

WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

Hale A. Vandercook (1995 Inductee) “Professor Van” 1864-1949

by Charles Conrad, WJU #1525

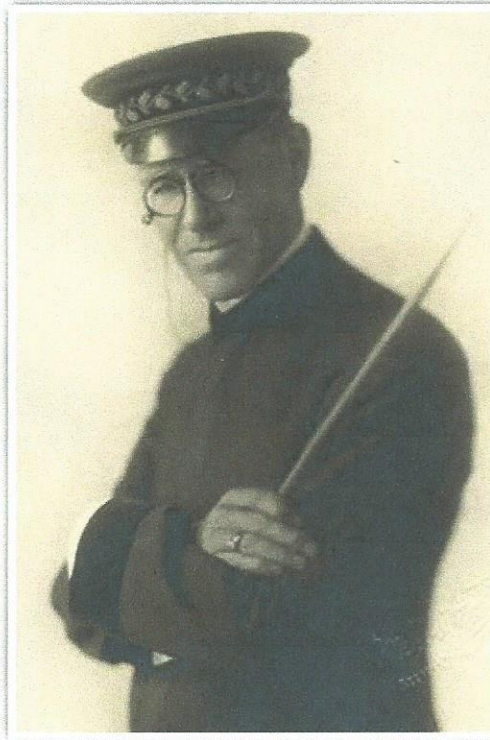
I have often looked at the life span of the great German romantic opera and tone poem composer Richard Strauss (1864-1949) with the thought that this would have been an amazing time to live. Just consider World Wars I and II, the invention of so many new things we now consider without a moment's thought, and especially the momentous musical changes that occurred around the last decade of the nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth centuries. H. A. Vandercook is an exact contemporary of Richard Strauss, and thus shared these same facets of life and music.

Hale Ascher Vandercook was born September 3, 1864 in Ann Arbor, MI. Dutch immigrants moved in droves to the area of southwestern Michigan, bringing with them a strong tradition of wind music. His family moved to nearby Allegan when he was about four years old, and much of his life would revolve around this small community. While he was a high school student, Vandercook studied the cornet with Frank Holton, who would later establish the musical instrument company that has borne his name for more than a century. He also studied the violin and composition with Louis Boos, another musician who would achieve some fame for his composition and his bands. It was most unusual for high schools to have school bands at the time, as most musicians were trained in and performed with the town bands.

Vandercook started a band in his school, making it one of the first in the nation. In the 1880s, Vandercook moved to Detroit, a city large enough to offer full employment to a musician, but close enough for him to care for his mother after the deaths of his father and his siblings. He played in theater orchestras and continued to study composition. He toured with Heywood's Mastodon Minstrels, the Mason &

Morgan Company, Hi Henry's Minstrels, Donaldson & Rich's Circus, and other similar shows. He married Emily Emmons on July 20, 1884, and she remained by his side until his death 65 years later.

Vandercook's circus career began in 1891, when he joined a new touring circus owned by J. H. La Pearl in Crawfordsville, IN. He started as a cornetist, but took over the bandmaster's position after a few weeks, replacing Harry Clair as leader of the 15-piece ensemble in July. The route book mentions that after the change the band became an important feature. His wife also toured with the show. In a rare instance of route book honesty, the circus admitted that the show did not earn money, and announced that La Pearl's Shows would be a railroad venture in 1892. The show came back as a smaller unit the next spring and it carried a 16-piece band. The 1893 La Pearl's Shows season began in Crawfordsville on April 24 with 2 inches of snow still on the ground and Vandercook directing a 17-piece ensemble. The most memorable event of the season occurred in Newman, IL in



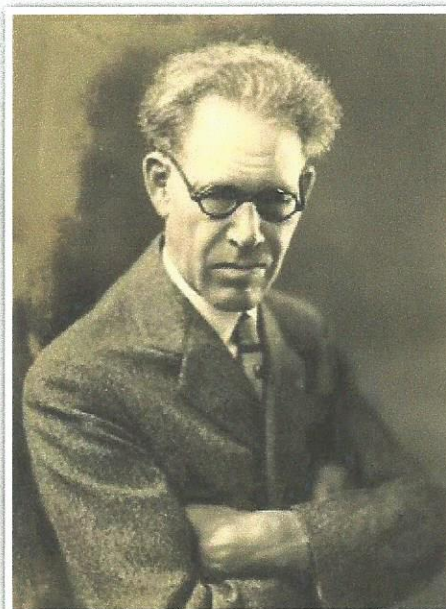
August. An explosion of a chandelier caused a tent fire; Vandercook was credited with keeping the band playing and calming the nerves of the crowd while the fire was extinguished with no serious injuries.

At the end of the 1893 season, La Pearl's Shows moved its quarters to Danville, IL and performed an indoor winter season, showing on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Vandercook and some of the other musicians filled the rest of the week by playing engagements at theaters, particularly Wise's Theater in Lafayette, IN. Vandercook took a concert band on the road in 1894, and Harry Clair returned to his former bandmaster's position with La Pearl's Shows. The Vandercook Band spent a portion of the

year appearing in Shippendecker Park in Joplin, MO, and Vandercook also found time to study in Chicago with A. F. Weldon, a well-respected cornet soloist and band director with whom Vandercook would develop his playing and also the philosophies of music education that become the foundation of his extensive work in that area.

Hale A. Vandercook returned to La Pearl's Shows in 1895, replacing Harry Clair for the second time. The band had grown considerably, and now numbered 28. He also joined the BPOE Evansville Lodge #116 of the Elks Club. He returned in 1896 to direct a 23-piece band. The band had a water spaniel, "Old Phil," as a mascot, and the dog sat in front of the band during center ring concerts. Vandercook's wife, working on the side show, had an incident that was described in the route book - "a rube got fresh with her in Independence, Iowa, and she used a riding whip on him as the crowd shouted its approval." La Pearl's performed in Bedford, IN and the *Bedford Daily Mail* made some observations about Vandercook in its July 1, 1896 edition: "Professor Vandercook's latest compositions *Campanello* and *Dewey* will be played by the Bedford Premier Band tonight.

In 1897, La Pearl's Shows had a spin-off minstrel show in the off-season, and Vandercook served as bandmaster for both ventures. The band had been called "La Pearl's Marine Band" since its inception, probably due to the bandwagon, which had the shape of a boat. The band's instrumentation included piccolo, Eb clarinet, 5 Bb clarinets, 4 horns, 4 cornet (including Vandercook as one of the two solo cornets), 2 trombones, euphonium, 3 tubas, and 2 drummers. There was also an 8-piece orchestra staffed by the band members. The return visit to Independence, Iowa brought claims from local residents that the previous season's horsewhipping had made a man out of the offender. Vandercook intended to return to La Pearl's Shows for the 1898 season (the full title of which was to be J. H. La Pearl's Great Allied Railroad Shows, Two Ring Circus, Gigantic Museum, Golden Menagerie and Spectacular Roman Hippodrome), but decided to leave just prior to the opening of the season. Perhaps he did not want to memorize the show's title! Among the band works that Vandercook wrote while with La Pearl's were *Ashtonian*, *La Pearl*, *Grand Entree*, *El Carnero*, *Chi-Gan-Cy Beach*, and the march that earned him a wide reputation as a composer of circus music, *Olevine*, which he dedicated to Carl Clair.



Vandercook left the world of the circus to begin a second career, and continued to develop the teaching prowess that would make him one of the twentieth century's greatest music educators. He moved back to Allegan, MI in 1898 to take over the post of conductor of the HECLA Mining Company Band of Calumet, MI. This was a prestigious position with a 26-piece ensemble that had been established in 1872. He was given the flexibility to experiment with the instrumentation, and the HECLA Band achieved musical levels well above that of the typical community or company band. Vandercook's six-year tenure was the highpoint of the band's fifty-year history. He wrote several marches while in Michigan, including *Bombardment*, *Columbia Yacht Club*, *Lake Front Park*, *Commodore Dewey*, *Mandator*, *Copper Queen*, and one that received a large advertising campaign from publisher C.L. Barnhouse: *Our Colonel*. In 1904, Vandercook moved to

Chicago, where he would spend the rest of his career, and where he would establish an educational legacy that is still flourishing at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

During the 1890s, Vandercook had studied cornet and conducting with Chicago bandmaster A. F. Weldon (1862-1914). He became Weldon's personal secretary and teaching assistant, and also served as the bandmaster for the Ames Second Regiment Band of nearby Michigan City, IN. He also spent a brief time in Salida, CO while conducting the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad Company Band. Until his retirement in 1941, Vandercook directed his school of music and continued to compose, serve as a guest conductor, and write

texts and articles about music education. He left the school in the capable hands of his assistant and member of his first graduating bachelor's degree class, H. E. Nutt. He moved back to Allegan with his wife and pet collie, hired a tenant farmer to work his land, tended to his sugar maple grove, and pursued with enthusiasm the love of his retired life, fly fishing. He would write, "the extreme quietness of our present location especially appeals to us and I find the environment perfect for my work in arranging band music and instructional material for the High School Bands." Hale A. Vandercook died in Allegan October 16, 1949, and was buried in Oakwood Cemetery following a Masonic ceremony attended by many luminaries from the band and music education fields.

Windjammers Unlimited inducted Hale Vandercook into its Windjammers Hall of Fame in January, 1995.