

WINDJAMMERS HALL OF FAME

Carl Clair (1868-1911), 2004 Inductee

By Charles Conrad, WJU #1525



Carl George Clair, whose real name was George W. Smith, was born on the first day of 1868 in Lisbon, a small East Central Iowa town. He moved to Grinnell and attended school there. He is believed to have started a band in Grinnell in 1882 at the age of 14.

Clair likely played Eb cornet, as there is a part book for that instrument in the holdings of the Parkinson Library at Circus World Museum in Baraboo, WI. Interestingly, it contains signatures in both of his names.

Clair's first known musical position, listed in the October 25, 1884 *New York Clipper*, is leading the band of the J. T. Johnson Circus as a sixteen-year old. He was with the Livingston Comedy Company in the winter season of 1885. In 1886 he played cornet with the King, Burk & Co. Circus. He played solo cornet with the 1887 King & Franklin Circus Military Band under bandmaster Severin Weber. When the season for that show closed, he led a group called "Carl Clair and his Concert Orchestra" at the Ocala Hotel in Ocala, FL for the winter.

In 1888, Clair assumed the posts of mail agent, route book designer, and sales agent for King & Franklin's New Colossal Shows and Great Wild West. Severin Weber's 11-piece ensemble used the same personnel for a band and an orchestra (led by violinist Jess Worden), with Clair serving as solo cornet in both. He also began a profitable relationship with Conn Instruments that year, and the route book mentions the band tried out a set of Conn horns when they visited Worcester, MA.

In the spring of 1889, Clair was named bandmaster for the King & Franklin Circus 16-piece band and orchestra. The instrumentation was 4 cornets, 2 clarinets (with one doubling on saxophone), 2 altos, 3 trombones, 2 tubas, a euphonium and 2 drummers. He kept the posts as mail agent and route book agent. He was elevated to the position of Music Director for the 1890 season. The next year would be his last with the entourage now billed as King & Franklin's New Colossal Shows and Hippodrome. According to the March 21, 1891 *New York Clipper*, his band had increased to 18 pieces and a well-known

lady cornet soloist had been added. Clair's big "break" came following the 1891 season, when he was named bandmaster with the Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth for the 1892 season.

With Barnum & Bailey, he was now in charge of a much larger band in a more prestigious circus. Clair's 1893 band was 30 pieces, with an instrumentation of piccolo, Eb clarinet, 4 Bb clarinets, 3 saxophones (soprano, alto, baritone), 2 Eb cornets, 4 Bb cornets, 3 trombones, 3 euphoniums, 3 tubas, 4 altos, and 2 drummers.

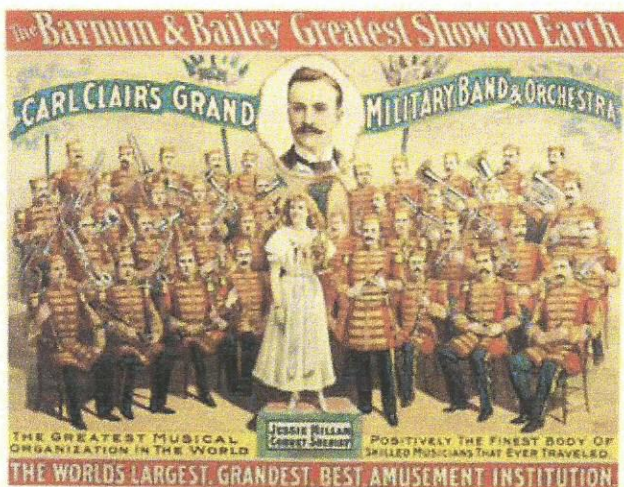


The spectacle that year was "Columbus and the Discovery of America," with music by Vernanzie. The ensemble performed a pre-show concert outside the big top rather than in the center ring.

Interviewed in the *New York Morning Journal*, Clair said: "I am constantly watching the different riding acts while playing. The various tricks need an immediate change of music. Animals are so sensitive to the sound of music that they are often taught in that way alone, and so accustomed have they become to the correct pauses and drum signals, that should any delay occur in giving them, it would seriously interfere with the performance." The story continued: "Much of the attractive music heard this year is of Mr. Clair's own composition. Besides this, he gathers up the latest popular songs and dance music, and carefully sets them to an orchestral score. *Footprints in the Mississippi* and *My Sweetheart's the Man in the Moon* are two favorites the band is now playing. *Gambrinus Polka* is a favorite of acrobats and jugglers."

In 1894, the musical attraction of the Barnum & Bailey Circus included the 24-piece big top band under Clair's direction, an 8-piece orchestra conducted by Charles Gerlach, the Three Fry Brothers playing on a single marimba, a 10-piece Italian side show band under F. Farally, 15 buglers, and a calliope. Clair claimed that more than 500 players applied for the positions with his band.

One of the great circus marches of the day, *Olevine* by Hale A. Vandercook, was dedicated to Clair in 1894. He served as the bandmaster for the Barlow Brothers Minstrels during the winter of 1894. The next year, 1895, would be another big year for the musical portion of the Barnum & Bailey Circus. The most important addition was a teenage cornet soloist about whom the *New York Clipper* said, "Jessie Millar, the young cornet soloist, is a bright feature in the B&B show, especially in the parade, where she appears in costume and finely mounted on the horse, Captain."



The 1896 season again featured Jessie Millar as cornet soloist, with a 24-piece big top band, including piccolo, Eb clarinet, 4 Bb clarinets, alto and tenor saxophones, 5 cornets, 2 trombones, euphonium, 2 tubas, 2 drummers and 4 horns. (The Conn Company *Musical Truth* stated that mellophones had been replaced by four Conn French horns). The marimba trio, Italian side show band, calliope, and the orchestra also returned.

The next five seasons for the Barnum & Bailey Circus would be one of the greatest adventures ever undertaken by an American circus -- a five-year European tour! The logistical arrangements for moving the menagerie alone were fodder for dozens of newspaper stories, both in Bridgeport, CT, the show's winter quarters, and in London, where the opening stand would take place. The obvious comparisons to Noah's Ark were numerous and some quite comical. Clair assembled an outstanding band for the trip, including a 23-year-old euphonium soloist and budding composer, Russell Alexander, a man considered the greatest of all circus bass drummers, Henry F. "Hank" Young, and a veteran tuba player who was also a gifted march writer, Walter P. "Woody" English. The circus performed an indoor winter season at the London Hippodrome that included a water show.

The Barnum & Bailey Circus continued its European tour after the turn of the new century, and was still highly successful, with Clair and the band receiving accolades from the local newspaper critics. In 1900, W. P. English wrote *Clair's Triumph March* in his honor. One of his band members, Frank Crowe, related this story, "In Europe with the Barnum show, Carl Clair played quite a lot of rag-time

music. It was about the first time such music had been heard there. In Brussels, Belgium, after we had played a couple of "rags," a fellow stepped up to Clair and said, "Gee, but you have a fine Hungarian band."

Clair married Christina Matilda Weedon (born January 1879) at St. Anne's Church in London in October 1899. The couple received an engraved silver tea service from his band. On December 8, 1901, while the circus was in Vienna, he received a cable that his daughter, Constance Christina Clair, had been born in London. Clair's wife and young daughter remained in London, and he visited them for several weeks in late 1903 and early 1904 during the circus off-season.



1903 Barnum & Bailey Circus Band, Carl Clair bandmaster

For another two years the accolades continued for the ensemble. Clair's photograph was used on the cover of a 1906 piece of sheet music entitled "The Circus Band," which was written by Neal Harper and George P. Smith. Clair was even quoted in the October 6, 1906 *Medical Record*: "I have been following circus work for the past eighteen years, thirteen years as Bandmaster of Barnum & Bailey's Circus with a band of 30 to 40 musicians, and during this time have had hundreds of different men under my direction, and never knew of one being troubled with any disease of the lungs." This was from a story about tuberculosis that also quoted several members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Sadly, one of Clair's greatest players, Russell Alexander, would be felled by the disease a decade later.

Carl Clair was expected to return as the bandmaster of the Barnum & Bailey Band in 1907, but he did not. There was a nasty court case that on August 23, 1907 made the front pages of the papers in New York as he sued his wife for divorce and demanded custody of their daughter. He was unsuccessful in this effort, and likely suffered a mental breakdown as a result.

Clair was succeeded at Barnum & Bailey by his friend Walter English. Carl Clair spent his last few years in an asylum in Stamford, CT., called "Dr. Givens' Sanitarium for the Treatment of Nervous and Mental Diseases, Opium and Alcoholic Habitués", and more discretely known as Stamford Hall. Carl Clair died there April 28, 1911 at the age of 43.

CARL CLAIR NAMED TO THE WINDJAMMER HALL OF FAME

At the banquet of our 2004 Windjammer Convention, Carl Clair was named to the Windjammer Hall of Fame. The following is a biography of Clair prepared by Windjammer and circus musicologist Charles Conrad. It is reproduced to acquaint members with one of the giants in the field of circus music at the beginning of the 20th Century.

Carl Clair (1868-1907)

Carl Clair, whose real name was George W. Smith, was born on the first day of 1868 in Lisbon, a small East Central Iowa town. He moved to Grinnell, Iowa where he attended school, and is believed to have started a band there at the age of 14 in 1882. His first known musical position was with the Livingston Comedy Company in the winter season in Lisbon. He played solo cornet with the 1887 King & Franklin Circus Military Band under bandmaster Severn Webster. When the season ended, he led a group called "Carl Clair and his Concert Orchestra" at the Ocala Hotel in Ocala, Florida for the winter. It was a 6-piece ensemble made up of members of the circus band.

In 1888, Clair assumed the posts of mail agent, route book "layout" and sales agent for what was called King & Franklin's New Colossal Shows and Great Wild West. The 11-piece ensemble used the same personnel for a band and an orchestra, with Clair serving as solo cornetist in both. In the spring of 1889, he was also named the Music Director for the King & Franklin Circus 12-piece band and orchestra. He kept the posts as mail agent and route book agent, and held the bandmaster position for the 1890 season. The next year would be his last with the entourage, billed as King & Franklin's New Colossal Shows and Hippodrome, and his band was increased to 18-pieces. Clair's big "break" came following the 1891 season, when he was named circus bandmaster with Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth.

He now had charge of a much larger band and in a more prestigious circus. His 1893 band was 30 pieces and the spectacle was "Columbus and the Discovery of America," with music by Vernanzie. In 1894, the musical attraction of the Barnum & Bailey Circus included the 24 piece big top band under Clair's direction, an 8-piece orchestra conducted by Charles Gerlach, the Three Fry Brothers playing on a single marimba, a 10 piece Italian side show band under F. Farally, 15 buglers, and a calliope. Clair claimed that more than 500 players applied for positions with his band. He was quoted in a New York newspaper about his recommendations for circus bandsmen. "Young men between the ages of 21 and 30 are best suited for a circus band. There are certain quick changes to be made in wardrobe as well as in the musical programme, and old men are too slow to make good bandsmen for the circus."

One of the great circus marches of the day, *Olevine* by Hale A. Vandercook was dedicated to Clair in 1894. He served as the bandmaster for the Barlow Brothers Minstrels during the winter of 1894. The next year, 1895 would be another big year for the musical portion of the Barnum & Bailey Circus. The most important addition was a teenage cornet soloist, Miss Jessie Millar, about whom the *New York Clipper* said, "Jessie Millar, the young cornet soloist, is a bright feature in the B & B show, especially in the parade, where she appears in costume and finely mounted on the horse." Captain. Jessie returned again in 1896 for the season with a 24-piece band led by Clair.

The *New York Clipper* previewed the show during rehearsal: "Carl Clair's Military Band will be one of the features of the B & B show this season. Two complete sets of new and costly uniforms have been purchased by the management, and the band will be dressed second-to-none on the road. An entirely new manuscript programme has been arranged by Prof. J A Emidy and Jas. Chattaway. Besides this, all the very latest popular airs and the best publications for military band will be played during the season. Band concerts will be given upon an elevated stage in the center of the large canvas previous to each performance featuring the young lady cornetist, Jessie Millar."

The next five seasons for the Barnum & Bailey Circus would be one of the greatest adventures ever undertaken by an American circus, a five year European tour! The logistical arrangements for moving the menagerie alone were fodder for dozens of newspaper stories, both in Bridgeport, CT, the show's winter quarters, and in London, England where the opening stand would take place. The obvious comparisons to Noah's Ark were numerous and quite comical. Clair assembled a band for the trip, including a 20 year old euphonium soloist and budding composer, Russell Alexander; a man considered the greatest of all circus bass drummer, Henry F. "Hank" Young; and a veteran tuba player who was also a gifted march writer, W. P. "Woody" English. The circus performed an indoor winter season at the London Hippodrome that included a water show. Clair married Christina Matilda Weedon at St. Anne's Church in London in 1899 and received an engraved silver tea service from his band.

Carl Clair - continued

The center ring concert of "Carol Clair's Grand Military Band" was a major feature and included the following repertoire:

MARCHES

1. Grand March "Invocation to Battle" from Rienzi, Wagner
2. "Grand Bridal March" from Lohengrin, Wagner
3. "March" from Tannhauser, Wagner
4. "Coronation March" Le Thier
5. "From Tropic to Tropic" March, Russell Alexander
6. "Crimson Flush" March, Russell Alexander

SELECTIONS

7. "Faust" Gounod
8. "Aida" Verdi
9. "Macbeth" Verdi
10. "Maritana" Wallace
11. "In Gay New York" Kerker
12. "Lady Slavey" Kerker
13. "La Poupee" Audran

MEDLEYS

14. "Crackerjack" Mackie
15. "Whitmark" Chattaway
16. "Around the Vaudeville" Chattaway
17. "Barnum & Bailey 1898" Alexander

FANTASIAS

18. "Albion" National Fantasia Baetens
19. "Grand American Fantasia Bendix

SOLOS

20. Euphonium Solo (Selected) Russell Alexander
21. Piccolo Solo (Selected) A. R. Michelsen
22. "Morning, Noon and Night" von Suppe
23. "Pique Dame" von Suppe
24. "The Beautiful Galatea" von Suppe
25. "Fest" Leutner
26. "Lurline" Wallace
27. "Iphenie en Aulide" Gluck
28. "Stradella" Flowtow
29. "Raymond" Thomas
30. "Egmont" Beethoven
31. "Masaniello" Auber
32. "Silvana" Weber
33. "Tannhauser" Wagner
34. "William Tell" Rossini
35. "Semiramide" Rossini

At the close of the famous European tour, Clair's reputation at home was as one of the world's leading musicians. He continued for the next four years and was expected to return as the band master of the Barnum & Bailey Band in 1907, since he was a major feature of the pre-season advertising. Unfortunately, a sudden illness with both mental and physical components sent him to a sanitarium in Stamford, CT, where he died in May 1907.

PHOTOS

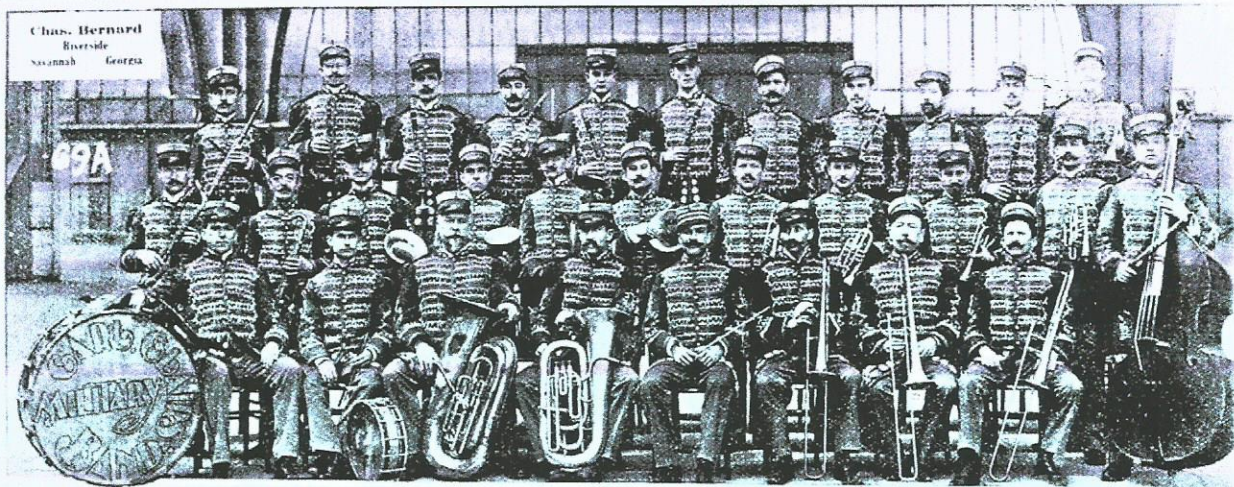
Vol. 7, No. 3 - 1977	Front Cover—1903-1904 Barnum & Bailey Circus Band-Carl Clair, director (Norman Wilbert);
Vol. 17, No. 5 - 1987	Carl Clair, Circus Bandmasters of Other Years (Charlie Duble)
vol 17, no.5 - 1987	Pg.14-1903 Barnum and Bailey Circus Band-Carl Clair bandleader,
vol 23, no 5 - 1993	Pg.30-1895 Barnum & Bailey Circus Band- Carl Clair's Military Band;
Vol 27, No 1 - 1997	Back Cover Pg.32- 1903 Barnum and Bailey Circus-Carl Clair's Military Band;
Vol 34, No 3 - 2004	Carl Clair WJU Hall of Fame
vol 41, no 4 - august 2011 PDF attached	1903 Barnum and Bailey Circus- Professor Carl Clair Pg.28- Back Cover: 1903 Barnum and Bailey Circus Band- Carl Clair Great Military Band of Skilled Musicians (Peter Rosa).



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August, 2011

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**GREAT MILITARY BAND OF SKILLED MUSICIANS
BARNUM & BAILEY CIRCUS SEASON OF 1903**

That Bull Fiddle would NOT AT ALL ride on a bandwagon! With this 30-piece aggregation of musicians, there could be anywhere from two to six circus bandwagons assembled out of these fellows, and that doesn't include the sideshow band, an usher band, or the clown band— anyone who could make a *thrum* on a horn or *boom* on a drum would be put on a bandwagon to add to the excitement and the cacophony of the Grand Circus Parade. (Photo Submitted from the Joyce and Peter Rosa Circus Collection)