

WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

RUSSELL ALEXANDER (1877-1915), 1978 Inductee

By Andrew Glover, WJU #423, (from his brochure *RUSSELL ALEXANDER - His Life & Music*; see Page 29)



Russell Alexander is best remembered today as the composer of some of the finest marches of all time -- notably, "Colossus of Columbia," "From Tropic to Tropic," "Olympia Hippodrome," and "The Southerner." He spent five years as a circus musician, followed by twelve years as a performer with a popular musical comedy group

on the vaudeville circuit. Sadly, he died at the age of 38 from tuberculosis.

Alexander's music was first published in 1896, when the composer was nineteen. In all, Alexander composed 31 marches, 6 galops, 3 overtures, 2 other band works, and the music to a song. Over one-fourth of his music was not published, and some confusing situations exist with pairs of different works (one published, one not) with identical or similar titles. All but 6 Alexander works were published by C.L. Barnhouse, of Oskaloosa, IA. Two were published by The Fillmore Bros. in Cincinnati, and one each by H.E. McMillin (Cleveland), H.N. White (Cleveland), Star Music Co. (Eldred, PA), and Leo Feist (New York). Some were released posthumously.

Alexander is reported to have been born in Nevada City, Missouri on February 26, 1877. His father, James W. Alexander, was manager of a circus, and at one time was a business partner of a man known to be involved in the burlesque entertainment industry. Russell was the middle of three brothers, flanked by older brother Woodruff and younger brother Newton. How and where he developed his music skills is unknown, but apparently he became a fine musician at a young age. All three brothers were employed in 1896 by the G.W. Belford Carnival of Novelties, a touring enterprise. Presumably, Alexander played in the band, and it is possible he and his brothers were involved in some type of performance acts with the carnival.

During his time with Belford, Russell began to compose, and his first work, "The Darlington" March, was published. It is interesting to note that the earliest Barnhouse

publications of Alexander music spell his first name as "Russel", and beginning in mid-1900, the first name begins to appear as "Russell." More curiously, at least one Alexander manuscript, presumably in his own hand, spells his first name with one "L".

He did not stay with Belford for long, securing employment as a euphonium player with Carl Clair's Barnum & Bailey Circus Band in late 1897. After Russell joined the big show, brothers Woodruff and Newton created a musical comedy act with William "Willie" Paton and James B. Brady. The act, known as "The Exposition Four," achieved success and popularity, and would figure prominently in Alexander's post-circus career.



Barnum & Bailey was embarking on an unprecedented European tour in 1898, so young Alexander was granted the opportunity to see the world -- literally. Before doing so, he felt he needed to procure a new instrument, and his publisher, C.L. Barnhouse, offered to secure one for him at a trade discount. Alexander paid for the horn, a British-made double bell euphonium manufactured by Joseph

Higham, via credits to his royalty account. During his time with the show, he performed in the band, was featured as euphonium soloist, and arranged music for the circus. He continued to compose original works, sending them back to the United States and C.L. Barnhouse. Several of his works enjoyed considerable popularity, and Barnhouse advertised the popular composer as "Alexander the Great."

The Barnum & Bailey European tour was a spectacular success -- at least according to the press agents of the circus. Crossing the Atlantic with the entire circus troupe and menagerie brought about many comparisons to Noah and his ark. During his time with B&B, Alexander became good friends with band mate Walter P. English, a tuba player. English was a composer as well, and would later lead the Barnum & Bailey band after Carl Clair's demise.



After the circus returned to America, Alexander decided to leave the show and join his brothers as a member of "The Exposition Four." All three Alexander brothers had significant musical talents, and their act was quite enjoyable and successful. "The Exposition Four" was known for its musical entertainment -- mostly on brass instruments -- but also as a vocal group, a comedy troupe, and later in its existence, as an entertaining quick-change group of artists. Performing in front of a backdrop, the four men would march in front, then go behind the backdrop, quickly shed a coat or other garments, then reappear so quickly that it seemed the four men were many more. During the height of the Exposition Four's popularity, they

were highly billed at theaters such as Hammerstein's Victoria, as well as many of the Keith-Albee venues. Actor Roger Imhof, in 1938, recalled The Exposition Four with fondness, stating "They sang great. Played every instrument. Were dancers ... They did everything, and did it well."

As early as 1911, the Exposition Four had to cancel engagements due to Russell's health. In the early years of the 20th century, tuberculosis was a deadly and widespread disease, and rarely treated with success. The consensus in the medical world at the time was it was a disease of the lungs that could be best treated by exposing those afflicted to fresh air of the outdoors. A number of "sanitariums" sprang up in areas away from congested cities, such as the Adirondacks and the Catskills. The idea behind treatment was to have patients spend as much time outdoors, involved in activities such as gardening and walking. Russell was sent to a sanitarium in the Adirondacks in May, 1911. Woodruff was also afflicted, but not as seriously at first.

With his health improved, on April 26, 1915, Russell returned to The Exposition Four, which performed for a gala event at New York's Victoria Theater. This famous vaudeville house, located at Seventh Avenue and 42nd Street, had been a mainstay of the entertainment world, but was closing down. Following this performance, the Victoria was to be demolished to make way for the Rialto Theater, a grand motion picture palace. The melancholy feeling that must have accompanied the closing of this great venue continued to another level, as this was also the final performance of The Exposition Four as well.

For a time following this performance, Alexander stayed at the Gerard Hotel in New York City, and at some point later in the year went to the Loomis Sanitarium at Liberty, New York. His health deteriorated precipitously, and on the night of October 1, 1915, he died. Russell was buried in what is now known as the Old Town Cemetery in Liberty, in an unmarked grave. Sadly, Woodruff also died of tuberculosis, in May, 1918. Newton survived, reinventing his musical act with Theodora "Theo" Lightner and her sister Winnie, who later became a film star of some note.

On October 21, 1915, publisher C.L. Barnhouse was shocked with the response to his September 16 letter to Russell. It was from Newton, informing him that Russell was deceased. Newton added he was performing in an act billed as "The Lightner Sisters and Alexander", and that Woodruff was performing in a solo act, under the name "Alex Wood."

On November 3, 1915, Russell's widow, Eleanor, wrote to Barnhouse, confirming Russell's death. Now living

in Washington, D.C., she indicated her late husband had advised her, in the event of his death, to contact Barnhouse and have the expectation of being treated fairly. She asked Barnhouse for an outright settlement, a cash offer for complete interests in all of Alexander's works. Undoubtedly, this placed Barnhouse in something of a predicament, as he had never had this type of request before. While some of Alexander's works had diminished in sales, a few others continued to sell quite well. Also, since Alexander had not been providing new material to Barnhouse in recent years, interest in the composer and his music had waned somewhat. Barnhouse offered Eleanor a cash settlement of \$100, for ownership of her husband's works, both published and unpublished. Mrs. Alexander wrote back, asking for an additional \$25, arguing that "The Southerner is sure a prize winner..." as the music stores in Washington kept running out of the Victor recording of it as performed by Pat Conway's band. Barnhouse acquiesced and paid her the \$125 requested.

While Mrs. Alexander and her heirs would likely have earned more in the long term by staying on a royalty basis, she was insistent on a "buyout," which is what she ultimately received. Considering the circumstances of the time, however, it was probably not an unfair exchange. By way of comparison, the royalty on quickstep marches in 1915 was three cents per copy sold. So, the \$125 settlement represented the equivalent royalty on the sale of over 4,100 units of band music.

The year following Alexander's death, Barnhouse released "Round-Up" march, from a stack of nearly a dozen Alexander manuscripts which had been submitted to Barnhouse over the years. The march enjoyed a modest sale, and soon went out of print. In 1919, Fillmore published "Hampton Roads" march, which bore the dedication "To Eleanor."

In 1926, C.L. Barnhouse decided to re-promote the composer responsible for his company's first great "hits". Thus, he had 16 of Alexander's best-selling marches re-engraved by Otto Zimmerman & Son of Cincinnati. He then republished them in a folio with a bright orange cover, and called *The Alexander March Book*. Barnhouse discovered this new edition, with modern instrumentation, clean parts, and corrected errors, was greatly successful, and brought a new life to Russell Alexander's music -- even though many bands already owned the original editions. The book remains a favorite with better bands, and the majority of band musicians who have played these marches have done so from the 1926 edition. Also, that same year, Barnhouse released the only Alexander overture to be published: "The Blue Ribbon."

In recent years, with a renewed interest in Alexander and his music, I began a process of editing all the unpublished works of Russell Alexander and presenting them in clean editions, typeset using music notation software. The purpose is to preserve these lost Alexander works, and make them available for performance by bands such as ours at Windjammers Unlimited. To date, six previously unpublished Alexander works have been edited and released by Barnhouse: the marches "Storming of El Caney," "Conway's Cantata," "The Rival Rovers," and "Vicksburg, The Valiant;" and the galops "Charioteers of Semiramis" and "Congressional Limited." The remaining five unpublished Alexander manuscripts (two marches, two overtures, and a descriptive work) will be edited and released in the future. This will bring all compositions of Russell Alexander to print, for the very first time, available for future generations of musicians to study, perform, and enjoy. We salute Russell for his legacy.



An 1898 photo of the Barnum & Bailey Circus band. Bandmaster Carl Clair is standing center, behind drums. Russell Alexander is fourth from right in the top row with his euphonium.

RUSSELL ALEXANDER TO BE HONORED JULY 20, 2015

Submitted by Andrew Glover, WJU #423

The music of Russell Alexander is known to many Windjammers. While he was not as prolific as some other composers, several of his marches rank among the most popular of all time. His best known marches include *Colossus of Columbia*, *From Tropic to Tropic*, *The Southerner*, and *Olympia Hippodrome*. In all, he composed thirty-one marches, three overtures, five galops, three other band works, and the music to one song.

Details of his life are scarce. He was born in Nevada City, Missouri on February 26, 1877. He was the middle of three brothers, Woodruff being the oldest, and Newton the youngest. Father James W. Alexander was believed to be associated with a traveling circus at some point. All three brothers developed musical skills, and in 1896 all three brothers joined G. W. Belford's Carnival of Novelties. Presumably they played in the band, or performed one or more musical acts, although throughout his career, Russell was primarily a euphonium player.

A letter written years later by music publisher Charles Lloyd Barnhouse states that Russell was a bandsman with the Buffalo Bill Wild West Show at some point, but in 1897 Russell joined the band of the Barnum and Bailey Circus under the baton of Carl Clair, and remained with this show until 1902 or 1903. This period saw Barnum and Bailey tour Europe, and Russell was reported to do arranging work for the circus band as well. While Russell was with Barnum and Bailey's Circus, his brothers formed an act with James Brady and Willie Patton, which became known as The Exposition Four. This act became well known first on the minstrel circuit, and later in burlesque and vaudeville venues. It performed successfully and occasionally received exceptional reviews, giving its final performance on April 26, 1915.



Most of his music was published by C. L. Barnhouse, the first being *The Darlington March* in 1886. He was the first composer in the Barnhouse catalog, other than its founder, to strike big "hits" with *From Tropic to Tropic* (1898), *Colossus of Columbia* (1901) and *The Southerner* (1908). He sought other publishers later (H. N. White, H. E. McMillan, and Star Music Co.), each publishing one Alexander march; and the Fillmore Bros., who published two.

Alexander suffered from tuberculosis for some time in his thirties, and he died at the age of 37 at the Loomis Sanitarium in Liberty, New York, on the night of October 1, 1915. Shortly after his passing, Widow Eleanor sold the remaining rights to all Alexander works published by Barnhouse as well as thirteen unpublished works which had been submitted to Barnhouse over the years. One march (*Round Up*) and an overture (*The Blue Ribbon*) were published posthumously (in 1916 and 1926, respectively). Also in 1926, Barnhouse re-engraved and updated the instrumentation for sixteen of Alexander's most popular marches and published them in "The Alexander March Book." Four of these marches were published decades later in concert-sized editions.



Despite the musical legacy of this wonderful composer, the circumstances surrounding his demise and burial are especially pitiful. Upon his passing at the Loomis Sanitarium, he was buried on October 3, 1915 in Liberty, New York in an unmarked grave. Widow Eleanor's situation was quite dire, given by her desperation for cash and the quick manner in which she sold the rights to her husband's music. Nearly a half century later, circus music researcher and enthusiast Sverre O. Braathen located the superintendent of the Liberty Old Town Cemetery and learned that Alexander had been buried in Grave No. 50, which had never been marked.

For many years I thought it would be appropriate, and of course long overdue, to obtain a proper marker for Russell Alexander's grave. In August 2012, after online research regarding cemeteries in Liberty revealed little helpful information, I contacted the Supervisor of Liberty, who put me in touch with the Cemetery Director. After my attempts to locate the gravesite myself, I brought the matter to both the Board of Directors of the C. L. Barnhouse Co. and Windjammers Unlimited. Barnhouse pledged partial financial support for the project, and Windjammers agreed to pursue the matter as an organization. Several Windjammers, especially Nancy Olson, made calls and conducted research with various individuals in Sullivan County, New York, in an effort to locate the exact gravesite. Windjammer Rich Copeland traveled to Liberty in August, 2014 to visit the Old Town Cemetery and conduct research in Liberty. Despite Rich's valiant efforts, no map of the Liberty Old Town Cemetery showing specific grave locations seems to survive. I have hoped that we would be able to locate the grave and place a marker in time for the centennial of Alexander's passing, in October 2015. Instead, Windjammers, through the kind assistance of the government of Liberty, will place a plaque commemorating the life of Russell Alexander on Liberty's Main Street Stage, on July 20, 2015. A Windjammers band will perform several of Alexander's most enduring works, and a brief ceremony will present information on Alexander's life and music.

The ceremony to honor Russell Alexander will take place Monday, July 20, 2015 at 1:30 pm at the Main Street Stage, 119 North Main Street, in downtown Liberty, NY.

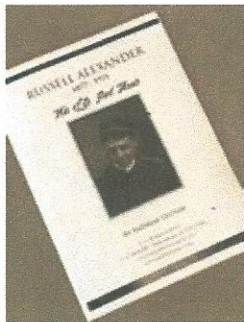
The ceremony is open to the public, and all are welcome.

♯ ♯ ♯



LEFT: The selection *Hampton Roads March* is dedicated simply, To Eleanor, Russell Alexander's wife.

RUSSELL ALEXANDER (1877-1915) - His Life and Music



Andrew Glover has produced a most-interesting and informative 28-page (9"x12") booklet regarding Russell Alexander. It includes many historic photographs and a discussion of the chronology of his music, with specific comments on a number of his compositions. Copies of the Solo Cornet parts are included for some of Alexander's

tunes as part of that commentary.

See Pages 22-24 in this *Circus Fanfare* for Alexander's biography, extracted from this booklet. Barnhouse is making this worthy document available for \$12.95 (\$9.95 + \$3.00 shipping & handling.) The Stock No. is 079-6202-00. If you would like a copy, it can be ordered by phone (877-673-8397), online (www.barnhouse.com), or by mail at this address:

C.L. Barnhouse Co.
P.O. Box 680
Oskaloosa, IA 52577