

WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

Everette James (1884-1955), 1998 Inductee

By Rod Everhart, WJU #1351

Everette Robert James was born October 30, 1884 in New Orleans, Louisiana to Harry K. James and Elizabeth "Lizzie" Wood. Through the years, the last "e" in Everette was often omitted, but his WWI and WWII draft registration signatures, numerous directories, contracts and his death certificate clearly reflect his first name as Everette.

Everette was literally "born into the circus" as his father, Harry K. James, was a circus musician and bandmaster himself. Harry K (1852) and Lizzie (1861) were married on December 26, 1878 in Madison, IL and settled in New Orleans where the 1880 Census listed his occupation as Musician.

Charles Conrad's listing of *Circus Band Leaders* shows Harry K. James with the Hunter's Circus in 1884, Eugene Robinson's Floating Palace in 1891, Phil Diefenbach Show in 1894, M.L. Clark's Big Wagon Show in 1895, and the Col. Daniel Boone Show in 1896. The New Orleans City Directories for 1893 and 1895 lists Harry K. as a resident at 372 Clio Street and occupation as musician. The family expanded with Everette gaining a sister in 1885 (Annie E.) and another in 1894 (Irene V.)

Following in his father's footsteps, in 1914 a 29-year old Everette joined the Mighty Haag Circus as bandmaster of their 19-person circus band. In 1915 he married Myrtle MAYBELLE (Stewart) Clark, an acrobat and horseback rider with that circus. She was born October 4, 1884, so was just 26 days older than Everette.

However, previously, Maybelle (or Mabel, as she was often known) had married fellow circus acrobat Willie Coleman Clark on December 17, 1897. He was 22, and she claimed she was 18, but was actually only 13 at the time. They had four children: Bessie Louise Clark (1898-1919), Lonnie Francis Clark (1900-1944), Adaline FAY Clark (1904-1953) and Walter Lensay Clark (1906-1968).

In Albany, GA on May 15, 1916, Maybelle delivered her fifth (and Everette's first and only) child. They named him Harry Haag James, honoring Everette's father with the first name and the owner of The Mighty Haag Show, Ernest Haag (1866-1935), with the middle name. Like his father, as the circus saying goes, young Harry Haag James "was born in a red wagon."



Everette and Maybelle James traveling overland with the Mighty Haag Show. Everette is holding son Harry. Standing to the left is Harry's half-sister, Fay Clark. A "Mighty Haag Shows" pennant is on the car.

Everette stayed with the Mighty Haag Circus for five years – 1914 through 1918 – serving in the "peak" middle years of that circus's life cycle. The Everette James Family contract with Haag dated April 9, 1917 included: "work to consist of Musician, Band Leader, Performers - Iron Jaw, Perch, Contortion, Rings, and general useful." As to pay, the contract stated: "The party of the first part will in turn pay \$Thirty five per week plus board and transportation. Six-show-days to constitute a week's work." Fay, as Fay James, was one of the circus performers during this time

Haag's circus toured continuously from 1891 to Haag's death in 1935. It was one of the larger traveling circuses in the U.S., and over those 45 years used a variety of different methods of transport: Flat-bottomed boats to start, then horse and mule-drawn wagons, a 14-car train, back to wagons in 1915, and then trucks. In Everette's last year with Haag, it had 100 employees and was a 3-ring show performing in a 180' by 80' tent. The show's territory was originally Mississippi, Tennessee and Kentucky but in the later years focused more on Louisiana and Texas. The Mighty Haag Circus wintered first in LeCompte, LA, then Shreveport, LA, and beginning in 1920, Marianna, FL.

In 1919, Everette joined Christy Brothers Circus as its bandmaster. Harry's first circus performance was at Christy as a contortionist. He was just four years old, and thus came the billing as "The World's Smallest Contortionist." At the time, Harry had long blond hair that was down to his waist. He had yet to have a haircut.



Christy Bros. Circus Band with bandleader Everette James and snare drummer Harry James.



It was also there as a six-year-old that Harry was given a snare drum and taught to play it. Soon, Harry was an official member of his father's band. Further, Harry wasn't opposed to participating in the elephant act!



Christy Bros. wintered in Beaumont, TX, so in 1924 that officially became "home" to the James Family and Harry attended school there. However, after six years with Christy, Everette decided to leave. Nevertheless, in three years he would be back!

Upon leaving Christy, Everette wintered with the Golden Bros. show that year, and then for the 1925 Season, he joined Lee Bros. Circus as its bandmaster and music director. At that point, Harry Haag James was a nine-year-old and apparently getting his first taste of trumpeting. He found a mentor at the Sideshow.

The leader of the sideshow band at Lee Bros. Circus was William James "Professor" Jackson (1870-1972). This black musician wrote that Harry "loved to come over and talk to me and listen to the music. He especially liked to hear me play the trumpet, so I soon began teaching him how to play it. After his father found out he had been spending so much time with me trying to learn to play the trumpet, he bought one for him." [Everette James took over trumpet lessons for his son when Harry was 10.]



"Little Harry would come over and ask me if he could rehearse with us and I would always let him. He loved his trumpet more than anything else in the world and caught on faster than anybody I had ever seen with it. Sometimes in rehearsal I would have a trumpet part and would let him play it. He tried so hard that sometimes his face would turn bright red, but he never gave up. In fact, the more difficult the part, the harder he would try, and he never quit a single time until he had mastered it. After Harry James got a little older his father would let him out at night to go with us when we played for dances. He would always be there if he could, no matter where we went, and we let him play the trumpet all he wanted to because he was trying to get experience playing orchestra music.

(In 1927) Everette, Harry and I left and joined the Christy Brothers Circus where Mr. Everette was the bandmaster of the big show, and like in the others, I was bandmaster of the sideshow. In this show, Harry played second trumpet in his father's band and was very proud of his job. By this time, he was getting to be really good on the trumpet and better-and-better as the days went by because he practiced constantly.

They left Christy Brothers (in 1931) and I never saw Harry again, though I did meet with his father while I was still with Christy Brothers in 1933. I wrote him for some music which I needed for my band and he came from Beaumont to Houston and brought music for the entire circus program and gave it to me free of charge."

Everette was a tough music teacher, and Harry seemed to be enthused about the challenge. Everette had him on a strict practice regimen. At each session Harry had to learn and master several pages from **Arban's Complete Conservatory Method** book before he could go out and play with his friends. Harry advanced rapidly. At Christy Bros., the 12-year old Harry was leading the musicians on the second bandwagon in the street parades.

Under the big top, Harry's mother would perform in a variety of ways: aerialist, on rings, contortionist and even participate with the elephant acts. It was reported Harry would sometimes leap from the bandstand to assist her in the ring. However, Maybelle had musical talent, too. She was at the end of the circus parades playing calliope.



Maybelle (Mabel) James with the Mighty Haag and Christy Bros. Air Calliopes



When the Christy gig ended for the Everette James family, Harry was 15.

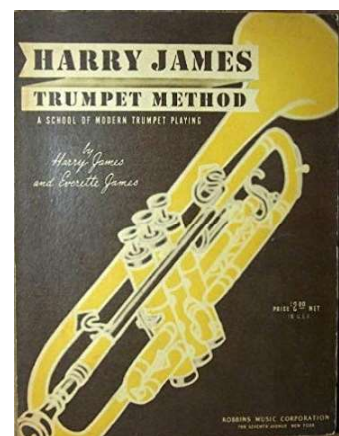
At age 47, Everette decided it was time to get "off the road" and retire from the rigors of circus life. He, Maybelle, and Harry returned to Beaumont, TX. There, Everette set up a music studio and began work as a private music teacher and full-time instructor at the St. Anthony's schools.

Almost immediately, Harry began playing in local dance bands. In 1935, a now-married Harry James joined Ben Pollack's band. However, he then left at the start of 1937 to join the Benny Goodman Orchestra. He stayed there just two years, gaining the nickname "The Hawk" because of his amazing ability to sight-read. A common joke about Harry was "if a fly landed on his written music, he would play it."

Of course, we know the rest of the Harry James story, whose legacy started with the circus and took him on to lasting celebrity with his own Big Bands and recordings.

Harry was married to Louise Tobin 1935-1943. Louise was a North Texas native and the vocalist with the Art Hicks Orchestra Harry joined in 1934. They had two boys, Harry Jeffrey and Timothy Ray. He was then married to Betty Grable 1943-1965 and they had two girls, Victoria Elizabeth and Jessica. Lastly, he was married to Joan Boyd 1968-1970. Harry and Louise's son, Harry Jeffrey James, was born March 3, 1941 in Dallas, TX. Everette's wife was in Dallas visiting their first-born grandchild when she had a fatal heart-attack. Maybelle died on March 16 at age 56.

In the summer following Maybelle's death, Everette happened to discuss with Harry his observation that student musicians tended to disregard basic musical training in their rush to develop so-called modern style and technique. Harry, who had frequent interactions with young trumpet players, completely agreed. So, together they decided to develop what became the *Harry James Trumpet Method: A School of Modern Trumpet*. It was intended to be the most up-to-date guide to modern trumpet style and technique. Everette James incorporated his wealth of knowledge from his career as circus bandmaster plus now being a full-time music instructor in Beaumont. Harry composed the authoritative studies and etudes necessary to show how training could best be applied to modern rhythm music. It was published by Robbins Music Company in late 1941. Recently, it has been re-published by qPress, so another piece of Everette's legacy still lives on 78 years later.



Everette Robert James married Alma Taylor on April 10, 1942 and she is reflected on his 1942 draft card and the 1949 Beaumont, TX City Directory. Everette died March 7, 1955 in Los Angeles, CA. Everette was inducted into the Windjammers Hall of Fame in January 1998.

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after April 23, 1877 and on or before February 16, 1897)

SERIAL NUMBER U 1295 I. NAME (Print) Everette Robert James ORDER NUMBER

2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print) 2307 Penn. Apt. 1, Beaumont Jefferson Texas
(Number and Street) (Town, Township, Village or City) (County) (State)
 [THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL.]

3. MAILING ADDRESS 2307 Penn. Apt. 1, Beaumont, Tex.
(Mailing address if other than line 2. If same insert word same.)

4. TELEPHONE 5406 5. AGE IN YEARS 57 6. PLACE OF BIRTH New Orleans
(Town or County) (State or Country)

DATE OF BIRTH Oct. 30 1884
(Month) (Day) (Year)

7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS IF
(Package) (Number) (Street) (City) (State)
Mrs. Alene James, 2307 Penn. Beaumont, Tex.

8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS
None

9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS
Music teacher - Beaumont, Tex.
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)

I ASSEVERATE THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.

D. S. S. FORM 1 (Revised 4-1-42) (over) 16-21630-2 Everette Robert James
(Registrant's signature)

WWII Draft Card 1942

CONTRACT
 OF
 THE MIGHTY HAAG SHOWS

This Agreement, entered into this 9th day of April, 1917
 by and between Mighty Haag Shows
 parties of the first part, and Everette James Family, part
 of the second part,

Witnesseth, That for and in consideration of the sum or sums hereinafter mentioned, and certain other valuable considerations, the said part _____ of the second part, being of lawful age, hereby agrees to work for the said parties of the first part for the term of the show season of 1917, in the capacity of Musicians -
 the said work to consist of Band leader + Performer
Organ - Piano - Violin - Trump - And general
useful -

and to further make Themselves generally useful around the said Shows, and further, to abide by the general rules and regulations of said Shows, which are a part of this contract.

For and in consideration of the heretofore described work being duly, promptly and faithfully performed, it is agreed the party of the first part shall pay to the part _____ of the second part Twenty five per week and board and transportation. Six-show days to constitute a week's work - big-show performance or performances

Everette Family Contract dated April 7th, 1917



Christy Bros. Aerialist Maybelle James



Christy Bros. Circus Clown Band around 1922. Everette on cornet 2nd from left; Harry on snare drum



Maybelle James as Elephant Performer



Harry Haag James about age 6 with Christy Bros. Circus