹⁸⁸"Popularity of Club Café is Known to Many," *Henderson Daily News*, 22 January 1934, p. 7.

business as many patrons, not wanting the night to end, made one more stop on their way home.

Black Dances

African-Americans also enjoyed dances at the Cooper Club, though on different nights due to the policy of racial segregation. However, except for one lone dance ad in the *Henderson Daily News*, this aspect of the night spot received virtually no documentation from this era.¹⁸⁹ The single ad made the dance seem like an anomaly when it was actually just the tip of the iceberg regarding this important subject. It only made sense that blacks were enjoying events, too, at the Cooper Club while it was open. In 1930, approximately 43 percent of the Rusk County population was black, stemming from the pre-Civil War days when plantations and slaves dominated the local economy.¹⁹⁰ By 1940, the black population had grown from 13,944 to 15,739.¹⁹¹

When Cooper initially opened his club, he may not have intended to hold dances for the local African-Americans, but they helped to change his mind. While the Cooper Club was open, members of the black business community often encouraged Cooper to bring in orchestras for their people to enjoy. In return, they helped Cooper advertise and sell tickets by displaying advertisements and offering tickets for purchase in their places of business. Mack Biggers of First & Last Chance Grocery and Benjamin Holliman of

¹⁸⁹*Henderson Daily News*, 10 February 1942, p. 6.

¹⁹⁰University of Virginia Geospatial & Statistical Data Center, "Historical Census Browser," <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/php/county.php> (accessed 26 September 2006); Knapp and Biesele, "Rusk County," 724.

¹⁹¹University of Virginia Geospatial & Statistical Data Center, "Historical Census Browser."

Holliman's Restaurant were two such citizens who participated in advertising and selling tickets for these dances.¹⁹²

Except for one ad during the last months of the night spot, Cooper Club-sponsored black dances never appeared in local newspaper ads. This may have been because few local blacks subscribed to the *Henderson Daily News*. In 1930 in Rusk County, approximately 14.6 percent of blacks age 10 and over were illiterate, compared to only 2 percent of native whites age 10 and older.¹⁹³ Illiteracy was probably one factor but certainly not the only one. Newspapers cost precious pennies that could be spent on other things. After all, it was the Great Depression. For those who did have the money for local newspapers, no one could blame them for not wanting to purchase them because they were full of racist terms and points of view. Many African-Americans in East Texas probably preferred to get their news from the black newspapers of the day. Texas offered the *Houston Informer and Texas Freeman*, the *Houston Defender*, the *Beaumont Industrial Era*, and the *Dallas Express*.¹⁹⁴ Another possible news source was the *Chicago Defender*, which had a wide readership in the South.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹²Harris, interview; *Henderson Daily News*, 10 February 1942, p. 6; *Henderson, Texas: City Directory 1935-36* (Springfield, Mo.: Interstate Directory Company, 1935), 106, 130.

¹⁹³University of Virginia Geospatial & Statistical Data Center, "Historical Census Browser."

¹⁹⁴*Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Houston Informer and Texas Freeman," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/HH/eeh11.html>; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Houston Defender," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/HH/eeh9.html>; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Beaumont Industrial Era," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/BB/eeb5.html>; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "Dallas Express," <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/DD/eed16.html>.

¹⁹⁵"Chicago Defender," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica Online, <http://www.search.eb.com/eb/article-9002511>.

Of course, a newspaper was not necessary to advertise a dance, especially in a small town. Word of mouth was very powerful, and news about the dances raced through the area. Such events were especially exciting for the black population because in the thirties Rusk County had a sheriff who heavily discriminated against blacks and often disrupted the activity at the black clubs and cafés in town. Because of his bullying, many blacks chose to stay home in the evenings.¹⁹⁶ All-black dances sponsored by a white man were hence a windfall. Of course, blacks could go to the Cooper Club and listen from outside when the white dances were going on, but this was hardly the same as having dances of their own. For one thing, they could not get too close, as Mattie Jones remembered: “We had to stand off to the side when the white people went in”¹⁹⁷

In addition to word of mouth, Cooper advertised with similar methods he used to advertise the all-white dances, minus the invitations and newspaper publicity. Harris remembered that Cooper’s advertising was similar to that of a political campaign. He nailed posters to trees and put out large signs along the highways and roads and on street corners: “Just like you see these signs we’ve got, Elect so-and-so. It’d be like that.” Cooper hung up smaller ads around town and also passed out flyers that could fit in people’s pockets:

Cooper would go around . . . to all the stores and different places where blacks hung out and hand them [out], and they’d be glad. He’d give them to them, give them a handful to give people.

¹⁹⁶Jones, interview.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

They'd run up. They'd be, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Cooper. Let me have some. I know some friends.
And, Okay.¹⁹⁸

The excitement surrounding future dances made them easy to advertise.

Evidence of the large number of black dances at the Cooper Club existed only in the memories of the scores of people who attended them. One of these people was Henderson resident Albertus Lewis, who was just barely old enough to attend dances. Unbeknownst to his parents, he was a frequent guest. When he was fifteen years of age, he had already reached his full height of 6 feet 2 inches, which made him look old enough to be at dances, and he used this to his advantage:

It's a funny thing. I used to slip out the window at night. . . . [and] go to dances. My brother would let me out, and then he would let me in, and I would do the same for him. But I really enjoyed dancing, and I enjoyed music and especially big-name bands that we had then, and I made practically all of the dances. . . . The dances didn't start until twelve o'clock at night, and we would dance nearly all night. I would leave the dance, go have breakfast, and go to school. That's right. I used to do that all the time. I made just about all of the dances.¹⁹⁹

After he crawled out his window, Lewis walked or caught a ride to the club. Sometimes he had planned ahead for someone to pick him up.²⁰⁰

Mattie Jones remembered attending at least one dance at the New Cooper Club, although her parents were also unaware that she was there. She had to steal away at night "because at that time children had to slip off to go to places like that. Come back . . . ,

¹⁹⁸Harris, interview.

¹⁹⁹Albertus Lewis, interview by author, 2 February 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

²⁰⁰Ibid.

the parents would hardly ever know.”²⁰¹ For Lewis and Jones, the chance to see live orchestras was worth the risk of any punishment their parents might enforce were they caught.

Another person who remembered the many African-American dances at the Cooper Club was John Harris, who attended a few at the original building. He never learned to dance and thus sat at the tables when he went to these events. While enjoying something to drink, he watched the band and the people on the dance floor: “I liked to see people dancing and moving around. It looked like everybody was happy.”²⁰²

From where John Harris sat inside the original Cooper Club, he witnessed one of the most interesting aspects of all-black dances. In a twist on segregation, on these nights a rope separated the benches around the wall from the rest of the club, and this became an area where white patrons enjoyed the dances. They could not get on the dance floor, but they clapped their hands and patted their knees and tapped their toes and danced as best as they could in their confined space.²⁰³ Surely these arrangements caused some whites in attendance to realize the absurdity of segregation, and some blacks probably thought it was quite amusing to see whites left on the sidelines because of their race. Harris recalled something his friends told him concerning this arrangement that occurred one night after he had left. During the closing song of the evening, a white couple left the roped-off section, stepped onto the dance floor, and danced to the music alongside the black attendees. Harris’s friends were in disbelief: “They said, You ought to have been

²⁰¹Jones, interview.

²⁰²Harris, interview.

²⁰³Ibid.

there. . . . You ought to have seen that.”²⁰⁴ Clearly, music had the power to bring together people who were supposedly different. At the New Cooper Club, there is no evidence of a roped-off section. Lewis recalled all of the dances he went to as being only for blacks.²⁰⁵ Also, the single newspaper ad for an all-black dance said “Colored Only” and made no mention of seating available for whites.²⁰⁶

Cooper Club dances for the black community were special events that caused people to dress up. Obviously, black citizens could not shop at the same stores as did the whites, and many had a comparatively lower income, but they still managed to dress up for the occasion. Whatever they could afford, they wore:

Put on their best they had, but it [was] according to how you were living. If you’re living good and buying good clothes, well, you’re going to show them. Yes, sir, that’s the best way I can describe it because I come up in that bunch that never did have nothing, just whatever I had and was clean and everything.²⁰⁷

Typically, for the men, “. . . if you had a suit you wore it. If you didn’t, you had nice trousers and a shirt.”²⁰⁸ As for the women, they wore their best dresses.²⁰⁹

People showed up at dances in all different combinations. The Cooper Club was the perfect place to go with a significant other or to look for one:

They went with dates. Some went single. I always went single because I was just so young. I was just out there, but they had dates. Some men took their wives because

²⁰⁴Ibid.

²⁰⁵Lewis, interview.

²⁰⁶*Henderson Daily News*, 10 February 1942, p. 6.

²⁰⁷Harris, interview.

²⁰⁸Lewis, interview.

²⁰⁹Jones, interview.

really he had them about once a month or every two months, and that was about the only thing that you could really talk about that you had an opportunity to attend.²¹⁰

Singles, couples, groups, they all came in droves: “I mean it would be full. I mean people turned out,” recalled Lewis.²¹¹

Of course, finding the money for tickets could pose a problem. However, dance patrons Lewis and Harris both related anecdotes concerning ways they found to solve this problem. Lewis reminisced how he frequently managed to go to dances for free:

You know how I used to get tickets to the dance? I had a beautiful sister.

And, “Hey.”

“Yeah.”

“Your sister going to the dance?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m going to take her.”

“We’ll be there.”

“Well, you tell her that I want to see her. Here. Here are your tickets.”

I knew my sister wasn’t going to the dance. I’d get that ticket and go to the dance, get there, “Well, man, my father changed his mind. He wouldn’t let her go.” But they couldn’t question it.²¹²

On occasions when he could not come across a ticket and did not have the money for one, Lewis would “slip in, go through a window, anything.”²¹³ John Harris and his friends had a method for getting into the dances when they collectively had enough money for only one ticket, and he recalled the night he got caught:

. . . One night I was helping my friends get in. I went in and took my ticket off and sent it back out, then give it to my friends. That’s the serious truth. I got three of my friends in, and I decided I would go out. I don’t know where. I decided I’d go outdoors. Then I got my ticket back, and you got to have it on. When I come back in

²¹⁰Lewis, interview.

²¹¹Ibid.

²¹²Ibid.

²¹³Ibid.

the house [club], well, one of the fellows [who] was at the door saw there was a pin up there instead of a clamp. And they want to know where did I get that ticket, and that . . . [fellow] gave me to Cooper. And I had been drinking some bootleg whiskey that night.

And he [Cooper] says, “What are you doing in here?”

He [doorman] said, “He had this ticket, had a pin on it. . . . I don’t know where he got it.”

And he [Cooper] said, “What?”

I said, “I’ll tell you where I got it.” I said—Mr. Biggers was out there—“I bought it from him.”

And so, he [Cooper] looked at me and looked . . . at the other fellow. He knew I used to be out to the golf course, too, at the time. He said, “Put that back on and get out of my face with that stinking whiskey. Get out of my face.”

So, they snapped it back on, but I was afraid to come home then.²¹⁴

Harris and his friends took turns buying these tickets that they shared. Whoever purchased the dance ticket entered the club first and then sent the ticket out to the rest of the group.²¹⁵

Just like the all-white dances at the Cooper Club, the all-black ones attracted a crowd outside as well. On nights when he did not have the means to go inside, John Harris sometimes stood outside and listened to the music and looked through the windows. “I wasn’t by myself,” he recalled. “There was a bunch of them didn’t have no money, didn’t have the dollar to get in there.” One night while looking through the windows, he witnessed a performance of Ella Fitzgerald and her Orchestra.²¹⁶ White music fans were also in the crowd outside on these nights. Through the windows, Lindell Stuart watched an all-black dance featuring Count Basie and his Orchestra. He witnessed a club packed with dancers who were thoroughly enjoying the band.²¹⁷

²¹⁴Harris, interview.

²¹⁵Ibid.

²¹⁶Ibid.

²¹⁷Stuart, interview.

Special Dances

Over the years, the Cooper Club periodically hosted special dances that broke out of the usual mold. For instance, dances at the Cooper Club typically started between 9 and 10 o'clock at night and lasted until about 2 o'clock. However, popular during the thirties were dances called *germans* that began at midnight and lasted until dawn.²¹⁸ The Cooper Club held its first german dance on its first Christmas, and patrons celebrated the holiday with music starting at 12:01 a.m. Monday, December 26, 1932, with the Campus Serenaders from A&M College performing.²¹⁹ Garth Green and his Orchestra played for another german dance in the early morning hours of Monday, April 22, 1935.²²⁰ Both of these were white dances, but the Cooper Club held *germans* for black dancers as well. Albertus Lewis recalled that many of the dances he attended began at midnight.²²¹

The other special dances of note at the Cooper Club were the President's Birthday Balls held on January 30. President Franklin Roosevelt initiated these national, annual events in 1934 to raise money for the Warm Springs Foundation in Georgia in its fight against infantile paralysis. During the balls, the president expressed his appreciation to everyone who participated by speaking over a national broadcast.²²² On the night of January 30, 1934, the dance at the Cooper Club was one of more than five thousand

²¹⁸Wright, interview; "Stroud Orchestra at Cooper Club for Gay New Years Eve Hop," *Henderson News-Herald*, 25 December 1932, p. 8.

²¹⁹"Christmas German Dance is Planned for Cooper Club," *Henderson News-Herald*, 25 December 1932, sec. 1, p. 1.

²²⁰*Henderson Daily News*, 21 April 1935, p. 6.

²²¹Lewis, interview.

²²²"President's Birthday Party Held on Tuesday Night," *Henderson Daily News*, 28 January 1934, sec. 2, pp. 1, 7.

similar dances held simultaneously all over the United States and its possessions, and patrons were able to listen to the president's radio announcement from the interior of the club: "The President will personally address you over N.B.C. and the loudspeakers will carry his voice to you with distinction and clearness."²²³ These were thrilling events for everyone who participated as they were taking part in a nationwide event. President's Birthday Balls were different from other dances at the Cooper Club in that, as a fundraiser, they were largely community-sponsored events with several people volunteering their time, money, and services. For instance, for the first one, Cooper donated the use of the club, the News Printing Company printed the tickets free of charge, the *Henderson Daily News* donated advertising space, and the Boy Scouts donated their time in selling the tickets.²²⁴ Hugh Cooper most likely helped to book some of the bands for the events over the years, but the dances had several sponsors who paid the orchestra cost.²²⁵

In all, the Cooper Club hosted at least six President's Birthday Balls. Patrons danced to an unknown orchestra in 1934, Richard Cole and his Orchestra in 1936, Garth Green and his Orchestra in 1937, Jay Gilstrap and his Orchestra in 1939, Shockey Wilcox and his Orchestra in 1940, and the Texas Collegians in 1941.²²⁶ The last dance in 1941 was a President's Birthday Ball for the black community, with Mack Biggers, Felix

²²³*Henderson Daily News*, 28 January 1934, sec. 2, p. 19.

²²⁴"President's Birthday Party Held on Tuesday Night," sec. 2, pp. 1, 7.

²²⁵*Henderson Daily News*, 28 January 1936, p. 7.

²²⁶"President's Birthday Party Held on Tuesday Night," sec. 2, pp. 1, 7; *Henderson Daily News*, 28 January 1936, p. 7; *Henderson Daily News*, 29 January 1937, p. 5; *Henderson Daily News*, 22 January 1939, p. 14; "Biggest Rusk County President's Birthday Ball Slated Tuesday," *Henderson Daily News*, 28 January 1940, p. 10; "Negroes Taking Active Part in Birthday Balls," *Henderson Daily News*, 28 January 1941, p. 8.

Jenkins, and Robert Sawyer overseeing the event. The white ball that year took place at the city auditorium.²²⁷

This was the milieu into which the many orchestras that came to the Cooper Club entered. Some bands came from far away and some from not very far at all, but they all brought with them the magic of dancing to music performed by musicians and vocalists who were within an arm's reach of each guest. These musical ensembles held the individuals at the Cooper Club in the palms of their hands. The orchestras were numerous and the times exciting.

²²⁷“Negroes Taking Active Part in Birthday Balls,” p. 8.

CHAPTER THREE

The Music Goes 'Round and Around

More than a hundred bands set foot in the Cooper Club to entrance audiences with their brands of dance music from 1932 to 1942. Many performed to receptive crowds, but a few of the bands, as well as individuals associated with these musical organizations, stand out for a variety of reasons. Focusing on highlights of the careers of these select bands and band members during the Cooper Club era can give readers an understanding of the relationships audiences had with these musicians through various mediums in the years surrounding the dances.

Local Dance Bands

During the thirties and through World War II, a multitude of dance bands existed throughout the United States that performed largely in their surrounding area. Many of these orchestras had dreams of becoming famous that never came to be, while others purposefully remained local in order to stay close to home and family. Sadly, because they failed to make a splash on the larger music scene, historians have forgotten them. Fortunately, discussing the Cooper Club provides the perfect opportunity to highlight two such local bands that performed in East Texas.

Paul Stroud and his Orchestra

One band that stands out for its Henderson roots and repeated engagements at the Cooper Club was Paul Stroud and his Orchestra. A native of the city, Stroud formed a dance band based out of Henderson in late 1932 with former members of the Sorin-White

Cadets, a musical group with radio and vaudeville experience.¹ He located the musicians through *Billboard Magazine*.² M. G. Wright, who lived two doors away from Stroud as they grew up, recalled that Stroud had the makings of a successful front man: “He was one of the funniest guys you ever met. He was a personality and a musician.” Wright added, “He was one of the best trumpet players I ever knew in my life”³ In the early thirties, the band played in dance clubs and hotels throughout the East Texas oil field and beyond, including the Crim Hotel Roof Garden in Texarkana, the Lamar Hotel in Houston, and the Tokio Club in Galveston.⁴

Henderson residents heard the Stroud band in its infancy. Four of the musical group’s earliest performances were at the Cooper Club in December of 1932 and January of 1933.⁵ Customers of Jay’s Café got to know the band as well as they played twice daily during the lunch and dinner hours.⁶ Lindell Stuart recalled enjoying the strains of

¹“New Orchestra is Organized Here by Paul P. Stroud,” *Henderson News-Herald*, 4 December 1932, p. 3; “Stroud Orchestra at Cooper Club for Gay New Years Eve Hop,” *Henderson News-Herald*, 25 December 1932, sec. 1, p. 8. See also Appendix G, Figure 7 for a photograph of Paul Stroud.

²“Paul Stroud,” Texas Bandmasters Hall of Fame, http://www.tmea.org/061_PBM/HOF/html/045_Stroud.htm.

³M. G. Wright, interview by author, 23 December 2005, Longview, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁴“Paul Stroud,” Texas Bandmasters Hall of Fame; “Paul Stroud and Orchestra Play in Troup Wednesday,” *Henderson News-Herald*, 19 February 1933, sec. 1, p. 5; “Paul Stroud Band in Galveston Club,” *Henderson News-Herald*, 16 April 1933, p. 4.

⁵Invitation for the 29 December 1932 and 31 December 1932 Cooper Club dances with Paul Stroud and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester; “Stroud’s Orchestra Heard at Cooper’s Club Last Night,” *Henderson News-Herald* 8 January 1933, sec. 1, p. 2; *Henderson Daily News*, 27 January 1933, p. 2.

⁶*Henderson Daily News*, 14 December 1932, p. 8.

Stroud's Orchestra as he dined at Jay's: "You'd go in there and have that dinner music at night, and he'd be in the back there playing."⁷

Despite the success with his organization, Stroud's real passion resided elsewhere. In 1933, before the days of school bands, Stroud formed and taught a young men's band in Henderson that gave public concerts.⁸ Later in the decade, he embarked on a forty-one-year career as a band director in many East Texas public schools, and his bands won numerous awards.⁹

Garth Green and his Orchestra

Without a doubt, the most popular local orchestra to grace the stage at the Cooper Club—and one of the overall favorites—was Garth Green and his Orchestra, "The Pride of East Texas," a group with the distinction of having six brothers as members, five of whom were twins.¹⁰ The Green brothers were actually from Lubbock, but the town soon accepted them as their own. Garth and Gayle, twins; Earl and Carl, twins; Rob, who had a twin sister not in the band; and Raymond Green moved to Henderson in the early

⁷Lindell Stuart, interview by author, 18 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁸"Paul Stroud," Texas Bandmasters Hall of Fame; "Paul Stroud to Organize Band," *Henderson Daily News*, 24 September 1933, p. 2; "Band Concert to be Given Next Thursday," *Henderson Daily News*, 21 January 1934, sec. 2, p. 1.

⁹"Paul Stroud," Texas Bandmasters Hall of Fame.

¹⁰*Henderson Daily News*, 20 February 1935, p. 7. See also Appendix B, Figure 3 for a photograph of Garth Green.

thirties in search of work.¹¹ With both carpentry and musical skills, the brothers soon became carpenters by day and their own six-member band by night.¹²

Lindell Stuart later reminisced about how he had a hand in their first gig. Knowing that the Greens wanted practice playing as a group for an audience, he and Pete McNee Jr. hired them to play a dance at the Henderson Woman's Forum that was then located on North Marshall Street. The crowd enjoyed the music so much that when the scheduled hours were over, they took up a collection and had the Greens play another hour.¹³ In the process of fine-tuning their harmonies, the Greens also played for school dances, in private homes, for parties, and at a gazebo on East Main so many times that the gazebo seemed like the band's very own.¹⁴ In the mid-thirties, they expanded into a larger ten-piece orchestra, which included trumpeter Paul Stroud as a member.¹⁵

Garth Green and his Orchestra made one of their first appearances at the Cooper Club in February of 1934, and subsequently became favorites at the night spot.¹⁶ They imitated the sounds of the famous big bands of the day with a mixture of sweet and swing

¹¹Marvis Green, interview by author, 21 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

¹²R. J. Kelley, interview by author, 23 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; "Garth Green to Play at Cooper," *Henderson Daily News*, 7 March 1935, p. 10.

¹³Stuart, interview.

¹⁴Nancy J. Preston, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Josephine Thrasher, interview by author, 18 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Green, interview; Catherine C. Brown, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

¹⁵"Garth Green to Play at Cooper," p. 10.

¹⁶"Catholic Ladies Give Cooper Club Dance for Church Friday," *Henderson Daily News*, 5 February 1934, p. 2.

music and proved so popular that Cooper booked them for several dances.¹⁷ Not only did they play several one-night stands at the club, but when Cooper initiated nightly dancing with the opening of the New Cooper Club, the first band he hired for the job was Garth Green's, and they repeated with another long engagement early the next year.¹⁸ George Cooper remembered how highly his father thought of the Green Orchestra, saying, "My dad told me they had as good a band as anybody. . . . He said they had a really good band."¹⁹ Cooper Club patrons held the same level of respect for Garth Green and his Orchestra, among them Bob Kelley, who later commented, "He knew what to do with his orchestra. It was well-planned."²⁰

The popularity of the Greens was not confined to the Cooper Club and Henderson. They also played locations in Lafayette, Louisiana, and Oak Cliff in Dallas, a month at the Kemp Hotel in Wichita Falls, and two weeks at the Rice Hotel in Houston.²¹ Nineteen thirty-six proved to be one of their most successful years. That

¹⁷Thrasher, interview.

¹⁸"Garth Green for Cooper Club This Saturday Coming," *Henderson Daily News*, 10 December 1934, p. 7; *Henderson Daily News*, 23 January 1935, p. 2; *Henderson Daily News*, 20 February 1935, p. 7; *Henderson Daily News*, 8 March 1935, p. 5; *Henderson Daily News*, 11 April 1935, p. 4; *Henderson Daily News*, 21 April 1935, p. 6; "2,000 Attend Queen's Ball at Cooper Club and Park Auditorium," *Henderson Daily News*, 24 April 1935, p. 2; *Henderson Daily News*, 29 May 1935, p. 5; "Garth Green Will Play Cooper Club Again on June 8," *Henderson Daily News*, 5 June 1935, p. 5; *Henderson Daily News*, 14 June 1935, p. 7; Hugh Vaughn, "That Big Saturday Dance," *Henderson Daily News*, 12 July 1935, p. 12; *Henderson Daily News*, 3 October 1935, p. 9; *Henderson Daily News*, 19 November 1935, p. 7; "Garth Green to Play Nightly at Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, p. 7; "Birthday Ball Being Arranged at Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 29 January 1937, pp. 1, 11.

¹⁹George D. Cooper, interview by author, 1 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

²⁰Kelley, interview.

²¹Green, interview; "Garth Green and his Orchestra Return," *Henderson Daily News*, 19 November 1935, p. 2; "Garth Green to Play Farewell Dance Friday," *Henderson Daily News*, 17 March 1937, p. 2.

year, they spent nine months in Arkansas, enjoying long engagements at Hotel Kingsway in Hot Springs, where they broadcast over KTHS, and at George's Place in Little Rock.²²

Marvis Green, the wife of Earl Green, reminisced later about the engagement in Little Rock and how much the manager appreciated the orchestra's demeanor:

Well, . . . there in Little Rock where we stayed so long, the manager of the place told the boys after the first tune was played—by other bands, not them—most of them were so drunk they didn't know what they were doing. And, see, the boys didn't drink, and they didn't get drunk.²³

Their alcohol-free performances no doubt won them the respect of other operators as well. Closer to home, the Greens also played extensively at Mattie's Ballroom in Kilgore and in the spring of 1939 began managing the Airport Nite Club in Kilgore, where they played nightly.²⁴

Music seemed to follow the Greens. Even when they went to California to join the World War II effort, they could not escape it. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the brothers traveled to Hawaii to help with reconstruction. As soon as their co-workers learned they were musicians, however, the Green brothers found themselves performing once again as a group. After their time in Pearl Harbor, the Greens next moved to Long Beach, California, where they found jobs in the shipbuilding industry. Again, word got out that the Green brothers were musicians. Their musical services were always in

²²“Farewell Dance for Garth Green Saturday, Jan. 4,” *Henderson Daily News*, 3 January 1936, p. 2; “Garth Green Comes to New Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 15 October 1936, p. 7.

²³Green, interview.

²⁴Keenan Barrett, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; “Garth Green Orchestra to Run Nite Club,” 7 May 1939, *Henderson Daily News*, p. 14.

demand, and they were more than happy to oblige. After the war, the Greens returned to Henderson, where several of the brothers went into the jewelry business.²⁵

Regional Dance Bands

Also prominent at the Cooper Club were several regional bands that performed, and none were more popular than those of Herman Waldman, “The Maestro of the South,” and Ligon Smith.²⁶ Although their reputations were confined largely to the Southwest, the fans of these bands were as devoted as those of any national orchestra, and much of this was due to radio. They may not have played over the major networks of CBS, NBC, or MBS, but as bands playing major hotels in the immediate area, the local radio stations they broadcast from were well within the reception of radios in much of East Texas. They each played multiple dates at the Cooper Club and became familiar faces on the bandstand.

Herman Waldman and his Orchestra

The perennial favorite Herman Waldman and his Orchestra opened the Cooper Club on its first night, christening it into the family of nightclubs, and were so popular that they came back at least seven more times.²⁷ One of the most popular Depression-era orchestras in the Southwest, Waldman and his men recorded for Brunswick and Bluebird and played long engagements at many of the leading regional hotels, such as the

²⁵Green, interview.

²⁶Invitation for the 4 May 1933 Cooper Club dance with Herman Waldman and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.

²⁷“Classy Orchestra to Furnish Music for Opening of Cooper Club Oct. 28,” *Henderson Daily News*, 23 October 1932, p. 1; “Famed Maestro Here Mar. 7,” *Henderson Daily News*, 1 March 1936, p. 6;

Adolphus and Baker in Dallas, Rice in Houston, Gunter in San Antonio, and Chase in St. Louis.²⁸ So popular was the Waldman Orchestra at the Peabody Hotel in Memphis that at the end of a lengthy stay, many people overcame their fear of public speaking to wish the bandleader well:

On his farewell party hundreds of his friends and admirers gathered in the ballroom, every club and organization which had heard him having a full representation. During his broadcast on this night scores of his friends jumped up on the orchestra stand to say a word into the microphone about him and his orchestra. Many of them stood in front of the orchestra, not even dancing, but chatting and letting him know how much he would be missed.²⁹

No doubt Cooper Club patrons would have done the same. Featuring a largely commercial style of dance music, Waldman's ensemble was easily one of the all-time favorites at the nightclub and attracted people from as far away as Dallas and Houston.³⁰

Ligon Smith and his Orchestra

The other favorite regional band at the Cooper Club was Ligon Smith and his Orchestra. They played for the first time in Henderson on Friday, November 25, 1932, a month after the club's opening, and throughout the years played at least fifteen one-night

Henderson Daily News, 5 March 1937, p. 2. See also Appendix B, Figure 7 for a photograph of Herman Waldman and his Orchestra.

²⁸Leo Walker, *The Big Band Almanac*, rev. ed., with introductions by Harry James and Les Brown (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), 408; "Herman Waldman Orchestra Cooper Club Saturday Night," *Henderson Daily News*, 5 March 1937, p. 8.

²⁹Invitation for the 9 February 1935 Cooper Club dance with Herman Waldman and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.

³⁰"Waldman Opens at Baker," *Dallas Morning News*, 3 January 1938, *Dallas Morning News Historical Archives by Newsbank*, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 10 March 2006. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>>; "Famed Maestro Here Mar. 7," p. 6.

stands at the nightclub.³¹ In his autobiography, Fred Lowery recalled the reputation that Smith had obtained by the early thirties: “In those days Ligon Smith was Mr. Music in Texas. He had organized a fine dance band in the twenties, and it had been a featured attraction throughout the Southwest for years.”³² With its “soft, restrained melodies” and “smooth, honied tones,” the orchestra, led by its piano leader with his Eddy Duchin style, was a staple throughout Texas in the thirties at such renown hotels as the Baker and Adolphus in Dallas, Rice in Houston, and the Gunter and Plaza in San Antonio.³³ Mid-decade, Smith took a brief respite from touring with his orchestra and spent a year on the staff of Dallas station WFAA working on the popular *Early Birds* morning program.³⁴

National Dance Bands

Of course, some of the most popular orchestras at the Cooper Club were nationally known. Most of these orchestras met nightclubs full of enthusiastic patrons, but a few also stand out for drawing tremendous crowds and putting on shows that were impossible to forget. Ben Bernie, Duke Ellington, Jan Garber, and Louis Armstrong were blockbuster music stars of their day, and the area turned out en masse to experience their music performed from the Cooper Club stage.

³¹“Ligon Smith’s Band Will Play Dance for Cooper Club Friday,” *Henderson News-Herald*, 20 November 1932, p. 3; “Ligon Smith Band at Cooper Club Tonight,” *Henderson Daily News*, 26 March 1937, p. 2. See also Appendix G, Figure 14 for a photograph of Ligon Smith.

³²Fred Lowery, *Whistling in the Dark*, with forewords by Art Carney and Harry James (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company, 1983), 39.

³³“Ligon Smith Band at Cooper Club Tonight,” p. 2; Ligon Smith, interview by Kenneth Ragsdale, 20 October 1977, Dallas, Texas, reel-to-reel recording, in possession of the Institute for Oral History at Baylor University. In the 1930s and 1940s, Eddy Duchin led a popular society orchestra built around his flashy style of piano playing (George T. Simon, *The Big Bands*, 4th ed., with a forward by Frank Sinatra [New York: Schirmer Books, 1981], 178-181).

³⁴Ligon Smith, interview.

Ben Bernie and All the Lads

Wildly popular in the thirties, Ben Bernie and All the Lads stepped into the Cooper Club on Thursday, November 8, 1934, and record crowds flocked to see them for what was a hefty ticket price of \$3.85, nearly double the typical cost.³⁵ As a rough estimate of how many people attended, an ad Cooper ran in the *Dallas Morning News* stated that the recent remodeling of the club three months earlier, which had increased the dance floor by one third, allowed the Cooper Club to accommodate two thousand people.³⁶ In anticipation of this massive crowd at the Bernie dance, Hugh Cooper increased the number of parking attendants to twenty to lessen the likelihood of accidents or delays.³⁷

A consistent favorite on radio, Bernie, nicknamed “The Old Maestro,” was never without a sponsored show on a major network from 1930 until his death in 1943. When he came to the Cooper Club, he had already broadcast for Mennen and was in the middle of his most successful program with Pabst Beer. He went on to star in programs sponsored by the American Can Company, U.S. Rubber, Half-&-Half Tobacco, Bromo Seltzer, and Wrigley’s Gum.³⁸ Bernie broadcast these programs from the best spots all

³⁵“The Ole Maestro’—Ben Bernie,” *Henderson Daily News*, 7 October 1934, p. 4; “Duke Ellington Billed at Cooper on July 3 and 4,” *Henderson Daily News*, 30 June 1935, p. 8. See also Appendix B, Figure 4 for a photograph of Ben Bernie.

³⁶*Dallas Morning News*, 2 November 1934, sec. 3, p. 8; “‘Blue Steele’ for Cooper Club This Saturday, Aug. 11,” *Henderson Daily News*, 8 August 1934, p. 7.

³⁷“Ben Bernie Dance to Provide Space for all in Autos,” *Henderson Daily News*, 24 October 1934, p. 7.

³⁸John Dunning, *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 78-80.

over the country, most notably the College Inn of the Hotel Sherman in Chicago, where he was extremely popular from 1930 to 1935.³⁹

Bernie was neither an accomplished musician nor comic, but his personality more than made up for these shortcomings, and he became one of the most beloved celebrities of his day. Speaking with an affected accent, he gave the vocal impression of Europe, Brooklyn, and the Old South all at the same time. His radio broadcasts were full of “yowsah”s, his trademark phrase, “au revoir”s, references to his audience as “youse guys and youse gals,” and such endearing passages as his classic plea during the Great Depression, “Come back, prosperity, all is forgiven!”⁴⁰ His personality was reflected in his orchestra as well, as it often featured characters like Frank Prince, “the university outcast,” Pat Kennedy, “the unmasked tenor,” Colonel Manny Prager, and Whistling Pullen, all of whom came with him to the Cooper Club.⁴¹

An obvious choice for the movies, Bernie and his Orchestra appeared in several films throughout the thirties. Just a few months prior to coming to the Cooper Club, Paramount had released *Shoot the Works*, in which they appeared with Jack Oakie.⁴² A year later came *Stolen Harmony* with George Raft and the short subject *Hark Ye Hark*.⁴³ Two more feature films followed in 1937, these the product of a skillful publicity stunt.

³⁹Charles A. Sengstock Jr., *That Toddlin' Town: Chicago's White Dance Bands and Orchestras, 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 87-88.

⁴⁰Dunning, 79.

⁴¹*Dallas Morning News*, 2 November 1934, sec. 3, p. 8; Invitation for the 8 November 1934 Cooper Club dance with Ben Bernie and All the Lads, in possession of Robert Forester.

⁴²*Variety Film Reviews*, vol. 5, 1934-1937 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983).

⁴³*Ibid.*; “Talking Shorts,” *Variety*, 19 June 1935, 21.

Throughout the thirties, Bernie and legendary gossip columnist Walter Winchell engaged in a feud in which they traded insults, both men over the airwaves and Winchell in his columns.⁴⁴ Their pretend fights made for the subject matter of *Wake Up and Live* and *Love and Hisses*, both starring Winchell and Bernie, along with his band.⁴⁵

In addition to the films and endless radio broadcasts that Ben Bernie and his Orchestra made, fans could also follow the band through their many recordings. Although he himself was an unremarkable violinist, Bernie routinely led a high-quality orchestra and thus recorded for such labels as Brunswick, Columbia, Decca, and Vocalion throughout the Great Depression years.⁴⁶

Given Ben Bernie's larger-than-life character, it seems only appropriate that his arrival in Henderson was out of the ordinary. *Variety* commented on the excitement Bernie and his gang caused the railroads on their way to Henderson:

Ben Bernie band played a concert and dance at Pine Bluff, Ark., Wednesday (7) to well attended houses, but had it not been for the cooperation of three railway companies the date could not have been played.

Bernie played Oklahoma City Tuesday (6) and was booked in Henderson, Tex., for Thursday. The regular railway schedule could not get him there to make his date, but the Shriners, who sponsored the date in Pine Bluff, arranged with the railways to hold their trains to make the connections. [On his way to Henderson,] A 42-minute delay in Pine Bluff, then delays at Texarkana and Overton, Texas, made the date possible."⁴⁷

For stars like Ben Bernie who were used to the glamour of the big cities, it must have been novel experiences to come to small towns. The track to Henderson from Overton

⁴⁴Dunning, 79. See also Appendix B, Figure 4 for a photograph of Walter Winchell.

⁴⁵*Variety Film Reviews*, vol. 5, 1934-1937.

⁴⁶Walker, 41; "February Music Survey," *Variety*, 19 March 1930, 66; "September Music Survey," *Variety*, 10 October 1933, 41; "August Music Survey," *Variety*, 16 September 1936, 45; *Variety*, 11 October 1939, 29.

⁴⁷"Inside Stuff—Music," *Variety*, 13 November 1934, 52.

was only a spur, so when they left the next day, the train carried them backward to Overton.⁴⁸

The arrival of Ben Bernie in Henderson did not only upset the railroads but excited the town as well. Residents turned out en masse by the tracks to greet the orchestra as it pulled into town late that morning.⁴⁹ E. F. Crim recalled how spectacular the occasion was:

And I'll never forget: Ben Bernie had a band in Chicago, and he came down here and played a dance. And he came in on a railroad car. We had never seen anything like that. The whole band was on this special pull, and they pulled off the side and got an engine train signal, and . . . Hugh Cooper was running the thing.⁵⁰

No president could have asked for a grander entrance by rail.

Since the band arrived long before the dance began at nine o'clock that evening, the musicians had several hours to pass. Thanks to the new country club that had been built a little over a year before and a suggestion by Hugh Cooper, they were well prepared for a fun-filled afternoon in Henderson.⁵¹

Of course, Hugh belonged to the country club. And he had told him [Bernie] that they had a good golf course, and a bunch of the guys in the band brought their golf clubs . . . so that they could play golf that afternoon. And a whole bunch of the boys slipped out the windows and went down—the high school was . . . where the administration building is now. You can see the railroad down there. And they slipped out the windows and went down to watch them get off, and I think two or three of them got a job caddying for them.⁵²

⁴⁸Albertus Lewis, interview by author, 2 February 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁴⁹Odell Poovey, interview by author, 23 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Thrasher, interview.

⁵⁰E. F. Crim and Elizabeth Mason, interview by author, 20 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁵¹“Country Club Opens Sunday,” *Henderson Daily News*, 16 July 1933, sec. 1, p. 5.

⁵²Thrasher, interview.

Undoubtedly, it was thrilling for the locals who were with Bernie and his men that day at the country club. Along with Hugh Cooper, Orin Williams and Dick Best swung their golf clubs alongside the famous band members.⁵³ An avid golfer, Bernie shot an 80 that afternoon.⁵⁴ Fun was then had by all well into the night as the dance got underway, and the entire day proved so exciting for Bernie that he made a long distance phone call early the next morning to talk about it: “After the dance, he called his wife in New York to tell her what a time he was having in Henderson.”⁵⁵

Bernie did not forget the Cooper Club when he and his band backed out of town the next day on the train. Over a national broadcast from California soon after, Bernie “wisecracked that he was leaving California and ‘going back to the Cooper club [*sic*] in Henderson where there is something besides hot oil.”⁵⁶ Seventy-plus years later, Lindell Stuart still remembered this occurrence:

I listened to him one night. He said something about the good old Cooper Club. He mentioned it. I heard it.⁵⁷

How the phones in Henderson must have started ringing after that!

⁵³Crim and Mason, interview; Stuart, interview.

⁵⁴Ray Withers Bonta, “Ben Bernie May Get Around to Playing Dances After Taking Care of Turf, Links and Pals,” *Dallas Morning News*, 10 November 1934, *Dallas Morning News Historical Archives by Newsbank*, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 8 March 2006. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>>.

⁵⁵“Cooper Club to be Rebuilt with Most Modern Structure,” *Henderson Daily News*, 6 April 1936, p. 4.

⁵⁶Bernie quoted in *Ibid*.

⁵⁷Stuart, interview.

Duke Ellington and his Orchestra

The peerless Duke Ellington and his Orchestra played for the Independence Day dance at the Cooper Club on July 3, 1935.⁵⁸ This dance was huge in every way, with tickets at the gate costing a whopping \$4.40, the most expensive tickets during the club's history, and the dance lasting an exhausting six hours, beginning at 10 p.m.⁵⁹ According to Cooper, Ellington was more than happy to play the long hours:

“Irving Mills, president of Mills Artists, Inc., who books Duke Ellington, advised me that ‘The Duke’ had insisted on taking this engagement for a record all night dance, hours that he has long since generally given up. Mills admits that he remonstrated with him, declaring it was foolish to play an all night stand;[’] but, he added, “The Duke simply wanted to do it. He thinks he’ll get a real thrill out of the East Texas oil field crowd.”⁶⁰

Apparently, Duke was amused by this little nightclub that thought so highly of itself as to ask such a thing of him.

The holiday appearance of Ellington's Orchestra at the Cooper Club was part of a Southern tour the band was making. The night before, they had played a one-night stand at the Coliseum in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the following night they were at the Yerger High School Auditorium in Hope, Arkansas.⁶¹ The Cooper Club was thrilled to have them and advertised heavily in the newspaper. One ad simply said, “He's Coming / Duke Ellington / 'Nough Said. Ask: Hugh Cooper.”⁶² The invitations were some of the most

⁵⁸“Duke Ellington Billed at Cooper on July 3 and 4,” p. 8.

⁵⁹*Henderson Daily News*, 28 June 1935, p. 7; *Ibid*.

⁶⁰Cooper quoted in “Duke Ellington Billed at Cooper on July 3 and 4,” p. 8.

⁶¹Ken Vail, *Duke's Diary. Part One: The Life of Duke Ellington 1927-1950* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 112.

⁶²*Henderson Daily News*, 26 June 1935, p. 12.

elaborate as well and pleaded for area residents not to miss out on this one:

Coming! to usher in East Texas' most thrilling "Fourth" with Indigo Blues, Scorching Rhapsodies, Torrid Tunes, Intoxicating Rhythms - Harlem's Aristocrat of Jazz Duke Ellington in person with music no other band can play. . . . Edward Kennedy Ellington - pianist, composer, arranger, radio star, movie feature, vaudeville hit, creator of a new vogue in modern dance music - will give you the greatest syncopation thrill of your life.⁶³

East Texans did not have to be coaxed. Advance tickets at the less expensive price of \$3.85 sold quickly.⁶⁴ In fact, so many people came that Cooper enlarged the club afterwards.⁶⁵

Today, no one would dare argue against the fact that Duke Ellington is one of the all-time legendary figures in American jazz. In 1935, it would have been difficult to dispute this statement as well. When Ellington came to the Cooper Club that summer, he was already an international star having toured Europe with smashing success two years before.⁶⁶

Stateside, Ellington and his men had gained their reputation through radio. The orchestra had achieved national attention from CBS broadcasts during a three-year run ending in early 1931 at the Cotton Club in New York City. Two years later, they returned to the night spot, this time broadcasting over NBC-Blue.⁶⁷ Ellington was at the

⁶³Invitation for the 3 July 1935 Cooper Club dance with Duke Ellington and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.

⁶⁴"Duke Ellington Sensation Dance All Night Long," *Henderson Daily News*, 3 July 1935, p. 5.

⁶⁵"Improvements to be Made Soon on Cooper Club Here," *Henderson Daily News*, 12 July 1935, p. 12.

⁶⁶Vail, *Duke's Diary*, 80-87.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 9, 46, 74, 76.

forefront of American bandleaders, but he was black, meaning radio sponsors were not knocking on his door. Still, he and his band remained prominent on radio throughout the thirties and into the next decade with broadcasts from several of their venues like the Congress Hotel and Panther Room of the College Inn in the Sherman Hotel, both in Chicago, and the Hurricane Club in New York City.⁶⁸ Fans could also follow the orchestra through its frequent appearances on CBS's late-thirties series *Saturday Night Swing Club*.⁶⁹ Furthermore, during World War II, they recorded a series of transcriptions for the Armed Forces Radio Service shows *Jubilee* and *Your Saturday Date With the Duke*.⁷⁰

In addition to their radio exposure, Ellington and his group came to the Cooper Club with several screen appearances on their resumé. One short, *Black and Tan Fantasy*, released in early 1930, was so popular that theaters were still showing it three years later.⁷¹ Other films that the orchestra performed in included the short *Bundle of Blues* along with the feature-length *Check and Double Check*, an Amos and Andy film, *Belle of the Nineties* with Mae West, and *Murder at the Vanities*.⁷² The following years brought other shorts like *Symphony in Black* and the feature-length *The Hit Parade*.⁷³

⁶⁸Ibid., 120, 216, 233.

⁶⁹Dunning, 72.

⁷⁰Vail, *Duke's Diary*, 221, 271.

⁷¹Ibid., 28-29; Hugh Vaughn, "It's the Party of Parties," *Henderson Daily News*, 28 June 1935, p. 7.

⁷²Vail, *Duke's Diary*, 78; *Variety Film Reviews*, vol. 4, 1930-1933 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983); *Variety Film Reviews*, vol. 5, 1934-1937.

⁷³"Duke Ellington," *Variety*, 25 March 1936, 15; Vail, *Duke's Diary*, 129.

During World War II, *Reveille with Beverly* and the groundbreaking all-black musical *Cabin in the Sky* flashed across movie screens, as well as more short subjects, among them *Jam Session* and *Flamingo*.⁷⁴

A brilliant composer, Ellington's songbook by the time he played in Henderson was already full of tunes that would become American standards. People who attended the dance heard songs such as "Sophisticated Lady," "Mood Indigo," "It Don't Mean A Thing," "Ring Dem Bells," "Solitude," "Cotton Club Stomp," "Rockin' in Rhythm," and "Shout 'Em Aunt Tilly." Needless to say, he was a record producer's dream and during the thirties was a recording artist for such top labels as Brunswick, Victor, and Columbia Graphophone of England.⁷⁵

To the Cooper Club Ellington brought with him an orchestra full of talented musicians, many of whom played with him for years and through their individual talents contributed to the sophisticated sound of the orchestra. Members at the time were Charles Williams, Freddy Jenkins, and Arthur Whetsol on trumpet; Lawrence Brown, Juan Tizol, and "Tricky Sam" Nanton on trombone; Johnny Hodges, Barney Bigard, Harry Carney, and Otto Hardwick on saxophone and clarinet; Wellman Braud on double bass; Sonny Greer on drums; Fred Guy on guitar and banjo; and vocalist Ivie Anderson, billed as "the California blackbird."⁷⁶ E. F. Crim later recalled how impressive the

⁷⁴*Variety Film Reviews*, vol. 7, 1943-1948 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1983); Vail, *Duke's Diary*, 206.

⁷⁵Invitation for the 3 July 1935 Cooper Club dance with Duke Ellington and his Orchestra.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

band's setup was: "And I'll never forget: Duke Ellington had such a big band, he was out on the floor. He couldn't fit them all on the bandstand."⁷⁷

As a sideshow for the special holiday dance, Cooper brought in some local talent to entertain guests as well. Lindell Stuart later recalled that among the entertainers was one of his relatives:

. . . I had a cousin named Edith Goode from Paris, [Texas,] and she was a dancer. And they came down and put on a little show that night for that. And later on Edith was up at the Casa Mañana up at Fort Worth when the [Texas] Centennial was going on in Dallas. . . . She was quite a dancer.⁷⁸

The Ellington Orchestra most likely backed these dancing numbers that the area residents staged, and the experience was no doubt an electrifying thrill for the latter.

One cannot help but wonder how whites in the South during the time of Jim Crow reacted to black orchestras. Many grew up learning from their environment that blacks were somehow inferior. But even those with racial issues knew real talent when they saw and heard it, and the crowd at the Cooper Club in the wee hours of the morning on July 4, 1935, gave Ellington and his Orchestra a standing ovation.⁷⁹ As Ellington's reputation only continued to increase in the coming decades, music aficionados who were at the Cooper Club the night his orchestra played had many opportunities to relive the night they were under its spell.

⁷⁷Crim and Mason, interview.

⁷⁸Stuart, interview.

⁷⁹"Duke Ellington Band Given Ovation at Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 4 July 1935, p. 2.

Jan Garber and his Orchestra

Like Ben Bernie, Jan Garber was another massively popular bandleader in the thirties who is largely forgotten today, remembered mainly by those who personally experienced the mania surrounding him. At the Cooper Club, Garber appeared not on one or two but three occasions, twice on tour while enroute to open his annual summer engagement at Catalina Island, and the third time while heading east after closing an engagement at the posh Ambassador Hotel's Cocoanut Grove in Los Angeles.⁸⁰ Had the Cooper Club not burned in April of 1936, Garber and his Orchestra would have played at the nightclub that summer as well.⁸¹

Each of the Garber dances were huge successes at the Cooper Club, even with tickets \$3.85 each time.⁸² Nancy Preston and Bettye Streeter were paying guests at the Cooper Club only once, and the band that got them there was Garber's. Still in high school, they had to beg their parents for permission to go. Their parents finally consented but on the condition that Preston attend the dance with her cousin and Streeter with her brother.⁸³ Streeter later reminisced that the dance was well worth the trouble it took to get there: "Oh, it was wonderful. I just thought I had died and gone to heaven."⁸⁴

⁸⁰*Henderson Daily News*, 19 June 1934, p. 5; "Garber's Music Creates Demand for His Return," *Henderson Daily News*, 21 June 1935, p. 7; *Henderson Daily News*, 19 January 1937, p. 2; "Garber at Catalina," *Variety*, 3 July 1934, 55; *Variety*, 3 April 1935, 64; "Ben Bernie," *Variety*, 11 November 1936, 35. See also Appendix B, Figure 6 for a photograph of Jan Garber.

⁸¹"Wayne King Cancels Date at Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 2 April 1936, p. 12.

⁸²*Henderson Daily News*, 19 June 1934, p. 5; "Garber's Music Creates Demand for His Return," *Henderson Daily News*, 21 June 1935, p. 7; *Henderson Daily News*, 19 January 1937, p. 2.

⁸³Preston, interview; Bettye Streeter, interview by author, 4 November 2005, Overton, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁸⁴Streeter, interview.

In fact, so popular were the Garber dances at the Cooper Club that Cooper enlarged the club in reaction to the mob at the first dance and enlarged it again in preparation for the second dance.⁸⁵ Even when Garber came to the larger New Cooper Club, Cooper enlarged the building beforehand.⁸⁶

As with all bands, radio was the medium through which Garber and company found fame. National broadcasts from the Trianon Ballroom in Chicago in the early thirties cemented their reputation, and while there Garber became known as the “Idol of the Airwaves,” a title that stuck.⁸⁷ By their first appearance at the Cooper Club, the orchestra had also appeared coast-to-coast on the Lucky Strike radio program and were stars of the Yeastfoamers show, eventually known as the *Jan Garber Supper Club*, sponsored by Northwestern Yeast Company.⁸⁸ Later in the decade in 1938, they replaced the Ray Noble Orchestra on the George Burns and Gracie Allen radio program.⁸⁹ Due to the heavy airtime they received, Garber’s vocalists were national favorites as well. Lew Palmer, Fritz Heilbron, and Rudy Rudisill came to Henderson all three times with

⁸⁵“‘Blue Steele’ for Cooper Club This Saturday, Aug. 11,” p. 7; “Improvements to be Made Soon on Cooper Club Here,” p. 12.

⁸⁶“Cooper Club is Being Enlarged,” *Henderson Daily News*, 11 January 1937, p. 2.

⁸⁷Walker, 140.

⁸⁸“Inside Stuff—Radio,” *Variety*, 12 April 1932, 48; Invitation for the 23 June 1934 Cooper Club dance with Jan Garber and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester; “Jan Garber’s Supper Club,” *Variety*, 25 September 1934, 40.

⁸⁹“Garber Vice Noble,” *Variety*, 16 February 1938, 39.

Garber. Other famed singers arriving with the band were Lee Bennett on the first two occasions and Russell Brown on the third.⁹⁰

In addition to radio, Garber and his Orchestra were also accessible to the American public through their recordings and movies. The group cut discs that were popular in the thirties for labels such as Columbia, Victor, Decca, and Brunswick.⁹¹ On screen, they appeared in the latter years of the Cooper Club in short-subject films like *Music Through the Years*, *Jan Garber and His Orchestra*, and *Shadows in Swing*.⁹² The war years in the forties brought a handful of appearances in feature-length films with *Here Comes Elmer*, *So's Your Uncle*, *Sweethearts of the U.S.A.*, and *Jam Session*.⁹³

Besides his national exposure, two other key ingredients aided in Garber's popularity. One was his visual effectiveness as a bandleader. Big band expert George T. Simon described him as "a short, intense man with the flamboyancy of a carnival conductor."⁹⁴ He must have been great fun to watch in a cozy setting like the Cooper Club. The other factor in Garber's notoriety was the fact that his orchestra was one of the best Guy Lombardo Orchestra imitators of the era, of which there were many.⁹⁵ So

⁹⁰"Featured at Cooper Club Saturday Night," *Henderson Daily News*, 20 June 1934, p. 8; "Garber's Music Creates Demand for His Return," *Henderson Daily News*, 21 June 1935, p. 7; "Jan Garber at Cooper Club on This Week-End," *Henderson Daily News*, 19 January 1937, p. 6.

⁹¹Invitation for the 23 June 1934 Cooper Club dance with Jan Garber and his Orchestra; *Variety*, 3 April 1935, 64; "January Music Survey," *Variety*, 19 February 1936, 58; "January Music Survey," *Variety*, 10 February 1937, 45.

⁹²Charles Garrod, *Jan Garber and His Orchestra* (Zephyrhills, Fla.: Joyce Record Club, 1992), 15-17.

⁹³*Variety Film Reviews*, vol. 7, 1943-1948.

⁹⁴George T. Simon, *The Big Bands*, 4th ed., with a forward by Frank Sinatra (New York: Schirmer Books, 1981), 492.

⁹⁵Sengstock, 131.

successfully had Garber cloned the sweet Lombardo sound that the *Dallas Morning News* commented in 1938, “There have been many times when you couldn’t tell them [Lombardo and Garber orchestras] apart. The only difference was to be found in the vocalists and in Garber’s clowning on the bandstand.”⁹⁶

As it had a tendency to do, the memory of the Cooper Club stayed with the members of Jan Garber’s Orchestra long after they had left. Over the airwaves of their nationally-broadcast shows, they chatted about Henderson and its local nightclub on occasion.⁹⁷ The Cooper Club meant little to the majority of listeners, but hearing the name of their beloved nightclub on radio meant a great deal to East Texans.

Louis Armstrong and his Orchestra

An artist who came to Henderson without any hoopla in the newspaper was the great Louis Armstrong. During the big band era, he toured with a band, although it was never really his in the same sense of the orchestras of other great bandleaders. Rather, it was more in the way of background music for Armstrong’s spectacular talent.⁹⁸ He came to Henderson at some point during the existence of the first Cooper Club building.⁹⁹ One

⁹⁶Charles Cullum, “Most Famous Imitator to Play Here,” *Dallas Morning News*, 9 February 1938, *Dallas Morning News Historical Archives by Newsbank*, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 21 March 2006. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>>.

⁹⁷Hugh Vaughn, “Dancing at its Best,” *Henderson Daily News*, 12 June 1935, p. 4.

⁹⁸Simon, 466.

⁹⁹George D. Cooper, interview; John H. Harris, interview by author, 13 February 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Mattie Jones, interview by author, 1 February 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

reason that the appearance of Armstrong was not advertised in the newspaper was that the dance was for the black community.¹⁰⁰

One of the best stories about the Cooper Club is of the inventive way that Armstrong attracted a crowd. Mattie Jones later related the story she heard concerning that night:

I knew Cooper well. I heard him say . . . they come there one night and played about a half hour, and didn't nobody come. Louis Armstrong got up and said, "I bet I can get them here. Ya'll let me have the horn. Let me have it." Said he walked out there on the porch and blowed that horn and said in about thirty minutes there were so many people there they couldn't find a place to put them.¹⁰¹

When Louis Armstrong blew his horn, no one could resist. One member of the audience that night was John Harris. He fondly remembered sitting at a table the entire evening, mesmerized by watching Armstrong play his trumpet as only he could.¹⁰²

Like Ellington, Armstrong was an international star by the time he blew his trumpet on the porch of the Cooper Club. Already considered the best trumpet player in the business, he had toured Europe twice, once in the latter part of 1932 and the second time from late summer of 1933 all the way through the end of 1934.¹⁰³ His unique and thrilling style of trumpeting made him a star wherever he went. In describing Armstrong's sound, a reviewer for *Variety*, who caught him on a broadcast from the Showboat Café in Chicago, noted, "He has a style bordering on the freakish when it

¹⁰⁰Harris, interview.

¹⁰¹Jones, interview.

¹⁰²Harris, interview.

¹⁰³"Louis Armstrong Orchestra," *Variety*, 15 April 1931, 72; Michael Meckna, *Satchmo: The Louis Armstrong Encyclopedia* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004), 379-380.

comes to hitting top notes on the instrument, and with it a lowdown and blue crooning voice. . . . Not unusual for him to go on a tear and run off 20 or 30 choruses to a high fevered pitch.”¹⁰⁴

During the Cooper Club era, fans could behold the mastery of Armstrong through his several screen appearances and wealth of recordings. Just a few of the films he appeared in were *Ex-Flame* in 1931, *Pennies From Heaven* with Bing Crosby in 1936, *Artists and Models* the next year, and *Cabin in the Sky* in 1943.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Armstrong had a prolific recording career that spanned multiple labels. In the thirties, among the companies he recorded for were Columbia, Victor, and Decca.¹⁰⁶

On the radio, Armstrong was often carried over the major networks. From places like Connie’s Inn in New York City, he broadcast over CBS; from the Grand Terrace in Chicago, NBC; and from the Casa Mañana in Hollywood, MBS.¹⁰⁷ He was also a guest performer on nationwide programs like the Kraft show and *The Pursuit of Happiness*.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, in 1937, Armstrong made history by leading the first black orchestra to have a sponsored radio show when he went on the Fleischmann Yeast program.¹⁰⁹ Simply put, “My word, he was a famous person,” Mattie Jones later recalled.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴“Louis Armstrong Orchestra,” p. 72.

¹⁰⁵*Variety Film Reviews*, vol. 4, 1930-1933; *Variety Film Reviews*, vol. 5, 1934-1937; *Variety Film Reviews*, vol. 7, 1943-1948.

¹⁰⁶“November Music Survey,” *Variety*, 22 December 1931, 52; “January Music Survey,” *Variety*, 21 February 1933, 57; “October Music Survey,” *Variety*, 13 November 1935, 44.

¹⁰⁷Meckna, 380; “Grand Terrace,” *Variety*, 16 February 1938, 52; *Variety*, 25 March 1942, 40.

¹⁰⁸“Here and There,” *Variety*, 12 August 1936, 44; “Vine Street Crosstalk,” *Variety*, 22 December 1937, 27; Dunning, 556.

¹⁰⁹“Louis Armstrong Orchestra,” *Variety*, 14 April 1937, 38.

¹¹⁰Jones, interview.

Individual Dance Band Members

Buried within the confines of the orchestras that came to the Cooper Club in Henderson were various individuals who deserve mention. Some were up-and-comers who went on to have stellar solo careers, others were already well-known, and some held significance for Cooper Club audiences for other reasons. The following individuals merit attention, if only briefly, in this study:

Mabel Jackson

The stage of the Cooper Club turned out to be where one local singer made her professional debut. Mabel Jackson, today Mona Graham, gave an impromptu performance one night at the New Cooper Club during the nightly engagement of Jack Winston and his Orchestra. Impressed with her vocal abilities, Winston promptly signed her as a featured vocalist for the duration of his orchestra's engagement and convinced her to take on the stage name Patsy Palmer.¹¹¹ When Winston left the New Cooper Club, Jackson stayed on as vocalist under the next bandleader, Dick Dickerson, who was also booked to play a nightly engagement.¹¹² She later sang with the Garth Green Orchestra at the Rice and Lamar hotels in Houston and at Mattie's Ballroom and the Airport Nite Club, both in Kilgore.¹¹³ In early 1941, Jackson's singing career took off when she won an open audition held by MCA's Chan Chandler's Orchestra. She sang with the group at

¹¹¹“Garth Green to Play Farewell Dance Friday,” *Henderson Daily News*, 17 March 1937, p. 2; Mona Graham, interview by author, 7 January 2006, telephone, tape recording, in possession of author.

¹¹²“New Orchestra Leader Takes Cooper Club Baton Friday,” *Henderson Daily News*, 7 January 1937, p. 14.

¹¹³Graham, interview; “Airport Nite Club Opens at Kilgore,” *Henderson Daily News*, 12 May 1939, p. 3.

Mattie's and remained with the orchestra when it left to tour eastward, eventually reaching the East Coast.¹¹⁴

Harry James

In the trumpet section on several of Ligon Smith's appearances in Henderson was a young lad from Beaumont, Texas, named Harry James. His first show with the band at the Cooper Club is unknown, as newspaper advertisements and invitations never mentioned him, but he was definitely there at the "Heads Up!" dance in late September of 1933.¹¹⁵ In discussing the "Heads Up!" tour in his later autobiography, Fred Lowery fondly remembered the friendship he developed with James:

As the youngest members of the *Heads Up!* [*sic*] troupe, he and I had a lot in common, and I'd got to know him fairly well on the tour. Harry was always ready to swing into a jam session, always ready to play any time of the day or night, always practicing, even on the bus.¹¹⁶

These two youngest band members would both eventually go on to greater things.

In his biography of Harry James, Peter Levinson offers a glimpse into the early days of the trumpeter's career. He refers to a photograph of the Ligon Smith Orchestra in the June 8, 1934, edition of the *San Antonio Evening News* in which James is still pictured as a member.¹¹⁷ According to this account, the trumpet player appeared at least

¹¹⁴Graham, interview.

¹¹⁵"Ligon Smith at Cooper Club Soon," *Henderson Daily News*, 28 September 1933, p. 8; Lowery, 41. To encourage people during the dismal days of the Great Depression, Ligon Smith and his Orchestra went on tour in late 1933 through Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana with a comedy and music program called "Heads Up!" (Lowery, 38-39).

¹¹⁶Lowery, 41.

¹¹⁷Peter J. Levinson, *Trumpet Blues: The Life of Harry James* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19.

four additional times at the Cooper Club.¹¹⁸ After leaving the Smith aggregation, James bounced around between other bands, including the ones of Herman Waldman and Art Hicks, two other orchestras that played at the Cooper Club, although not during their Cooper Club appearances.¹¹⁹ Harry James went on to lead one of the biggest orchestras of them all during the big band era. He left the band of Benny Goodman in 1939 to form his own group and by 1942 led the highest-grossing orchestra in America.¹²⁰

Harriet Hilliard

Harriet Hilliard performed at the Cooper Club with Ozzie Nelson and his Orchestra on August 17, 1935, a couple of months before marrying the bandleader.¹²¹ At the time of her appearance, Hilliard was in the middle of a five-year stint on the popular *Baker's Broadcast* as the vocalist with Nelson's band, and thus radio fans knew her well.¹²² That night in Henderson, Hilliard stepped off the bandstand and danced with members of the crowd, much to the delight of the male segment of the audience. Lindell Stuart reminisced about the sensation that she caused on the dance floor:

¹¹⁸“Dance at Club Thanksgiving Well Attended,” *Henderson Daily News*, 1 December 1933, p. 7; “Entertainer,” *Henderson Daily News*, 24 December 1933, p. 3; “Ligon Smith for Cooper Club this Saturday, Mar. 3,” *Henderson Daily News*, 28 February 1934, p. 7; Invitation for the 28 April 1934 Cooper Club dance with Ligon Smith and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.

¹¹⁹Levinson, 22, 25.

¹²⁰Simon, 263; “Harry James, Now Top B.O. Band, Into 3-Month Losing Hotel Date,” *Variety*, 16 September 1942, 39.

¹²¹*Henderson Daily News*, 16 August 1935, p. 12; Dunning, 11. See also Appendix C, Figure 8 for an ad picturing Hilliard and Nelson.

¹²²Thomas A. DeLong, *Radio Stars: An Illustrated Biographical Dictionary of 953 Performers, 1920 through 1960* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company Publishers, 1996), 202.

Oh, you'd start dancing, and you couldn't take a step [before] somebody tagged you. Everybody wanted to dance with her. Dance about one step, and somebody tagged you. You just wanted to say you danced with her. That was a big deal.¹²³

Just as Hilliard appeared to have a wonderful time in Henderson, Stuart recalled so did her soon-to-be husband: "He had a big time. He enjoyed it."¹²⁴ On radio nearly a decade later in 1944, the duo launched the iconic *Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, which eventually made a successful transition to television.¹²⁵

Red Hodgson

One evening at the Cooper Club, a trumpeter played a novelty song that in a few years time would be the subject of a heated debate. The *Henderson Daily News* described the performance: "He called it the 'Orange Number' because he punctuated a skit with an orange. The orchestra swung up, the music swirled, 'Red' Hod[g]son twirled his orange and the crowds went wild."¹²⁶ Under the new title "The Music Goes 'Round and Around," the addictive melody took the nation by storm mid-decade and was so popular that Hollywood soon produced a movie with the same name. However, instead of basking in the tune's success, Hodgson ended up in a struggle to retain the rights to his composition. He had written it, but Mike Riley and Ed Farley had popularized it and

¹²³Stuart, interview.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵DeLong, 202.

¹²⁶"Cooper Closes Deal for Spell Club Property," *Henderson Daily News*, 24 August 1936, pp. 1, 8.

thereby claimed co-authorship. In February of 1936, Hodgson took the matter to court.¹²⁷ During the debate about the song's origin, Cooper claimed that it had been performed first at the Cooper Club when Hodgson came with Joe Roberts and his Orchestra, but this proved incorrect.¹²⁸ According to Hodgson, he first performed the popular song in Galesburg, Illinois, in 1931, when he was playing with the band of Ernie Palmquist.¹²⁹

Dorothy Lamour

The first two of the three times that Herbie Kay and his Orchestra came to Henderson in late 1932 and late 1933, they brought with them the glamorous Dorothy Lamour.¹³⁰ A few years thereafter in 1936, she splashed onto movie screens as the sarong-clad beauty in *Jungle Princess* and continued to appear in her trademark sarong in similar exotic films.¹³¹ Her movie career steadily rose, and in 1941 she was the highest-grossing actress in the United States.¹³² Although most people later remembered Lamour

¹²⁷Jay Hall, "Hodgson Takes Famed 'Round' Tune to Court," *Dallas Morning News*, 21 February 1936, *Dallas Morning News Historical Archives by Newsbank*, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 20 March 2006. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>>.

¹²⁸"Cooper Closes Deal for Spell Club Property," pp. 1, 8.

¹²⁹"Whoa-ho-ho-ho-ho!" *Time Magazine*, 20 January 1936, Time Archive, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,755686,00.html>. This article also refers to Hodgson performing with Earl Burnett's band at the Drake Hotel in Chicago in 1934. Burnett brought his orchestra to the Cooper Club three times in the last half of 1933, so it is possible that Cooper had the bands mixed up, and Hodgson actually came to Henderson with Burnett's band ("Earl Burnett and Orchestra Will Play Here," *Henderson Daily News*, 16 July 1933, sec. 1, p. 2; "Earl Burnett Plays for Many Moving Pictures," *Henderson Daily News*, 4 August 1933, p. 5; "Earl Burnett to Play Saturday at Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 17 October 1933, p. 8).

¹³⁰"Entertainer," *Henderson News-Herald*, 4 December 1932, p. 3; "Herbie Kay Plays at Cooper Club in November 11 Dance," *Henderson Daily News*, 10 November 1933, p. 3. See also Appendix G, figures 3 and 4 for photographs of Herbie Kay and Dorothy Lamour that appeared on an invitation for their first dance at the Cooper Club.

¹³¹*Variety Film Reviews*, vol. 5, 1934-1937.

¹³²"Top Money Stars, Pix in '41," *Variety*, 31 December 1941, 1, 20, 22-24.

as a movie star, her career included prominent radio appearances as well. In 1935, she had her own network radio show called *The Dreamer of Songs*, and a couple of years later she began a two-year run on the popular *Chase & Sanborn Hour*.¹³³

Other Noteworthy Individuals

Several other individuals stand out when reviewing the performers who entertained audiences at the Cooper Club. Many of these were vocalists. Gogo DeLys and Kay St. Germain were both early regular singers on the *Lucky Strike Hit Parade*, and they both came to Henderson: Delys with Jimmie Grier and his Orchestra and St. Germain with Anson Weeks and his Orchestra.¹³⁴ From 1935 to 1936, Delys also had her own network radio program.¹³⁵ Dale Evans, before the days of her marriage and teamwork with Roy Rogers, performed in Henderson as the featured singer with Ligon Smith and his Orchestra on at least one of its many Cooper Club dates.¹³⁶

Vocalizing for Art Jarrett's Orchestra during its one-night stand at the Cooper Club was Eleanor Holm, his wife at the time.¹³⁷ Holm's name was familiar to sports fans from competing for the United States in the 1928 and 1932 Olympics, winning the 100-

¹³³DeLong, 157.

¹³⁴Dunning, 738; "Jimmy [*sic*] Grier Band at Cooper's Tonight," *Henderson Daily News*, 16 February 1933, p. 2; DeLong, 51; "Anson Weeks for Cooper Club on Friday, April 6th," *Henderson Daily News*, 2 April 1934, p. 8.

¹³⁵Luther F. Sies, *Encyclopedia of American Radio, 1920-1960* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2000), 161.

¹³⁶*Henderson Daily News*, 24 March 1937, p. 2.

¹³⁷"Eleanor Holm is Vocalist Coming for Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 5 August 1935, p. 5.

meter backstroke in the latter.¹³⁸ Rising star Lena Horne entertained Cooper Club patrons as the featured singer with Noble Sissle and his Orchestra.¹³⁹ East Texans enjoyed Muzzy Marcellino, guitarist as well as vocalist, when he accompanied the band of Ted Fio-Rito onstage during both of its Henderson one-night stands.¹⁴⁰ In 1950, Marcellino became the musical director for the *The Art Linkletter Show* on radio and remained until the program ended in 1969 on television.¹⁴¹

Other significant vocalists and the dance bands they appeared with at the Cooper Club were as follows: Maxine Tappan, Gus Arnheim and his Orchestra; Rosemary Dillon, Charlie Agnew and his Orchestra; Bob Hannon, Harry Sosnik and his Orchestra; Ray Hendricks, twice with Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra; and Evelyn Oaks, on two occasions with Herman Waldman and his Orchestra.¹⁴²

Of course, vocalists were not the only type of featured entertainer that dance bands offered audiences. Accompanying the orchestra of Ligon Smith to the Cooper Club on the “Heads Up!” tour was Jimmy Jefferies, at the time the announcer and star of

¹³⁸Ibid.; Arthur J. Daley, “Miss Holm of Brooklyn Wins Olympic Swim; Crowd of 10,000 Sees Two Records Broken,” *New York Times*, 12 August 1932, *The New York Times (1851-2003) by ProQuest Historical Newspapers*, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 25 May 2006. <<http://www.proquest.com/>>.

¹³⁹Invitation for the 3 March 1937 Cooper Club dance with Noble Sissle and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.

¹⁴⁰*Henderson Daily News*, 18 April 1935, p. 4; *Henderson Daily News*, 18 December 1936, p. 2.

¹⁴¹Walker, 285.

¹⁴²“Maxine Tappan to be with Arnheim for Party Here,” *Henderson Daily News*, 2 January 1935, p. 7; *Henderson Daily News*, 24 November 1935, p. 2; *Henderson Daily News*, 10 November 1935, p. 2; Invitation for the 19 April 1935 Cooper Club dance with Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester; “Ted Fio Rito at Cooper Club on Tuesday Night,” *Henderson Daily News*, 18 December 1936, p. 6; “New Addition to Waldman’s Band,” *Henderson Daily News*, 6 February 1935, p. 2; *Henderson Daily News*, 20 December 1935, p. 8.

the popular WFAA *Early Birds* show.¹⁴³ The “Heads Up!” program also featured Fred Lowery, a talented whistler.¹⁴⁴ Then a two-year veteran cast member of the *Early Birds* morning program, he was known as the Texas Red Bird.¹⁴⁵ Lowery appeared a second time at the Cooper Club as a member of the famous Vincent Lopez Orchestra.¹⁴⁶ Saxophonist Dick Stabile traveled to Henderson with Ben Bernie and All the Lads.¹⁴⁷ In later years, he became the maestro for the orchestra backing the comedy acts of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis.¹⁴⁸

All in all, a multitude of talented musicians appeared onstage at the Cooper Club to delight the crowds with music by which to twirl across the dance floor. While the nightclub was open, it must have been thrilling for patrons to wonder who Hugh Cooper would book for the next event. At the same time, and in the years to come, whether going to the movies or turning on the radio or reading newspapers and magazines, the many music fans who attended Cooper Club dances were constantly coming across orchestras and featured entertainers who they had seen in person. These halcyon days of music, musicians, and wonderful experiences—not the disappointments along the way—

¹⁴³“Ligon Smith at Cooper Club Soon,” p. 8; Lowery, 39.

¹⁴⁴“Ligon Smith at Cooper Club Soon,” p. 8.

¹⁴⁵Lowery, 33-34.

¹⁴⁶Hugh Vaughn, “Another Cooper Club Victory,” *Henderson Daily News*, 22 May 1935, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷Invitation for the 8 November 1934 Cooper Club dance with Ben Bernie and All the Lads.

¹⁴⁸Simon, 479.

were what any high-end nightclub operator hoped its patrons would remember when they later reflected upon a night spot.

CHAPTER FOUR

Let's Face the Music and Dance

For nearly a decade, the Cooper Club provided many glorious nights of music and entertainment for the East Texas area. However, the nightclub was not problem-free. Throughout the years, the Cooper Club had to contend with several challenging issues.

Local Opposition to the Cooper Club

One of the club's greatest obstacles was the controversy that emerged within the local religious community. In the 1930s, Henderson had a wide range of Christian denominations, including Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, Catholic, and Christian Methodist Episcopal.¹ Pastors of local churches had no further to look than the local nightclub for each Sunday morning's sermon topic as many advised parishioners that the Cooper Club was "a hellhole, a place of sin."² Devout defenders of the faith were afraid that their weaker brothers and sisters "might get happy and join the band." In fact, when the original club burned, some people believed it was because the club stood too close to neighboring churches.³

¹*Henderson, Texas: City Directory 1935-36* (Springfield, Mo.: Interstate Directory Company, 1935), 90.

²Josephine Thrasher, interview by author, 18 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

³John H. Harris, interview by author, 13 February 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author. At the time, at least three churches were within a mile of the old Cooper Club: St. Jude's Catholic Church on Morningside Avenue, the Assembly of God Church on Katherine Street, and First Baptist Church downtown on West Street (*Henderson, Texas: City Directory 1935-36*, 90).

These concerns of the religious community surrounded the Cooper Club from its early existence, and the building's physical appearance did not help. When the original club first opened in its very ordinary building, it looked suspiciously like a type of establishment that was well-known in the oil field: "Well, Daddy didn't particularly care for it when it first opened up," remembered M. G. Wright, "because he thought it was going to be like some of those honky-tonks built around there. And he was a teetotaler, and his family were teetotalers."⁴ His dad had good reason to think the worst. Honky-tonks, drinking and dancing establishments that specialized in guitar and fiddle music, blanketed the oil field, leading a New Orleans newspaper to report that the "highways and biways of this new oil center are lined with taverns called 'honky-tonks,' and the music emanating from their open windows is enough to drown out the steady roar of the working machinery."⁵ Henderson was no different, and West Street had its share of these joints. Don Lambeth, who lived on the Tyler highway near where the New Cooper Club stood, later remembered passing several of them each day on his way to and from work, although he never stopped at them. He recalled, ". . . You'd hear them places all night long." He added, "It was just like a beer joint all day and all night."⁶ John Harris's

⁴M. G. Wright, interview by author, 23 December 2005, Longview, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁵Information from and New Orleans newspaper quoted in James A. Clark and Michel T. Halbouty, *The Last Boom* (Fredericksburg, Tex.: Shearer Publishing, 1984), 129. For a humorous description of typical honky-tonks in the South and Southwest, see also James Ward Lee, "'The Glamour of the Gay Night Life': The Classic Honky Tonk," in *T for Texas: A State Full of Folklore*, ed. Francis Edward Abernathy (Dallas: E-Hart Press, 1982). Honky-tonks during the 1930s usually featured early forms of country music. For an excellent history of this genre, see also Bill C. Malone, *Country Music U.S.A.: A Fifty-Year History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

⁶D. W. Lambeth, interview by author, 18 December 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

family moved into a house on the street behind the original Cooper Club in 1935, and he also remembered how rowdy West Street was. As he recalled, there were “just plenty of them. . . . Near about every other house was a honky-tonk.”⁷ No doubt Henderson residents heard about the illegal gambling and whiskey sales at area honky-tonks, like the one in Gladewater that was “raided often, to the delight of the patrons, many of whom continued dancing while peace officers smashed bottles and overturned tables in their zeal.”⁸ Needless to say, many individuals in town did not want another such place.

Although the Cooper Club turned out to be a relatively sophisticated nightclub instead of a honky-tonk, this meant little to large portions of the religious community, for the club still featured the same vices: drinking and dancing. Fueling the flames of their concern over the presence of alcohol on the premises was the background in which the nightclub existed. The Cooper Club opened in 1932 at the tail end of Prohibition, a confusing time for America in which it attempted to end excessive alcohol consumption through legislation. Since the early 1800s, temperance and Prohibition movements had gained strength all across the country as thousands of people joined forces to put an end to the ruination that alcohol too often brought upon drinkers. In 1919, nationwide prohibition was finally achieved in the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, but the country soon realized that a successful enforcement of the ban required more manpower than was possible, and the illegal manufacture and sale of alcohol skyrocketed during the 1920s. Popular support for Prohibition steadily dropped throughout the twenties and

⁷Harris, interview.

⁸Clark and Halbouty, 129.

plummeted as the Great Depression swept across the nation. It ended in December of 1933 with the extremely popular Twenty-First Amendment.⁹

Alcohol was an especially hot topic in East Texas during the early thirties because of a link with the oil boom of that decade. The potential wealth to be made in the area proved to be a magnet for bootleggers, and illegal whiskey flowed as freely as water. If America at large was ill-equipped to handle the logistics of Prohibition, it is easy to see how in East Texas, amidst the sudden boom in population, the ability to enforce this law was even more hopeless.¹⁰ Throughout the decade, the subject of alcohol continued to be divisive for Rusk County. When residents voted the county dry in September of 1939, it was only by a ninety-vote margin.¹¹

The other feature of the Cooper Club that riled many members of the religious community was the matter of social dancing, a taboo subject with many denominations in the thirties. John Harris, who attended a community church while growing up, remembered how he would get in trouble if his mother caught him trying to mimic a new dance move he had recently seen:

That was a sin. That was a sin in those days. You'd go to hell. The devil would get you for dancing.¹²

On the other hand, many church-going families did not have problems with dancing.

Elizabeth Mason, who was reared as a Baptist, the denomination perhaps most associated

⁹“prohibition,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica Online, <http://www.search.eb.com/eb/article-9061510>.

¹⁰Clark and Halbouty, 138.

¹¹“Rusk County Votes to Prohibit Beer Sale; 3,512 Ballots Cast,” *Henderson Daily News*, 3 September 1939, p. 1.

¹²Harris, interview.

with disapproval of dancing, remembered, “My dad used to say it was too beautiful music not to dance.”¹³ Pastors may have preached against it, but at the end of the day it was a personal choice.

On top of the drinking and dancing that occurred at the Cooper Club, what further fueled suspicions even more was the boom environment in which it opened its doors.

Many residents feared what was happening to their town and way of life:

But everything was in such an uproar then. Things were moving so fast. They were just drilling drills out here . . . one right after another when there were a lot out there in the oil field. . . . People uptown until midnight and cars were [jam-packed] on the square . . . , so people were caught up in something they didn’t know much about.¹⁴

Much to the distress of local residents, many of the people who seemed to be overwhelming the city were quite unsavory. Thieves, gunmen, con men, gamblers, pimps, prostitutes, and the unemployed had swarmed into the area to make fast money as soon as the oil boom began at the start of the decade.¹⁵ To the families who had lived in Henderson before the discovery of oil, it seemed like the End Times.

Efforts to Maintain the Respectability of the Cooper Club

To Hugh Cooper’s credit, he understood that many people in the community would resent the dance club. Those who opposed the Cooper Club were no doubt constantly looking for ways to attack its reputation. However, Cooper did his best to give these naysayers as little material as possible.

¹³E. F. Crim and Elizabeth Mason, interview by author, 20 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

¹⁴Keenan Barrett, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

¹⁵Clark and Halbouty, 129.

Early on, Cooper instigated a couple of pre-emptive strikes against any speculation that his club would be a disreputable place. For instance, when the club opened, it doubled as a skating rink.¹⁶ This decision was a wise business move on the part of Cooper to maximize the building's profitability, and it also offered the Cooper Club a positive and clean atmosphere. As a skating rink, the club was open all day Monday through Saturday and in the afternoons on Sunday for people to enjoy family- and community-oriented entertainment. Cooper hired "expert skaters" to be on hand to teach beginners and also catered to non-skaters by offering free seating to spectators.¹⁷ The club's life as a skating rink may not have lasted long, for after about a month there was no mention of it in the local newspaper, but its existence no doubt had a lasting impact on the standing of the club in many people's eyes.

Another early offensive move that Cooper made on behalf of the reputation of his club occurred within a month of its opening at the Armistice Day dance, which featured the music of Ernie Fields and his Orchestra. To this event, Cooper issued a special invitation to both the Henderson and Kilgore pep squads and football teams.¹⁸ Through announcing in the paper that they would attend the dance, he was highlighting the community-minded establishment that he intended the Cooper Club to remain.

Throughout the Cooper Club's life, Hugh Cooper continued to do everything in his power to fight off negative speculation about his club. Possibly the single most

¹⁶"Classy Orchestra to Furnish Music for Opening of Cooper Club Oct. 28," *Henderson Daily News*, 23 October 1932, p. 1.

¹⁷*Henderson News-Herald*, 30 October 1932, p. 8; *Henderson News-Herald*, 6 November 1932, p. 5; *Henderson News-Herald*, 20 November 1932, sec. 2, p. 5.

¹⁸"Armistice Dance at Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 10 November 1932, p. 8.

positive policy he put into effect was that, while he was manager, the Henderson night spot did not serve alcohol.¹⁹ He allowed patrons to bring their own bottles of spirits, and they could purchase soft drinks as mixers along with ice if they so chose. But the club, under Cooper's management, never sold alcohol.²⁰ This attribute of the club probably redeemed Hugh Cooper in the eyes of many individuals. Certainly between the end of Prohibition and September of 1939, when all of Rusk County became dry, Cooper could have made a great deal of money selling alcoholic beverages, but he chose not to do so.

Further aiding in creating a positive image for the Cooper Club, a constant at both locations were people strategically placed to make sure that customers stayed under control. Law enforcement, including Texas Rangers, such as the legendary "Lone Wolf" Manuel T. Gonzauillas, who were in the oil field trying to fight lawlessness, and local sheriffs such as W. L. (Bill) McMurray, kept watch over social activities, no doubt enjoying the evenings but also making sure that everything was run legally.²¹ Cooper also employed individuals such as Johnny McKnight to ensure a calm evening. McKnight worked as the floor bouncer and quickly carried out anyone who exemplified unacceptable behavior.²²

¹⁹"Hugh Cooper Announces Oct. 20 as Opening [sic] Date for New Night Club Near Henderson," *Henderson Daily News*, 12 October 1936, p. 2.

²⁰Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

²¹Buster Hale, "Cooper Club Filled an Entertainment Void in Area," *Henderson Daily News*, 20 August 1981, p. 4; Odell Poovey, interview by author, 23 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Clark and Halbouty, 140; Crim and Mason, interview; Lambeth, interview. See also *Boom and Bedlam* (pp. 135-140), in which authors Clark and Halbouty provide an excellent account of Gonzauillas' contribution to fighting crime in the East Texas oil field.

²²Ebb Smith, interview by author, 22 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; R. J. Kelley, interview by author, 23 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

Cooper also attempted to keep negative comments at bay by paying all of the required taxes to the government for his dances. In June of 1935, Cooper happily reported to the local newspaper that government officials had recently audited his financial management of the club and found nothing amiss:

“Uncle Sam deserves his revenue from dances and I’ve always seen to it that he got it all. It was a pleasure to have met the federal tax men and particularly it was a pleasure to have received their expression of appreciation for the cooperation I have always given them through the Cooper Club.”²³

For people who looked at the Cooper Club with raised eyebrows, reading about this incident in the newspaper surely put to rest many of their suspicions as to whether or not Hugh Cooper was properly running the nightclub.

In addition to running everything aboveboard behind the scenes, Cooper was always extremely public and vocal about how he intended to maintain his nightclub as a classy place. The opening story about the club in the newspaper reported, “It is the desire of Mr. Cooper to give to Henderson the best possible in this line [nightclubs]”²⁴ A couple of years later, Cooper stated, “We intend to continue to cater to the better class of patrons, and to merit their support by keeping the club free of all objectionable features.”²⁵ While he was in the process of converting Spell’s Night Club into the New Cooper Club, Cooper announced that the finished product would be “something

²³Information from and Cooper quoted in “Cooper Club Will Play Garth Green Saturday, June 15,” *Henderson Daily News*, 14 June 1935, p. 7.

²⁴“Classy Orchestra to Furnish Music for Opening of Cooper Club Oct. 28,” p. 1.

²⁵Cooper quoted in “Cooper Club Books Blue Steele Band for Opening Date,” *Henderson Daily News*, 5 August 1934, p. 12.

Henderson will be proud of.”²⁶ And in late 1939, Cooper reiterated his earlier claims, saying, “As it has been in the past, we shall continue a policy of bringing only orchestras of the better rating to the Cooper Club. It will also continue to be our policy to operate the Cooper Club as a place of amusement that is conducted in an orderly manner at all times.”²⁷ Cooper was constantly reminding anyone who would listen that his was not a sleazy establishment.

Additionally, the very nature of keeping ticket prices relatively high helped the nightclub to maintain a respectable clientele. Cooper understandably had to make a profit off of the dances in order to stay in business, but keeping the prices above a certain minimum level encouraged individuals to attend who truly came for the band and the music and not for drink or to roughhouse. As Keenan Barrett later recalled:

There were no shootings, no fighting, no knives, nothing like that because the people that wanted to do that wouldn't go out there. They'd go further out on the highway there where they had places they could do that if they wanted to, but they didn't want to come out there. In the first place, they didn't want to pay \$2 to get in, and so we didn't have anything like that.²⁸

However, Cooper's decision to keep entrance fees relatively high was not without some opposition. Although the people attending Cooper Club dances undoubtedly appreciated the wholesome atmosphere that the cost of tickets provided, those who could not afford to take part in the activities were not so thrilled. There were people in the community who criticized Hugh for making the Cooper Club an upscale joint instead of an

²⁶Cooper quoted in “Cooper Closes Deal for Spell Club Property,” *Henderson Daily News*, 24 August 1936, pp. 1, 8.

²⁷Cooper quoted in “Saturday Night Dances Resumed at Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 1 December 1939, p. 10.

²⁸Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

affordable, lower-end dance hall that the masses could enjoy and afford.²⁹ But those types of places were a dime a dozen in the Texas oil fields, and Hugh Cooper wanted something better.

One of the best effects on the reputation of the club was Hugh Cooper himself. Besides being well-liked, he was respected. Mona Graham remembered, “. . . He was a very good upstanding citizen in the whole town. Everybody knew Hugh.”³⁰ John Harris agreed and recalled that he “never did see him raising no sin.”³¹ Furthermore, Cooper did not smoke and did not consume alcohol.³² In fact, an editorial in 1935 in the *Henderson Daily News* commented on Hugh’s role in giving the club a clean atmosphere: “The Club has always been free from any character of brawls or rough and rowdy element. Hugh has insisted that each dance be an occasion attracting the best character of couples.”³³ No doubt, the most interesting characteristic of Cooper to many in the community was the fact that he was Baptist.³⁴ Surely, if he could operate a nightclub where dancing and drinking occurred and not encourage the wrath of God, it was not so bad of a place.

²⁹Hugh J. Vaughn, “Your Own Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 6 March 1935, p. 5.

³⁰Mona Graham, interview by author, 7 January 2006, telephone, tape recording, in possession of author.

³¹Harris, interview.

³²Hazel Cooper, interview by author, 1 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

³³Vaughn, “Your Own Cooper Club,” p. 5.

³⁴“Hugh Cooper,” *Henderson Daily News*, 7 May 1986, sec. A, p. 10.

Nonetheless, many people clung to an unfounded belief that the Cooper Club was a rowdy place that was leading numerous people into the depths of temptation. Fern Herrington, Hugh Cooper's niece, remembered the attitudes many individuals displayed toward her because of her relationship to the nightclub's manager: "And many an argument, many hard feelings from people because of my uncle, and they'd just talk about the Cooper Club as though it was our greatest sin in the world."³⁵ However, as M. G. Wright explained, morality was relative, and some had placed the bar ridiculously high: "If somebody drank a beer back in those days, he was just wild as a buck to some people, which I just thought he was thirsty, as far as I was concerned." He went on to say, ". . . I never heard a legitimate complaint about Cooper Club not being a decent place."³⁶

Perhaps the greatest response to the opposition produced by the Cooper Club was in its positive influence on the local economy. The *Henderson Daily News* took note of the benefits of having a popular nightclub in the town:

It is true that the Cooper Club has brought to Henderson many thousands of dollars worth of business. There have been nights, many Cooper Club nights, when the restaurants could not handle the crowds. There have been Cooper Club nights when the hotels were booked to capacity. Filling stations have done a record business with cars from out-of-town and out-of-the-county. Clothing stores have done heavy business in both men's and women's wear. Cleaning and Pressing establishments are invariably helped by each Cooper Club dance.

And many beauty parlor operator in this area of East Texas will tell you what a Cooper Club occasion means for that profession; as will any barber, shine parlor or ?³⁷

³⁵Fern Herrington, interview by author, 18 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

³⁶Wright, interview.

³⁷Vaughn, "Your Own Cooper Club," p. 5.

Many businesses took full advantage of the Cooper Club's popularity, and, as event dates approached, placed ads connecting their companies to the dances. When Ben Bernie came to town, Oberthiers' and Cannon-Hale, both cleaning services; Packman's, a clothing store; Jordan's Sinclair Service Station; Allen Brothers Drugs, advertising Evening in Paris perfume; and Henderson Steam Laundry all ran ads with a Ben Bernie graphic in them reminding readers of the upcoming dance.³⁸ Randolph Beauty Shop had a "Ben Bernie Dance Special" that included a shampoo, set, clean up, manicure, and facial.³⁹ Cannon-Hale Cleaners even ran an additional full-page ad, claiming that their Sanitone cleaning process was the very one that Ben Bernie always used.⁴⁰

With all of this said about the controversy created by the Cooper Club and the means that Hugh Cooper took to minimize problems, it brings to mind a truism: there was no such thing as bad publicity. The fact that many preachers and members of the religious community spoke out against the night spot most likely increased the number of individuals attending Cooper Club dances by attracting people who otherwise would not have bothered to go. All of the negative talk surrounding the nightclub made it all the more fascinating.

ASCAP Fines Hugh Cooper \$500

Outside the realm of controversy, the Cooper Club had many other obstacles to face throughout its existence. One of the bumps along the road involved the very

³⁸*Henderson Daily News*, 24 October 1934, p. 4; *Henderson Daily News*, 2 November 1934, p. 10; *Henderson Daily News*, 4 November 1934, p. 4; *Henderson Daily News*, 4 November 1934, p. 8; *Henderson Daily News*, 4 November 1934, p. 16; *Henderson Daily News*, 6 November 1934, p. 3.

³⁹*Henderson Daily News*, 5 November 1934, p. 8.

⁴⁰*Henderson Daily News*, 4 November 1934, p. 13.

powerful American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers, or ASCAP. In the 1930s, ASCAP held the copyright to the majority of popular American songs and demanded royalties from any public performance of these tunes. Because of this policy, places such as nightclubs, hotels, and theaters had to pay ASCAP for a license in order to showcase any songs that the organization controlled. ASCAP had a well-oiled system for monitoring the vast number of public venues throughout the country to make sure they were in compliance with its regulations. *Time Magazine* described their method in late 1934: “Places that play A. S. C. A. & P. music without licenses are reported by a nationwide organization of spies, [and] are promptly sued.”⁴¹ Unfortunately for the Henderson club, one of these “spies” found his/her way to the Cooper Club in the spring of 1935 and caught the unsuspecting Garth Green and his Orchestra playing a copyrighted song. Cooper must have thought it was a joke when he found himself with a five hundred dollar fine to pay. However, he handed over the money and then promptly purchased a license from ASCAP so that the situation would not happen again.⁴²

Statewide Sunday Dance Ban

Two years later, the Cooper Club, as well as nightclubs statewide, had another problem. On Saturday, March 13, 1937, the State of Texas began enforcing a Sunday dance ban that required all public dances to halt at midnight on Saturday nights.⁴³ As

⁴¹“U. S. v. A. S. C. A. & P.,” *Time Magazine*, 10 September 1934, Time Archive, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,747921,00.html>.

⁴²Hugh Vaughn, “Another Cooper Club Victory,” *Henderson Daily News*, 22 May 1935, p. 4; “Garth Green Will Play Anything He Likes To,” *Henderson Daily News*, 31 May 1935, p. 10.

⁴³“Herman Waldman Orchestra Cooper Club Saturday Night,” *Henderson Daily News*, 5 March 1937, p. 8.

Saturday was naturally the most popular dance night, this was a tremendous blow to nightclub operators, especially those like Hugh Cooper who specialized in one-night stands and typically had no more than one dance a week. Until this ban, Saturday night dances at the Cooper Club had typically lasted anywhere from 1 a.m. to 2 a.m. on Sunday mornings, and sometimes even later. However, Cooper took this in stride and used it to highlight the classy, responsible way he attempted to manage the Cooper Club:

“We want to abide by the wishes of the people . . . and by all laws. The Cooper Club attracts the most decorous and well-mannered people of East Texas, visitors we feel Henderson is proud to be host to. The Cooper Club certainly cannot be classed with ordinary road-side taverns.”⁴⁴

Luckily for Cooper, this law only lasted a few months, for soon the Cooper Club was advertising a dance with Blue Steele and his Orchestra to be held from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m. on Saturday, July 3, 1937.⁴⁵

Financial Risk Involved with One-Night Stands

An important element of running a nightclub and a constant concern for Hugh Cooper was the fact that every dance was a gamble involving large sums of money. Throughout the years, Cooper paid booking fees of anywhere from \$200 for Frank Trumbauer to as much as \$1,000 for Jan Garber and \$1,500 for Ben Bernie.⁴⁶ Added to

⁴⁴Cooper quoted in “Irwin Feature Cooper Club on Saturday Night,” *Henderson Daily News*, 12 March 1937, p. 16.

⁴⁵*Henderson Daily News*, 29 June 1937, p. 2.

⁴⁶Philip R. Evans and Larry F. Kiner with William Trumbauer, *Tram: The Frank Trumbauer Story*, Studies in Jazz, eds. Dan Morgenstern and Edward Berger, no. 18 (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 619; Hugh J. Vaughn, “What About the Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 29 June 1934, p. 7; “Cooper Club to Offer Something We All Wanted,” *Henderson Daily News*, 26 November 1934, p. 7.

the expense of booking a band was the expense of the advertising campaign that Cooper produced for each dance. Since these were one-night stands, all of this money was riding on one evening, and any number of things could go wrong.

Weather

One unpredictable factor having a heavy impact on the attendance at a dance was weather. Oftentimes nightclubs had to book bands several weeks in advance, and dance operators could only pray that clear weather would prevail on the night of the scheduled event. Of course, such tools as the *Farmers' Almanac* could be helpful, but promoters had to book bands on dates that were convenient for the musicians, not the night spot.

Hugh Cooper certainly had his share of dances ruined by poor weather conditions. In the winter of 1932-33, for example, rain was wreaking havoc on Henderson and was one of the reasons that Joe Sanders and his Original Nighthawk Orchestra canceled its Saturday, December 17 dance.⁴⁷ Fortunately, Cooper did not have to pay the band for what would have probably been a poorly-attended event, but there was still all of the money spent on advertising that was wasted. Another dance that fell victim to rain was one featuring Paul Stroud and his Orchestra on Saturday, January 7. A heavy downpour started shortly before the dance began, resulting in a low turnout of patrons that evening.⁴⁸

⁴⁷“Stroud’s Orchestra Heard at Cooper’s Club Last Night,” *Henderson News-Herald*, 8 January 1933, sec. 1, p. 2; Invitation for the 11 January 1933 Cooper Club dance with Joe Sanders and his Original Nighthawk Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.

⁴⁸“Stroud’s Orchestra Heard at Cooper’s Club Last Night,” sec. 1, p. 2.

In addition to people wanting to keep their evening clothes dry, rain was also troublesome for the Cooper Club because of the quagmire it made of the roads. With the majority of streets still unpaved in the early thirties, rain could quickly turn a road into a motorcar's worst nightmare, and this is to say nothing of the grassy areas in which many patrons parked near the Cooper Club. Rain or even a cloudy sky could deter people from getting out in their automobiles if they did not have to for fear of getting stranded somewhere along the way. Mabel Hinson, who grew up a few miles west of the Cooper Club on Highway 13, the highway that the Tyler highway forked with, remembered the many cars that her father pulled through the mud on rainy days with his two mules before workers completed paving Highway 13 in 1935.⁴⁹

In the winter of 1935-36, yet another weather phenomenon proved to be a hindrance. This time, the culprit was snow. On Saturday, December 21, the white substance hurt the attendance at the dance featuring the always popular Herman Waldman and his Orchestra.⁵⁰ A month later, snow also drastically reduced the number of people who showed up to see Duke Wright and his Blackbirds Swing Band on Saturday, January 18. So severe was the latter storm that only about fifteen couples came, making the dance a near complete financial loss.⁵¹ Needless to say, when snow melted, the ground became an impassable bog for automobiles and as large a problem as that caused by any thunderstorm.

⁴⁹Mabel Hinson, interview by author, 19 December 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁵⁰“Great Party for All Night Dance Planned at Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 24 December 1935, p. 12.

⁵¹“‘Swing into the Dance’ at Cooper Club Saturday, Jan. 25,” *Henderson Daily News*, 24 January 1936, p. 13.

Disappointing Turnouts

Having a night ruined by weather was unfortunate, but at least the dance operator could attribute the poor attendance to something beyond his control. Sometimes the significantly fewer tickets bought was unexplainable. For instance, on Saturday, December 14, 1935, attendance for the Jay Whidden dance was far below the expected gate for no known reason. The newspaper explained away the dismal turnout by pointing to a natural lull between Thanksgiving and Christmas, but this was only speculation.⁵² Clearly if the lull scenario were true, Cooper would have learned about it from previous years and not booked a band during that time between holidays.

Another poorly attended dance that baffled Hugh Cooper was the one featuring Vincent Lopez and his Orchestra in May of 1935. As Vincent Lopez was a huge name in popular music in the thirties, Cooper had anticipated one of the largest crowds ever.⁵³ However, he received an unwelcome surprise. So far below the expected crowd was the attendance that night and so great the financial loss that Cooper considered making the Lopez Orchestra the last big-name band to play the Cooper Club. He very nearly canceled the next two high-price bands he had already booked, Duke Ellington and Jan Garber.⁵⁴ Understandably, he was hesitant to take again the risk involved with a band requiring a high cash guarantee.

⁵²“Herman Waldeman for Cooper Club Saturday, Dec. 21,” *Henderson Daily News*, 15 December 1935, p. 14.

⁵³See Appendix B, Figure 5 for a photograph of Vincent Lopez.

⁵⁴“Garth Green Will Play Cooper Club Dance of June 1st,” *Henderson Daily News*, 29 May 1935, p. 5.

There were at least a couple of reasons possibly contributing to the poor attendance at the Lopez dance. First, Spell's Night Club had opened a mere mile and a half down the road a few weeks before on May 1.⁵⁵ However, the Cooper Club had had a dance with the orchestra of Alex White since the Spell's opening without any complaints of low attendance, so it does not appear that the new nightclub's presence alone could have resulted in such a tragically small number of tickets sold for the Lopez dance.⁵⁶ It is more likely that Lopez's "invigorating, blood tingling rhythms of the South American danzon[e]s and Cuban rhumbas" were not something that many East Texans understood or wished to experience in person.⁵⁷ Henderson resident Keenan Barrett discussed why he personally was not a fan of Vincent Lopez and his Orchestra:

Of course, Lopez's didn't suit me too well. I didn't like it as well as I liked some of the others. He had a good band, though. . . . He played a lot of Spanish-type—put a little beat to it that I couldn't—I wasn't taught to do that.⁵⁸

East Texans probably either did not approve of Lopez's Latin style of music or were unsure about how to dance to it. A dance operator had to find an orchestra that was the right fit for its audience, and apparently Vincent Lopez's was not in this instance. Luckily, Cooper did not cancel Garber or Ellington, and they turned out to be two of the most successful dances ever at the Henderson nightclub.

⁵⁵*Henderson Daily News*, 28 April 1935, p. 4.

⁵⁶"Alex White Will Play Cooper Club Saturday, May 11," *Henderson Daily News*, 9 May 1935, p. 5.

⁵⁷Invitation for the 23 May 1935 Cooper Club dance with Vincent Lopez and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.

⁵⁸Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

Booking Mishaps

Other potential misfortunes that could befall one-night stands had to do with problematic bookings. During the dance band era, booking agencies had challenging jobs in trying to coordinate the schedules of the numerous orchestras under their management, and mistakes and schedule conflicts were inevitable. For instance, Hugh Cooper booked Earl Burtnett and his Orchestra for the Cooper Club on Saturday, June 17, 1933, but a few days before the scheduled dance Music Corporation of America canceled the event.⁵⁹ Burtnett's group had planned to stop at the Cooper Club on its way to Cincinnati after closing an engagement at the Gunter Hotel in San Antonio, but apparently the orchestra had to skip Henderson in order to reach its northern destination on time.⁶⁰ Nearly three years later, another band had to back out of a Cooper Club date. Wayne King, "The Waltz King," had intended to lead his orchestra through Texas on a road tour in the spring of 1936 with stops in Fort Worth, Austin, and Henderson, making the Cooper Club the band's last stop on Saturday, April 18, 1936. However, early in the month King had to cancel his Henderson date because of a contractual obligation that required his orchestra to broadcast from Chicago on Sunday, April 19.⁶¹ In the end, the scheduled date would not have been possible anyway in light of the April 5 fire that devastated the club. Later on, in late 1939, confusion on the part of a booking agency resulted in a spoiled dance. The Cooper Club had Matlock's Wabash Swingsters on its schedule for Saturday, December 2, but the musical group's booking office confused the

⁵⁹"Dance Postponed at Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 14 June 1933, p. 3.

⁶⁰"Here and There," *Variety*, 13 June 1933, 49.

⁶¹"Wayne King Cancels Date at Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 2 April 1936, p. 12.

Henderson club with the Palm Isle Club, which at the time Hugh Cooper also owned and operated, and sent the band to the Longview club instead on the night of the dance. After this incident, Cooper apologized through the *Henderson Daily News* for the mistake and promised patrons that it would not happen again, as he had straightened out the matter with the booking office.⁶²

Unexpected Calamities – New London School Explosion

One-night stands furthermore involved financial risk because there was always the chance of an unforeseen, freak occurrence affecting dances. Such an event occurred on March 18, 1937, when a natural gas explosion at New London School in northwest Rusk County killed nearly three hundred students and teachers. The tragedy devastated East Texans, and the world mourned with them over their loss, for news of the explosion traveled far and wide. From all over the oil field area, and even beyond, people from all professions and walks of life dropped what they were doing and rushed to New London to assist in any way they could.⁶³ A few miles away in Henderson, the Cooper Club had on its schedule a special farewell dance for Garth Green and his Orchestra on Friday, March 19, to wish the musicians well on their upcoming engagement at the Rice Hotel in Houston.⁶⁴ However, after a misfortune as great as the New London School explosion, the dance suddenly seemed trivial, and Cooper decided to cancel the event.⁶⁵ On the day after the explosion, a dance was the last thing on the minds of East Texans.

⁶²“Rhythm Kings Coming Here Saturday Nite,” *Henderson Daily News*, 8 December 1939, p. 12.

⁶³*Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “New London School Explosion,” <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/NN/yqn1.html>.

⁶⁴*Henderson Daily News*, 17 March 1937, p. 2.

⁶⁵“Green Cancels his Farewell Dance Tonight,” *Henderson Daily News*, 19 March 1937, p. 4.

Fire Destroys Original Cooper Club

One of the major setbacks of the Cooper Club occurred on the morning of Sunday, April 5, 1936. Around 5 o'clock, Cooper awakened to the sound of fire engines racing down the street toward the Cooper Club, which was ravaged with flames. Firefighters made a valiant attempt to save the structure, but a couple of hours later it lay in ruin and was unsalvageable.⁶⁶ This could have been the end of the Cooper Club.

The cause of the club's destruction is an interesting question to examine. Officials at the scene determined that the cause of the disaster was quite innocent. Because the fire had begun at the front of the building, officials declared that a carelessly-dropped cigarette stub in the men's washroom was most likely the culprit.⁶⁷ This makes sense, considering that the dance with Paul Nathan and his Orchestra had ended just a few hours before the fire began.⁶⁸ Given the large numbers of people who smoked in those days and the fact that the Cooper Club was a wooden structure, it almost seems surprising that the club had not burned before.

However, the fire at the Cooper Club was not the only one that summer. The Palm Isle Club in Longview had a fire inside, although minor, later that month, and Sandy Beach, which by that time Cooper co-owned with his brother, John Cooper, and Gene Henson, burned in late August the day after Cooper announced in the *Henderson*

⁶⁶“Cooper Club to be Rebuilt with Most Modern Structure,” *Henderson Daily News*, 6 April 1936, p. 4. See also Appendix A, Figure 3 for a photograph of the old Cooper Club after it burned.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.; *Henderson Daily News*, 3 April 1936, p. 13.

Daily News his plans for building the New Cooper Club.⁶⁹ These events beg the question: Were the fires a coincidence or the result of an arsonist's sinister plot? If the latter is true, the target was not specifically Hugh Cooper, for he was not yet a part of the Palm Isle Club, but rather nightclubs in general. If a perpetrator did exist, he/she escaped punishment, for the police evidently did not charge anyone in connection with the fires that summer.

Whatever the real story behind the burning of the Cooper Club, it was a loss to the community. Barrett recalled his reaction to hearing of the destruction: "Oh, I nearly cried when it burned."⁷⁰ Preston echoed his thoughts: "I remember it was a shock to the town when it burned, and it was a big thing here."⁷¹

Naturally, the fire would have been detrimental at any moment in the club's life, but the point at which it occurred was particularly ill-timed. For one reason, the Texas Centennial Exposition was scheduled to begin that 1936 summer in Dallas. All of East Texas hoped to benefit from the publicity that the centennial would bring to the state, and that included the Cooper Club. In fact, the nightclub and Henderson had been involved in celebrating its arrival more than a year before it opened its gates. In April of 1935, the East Texas Chamber of Commerce held its annual meeting in Henderson and made the theme the approaching hundredth birthday of their state:

⁶⁹"Morris Orchestra at Palm Isle Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 24 April 1936, p. 3; "Sandy Beach Destroyed by Flames Today," *Henderson Daily News*, 25 August 1936, p. 12; "Cooper Closes Deal for Spell Club Property," pp. 1, 8.

⁷⁰Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

⁷¹Nancy J. Preston, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

“We are proud we are firing the first gun in the Texas Centennial, which I regard as Texas’ opportunity to sell Texas to the world,” said President Charles F. Ashcroft of the East Texas Chamber of Commerce in making his annual address Monday at the first general session of the organization. “I believe,” he said, “the Centennial will attract more people to Texas than the Century of Progress brought to Chicago. It’s the greatest project, I think, Texas ever has undertaken.”⁷²

The meeting was a huge celebration for the entire East Texas area. After 330 East Texas leaders enjoyed a luncheon in their honor Monday, April 22, 1935, at the Cooper Club, they and other visitors along with the city of Henderson enjoyed the East Texas Centennial parade, highlighting one hundred years of Texas history.⁷³ In addition to the many decorated floats, the parade showcased fourteen bands, Queen East Texas VI Frances Connally of Tyler and her court, and several area organizations. Later that day, Governor James V. Allred flew into town from Austin in an army plane.⁷⁴ Dressed in period costume from the era when Texas was a republic, Allred attended the East Texas Queen’s Ball that night at the Cooper Club, which featured music by the orchestra of Garth Green, and Allred addressed the crowd on the subject of a century of progress in Texas.⁷⁵

The next year, starting on June 6, 1936, the Texas Centennial opened for six months and featured many of the biggest names in dance bands, much to the delight of small nightclub operators in the vicinity who were hoping to book some of them for one-

⁷²Information from and Ashcroft quoted in “East Texans Give Support to Centennial,” *Dallas Morning News*, 23 April 1935, *Dallas Morning News Historical Archives by Newsbank*, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 9 March 2006. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>>.

⁷³“330 Conventioneers Meet at Cooper Club Today Noon for Presidents Luncheon,” *Henderson Daily News*, 22 April 1935, p. 10; “East Texans Give Support to Centennial.”

⁷⁴“East Texans Give Support to Centennial.”

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, “2,000 Attend Queen’s Ball at Cooper Club and Park Auditorium,” *Henderson Daily News*, 24 April 1935, p. 2.

night stands at their own venues. Orchestra leaders bringing their groups to the exposition for engagements read like a list of “who’s who” in popular American music: Art Kassel, Herbie Kay, Horace Heidt, Phil Harris, Tommy Tucker, Ben Bernie, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Isham Jones, Ted Lewis, Tommy Dorsey, and Rudy Vallee.⁷⁶ When Hugh Cooper was able to book Jan Garber for a one-night stand on June 3, 1936, three days before Garber and company stepped onto the exposition grounds as the opening band for the General Motors Auditorium, he was probably expecting to be able to book at least a couple of other groups playing at the centennial.⁷⁷ Unfortunately, this would not be the case. The fire that destroyed the club two months before the centennial opened put it out of commission for the majority of the festivities and resulted in the cancellation of Jan Garber and his Orchestra in Henderson. When the club reopened in its new location on Tuesday, October 20, 1936, it did manage to book Jimmy Joy and his Orchestra, who were on their way to open an engagement at the exposition, for a one-night stand.⁷⁸ However, the Texas Centennial in Dallas was nearing its end, and the Cooper Club was unable to secure any of its other bands.

Another reason that the fire at the Cooper Club occurred at a distressing time was that it added to Cooper’s financial loss. He estimated that the damage caused by the fire

⁷⁶Kenneth B. Ragsdale, *The Year America Discovered Texas: Centennial '36*, with a foreword by Stanley Marcus, The Centennial Series, no. 23 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), xviii, 291, 254.

⁷⁷“Wayne King Cancels Date at Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 2 April 1936, p. 12; Jay Hall, “Night Club Business Booms Midst Rainfall of Changes,” *Dallas Morning News*, 28 May 1936, *Dallas Morning News Historical Archives by Newsbank*, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 15 March 2006. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>>. See also Appendix B, Figure 6 for a photograph of Jan Garber.

⁷⁸“600 Present at Cooper Club on Opening Night,” *Henderson Daily News*, 21 October 1936, p. 6.

was between \$16,000 and \$17,000, only a third of which insurance covered.⁷⁹

Tragically, included in that cost was the expensive electric Symphonola that Cooper had installed less than one month before.⁸⁰ A coin-operated phonograph, the contraption was apparently an early jukebox.⁸¹ With its debut on Wednesday, March 18, at the Cooper Club, the instrument became the centerpiece for the newly-formed Wednesday Nite Dance Club in which, for a weekly fee of 65 cents or monthly fee of two dollars, dancers could come to the nightclub every Wednesday night and dance to the latest popular pieces from nine o'clock in the evening to two o'clock in the morning.⁸² It is not a stretch to say that Cooper wished he had waited on that purchase.

Cooper Considers Not Rebuilding

Nevertheless, undaunted by the setback of the fire, Hugh Cooper initially looked to the future and immediately started drafting ideas for a new club. The day after the disaster, he announced that he would rebuild the Cooper Club on the original site as an attractive, colonial-style building that offered dining as well as dancing. His projected reopening date was on the night of the Jan Garber dance already booked for June 3.⁸³ Two days after the fire, Cooper had architects working on plans for a new building, and

⁷⁹“Cooper Club to be Rebuilt with Most Modern Structure,” p. 4.

⁸⁰“Cooper Club has Latest Innovation,” *Henderson Daily News*, 17 March 1936, p. 10; “Cooper Club Dance to be Held Tonight,” *Henderson Daily News*, 25 March 1936, p. 9.

⁸¹E. C. Wallis, “Dallas Business News in Brief,” *Dallas Morning News*, 15 August 1937, *Dallas Morning News Historical Archives by Newsbank*, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 19 March 2006. <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com/>>.

⁸²“Cooper Club has Latest Innovation,” p. 10; *Henderson Daily News*, 25 March 1936, p. 2.

⁸³“Cooper Club to be Rebuilt with Most Modern Structure,” p. 4.

he stated his intentions to visit several area nightclubs to brainstorm ideas for the new club.⁸⁴ Things seemed to be moving along at a brisk pace.

However, Cooper paused shortly thereafter and rethought his strategy. Two weeks after his club burned, he announced that, for the time being, he had discarded his plans for rebuilding the club:

“If I do rebuild, . . . I will wait until mid-summer is over. Perhaps I may decide to have a modern club operating when cooler weather comes, but certainly not until the summer lull is over.

You hesitate, you know, before you sink \$20,00[0] or \$30,000 in a night spot. Anything I build would be the latest word in East Texas.”⁸⁵

The cost of rebuilding the club, on top of the amount Cooper had lost in the flames of the first one, would have been enough to discourage even the most optimistic person.

Fortunately, Cooper made a deal with A. E. Spell to buy his nightclub later that summer and plunged ahead with plans to build a better Cooper Club.

Other Business Interests Take Cooper’s Focus Away from Club

Yet another huge hurdle that the Cooper Club faced through the years was the fact that Hugh Cooper had other business interests. Although Cooper attempted to maintain the aura of the nightclub, it suffered when Cooper did not have his full attention focused on it.

⁸⁴“Architects at Work on New Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 7 April 1936, p. 12.

⁸⁵Cooper quoted in “Cooper Abandons Plan to Rebuild Famed Night Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 20 April 1936, p. 12.

Cooper Leases Old Cooper Club to C. L. Ryan

The spring and summer of 1934 was the first time that Cooper attempted to take a step back from the Cooper Club. Anticipating a busy season at Sandy Beach, Cooper thought it would be best to temporarily hand the management of the club over to someone who could devote his full attention to it, and he leased the club to C. L. Ryan.⁸⁶ As the new manager, Ryan stated that he intended to continue Cooper's policy of booking only the best for the Cooper Club. He also put into place a new policy of his own in which the Cooper Club would have a dance every Saturday night.⁸⁷

Although Ryan managed to deliver on his promise of weekly dances, the quality of orchestras noticeably dropped under his watch. Jan Garber came during his time as operator, but Cooper had booked that orchestra himself before leasing the club.⁸⁸ Part of Ryan's troubles may have been that he did not realize that part of Cooper's success had been the offering of high quality, not quantity, to area patrons. Promising a dance every Saturday night meant that oftentimes one had to take whatever entertainment was available. The change in atmosphere was not lost on Cooper Club patrons, and they made their opinions known to Hugh Cooper, who returned as operator of the club in late July. The local press reported:

“Shortly after the first few dances [under new management] a good many started what later seemed to grow into a combined complaint. They declared that the spirit of the Club was dying and that I should take back its management.

⁸⁶“Cooper Club to be Managed Now by Hugh Cooper,” *Henderson Daily News*, 22 July 1934, p. 3; *Henderson Daily News*, 3 May 1934, p. 9; “Paul Skinner at Cooper Club on This Saturday,” *Henderson Daily News*, 15 June 1934, p. 8.

⁸⁷Invitation for the 5 May 1934 Cooper Club dance with Red Mills and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.

⁸⁸Hugh Vaughn, “Dancing at its Best,” *Henderson Daily News*, 12 June 1935, p. 4.

I have just decided to do so this week and will announce in the near future the first dance under my own direction at the Club”⁸⁹

Cooper promised that under his guidance the Cooper Club would return to offering the high quality of entertainment that had been its mainstay before.⁹⁰ In order to achieve this, he promptly announced that it would not be possible for the club to continue having a dance every Saturday.⁹¹

Plans for Resort at New Cooper Club Fall Through

In late 1936 or early 1937, Hugh Cooper began managing the Palm Isle Club in Longview in addition to the Cooper Club in Henderson, and the Cooper Club would never again be quite the same.⁹² The first noticeable impact of this decision on the nightclub was in the outcome of the New Cooper Club. Although the New Cooper Club building itself was a triumph, Cooper had dreamed of much more. He had intended to make the club the focal point of a lavish 108-acre lake resort scheduled to be completed by the summer of 1937. By damming up the springs in the Beaver Springs Community about a mile north of the night spot, Cooper planned to have a forty-acre lake named Ginger Rogers connected to two smaller ponds named Loretta Young and Myrna Loy that would be stocked with game fish for recreational fishing. Canoeing, swimming, a dining lodge, skating rink, bowling alley, riding academy and bridle paths, rustic cabins,

⁸⁹Cooper quoted in “Cooper Club to be Managed Now by Hugh Cooper,” p. 3.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹“Cooper Club to Accommodate All at Future Dances,” *Henderson Daily News*, 27 July 1934, p. 7.

⁹²“Society Everywhere Heralds Technique of Noble Sissle,” *Henderson Daily News*, 28 February 1937, p. 14.

rifle range, and a summer dance pavilion, in addition to the nightclub, with room for five hundred tables were other attractions that Cooper initially envisioned to feature at his resort. In addition to the location's natural beauty, Cooper chose the spot in the Beaver Springs Community because it was located next to where the new Tyler highway, then in the planning stages, would be built, providing additional access to the resort. He planned to start construction after the first of the year.⁹³

Unfortunately, these ideas apparently never came to fruition. Since Cooper took over the management of Palm Isle Club in Longview around the time he had planned to begin construction, his plans for a resort as a background to the New Cooper Club faded into oblivion. In addition to the time needed to oversee the creation of the resort simply being too much for Cooper to handle on top of his managing the two dance clubs, the expense probably made him think twice. Building the dam alone for his lake tallied in at \$1,500, and one can only guess how much the final cost would have been.⁹⁴

Later on in May of 1941, Cooper did eventually open his lake, which he named Cooper Lake, for public fishing at a charge of one dollar per day. Advertised as located on the new Tyler highway, the lake offered seventy-three acres of water freshly stocked with several types of fish.⁹⁵ However, the lake was not in any way associated with the New Cooper Club.

⁹³“Cooper Closes Deal for Spell Club Property,” pp. 1, 8; “Recreation Resort to be Background of New Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, p. 7.

⁹⁴“Recreation Resort to be Background of New Cooper Club,” p. 7.

⁹⁵*Henderson Daily News*, 27 April 1941, p. 9; “Cooper Lake Will Open Thursday,” *Henderson Daily News*, 27 April 1941, p. 12.

Cooper Leases New Cooper Club to Bill Deane

The excessive workload Cooper had undertaken in operating the Palm Isle and Cooper Club led him to lease the Cooper Club for a second time in late July of 1937, this time to Bill Deane.⁹⁶ If anyone could have successfully operated the Cooper Club besides Hugh Cooper, Deane was that person. As one of the original co-owners of the Palm Isle Club in Longview and its first general manager when the club opened in September of 1935, Deane had a wealth of experience in nightclub management.⁹⁷ He had brought such spectacular orchestras to the Palm Isle as those led by Eddy Duchin, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Ina Rae Hutton, Rudy Vallee, and Herbie Kay.⁹⁸

Initially, the trade-off seemed like a match made in heaven. Cooper evidently wanted to focus his managing skills on the larger establishment, and Deane apparently was ready to operate a smaller outfit. Deane vowed to live up to the reputation he had in East Texas by bringing top orchestras to the Cooper Club for affordable prices.⁹⁹ However, his stay at the Cooper Club was short-lived. For some unknown reason, less than two months later, he departed as manager of the Cooper Club.

⁹⁶“Bill Deane Takes Charge of Cooper Club This Week,” *Henderson Daily News*, 28 July 1937, p. 8.

⁹⁷“Geo. Hamilton to Play at Palm Isle Club Saturday Night,” *Henderson Daily News*, 26 September 1935, p. 2.

⁹⁸“Herbie Kay Orchestra at Palm Isle Club Tomorrow,” *Henderson Daily News*, 11 September 1936, p. 13.

⁹⁹“Bill Deane Takes Charge of Cooper Club This Week,” p. 8.

Cooper Leases New Cooper Club to J. D. Buie

The next two leasing arrangements that Cooper made for the nightclub due to his activity at the Palm Isle Club were the most unusual and made the Cooper Club nearly unrecognizable from the place that Cooper had originally created. With Deane leaving as manager, Cooper next leased the club for a year to service station operator J. D. Buie of Joinerville.¹⁰⁰ The lease officially began on September 30, 1937, and ended on October 1, 1938.¹⁰¹

With a background of promoting dances in several cities such as Kansas City, Oklahoma City, and Fort Worth, Buie had received several requests from his friends who worked in the oil field to organize dances especially for their community in a wholesome environment.¹⁰² As the new manager of the nightclub, Buie kicked off a series of dances in response to these entreaties on Saturday, October 2:

Three dances a week have been arranged for the rest of the year and the price placed within reach of all workers who like to dance, Mr. Buie said. These dances are for all of the laborer[']s family. A nurse will be on duty and a nursery maintained so parents can bring their children and enjoy themselves.

Dances will be staged Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday nights, Buie announced, and he promises a wonderful program and different each night.¹⁰³

This was certainly a different style of dance than the Cooper Club had been accustomed to featuring. Never before had the club allowed children inside during its dances.

¹⁰⁰“Cooper Club to Entertain with Opening Dance,” *Henderson Daily News*, 14 September 1937, p. 8.

¹⁰¹Rusk County, Texas, Deed Records, no. 45382, vol. 313, p. 335, Rusk County Courthouse, Henderson, Texas.

¹⁰²“Cooper Club to Entertain with Opening Dance,” p. 8; “Working Man Will be Given ‘Break’ in Winter Dances,” *Henderson Daily News*, 28 September 1937, p. 5.

¹⁰³“Working Man Will be Given ‘Break’ in Winter Dances,” p. 5.

Although targeting the families of oil field workers, Buie advertised the events as “everybody’s dance,” so presumably anyone could go. He set prices at 40 cents for men and 10 cents for women.¹⁰⁴

Although it is impossible to know for sure, it appears that these dances only lasted for about a month. The last ad for the events appeared in the *Henderson Daily News* on Monday, November 1.¹⁰⁵ The next week, the local Lions Club hosted a private banquet and dance for their organization at the New Cooper Club and also invited Kiwanis Club members as special guests.¹⁰⁶ Between this party and August of the next year when the club once again went under new management, the Cooper Club disappeared from the pages of the *Henderson Daily News* and seems to have been closed.

Cooper Leases New Cooper Club to L. B. Pool and O. Young

On August 11, 1938, a couple of months shy of when the previous lease was supposed to run out, Hugh Cooper leased the New Cooper Club out for another year through August 10, 1939, to L. B. Pool and O. Young.¹⁰⁷ The club reopened under its new management Thursday, August 18, for nightly dancing with music courtesy of the Musical Blue Boys.¹⁰⁸ During their management, Pool and Young kept the club lively with a handful of lesser-known bands playing nightly engagements—the Rose City

¹⁰⁴*Henderson Daily News*, 29 September 1937, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵*Henderson Daily News*, 1 November 1937, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶“Lions-Kiwanis ‘Ladies Night’ at Club Tonight,” *Henderson Daily News*, 10 November 1937, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷Rusk County, Texas, Deed Records, no. 51269, vol. 324, pp. 73-74, Rusk County Courthouse, Henderson, Texas.

¹⁰⁸*Henderson Daily News*, 18 August 1938, p. 3

Entertainers, Jerry Wilson and his Orchestra, and Frank Robinson and his Orchestra—but apparently the new managers envisioned the club as more of a roadside tavern.¹⁰⁹ They opened the club at 1 p.m. everyday with nickelodeon music and curb and table service.¹¹⁰ They also served beer, a major change of policy.¹¹¹

Young and Pool only stayed about three and a half months as managers of the Cooper Club.¹¹² Possibly horrified at the nose-dive his club had taken, or as a result of Young and Pool wishing to end their lease early, Cooper took back management of the club in late November or early December of 1938.¹¹³ A month later he discussed his return as operator of the club:

“When I took the management of the club back, . . . the sale of beer at the club was stopped. It is my purpose to keep the Cooper Club known throughout this section for the famous dance orchestras that play here, and at the same time maintain the kind of amusement center that is operated on the highest plane,” Mr. Cooper said.¹¹⁴

From this point forward until he left to join the military in June of 1942, Cooper managed both the Cooper Club and the Palm Isle Club, except for a brief period in 1940 when, as owner, he sold the Palm Isle to C. L. Ryan before buying it back again.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹*Henderson Daily News*, 25 August 1938, p. 6; “Hallowe’en Festivities at Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 30 October 1938, p. 12; *Henderson Daily News*, 9 November 1938, p. 6.

¹¹⁰“Rose City Band Playing at New Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 25 August 1938, p. 8.

¹¹¹“Hugh Cooper Books Buzze Orchestra for Saturday Nite,” *Henderson Daily News*, 15 January 1939, p. 9.

¹¹²*Henderson Daily News*, 23 November 1938, p. 5

¹¹³*Henderson Daily News*, 9 December 1938, p. 5.

¹¹⁴Cooper quoted in “Hugh Cooper Books Buzze Orchestra for Saturday Nite,” p. 9.

¹¹⁵“George Towne Play Palm Isle,” *Henderson Daily News*, 26 June 1942, p. 6; “Jan Garber to Play for Palm Isle on Monday,” *Henderson Daily News*, 10 May 1940, p. 10; “Benefit Dance at Palm Isle for Goodfellows,” *Henderson Daily News*, 13 December 1940, p. 1.

These descriptions of other managers of the Cooper Club are certainly not meant to condemn their actions. Each one made an earnest effort to breathe new life into the club by operating it as he saw fit. In a way, they were all doomed to failure from the beginning. They were trying to take over a club that was closely associated with its owner, a beloved man of the community and whose very name was in the name of the club. Despite their attempts, these other individuals could not escape his shadow and the fact that they were not Hugh Cooper himself.

Segregation Creates Difficulties for Black Orchestras on the Road

Throughout the South during the time the Cooper Club was in operation, segregation created many embarrassments for nightclubs when they booked black orchestras. When white musical outfits came to Henderson, they could stay at any hotel and eat at any restaurant. The orchestras of Jimmie Grier, Ted Fio-Rito, and Bob Crosby were just a few of the groups that stayed at the exclusive Randolph Hotel downtown, and Art Jarrett and his Orchestra dined at the popular Jay's Café also located downtown.¹¹⁶ However, the social conditions of the day barred black bands from enjoying these same amenities, no matter how famous they were. Fern Herrington later remembered, “. . . When Duke Ellington came, he had to stay in Tyler because there wasn't any white place that would let him stay. And, of course, he was used to staying in the best places in the world.”¹¹⁷ This situation was so tragic, it was almost funny. Ellington and his Orchestra

¹¹⁶“Jimmy [*sic*] Grier Band at Cooper's Tonight,” *Henderson Daily News*, 16 February 1933, p. 2; Wright, interview; *Henderson Daily News*, 5 August 1935, p. 11. See also Appendix B, Figure 2 for a photograph of Ted Fio-Rito.

¹¹⁷Herrington, interview.

had arrived in Henderson as the toast of the music world with a celebrated European tour on its resumé, and at the Cooper Club the crowd had given the band a standing ovation. Yet the musicians could not set foot in any hotel in the city because of their color. One can only hope that incidents such as these involving black orchestras scheduled for the Cooper Club led East Texans to question the institution of racial segregation.

To deal with the way the South treated black orchestras, oftentimes a manager or representative of the band traveled to the towns it was scheduled to play in beforehand and secured arrangements for its members. In Henderson, bands often ate in one of the local black cafés that were located along the railroad track and on the outskirts of town. Furthermore, local black businessmen such as Benjamin Holliman, Robert Edwards, and Mack Biggers had rooming houses that gave black musicians spending the night places to sleep.¹¹⁸ Segregation was certainly a loss for members of the white population. They missed out on the honor of eating alongside such musical greats as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Noble Sissle, and Ella Fitzgerald in their restaurants and spotting them in their hotels.

The many problems that the Cooper Club had to deal with through the years only serve to make its story all the more interesting. The ability of the club to survive these roadblocks is a testament to Hugh Cooper's business acumen and steadfast vision of offering East Texans high-quality entertainment in their own backyard.

¹¹⁸Harris, interview.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Final Years of the Cooper Club—and Beyond

In late 1938, when Hugh Cooper resumed management of the Cooper Club, it must have seemed to East Texas music fans that everything was as it should be. Cooper was back at the helm of the club which he had early on sculpted into a well-respected place of entertainment, and now things could return to the way they were in previous years. But after an absence of a year and a half, was this possible? This question is difficult to answer.

The years leading up to the end of the Cooper Club are not well documented, and, as a result, this period is difficult to describe. During its early years, the *Henderson Daily News* brimmed with stories, editorials, and ads about the club, and surviving also from that era are dozens of invitations. None of that was true for the later years. Long periods passed in which the newspaper was completely void of any news of activities at the club. In fact, only one dance is advertised each year for 1940, 1941, and 1942.¹ From the *Henderson Daily News* and lack of invitations, it appears that the club was dead except for a few sporadic sputters of life.

Oddly, the oral histories gathered during this research were also of little help in deciphering this period. Logic would lead one to believe that it would be these years that people would remember most since they were the most recent, but instead the opposite is

¹“President’s Ball Jan. 30,” *Henderson Daily News*, 11 January 1940, p. 8; “Negroes Taking Active Part in Birthday Balls,” *Henderson Daily News*, 28 January 1941, p. 8; *Henderson Daily News*, 10 February 1942, p. 6.

true. One reason for this could be that the impending major war overshadowed a great deal of the everyday routine. Both Lindell Stuart and Keenan Barrett recalled that as early as the late thirties, the events in Europe were constantly on their minds.²

However, there is no doubt that there were dances going on during this puzzling period—and big ones, too. Other resources reveal that from 1939 through 1941, such prominent orchestras as Russ Morgan’s, famous for the leader’s trademark “wah-wah” sound on his trombone, and Tiny Bradshaw’s, which made several records for Decca featuring the leader’s vocals, appeared at the Cooper Club for one-night stands.³ Making at least two appearances during this time frame were the orchestras of Count Basie, with its style of jazz that the general public could understand; Ella Fitzgerald, who had been fronting the former Chick Webb Orchestra since the leader’s death; and Jimmie Lunceford, whose band exuded such showmanship that George Simon crowned it “without a doubt the most exciting big band of all time.”⁴ With dances featuring bandleaders of this magnitude not appearing in the newspaper, there is no telling who else came to the Cooper Club during that time frame.

²Keenan Barrett, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Lindell Stuart, interview by author, 18 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

³“Band Bookings,” *Variety*, 24 April 1940, 44; George T. Simon, *The Big Bands*, 4th ed., with a forward by Frank Sinatra (New York: Schirmer Books, 1981), 375; “Band Bookings,” *Variety*, 27 August 1941, 41; Leo Walker, *The Big Band Almanac*, rev. ed., with introductions by Harry James and Les Brown (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), 48.

⁴Ken Vail, *Count Basie: Swingin’ the Blues, 1936-1950*, vol. 3, *Ken Vail’s Jazz Itineraries* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 34, 42; Simon, 87; “Band Bookings,” *Variety*, 19 June 1940, 34; “Band Bookings,” *Variety*, 11 June 1941, 32; “Ella Fitzgerald, Webb Boys Continue,” *Variety*, 28 June 1939, 39; “Band Bookings,” *Variety*, 17 January 1940, 38; “Band Bookings,” *Variety*, 12 February 1941, 34; Simon, 328. See also Appendix B, Figure 1 for a photograph of Jimmie Lunceford.

Two explanations for the lack of information about the club toward its end are possible. First, perhaps Cooper simply decided that advertisements in the newspaper were not worth their cost. After all, he had several other means, such as flyers and placards, through which to inform the public of upcoming dances. Perhaps he had also decided that invitations were too great of an expense. Then again, maybe he did use them during this time, but none survived.

On the other hand, it is quite possible that these later years at the Cooper Club were devoted to holding dances for the black community, which might explain the lack of chatter about the events in the local newspaper. Since Hugh Cooper was managing both the Palm Isle Club in Longview and the Cooper Club in Henderson during these years, he could have used the two clubs as a simple method of segregation by holding the majority of white dances in Longview and the majority of black dances in Henderson. This would correlate with the fact that Jimmie Lunceford and his Orchestra, a renowned black band, played at the Cooper Club on February 13, 1942, for blacks only and then the next night performed at the Palm Isle for whites only.⁵ Further indicating that the Cooper Club catered to the black community during its last years, Albertus Lewis, an African-American, recalled going to several dances there through 1940, the year he graduated from high school.⁶ Moreover, Mattie Jones remembered that the second club featured more dances for blacks than did the first one, and Ebb Smith, who worked at the New

⁵*Henderson Daily News*, 10 February 1942, p. 6; "Jimmie Lunceford at Palm Isle," *Henderson Daily News*, 11 February 1942, p. 8.

⁶Albertus Lewis, interview by author, 2 February 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

Cooper Club, later recalled that club held several all-black dances.⁷ Yet another hint of frequent African-American dances at the Cooper Club as it neared its end is the black President's Birthday Ball that the African-American community sponsored there on Thursday, January 30, 1941.⁸

Since little information exists about the latter years of the Cooper Club, there is also no way to know when the club permanently closed. While Hugh Cooper managed the Palm Isle Club until the night before he went off to war in June of 1942, the Cooper Club might not have lasted quite that long.⁹ The last recorded event there was the all-black Jimmie Lunceford dance on February 13, 1942.¹⁰ On May 1, 1942, Earl Hines and his Orchestra played at the Henderson city auditorium for the black community.¹¹ The reason behind Hines's performance at the city auditorium instead of the Cooper Club could be as innocent as the Palm Isle having a dance that night requiring Cooper's attention. However, it could also be a sign that the Cooper Club had ceased operations.

Why the Cooper Club Closed

Several factors combined to compel the closing of the Cooper Club in 1942. The most visible one, of course, was the beginning of World War II, an event that affected

⁷Mattie Jones, interview by author, 1 February 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Ebb Smith, interview by author, 22 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁸"Negroes Taking Active Part in Birthday Balls," *Henderson Daily News*, 28 January 1941, p. 8.

⁹"It Seems This Way," *Henderson Daily News*, 8 June 1975, pp. 1, 14.

¹⁰*Henderson Daily News*, 10 February 1942, p. 6.

¹¹"'Father' Hines Here Friday Night," *Henderson Daily News*, 30 April 1942, p. 7.

nearly every aspect of life for Americans. The music scene was no different.

Nationwide, orchestras, one-night stand locations, and their audiences struggled to adapt to the new wartime environment.

Conscription and military enlistment were among the major calamities facing nightclubs in small towns such as Henderson. With millions of American men in the armed forces, populations of towns across the country quickly shrank, and women were left without their dancing partners.¹² Furthermore, among these millions of American draftees were several nightclub operators, among them Hugh Cooper. Marching orders also adversely affected the bands upon which one-night stand locations depended. Dance orchestras, both black and white, could be here today and gone tomorrow if Uncle Sam decided to request the services of their members.¹³ Three members of Herbie Kay's Orchestra were drafted in one week, according to *Variety* in March 1942.¹⁴

The draft was not the only factor in the early forties that diminished the population of East Texas. Many residents of Henderson migrated to larger Texas cities such as Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston to take jobs in defense plants.¹⁵ Moreover, Rusk County was experiencing changes in population for reasons unique to its area. The oil boom that had so dramatically increased the number of residents in East Texas a decade earlier was coming to an end in the early forties. With a jump in people from 32,484 in 1930 to approximately 65,000 in 1936, Rusk County by 1940 had decreased in

¹²Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005.

¹³“Colored Bands Hit by Draft for 1st Time,” *Variety*, 16 September 1942, 41.

¹⁴“On the Upbeat,” *Variety*, 25 March 1942, 40.

¹⁵Barrett, interview, 19 October 2005; Lewis, interview.

population by 14,000 to a total of 51,023.¹⁶ Henderson's population that had quadrupled from approximately 3,000 in 1930 to 12,000 in 1936 dropped by about a third to 6,500 by 1940.¹⁷ Moving away were many of the patrons who had kept the Cooper Club alive.

Gas and rubber rationing and difficult railroad conditions also hindered the boom of one-night stands in small towns.¹⁸ The inability of orchestras to travel as freely as before changed the practice of orchestras actually seeking unfamiliar destinations at which to play. Whereas in years past the dance club market had been overflowing with bands looking for one-night stands, now booking agencies were experiencing difficulties in convincing groups, especially top-notch ones, to play these dates. Not surprisingly, this was especially true all across the South, and *Variety* took note of this:

One agency claims it had over \$10,000 worth of offers last week from southern colleges, and couldn't induce any of its higher priced talent to accept any of them. Some of the bookers are a bit worried by the situation since they owe something to one-night promoters as well as the bands they handle.¹⁹

A night spot could only last so long when the numbers of available bands coming through its region decreased. Even when small nightclubs were able to book bands, the wartime restrictions on gas and rubber affected the number of out-of-town customers who made

¹⁶University of Virginia Geospatial & Statistical Data Center, "Historical Census Browser," <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/php/county.php> (accessed 26 September 2006); Virginia Knapp and Megan Biesele, "Rusk County," in *The New Handbook of Texas*, vol. 5., ed. Ron Tyler, Douglas E. Barnett, Roy R. Barkley, Penelope C. Anderson, and Mark F. Odintz (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1996), 725.

¹⁷Knapp and Biesele, 725; *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide: 1936* (Dallas: Dallas News, 1936), 153.

¹⁸Bernie Woods, "War Gives Bands Roughest Year," *Variety*, 6 January 1943, 189.

¹⁹"One-Nighters Losing Their Lure?" *Variety*, 1 April 1942, 39.

up a vital proportion of small-town nightclub audiences.²⁰ While small night spots just outside of larger cities were relatively more likely able to survive, it was clearly not a healthy situation for out-of-the-way places like the Cooper Club.

Black bands felt the transportation problems even more acutely than white musical groups. Early on in the war, the Office of Defense Transportation required charter bus companies to halt operation, forcing many bands to take to the railways.²¹ With Jim Crow laws firmly in place in the South, train travel was a transportation method that many black bands chose to avoid. The federal government made attempts to ease the situation by such measures as allowing a few buses in the South for black bands to make limited tours, but this was in no way a solution to the problem. The American South was the most lucrative territory for black bands, and since many of them were unable to find work in hotels and ballrooms, they relied heavily on one-night stands for their incomes.²² They needed more than a few buses. This situation was especially pertinent to the Cooper Club since it evidently catered to the black community toward its final years.

Another reason for the closing of the Cooper Club and other similar spots across the country was increased competition. When the Cooper Club had first opened, it enjoyed being one of first nightclubs in the area booking big-name dance bands that were traveling around the United States. However, as could only be expected, many more dance venues opened throughout the decade as the trade boomed. In 1937, *Variety*

²⁰Simon, 31.

²¹“Greyhound Ends Chartered Bus Service, Further Handicapping Dance Tours,” *Variety*, 1 April 1942, 39.

²²Moe Gale, “Colored Bands Doomed?” *Variety*, 7 October 1942, 42.

reported that the Dallas area alone featured approximately one thousand locations hosting one-night stands. Across the country that same year, each small-town nightclub had to compete with 7,800 locations.²³ By the early forties, the number of spots in the Dallas area and nationwide was even higher. Ironically, the nightclub that seemed to hurt the Cooper Club the most was the Palm Isle Club.

For these reasons and probably many more, the Cooper Club closed its doors in either the spring or summer of 1942 and did not reopen. When Hugh Cooper returned from the war, he had no interest in resuming the club operation.²⁴ He subsequently sold the Palm Isle Club to Mattie Castleberry, the owner of Mattie's Ballroom in Kilgore, with whom he had entrusted the Palm Isle while he was away serving in the military.²⁵ As for the New Cooper Club, he sold the building, and the buyer moved it to Texarkana. The structure ironically burned soon after, meeting the same fate as the original Cooper Club.²⁶

Interestingly, around the time of the Cooper Club's final closing, *Variety* voiced its concern over what might happen to the music business if one-night stand locations disappeared: "One-nighters are and always have been the backbone of the band business as its currently known and they have to be serviced with material if they're to remain

²³"7,800 Spots in U.S. for Touring Bands; Competition and Showmanship Aids," *Variety*, 21 July 1937, 55.

²⁴Rusk County Historical Commission, *Rusk County History* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1982), 155.

²⁵George D. Cooper, interview by author, 1 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; "George Towne Play Palm Isle," *Henderson Daily News*, 26 June 1942, p. 6.

²⁶Hazel Cooper, interview by author, 1 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

alive.”²⁷ This statement was a foreshadow of things to come, for the big band and dance band eras were largely over by the end of World War II as vocalists and more progressive styles of music like bop moved to the forefront.²⁸ Although several factors brought about the ends of these eras, *Variety* hinted at one never mentioned: the demise of the popularity of one-night stands in small towns contributed to the overall changing music scene, for they had been quite powerful. After all, these night spots had saved dance bands from the clutches of the Great Depression. The Cooper Club, therefore, has a role to be proud of in the American music scene of the thirties.

Gone but Not Forgotten

In the spring or summer of 1942, the Cooper Club closed, and never again would Henderson have the strains of music float from out of its windows. It had been a source of pride and sheer joy for many of the townspeople for nearly a decade. Henderson would never have anything like it again. However, it would not be forgotten as long as Hugh Cooper was alive, for Hugh Cooper would not allow it. Throughout the coming years, he acted as an ambassador to the memory of the Cooper Club.

One former patron of the nightclub who remained friends with Cooper after the club’s closing was John Harris. During the many times he spoke with Cooper over the years, Harris later recalled that Cooper’s favorite subject was always the dance club:

. . . He enjoyed talking about it. To me, I enjoyed listening to it. I know that. . . . He’d ask me do I remember so-and-so, so-and-so, such and such a band. And then

²⁷“One-Nighters Losing Their Lure?” 39.

²⁸Simon, 32; Albert McCarthy, *The Dance Band Era: The Dancing Decades from Ragtime to Swing: 1910-1950* (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Company, 1971), 161.

he'd tell when he'd have a bad spell that people didn't turn out. He probably spent more money advertising than he did getting his money back²⁹

Harris never forgot the last time he spoke at length with Hugh Cooper. While Harris's sister was inside finishing up some paperwork for a house she was buying from Cooper, the former owner of the local nightclub invited Harris out onto his front porch to reminisce, and again the main subject was the Cooper Club. Harris later fondly remembered how much the pair of them laughed as Cooper told his stories.³⁰

Although Odell Poovey was too young to go to the Cooper Club, he learned about it later in life during his time as mayor of Henderson between 1963 and 1968. While Poovey was in office, Cooper served a two-year term on the city council and often accompanied the mayor on business trips to places such as Austin:

I'd usually take at least two or three members of the council when we'd go somewhere, and we'd get Mr. Cooper talking about the club and just enjoy it He could make it funny. He was something else.³¹

One of the stories that Poovey heard often was of the day that Ben Bernie and All the Lads came to town on a train and found an enormous crowd at the station cheering their arrival.³²

Hugh Cooper's wife knew better than anyone else how much he loved to remember his days as manager of the local nightclub. Recalling with a laugh how often he spoke of it, Hazel Cooper said:

²⁹John H. Harris, interview by author, 13 February 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Odell Poovey, interview by author, 23 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

³²Ibid.

Oh, he enjoyed talking about it to people. As he got older, he reminisced an awful lot about the Cooper Club and [to] anybody that he could get to listen to him. They'd get tired of it, I'm sure, but he did enjoy talking about it. I guess it just brought back old memories to him.³³

One of his reminiscences she remembered well concerned the purchase of one of his many cars. On the day of one of Ella Fitzgerald's dances at the Cooper Club, he spotted a red convertible at the local Buick dealership that caught his fancy. He told Ross Iliff, the owner, that he would be back the next day ready to purchase it. As promised, Cooper returned the next day with three thousand dollars and rode away in a sparkling new car.³⁴ Unsurprisingly, the Ella Fitzgerald tickets had sold extremely well. When she came to the Cooper Club for a one-night stand in June of 1941, she attracted 1,300 fans.³⁵

Another of Hugh Cooper's favorite anecdotes about the Cooper Club occurred on the night of Thursday, February 16, 1933, when Jimmie Grier and his Orchestra played. Largely stationed on the West Coast, Grier and his group had a national reputation when they came to the Cooper Club due to their many appearances on the Lucky Strike radio program and broadcasts from engagements at such upscale places as the Cocoanut Grove of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, the Hotel Mark Hopkins in San Francisco, and the Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood.³⁶ Unfortunately, their fame evidently made their leader a bit cocky, and things could have gone terribly wrong that night:

Hugh wasn't enthusiastic about Grier, but the bandleader said he would play for a fee of \$400 just to help pay tour expenses and Cooper finally agreed.

³³Hazel Cooper, interview.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵"Auburndale's Totem Ballroom Hit by Heat, Gray Gordon \$4,900 in Six Days," *Variety*, 25 June 1941, 32.

³⁶Invitation for the 16 February 1933 Cooper Club dance with Jimmie Grier and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.

The Cooper Club's reputation for offering only the finest in music resulted in the usual capacity crowd to hear Grier. When Grier saw the size of the crowd, he demanded that Cooper pay him \$1,000 instead of the agreed \$400 or he would take his orchestra off the bandstand at intermission and leave.

. . . Bill McMurray was sheriff at the time and was present that evening along with a couple of Texas Rangers. When Grier and his band prepared to depart at intermission, the sheriff and Rangers were just sort of hanging around the bandstand, their mere presence indicating it would not be wise for the musicians to try to leave early.

Grier took one look at the situation and immediately decided the band ought to keep right on playing, which is precisely what they did. "As a matter of fact," Cooper recalls even today [1981], "we almost couldn't get them to stop when they were scheduled to. They insisted on playing as long as anyone remained and wanted to dance."³⁷

Just as Cooper never forgot that dance, Grier probably never forgot the night he almost got into a tangle with two Texas Rangers and an East Texas oil-field county sheriff.

Cooper was not the only person with stories of the days of the Cooper Club. Many others in the community who had attended events at the nightclub carried with them in the years to come their own favorite memories. Lindell Stuart laughingly recalled the opening dance at the Cooper Club with Herman Waldman and his Orchestra. He never forgot that dance because of a joke it started between him and a friend:

He [Waldman] had the first band, and I was going with a girl that she was still a senior in high school. I had just graduated. It was Judge [Robert] Brown's daughter [Betsy Brown], and I asked her to go. And the only way her mother would let her go, she had to go with us, and I had to leave at intermission. So, we went out there, and her brother was named Dick. Every time I'd have a date with her [after that], he said, "Is Momma going with ya'll tonight?"³⁸

This jesting between Stuart and Brown's brother probably continued even after Stuart and Brown quit dating.

³⁷Passage from and Cooper quoted in Buster Hale, "Cooper Club Filled an Entertainment Void in Area," *Henderson Daily News*, 20 August 1981, p. 4.

³⁸Stuart, interview.

During the Cooper Club years, the actual night spot was not the only place in Henderson where people could rub elbows with celebrities. For three years during the latter part of the thirties, M. G. Wright worked at the Randolph Hotel in downtown Henderson as a room clerk. Many of the orchestras that played at the Cooper Club spent the night at the Randolph, as it was the most exclusive hostelry in town, and Wright's job gave him the opportunity to meet and chat with many members of these bands during their hotel stays. He checked them into their rooms when they arrived and performed other services for them as well throughout their stay.³⁹ One person he encountered on the job was none other than Bob Crosby, who had brought his orchestra to Henderson for a dance on the night of Tuesday, October 8, 1935, at the Cooper Club.⁴⁰ This was actually Crosby's second time in Henderson, for he had appeared the year before in April of 1934 as a featured vocalist with Anson Weeks and his Orchestra.⁴¹ At the time of his second appearance, Crosby had only been a bandleader for about four months, so Cooper Club patrons had the chance to see his orchestra in its infancy: before it adopted the Dixieland sound that became its trademark and before it formed the famous eight-piece ensemble within the band called the Bob Cats.⁴² The orchestra may have been new, but it was gaining in popularity, and Wright never forgot a request that Bob Crosby made of him when he stayed at the Randolph:

³⁹M. G. Wright, interview by author, 23 December 2005, Longview, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*; *Henderson Daily News*, 6 October 1935, p. 3.

⁴¹Invitation for the 6 April 1934 Cooper Club dance with Anson Weeks and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.

⁴²"Radio Chatter," *Variety*, 26 June 1935, 46; Scott Yanow, *Swing* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 2000), 37.

. . . The biggest band that I have recollection of was Bing Crosby's brother: Bob Crosby and his band. And I remember he brought a coat down to me and said, "I want you to send this to the cleaners and have the sleeves pressed. Do *not* crease them. Have them press around them."⁴³

With Crosby, sporting his uncreased sleeves, as frontman, the orchestra was well on its way to becoming one of the most exciting bands of the big band era. Wright also reminisced about an incident that occurred on one of the two occasions, either in April of 1935 or December of 1936, that Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra came to the Cooper Club.⁴⁴ Today, Fio-Rito is best known for writing the famous jazz song "Toot, Toot, Tootsie!" but during the thirties he was bandleader of one of the leading sweet orchestras in the nation and was prevalent on radio, records, and screen.⁴⁵ Despite this success, Fio-Rito was evidently thrifty, as one of Wright's fellow employees at the Randolph discovered:

George Carter was also one of the room clerks there, and I remember one time Ted Fio-Rito had checked in. He played . . . at the Cooper Club.

And he came down to check out the next morning. . . . The rooms were two-fifty a piece. And he told George, "For two dollars and fifty cents, I could have stayed at the Ritz-Carlton in New York."

And George said, "Yeah, but for what I paid to hear you last night, I could have heard Vincent Lopez."⁴⁶

Perhaps Fio-Rito thought twice the next time he intended to complain about hotel rates while on tour.

⁴³Wright, interview.

⁴⁴*Henderson Daily News*, 18 April 1935, p. 4; *Henderson Daily News*, 20 December 1936, p. 2.

⁴⁵Invitation for the 19 April 1935 Cooper Club dance with Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester. See also Appendix B, Figure 2 for a photograph of Ted Fio-Rito.

⁴⁶Wright, interview.

Fellow golfer E. F. Crim spent many hours on the golf course with Hugh Cooper over the years, and they often chatted about the popular Cooper Club. One of Crim's favorite memories of the nightclub concerned the night that Seymour Simons and his Orchestra blew into town in the fall of 1934.⁴⁷ A talented songwriter, three years before Simons had co-written the soon-to-be American standard "All of Me" with Gerald Marks.⁴⁸ Fans were familiar with his famous opening line "May We Come In?" from his Lucky Strike appearances and radio broadcasts from places such as the Hotel Schroeder in Milwaukee, Netherland Plaza in Cincinnati, and Blackhawk Café in Chicago.⁴⁹

Although the Cooper Club advertisements do not mention any vocalists, E. F. Crim recalled that Simons brought an entire crew. He especially remembered the female ones:

Seymour Simons had about six of the prettiest girls singing in the band you ever saw in your life, and . . . just brought a bunch of singers, too, with his band. That was really something.⁵⁰

It is highly doubtful that Crim was alone in remembering Simons's singers long after they appeared onstage in Henderson.

⁴⁷E. F. Crim and Elizabeth Mason, interview by author, 20 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; *Henderson Daily News*, 3 October 1934, p. 12.

⁴⁸"2000 Award & Induction Ceremony," Songwriters Hall of Fame, http://www.songwritershalloffame.org/award_recipient_detail.asp?ceremonyId=12&awardRecipientId=92.

⁴⁹Invitation for the 6 October 1934 Cooper Club dance with Seymour Simons and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester; "Inside Stuff—Radio," *Variety*, 12 April 1932, 48; "Ol' Maestro Coming East; Harris to College Inn," *Variety*, 11 July 1933, 45; "Seymour Simons Here October 6th at Cooper Club," *Henderson Daily News*, 3 October 1934, p. 4.

⁵⁰E. F. Crim, interview by author, 29 January 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

Bob Kelley later enjoyed telling the story of the first time he went to the Cooper Club. At the time, he was living in Minden, and one night he and four or five of his friends from Minden and Mt. Enterprise decided to visit the Henderson night spot:

So, we went out there at Cooper's one night. And Johnny McKnight was there, and he knew me—next door neighbors.

He said, "What in the you know what—what are you doing out here?"

I said, "Johnny, I'm out here for the same purpose you are: I just want a little different way of life."

And so, he picked us out a table over there and said, "You boys go over there, and I'll see after you."

Well, we did, and he'd take care of us. And we left pretty soon after that.⁵¹

Apparently, McKnight felt protective toward his neighbor and his neighbor's pals and wanted to make sure they did not get into any mischief. After that night, Kelley and his group of friends attended many dances at the Cooper Club, and one of their favorite orchestras was Garth Green's. Kelley personally knew several of the Green brothers since they worked together during the day as construction laborers. Years later, Kelley joked with Garth about their friendship during the time the Cooper Club was open:

I said, "Garth, do you know what's wrong with me?"

And he said, "No, I didn't know there was anything wrong with you."

I said, "Yeah, I used to work with you all day and dance with you all night."⁵²

Countless other people who attended Cooper Club dances no doubt also remembered in the years to come their very first time at the night spot, as well as the familiar faces they knew they would see there.

⁵¹R. J. Kelley, interview by author, 23 November 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁵²Ibid. See also Appendix B, Figure 3 for a photograph of Garth Green.

Josephine Thrasher, Mary Melissa Bateman, and Nancy Preston all remembered the junior-senior banquet they attended at the Cooper Club in May of 1935.⁵³ Thrasher recalled the great care that the junior class took to create a special evening:

When I was a junior, the juniors always gave the seniors a junior-senior banquet, and we were responsible for all the decorations and the food and the preparation for the banquet. And that was when Shirley Temple was the biggest star in Hollywood, and so we made a gangplank . . . over those steps [leading up to the club's entrance] and put pennants and life preservers and called it the Good Ship Lollipop. . . . And the whole banquet was geared to that, the program and everything.⁵⁴

Inside, lifesavers decorated the stage upon which many of the students offered renditions of popular songs for the program, and providing music for them was the Garth Green Orchestra. Throughout the evening, girls dressed in sailor costumes served the meal.⁵⁵

The next year, the Cooper Club was again the scene of a school dance when female members of the senior class hosted one for classmates and friends.⁵⁶ Elizabeth Mason laughed as she recalled a comment one of her dancing partners made that night:

Well, we had our senior party out there And E. F. [Crim] broke in to dance with me and said, "Well, Elizabeth, why don't you comb your hair?" . . . My hair had always just stood up—looked unkempt.⁵⁷

When asked about this incident, Crim had no memory of it.⁵⁸

⁵³Josephine Thrasher, interview by author, 18 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Mary Melissa Bateman, interview by author, 20 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; Nancy J. Preston, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author; "Junior-Senior Banquet at Cooper Club Thurs. Night Event of Commencement," *Henderson Daily News*, 10 May 1935, p. 2.

⁵⁴Thrasher, interview.

⁵⁵"Junior-Senior Banquet at Cooper Club," p. 2.

⁵⁶"Seniors Have Cooper Club Dance," *Henderson Daily News*, 15 March 1936, p. 17.

⁵⁷Crim and Mason, interview.

⁵⁸Ibid.

The Cooper Club of Henderson, Texas, had an uneven life with a pronounced valley in the middle. However, after Hugh Cooper took back the management of the club in late 1938, it appears that the club returned to being a financially successful place of entertainment in East Texas until unavoidable circumstances forced it to close. It may have been there for less than a decade, but it provided enough memories to fill thousands of lifetimes.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The Cooper Club existed during a small window of time in American history that embraced the small-town nightclub. Due to the Great Depression, the unfortunate state of the music business in the United States was such that many dance orchestras, even the most famous, had no choice but to embark on road tours of one-night stands, between longer engagements at hotels or ballrooms, in order to remain financially successful. Wherever they performed, these musicians found fans who were knowledgeable of them through radio, movies, records, newspapers, and magazines and who were more than willing, even eager, to pay to see them in person.

Despite this trend in the music business that made it possible for small-town nightclubs to consistently book name orchestras, Hugh Cooper might not have established the Cooper Club to begin with had it not been for the East Texas oil boom during the early 1930s, for it brought a surge of people into the area, all of whom were potential patrons, as well as a surge in the local economy. Although the oil boom did not make everyone in East Texas a millionaire, it allowed the region to escape some of the worst hardships of the Great Depression and provided many area residents with more disposable income than people had in other sections of the country.

During its time in Henderson, the Cooper Club had significance for various segments of the population. For African-Americans, the nightclub was one of the few entertainment places of that caliber in the area that they were able to attend, and their dances were of no less quality than ones held for the white population. Louis Armstrong,

Count Basie, and Jimmie Lunceford were just a few of the outstanding musical groups that Cooper managed to book for black dance audiences. Moreover, African-Americans could relax and enjoy the evening without fear of outside interference. At that time, racist members of the local law enforcement were able to disrupt social activities in the black part of town, as well as to discriminate against African-Americans in other ways, and get away with it. But because Hugh Cooper was a pillar of the community, they looked the other way on nights when the Cooper Club held all-black events and did not interfere with the dances.

The Cooper Club also served the young people of the Henderson area. Before they were old enough to enter the nightclub, many members of the younger set watched performances from outside through the windows at both buildings. In this, the Cooper Club offered a supervised location for them to congregate on dance nights. Because of the law enforcement always present, parents could rest assured that their children's safety was not being compromised. Whether they peered through the windows or not, the nightclub became a place that young people dreamed about entering one day. As Josephine Thrasher later recalled, "Well, it was . . . a place that was full of mystery and a place that we wanted to go to so bad until we were old enough to go. And we weren't disappointed in it."¹ Furthermore, the first time that teenagers entered through the door as official patrons, the club acted as a rite of passage, a declaration of their approaching adulthood. Their parents had agreed that they were mature enough to attend a Cooper

¹Josephine Thrasher, interview by author, 18 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

Club dance, assuming that the youngsters had not sneaked out of the house, and by allowing the young first-timers to stay, the community was also accepting them as adults.

Of course, it was not only children who watched through the windows. The Cooper Club also offered free entertainment to anyone who could find a way to travel to the club on the nights of events. They may have been on the outside looking in, but even there people could have a fabulous time dancing, chatting, listening, and watching.

Overall, the local nightclub provided everyone with an elegant place in which to socialize. While the club was under his management, Cooper kept several individuals in his employment who helped maintain order, and Cooper did not serve alcohol on the premises as a way of discouraging excessive drinking. Patrons appreciated the resulting ambiance of sophistication. For a night at the Cooper Club, they had the opportunity to put on their best clothes and even buy something new if they could afford it. The nightclub gave couples, both married and unmarried, a place to go on dates where they could enjoy each other's company and also mix and mingle with friends in a pleasant atmosphere. For the people who came alone, usually males, the accepted tagging method of dancing assured them an evening full of dance partners.

At the Cooper Club, small-town folks were able to get a taste of city life. In their very own town of Henderson, they could enjoy in person some of the same orchestras and entertainment as did city dwellers in Dallas, Chicago, and New York City. Frequent attendee E. F. Crim later recalled the excitement of seeing a famous orchestra onstage at the nightclub:

Oh, boy, that was like seeing a movie star. That's what they were. All we had was radio, and we'd listen to them. And no way we'd ever get to go see them or hear them anywhere. And that'd be an occasion that you just couldn't miss if you loved good

music. . . . And we all had those records that they'd make and listen to them. And then to see and listen to them in person, that was really an occasion, a wonderful occasion.²

In the thirties and early forties, nobody was bigger than the popular American dance orchestras. To see them in person at a local nightclub was a thrill that no doubt proved difficult to surpass later in life.

Another opportunity available to everyone at the local nightclub was the chance to meet new people and share ideas. Here, the people of Henderson met individuals from all over that region, and they could discuss the oil field with patrons from the immediate area or hear about conditions in regions outside the oil field from people who had driven in from cities further away. Even more thrilling for guests were the conversations in which they could engage band members during intermissions. Whether an orchestra was local, regional, or national, its members most likely had traveled to more places than the majority of audience members. These musicians brought eye-witness accounts of other places they had been, along with musical tips they could share with local patrons who played instruments or sang.

Perhaps one of the most important contributions of the Cooper Club to its many fans was the manner in which it brought whites and blacks together. On the nights of both all-black and all-white dances, members of both races listened from outside the nightclub, bonded for a few hours by their shared love of current popular music. Surely this common interest sparked conversations and friendships between people of different skin colors who otherwise would have never spoken to one another. Inside the old Cooper Club, interesting conditions existed as well for both races. For the whites who

²E. F. Crim, interview by author, 29 January 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

enjoyed all-black dances from their roped-off section of the club, they could watch African-Americans enjoying the live orchestras and realize that the two races were not so different after all. Whites also got the chance to experience what it felt like for their skin color to exclude them from events, and it is impossible that people on both sides of the rope did not see the irony in all of this: whites had created segregation because of their supposed superiority, and now, sitting behind a rope, they were being beaten by their own rules. Hopefully, for some individuals from both groups, nights at the Cooper Club were a means to a better understanding of the other race.

For the community as a whole, the Cooper Club created a constant buzz of excitement. The very mention of it undoubtedly could resuscitate even the most dreary of conversations, whether participants looked favorably or otherwise upon the night spot. Because dances were usually only held a few times a month, it made each of them all the more special. As dance nights approached, anticipation increased for people planning to attend. As E. F. Crim reminisced, “. . . That’s all we waited for from month to month. It would be the occasion.”³ When the big night finally arrived, a hint of magic must have hovered over Henderson as the majority of the town was aware that a professional traveling orchestra was in town.

Considering the environment in which the Cooper Club existed, it is interesting to review and consider the way in which Hugh Cooper decided to operate it. He certainly could have made a profit running something more in the line of a honky-tonk. The reason that so many honky-tonks existed in the oil field of East Texas was that they were

³Ibid.

profitable. For Cooper to have invested such a large sum of money into a nightclub seems rather risky and unnecessary in retrospect. But Hugh Cooper apparently realized there was money to be made in a more sophisticated form of entertainment. He most likely was unaware that major dance bands were beginning to prefer playing out-of-the-way venues. Thus, perhaps he took stock of the oil field atmosphere, ascertained that people in the area were hungry for a touch of elegance, thought about the huge popularity of dancing and music, and concluded that a high-class nightclub had a chance of being financially successful in East Texas.

Cooper's interests took him away from the club during the years it was open, forcing him to lease it to others four times. However, he never sold it, and he never gave up on it. In fact, when he took back the management in late 1938 for the final time, the club was going downhill and turning into a run-of-the-mill establishment. Since Cooper was by this time heavily involved with the Palm Isle Club as its manager, he could have closed the Cooper Club or left it in the hands of some of his employees to keep it running in its diminished condition. He certainly did not need the money. However, he became personally involved with the club again and turned it around, making it once again a respectable nightclub.

After Cooper returned as active manager of his nightclub in late 1938, the years of the club were numbered, as circumstances that the night spot had no control over led to its demise. World War II conditions made traveling increasingly difficult for dance bands as well as for dance patrons who drove great distances to attend dances at the Cooper Club. This affected not only the Henderson spot but small-town nightclubs all over the country. Another nationwide element burdening these night spots was the

increasing number of competing clubs, and most detrimental to the Cooper Club was the larger Palm Isle Club in nearby Longview. Furthermore, dwindling populations due to wartime conditions made it difficult for small-town nightclubs to stay alive. Millions of men went off to war, and other residents, including women, moved to larger cities to get defense jobs. Moreover, specifically in East Texas, the oil boom was coming to an end, and this also caused the population to decrease.

In hindsight, the Cooper Club played an important role in a movement in the history of American music. The club is an example of how history starts on the local level. In the 1930s and early forties, smaller towns collectively propped up the popular dance orchestras of the day and made it possible for them to survive the Great Depression. The story of the Cooper Club is only one among hundreds, possibly thousands of out-of-the-way night spots in small towns that offered one-night stands during this era. More of these dancing establishments merit a resurrection and official documentation of their existence. Each one is unique and highlights social and cultural characteristics of the community in which it stood. Additionally, these venues shift the focus of the big band era onto the audiences, a segment of the population that history often overlooks. After all, without them, an era of dance bands would not have existed.

Sadly, very little remains today of the Cooper Club buildings. One interesting item that somehow survived the fire of the original club was the piano, now in the possession of Cooper's son, George Cooper. Possibly because Hugh Cooper already had in mind purchasing a grand piano for his next club, he sold the upright piano to John William Durwood Smith, a man who delivered ice to the club and who was in need of a piano for his young daughter to play. The instrument remained in the Smith family until

2005 when his granddaughter, Jean Moore, decided to donate it to George Cooper, who was extremely pleased. Moore recalled, “And Mr. [George] Cooper brought Jerry’s Wrecker out here, picked up the piano, belted it down on the top of a wrecker, and transported it across Henderson with flashing red lights.”⁴ Because a piano was not a convenient instrument to travel with, many bands that performed at the original Cooper Club most likely played this instrument, making it a cherished, priceless artifact. As far as the New Cooper Club building, all that remains is the well that provided the club with water.⁵

Oddly, where the old Cooper Club originally stood became the location of today’s Henderson Health & Rehabilitation Center, formerly Leisure Lodge. The irony of a nursing home now resting on the spot of the famous nightclub is not lost on those who knew the Cooper Club, people such as Keenan Barrett, who noted that the turn of events was rather “strange.”⁶ Nancy Preston also later commented on what the location had become: “Certainly is a switch where Leisure Lodge is and then that was.”⁷ Many individuals who had spent so many glorious, happy hours at the original Cooper Club would spend their final years at the same location, tapping their feet to the music in their

⁴Jean Moore, interview by author, 18 February 2006, telephone, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁵John H. Harris, interview by author, 13 February 2006, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁶Keenan Barrett, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

⁷Nancy J. Preston, interview by author, 19 October 2005, Henderson, Texas, tape recording, in possession of author.

memories. The property occupied by the New Cooper Club ultimately became an open pasture.

Today, the population of Henderson is approximately 11,500, still less than the number of residents at the height of the oil boom in the 1930s. The town takes pride in its modest size and displays little ambition for growth, but perhaps at some point in the future its small size will once again work in its favor and consistently bring in top entertainment. One never knows.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Hugh Cooper and his Cooper Club Buildings



Fig. A.1. Hugh Cooper Circa 1935 (Reprinted from Oren Arnold, "Where Radio's Big-Name Orchestras Play in a Barn!" *EveryWeek Magazine*, 1 December 1935, 2.)



Fig. A.2. Original Cooper Club (Reprinted from Arnold, "Where Radio's Big-Name Orchestras Play in a Barn!" 2.)

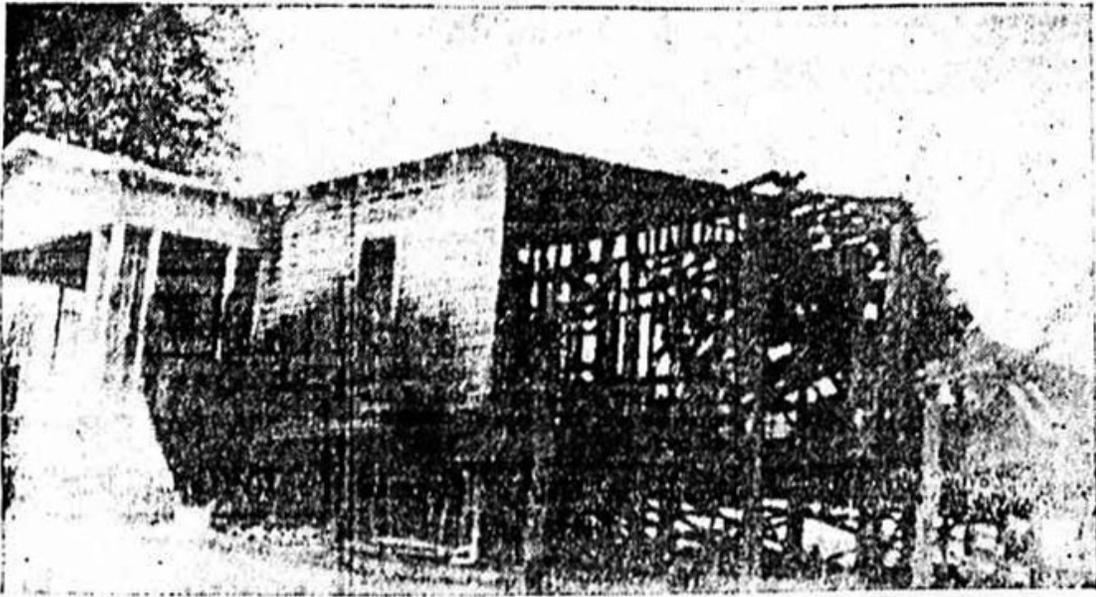


Fig. A.3. Ashes of the Cooper Club (Reprinted from “All That Flames Left of Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 6 April 1936, p. 4.)

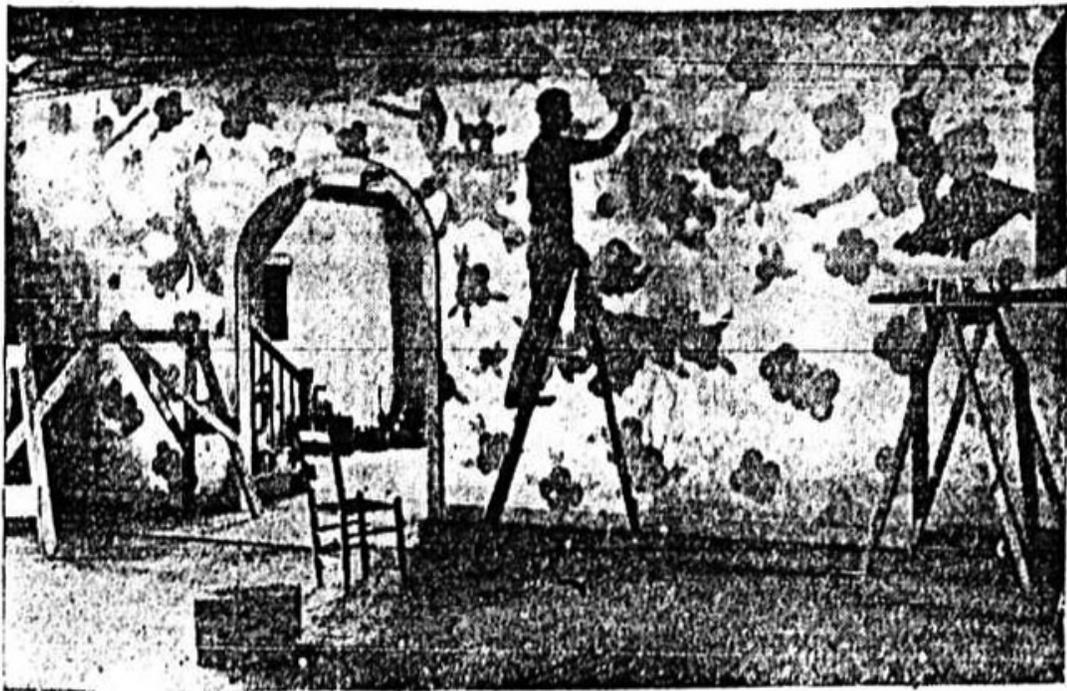


Fig. A.4. Gustav Ivan Painting a Mural in the Ballroom of the New Cooper Club (Reprinted from “Artist Does Murals for Cooper Club,” *Henderson Daily News*, 18 October 1936, sec. 2, p. 2.)



Fig. A.5. New Cooper Club (Reprinted from Invitation for the 20 October 1936 Cooper Club dance with Jimmy Joy and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

APPENDIX B

Bandleaders at the Cooper Club



Fig. B.1. Jimmie Lunceford (Photo courtesy of “Lunceford, Jimmie,” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica Online, <http://www.search.eb.com/eb/article-9049356>.)



Fig. B.2. Ted Fio-Rito (Photo courtesy of Big Bands Database Plus, <http://www.nfo.net/usa/tfiorito.jpg>.)



Fig. B.3. Garth Green (Reprinted from Rusk County Historical Commission, *Rusk County History* [Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1982], 49.)



Fig. B.4. Ben Bernie with Walter Winchell and Al Jolson (from left to right) (Reprinted from Thomas A. DeLong, *Radio Stars: An Illustrated Biographical Dictionary of 953 Performers, 1920 through 1960* [Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company Publishers, 1996], 32.)



Fig. B.5. Vincent Lopez (Photo courtesy of Big Bands Database Plus, <http://www.nfo.net/usa/vlopez2.jpg>.)



Fig. B.6. Jan Garber (Reprinted from George T. Simon, *The Big Bands*, 4th ed., with a forward by Frank Sinatra [New York: Schirmer Books, 1981], 493.)

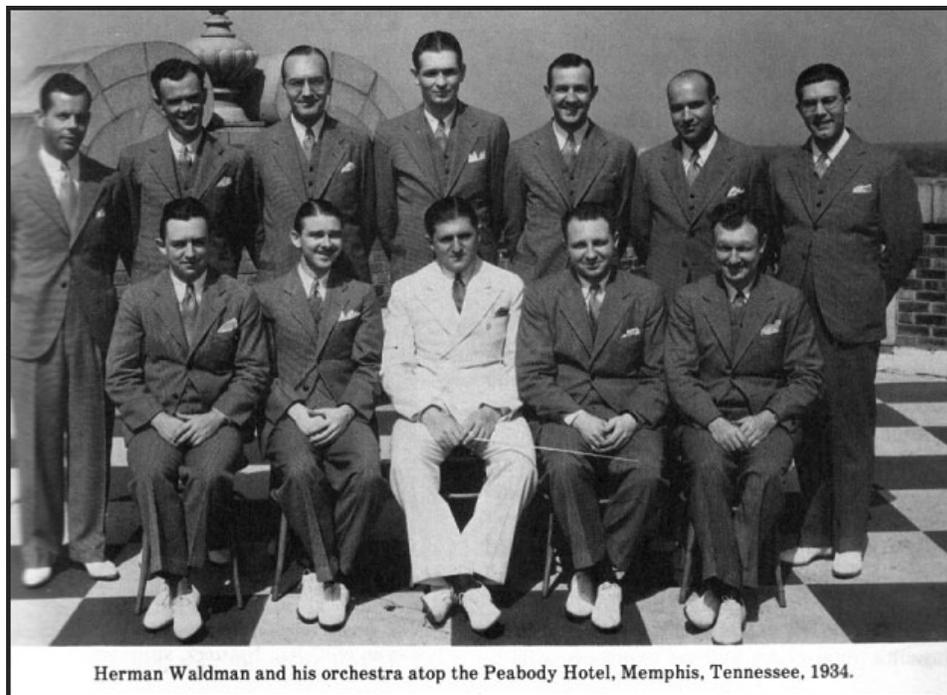


Fig. B.7. Herman Waldman and his Orchestra (Photo courtesy of “Memphis in the ‘Swing Era,’” <http://www.geocities.com/jingram05/>.)

APPENDIX C

Cooper Club Newspaper Ads

SURE, You'll Be There
for
Herman Waldman
and
His Orchestra



**GIVE YOU THE KEYS
TO THE NIGHT**

'Nuf Sed—He's the same Herman Waldman
who delighted you the opening night at the
Cooper Club. Bring your wife, your sweet-
heart, your girl friend . . . It's the night of
nights.

COOPER CLUB

"Where East Texas Dances"

9:30 'til 2:00 \$2.00 (Tax Included)

Fig. C.1. Herman Waldman and his Orchestra Ad (Reprinted from *Henderson Daily News*, 19 January 1934, p. 5.)



Let's Go

Cooper Club

Saturday

June 15, 9:30 'til

\$1.50, Tax Included

GARTH GREEN

and His Orchestra

You Always Have a Good Time

"Where East Texas Dances"



Fig. C.2. Garth Green and his Orchestra Ad (Reprinted from *Henderson Daily News*, 14 June 1935, p. 7.)



Let's Go
 Duke Wright's
 Swing Band
 JANUARY 18
 Saturday Next
 \$1.00 Per Couple "Where East Texas Dances"
The Cooper Club

Fig. C.3. Duke Wright and his Swing Band Ad (Reprinted from *Henderson Daily News*, 15 January 1936, p. 12.)



One of Those
 Really Enjoyable
DANCES
 with
Bernie King
 and His
 Aristocrats of Rhythm
 At Your
Cooper Club
 Saturday, April 27
 From 9:30 'til 2:00
 Admission \$1.25

Fig. C.4. Bernie King and his Aristocrats of Rhythm Ad (Reprinted from *Henderson Daily News*, 25 April 1935, p. 2.)

. DANCING .

Saturday Night

May 12, 1934

The Cooper Club

Presenting

BILL HOGAN

and

His Hollywood Californians

Consisting of

FOURTEEN FAMOUS ARTISTS



Hogan has been featured in many movie productions, the most recent of which are: "Going Hollywood" with Marlon Davies and Bing Crosby, and "Operator Thirteen" with Marlon Davies.

Hogan has also been featured on "The Lucky Strike Hour" and Brunswick Records . . . also played at the Gunter Hotel Terrace Garden over WOAI, San Antonio, through Saturday, April 28th.

9:30 to 2:00 \$1.50 plus tax

Fig. C.5. Bill Hogan and his Hollywood Californians Ad (Reprinted from *Henderson Daily News*, 11 May 1934, p. 7.)

Saturday
Night
At The

JACK CRAWFORD

Cooper Club
"WHERE EAST TEXAS DANCES"
ON TYLER HIGHWAY

Fig. C.6. Jack Crawford and his Orchestra Ad (Reprinted from *Henderson Daily News*, 19 November 1936, p. 2.)

"Husk" O'Hare For
COOPER CLUB

"Nuf Sed"

ADMISSION
\$2.00
(Tax included)
Per Couple

"Where East Texas Dances"
It's Going to Be A Great Party

Fig. C.7. Husk O'Hare and his Orchestra Ad (Reprinted from *Henderson Daily News*, 21 February 1936, p. 12.)

YOUNG AMERICA FAVORITES ★ **IN PERSON!**

MCA Presents **OZZIE NELSON**

★ AND HIS ORCHESTRA

With Lovely ★ **HARRIET HILLIARD** ★

★

★

★

★

Dance

To

OZZIE'S

Soothing!

Lilting!

Romantic!

Melodies

Listen to the Sparkling Songs of OZZIE and HARRIET

COOPER CLUB

Saturday, August 17

Advance Ticket Sale, \$3.30 per couple, including Tax.

Buy your tickets now . . . Save 55 cents

Fig. C.8. Ozzie Nelson and his Orchestra Ad (Reprinted from *Henderson Daily News*, 16 August 1935, p. 12.)

**Coming To The
Cooper Club
—Wed., March 3—**



**NOBLE
SISSLE**
AND HIS
ORCHESTRA

STARTED WITH *Jollie's Berquet Reoue* NEW YORK & CHICAGO
FRENCH CASINO

9 'til 2 Admission \$2, Tax Paid

Fig. C.9. Noble Sissle and his Orchestra Ad (Reprinted from *Henderson Daily News*, 1 March 1937, p. 2.)

APPENDIX D

Flyers

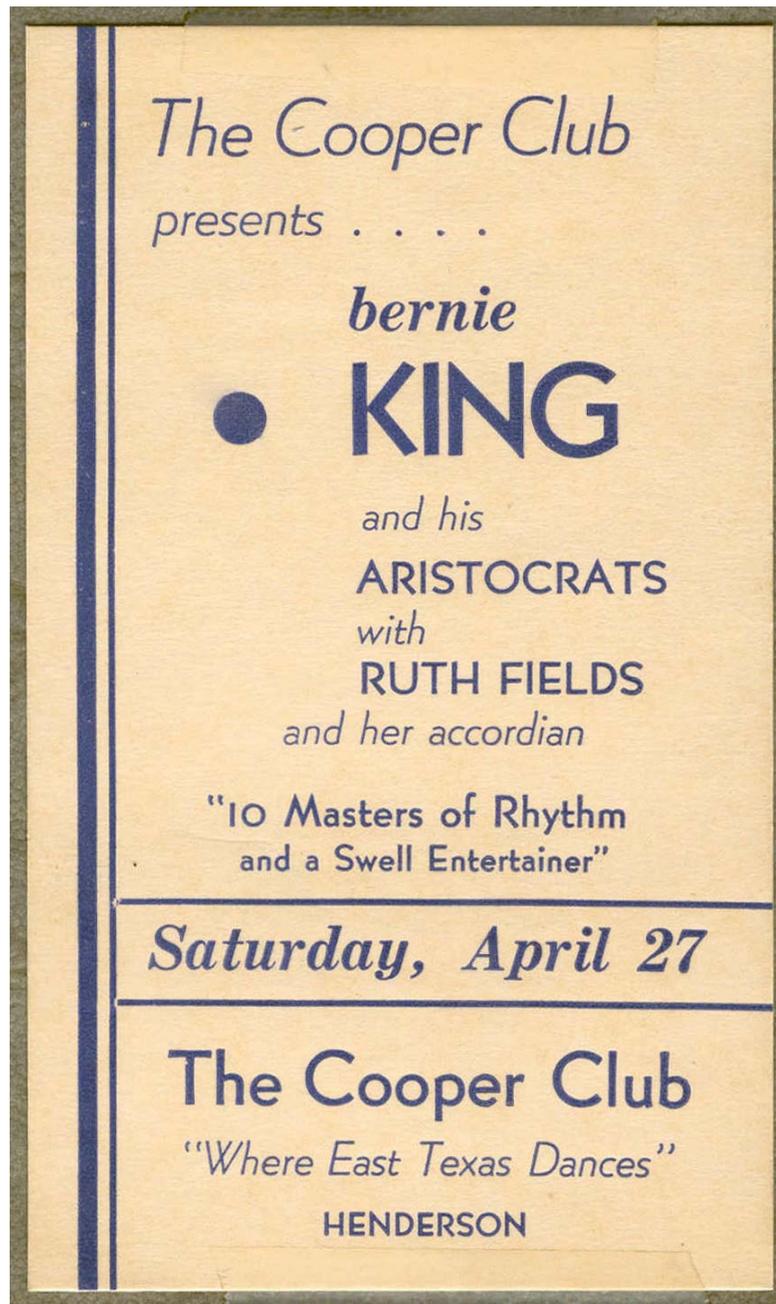


Fig. D.1. Bernie King and his Aristocrats of Rhythm Flyer. Original size: 3 ¼ by 5 ½ inches. (Flyer for the 27 April 1935 Cooper Club dance with Bernie King and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

★ TED
Fio-Rito
AND HIS ORCHESTRA

WITH
"MUZZY" MARCELINO,
THE THREE "DEBS"
AND 18 OTHER STARS

FRIDAY, APRIL 19th

Adm. \$3.50 (PER COUPLE)
PLUS TAX

DANCE ❖ ❖
SATURDAY, APRIL 13
..... WITH
GARTH GREEN

9:30 'til 2:00 ❖ Adm. \$1.00 (INC. TAX)

Tickets are now on sale in your city for \$3.30. Buy now and save 55c, also avoid delay at the dance. All tables will be placed in an enclosure on the west side of the building, providing ample room inside for dancing. As you know, this is one of the greatest musical organizations in the country and you will not want to miss this dance. For table reservations write Box 282, Henderson, or phone 534.

The COOPER CLUB "Where East Texas Dances"
..... HENDERSON TEXAS

Fig. D.2. Garth Green and his Orchestra and Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra Flyer. Original size: $5 \frac{9}{16}$ by $3 \frac{1}{4}$ inches. (Flyer for the 13 April 1935 Cooper Club dance with Garth Green and his Orchestra and the 19 April 1935 Cooper Club dance with Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

Coming! FRIDAY, APRIL 19

Radio's
Favorite Band
TED FIO-RITO
and his ORCHESTRA

• featuring •
MUZZY MARCELLINO
THE THREE DEBUTANTES
and other stars

9:30 'til 2:00 ❖ \$3.50 (PLUS TAX)
Per Couple

The Smoothest Music on the air waves. . . .

Hollywood's favorite maestro and the band that set a new style in rhythm. . . .

He gave America seventy-eight song hits.

THE COOPER CLUB "Where East Texas Dances"
..... HENDERSON TEXAS

Fig. D.3. Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra Flyer. Original size: $6 \frac{1}{8}$ by $3 \frac{9}{16}$ inches. (Flyer for the 19 April 1935 dance with Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

THE COOPER CLUB

.....PRESENTS.....

Garth Green and His 10-Piece Orchestra
SATURDAY NIGHT, JANUARY 26

This Orchestra has become very popular throughout East Texas the past year and we are proud to present them for a popular priced dance. We also wish to remind you of the change in the orchestra pit and a new sound system, both of which lend to your enjoyment of the dances.

9:30 'TIL 2:00 **\$1.25 PER COUPLE**

"Where East Texas Dances" *Henderson, Texas*

Fig. D.4. Garth Green and his Orchestra Flyer. Original size: $5 \frac{5}{8}$ by $3 \frac{5}{16}$ inches. (Flyer for the 26 January 1935 Cooper Club dance with Garth Green and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)



The COOPER CLUB

presents

Garth Green ::
::-:: and his Orchestra

Saturday, June 8

Nine-thirty 'til two

Admission \$1.36½ Tax 13½c Total \$1.50

Fig. D.5. Garth Green and his Orchestra Flyer No. 2. Original size: $5 \frac{1}{2}$ by $3 \frac{1}{4}$ inches. (Flyer for the 8 June 1935 Cooper Club dance with Garth Green and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

APPENDIX E

Cooper Club Signs



Fig. E.1. Anson Weeks and his Orchestra Sign. Original size: 11 by 3 inches. (Sign for the 6 April 1934 Cooper Club dance with Anson Weeks and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)



Fig. E.2. Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra Sign. Original size: 8 ½ by 3 ½ inches. (Sign for the 19 April 1935 Cooper Club dance with Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

APPENDIX F

Cooper Club Tickets



Fig. F.1. Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra Ticket. Original size: $4 \frac{3}{8}$ by $2 \frac{1}{4}$ inches. (Ticket for the 19 April 1935 Cooper Club dance with Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

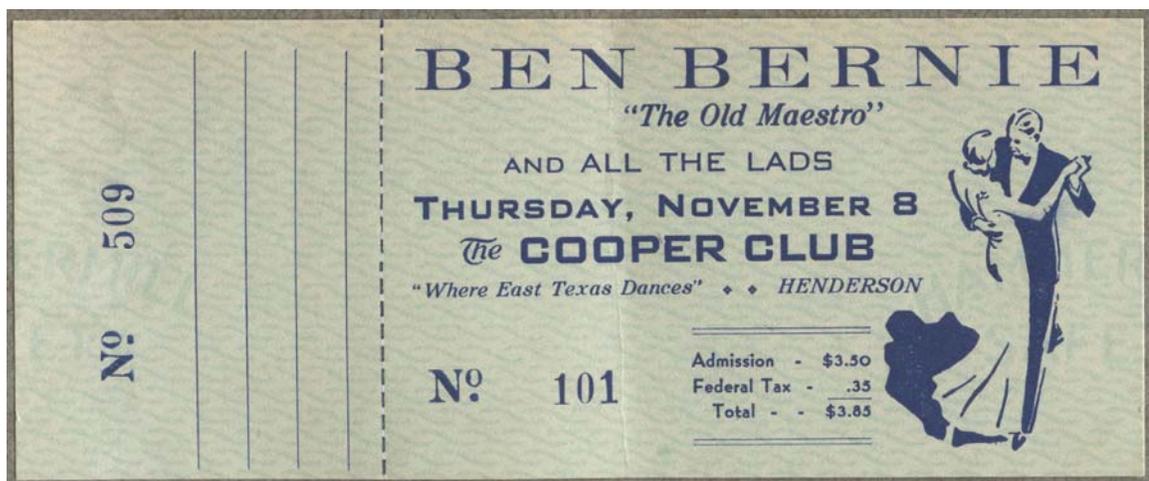


Fig. F.2. Ben Bernie and All the Lads Ticket. Original size: $6 \frac{3}{8}$ by $2 \frac{9}{16}$ inches. (Ticket for the 8 November 1934 Cooper Club dance with Ben Bernie and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)



Fig. F.3. Complimentary Ticket. Original size: 2 ½ by 4 ¼ inches. (Complimentary Ticket for the 11 November 1935 Cooper Club dance with Harry Sosnik and his Orchestra, in possession of George D. Cooper.)

APPENDIX G

Cooper Club Invitations

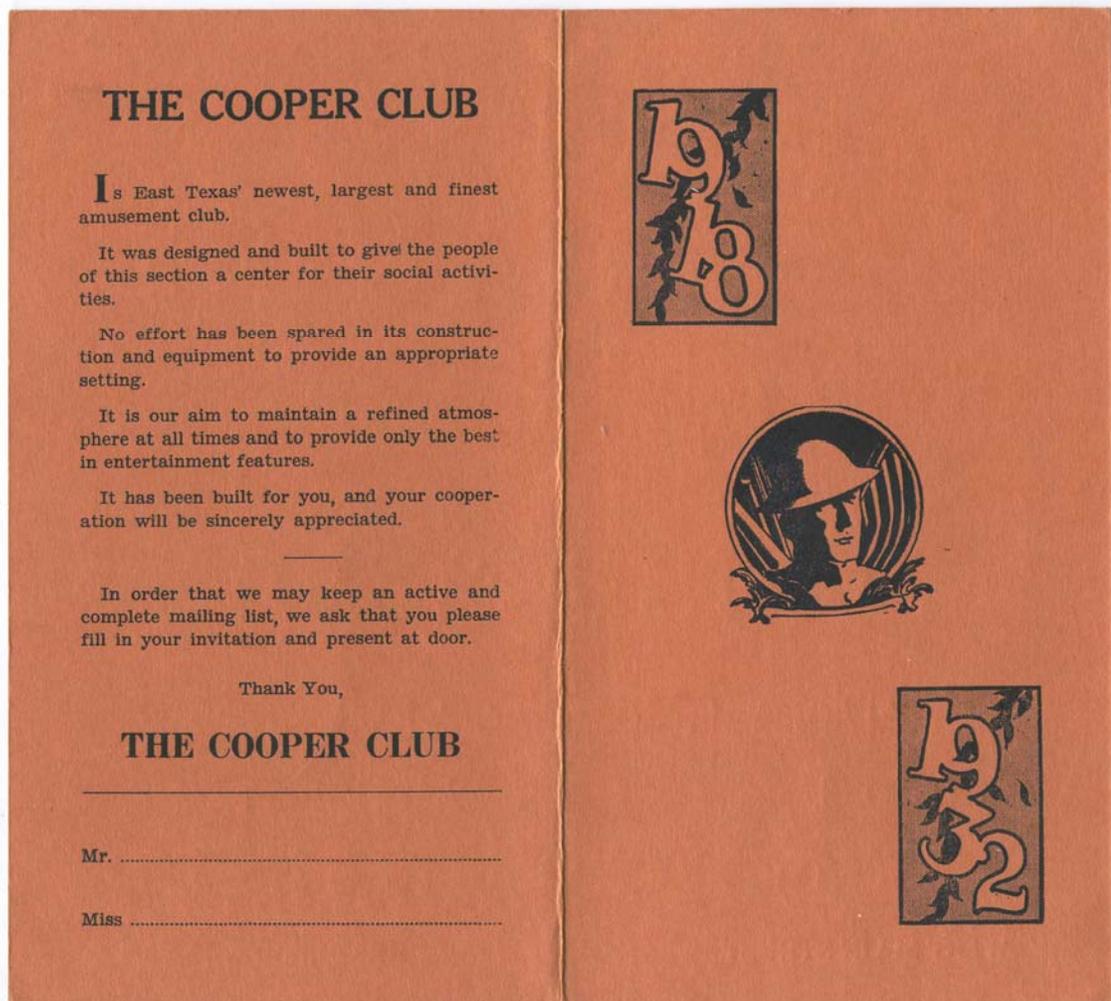


Fig. G.1. Back and Front of Ernie Fields and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 3 ½ by 6 ¼ inches. (Invitation for the 11 November 1932 Cooper Club dance with Ernie Fields and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

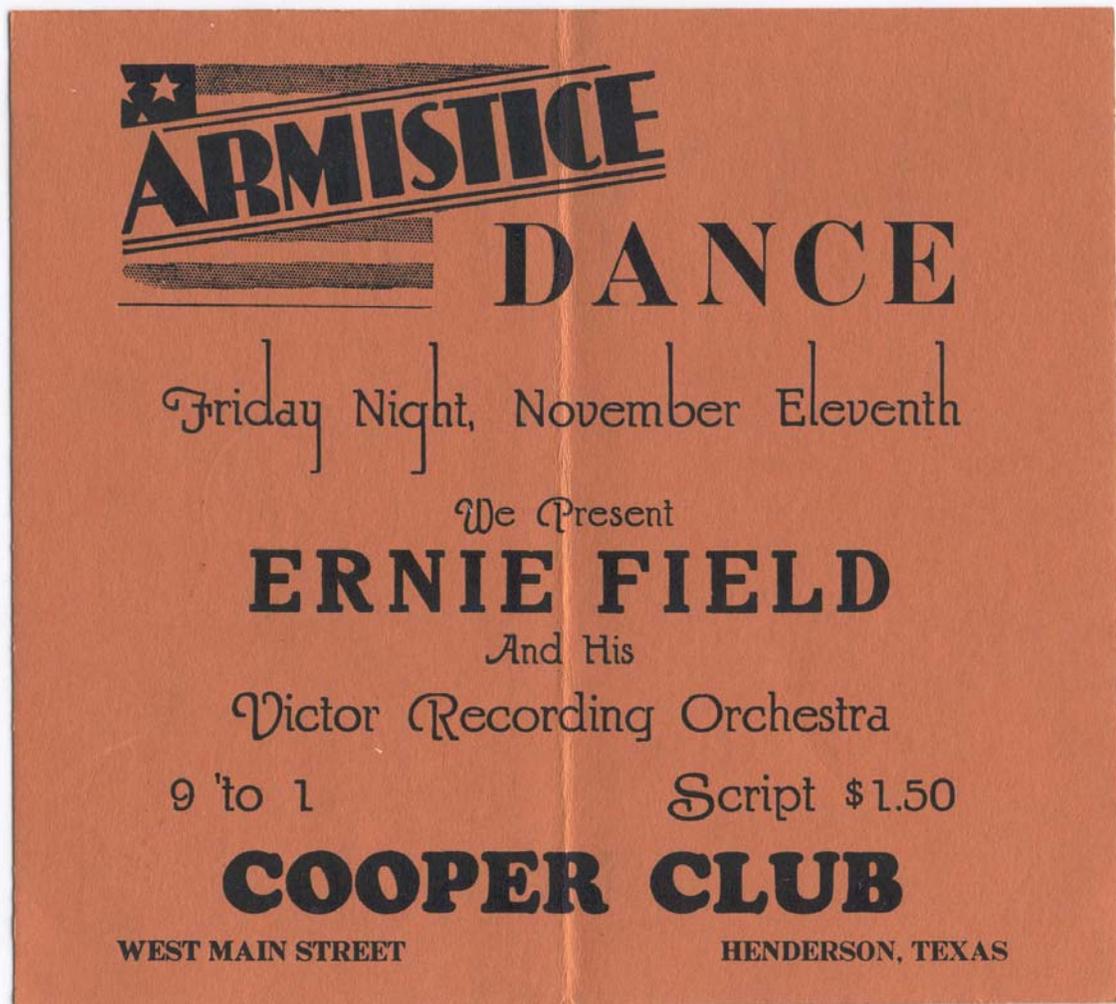


Fig. G.2. Inside of Ernie Fields and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 3 ½ by 6 ¼ inches. (Invitation for the 11 November 1932 Cooper Club dance with Ernie Fields and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

THE COOPER CLUB

Is East Texas' newest, largest and finest amusement club.

It was designed and built to give the people of this section a center for their social activities.

No effort has been spared in its construction and equipment to provide an appropriate setting.

It is our aim to maintain a refined atmosphere at all times and to provide only the best in entertainment features.

It has been built for you, and your cooperation will be sincerely appreciated.

In order that we may keep an active and complete mailing list, we ask that you please fill in your invitation and present at door.

Thank You,

THE COOPER CLUB

Mr.

Miss

(Spectators will be charged regular admission)

HERMAN WALDMAN ERNIE FIELD LIGON SMITH

—AND NOW—



Herbie Kay

Fig. G.3. Back and Front of Herbie Kay and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 4 ¼ by 6 inches. (Invitation for the 7 December 1932 Cooper Club dance with Herbie Kay and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

**THE COOPER CLUB!
SCORES AGAIN!**

**HERE THEY
ARE FOLKS**

**HERBIE
KAY**

AND HIS ORCHESTRA.
America's Outstanding
Singing and Entertaining

DANCE ORCHESTRA

The Orchestra That Set All the Universities Agog—
FEATURED ONE SOLID YEAR ON THE N. B. C.
YEASTFOAMERS PROGRAM—COAST TO COAST

Wednesday, December 7th
9 'til 1 --- Script \$2.00

**THE DANCE
YOU
WILL
NEVER
FORGET**



Featuring also
that charming Miss—
*Dorothy
LaMour*
(Who would be a hit
with any orchestra)

•
JACK LAWS
One of America's Most
Popular Baritones

•
**THE
HERBIE KAY
TRIO**
And Others

THE COOPER CLUB

WEST MAIN STREET HENDERSON, TEXAS

Fig. G.4. Inside of Herbie Kay and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 4 ¼ by 6 inches. (Invitation for the 7 December 1932 Cooper Club dance with Herbie Kay and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

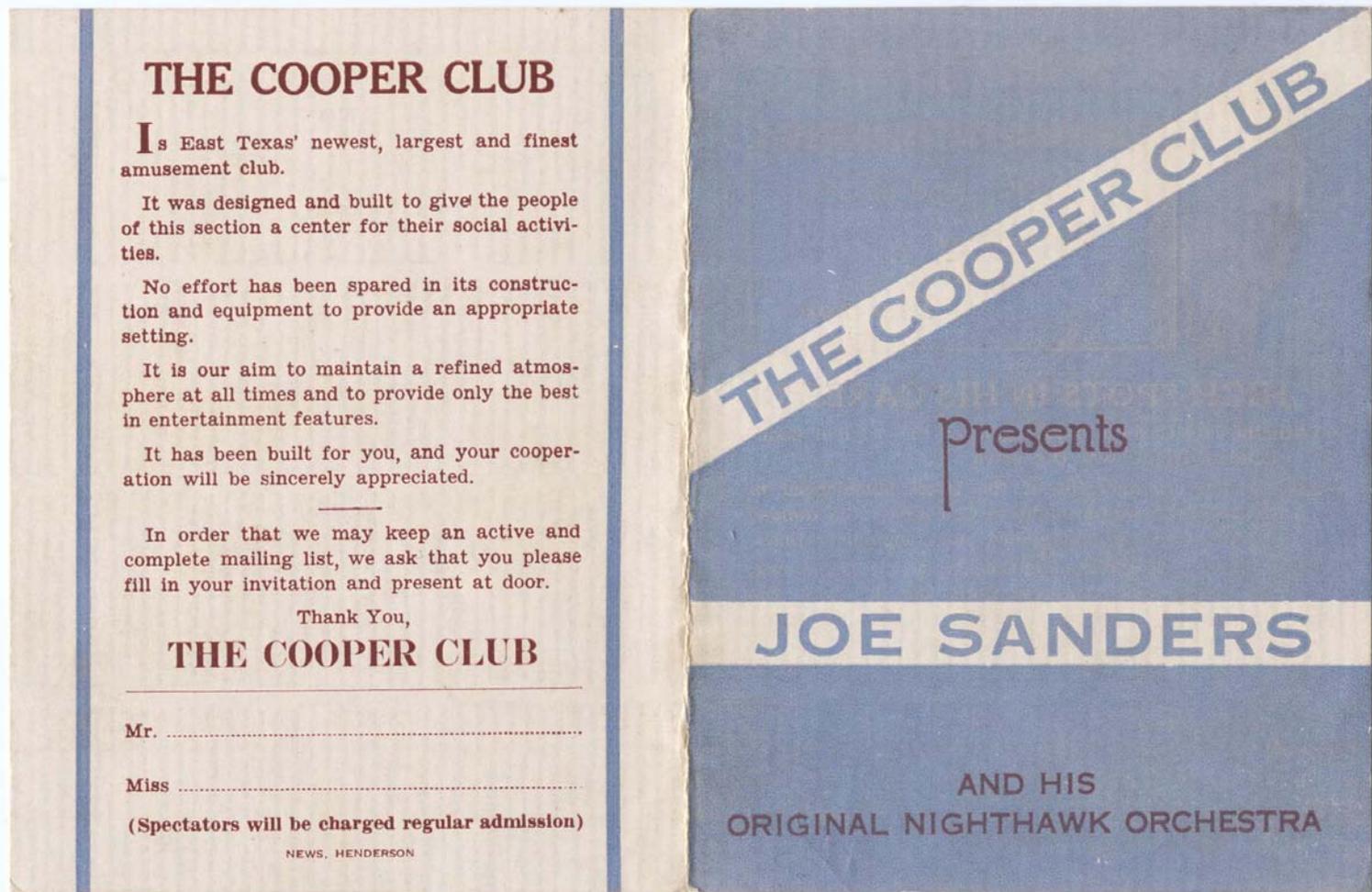


Fig. G.5. Back and Front of Joe Sanders and his Original Nighthawk Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 4 by 5 ¹/₈ inches. (Invitation for the 17 December 1932 Cooper Club dance with Joe Sanders and his Original Nighthawk Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

Folks Meet —



Joe Sanders
Pianist —
Vocalist —
Director

HIGH SPOTS IN HIS CAREER

With the late Carlton Coon organized the original Coon-Sanders Nighthawk Orchestra.

After a long engagement at the Hotel Muehlebach in Kansas City, was brought to Chicago to the famous Blackhawk Cafe, and gained more popularity there.

After six successful seasons in Chicago, at the Blackhawk, the College Inn, Congress Hotel and the Dells, the now nationally famous band was called to the smart Hotel New Yorker in New York City.

Has just completed a return engagement at the College Inn of the Hotel Sherman and will open soon at the popular Hollywood Club at Galveston.

THE COOPER CLUB

AND

MUSIC CORPORATION OF AMERICA

PRESENT

RADIO'S ACE - IN PERSON



**ORIGINAL
NIGHTHAWK
ORCHESTRA**

Saturday Night — — — December 17th

9 'til 1 — — — — — Script \$2.00

THE COOPER CLUB

WEST MAIN STREET HENDERSON, TEXAS

Fig. G.6. Inside of Joe Sanders and his Original Nighthawk Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 4 by 5 1/8 inches. (Invitation for the 17 December 1932 Cooper Club dance with Joe Sanders and his Original Nighthawk Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

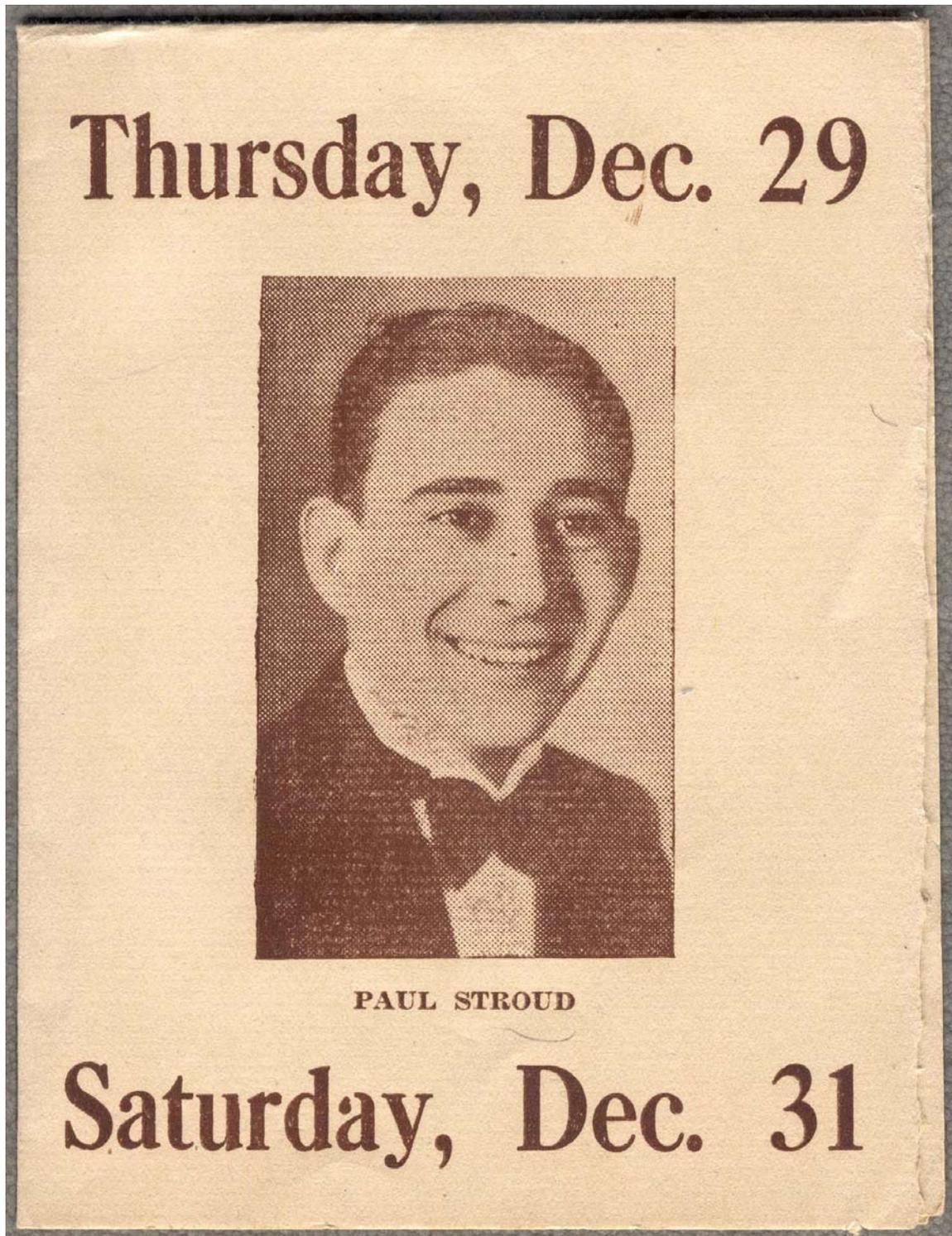


Fig. G.7. Front of Paul Stroud and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 4 by 5 ³/₈ inches. (Invitation for the 29 December and 31 December 1932 Cooper Club dances with Paul Stroud and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

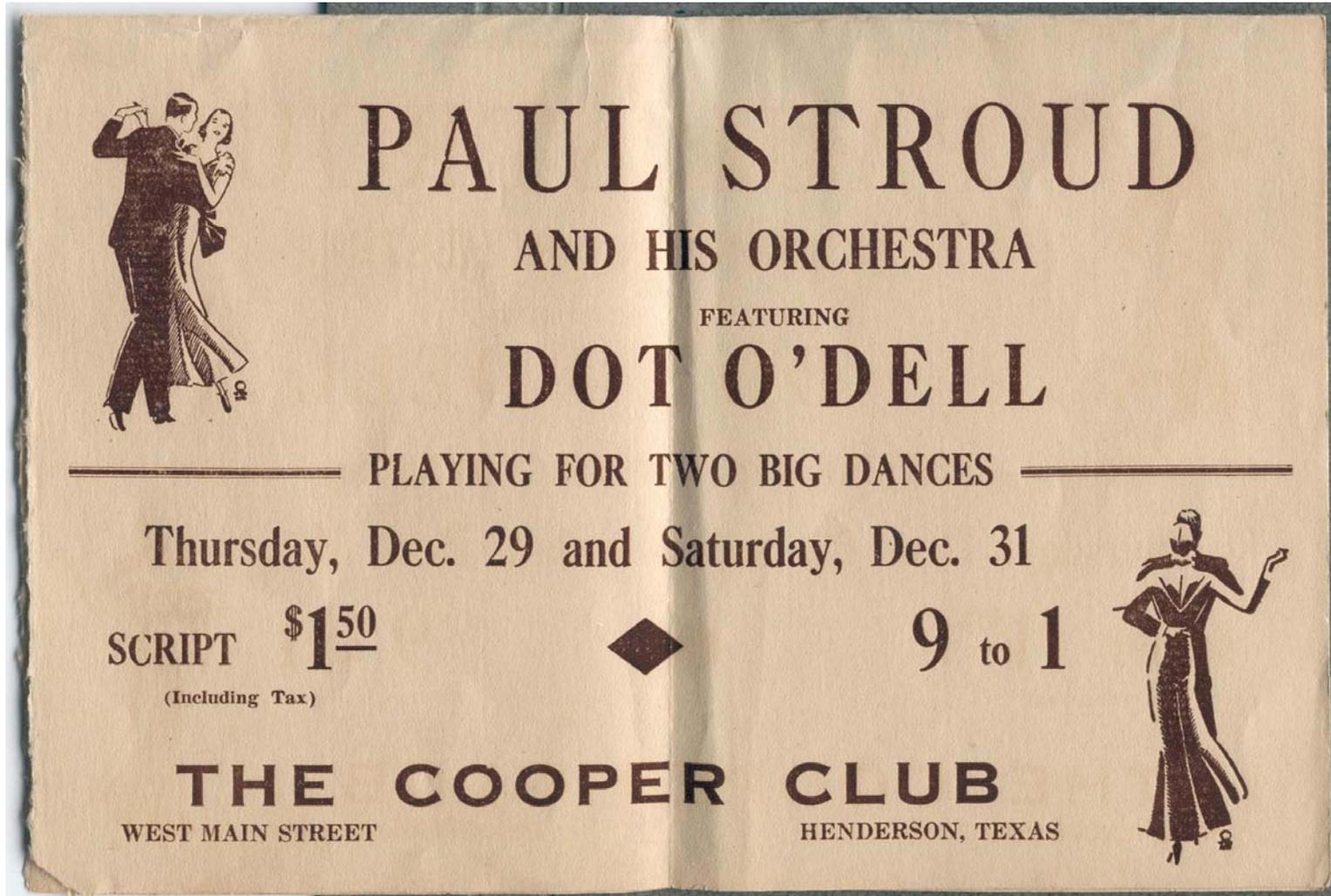


Fig. G.8. Inside of Paul Stroud and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 4 by 5 ³/₈ inches. (Invitation for the 29 December and 31 December 1932 Cooper Club dances with Paul Stroud and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)



Fig. G.9. Front of Jimmie Grier and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: $3\frac{1}{2}$ by $6\frac{5}{16}$ inches. (Invitation for the 16 February 1933 Cooper Club dance with Jimmie Grier and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

THE COOPER CLUB
 Is "LUCKY" to Present
 Jimmie Grier
 And His 18 Piece
 Cocoanut Grove
 ORCHESTRA

the featured
 Lucky Strike Dance Band
 Thursday, Feb. 16th
 from Nine until One-thirty

Admission	- - -	\$1.80
Tax	- - -	.20
Total	- - -	\$2.00

THE COOPER CLUB
"Where East Texas Dances"
 WEST MAIN STREET HENDERSON, TEXAS

Jimmie Grier

Jimmie Grier should need no introduction, for his famous orchestra is as well known as the popular Lucky Strike radio hour on which he was featured during the past year.

Grier's Band first gained national prominence during their long engagement at the famous Cocoanut Grove of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles—the social center of the West Coast. His successful rise in the musical world has been phenomenal and today his band is rated among the leading orchestras of the country.

He has been featured at different times at St. Francis Hotel in Los Angeles; the Hotel Mark Hopkins in San Francisco; the Monmartre Cafe and the Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood; the Hotel St. Moritz, New York; Copley Plaza, Boston; Hotel Mount Royal, Montreal, Canada; the Coronado Hotel, St. Louis; the Adolphus at Dallas; and the Club Forest at New Orleans.

Grier's engagement at the Cooper Club Thursday night is his only stop in East Texas, and the music lovers of this section are indeed "Lucky" to have the opportunity of hearing his unusual music.

Fig. G.10. Inside of Jimmie Grier and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: $3\frac{1}{2}$ by $6\frac{5}{16}$ inches. (Invitation for the 16 February 1933 Cooper Club dance with Jimmie Grier and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

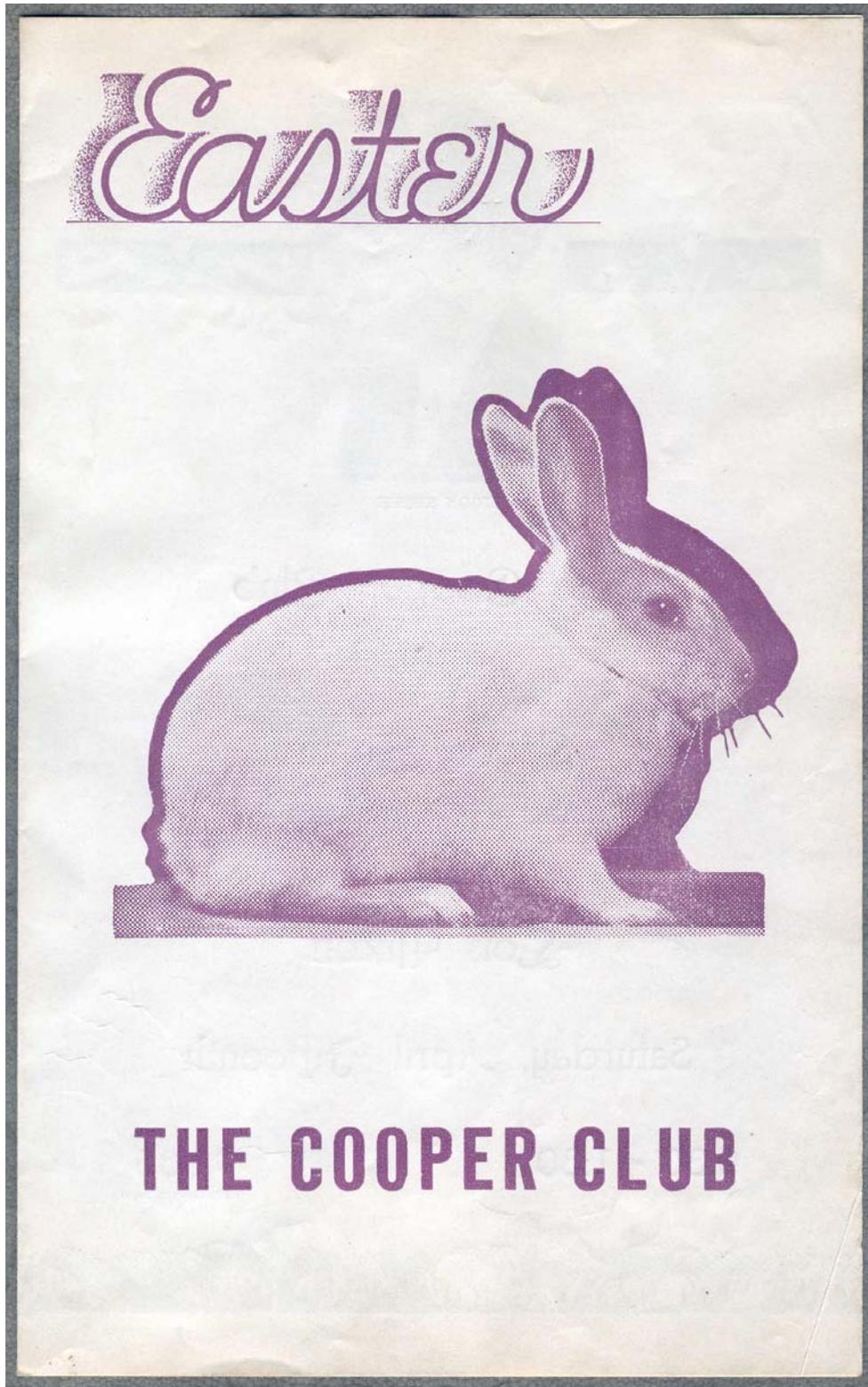


Fig. G.11. Front of Easter Ligon Smith and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: $6 \frac{1}{16}$ by $9 \frac{13}{16}$ inches. (Invitation for the 15 April 1933 Cooper Club dance with Ligon Smith and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)



Fig. G.12. Inside of Easter Ligon Smith and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: $6 \frac{1}{16}$ by $9 \frac{13}{16}$ inches. (Invitation for the 15 April 1933 Cooper Club dance with Ligon Smith and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

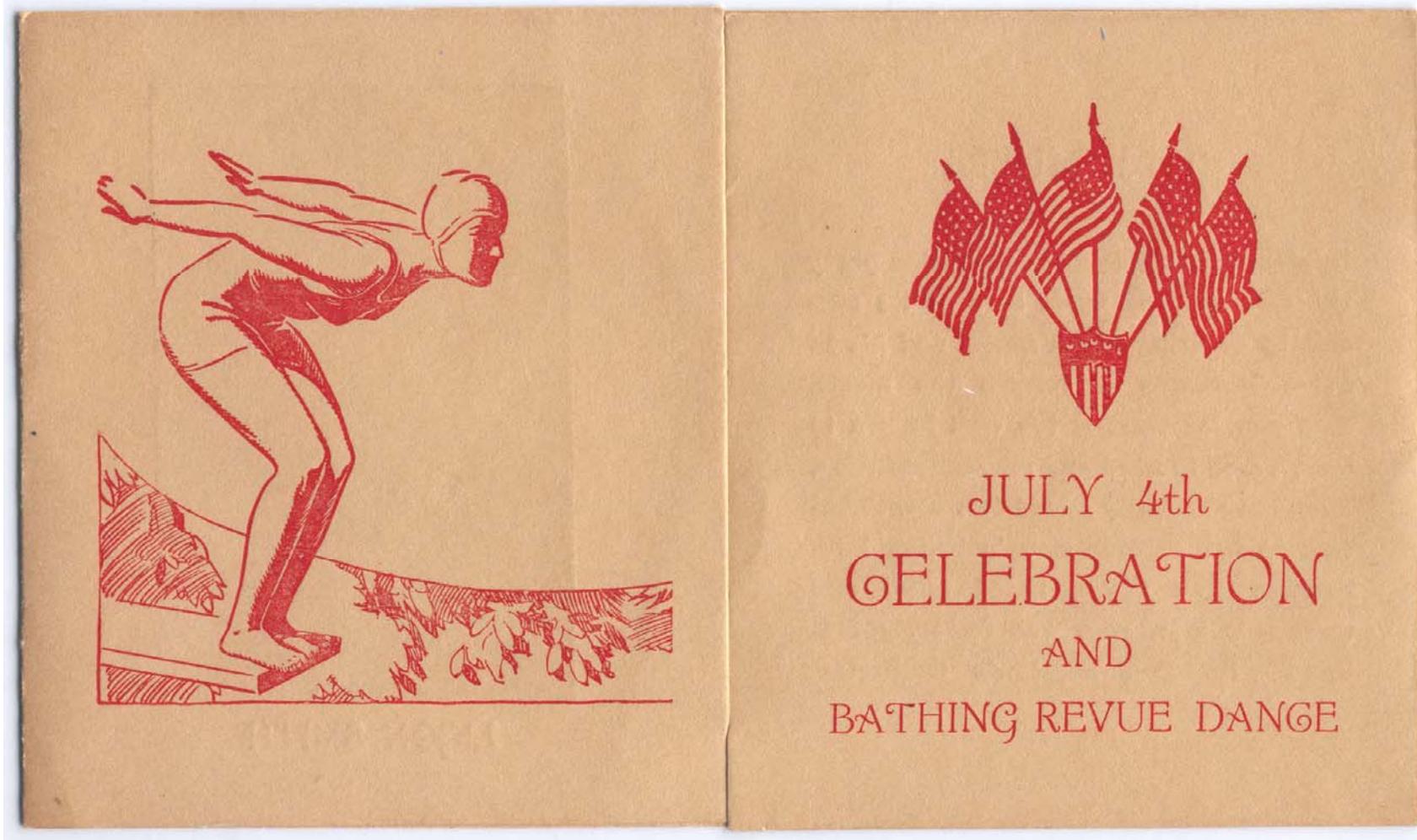


Fig. G.13. Front of July 4th Ligon Smith and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 6 by 3 ½ inches. (Invitation for the 4 July 1933 Cooper Club dance with Ligon Smith and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

The Cooper Club invites you to attend it's first
ANNUAL JULY 4th CELEBRATION
 Honoring the entries in the Sandy Beach Bathing Revue
 TUESDAY NIGHT, JULY 4th
 Featuring
LIGON SMITH and HIS 14 PIEGE ORGHESTRA
 9:00 'til 2:00
 Admission (Including Tax) **\$2.00**
THE COOPER CLUB
Where It's Really COOL!!
 WEST MAIN STREET HENDERSON, TEXAS

THE MUSIC

In planning this double celebration party the management made sure of its success by securing Ligon Smith and his 14 Piece Orchestra to furnish the music. This popular band is too well known in East Texas to need any recommendation. They have recently added two new members to the organization including Miss Frances Van Cleve, noted radio and vaudeville star, who was formerly featured with Don Bigelow's Orchestra.

LIGON SMITH

Fig. G.14. Inside of July 4th Ligon Smith and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 6 by 3 ½ inches. (Invitation for the 4 July 1933 Cooper Club dance with Ligon Smith and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)



Fig. G.15. Front of Lou Harris and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: $4 \frac{5}{16}$ by $5 \frac{1}{2}$ inches. (Invitation for the 28 October 1933 Cooper Club dance with Lou Harris and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)



Fig. G.16. Inside of Lou Harris and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: $4 \frac{5}{16}$ by $5 \frac{1}{2}$ inches. (Invitation for the 28 October 1933 Cooper Club dance with Lou Harris and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)



Fig. G.17. Front of Christmas Ligon Smith and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 6 by 3 ³/₁₆ inches. (Invitation for the 25 December 1933 Cooper Club dance with Ligon Smith and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)



Fig. G.18. Inside of Christmas Ligon Smith and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 6 by 3 ³/₁₆ inches. (Invitation for the 25 December 1933 Cooper Club dance with Ligon Smith and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

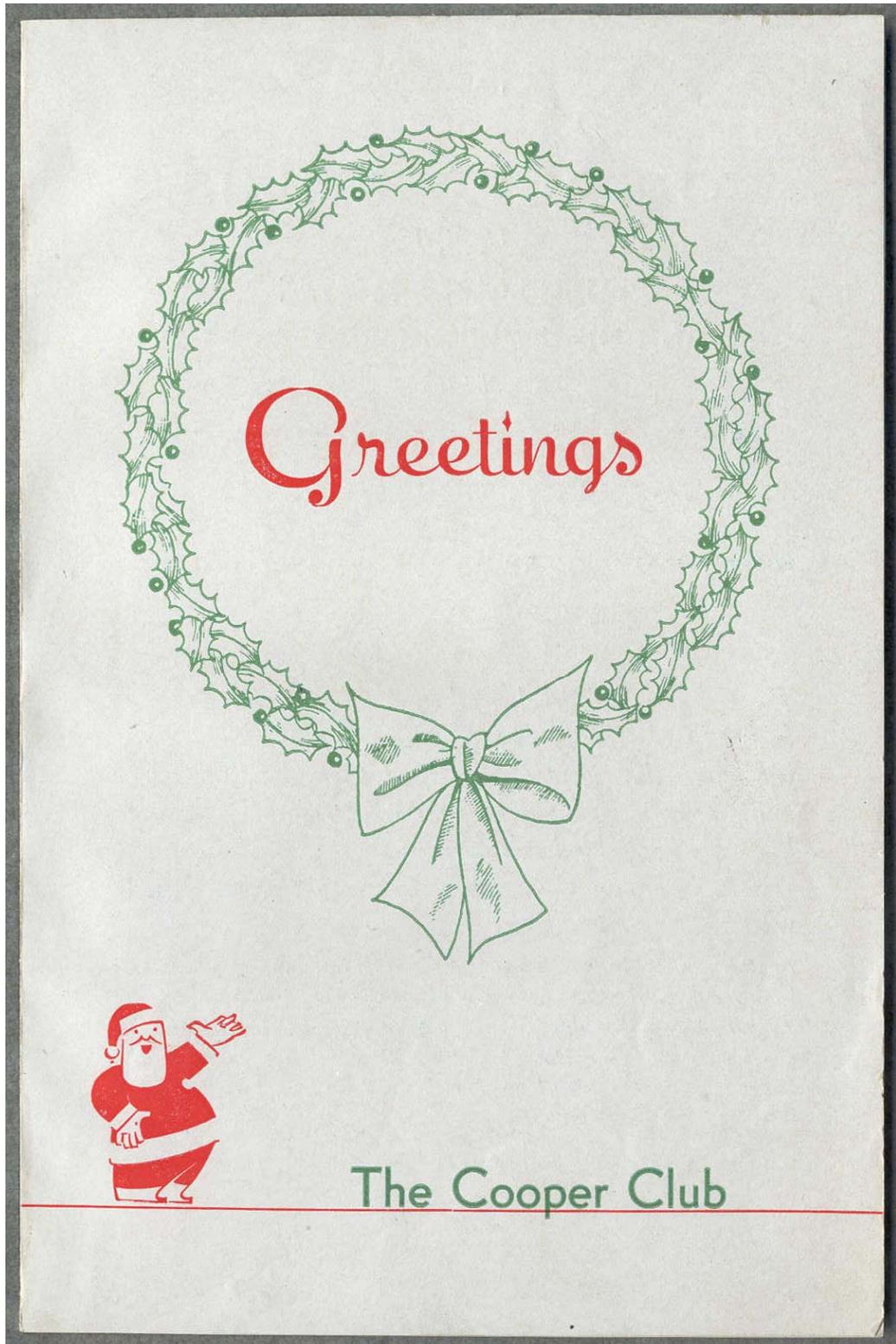


Fig. G.19. Front of Richard Cole and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 5 ¼ by 8 inches. (Invitation for the 25 December 1934 Cooper Club dance with Richard Cole and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

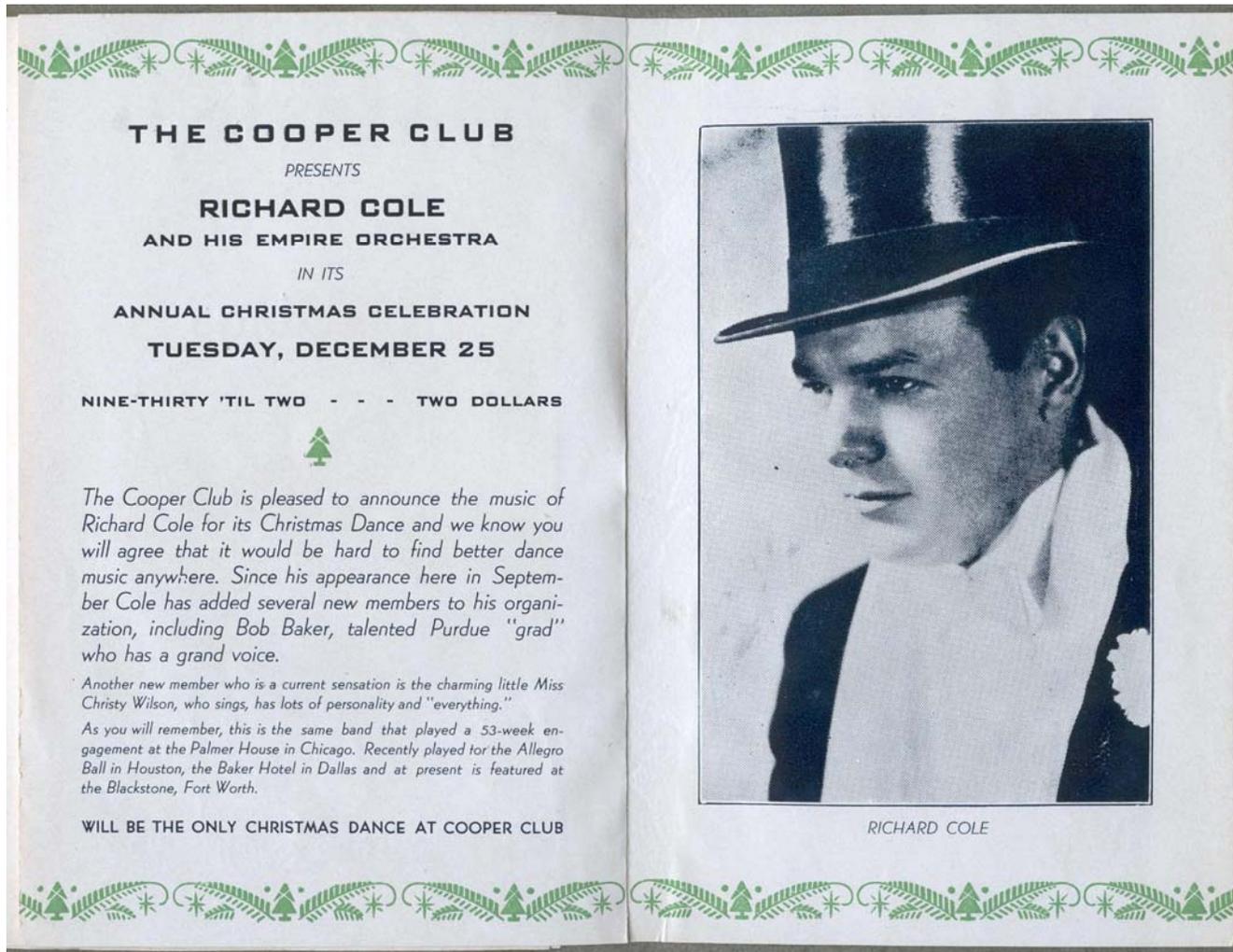


Fig. G.20. Inside of Richard Cole and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size when closed: 5 ¼ by 8 inches. (Invitation for the 25 December 1934 Cooper Club dance with Richard Cole and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

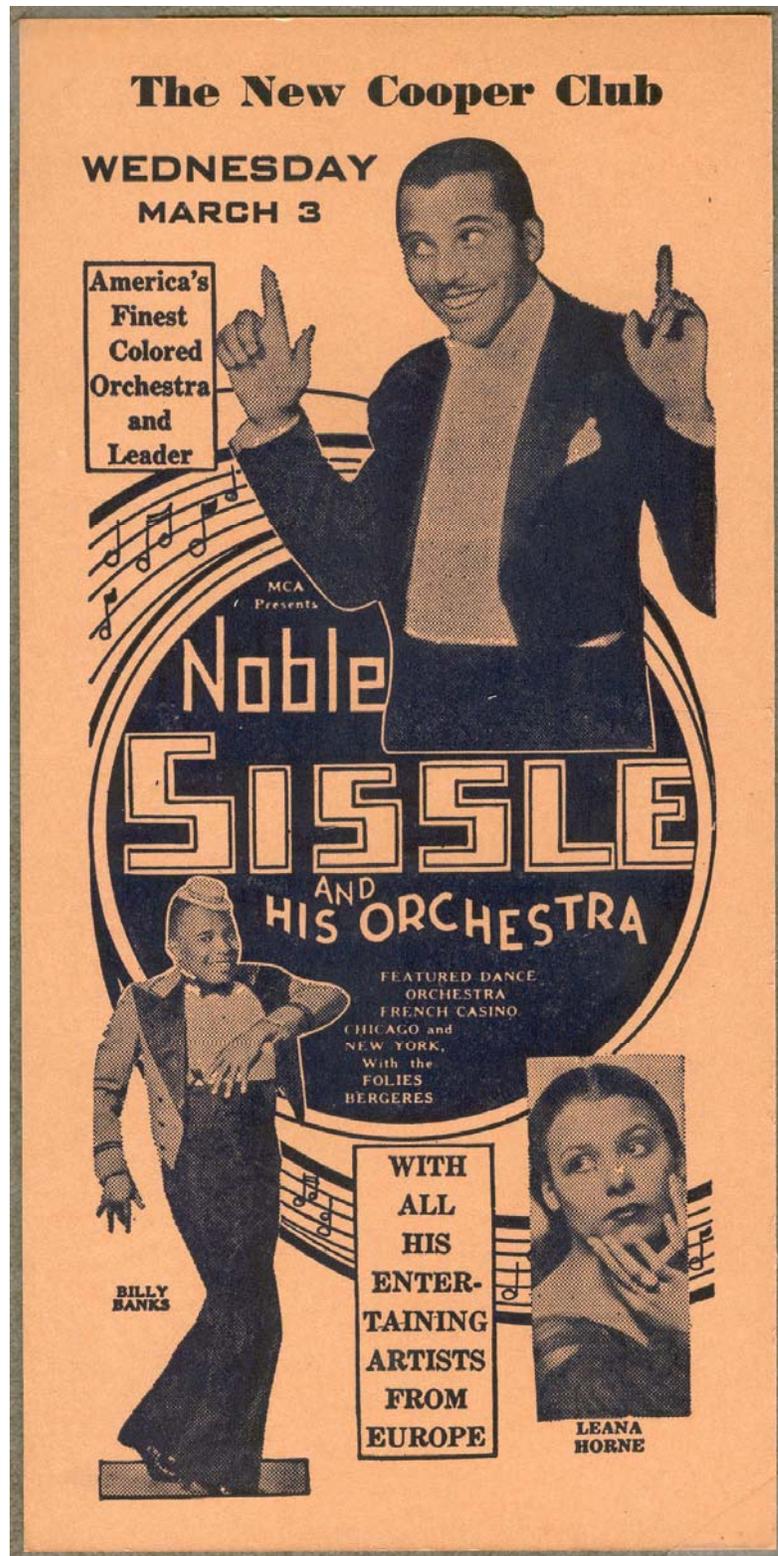


Fig. G.21. Noble Sissle and his Orchestra Invitation. Original size: 4 ½ by 9 ¼ inches. (Invitation for the 3 March 1937 Cooper Club dance with Noble Sissle and his Orchestra, in possession of Robert Forester.)

APPENDIX H

Alphabetical Listing of Dance Bands

Table H.1. Alphabetical Listing of Orchestras Booked for the Cooper Club, Dates of Performances, and their Theme Songs

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Louis Armstrong and his Orchestra	played at old Cooper Club at some point between October 1932 and April 1936	“When It’s Sleepy Time Down South” “On the Sunny Side of the Street”
Bertson Adams and his Rhythm Kings	December 9, 1939	
Charlie Agnew and his Orchestra	August 30, 1934 November 28, 1935	“Slow but Sure”
Gus Arnheim and his Orchestra	January 12, 1935	“Say It with Music” “Sweet and Lovely” “I Cried for You” “It Must Be True”
Walter Barnes and his Royal Creolians	February 11, 1933 April 8, 1933	
Count Basie and his Orchestra	November 16, 1939 September 17, 1940	“One O’Clock Jump”

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Ralph Bennett and his Seven Aces	May 19, 1934	
Ben Bernie and All the Lads	November 8, 1934	“One of Us Was Wrong” opening song: “It’s a Lonesome Old Town” closing song: “Au Revoir, Pleasant Dreams”
Babe Blok and his Chips	June 29, 1933	
The Blue Boys	September 15, 1937 August 18, 1938 – opened nightly engagement as Musical Blue Boys	
Tiny Bradshaw and his Orchestra	September 5, 1941	“Fascination”
Ralph Britt and his Orchestra	July 15, 1933 September 9, 1933 December 8, 1934	
Earl Burtnett and his Orchestra	June 17, 1933 – <i>canceled</i> July 20, 1933 August 4, 1933 October 21, 1933	“Hour of Parting”

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Ben Burton and his Orchestra	December 16, 1939	
Henry Busse and his Orchestra	September 27, 1933	opening song: “Hot Lips” closing song: “When Day Is Done”
Joe Buzze and his Orchestra	January 21, 1939	
Campus Serenaders from A&M College	December 26, 1932	
Joe Candullo and his Orchestra	February 3, 1933	
Richard Cole and his Empire Orchestra	September 8, 1934 December 25, 1934 January 30, 1936 March 14, 1936	
Travis Cole and his Hotel Kilgore Orchestra	September 25, 1937	
Paul Cornelius and his Orchestra	December 10, 1938	
Jack Crawford and his Orchestra	November 21, 1936	
Bob Crosby and his Orchestra	October 8, 1935	“Summertime”

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Bernie Cummins and his New Yorkers	August 26, 1933	“Dark Eyes”
Leo Davis and his Masters of Harmony	March 31, 1934	
Dick Dickerson and his Orchestra	January 8, 1937 – opened nightly engagement	
Duke Ellington and his Orchestra	July 3, 1935	“Take the ‘A’ Train” “East St. Louis Toodle-oo” “Solitude”
Eddie Fennell and his Orchestra (Leader was the “Eddie” of Eddie and Sugar Lou, the house band of the Hotel Tyler in Tyler, Texas, in the thirties.)	June 24, 1933 June 30, 1937 September 11, 1937	
Ernie Fields and his Clouds of Joy	November 11, 1932	
Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra	April 19, 1935 December 22, 1936	“Rio Rita”
Mark Fisher and his Orchestra	January 6, 1934	“When You’re Smiling”
Ella Fitzgerald and her Orchestra	June 24, 1940 June 18, 1941	

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Bobby Friedman and his Orchestra (Leader also used the names Snooks and his Memphis Ramblers, Snooks Friedman, Leon Friedman, and Hale Hamilton throughout his career.)	January 27, 1934	“Clover Blossom”
Jan Garber and his Orchestra	June 23, 1934 June 25, 1935 June 3, 1936 – <i>canceled</i> January 23, 1937	“My Dear”
Jay Gilstrap and his Orchestra	January 28, 1939	
Garth Green and his Orchestra	February 9, 1934 December 15, 1934 January 26, 1935 February 23, 1935 March 9, 1935 April 13, 1935 April 22, 1935 – two dances: a german early that morning and a dance that night June 1, 1935 June 8, 1935 June 15, 1935 July 13, 1935	

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
	October 5, 1935 November 23, 1935 October 21, 1936 – opened nightly engagement January 30, 1937 – opened nightly engagement March 19, 1937 – <i>canceled</i>	
Jimmie Grier and his Orchestra	February 16, 1933	“Music in the Moonlight” “Bon Voyage, Ship of Dreams”
Lou Harris and his Orchestra	August 19, 1933 October 28, 1933	
Art Hicks and his Biltmore Aristocrats	May 26, 1934	“Bonita”
Bill Hogan and his Hollywood Californians	May 12, 1934	
Don Irwin and his Orchestra	March 13, 1937	
Art Jarrett and his Orchestra	August 8, 1935	“Everything’s Been Done Before”
Wesley Jones and the Original Carolina Cotton Pickers	December 23, 1939	

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Jimmy Joy and his Orchestra	October 20, 1936	“Shine On, Harvest Moon”
Art Kassel and his Kassels in the Air	May 26, 1933	“Hell’s Bells” “Doodle Doo Doo”
Herbie Kay and his Orchestra	December 7, 1932 November 11, 1933 June 17, 1937	“Violets”
Bernie King and his Masters of Rhythm	April 27, 1935	
Wayne King and his Orchestra	April 18, 1936 – <i>anceled</i>	“The Waltz You Saved for Me”
Maxine Kirk and her Melody Men of Swing	September 4, 1937	
Martin Kuker and his California Nighthawks	March 16, 1935	
Larry Lee and his Orchestra	April 6, 1935	
Jack Long and his Orchestra	June 2, 1934 June 30, 1934	
Vincent Lopez and his Orchestra	May 23, 1935	“La Paloma” “Nola”

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Clarence Love and his Orchestra	August 20, 1938	
Robie Love and his Orchestra	June 9, 1934	
Jimmie Lunceford and his Orchestra	February 13, 1942	“Uptown Blues” “Jazznocracy”
Clarence Lund and his Orchestra	September 28, 1935	
Frankie Masters and his Orchestra	October 7, 1933	“Scatterbrain” “Moonlight and You”
Tony Mastroni and his New Yorkers	July 27, 1933	
Matlock’s Wabash Swingsters	December 2, 1939 – <i>booking mix-up:</i> <i>musicians went to Palm Isle Club</i>	
Red Mills and his Orchestra	May 5, 1934	
Carl “Deacon” Moore and his Orchestra	December 30, 1933	
Russ Morgan and his Orchestra	May 9, 1940	“Does Your Heart Beat for Me?” closing song: “So Long”
Kelso Morris and his Rhythmic Collegians	April 1, 1933	

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Ken Moyer and his Orchestra	November 25, 1936	
Musical Blue Boys	September 15, 1937 – as The Blue Boys August 18, 1938 – opened nightly engagement	
Paul Nathan and his Orchestra	April 4, 1936	
Ozzie Nelson and his Orchestra	August 17, 1935	“Loyal Sons of Rutgers”
Red Nichols and his Pennies	February 3, 1934	“Ida” “Wail of the Winds” “Parade of the Five Pennies”
Husk O’Hare and his Genial Gentlemen of the Air	March 27, 1935 February 22, 1936	“You, Just You” “The One I Love”
Burgess Pool and his Imperial Dance Orchestra	March 11, 1933	
Ernie Pritchard and his Orchestra	May 5, 1937 January 14, 1939 February 18, 1939 February 25, 1939 April 1, 1939	

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Slatz Randall and his Orchestra	December 23, 1933	
Ike Ragon and his Orchestra	April 10, 1937 – opened nightly engagement	
Raymond Rhone and his Orchestra	April 3, 1937 July 24, 1937 February 4, 1939	
Ben Ribble and his Juvenile Orchestra	August 14, 1937	
Dick Richardson and his Orchestra	March 24, 1934	
Joe RiVette and his Orchestra	April 27, 1933	
Joe Roberts and his Orchestra	February 28, 1933 March 17, 1933	
Frank Robinson and his Orchestra	November 9, 1938 – opened nightly engagement	
Johnny Robinson and his Orchestra	February 17, 1934	
Mack Rogers and his Orchestra	October 12, 1935	

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Rose City Entertainers	August 25, 1938 – opened nightly engagement	
Joe Sanders and the Original Coon-Sanders Nighthawks	December 17, 1932 – <i>canceled</i> January 11, 1933	“My Paradise” “Nighthawk Blues” opening song: “I Found a Rose in the Snow” closing song: “Nighty Night, Dear”
Señor José’s Rio Grande Aces	April 14, 1934 July 7, 1934	
Ike Silver and his Sterling Orchestra	July 31, 1937	
Seymour Simons and his Orchestra	October 6, 1934	“Honey”
Noble Sissle and his Orchestra	March 3, 1937	“Hello, Sweetheart, Hello” “I’m Just Wild About Harry”
Paul Skinner and his Orchestra	June 16, 1934	
Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	November 25, 1932 April 15, 1933 June 10, 1933	

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
	July 4, 1933 September 30, 1933 November 30, 1933 December 25, 1933 March 3, 1934 April 28, 1934 July 4, 1934 November 29, 1934 March 26, 1937	
Harry Sosnik and his Orchestra	November 11, 1935	“Lazy Rhapsody”
Blue Steele and his Orchestra	August 11, 1934 December 25, 1935 July 3, 1937	“Coronado Memories”
Stephen F. Austin College Orchestra	March 28, 1936	
Paul Stroud and his Orchestra	December 29, 1932 December 31, 1932 January 7, 1933 January 28, 1933	
Texas Collegians	January 30, 1941	

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Wit Thoma and his Princetonians	December 29, 1934 February 2, 1935	
Buron Thomas and his Royal Austonians	February 29, 1936 March 28, 1936	
Frankie Trumbauer and his Orchestra	December 22, 1932 January 17, 1933	“Singin’ the Blues”
Herman Waldman and his Orchestra	October 28, 1932 May 4, 1933 January 20, 1934 February 10, 1934 February 9, 1935 December 21, 1935 March 7, 1936 March 6, 1937	
Bud Waples and his Orchestra	May 15, 1937	
Anson Weeks and his Orchestra	April 6, 1934	“I’m Writing You This Little Melody” “I’m Sorry, Dear”
Royce West and his Orchestra	March 17, 1934	

Table H.1.—Continued

Orchestra	Dates of Cooper Club Performances	Theme Songs
Jay Whidden and his Society Orchestra	December 14, 1935	
Alex White and his Orchestra	May 11, 1935	
Jerry Wilson and his Orchestra	October 31, 1938	
Shockey Wilcox and his Orchestra	January 30, 1940	
Jack Winston and his Orchestra	December 10, 1936 – opened nightly engagement	
Duke Wright and his Blackbirds Swing Band	January 18, 1936 January 25, 1936	

APPENDIX I

Chronological Listing of Dances

Table I.1. Chronological Listing of Cooper Club Dances with Dates, Orchestra Names, Times, and Ticket Prices

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Unknown	Louis Armstrong and his Orchestra came to the original Cooper Club at some point between October 1932 and April 1936.		
Friday, October 28, 1932	Herman Waldman and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	
Friday, November 11, 1932	Ernie Fields and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	\$1.50
Friday, November 25, 1932	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	\$2
Wednesday, December 7, 1932	Herbie Kay and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, December 17, 1932	Joe Sanders and the Original Coon-Sanders Nighthawks <i>canceled due to rain and illness on part of musicians</i>		
Thursday, December 22, 1932	Frankie Trumbauer and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	\$2
Monday, December 26, 1932	Campus Serenaders from A&M College <i>german dance</i>	midnight-4 a.m.	\$1.65
Thursday, December 29, 1932	Paul Stroud and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, December 31, 1932	Paul Stroud and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	\$1.50

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Saturday, January 7, 1933	Paul Stroud and his Orchestra		
Wednesday, January 11, 1933	Joe Sanders and the Original Coon-Sanders Nighthawks	9 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$2
Tuesday, January 17, 1933	Frankie Trumbauer and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, January 28, 1933	Paul Stroud and his Orchestra		\$1
Friday, February 3, 1933	Joe Candullo and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$2.20
Saturday, February 11, 1933	Walter Barnes and his Royal Creolians	9 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$1.50
Thursday, February 16, 1933	Jimmie Grier and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$2
Tuesday, February 28, 1933	Joe Roberts and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, March 11, 1933	Burgess Pool and his Imperial Dance Orchestra	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	\$1.50
Friday, March 17, 1933	Joe Roberts and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, April 1, 1933	Kelso Morris and his Rhythmic Collegians	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, April 8, 1933	Walter Barnes and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, April 15, 1933	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$1.65
Thursday, April 27, 1933	Joe RiVette and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$1.50
Thursday, May 4, 1933	Herman Waldman and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$2

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Friday, May 26, 1933	Art Kassel and his Kassels in the Air	9:30 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, June 10, 1933	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, June 17, 1933	Earl Burtnett and his Orchestra <i> canceled due to Burtnett's schedule</i>		
Saturday, June 24, 1933	Eddie Fennell and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	
Thursday, June 29, 1933	Babe Blok and his Chips	9:30 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$1.65
Tuesday, July 4, 1933	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, July 15, 1933	Ralph Britt and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Thursday, July 20, 1933	Earl Burtnett and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Thursday, July 27, 1933	Tony Mastroni and his New Yorkers	9:30 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$1.65
Friday, August 4, 1933	Earl Burtnett and his Orchestra		
Saturday, August 19, 1933	Lou Harris and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	
Saturday, August 26, 1933	Bernie Cummins and his New Yorkers	9 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$2.20
Saturday, September 9, 1933	Ralph Britt and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Wednesday, September 27, 1933	Henry Busse and his Orchestra		
Saturday, September 30, 1933	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Saturday, October 7, 1933	Frankie Masters and his Orchestra		
Saturday, October 21, 1933	Earl Burnett and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, October 28, 1933	Lou Harris and his Orchestra <i>first anniversary celebration</i>	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, November 11, 1933	Herbie Kay and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.20
Thursday, November 30, 1933	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, December 23, 1933	Slatz Randall and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2:30 a.m.	\$2
Monday, December 25, 1933	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-3 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, December 30, 1933	Carl "Deacon" Moore and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, January 6, 1934	Mark Fisher and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2:30 a.m.	\$2.20
Saturday, January 20, 1934	Herman Waldman and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, January 27, 1934	Bobby Friedman and his Orchestra	began at 9 p.m.	\$1.50
Tuesday, January 30, 1934	unknown orchestra <i>President's Birthday Ball</i>	8:30 p.m.-midnight	\$1.50
Saturday, February 3, 1934	Red Nichols and his Pennies	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Friday, February 9, 1934	Garth Green and his Orchestra <i>sponsored by Catholic ladies of Henderson to finance building of St. Jude's Church</i>		\$1.50
Saturday, February 10, 1934	Herman Waldman and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, February 17, 1934	Johnny Robinson and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, March 3, 1934	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, March 17, 1934	Royce West and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, March 24, 1934	Dick Richardson and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, March 31, 1934	Leo Davis and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Friday, April 6, 1934	Anson Weeks and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.20
Saturday, April 14, 1934	Señor José's Rio Grande Aces	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, April 28, 1934	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	began at 9:30 p.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, May 5, 1934	Red Mills and his Orchestra	began at 9:30 p.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, May 12, 1934	Bill Hogan and his Hollywood Californians	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, May 19, 1934	Ralph Bennett and his Seven Aces	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, May 26, 1934	Art Hicks and his Biltmore Aristocrats	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Saturday, June 2, 1934	Jack Long and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, June 9, 1934	Robie Love and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, June 16, 1934	Paul Skinner and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, June 23, 1934	Jan Garber and his Orchestra	10 p.m.-3 a.m.	\$3.85
Saturday, June 30, 1934	Jack Long and his Orchestra	10 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50
Wednesday, July 4, 1934	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2:30 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, July 7, 1934	Señor José's Rio Grande Aces	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1
Saturday, August 11, 1934	Blue Steele and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.20
Thursday, August 30, 1934	Charlie Agnew and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.20
Saturday, September 8, 1934	Richard Cole and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, October 6, 1934	Seymour Simons and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.20
Thursday, November 8, 1934	Ben Bernie and All the Lads	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$3.85
Thursday, November 29, 1934	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, December 8, 1934	Ralph Britt and his High Hatters of Rhythm	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, December 15, 1934	Garth Green and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$1

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Tuesday, December 25, 1934	Richard Cole and his Empire Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, December 29, 1934	Wit Thoma and his Princetonians	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, January 12, 1935	Gus Arnheim and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$3.30 advance \$3.85 at gate
Saturday, January 26, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.25
Saturday, February 2, 1935	Wit Thoma and his Princetonians	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, February 9, 1935	Herman Waldman and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.20
Saturday, February 23, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra	began at 9:30 p.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, March 9, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, March 16, 1935	Martin Kuker and his California Nighthawks	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50
Wednesday, March 27, 1935	Husk O'Hare and his Genial Gentlemen of the Air	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, April 6, 1935	Larry Lee and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, April 13, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1
Friday, April 19, 1935	Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$3.30 advance \$3.85 at gate
Monday, April 22, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra <i>german dance</i>	began at midnight	\$1.25

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Monday, April 22, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra <i>East Texas Queen's Ball</i>		
Saturday, April 27, 1935	Bernie King and his Aristocrats of Rhythm	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.25
Saturday, May 11, 1935	Alex White and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50
Thursday, May 23, 1935	Vincent Lopez and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$3.30
Saturday, June 1, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, June 8, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, June 15, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra	began at 9:30 p.m.	\$1.50
Tuesday, June 25, 1935	Jan Garber and his Orchestra		\$3.85
Wednesday, July 3, 1935	Duke Ellington and his Orchestra	10 p.m.- 4 a.m.	\$3.85 advance \$4.40 at gate
Saturday, July 13, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra <i>grand charity ball to benefit Rusk County Chapter of the Texas Society for Crippled Children</i>		\$1.50
Thursday, August 8, 1935	Art Jarrett and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.75 advance \$3.30 at gate
Saturday, August 17, 1935	Ozzie Nelson and his Orchestra		\$3.30 advance \$3.85 at gate

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Saturday, September 28, 1935	Clarence Lund and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, October 5, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra		
Tuesday, October 8, 1935	Bob Crosby and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1:30 a.m.	\$2.20 advance \$2.75 at gate
Saturday, October 12, 1935	Mack Rogers and his Orchestra		\$2.20
Monday, November 11, 1935	Harry Sosnik and his Orchestra	began at 9:30 p.m.	\$2.20 advance \$2.75 at gate
Saturday, November 23, 1935	Garth Green and his Orchestra	began at 9:30 p.m.	\$1.50
Thursday, November 28, 1935	Charlie Agnew and his Orchestra	began at 9:30 p.m.	\$2.50
Saturday, December 14, 1935	Jay Whidden and his Society Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.20
Saturday, December 21, 1935	Herman Waldman and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.25
Wednesday, December 25, 1935	Blue Steele and his Orchestra		\$2.75 advance \$3.30 at gate
Saturday, January 18, 1936	Duke Wright and his Blackbirds Swing Band	began at 9:30 p.m.	\$1.25
Saturday, January 25, 1936	Duke Wright and his Blackbirds Swing Band	began at 9:30 p.m.	\$1.25
Thursday, January 30, 1936	Richard Cole and his Orchestra <i>President's Birthday Ball</i>	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Saturday, February 22, 1936	Husk O'Hare and his Orchestra	began at 9:30 p.m.	\$2
Saturday, February 29, 1936	Buron Thomas and his Royal Austonians <i>sponsored by Charles P. Rankine Post No. 195 of the American Legion to raise funds for the local American Legion park</i>	began at 9 p.m.	
Saturday, March 7, 1936	Herman Waldman and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, March 14, 1936	Richard Cole and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, March 28, 1936	Buron Thomas and his Royal Austonians <i>sponsored by the local American Legion post to raise funds for building the Legion hut</i>		\$1.50
Saturday, April 4, 1936	Paul Nathan and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50
Saturday, April 18, 1936	Wayne King and his Orchestra <i>canceled because King had to broadcast Sunday from Chicago</i>		
Wednesday, June 3, 1936	Jan Garber and his Orchestra <i>canceled because of the fire that destroyed the first club</i>		
Tuesday, October 20, 1936	Jimmy Joy and his Orchestra		\$2.75
Wednesday, October 21, 1936 through Saturday, December 5, 1936 – nightly engagement	Garth Green and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m. on Saturdays; 9 p.m.-1 a.m. other nights	40 cents per person
Tuesday, November 10, 1936	Garth Green and his Orchestra <i>special Armistice Eve dance</i>	9 p.m.-4 a.m.	\$1.50

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Saturday, November 21, 1936	Jack Crawford and his Orchestra	9:30 p.m.-2 a.m.	
Wednesday, November 25, 1936	Ken Moyer and his Orchestra	ended at 4 a.m.	
Thursday, December 10, 1936 through Saturday, January 2, 1936 – nightly engagement	Jack Winston and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-1 a.m.	\$1.65 per couple on first night and Saturdays; 40 cents per person other nights
Tuesday, December 22, 1936	Ted Fio-Rito and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$3.30 advance \$3.85 at gate
Thursday, December 24, 1936	Jack Winston and his Orchestra <i>first in a series of special holiday dances</i>	10 p.m.-3 a.m.	\$1.65
Friday, December 25, 1936	Jack Winston and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, December 26, 1936	Jack Winston and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Sunday, December 27, 1936	Jack Winston and his Orchestra	8:30 p.m.-1 a.m.	\$1.65
Friday, January 1, 1937	Jack Winston and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, January 2, 1937	Jack Winston and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Friday, January 8, 1937 through Friday, January 29, 1937 – nightly engagement	Dick Dickerson and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m. on Saturdays; 9 p.m.-1 a.m. other nights	\$1.65 per couple on Saturdays; 40 cents per person other nights

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Saturday, January 23, 1937	Jan Garber and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-3 a.m.	\$3.30 advance \$3.85 at gate
Saturday, January 30, 1937	Garth Green and his Orchestra <i>President's Birthday Ball</i>	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	
President's Birthday Ball kicked off a nightly engagement, except Sundays, through Friday, March 12, 1937	Garth Green and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-3 a.m. on Saturday nights; 9 p.m.-1 a.m. other nights	\$1.65 per couple on Saturdays; 40 cents per person other nights
Wednesday, March 3, 1937	Noble Sissle and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2
Saturday, March 6, 1937	Herman Waldman and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.20
Saturday, March 13, 1937	Don Irwin and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-12 a.m.	\$1.65
Friday, March 19, 1937	Garth Green and his Orchestra <i>farewell dance – canceled because of New London School explosion the day before</i>		
Friday, March 26, 1937	Ligon Smith and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, April 3, 1937	Raymond Rhone and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-12 a.m.	\$1.65
Saturday, April 10, 1937 through Saturday, April 24, 1937 – nightly engagement, except Sundays	Ike Ragon and his Orchestra		\$1.65 per couple on Saturdays; 40 cents per person other nights

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Wednesday, May 5, 1937	Ernie Pritchard and his Orchestra <i>local American Legion post benefit</i>		\$1
Saturday, May 15, 1937	Bud Waples and his Orchestra		\$1.25
Thursday, June 17, 1937	Herbie Kay and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.25
Wednesday, June 30, 1937	Eddie Fennell and his Orchestra <i>Henderson Fire Department benefit</i>	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.10
Saturday, July 3, 1937	Blue Steele and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$2.20
Saturday, July 24, 1937	Raymond Rhone and his Orchestra <i>local American Legion post benefit</i>	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1
Saturday, July 31, 1937	Ike Silver and his Sterling Orchestra		\$1.50 advance \$2 at gate
Saturday, August 14, 1937	Ben Ribble and his Juvenile Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50 advance \$2 at gate
Saturday, September 4, 1937	Maxine Kirk and her Melody Men of Swing		\$1.50 advance \$2 at gate
Saturday, September 11, 1937	Eddie Fennell and his Swing Band		\$1.50
Wednesday, September 15, 1937	The Blue Boys		
Saturday, September 25, 1937	Travis Cole and his Hotel Kilgore Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.50

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Saturday, October 2, 1937 through Monday, November 1, 1937 – dances every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday	unknown orchestras		40 cents each for men; 10 cents each for women
Thursday, August 18, 1938 – began week's engagement	Musical Blue Boys		40 cents each for men; women free
Saturday, August 20, 1938	Clarence Love and his Orchestra		\$1.10
Thursday, August 25, 1938	Rose City Entertainers	began at 9 p.m.	55 cents per person
Monday, October 31, 1938 through Tuesday, November 8, 1938 – nightly engagement	Jerry Wilson and his Orchestra		
Wednesday, November 9, 1938 through Wednesday, November 23, 1938 – nightly engagement	Frank Robinson and his Orchestra		
Saturday, December 10, 1938	Paul Cornelius and his Orchestra		\$1
Saturday, January 14, 1939	Ernie Pritchard and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.25
Saturday, January 21, 1939	Joe Buzze and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.25
Saturday, January 28, 1939	Jay Gilstrap and his Orchestra <i>President's Birthday Ball</i>	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.00
Saturday, February 4, 1939	Raymond Rhone and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.25

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Saturday, February 18, 1939	Ernie Pritchard and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.25
Saturday, February 25, 1939	Ernie Pritchard and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.25
Saturday, April 1, 1939	Ernie Pritchard and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	\$1.25
Thursday, November 16, 1939	Count Basie and his Orchestra		
Saturday, December 2, 1939	Matlock's Wabash Swingsters <i>booking mix-up – musicians went to Palm Isle Club in Longview instead of Cooper Club</i>		
Saturday, December 9, 1939	Bertson Adams and his Rhythm Kings	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	50 cents per person
Saturday, December 16, 1939	Ben Burton and his Orchestra	9 p.m.-2 a.m.	50 cents per person
Saturday, December 23, 1939	Wesley Jones and the Original Carolina Cotton Pickers		75 cents per person in advance; \$1 per person at gate
Tuesday, January 30, 1940	Shockey Wilcox and his Orchestra <i>President's Birthday Ball</i>		
Thursday, February 1, 1940	Jimmie Lunceford and his Orchestra		
Thursday, May 9, 1940	Russ Morgan and his Orchestra		
Monday, June 24, 1940	Ella Fitzgerald and her Orchestra		
Tuesday, September 17, 1940	Count Basie and his Orchestra		

Table I.1.—Continued

Date	Orchestra	Time	Ticket Price (Per Couple Unless Noted)
Thursday, January 30, 1941	Texas Collegians <i>President's Birthday Ball</i>	began at 9:30 p.m.	
Tuesday, March 4, 1941	Jimmie Lunceford and his Orchestra		
Wednesday, June 18, 1941	Ella Fitzgerald and her Orchestra		
Friday, September 5, 1941	Tiny Bradshaw and his Orchestra		
Friday, February 13, 1942	Jimmie Lunceford and his Orchestra		\$1 per person

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