

WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

Henry Fillmore (1881-1956), 1988 Inductee

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351 (Primary resource: *Hallelujah Trombone !*, a book by Paul E. Bierley, WJU #255)

James Henry Fillmore, Jr. was born in Cincinnati, OH on December 3, 1881, the first of five children of James Henry Fillmore, Sr. and Annie Eliza McKrell. From the beginning, the boy was called Henry and his father was known by most people as J.H.

Henry is credited with composing more than 250 original works and approximately 750 arrangements for bands. While best known for his marches and screamers, he also wrote hymns, fox-trots, waltzes, novelty tunes, and overtures.



The musical heritage of the Fillmore family began with Henry's grandfather, Augustus Dameron Fillmore. Like his son, J.H., A.D. generally went by his initials. He was an ordained minister in two denominations and he composed perhaps as many as 200 gospel hymns. He was also known as a singing school teacher, adding to the cultural heritage of the Midwest. Singing schools were both a school and a

social event. The itinerant teacher would visit a community for a week or two, holding classes wherever space was available. This was how rural folks learned music back then, starting with simple songs sung in unison and building to four-part harmonies. Tuition was a dollar a week.

A.D. and his wife, Hannah, an outstanding soprano, had seven children, six of whom were in the music profession at some point in their lives. J.H. was their first and became the most famous of that generation. J.H. demonstrated early on his talent as a vocalist and pianist. While in school he studied music theory and harmony, yet he was largely self-taught, spending long hours daily developing his musical skills.

J.H. had two passions ... music and printing. He became an apprentice printer at the age of 14 and over the next seven years became an expert on all aspects of printing and binding, including regular and music typesetting. When A.D. died, J.H. was 21 and he headed out in his father's footsteps as a singing teacher and seller of his father's hymnals, and then his own.

With his reputation as a published composer now established, J.H. decided to create his own business and The Fillmore Brothers Company came into existence. His brother Frank was hired as salesman and general manager, leaving J.H. free to compose. Their brother Fred was brought in to handle the various printing and binding tasks. With several best-selling hymnals at the outset, Fillmore Brothers quickly became well-known in the religious music publishing field.

J.H. married Annie McKrell on Thanksgiving Day 1880. A year later Henry Fillmore was born. About that time, Frank left to join a newspaper in Oklahoma. Fred was now also composing religious music and expanding his role with the company. Further, brother Charles, a minister, was adding tunes to the Fillmore catalog.

Growing up, Henry was bored with school. He was quite intelligent, but mathematics was the only subject holding his attention. Teachers pegged him as a "rowdy", and he was often in fights or getting into mischief. Henry was a constant source of embarrassment to his parents.

One day, his Uncle Fred gave Henry a fancy walking stick. Thinking it resembled a drum major's baton, Henry rounded

up several of his friends and furnished them with special "instruments" – dish pans, wash buckets, toy instruments and other noisemakers. As the proud leader of his first "band," drum major Fillmore led an obnoxiously noisy march down the middle of the street.

By the age of eleven, it became obvious Henry had an outstanding singing voice and he was encouraged to sing solos in Sunday School. Because there was often a reward of as much as fifty cents for doing so, he didn't hesitate to sing with gusto. At the same time, he was exhibiting an unusual musical talent, quickly learning to play violin, flute, and guitar. His sister, Mary, accompanied him on piano and he became a showman, performing at every opportunity. Incredibly, most of the music he performed was of his own composition.

However, the instrument most fascinating to him was the one forbidden by his father -- the trombone. J.H. would not approve the slide trombone, or for that matter, any other brass instrument, believing these instruments to be associated with "evil."

For some time, Henry pleaded with his mother to buy him a trombone, and she was sympathetic, thinking it might keep Henry from his pranks, protests, and frequent moments of rebelliousness. So, she secretly saved money out of household funds and bought a good used trombone for \$8 from a retired neighbor. Henry was thrilled and practiced for an hour after school each day. When finished, he would carefully hide the instrument in their barn.

After about six months, Henry got an unhappy surprise when his father came home early and discovered him in the parlor playing the trombone. Fortunately for Henry, he was playing a hymn at the time, one he had himself composed. Once J.H. had gotten over the shock of seeing and hearing his son playing the forbidden instrument, J.H. finally said, "Well, son, if you must learn how to play that thing, let's do it right", and arranged for lessons starting the next day.

At the time, there were no school bands Henry could join, nor was he permitted to play his trombone in church. On rare occasions, he could play for guests at his home. Once, when he tried serenading his girlfriend, her father charged out of the house threatening him with bodily harm if he didn't leave immediately.

In June 1898, at the age of sixteen, Henry shocked his family by running away from home and joining a circus -- the John Robinson 10 Big Shows. In a sense, it could have been predicted, but it was still a major blow to the family. J.H. was especially mortified given the Company's exclusive focus on religious music and beliefs, and his



strong personal views that the general circus environment represented the reverse.

Henry's role with his first circus experience was as a laborer. He cleaned up after the animals, watered the elephants, and raised and lowered tents. Only once was he able to sit in for a trombone player during a performance, and he instantly learned he didn't have the experience to "cut the mustard" as a windjammer. Soon broke and homesick, Henry returned home after perhaps only three weeks on the road. As penance, he was required to compose a Thanksgiving hymn, both words and music. Further, J.H. decided that Henry would be required to attend Miami Military Institute (MMI), fifty miles north of Cincinnati, instead of continuing with public high school. MMI was effectively a junior college, prepping cadets for higher colleges, West Point or Annapolis.

Within a month at MMI, Henry had run afoul of the strict codes of conduct and found himself in "solitary confinement." In the assigned room was an old piano, in need of repair. Henry disassembled it and resolved the issues. Smartly, Henry chose to play hymns in testing it out. When the school president heard the music, he was startled, and impressed. "Your period of confinement is over, Cadet Fillmore", the Colonel said. "Follow me to my office." There, he told Henry it would be nice if he would organize some sort of orchestra or band as a recreational activity. Henry quickly identified nine cadets as potential musicians and wrote his father to send music and instruments. That happened, and MMI's first orchestra took shape.

During the summer of 1900, Henry joined singer Homer "Rody" Rodeheaver on the revival circuit. Rody was flashy and exciting musically, and a trombone player. Thus, Henry was invited to play along with the singing, followed by selling hymnals published by Fillmore Bros. In the process, Henry sharpened his "showmanship" as well as "salesmanship" skills.

Upon graduation from MMI, Henry worked the summer at Fillmore Bros., learning all aspects of the company. He was involved in everything, from typesetting, printing and binding, to editing music. He also did some choral arrangements for some of the hymns. Having studied bookkeeping at MMI, he also worked on the company's financial records. Given his better understanding of the business, he advanced the argument the company needed to diversify beyond the religious music field. He even had the audacity to suggest Fillmore Bros. Company should begin publishing band music. He also proposed opening a retail store that would sell band instruments in addition to music. As you might expect, this didn't sit too well with J.H. or other senior staff members.

At the end of the summer, Henry enrolled in The College of Music of Cincinnati, founded in 1878. It was not the same as the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, although the two merged many years later in 1955.

Henry attended only one semester at The College of Music, leaving because he felt he had learned all he wanted to know about “serious” music. He knew a career in classical music was not for him. Rather, he was interested in music for entertainment and such was of secondary importance at that College. However, one of Henry’s most treasured memories was Prof. John A. Broekhoven’s heart-to-heart chat prior to the end of that first semester. The professor expressed astonishment at Henry’s grasp of theory, harmony and orchestration. He said he had never seen a student with so much natural talent. He said he had taught Henry all he, the professor, was capable of and that further study would be a waste of time. He then asked Henry to make band arrangements for several pieces to be performed at Cincinnati’s Fall Festival the following year. To his amazement, the pieces were completed with perfection long before the due date.

Having dropped out of college, Henry resumed his push for band music. To him, this was where the money was. After all, bands were drawing capacity crowds all over the nation. John Philip Sousa was king of the march, and it seemed clear to Henry this was the golden age of bands. Meanwhile, J.H. was struggling to keep Henry occupied and happy. So, in 1902, J.H. acquired A. Square, a company with musical instruments and music publishing facilities. He also rented first floor space for a retail store and gave Henry the role there of junior clerk. The company then published a few pieces of band music, but since their client base was religious-related, sales were minimal.

In early 1903, J.H. sent Henry to Europe to explore the church music situation overseas and see if there was a market for Fillmore publications. Henry quickly realized the opportunity was essentially zero. While there, however, he attended a circus performance and learned one of their trombone players had just left. Henry volunteered and played with the circus for several days, returning to the U.S. when his money ran out.

Once home, Henry persuaded his dad to publish a march he had written himself. J.H. said okay, but it couldn’t show a Fillmore as the composer. Henry, thinking this a bit absurd and funny, came up with the name to use based on something he thought as a young boy when his father had so strongly disapproved of band instruments. He told his friends at the time “I will huff and puff and play my trombone whether Papa likes it or not.” Thus, *Will Huff* became the pseudonym he chose. That first published march was “Higham March”. Higham was the line of imported English brass instruments the new Fillmore store was now carrying.

Out of curiosity, in the fall of 1903, J.H. joined Henry in attending concerts by two great bands – John Philip Sousa’s and Frederick Innis’. Having a change of heart, J.H. came away more supportive of band music. Henry then went to work on five more marches, all published in 1904. One, called “Vashti” showed Henry as the composer, permitted because Vashti was a Biblical character (Esther, Chapter 1).

Henry’s name was also on the *Gary Owen* and *Lord Baltimore* marches, since these titles were neutral. He used Al Hayes for his *Under Arms* march and Will Huff for the *March of the Blue Brigade*.

Shortly after “Blue Brigade” was published, a Fillmore employee brought Henry a copy of *Howard March*, composed by a Will Huff and published by piano manufacturer and publisher, the Rudolph Wurlitzer Company of Cincinnati. Turns out he was the real Will Huff, also a southern Ohio composer. Henry and Will met, with Henry apologizing and promising not to use the name again. Adding to the confusion, however, starting in 1908 Fillmore became Will Huff’s publisher.

In 1904, Henry joined the band of the First Regiment, Ohio National Guard. He did not have to enlist in the National Guard to play in their band. The director of the band, Billy Kopp, and Henry soon had a mutual respect. From Billy, Henry learned conducting. Meanwhile, tension was building again between J.H. and his son. Henry was pressing for the company to jump into the band music business full bore, as he saw the religious music business as stalling. But J.H. was adamant the company was founded as a church music publishing house and it would always be that way. Further, he was the boss and his decision was band music would remain on the sidelines.

Henry published five marches 1904 and four more in early 1905. Most were using the Al Hayes pseudonym. He did trick his father with *Troopers Tribunal*, a circus march where “Troupers” was deliberately misspelled to make it appear as a military parade title.

Not only were there conflicts over the music, J.H. and Annie strongly disapproved of Henry’s girlfriend, a Vaudeville dancer. In March 1905, the collective arguments peaked, and Henry packed a suitcase and his trombone and left town, not so much angry as deeply hurt. At age 23, Henry married Mabel May Jones in St. Louis on April 10, 1905.

The newlyweds then joined the Lemon Brothers Circus, with Henry in the band and Mabel as a nursemaid and tutor for the performers’ children. Owner Frank Lemon needed a calliope player and Henry volunteered despite never having played one before. It also needed repairs and Henry accomplished that. Soon he was playing ragtime on the calliope and the circus people loved that.

Playing trombone in the circus band, Henry was now a genuine windjammer. Further, he was often allowed to conduct. His pay was just \$8 per week plus food and a berth on the train. Henry’s musicianship improved significantly during the five-month 1905 tour. In the parades, he would first be playing trombone from atop a bandwagon near the front of the parade. Then, when he reached the finish of the parade route, he would hop on a horse and gallop to the end, where he would climb onto the calliope wagon and play the route a second time.

When the circus season ended, his parents apologized and invited Henry and Mabel back to Cincinnati with employment for Henry at Fillmore Bros. J.H. had done some serious soul-searching, and realized Henry's career was going to be band music. If Fillmore Bros. Company didn't publish his work, some other publisher certainly would.

Henry had perfect pitch and would compose directly to music paper, and then try them out on a piano afterward. However, for his first two years of married life, most of Henry's music was tested using a toy piano, because he could not afford a real one. Further, his composing was done at home, to avoid distractions at the business.

During 1906, Henry published more of his own music than in the prior three years combined. Yet, many were still under the Al Hayes label. Because his pay was quite low and royalties were slow to appear, he supplemented with nighttime theater and dance hall work as a musician, offered trombone lessons, and played semi-professional sports. The summer of 1906, he also played in a minstrel band on an Ohio River showboat. One of Henry's friends during this time was John Klohr, noted march composer who became famous for the familiar *The Billboard March*. In the early years, Klohr was certainly an influence relative to Henry's circus tunes, and later, vice versa.

From 1907 to 1911, Henry firmly established himself as a composer and arranger. Nearly half his tunes during this time were marches. When J.H. wouldn't let him publish *The Victorious First* with the Fillmore name, Henry sold it to Harry Coleman, a Philadelphia publisher. It sold so well, that J.H. finally gave up and allowed Henry to put his name on whatever he wanted. In celebration, Henry composed *The Circus Bee*, published in February 1908. This was his most difficult march to that point, and this imaginary circus newspaper title was reminiscent of Klohr's "The Billboard" title.

Henry's first trombone smear was composed in 1908. *Miss Trombone* was a light-hearted piece, and it really put him on the musical map. However, J.H. had been hesitant to allow it to happen, believing that ragtime music was the work of the devil and associated with brothels. But in the end, even J.H. had to admit it was a catchy tune and he let it go to print.

The next trombone smear, *Teddy Trombone*, didn't happen until March 1911. Years later, when Henry wrote *Hallelujah Trombone* in 1920 with a paraphrase of the "Hallelujah Chorus", J.H. put his foot down, calling it sacrilegious. The name was changed to *Shoutin' Liza Trombone*. Overall, Henry published fifteen smears in his "Trombone Family" of tunes.

By using pseudonyms, Henry was successful in keeping Fillmore Bros. from seeming to be a one-composer publishing house. In addition to the Al Hayes label (for average bands), he used Harold Bennett (non-progressive pieces for early bands), Ray Hall (medium difficulty), Harry Hartley (easy solos), Henrietta Moore (twilight songs), and Gus Beans (used as a test of name influence on a quality march.)

Appointed as the leader of the Syrian Temple Shrine Band in January 1921, Henry led the band for five and a half years, during which it became the most highly regarded of fraternal bands. He initiated Shrine circuses in Cincinnati, raising funds for charities. When he left in a dispute with Shrine officials, the entire band resigned with him. In its place, in 1927 he founded The Fillmore Band. It's 22-members were drawn from the Cincinnati Symphony and other professional organizations. At one point, the legendary William J. Bell was on tuba. During summers, he expanded the band to 32 players. He used no notes for his announcements, and no scores for his conducting.

When J.H. decided to retire in 1933, the Board elected Henry as President of Fillmore Brothers. However, with trusted employees in place and well-organized operations, Henry's duties were limited, giving him freedom to focus on composing, conducting, and traveling.

J.H. died February 6, 1936 at age 86. The Will divided the estate, comprised primarily of the Fillmore Brothers Company, equally among Henry and his three sisters, who had played no role in the company. Henry was shocked, as he felt if it had not been for his published music, the company would have collapsed many years earlier. He felt embittered and, consequently, lost interest in the business.

At age 56, and just diagnosed with a serious heart condition, Henry and Mabel moved from Cincinnati to Florida, hoping he would live another 6 months. Florida was good to him, and he lived another 19 years.

Meanwhile, he became "Uncle Henry" to Florida school musicians and was often called the "patron saint of Florida school bands." Despite the advice of doctors, Henry continued being an active conductor. He also served as VP and then President of the ABA. In June 1942, he even attempted (quite unsuccessfully!) to enlist in the Army.

The Fillmore Bros. Company was sold to New York-Chicago music publisher Carl Fisher in November 1951.

Mabel died of a stroke on April 13, 1954, just eight days after she and Henry celebrated their 49th anniversary.

On December 7, 1956, Henry Fillmore passed away in his sleep. With minor exceptions, his estate went to the University of Miami band foundation.



Henry Fillmore was inducted into the Windjammers Unlimited Hall of Fame in January 1988.

TROMBONE SMEARS

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351

While Henry Fillmore is often called “The Father of the Trombone Smear”, he wasn’t the first to compose tunes incorporating that concept. Certainly, due to the very nature of the slide trombone, or the sackbut, the smear has surely been used by trombone players for as long as the instrument has been around. In 1687, German composer Georg Daniel Speer wrote about the trombone glissando in anti-smear terms: “Some slur the trombone’s sound with the breath, but it comes out better and livelier when it is cleanly articulated with the tongue.”

Indeed, the trombone smear is the opposite of staccato. It is legato, played quickly with no separation between successive notes, and with a constant flow of air. If vibrating air is flowing smoothly, without interruption, through the instrument while the slide is in motion, the result is a smear. No other brass instrument in common use can accomplish this same effect.

Trombone novelty pieces existed before Fillmore began to write them. Arthur Pryor, trombone soloist with the John Philip Sousa Band, used slide effects in some of his novelty compositions as early as 1902. In that same era, several other composers, such as Frank Losey and Fred Jewell, used trombone smears in their pieces. No doubt, professional minstrel companies were largely responsible for popularizing the trombone smear. Trombones were often used in minstrel comedy routines, and ragtime and cakewalk music were common in that venue. What Fillmore accomplished was combining ragtime, march elements, and glissandos into a fun, humorous form. The tunes were tricky to play, but happy and catchy. The audiences loved them.

In the early 1900’s, ragtime was popular in Cincinnati, as it was in other riverboat cities in the U.S. Fillmore was moonlighting in theaters, minstrels, dance halls and clubs, and rags were popular tunes in those venues. A significant influence promoting ragtime were the African-American musicians coming up the inland waterways from New Orleans. Another was the circus sideshow bands, whose black musicians featured blues and ragtime pieces in their shows and in the circus street parades. Fillmore understood these people and their music, so much so, that musicians in Sousa’s band claimed that for years John Philip Sousa believed Fillmore was a black man because of how well he had imitated their music style.

Fillmore’s first tune in his “Trombone Family” was published in 1908, and his last 21 years later. In today’s society, the advertisements for these novelty tunes would be unthinkable in terms of both images and language. When the entire series was completed, they were published in a book titled ***The Trombone Family – A Collection of 15 Original & Humorous Trombone Novelties***. The advertising copy

included this literary gem: “AN ATTOUPEMENT UV UNPRECEDENTED DIATHYRAMB PREMONSTRATING DE JOCOSINESS UV DE PERAMBULATIN’ TROMBONE.”



- 1908 *Miss Trombone*. The soloist of the famous “Colored Ladies’ Band of America”.
- 1911 *Teddy Trombone*. Brother of Miss Trombone, and trombonist in the Great Side Show. (Dedicated to Theodore Hahn.)
- 1915 *Lassus Trombone*. Valet to Teddy Trombone and a trombonist with the minstrel band.
- 1916 *Pahson Trombone*. The preacher, and father of Lassus.
- 1917 *Sally Trombone*. Sister to Lassus and oldest daughter of Pahson. Long, shuffling, loose-jointed.
- 1918 *Slim Trombone*. Sally Trombone’s city cousin, a jazzin’ one-step kid.
- 1919 *Mose Trombone*. Slim Trombone’s good buddy. (Dedicated to John Klohr.)
- 1920 *Shoutin’ Liza Trombone*. Mose Trombone’s girlfriend.
- 1921 *Hot Trombone*. “He’s just a fren ob Liza”
- 1922 *Bones Trombone*. “Just as warm as Hot Trombone.”
- 1923 *Dusty Trombone*. Bones’ next door neighbor.
- 1924 *Bull Trombone*. A toreador.
- 1926 *Lucky Trombone*. The family’s 13th member.
- 1929 *Boss Trombone*. The head man
- 1929 *Ham Trombone*. “A cullud bahbaque”