

## Polite, Walter "Creole"



### Zydeco Musician

Mr. Walter Polite was born in 1910, in St. Martinville, Louisiana. He received his first accordion when he was about eleven years old. "My cousin paid about ten to twelve dollars for one of those Cajun diatonic accordions. He couldn't play it so he gave it to me. Two weeks later I played a house dance and just kept going from there."

Walter learned to play by going to dances and listening to the great Creole accordionists of the time. He listened to Marcel Dugas, Clifton Chenier, Claude Faulk, and Boule and Bidon. His greatest influence was Clifton Chenier, a relative by marriage. Chenier took a special interest in Polite and often played his new songs to him. "Clifton was the best. Zydeco music ain't nothing since Clifton died," Walter remarked. In 1926, he played primarily for house dances for both blacks and whites. His band was simple, consisting of the accordion, washboard, and the triangle. They played for election events with "French music" or "French La-La."

For many years, Walter played music at night and on weekends. He worked days at Meyer's Furniture Store in New Iberia. Although Mr. Polite and his band stopped playing shortly after Clifton Chenier's death, his music is still a part of many contemporary Zydeco bands' repertoires. John Wilson, leader of John Wilson and the House Rockers, is considered Walter Polite's protégé, and his band plays many of the tunes popularized by Walter Polite and the Red Hot Swinging Dukes.

Mr. Polite had a wealth of information about many old traditions, including the rural Creole Mardi Gras and the Lenten season rules pertaining to music and dance. Mr. Walter "Creole" Polite died May 9, 1997.