

Frank 'Josh' Billings

a suitable suitcase for treatment



MEZZ MEZZROW, JOSH BILLINGS, FRANK VERNIER,
FRANK TESCHMACHER

Cutting up at White City Amusement Park, Chicago

by Gerry Paton

Copyright © Gerry Paton 2012

Originally published 2011 by www.brushbeat.org

This file may be stored on your computer and a single copy printed for personal use. All other reproduction or circulation, even if in part, whether for commercial use or otherwise, is prohibited without the written permission of the author.

Contact: gerrypaton@hotmail.co.uk

Should you wish to alert others to this article, please direct them to brushbeat.org where it is available as a free download.

Frank 'Josh' Billings is perhaps best remembered as the suitcase-drumming dandy in the Jazz outfit *The Mound City Blue Blowers*. The Blowers were captured on celluloid in 1929 and 1931 and clips from these performances have been posted on the internet, raising some interest in Billings on account of his antics. This article is in response to that interest and is an attempt to collate, and add to, what little is known about the man.

So who was this all-singing-all-dancing eccentric, 'Josh' Billings? Well, there was certainly more to him than at first meets the eye. Somewhat of a free spirit, Billings had a gift for painting and drawing, becoming a professional lithographer in later life. He was witty and good company, freely associating with virtually all of the major Chicago jazz musicians of the 1920s and many of New York's finest in the 1930s. Through his work with the Blue Blowers he mingled with society bigwigs, instructing more than a few on the finer points of playing the suitcase. It has even been claimed that he invented the Zoot Suit. And he was the first (and possible only?) suitcase-drummer of his generation to be captured on film, and certainly the first to achieve any sort of fame.

Frank Rhoads Billings was born in Chicago, Illinois on Valentine's Day, 1905. He was the only child of Thomas Emerson Billings and Rebecca Margaret Rhoads. At the time of the 1900 U.S. census Miss Rhoads boarded at the house of widower Thomas Billings on Madison Street, Chicago. The couple were married by the end of the following year. Thomas was no youngster. Born in Ohio in 1845, a veteran of the Civil War (fighting on the side of the Union), he was 56 at the time and his bride 29. Due to his age, and perhaps on account of his first marriage being childless, when Rebecca announced that she was pregnant three years later, Thomas was so surprised that he exclaimed in exasperation, "*Molly!* [presumably Rebecca preferred to be called by her middle name 'Margaret'] *What have I done to make you unfaithful to me?*" [1]

Thomas never saw Frank reach maturity. He died aged 70 in 1915, just two weeks short of Frank's 10th birthday—one obituary for Thomas claimed that Frank was "*the youngest son of a civil war veteran at present on record*". The doctor who attended Thomas toward the end was one Charles J. McIntyre. Perhaps he was a close colleague of Frank's mother, who was also a physician, because 'Molly' married Charles McIntyre two years later. Saxophonist Bud Freeman recalled that this Doctor couple had little time for Frank, who was pretty much left to his own devices, being raised for the most part by a African American maid who had been with the family for years. Perhaps it was this close relationship that fostered Frank's sympathetic attitude towards race—as he used to quip, "*I don't know if I have any black blood in me, but I certainly have a lot of black milk in me.*" This free-and-easy home life appears to have suited Frank, the "*natural-born bohemian*" with a talent for art and a love of literature, "*especially the books that were suppressed*". [2]

Despite his mother remarrying, Frank continued to use Billings as a surname and friends dubbed him 'Josh' after the famous humorist Josh Billings (the pseudonym of nineteenth century writer Henry Wheeler Shaw). Josh (from hereon used to signify Frank) must have attended Austin High as Bud Freeman referred to him as "*a high school friend*". Either way, he was thick with the *Austin High Gang*: a group of high-school buddies who took up musical instruments in the early 1920s, eventually becoming influential figures in the jazz world. Although Josh appears to have been a 'non-player' among his friends, he fitted in well with the Austin High clique, what with

his shared love of the newly emerging music 'jazz' that was sweeping the world. [3]

By 1926 most of the Austin High gang had replaced the original members of the Wolverines—the group whose recordings pushed Bix Beiderbecke into the limelight—and this refitted band was rechristened 'Husk O'Hare's Wolverines'. Gigs were thin on the ground over the Summer and, inevitably, most of the band went their own ways to follow job opportunities. Only Bud Freeman and Milton "Mezz" Mezzrow—a clarinetist and saxophonist who had joined the gang's swelling ranks—were at a loose end, but Josh proved invaluable by keeping spirits high. As Mezzrow recalled, Josh "*didn't play music but always hung out with us...wherever we went he tagged along and danced on all settings*" Out of desperation, a plan was hatched by Mezzrow to relocate to Hollywood. Mezzrow was convinced that Bud Freeman had the looks to make it in the movies, and Mezz was quite happy to live off the fortune that Bud was bound to make. Freeman later claimed that he didn't take the idea seriously, but thought that a road trip might be fun so, along with his younger brother Arny (who actually became an actor in later life) and Josh, they all set off. [4]

The plan was ill-conceived at best. Their money ran out by the time they reached Kansas, where Mezzrow's car was repossessed. Musical instruments were then hocked in order to buy a replacement vehicle, which continuously broke down. When they reached Menlo, Kansas, they ended up harvesting wheat to raise much needed funds, although Josh, forever the sly one, managed to wangle lighter duties by beating everyone to the horse and cart that followed the threshing machine. The following day they were given the opportunity of playing for around 30 people at a barn dance. The show they put on verged on cabaret and, depending on whose account of this event you believe, Josh either 'tinkled away on the piano' or (more likely) banged out rhythm with Arny on benches. Finally, in Pueblo, the Freeman brothers threw the towel in, wired their parents for money and bought tickets to go back home. By this point Josh had already abandoned ship. [5]

Always impeccably dressed, Billings had an eye for fashion and "*was always drawing sketches of well-dressed men.*" In 1927, Josh showed Bud Freeman one such sketch, outlining a suit that he had conceived. As Freeman was to recall, "*The trousers were high peg-top, full in the legs and tapered down to very narrow, cuffless bottoms. The jacket was long, with wide lapels and one button, which was not worn buttoned, and there was a tight vest...My brother, Dave Tough, Josh, Jim Lanigan, Jimmy and Dick McPartland and I had suits of this design made immediately.*" The look was worn for about a year and the gang thought no more of it until, around 1932, what was almost a parody of Josh's design caught the public imagination and the 'Zoot Suit' was born. Even if this was coincidence, Josh undoubtedly had a flair for innovation and style, at least when it came to fashion. [6]

In 1928 many of the Austin High gang followed banjoist Eddie Condon's lead and relocated to New York. Left behind were Mezzrow and Josh. They whiled away their time listening to records and smoking 'muta' (marijuana). Downhearted at being separated from their friends, Mezzrow soon hatched a plan to reunite everyone. A car was borrowed from a friend, who would then report it stolen after a couple of days. Once found, the vehicle would have to be returned to its owner by the insurance company, thereby saving Mezzrow the bother. The keys handed over, the pair packed essential supplies—records, a gramophone and some cans of muta—and, fuelled by cocaine to help them stay awake, drove non-stop to New York. Upon arrival they

dumped the car and headed for the Cumberland Hotel, where Condon and company were holed up. [7]

After two weeks of near starvation at the Cumberland, Condon and Mezzrow landed a job on Long Island. Josh and a few others relocated with them to a boarding house in Valley Stream, run by an old lady. They soon tired of the poor food and service. Condon recalled that, "*Billings, a natural prowler, discovered a hoard of wine in the cellar and tapped it. The old lady put locks on the cellar doors. Billings, who could open a bank vault with the hairspring of a watch, picked them with a nail file. The old lady bought a police dog. The dog slept with Billings.*" [8]

Although he had no gainful employment, Josh remained in New York with his friends and it was during this time that he was injured in a car crash. He'd driven someone home in their car because they were too inebriated to drive. Upon arrival, the drunk offered to drive Josh to the bus-stop, to return the favour. Within minutes of switching places they'd had an accident and Josh was thrown through the windscreen. After being patched up at the hospital, "*the only parts visible on him were his nostrils and one eye.*" He was compensated by the drunk, who happened to be in insurance, and with the proceeds Josh checked into a better hotel "*and gave Harlem hell.*" Although Condon made light of the accident, Josh lost his sight in one eye and a number of his front teeth were pulled at a later date due to complications. Josh supposedly had 'replacements' made, but it seems that he never quite got on with them because his toothless grin can be seen quite clearly in both Vitaphone shorts featuring the Blowers. [9]

Josh returned to Chicago some time before February 1929. During those last throws of Winter another road trip was in the planning. This time, however, those involved didn't even manage to make it out of Chicago. Bostonian trumpet player Max Kaminsky had turned up in town only to find that he was unable to take the job he'd been promised because of local Union regulations. He was compensated by the band leader who had booked him, but instead of doing the sensible thing and buying a train ticket home, Josh and drummer Dave Tough persuaded Kaminsky to spend the money on a used car so that they could all drive to Boston, just for the hell of it. At least he did buy a car, but Kaminsky lost the rest of his money in a card game held at drummer George Wettling's house, so was unable to buy fuel for the journey. To top things off, one day the car jumped into gear as he was cranking it, bearing down on his arm and breaking his wrist. Kaminsky was rushed over to Josh's step-father, who applied a temporary splint before taking the injured young man to hospital to have his wrist set. [10]

By the Spring of 1929 Josh had returned to New York. Mezzrow, Condon and Dave Tough had been offered a Summer tour with trumpeter Red Nichols and during the rehearsal period they landed a job playing at a society function in Westchester. Red McKenzie—leader of the then defunct Mound City Blue blowers—and Josh went along too, but when it became clear that the audience were unappreciative of the music, Josh grabbed a megaphone and sang along to a blues the band were playing:

*I came up to this party thinking' I would have a good time,
I came up to this party thinking' I would have a good time,
I'd sell it for a nickel and a high price would be a dime.
I'd rather take a baby out for a moonlight walk,*

*I'd rather take a baby out for a moonlight walk,
I'd make her happy and she wouldn't even have to talk.*

*Oh, why don't someone give me a little of the lovin' I crave?
Oh, why don't someone give me a little of the lovin' I crave?
If I can be so weak why can't one of you girls be so brave?*

The band got the most complaints the booking agent had ever received, both Red and Josh having been described as 'Chicago hoodlums'. [11]

It appears that Josh stayed in New York during the Nichols tour as he was residing at the Riverside Hotel (the gang's new base) when everyone returned, albeit a little earlier than anticipated having been fired en masse by Nichols. It was certainly to his advantage because Red McKenzie resurrected the Mound City Blue Blowers and asked Josh to join them on the suitcase. Exactly when this happened isn't clear, but the band were active by August 1929 and Josh was with them by September. The idea of a suitcase-drummer on stage was a bit of a gamble, but preliminary gigs proved successful, the sight of Josh banging out rhythms with whiskbrooms fitting in nicely with the novelty aspect of the band. The Wall Street crash later that year meant that jobs were thin on the ground, but, at the suggestions of the group's guitarist Jack Bland, McKenzie and the Blowers began performing at society functions—the super-rich had remained super-rich, despite the economic situation, so regular work was to be had. It was around this time—November 1929—that Eddie Condon joined the band on banjo. The Blowers continued to be a regular sight at society parties, but they also played at exclusive clubs and the suitcase soon became a major attraction, with many guests clambering to have a go on it—most notably film star Gloria Swanson. [12]

Eddie Condon claimed that Josh invented suitcase-playing during a hotel jam-session in Chicago. However, the drummers of that city were using this form of rhythmic accompaniment at jams before the Austin High gang were even conceived, and the practice probably dated back further in the south (see my article "Never Swat A Fly"). The most likely scenario is that Josh was the first person whom Condon saw playing the suitcase and he jumped to conclusions. Credit where it's due though, because Josh was the first drummer to bring the 'instrument' to the attention of the masses and his pioneering work with the Blowers helped start a minor trend, suitcase players being a regular feature on *selective* stages. [13]

So how did Josh, a supposed non-musician, acquire his percussive skill? Although his musical ability doesn't seem to have been taken that seriously by his contemporaries, Arny Freeman claimed that Josh had been a drummer originally. Josh certainly could play a conventional drum kit. Not only did he do so on a number of recordings by the Blowers but also the jazz enthusiast Timme Rosenkrantz remembered Josh as being an accomplished player. Another thing Rosenkrantz recalled was that Josh would boast of having 'studied' under Virgil Scoggins, the suitcase drummer with *The Spirits of Rhythm*. No doubt this is true, but it is clear from the film shorts of the Blowers that Josh had received some formal instruction too, because he held his whisk brooms using traditional grip—the 'untrained' Scoggins used matched grip (unusual for a drummer in those days). One of Josh's teachers may have been Dave Tough. Tough was quite generous with his knowledge. Among his friends at any rate and Josh was certainly a good friend. Josh also knew George Wettling and Gene Krupa, and must have known scores of minor figures in the drumming world. And then of course there

are the numerous gigs and jam sessions that he attended in Chicago and Harlem, where he must have spent many hours observing drummers. Obviously by 1929 he'd picked up enough skill on the suitcase to accompany his musician friends with reasonable proficiency and Red McKenzie gave him a break. As Eddie Condon put it, "*Billings had finally contrived a place for himself in music*". [14]

Josh, forever the showman it seems, developed various stage antics such as juggling his whisk brooms. Eddie Condon recalled that, "*Billings had a trick of flicking a tip—usually a five-dollar bill—off the suitcase and catching it under his armpit, so that it seemed to disappear.*" He also used to kick his suitcase in lieu of a bass drum. Inevitably this meant that they fell apart pretty quickly and so would need replacing. Josh therefore became a regular sight on Sixth Avenue, "*where the luggage shops always had a supply of goods conveniently stacked along the sidewalk.*" Eddie Condon would often accompany Josh on such outings, "*to watch the proprietors when Billings tried out their wares.*" As Condon recounted in his autobiography:

"I'd like a suitcase," Billings would say. "I prefer one made of fibre." The man would bring several. "This is our best" he would say, pointing to a particular one. "A very nice bag," Billings would say. Then he would kick it. The proprietors never said anything—this was during the depression—but as Billings tapped, slapped, and kicked the bags, listening and muttering to himself, I had the pleasure of observing the effect on a man's face of the gradual discovery that he is dealing with a dangerous lunatic. [15]

After the Christmas holidays, Josh returned to Chicago for some time off, Gordon Means taking his place as suitcase-drummer in the Blowers. The U.S. 1930 census, undertaken in April, confirms Josh's new found status as a musician, in the 'Broadcasting' industry. He resided at home with his mother and step-father and presumably remained there until Spring, when he was recalled by McKenzie to rejoin the Blowers. [16]

Josh continued to work with the band until he returned to Chicago in the Autumn of 1931, shortly after the death of Bix Beiderbecke. Bix and Josh had been good friends. According to Shapiro and Hentoff's, *The Jazz Makers*:

"His [Beiderbecke's] last year [1931] was spent in a bare hotel room. The late Josh Billings used to tell how he often visited Bix and how they filled the bathtub with prohibition gin. There was a piano in the room and Bix would play for hours. When his tumbler was empty, he would tell Josh to "scoop him some gin." They had a big dipper to use for filling the glasses." [17]

Many of the Austin High Gang had befriended Bix in Chicago during the 1920s, so it's possible that Josh knew him from those days and the pair renewed their acquaintance later in New York. It is also possible that they met via the nightclub Plunketts, which was a regular haunt for New York's white jazz musicians during prohibition, including Bix. Josh was a regular patron and he even penned an article about Plunketts for *Esquire Jazz Book* in 1947, describing the place with characteristic humour:

"There were two booths in the small back room, but they were seldom used except for a siesta or the occasional visit of an angry wife. Every day the barrelled beer arrived at Plunkett's in a different truck. Sometimes it was a florist delivery car, sometimes a milk wagon and on one occasion it was even a hearse."

While Josh rested in Chicago a fellow suitcase drummer, Slim Kurtzmann, replaced him in the Blowers, but they were put on hold in the Spring of 1932 when McKenzie joined Paul Whitman's band, to make a go of a career as a singer. The outfit reformed in the Spring of 1933, but repeal in November of that year sent a lot of clubs out of business and the Blowers, left without work, disbanded. Whether Josh was ever a part of the 1933 line-up is unclear. [18]

Arny Freeman claimed that Josh played suitcase in vaudeville sometime after his stint with the Blowers. It has also been claimed that he became a bus boy for the band leader Ray Noble in the mid 1930s. Timme Rosenkrantz, who befriended Josh around that time, recalled that Josh's drums were often in hock due to a lack of gigs. This was often the reason why Josh continued to work as a suitcase drummer it seems. However he scratched out a living, all we know for certain is that Josh had moved back to Chicago by the Summer of 1941, where he shared an apartment with the aforementioned Slim Kurtzmann. Josh was working as a professional Lithographer, and had been since 1940. Where and when he received his training is unclear, but his father had been a printer since 1859 until his retirement in 1910, so it's possible that Josh had connections within the industry through former colleagues of his father. Josh undoubtedly had a talent for art. Bud Freeman recalled that "*He was a good painter (I think that he identified with the French impressionists)*", and Mezz Mezzrow commented that, "*he was always trying to capture the rhythm of the Negro in his drawings.*" [19]

Despite his career change, Josh engaged with the music business from time to time. On 3rd November 1945 he played in New York at one of the Town Hall concerts that Eddie Condon used to organise. And in early 1946 he performed during the intermissions of a *Jimmie Noone Memorial Concert* and also a *Baby Dodds Riverboat Band Session*, both events being staged at Chicago's Uptown Playhouse Theater. The act was a sort of resurrected *Mound City Blue Blowers*, Josh, once more, banging away on a suitcase with a pair of whiskbrooms. His musical companions were pianist Tut Soper and guitarist Jack Goss—one wonders if this was the 'vaudeville' act that Arny Freeman referred to. The trio had performed before on an informal basis at the Playhouse. Josh and Jack Goss were even recorded for posterity at the venue, in January 1946. Both musicians were part of *The Bert Patrick Quartet* and three tunes were recorded. Sadly, they remain unreleased to this day. [20]

Eddie Condon opened a club in Greenwich Village towards the tail-end of 1945 and sometime during 1946 Josh moved to New York, presumably to revive his career in music with Condon's help. It appears that he was successful to a certain degree as it was in the Village (though probably not at Condon's club) where one future contributor to *IAJRC Journal* saw Josh performing in 1949. Josh played suitcase, just like in the old days, his band mates being pianist Art Hodes, clarinetist Pee Wee Russell and an unknown bass player. The highlight of the evening came during a performance of *Ballin' the Jack*, when Josh "*stepped out in front of the band, stuck a lit cigarette behind one of his ears, as one would a pencil, and performed the dance action that accompanies the tune.*" A similar piece of theatre by Josh can be witnessed during the song *My Girl Sal* in the Vitaphone short *The Opry house*, filmed twenty years earlier. [21]

Despite his continued involvement with jazz, Josh worked as a lithographer for the rest

of his life. Josh died in Roosevelt Hospital on 13th March 1957 after a short illness. Obituaries appeared in a number of publications including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and *Downbeat*. His funeral was a 'sad deal', according to Pee Wee Russell, and there were "Not too many guys. Condon said a few words. In good taste, incidentally. Josh didn't have any family. The hearse went off alone with no one to follow it." [22]

It is clear from those who remembered Josh in autobiographies and interviews that people felt a lot of affection for him. He was a valued friend, an adventurer, a talented artist, an entertainer and, possibly, a fashion icon whose influence is still visible to this day. Frank 'Josh' Billings may not have been pivotal in the development of drumming, but he has a place in jazz history, contrived or not.

If you have enjoyed this article then please support brushbeat by buying a copy of my book, *The Richmond Assault: a short history of barber-musicians and their role in the development of brush-playing*. Either search for the title at completelynovel.com or use the following link:

<https://completelynovel.com/search?query=the+richmond+assault&commit=Go>

References and Notes

Census returns and certificates (birth, marriage and death) are available to view online by registering with www.familysearch.org

1. *Frank Rhoads Billings was born in Chicago...* Frank was born at the family home: 2585 Lake Street, Chicago, Illinois (information obtained from birth certificate).

The couple were married... Frank's parents married on 31st October 1901 in Cook County, Illinois.

Born in Ohio in 1845... the death certificate of Thomas E. Billings gives his date of birth as 31st Jan 1845.

a veteran of the Civil War... one of two obituaries (presumably early and late editions of the newspaper) for Thomas E. Billings in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3rd Feb 1915:

"Mr Billings served in the Thirty-eighth Ohio regiment in Sherman's march to the sea. He had three enlistments to his credit, was a corporal, and the holder of a medal for distinguished service."

Also see entries for Thomas E. Billings in *Organization Index to Pension Files of Veterans Who Served Between 1861 and 1900* at www.fold3.com

perhaps on account of his first marriage being childless... obituary of Thomas E. Billings in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* (as above): "He leaves one son, Frank".

"Molly! What have I done to make you unfaithful to me?"...The Man Who

Invented the Zoot Suit from You don't look like a musician by Bud Freeman (1974 pages 17-18).

2. *He died aged 70 in 1915...the death certificate of Thomas E. Billings gives his date of death as 1st Feb 1915.*

"the youngest son of a civil war veteran at present on record"...obituary of Thomas E. Billings, Chicago Daily Tribune (as above).

The doctor who attended Thomas toward the end was one Charles J. McIntyre...from the death certificate of Thomas E. Billings.

Frank's mother, who was also a physician...her profession as recorded in census returns from 1900-1930 and the marriage certificates for Rebecca M Rhoads to Thomas Billings and Rebecca Rhoads Billings to Charles McIntyre (taking place on 29th Oct 1917).

Bud Freeman recalled that this Doctor couple had little time for Frank...The Man Who Invented the Zoot Suit from You don't look like a musician by Bud Freeman (1974 pages 17-18).

"natural-born bohemian"...Really the Blues by Mezz Mezzrow (Flamingo 1993, page 130).

"especially the books that were suppressed"...The Man Who Invented the Zoot Suit from You don't look like a musician by Bud Freeman (1974 pages 17-18).

3. *Frank continued to use Billings as a surname and friends dubbed him 'Josh' after the famous humorist Josh Billings...We Called It Music* by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, notes on page 203).

Bud Freeman referred to him as "a high school friend"...The Man Who Invented the Zoot Suit from You don't look like a musician by Bud Freeman (1974 pages 17-18).

a group of high-school buddies who took up musical instruments in the early 1920s...The gang formed a group in 1922 according to The Austin High School Gang by Charles Edward Smith in *Jazzmen* by Ramsey and Smith (Jazz Book Club edition, 1958, page 161).

4. *By 1926 most of the Austin High gang had replaced the original members of the Wolverines...Crazeology: the autobiography of a Chicago jazzman* by Bud Freeman (1995 page 21).

didn't play music but always hung out with us...Really the Blues by Mezz Mezzrow (Flamingo edition, 1993, page 130).

Out of desperation, a plan was hatched by Mezzrow to relocate to Hollywood...Crazeology: the autobiography of a Chicago jazzman by Bud Freeman (1995 pages 21-23); *Really the Blues* by Mezz Mezzrow (Flamingo edition, 1993, pages 130-137).

along with his younger brother Arny (who actually became an actor in later life)...Arny Freeman began acting professionally circa 1950 according to the introduction to an article that he penned for *Jazz Journal: Bad Times, Good Tempos*, July 1975, volume 28 No 7.

5. *Crazeology: the autobiography of a Chicago jazzman* by Bud Freeman (1995, pages 21-23); *Really the Blues* by Mezz Mezzrow (Flamingo edition, 1993, pages 130-137).
6. *The Man Who Invented the Zoot Suit* from *You don't look like a musician* by Bud Freeman (1974 pages 17-18).
7. *Really the Blues* by Mezz Mezzrow (Flamingo edition, 1993, pages 164-174); *We Called It Music* by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, page 110).
8. *We Called It Music* by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, page 111).
9. *Although he had no gainful employment...We Called It Music* by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, pages 113-114).

Josh lost his sight in one eye...Harlem Jazz Adventures: A European Baron's Memoir, 1934-1969 By Timme Rosenkrantz; adapted and edited by Fradley Hamilton Garner (2012 page 85).

*Josh supposedly had 'replacements' made...Eddie Condon claimed that Josh arrived at the Riverside Hotel from Chicago in the Spring of 1930 only to be met with consternation. Some of his teeth were missing and he was barely able to speak until 'replacements' arrived by post a few days later. *We Called It Music* by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, page 128).*

However, Josh is missing his teeth in *The Opry House* film that the Blowers appeared in; a film that was supposedly shot/released on 13th Nov 1929 according to *The First Hollywood Musicals: A Critical Filmography of 171 features, 1927 through 1932* by Edwin M. Bradley (2004, page 336)—also mentioned as being filmed during 1929 in *Jazz on film and video in the Library of Congress* by Rebecca D. Clear (page 101). Condon is notably absent from that particular Blowers line-up, suggesting that the date attributed to the film is correct (Condon had yet to join the band at that point, although he had recorded with them earlier in the year). So Josh either had his teeth yanked in the Spring of 1929 rather than 1930, and Condon's memory of events was slightly hazy when it came to writing them down for his autobiography, or Josh had further teeth removed in the Spring of 1930.

*it seems that he never quite got on with them...Josh is also missing his teeth in the Vitaphone short *Nine O'Clock Folks*, which was filmed in 1931 according to *The first Hollywood sound shorts, 1926-1931* by Edwin M. Bradley, 2005.*

10. *My Life In Jazz* by Max Kaminsky (1965 Jazz Book Club edition, pages 42-44).
11. *We Called It Music* by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, pages 119-120).

12. *It appears that Josh stayed in New York during the Nichols tour as he was residing at the Riverside Hotel (the gang's new base) when everyone returned...My Life In Jazz by Max Kaminsky (1965 Jazz Book Club edition, page 52).*

Red McKenzie resurrected the Mound City Blue Blowers and asked Josh to join them on the suitcase...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, pages 125-126).

the band were active by August 1929...the "program suggestions" in the Hartford Courant for the week starting Sunday 28th July 1929 list a broadcast by the Blowers for CBS's New York based WABC radio station.

at the suggestions of the group's guitarist Jack Bland, McKenzie and the Blowers began performing at society functions...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, pages 125-126).

It was around this time—November 1929—that Eddie Condon joined the band on banjo...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, page 125).

the suitcase soon became a major attraction, with many guests clambering to have a go on it—most notably film star Gloria Swanson...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, pages 126 & 131).

13. *Eddie Condon claimed that Josh invented suitcase-playing...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, page 126).*

14. *Arny Freeman claimed that Josh had been a drummer originally...Bad Times, Good Tempos by Arny Freeman, Jazz Journal, July 1975, volume 28 No 7.*

Josh would boast of having 'studied' under Virgil Scoggins...Harlem Jazz Adventures: A European Baron's Memoir, 1934-1969 By Timme Rosenkrantz; adapted and edited by Fradley Hamilton Garner (2012 page 84).

Tough was quite generous with his knowledge. Among his friends at any rate...Arny Freeman would play suitcase at jam sessions and Dave Tough offered to teach him the drums. Freeman decided that it wasn't for him, but Mezz Mezzrow learned the intricacies of drumming from Tough and was able to pass on a lot to the young Gene Krupa: Bad Times, Good Tempos by Arny Freeman, Jazz Journal, July 1975, volume 28 No 7; Really the Blues by Mezz Mezzrow (Flamingo edition, 1993, page 143).

Josh also knew George Wettling and Gene Krupa...My Life In Jazz by Max Kaminsky (1965 Jazz Book Club edition, page 43); We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, pages 109-110).

"Billings had finally contrived a place for himself in music" ...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, page 126).

15. *Billings had a trick of flicking a tip...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, page 132).*

Josh was a regular sight on Sixth Avenue...The New Yorker, Volume 84, Issue 15, 1945.

"I'd like a suitcase," Billings would say...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, page 132).

16. *After the Christmas holidays, Josh returned to Chicago...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, page 127).*

The U.S. 1930 census, undertaken in April, confirms Josh's new found status as a musician...The McIntyres were living on Homan Boulevard in Chicago. Josh was simply recorded as 'Frank B' [McIntrye].

he was recalled by McKenzie to rejoin the Blowers...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, page 128).

17. *His [Beiderbecke's] last year [1931] was spent in a bare hotel room...The Jazz Makers: essays on the greats of jazz by Nat Shapiro and Nat Hentoff (1979, page 102).*

18. *We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, pages 136, 141 & 142).*

19. *Arny Freeman claimed that Josh played suitcase in vaudeville...Bad Times, Good Tempos by Arny Freeman, Jazz Journal, July 1975, volume 28 No 7.*

It has also been claimed that he became a bus boy for the band leader Ray Noble...entry for "Billings, Josh (Frank R.)", The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz by Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler (page 61).

Timme Rosenkrantz, who befriended Josh around that time...Harlem Jazz Adventures: A European Baron's Memoir, 1934-1969 By Timme Rosenkrantz; adapted and edited by Fradley Hamilton Garner (2012 page 84).

Josh had moved back to Chicago by the Summer of 1941...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, pages 168 & 170).

Josh was working as a professional Lithographer, and had been since 1940...We Called It Music by Eddie Condon (1962 Corgi edition, page 170); obituary for "Josh Billings", The New York Times, 14th March 1957.

his father had been a printer since 1859 until his retirement in 1910...from the death certificate of Thomas E Billings, 1st Feb 1915.

He was a good painter (I think that he identified with the French impressionists)...The Man Who Invented the Zoot Suit from You don't look like a musician by Bud Freeman (1974 pages 17-18).

he was always trying to capture the rhythm of the Negro in his drawings...Really the Blues by Mezz Mezzrow (Flamingo edition, 1993, page 130).

20. *On 3rd November 1945 he played in New York...Condon at Town Hall by Tuffy*

Deckert, *The Jazz record*, December 1945.

in early 1946 he performed during the intermissions of a Jimmie Noone Memorial Concert and also a Baby Dodds Riverboat Band Session...Records to Burn by John Steiner, *The Jazz Record*, September 1946; *Esquire's jazz book*, 1946.

Josh and Jack Goss were even recorded...Jazz monthly, 1968, page 26 issue unknown (158-166); *Hot Box* by George Hoefler, *Down Beat*, 11th February 1946.

21. *Eddie Condon opened a club in Greenwich Village...Eddie Condon's Scrapbook of Jazz* by Eddie Condon and Hank O'Neal, St. Martin's Press 1973.

during 1946 Josh moved to New York...entry for "Billings, Josh (Frank R.)", The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz by Leonard Feather and Ira Gitler (page 61).

one future contributor to IAJRC Journal saw Josh performing in 1949...Swing Mr Suitcase by Frank H. Trolle, *International Association of Jazz Record Collectors Journal*, Vol 9 No. 3, Summer 1976.

22. *Josh worked as a lithographer for the rest of his life...obituary for "Josh Billings", The New York Times*, 14th March 1957.

Josh died in Roosevelt Hospital...obituary for "Josh Billings", The New York Times, 14th March 1957.

His funeral was a 'sad deal'...JAZZ, Man of Letters, by Whitney Balliett, *The New Yorker*, February 19, 1979 (page 132).