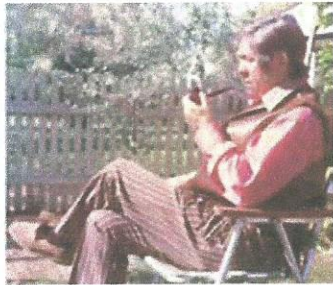


WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

EARLE M. MOSS (1900-1991), 1987 Inductee



Earle Moss 1972. Charles Bennett Photo

Earle Moss was a "trouper" back in "the good old days of the American Circus." In 1917, Moss played cornet in the Gentry Bros. Circus Band. He was also with Hugo Bros. and again with Gentry Bros. in 1918. In 1919, Earle was the bandmaster on Gentry Bros. and in 1920 and 1921 he was on the famous Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, directing the band on that show in 1921. He spent 1922 with the Mighty Haag show. During 1919 and 1920 he also worked with a Minstrel company, Price & Bonelli, and later on the Neil O'Brien Minstrel.

After his years in the outdoor show business, he entered the jazz field, playing with many big name dance bands. In

1932, he took the position of principal orchestrator at Radio City Music Hall in New York City and was in that role for 18 years.

A long time member of Windjammers Unlimited (WJU #19) and a contributor to the *Circus Fanfare* in its earlier years, Earle was honored by being named to the Windjammers Hall of Fame in 1987.

Earle was born February 11, 1900 and died May 18, 1991. He is buried in Nodaway Memorial Gardens Cemetery in Maryville, MO. He was married to circus performer Rose Ellen Kelly, and they had a son, Earle I. Moss (WJU #1438; 1/26/1922-10/27/2002).



WINDJAMMING ...

by Earle M. Moss, (Extracted from his 1973 Vol. 3, No. 4 *Circus Fanfare* article)

I was with the Price & Bonelli Minstrels during 1919 and 1920. It was a few years later that I put on the high silk hat and the Ascot tie to become again a minstrel man.

In the interim, much had happened. I had married, fathered a son, spent a couple years as a circus musician and later, bandmaster with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, then bandmaster with the Mighty Haag Shows. The fall of 1923 found me playing cornet in the pit of the Orpheum Theatre in Quincy, Illinois. I had just lost my wife and I was at a loose end. It so happened that the Neil O'Brien Minstrel booked a date in Quincy that Fall. Of course, it would have taken wild horses to have kept me from casing their parade. I was pleased to see an old associate of several different shows. I made myself known and he said ... "So you want to troupe? The old man is looking for a musical director who can arrange for male voices." The upshot of it was ... I was offered the job of general music director. I decided upon the spot to accept it; the money was slightly better than TWICE what I was then making.

The O'Brien show was about twice as large as the Price & Bonelli Minstrels. Our company numbered about 50. We

had about 18 in our street band. For the street parade, we made a nice appearance. We wore white serge suits, trimmed in black satin and velvet. The coats were Prince Alberts, double-breasted, with the trousers to match. Our headgear were high silk hats, which were meticulously brushed out before each parade. The customary wing collar and Ascot tie were present. In this case the tie was purple. White gloves and patent leather shoes completed the picture. As was customary, we paraded in double file, about 15 feet apart. Mr. O'Brien, his manager, and a couple banner boys led the parade; the singers and dancers followed, and the band brought up the rear. There was no room for that one trumpet stuff; we had FOUR. This was really living it up! If you took the trumpet down for a strain to catch your breath, there was at least one or two other trumpets belting out the melody while you rested.

Parade was usually at 11:30 if we arrived in time. If not, it was "parade upon arrival." We would parade from the theater to the heart of town, playing most of the way. Once downtown, we would form a circle and play a light band concert. It might have consisted of such items as: "Barnum and Bailey's Favorite", "Orpheus Overture", a

pop tune of the day, "Lassus Trombone", and finally another good solid circus march to close the proceedings. The drums would sound off then, and we would march back to the theater.

We made a nice appearance on parade. Aside from the woodwinds ... everything was gold plated, from trumpets on up to the tubas. At first I was broken-hearted because they would not let me play my silver English Besson cornet -- I have never had much use for trumpets, regardless of make. Eventually though, I became reconciled to my shiny gold trumpet and learned how to get some fairly decent sounds out of it on the march.

On those occasions when we were late arriving at our destination, Mr. O'Brien would walk through our chartered day coach beforehand, proclaiming to one and all, "Parade

on arrival; no check-in, no shave, no coffee; go directly to the theater." (On one such occasion, an eccentric tenor singer named Charlie Wright) did not go directly to the opera house. Instead, he went to the first barber shop he could find and sitting down in the chair, asked for a close shave with plenty of hot towels, all the while delivering commentary upon Mr. O'Brien's tactics as a slave driver. He was saying something like, "This old goat O'Brien has a helluva nerve telling us no check in, no shave, no coffee. Who the hell does he think he is, Julius Caesar? As for me, damned if I will make the parade without a shave and a shoe shine; he can like it or lump it!" In the adjacent chair, a rather portly individual shook off a mound of hot towels from his visage, and sitting up, demanded, "What did you say Charlie?" It was the "old man" in person! Charlie ... immediately replied, "I said, 'Once over barber, and MAKE IT SNAPPY!'"

INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Excerpts from April 20, 1977 *Circus Fanfare* interview of Earle Moss by Charlie Bennett, WJU #1

Moss: Every show that I worked on gave daily street parades. Gentry Bros. and Hugo Bros. had one band wagon for the entire band of 10. Gentry Bros. in 1918 also had a mounted band. I was one of the members of that equestrian group of windjammers. Hagenbeck-Wallace used two wagons for the big show band, plus another wagon for the side show band of 10 persons. There was another smaller wagon for the clown band of 6 pieces. The rule on most circuses was that if you missed a parade, you were fined \$2.00.

The mounted band on Gentry's was positioned near the end of the parade, ahead of the camels, elephants, and steam calliope. I was mounted on an old, formerly trained horse named "Silver." He had aged and grown pretty fat and now was a common baggage horse. He was deathly afraid of camels. In Des Moines, Iowa, we were parading along the street blasting merrily. As we turned a corner, the wind was at our back and it brought the scent of the following camels up to old Silver. He took off at a gallop for the head of the parade several blocks distant. I was hanging on for dear life, attempting to stop him, while flailing him vigorously with my King Master Model cornet. It was to no avail. Two of our parade marshals were in hot pursuit, mounted on horses. They finally caught up to Silver... heading us back to our proper position. On the way back, a small boy came out into the street and said "I think you dropped this mister." He then handed me my 3rd valve slide. I had apparently lost it while using the cornet for a whip. If he had not found that slide, I would have had to buy a new cornet, and I was not financially able to do that at the moment.

The mounted band wore orange uniforms trimmed in a lot of black braid. We wore high hussar-type busbies, black

riding breeches with an orange stripe down the side, and black leather leggings. We looked pretty snazzy, I thought.

One time we were parading with the Hagenbeck-Wallace show in Quebec City, Canada. The hills were so steep that the big boss told everyone who rode atop wagons that they could dismount at the top of the hill, if they chose. Evidently he did not want to be sued if a wagon got out of control and cracked up. We in the band availed ourselves of this proposition and walked down two or three of the steepest hills, while the wagons came crawling down with brakes set. We had some difficulty "scaling" (back onto) the band wagon. Those were the days!!

Once, in Paris, Kentucky, I was riding on the Gentry bandwagon when a small boy came alongside and said, "I know you mister. I saw you last year with this circus." I said, "How can you be sure that you know me?" He replied "I know you because you still got that dirty brass cornet, and you're still chewing tobacco." Many of the old time musicians chewed tobacco. They could do it while playing in the program and the parade. There was little time during a 2 1/2 hour program to have a smoke, and there was no smoking on the bandstand. Chewing was okay if you happened to sit somewhere that you could dispose of the juice.

The bandwagons on the Hagenbeck show were very high and you were right up there amongst the trolley power wires. In sunny weather, we thought nothing of grabbing the power wire and passing it over our heads. In wet weather, if we approached a wire, we all used to hit the floor beneath to keep from being a statistic in the obituary columns of the *Billboard!*