

# Jack Clark and His Washboard

*by Richard Regent*

**Jack Clark** and I are in the **Dixie Doodlers**, a seven piece Dixieland band out of New Berlin. We played a 90-minute evening program on October 10, 2005, for the New Orleans evacuees who were temporarily housed at the Tommy G. Thompson Youth Center at the fair grounds. The authentic Dixieland music was well received. There were even a few requests, including the popular *Bourbon Street Parade* and *When The Saints Come Marching In*.

Jack began playing trumpet around 1948 and soon joined his high school band in Minneapolis. A year later he took up playing the drums. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1952 and spent two years playing trumpet, French horn and drums in the **47th Division Band** at Camp Rucker. After an honorable discharge, Sergeant Clark joined the Musicians Union to play many local gigs on the drums.

Jack married Jacquelyne and had to put the drums aside to start a new job at a grain company in Minneapolis. The Clarks moved to Baton Rouge, Chicago, Milwaukee and finally settled in Havana, Illinois. He set up his drums at home to practice and play for his own enjoyment. While living in Havana, he heard a gal playing rag time piano in a restaurant lounge outside of Springfield. He told her he could play that kind of music on drums. She talked to the owner and soon had Jack playing drums at her weekend gigs. After about four months, she received an new opportunity. Fortunately, she knew a replacement pianist, **Paul Gronemeier**, the *1992 Old-time Piano Player World Champion*. Jack played in the **Paul Gronemeier Trio** for six years.

The Clarks moved back to Milwaukee in 1998. Jack sat in with a couple of bands. That's when he met Mark Kranz of New Berlin and his **Dixie Doodlers**. Jack assembled a washboard percussion system in 2004, shortly after hearing **Vince Picciolo** with the **New South Rampart Street Paraders** at the *Potawatomi Casino Mardi Gras*. Jack found the washboard was a terrific percussion instrument and easier to transport than the traditional drum sets. He continued playing washboard with the **Dixie Doodlers**, sat in and then played a gig with the **Norrie Cox's New Orleans Jazzmen**, and played with **Dave Bock's Past Jazz Masters** at the 16th Tribute to Bix in Racine, March 2005.

Although he gives his full drum percussion set plenty of practice hours in his basement, Jack prefers playing his washboard system for gigs. It is light weight, full of unique sound makers, a real audience pleaser and it's fun to play. He doesn't mind getting kidded about who does the wash because everyone loves his horn blatt, thimble rhythm, and cow bell ring at the tune's end tag.

Note: During his time with the Paul Gronemeier Trio, Jack began to take, collect and display photographs of jazz musicians. Today he has hundreds of color photographs capturing shots of local musicians in action. For more information on the Jack Clark photo collection, contact [Jajacla@aol.com](mailto:Jajacla@aol.com).